

CRE8[®] EUROPE: A TRANSNATIONAL MODEL FOR ENHANCING STUDENT EMPLOYABILITY

GOOD PRACTICE IN STUDENT SUPPORT COOPERATION AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

National overviews, event reports and future directions

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Foreword

Recent years have seen profound and enduring changes to the global labour market for graduates. It has never been more important for graduates to be prepared for diverse careers; or for university support staff to be ready to advise and guide them as they transition into employment.

Numerous reports and studies highlight the importance for employers of entrepreneurial and creativity competences among the graduate population from which they recruit. There is a growing requirement, beyond the technical knowledge gleaned from education, that graduates bring a range of ‘soft skills’ to bear on workplace challenges, chief among which is the capacity for creative problem-solving.

At the same time, the number of graduates entering the labour market remains high across Europe. To navigate this highly competitive environment successfully, students need to understand the context in which employers operate, to learn how to shape their skill-sets to meet employer needs, and to communicate

their skills and the value of their experiences to an array of employers, potentially across multiple sectors.

The Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership project ‘CRE8® Europe’ was formed with the aim of developing a programme to address these issues around student employability and competence development. Led by Karlstad University, the project consortium comprised Inland Norway University, Jaume I University and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu.

The main purpose of the document which follows is to provide an overview of student competence development and employment issues in a transnational context, and to highlight key aspects of the CRE8® Europe event programme with a view to encouraging its wider uptake beyond the project consortium. The programme contains crucial concepts to grasp for all students – regardless of discipline or country – who aim to have a fulfilling career.



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Executive Summary

This good practice document was compiled using material received from each of these CRE8® Europe partners. It is not a peer-reviewed publication, but rather a compilation of useful information in relation to student competence development and the graduate employment landscape in participating countries, together with brief reports on the CRE8® Europe events as delivered in each partner country.

The main body of the document contains four sections from the CRE8® Europe partners, presented in the order in which the project events were delivered (Sweden, Romania, Spain, Norway), each written by the project's support staff in that country. These sections all follow the same broad structure: a national overview of student competence development and graduate employment issues, together with how these are addressed at the partner institution; a short report on the partner's CRE8® Europe event, as delivered; and reflections on possible future directions in areas of interest for the CRE8® Europe project. The fifth, and final, section of the document is a brief overview of good practice recommendations emerging from the project's implementation and the design of the event programme.

Taken overall, the national sections demonstrate similar trends, albeit experienced to different degrees, in the student employment landscape. Key points emerging about the graduate labour market include:

- A general increase in annual numbers of graduates in each of the partner countries over the past two decades, albeit with some levelling off in recent years, and a highly competitive environment for those seeking work.
- The strong and positive impact of higher education qualifications on employment prospects and salary.
- Heightened efforts by universities to provide a range of employability competence development offerings for students.
- Further evidence of the value of international mobility and intercultural skills for graduates entering the labour market.
- A general, and growing, appreciation of the need to enhance students understanding of innovation and entrepreneurial processes, to align their skill-sets more closely with the demands of the labour market.

The event reports contain some valuable reflections on competence development good practice, with two particularly strong points emerging from the experience of delivering the event programme. These are:

- Students engage much more fully with interactive content, such as small group exercises, than with the traditional presentation approaches and study visits. A balance heavily in favour of interactivity and novelty should be aimed for in future deliveries of the CRE8® Europe programme.
- Students are more willing to engage with topics and methodologies that are unconventional in an academic setting than might be supposed. Knowledge of facilitation techniques and experience of the needs of a range of employment sectors are of great benefit to student support staff at universities.

Comparisons between the partners' accounts show variations in student support culture between countries, but with a strong emphasis on the nurturing of entrepreneurial skills appearing throughout. Partners also report a growing need for staff to be trained to better support students in this regard, through the development of more advanced facilitation skills. A greater availability of training courses specifically aimed at the development of student support staff and more comprehensive professional accreditation would help in this regard. This development would naturally benefit not only the support staff themselves, but also the students whom they support, their future employers, and society at large.

Sweden (Karlstad University)



National overview

Higher education landscape

The recent history of higher education policy and graduate employment in Sweden reflects to a great extent patterns which can be observed across the rest of Europe. In common with many European higher education systems, the 1990s saw a surge in the creation of new Swedish universities, with three emerging in 1999 alone. This was very much in line with the gradual trend towards mass university education which is apparent elsewhere in the western world throughout the second half of the 20th century. In 1950, there were 16,000 students enrolled at Swedish higher education institutions (HEIs); by 1998, that figure had risen by nearly twentyfold to 305,000 students.¹ A particularly dramatic increase occurred again in the aftermath of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, with the number of students enrolled at Swedish HEIs increasing to 365,000 by 2010.²

In Sweden, as in other Nordic countries, the level of educational attainment is higher than the OECD average, standing at 43% of the Swedish population with higher education qualifications as compared with 37% across all OECD countries.³ Accessibility to higher education for potential students is comparatively open in Sweden. Each of the country's 21 counties contains at least one HEI (a university or 'university college') and the potential barrier of tuition fees is largely absent; fees only apply to non-EU nationals. There is also a comprehensive system of state support to enable students to cover living costs while they study. Despite this, a persistent, and concerning, trend in recent years has been the declining number of students accessing higher education, despite the government's efforts to encourage uptake. Applications to university fell each year between 2014, when 133,300 new students were enrolled, and 2018, when that figure was 122,400.⁴ The intake figure rose slightly for 2019 (to 125,900 new students), but it remains to be seen whether the longer-term trend of decline has been reversed, or even halted.⁵

Higher education policy in Sweden has, in common with that of other European countries, become focussed on meeting labour market needs for skilled employees in certain key areas, with 'labour shortages an issue in both the public and private sectors'.⁶

