

**Peer Learning Seminar
„Tracking graduates’ career paths”**

Warszawa, 3-4 September 2015

Non-Paper: Chair’s Conclusions

1. Graduate tracking, defined for the purpose of the seminar as arrangements enabling gathering information on career paths of graduates from higher education, is considered by the countries participating in the seminar as a very significant tool supporting the improvement of graduates’ employability, dialogue between higher education and the world of work and transparency of educational offers. At the same time, there is a strong need for further improvement of implemented arrangements which can be supported by mutual learning.
2. Among the methods used, surveys, including census or sample surveys and panel design, as well as systems taking advantage of administrative data, are the predominant ones. Some Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) also make use of qualitative research methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups.
3. Due to the information needs of potential students and their parents, society, the higher education sector, employers and public authorities regarding access to comparable, representative and objective information on career paths of graduates from particular HEIs and study fields, European governments ever more often opt for creating tracking arrangements that take advantage of administrative data.
4. Graduate tracking taking advantage of administrative data is usually based on (or shall be based on) matching data from different databases, above all – data from higher education information systems with databases of other administrative systems, especially social security systems. The objective of gaining comparable data from this type of tracking requires that it be managed at national level. Obviously, HEIs with a history of running comprehensive graduate tracking systems making use of data from different registers should continue their efforts to maintain and develop those systems.

5. Participants explored the pros and cons of graduate tracking taking advantage of administrative data. No response rate problem, low costs as well as representativeness and comparability of data are among the advantages of this tracking method. Nevertheless, it has a number of limitations, such as a limited number of variables, no control over data collection and no possibility of analysing opinions or satisfaction with the programme completed.
6. At national level, the results of graduate tracking are used mainly as information for potential students willing to make an informed decision on the choice of a study field and a HEI. Some countries elect to take account of the results in other aspects of higher education governance.
7. Regulations on personal data protection (privacy), whose stringency varies between countries, are the most important factor limiting the scope of graduate tracking based on administrative data.
8. Higher Education Institutions need in-depth analysis of their graduates' career paths for the purpose of a full-fledged internal quality assurance system and institutional management. Therefore, surveys are an important tool for HEIs allowing them to explore issues relevant from a HEI's perspective. Surveys also help in contextualizing the results of tracking based on administrative data which are a good source of evidence but alone do not necessarily determine the quality of a programme. Qualitative research methods are also very useful in this context. It is a HEI's responsibility (also according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) to obtain information indispensable for a well-functioning internal quality assurance system. It has to be underlined that from HEIs' perspective, graduate tracking is only one phase of indispensable data collection concerning the whole student life cycle.
9. Surveys on graduates' situation in the labour market entail various methodological challenges: the self-selection bias, the need to secure a very high response rate, or the disparities in response rates between participating HEIs. As more HEIs participate, the challenges get weightier. Those methodological problems should therefore be carefully addressed especially in nationwide surveys on graduates' transition into the labour market.
10. Discussions on a possible European approach to graduate tracking should take into consideration the relevance of information on particular aspects of graduates' career paths in the European context, as well as methodological problems concerning the

representativeness of data. It should be explored to what extent data collection should be coordinated in the framework of the joint European enterprise with voluntary participation of countries, and to what extent we should rather trust the robustness of data collected under national tracking systems, improve mutual understanding of the indicators used and explore the possibilities of making reliable comparisons between particular countries.

11. Publication of the results of graduate tracking needs careful and well-considered communication with the mass media so that graduate tracking truly contributes to raising public awareness of real outcomes of higher education. Ill-prepared collaboration with journalists can result in numerous misunderstandings.
12. The seminar was a good kick-off for further peer learning and networking between experts dealing with graduate tracking. There is a strong need for more focused cooperation among national experts concerning e.g. the use of administrative data in graduate tracking, including dealing with technicalities, discussing common limitations and supporting mutual understanding of different indicators, as well as further collaboration of policy-makers. Next peer learning events could be organised in the framework of the Bologna Follow-up Group Work Plan 2015-2018.