

Enhancing graduate employability: what universities should understand and react?

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Observations world wide

- * Communications from the European Commission: Rethinking Education: Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes –use graduate employment as an indicator for higher education funding etc.
- * China: existing degree courses can be cancelled if fewer than 60% of graduates from two successive years fail to find work.
- * Vietnam: Applications for ‘high employment’ courses (like economics, finance, banking, business and information technology) drop 30-50%

Source: University World News

Employability

- * A set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”.

(Yorke, 2004, p. 8)

Why employability is important?

- * The employability of graduates is often used as a benchmark to measure the quality of higher education and even to allocate additional funding to higher education institutions .
- * The quality of graduates is also a key factor of economic development.
- * The success of a global economy is largely dependent on its attractiveness of global talent.
- * The competing and developing global starts at the level of higher education.

What affect emploability?

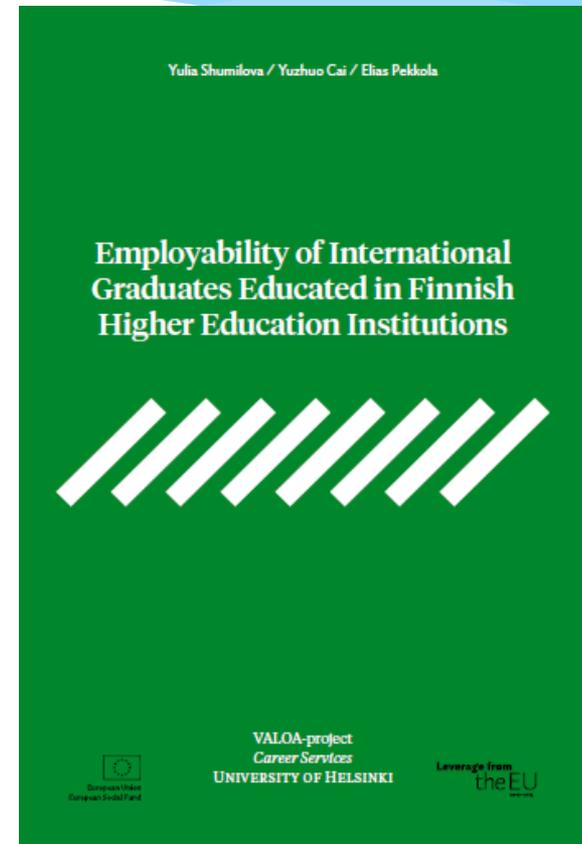
- * Students
- * Higher Education Institutions
- * Employers (How to change employers' perceptions?)
- * Linking agencies (UNIPOLI: Network of HEIs in Tampere, Finland)
- * Context (Employment prospects in Finnish companies in students' home countries)

(Shumilova & Cai, 2012)

Some empirical findings in Finland

VALOA Study

- * Employment rate
- * Key skills and competencies leading to employment
- * Perceptions of graduates vs. perceptions of employers