The Swedish Higher Education Authority (UKÄ), in its *Higher Education in Sweden: 2019 Status Report*, noted in particular the urgent need for more graduates in the welfare sector – specifically nurses and teachers – and a greater emphasis on skill-sets related to digitalisation, to help graduates meet the broader technological needs of employers.⁷

An exacerbating factor in supplying adequate numbers of graduates for the prioritised welfare sector is the continuing gender imbalance in certain degree programmes. In common with many other countries across Europe, great difficulty is being experienced in recruiting male students for nursing and teacher education courses. For example, as has long been the case across all OECD countries, women continue to make up the majority of new entrants to higher education in Sweden (60% in 2020).⁸ However, the gender distribution for the 2018/19 intake of new students on healthcare courses was 84% women and 16% men.⁹ There is, UKÄ reports, 'no sign that this is about to change'.¹⁰ As regards teacher education, 'everything indicates that Sweden is facing a growing teacher shortage in the future' and that a crisis point will be reached by 2033 if current student recruitment and graduation patterns remain unchanged.¹¹

Meanwhile, the courses most sought after by students in 2020 remained the traditional table-leaders: medicine, psychology, architecture and law, with competitive ratios of between 9.6 and 4.5 applicants per granted place (see Figure 1). In contrast, applications for places on teacher education and engineering courses continued to be so low in 2020 that 'there was no competition... Nearly everyone who is eligible to the programmes is accepted'.¹² Taken overall, the single largest subject area by number of students has, for many years, been law and social science (210,600 students in 2019). Fine, applied and performing arts have the fewest students enrolled.¹³

A further trend is also apparent in the modes of study. Even before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in the spring of 2020, the number of students studying distance courses was increasing, and in the period between 2018 and 2021 the number studying solely at distance rose by 20%.¹⁴ Sweden's universities also strongly encourage student mobility, with 23,700 new students entering the system from

abroad in 2018/19; notably from Germany, France and China.¹⁵ Those coming from outside the EU are eligible to apply for scholarships to offset the cost of tuition fees. In contrast to the practice in many other countries, Swedish students can also receive state financing to study abroad, with 23,580 doing so in 2018/19.¹⁶

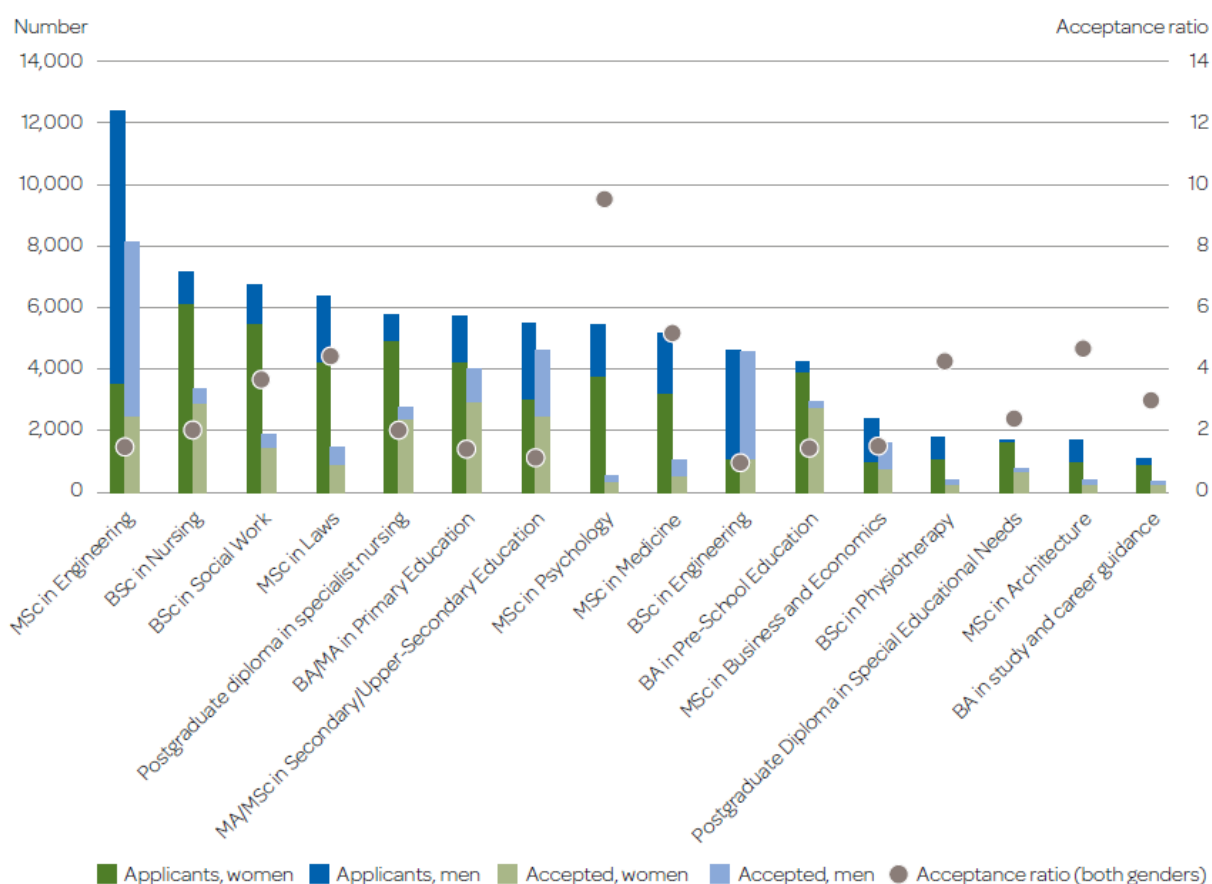
Graduates and the labour market

As mentioned above, for several years the Swedish labour market has experienced severe staff shortages in both the public and private sectors, and especially in the areas of education and healthcare. However, ‘at the same time as there is a shortage of personnel, there is a high level of unemployment’.¹⁷ The key issues, then, are recruiting students to courses in the areas which are most under pressure, while at the same time ensuring the relevance of course content for the labour market. In this regard, Swedish HEIs have been instructed by the government ‘to adjust their educational offerings based on demand from students and the labour market’s needs’.¹⁸

Surveys of graduate establishment within the labour market reveal positive results for holders of higher education qualifications in Sweden. Most graduates find good quality employment relatively soon after leaving university. For the 2016/17 graduate cohort (bachelor’s and master’s degree-holders) 86% were ‘established’ in the labour market 12 to 18 months after graduation. ‘Established’ in this context is defined by UKÄ as being in employment with an annual salary of at least SEK 230,200 (c. €2,600).¹⁹ As well as being a considerable advantage when entering the labour market, in Sweden, as in other countries, attainment of higher education qualifications has a significant impact on long-term earnings. Holders of undergraduate and master’s degrees in Sweden have, on average, 24% higher salaries than those with only secondary-school qualifications. That advantage is much greater for women (26%) than for men (19%).²⁰

In summary, the picture of the immediate post-graduation employment phase which emerges in Sweden is not too dissimilar from that of other

Figure 1. ‘Number of eligible first-choice applicants and admitted students and acceptance ratio of programmes leading to a professional qualification with more than 1,000 eligible first-choice applicants, autumn semester 2019, divided by gender’.



Source: *Higher Education in Sweden: 2020 Status Report*, p. 20.

European countries. Both the short- and long-term benefits of higher education attainment for the possibility of employment and higher salaries are clear. As is the case across Europe, there are shortages of skilled staff in certain areas, but the graduate population as a whole has good prospects for rapid employment. However, although graduate employment rates are high, and establishment in the labour market is strong for that group, it is by no means certain that the employment which graduates obtain – particularly early in their careers – is fulfilling and makes optimal use of their skills. It is that issue which CRE8® Europe seeks to address.

Skills awareness and development

There is, then, an acknowledged lack of qualified potential employees in key areas of the Swedish graduate labour market. The issue is not so much with the level of funding which universities receive to run much-needed courses, or with the relevance of course content. Rather, the difficulty lies in attracting students to courses in these subject areas: ‘the wishes and interests of the individual do not always correspond to the need for skills on the labour market and to greater societal needs.’²¹ That raises the question of how to make such careers attractive for prospective students; a question which, unfortunately, falls outside the remit of this survey. Looking beyond the prioritised areas of healthcare and education, at the Swedish graduate population at large, a broader issue – and one more closely linked to the concerns of CRE8® Europe – becomes apparent. That is the issue of how universities can assist students in developing transversal skills and, crucially, how they can help students to recognise and articulate the skills which they already possess to potential employers.

A useful first step in addressing this is to encourage connections between students and society during their studies. At KAU, an annual programme of ‘wider cooperation’ activities complements the students’ formal education. There is, for example, a mentoring programme in which students are assigned a mentor from outside the university who is able to advise them on career pathways and points for development, and perhaps offer them placement opportunities at their organisations. There is also an agreement with the local authorities which enables students to gain experience working with five municipal councils within the county of Värmland. Beyond direct engagement with workplaces and potential employers, students have the opportunity to participate in the *Näktergalen* (‘Nightingale’) project, in which KAU students are assigned to act as mentors

to between one and three school pupils, with whom they engage one-to-one or as part of larger group activities. The school pupils get the opportunity to learn more about life after school and the possibility of transitioning to university education, but the KAU students potentially gain even more from the experience. The project, which has involved more than 100 KAU students since 2016, gives a unique chance to develop universally applicable skills: leadership, problem-solving, personal judgment, self-awareness and empathy. Furthermore, as the *Näktergalen* project website succinctly states: ‘Committed students get employment faster. Employers value extra activities during their studies’.²²

An important part of KAU’s programme for transversal skills and employability development among students is the CRE8® workshop model, which formed the core of the events within the CRE8® Europe project. CRE8® was originally inspired by the TIMES competitions used by ESTIEM (the organisation of European Students of Industrial Engineering and Management). CRE8® was then further developed through the MINT project (2015–17), funded by Vinnova, the Swedish state innovation agency. A capacity for problem-solving regularly tops the tables of the skills most valued by employers, across sectors, when recruiting for posts, and this was taken as the starting point for the CRE8® model. During the MINT project, KAU worked with three other universities in the *Fyrklöver* network (Linnaeus University, Mid-Sweden University and Örebro University) to find a method which could enhance students’ problem-solving skills, while at the same time exposing them to the challenges of actual employers.²³ The consortium bench-marked and evaluated a range of concepts and produced CRE8®, a creative problem-solving and pitching competition with real-world challenges set by organisations, whose representatives also sit on the final jury. CRE8® has now been further developed in an international setting through CRE8®Europe, where it forms part of the broader ‘CRE8®Europe Five-Day Event’ model.

Event report

The opening five-day event in the CRE8® Europe programme was held at KAU’s Karlstad campus in September 2019. Its key aims were to introduce the students to the CRE8® model and to begin fostering a bonding process within cohort, which would enable them to function better in the teamwork to come. It was also the natural point at which to introduce the students to the pitching and feedback techniques

which would be used throughout the programme. As with all the events, it was attended by the full student cohort and support staff drawn from CRE8® Europe's partner universities.