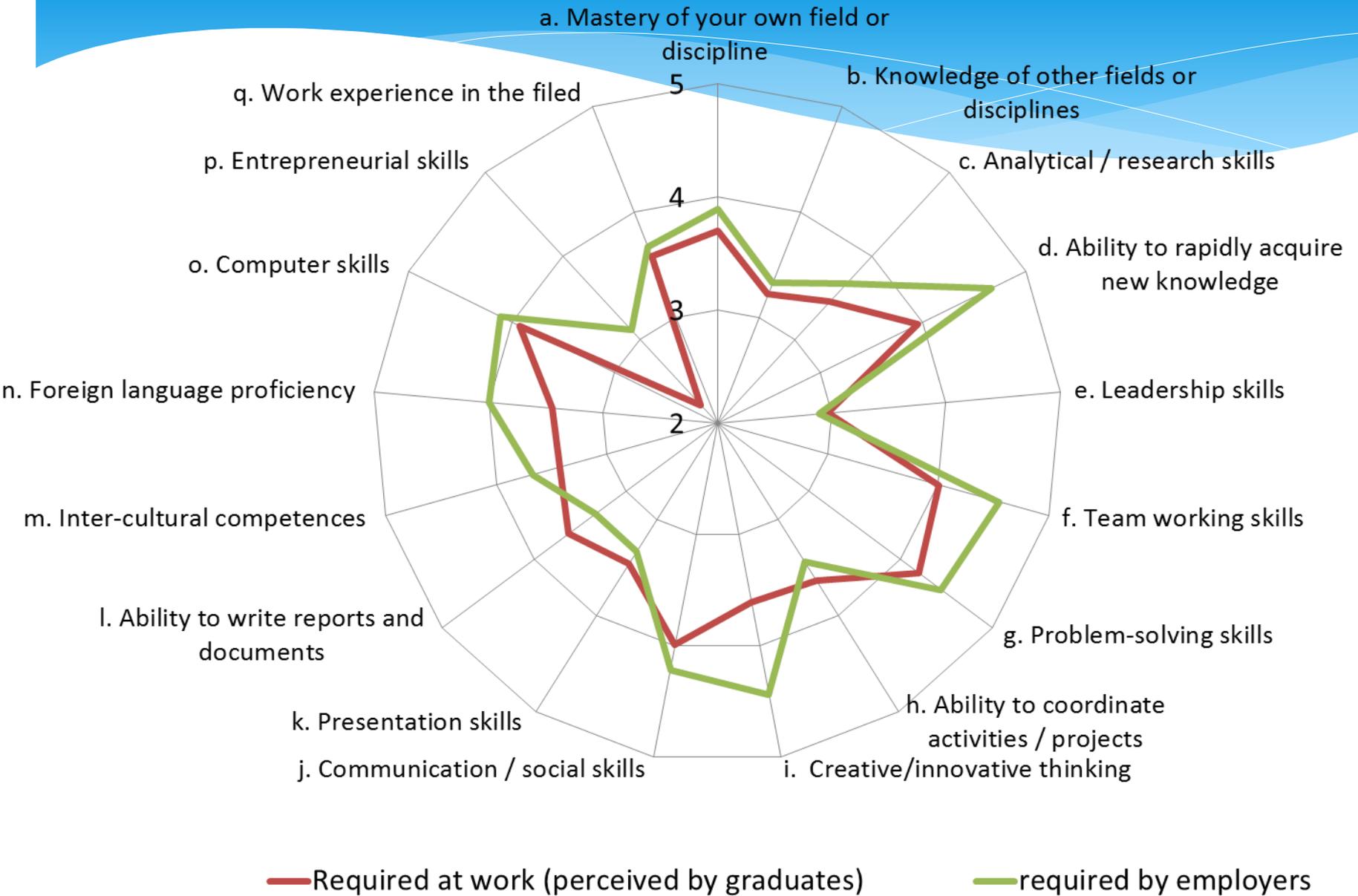


Employment rate

- * 70% of all respondents are currently employed
- * Among those who are not employed,
 - * 61% are undertaking further studies,
 - * 11% are doing internship,
 - * 29% are taking care of family,
 - * 12% are in other situation.

Skills that significantly matter

- * a. Mastery of one's own field or discipline
- * b. Knowledge of other fields or disciplines
- * c. Analytical / research skills
- * d. Ability to rapidly acquire new knowledge
- * e. Leadership skills
- * f. Team working skills
- * h. Ability to coordinate activities / projects
- * m. Inter-cultural competences
- * o. Computer skills
- * q. Work experience in the field



Developing employability together with employers and industry: Finnish cases

- * Demola: Entrepreneurship development
- * UNIPOLI: Mentoring system

Demola: Entrepreneurship development

- * Based on projects and student team works.
- * Project ideas and needs come from the project partners, companies and organizations or international Demola Network partners.
- * Students work in teams to create innovative solutions for real-world needs.
- * Launched in Tampere but growing nationwide and even at the European level.

UNIPOLI: Mentoring system

- * UNIPOLI: Mentoring system
 - * Mentoring is a process whereby experienced professionals impart their knowledge and skills to aspiring young adults at the beginning of their careers.
 - * The programme aims to help mentees develop their job hunting skills, acquire further knowledge of Finnish workplace culture and build professional contacts.

Recommendations for HEIs based on Finnish experience

Recommendations for HEIs 1

- * Recruiting most gifted or relevant students.
- * Enhancing professional skills, intercultural competence and soft skills.
- * Paying attention to context-specific knowledge and skills
- * Mixing international and local students
- * Developing Job-seeking skills

Recommendations for HEIs 2

- * Enhancing the labour market relevance of university studies.
 - * Paying more attention to the needs in the labour market, and having more cooperation with potential employers in curriculum design and teaching.
- * Trying to forecast the prospective labour markets for the students.
- * Helping students identify possible internship places, employers and target labour markets (in different contexts).