The thinking behind the CRE8® Europe programme as a whole was to create a series of events with linked and overlapping themes, which would gradually strengthen the students' problem-solving and team-working skills. In addition to this, a crucial element of the CRE8® Europe programme was to give the student cohort every opportunity to mix socially with each other outside the training environment as a means of creating a comfortable setting conducive to engagement and interaction within it. In common with the following three events, the cohort participated in cultural visits while in Karlstad – to the local Mariebergskogan park and also on a city tour – and the event began with an informal gathering for dinner the night before the workshop commenced. Also, the visiting students were all provided with accommodation at the same location, the Karlstad City Hostel. The fact that the students had the hostel entirely to themselves turned out to be a contributing factor in encouraging socialisation within the cohort.

The first day of the event commenced with a scene-setting presentation on the purpose behind the programme and an outline of the coming five days from Ximena Deramond, the CRE8® Europe project manager. This was followed by the first cohort ice-breaking activity, a 'duo interview' workshop in which the students were paired off and given time to interview and prepare a short presentation about each other. The cohort then toured the university campus and were greeted by the KAU vice-chancellor, Johan Sterte, and the Director of External Relations, Håkan Spjuth. The remainder of the first day was spent in a pitch-training session led by Patrik Bångnerius, one of Karlstad University's CRE8® Europe project team and a senior innovation advisor with considerable experience of working with the CRE8® model and with student entrepreneurs more broadly. He began by discussing the nature of innovation, and his key message to the cohort was that innovation does not necessarily mean a technological 'invention'. The majority of innovative ideas do not lend themselves to such development, and the cohort were encouraged to think of innovation as any novel solution or idea that adds value to the human experience; that value being economic, social, environmental, purely



The project staff and cohort meet for the first time at Karlstad, September 2019

experiential, or a combination of all of these. The pitching model which the cohort were then introduced to was the NABC (Needs, Approach, Benefits and Competition) system, which was originally developed by the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in the USA, and which remains one of the cornerstones of their innovation process. The cohort were asked to pitch an idea or output in four minutes, addressing the following elements:

- The market's/ target audience's important need.
- The pitcher's approach to addressing this need.
- The benefits of the pitcher's approach (i.e. the positive change created).
- How those benefits compare with the competition or alternatives (including doing nothing/ status quo).

In addition to the NABC structure, cohort members were also advised to include a 'hook' at the beginning of the pitch, to catch the audience's attention (perhaps using a prop or a counter-intuitive statement) as well as an 'offer' at the end, to make clear what they were asking for and what they would deliver. The NABC pitching method was complemented with the VCF (Value Creation Forum) feedback method, also developed by SRI. In this, cohort members who were not pitching delivered feedback to the pitcher from a range of set viewpoints, on rotation. These were:

- *Green*. What worked well in the pitch?
What elements should stay in?
- *Red*. What did not work well? Are there elements which should go or be improved?
- *Customer/ user*. Is this offer relevant/ useful?
Would a customer/ user buy/ use it?
- *Funder* (research/ business/ public sector). What would a funder need to hear to be convinced? Is this idea ready for funding/ a good investment?

An important part of the NABC/VCF system is that the pitcher is barred from responding to feedback, and this was a restriction which many cohort members struggled with, it being counter to conventional practice in higher education. The thinking behind it, though, is that the pitcher should be devoting their full attention to absorbing the feedback, rather than mentally preparing a rejoinder or jotting down points; for the same reason, a dedicated note-taker was appointed from among the cohort to record the feedback for each pitcher.

The event's second day introduced the cohort to their first CRE8® challenge, posed by the Ljöfbergs, a Karlstad-based coffee company. The family-owned

Ljöfbergs company was founded in 1906 and has grown to be one of the largest coffee roasteries in the Nordic countries. The company faces issues in its future operations, since fewer and fewer farmers want to grow coffee and coffee consumption is declining worldwide. Consequently, the challenge was the broad: 'How can Ljöfbergs become more relevant and create value for future generations?'. This was addressed by the student teams for the remainder of the day, and the winning team proposed a heightened focus on education for the farmers on whom Ljöfbergs relies. The second day ended with the event dinner at a restaurant in the city centre.

The third day in the schedule, coming between the two CRE8® challenge days in the programme, was designed to be less intense, and to allow the students to relax and bond as a group. The cultural visits mentioned above were organised for this day, as was a site visit to Ljöfbergs, the previous day's task-owner, and lunch with the Governor of Värmland.

The penultimate day saw the students tackle their second CRE8® challenge of the week, set this time by Karlstad Energi, a publicly-owned corporation producing electricity for Karlstad. The company wanted input on how to reduce domestic waste by changing practices among the general public. The task assignment was: 'How can we make the bin bag obsolete?', and the winning pitch focused on adapting domestic rubbish bins to hold different compartments for each category of waste.

On the final day, the full cohort and project staff met at the local convention centre (Karlstad CCC) to reflect on week and to evaluate the activities which had been carried out. This was also an opportunity to further publicise both the project and the wider Erasmus+ programme, and two newspapers and a local radio station covered the event.

A number of points emerged from this evaluation on the final day. The main one was that the event was deemed both useful and enjoyable by the student cohort. Another, which was addressed in following events, was that sessions which required participants to interact and solve problems as a method of learning were significantly better received than campus visits and the more traditional presentation and Q&A approach. A further point, which was observed throughout the programme, was the appetite among the student cohort for methodologies and topics which are not conventional for student development in a general higher education setting. For example, sessions exploring creativity, self-reflection and innovation, received consistently high scores in the cohort satisfaction surveys.

As the first event of four in the programme, it was vital that the Karlstad CRE8® Europe event set the expectations and tone of what was to follow. As well as introducing the cohort to the CRE8® model, it was deemed important to devote time to developing the students' pitching and teamwork skills, as well as providing both structured and free-form activities to help them bond as a group. In all these regards, the event can be considered a success and a strong start to the CRE8® Europe programme.

Future directions in Sweden's graduate labour market

The short- to medium-term experience of graduates in the Swedish labour market looks set largely to follow the patterns detailed above. There are continuing and appreciable benefits both for employability and salary level in being a university graduate, and almost half of the Swedish population hold higher education qualifications (43%); a proportion well above the OECD average. At the same time, there is a marked, and growing, shortfall of skilled workers in key areas, such as education and healthcare. One indicator of market needs for skilled graduates in these areas can be seen in the graduate establishment rates: 98% of graduates with a diploma in special needs education are 'established', on a competitive salary, within 18 months of graduation, as compared with an average across other subjects of 79%, and a low of 43% for fine, applied and performing arts graduates.²⁴

Sweden weathered the Global Financial Crisis of the late 2000s better than most OECD countries,²⁵ but the number of new entrants to Swedish HEIs dipped in the mid-2010s, and now shows signs of levelling off; as, incidentally does the number of PhD students.²⁶ If the student enrolment patterns continue as they stand now, Sweden looks set to experience a critical shortage of teachers by the mid-2030s, together with a staff shortage across the healthcare sector even sooner. The Swedish government has been exhorted for several years to better align higher education programmes and policies to economic development and societal needs, but its efforts to date have met with only limited success.²⁷ It remains to be seen what centralised action can be taken to avert these specific crises and also to ensure that third-cycle education remains accessible and desirable for potential students. This is, of course, only part of the picture. A significant percentage of the newly-graduated population are not finding secure employment within 18 months of graduation, with the picture even bleaker for graduates in some specific subject

areas, such as the arts and humanities. Unlike the looming crises in healthcare and education, the challenge here is not in attracting students to the courses, but rather in helping them to develop and better articulate the skills which they acquire during their time at university.

One trend in recent years which could contribute positively in that regard, and which looks set to continue, is increased cooperation between the higher education sector and wider society in a range of initiatives. The Swedish government's direct contribution to the higher education sector remains high, but there is a growing demand that universities secure external funding, which requires cooperation with non-academic partners. State funding for research and research education rose gradually between 2008 and 2018 (from c. SEK 15 Bn to just under SEK 20 Bn), while the external funding component rose more sharply (from c. SEK 15.5 Bn to c. SEK 25 Bn).²⁸ This pattern seems likely to continue – these levels have plateaued since 2016 – and the government's 2020 *Forskningspolitiska Propositionen* ('Research Policy Bill') posits similar levels of direct funding up to 2024.²⁹ One corollary of increased wider cooperation for research activities is the forging of new partnerships with non-academic actors, who can influence education offerings for students and potentially provide them with direct workplace experience and contact with the labour market during their studies.

A key group in facilitating this process are the student support staff who are present, in a range of functions, at Sweden's universities. They should be empowered and encouraged to act as connectors between non-academic partners, researchers, educators and students. In this role they can develop offerings which can enhance skills and knowledge at this intersection between students' career needs, the needs of employers and wider society, and the universities' own external partnership goals.

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Romania (Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu)



National overview

With 19.4 million inhabitants, Romania is a country that has 44.8% (as of July 2020) active population: 47.1% women and 56.2% men. While most individuals work in services, the most desired jobs are found in the fields of industry and construction. Employability is defined, in the context of the Bologna Process, as the ability to 'obtain an initial job, maintain a job and be mobile in the labour market'.¹ When referring to unemployment rates in Romania, these data are calculated in two different modes, by two different entities: the ILO unemployment rate, calculated by the National Institute of Statistics (INS), based in the definition provided by the International Labour Office was 5.6% in march 2020; the rate of registered unemployment, determined by the National Employment Agency (ANOFM), showing how many people are registered in their database as being unemployed, was 2.9% in the same period. In Romania, the main types of businesses are limited liability companies (SRL), joint-stock companies (SA), partnerships (SNC), simple partnerships (SCS), joint-stock partnerships (SCA), sole traders (PFA) and family associations). The main employers are multinational companies, profit/non-profit state-owned companies, private companies and NGOs.² Employment differences are sizeable between men and women, the gender employment gap being 17.16% in 2018. Factors contributing to this statistic are the level of education of women in the rural area, as well as a low participation in adult learning programs.³

Romania has undertaken to improve cooperation between employers, students and higher education institutions, especially in the development of study programs that lead to increased innovation, entrepreneurship and research potential of graduates. Although there are a number of positive elements in this regard, there are still issues that need to be addressed. For example, both graduates and employers consider that at the end of their university studies, the first mentioned category did not acquire sufficient transversal technical skills (IT&C), which obliges the graduates to follow continuous professional training courses in this respect.⁴

Recent Eurostat data shows a slight decrease in graduates' employability on a European level; 2020 having 77.7% of total European graduates employed

compared to 80.1% in 2019. If we look at Romania, a fair percentage of 76.7 % of total graduates appear to be already employed.⁵ We can compare this data to different times over the past decade and realise that there is a minimum increase that represents a reason for celebration. In 2012, when only 70.2% of alumni were employed, research showed that employers considered that students had more theoretical than practical knowledge, thus the need for an increased social and strategic environment in universities was justified for increasing employability.⁶ We can see that in 2018 and 2019, 76% of graduates had a job, Romania being placed at 22 out of 28 in terms of employability.⁷ At the beginning of this decade, the discrepancies between the labour market and the university environment were significantly greater. The implementation of the objectives assumed by Romania in the Bologna Process on employability has been closely related to those related to student-centred education, for example, which has led and still leads to a number of structural changes in higher education institutions. The data presented above indirectly show that both formal and informal education, as well as internationalisation of opportunities had an impact on employability, taking us to the place we are now.⁸ That said, having countries such as Malta, with 93.4%, or Germany, with 92.7%, employment rate, it is clear that in Romania there is still place for improvement.⁹ We consider that a continuum process to fulfill the following objectives, that Romania has set to attain within the Bologna process, will impact considerably the employment situation in Romania:¹⁰