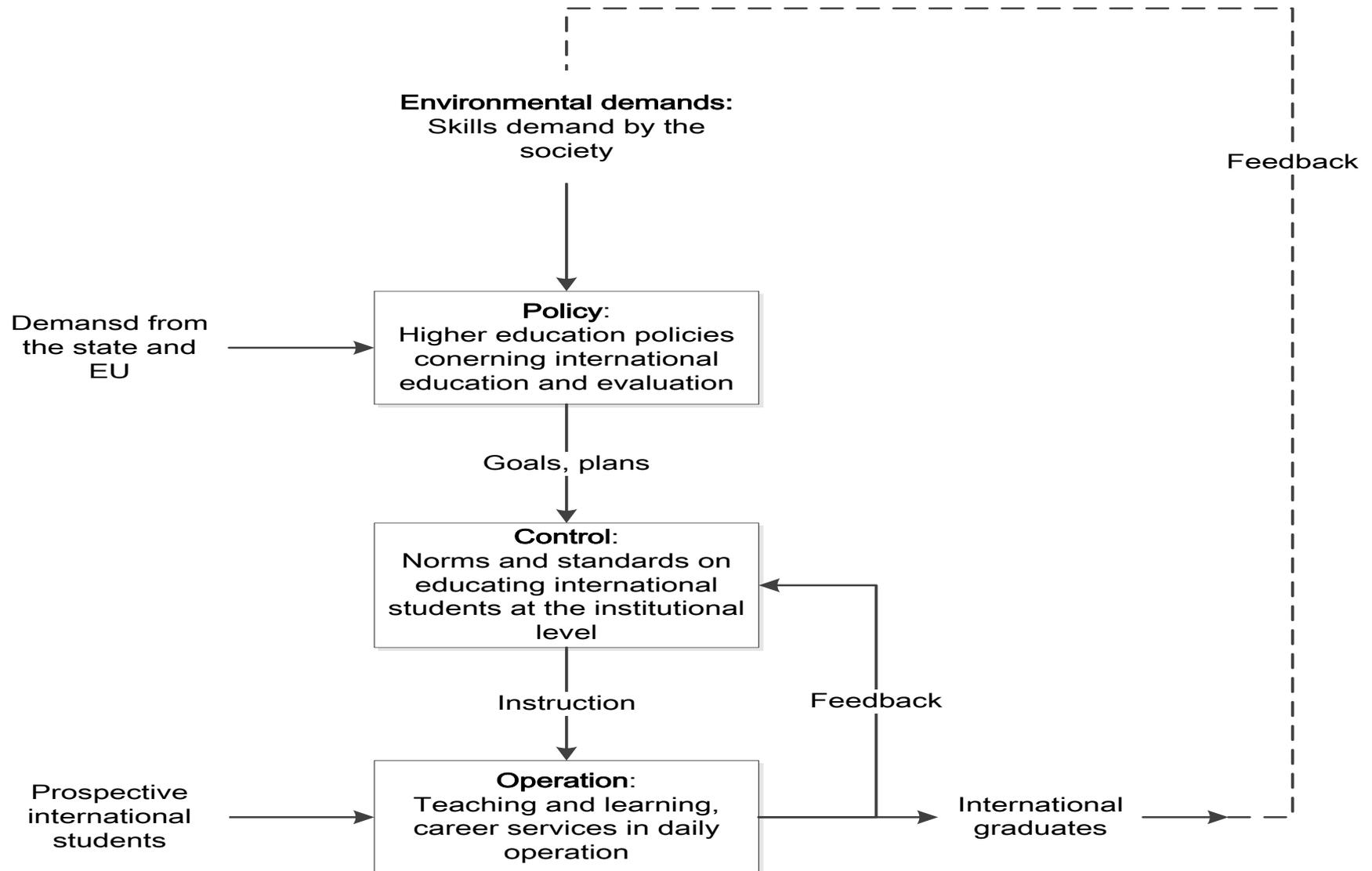
Recommendations for HEIs 3

- * Promoting graduates to employers.
 - * most employers' perception of the skills of international graduates are intuitive
 - * more information and channels to be developed for the employers to have a true picture of the graduates
- * Developing alumni activities
 - * keeping a e-mail database of your graduates and collecting feedback from them on the relevance of HE to the world of work
 - * tracking their employment situation for self-evaluation and marketing purposes

Employers' needs vs. Universities' missions

- * Universities are developing students employability for employers' needs, but what if employers' perceptions are wrong? Employers may be wrong in
 - * identifying perspective employees,
 - * understanding competences and potentials of graduates,
 - * predicting possible added values brought by the graduates
- * Universities are not just about preparing students for the future needs in the labour market, but also transforming the structures of future labour market and bring in new values to the society.
- * Instead of imposing certain ideas on employers, universities should join together with employers in developing common belief systems based on mutual understandings.

Towards a systematic understanding



Recent studies (on international graduate employability) by HEG

- Cai, Y. (2013). Graduate employability: A conceptual framework for understanding employers' perceptions. *Higher Education*, 65(4), 457-469.
- Cai, Yuzhuo 2012: *Understanding employers' perceptions of international graduates: An investigation of the employment prospects of Finnish-educated Chinese graduates in Finnish companies operating in China*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.
- Shumilova Yulia, Cai Yuzhuo, Pekkola Elias 2012. *Employability of International Graduates Educated in Finnish Higher Education Institutions*. Valoa project, University of Helsinki.
- Cai, Y. (2012). *International graduates from Finland: Do they satisfy the needs of Finnish employers abroad?* *Journal of Research in International Education*, 11(1), 19-31.
- Shumilova, J., & Cai, Y. (2012, 27 - 28 September). Factors affecting employability of international graduates: International experiences and the case of Finland. Paper presented at the 2nd DEHEMS International Conference: Employability of Graduates & Higher Education Management Systems, Ljubljana, Slovenia.



* Thank you!