- Reducing the unemployment rate among young people through education (Bucharest 2012);
- Compatibility of the new system of cycles with employment and career structure in public administration (London 2007);
- Improving the employability of graduates with a bachelor's degree, including in public service positions as well as the personal and professional development of graduates for their careers (Bergen 2005, Bucharest 2012, Yerevan 2015);
- Improving the cooperation between employers, students and higher education institutions, especially in the development of study programs

that lead to the increase of innovation, entrepreneurship and research potential of graduates (Bucharest 2012);

- Inclusion of practice in study programs, as well as learning in the workplace (Leuven / Louvain-la-Neuve 2009);
- Improving career-counseling services (Leuven / Louvain-la-Neuve 2009);
- Improving the data collection process and ensuring reliable and interesting information on the employability and career path of higher education graduates in the labour market (London 2007 / Yerevan 2015).

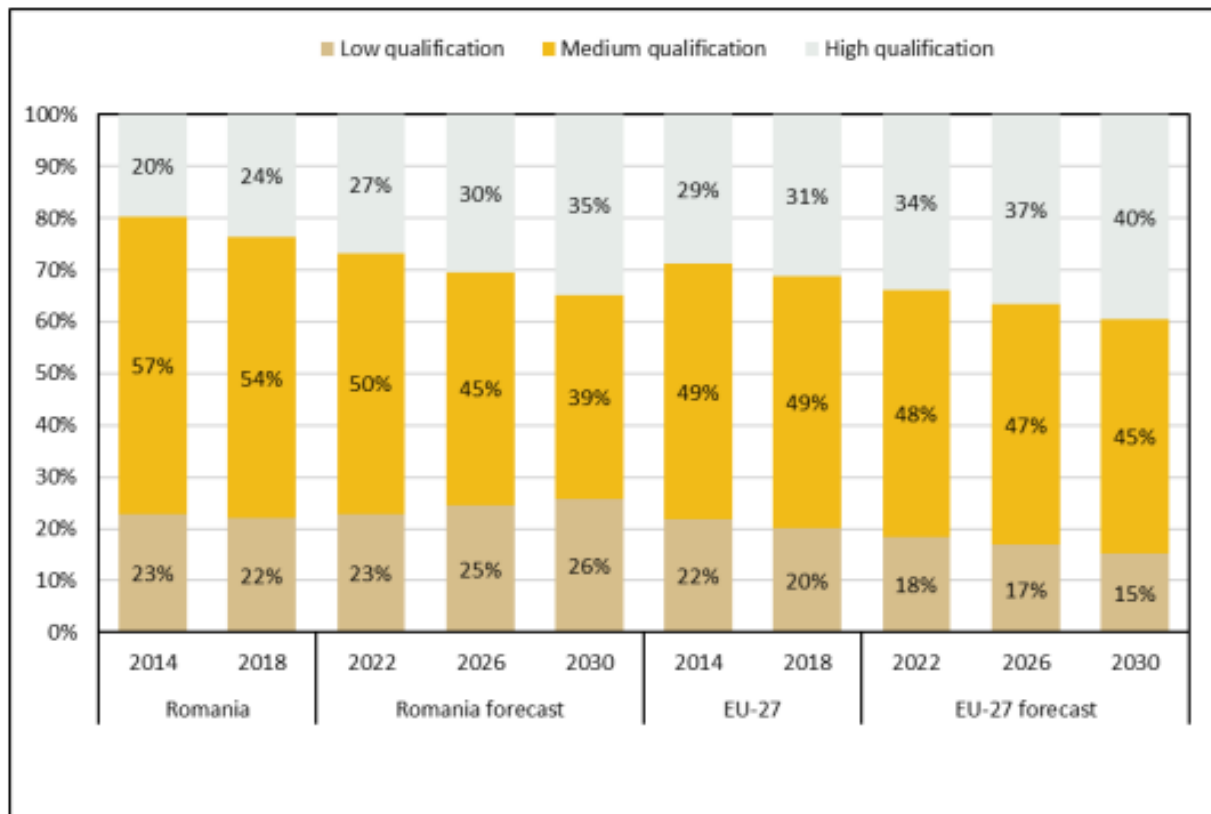
A recent, wide study of graduate employability in Romania proposes a series of solutions for the following period. These include better support from the Ministry of Education and Research to educational institutions, promotion of gender equality policies, legislation for a separate framework to support higher education graduates for employment, and taking into account the particularities of the graduated study cycle and the skills acquired. Additional recommendations include differentiation between master's and bachelor's graduates at the time of employment in

public administration, increasing the number of educational partners involved in the process of initiating new study programmes, and implementation of a periodic national questionnaire regarding the professional path followed by higher education graduates.¹¹

When referring to the skills that employers are looking for when searching for the ideal employee, an interview with one of the top recruiters in Romania indicated that, besides the technical knowledge of the graduates, the skills that are appreciated are good communication aptitudes, honesty, humour, politeness and punctuality.¹² A good knowledge of foreign languages, as well as the capacity to adapt to a constantly changing and complex environment and courage, shown through different professional initiatives, are also skills demanded by employers.¹³ Although some of these skills can be acquired through formal education, the best way to develop them is through extracurricular activities.

The following image (figure 1) presents the qualification level of Romanians compared to other EU citizens, showing that the percentage of highly qualified individuals increased over time, with a forecast for continuous development during the next 10 years.

Figure 1. Romanians' qualification compared to other EU citizens



Source: Cedefop (2020 Skills Forecast)

Activities at ULBS focussing on student employability

ULBS focusses on developing students' skills not only through formal education, theoretical instruction and classroom tasks, but also by creating a diverse set of extracurricular activities which students can choose from. No matter the field of education, every year students have the opportunity to get involved in events, activities and projects that contribute to the development of their professional and personal skills, thereby enhancing their future employability. In the following part, we will briefly present the main projects that took place at ULBS in recent years, mainly international projects, nationally- or internationally-funded. These projects are either ones that allowed students to gain new skills by direct participation, or projects that had as their objective the development of teachers, in order to encourage qualitative teaching methods that lead to the appropriate skills formation.

- EduHub is the ULBS Student Entrepreneurial Society. Each year, they organise meetings, workshops and contests where they support, financially and logistically, new student startups. Within EduHub, *Start-Up Hub: the laboratory of entrepreneurs* proposes a series of events targeting entrepreneurship; for example, Innovation Labs is a national programme dedicated to young people passionate about technology and digital innovation and is an opportunity for them to set their ideas in motion and live the experience of developing a tech product with top mentors, entrepreneurs and ICT and business specialists.
- SavingHearts: Innovative Methods in Cardiovascular Disease Treatment was a medical project that employed the strategic use of ICT technologies in teaching/training activities by using a telemedicine approach and created an innovative best practice environment in the form of an ICT platform where students and other practitioners can experience non-invasive surgery procedures. Besides the creation of the platform, medical students had the chance to attend real-life surgeries, learning from the best international heart surgeons.
- Next Cardio: Besides the research and practical experimental development that took place during the project lifetime, Next Cardio summer school gathered students and heart surgeons from other countries who worked together in learning how to better approach heart surgery, through minimum invasive techniques.
- Educating students for developing high quality research skills (ENSURE): a project that seeks to develop the skills needed to design and perform experiments, interpret data, and write scientific reports and research papers for students from medical and related fields.
- ULBS Smart – Hasso Plattner Foundation - Scholarship program of excellence for innovative projects and student solutions. The competition is organised by ULBS in order to financially support students in carrying out projects involving the development and use of technology, digitisation or any innovative methods and the development of products/ innovative services in the fields of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, maths) that respond to a societal need and that have the potential to go to market.
- Development of socio-physical and cyber systems based on the Internet of Things in the factory of the future. This has as its objective the creation of fundamental and applied research in the field of emerging technologies on which the assimilation of the Internet of the Future depends for the realisation of valuable publications at international level, as well as of patents for inventions. Also, the project seeks to create a technological infrastructure for research in the field of socio-physical-cybernetic systems within ULBS with prototypes and experimental systems. The infrastructure will allow the validation, demonstration and presentation of the concepts of fundamental and applied research for both the academic and the industrial environment.
- AGROPRACTIK. A total of 150 student members of the target group benefitted from individual and group counseling that helped them in exploring individual interests, job search techniques, personal promotion tools and techniques, and psycho-aptitude assessment. Addressing students from the agricultural field especially, students applied theoretical knowledge in the practical sector, completing their professional training. By participating in internships, students increased their capacity for self-decision, initiative, flexibility in various specific situations at work and developed their professional training.
- Simpract is a national project, gathering students from different fields of education in groups where different businesses are simulated. While each student occupies a specific position within the simulated enterprise, the companies collaborate via the specially designed platform, selling, buying or trading goods and services. The main objective of the project is that students acquire

information about running a business, financial and logistical procedures and processes, human resource management, marketing and so on; thus being prepared to face each of these when they enter the labour market.

- KNOWinFOOD. The knowledge triangle for food innovation, by harnessing tradition and assuring sustainability, aims to bring together higher education and industrial innovation in an integrated collaborative environment that provides students with the conditions to develop skills and specifically to improve food innovation skills. Thus, the students selected by the partner universities (Romania, France, Bulgaria, Hungary), in collaboration with Romanian food companies, designed innovative foods with added functionality, by capitalising on the existing tradition in the field and ensuring sustainability.
- The FOF-Designer: Digital Design Skills for Factories of the Future (DigiFoF). This activity has developed a network of training environments where HEIs, enterprises and training institutions come together to develop skill profiles, training concepts as well as materials for design aspects of the Factory of the Future (FoF).
- UniverCity – Strategic Partnerships of Higher Education for Community. This 36-month project to empower universities to enter into new strategic partnerships to engage with local communities, build stronger neighborhoods, and support future employability, addressed the challenge of breaking down the barriers between higher education and the ‘outside world’ in local communities as identified within the renewed EU strategy for higher education.
- Master’s in Diversity And Social Inclusion. This course proposes the creation of a flexible learning pathway in line with the needs of learners and social organisations in meeting diversity and social inclusion issues and solutions for EU citizens.
- Access and equity in universities. Innovative entrepreneurial approaches for students and teachers: The general objective of the project is to increase the quality, efficiency and access to higher education, in correlation with the needs of the labour market in economic sectors, by developing an integrated program of innovative and attractive educational offers, modern and flexible learning resources, teacher training and student support.

Cultivating skills, improving results, developing employability at ULBS

ULBS is concerned with the well-being of its students and so it operates the Centre for Integrated Services for Students (Smart-Hub), which offers psychological counselling, self-reflection and personal development, educational counselling, as well as career counselling and guidance. At the moment, the university has two psychologists and a career counsellor approximately 15,000 bachelor’s, master’s and doctoral students.

The mission of SmartHub is: to provide information and guidance to university students, graduates and students in the final years of high school, together with training activities, monitoring and prevention activities related to adaptation to the academic environment; to develop functional relations with the faculties and departments at ULBS and build relations with similar centres at other universities, the National Employment Association, employers, national and international specialised forums; and to develop partnerships with pre-university education units.

Psychological counseling, along with psychotherapy or other psychosocial approaches, are treatment alternatives for mental health problems. In this context, during the Covid-19 pandemic (March 2020 – July 2021) two main activities took place within SmartHub, which aimed at mitigating and/ or preventing mental health problems:

- Psychological counseling;
- Training activities / self-reflection workshops in which there were psychoeducation modules (correcting thinking styles, managing emotions, optimising decisions).

SmartHub has come to support student needs and facilitate the two processes. Thus, the Centre offers students psychological assessment services, individual and group psychological counselling, individual and group psychotherapy, individual and group career counselling and guidance, educational and intercultural counselling, as well as a series of self-knowledge and personal and professional development workshops.

At ULBS, within the SmartHub there is an Alumni Office, that has the following remit:

- Effective communication with students, employers, ULBS graduates, high school students;
- Maintaining and developing relationships with employers / labour market, ULBS graduates, high school students;
- Creating and monitoring the communication platforms with university graduates, with the labour market with high schools;

- Creation and annual completion of the graduates' database, in order to ensure a good communication with them;
- The evaluation graduates and the follow-up of their professional path;
- Training sessions for the development of students' transversal skills;
- Carrying out (together with specialised teachers) regular studies and analyses on university dropout, the integration of students in the labour market, the impact of counselling and career guidance services, as well as proposing measures to improve them.

The organisation of accredited courses (by the National Authority for Qualifications - ANC, Romanian College of Psychologists, other institutions) of interest for university graduates

How international partnerships can contribute to students' employability

We find ourselves part of a global village, having access to information, opportunities, as well as competition, from all over the world. For Europeans, the boundaries are even fewer compared to other parts of the world, therefore finding appropriate formation and jobs becomes easier for European citizens. Formal education, as well as extracurricular activities, internships or external scholarships are also easier to access and have a strong impact on graduates' employability. In this sense, international partners of European universities provide a wide set of formation opportunities, including programmes like Erasmus for study or internships.

Mobility projects aim at: personal, professional and social development, through the development of skills (knowledge, skills, attitudes) in an international context as well as the recognition of these skills; improving the teaching, training and learning process of professionals in the fields of education, training and youth; learning or deepening foreign languages (increasing language skills); awareness of the importance and understanding of new cultures and countries, thus developing a sense of belonging to European values and active involvement in the community; developing organisational capacity in the context of European and international cooperation; creating links between formal education, non-formal learning and vocational training; and pursuing synergies with labour and entrepreneurship.¹⁴

Germand and Cuevas show that, both on a general level and for Romania as well, 'work experience and time spent abroad are among the key criteria for

securing a job after graduation. The Erasmus Impact Study (EIS) and others have proven this with quite impressive figures: for example, 36% of Erasmus students have been offered a job during or after their traineeship abroad'.¹⁵ The authors consider that making international internships compulsory as part of the curricula will ensure a complex skill formation, thus increasing students' employability.

An impact study carried out within the Erasmus programme indicated that students' participation in Erasmus + mobility projects will 'improve the employability of graduates and their transversal skills' and the unemployment rate would be 23% lower at five years after graduation compared to those who did not participate in international mobility'.¹⁶ Also, employers seem to value Erasmus participation, as their experience shows how international mobility of students makes for more responsible professionals, due to language, working or self-management skills acquired during the mobility. We can therefore say that students who have experienced Erasmus mobility have a learning and employability advantage compared to students who have not benefited from such mobility.

Another study that presents a relevant image of Romania's graduates and the importance of international cooperation for employability, involved 77,000 students and 500 organisations in order to determine the impact of international activity over an individual.¹⁷ For almost 70% of the respondents, the Erasmus programme has been useful for finding the right job and for 90% of the students, the mobility contributed to skills improvement and acquiring a sense of European identity through communication with people from different cultures. At ULBS, between 80% and 90% of Erasmus mobility graduates (depending on the mobility type) declared that the Erasmus programme impacted their career and that they felt more appreciated in their work after completing their international mobility.¹⁸

According to a study conducted in 2019, targeting 60 student beneficiaries of Erasmus + projects, the following skills and knowledge are created through an international mobility:

- Benefits gained through the Erasmus + programme:
 - development of language skills;
 - experimenting with other teaching methods;
 - 'meeting' a new culture;
 - intercultural experience;
 - improving work skills in an international environment;
 - access to advanced technology;

- acquiring a different perspective on life, living in a different culture;
- meeting people with different professional backgrounds.
- Acquired knowledge within Erasmus mobilities;
- Teamwork experience (here students refer to a multinational team);
- Experience of working with other nationalities;
- Improving language skills;
- Development of communication skills;
- Work in an international environment.

Of course that, international mobility is the desired means to achieve these skills and develop as a professional, but not always students and staff have the means to spend some time abroad. This is where the locally organised, international events are most valuable, offering the chance for internationalisation at home. For example, ULBS organizes an annual 'International Week', gathering around 80 academics and staff from partner universities in 10 to 15 countries in Sibiu. For one week, all the regular activities stop and the international guests step in, sharing with students and staff their knowledge on certain topics, in certain fields or even just life expe-

riences. Students are eager to engage in discussions with the guests, many times forming a good network that results in later collaborations in their field of expertise. Frequently students have managed to find high-ranked, international jobs with the help of past International Week participants.

Event report

The CRE8® Europe event in Sibiu (4–8 November 2019) was the second in the project programme, following the first event in Karlstad. Before the actual start of the programme in Sibiu, the Romanian students met their colleagues (and soon to be friends) and went out for dinner. This was a very much appreciated activity, as it gave the occasion to the students to meet in an informal environment ahead of the project activities.

The students from Sweden, Norway and Spain were accommodated in the ULBS Academic Centre. The teachers and staff members involved in the project booked their own accommodation in the city centre. Most of the breakfasts were served at the campus accommodation, therefore the logistics were optimal for the students.

On the first day of the event (Monday), attending the welcoming ceremony at the Faculty of Med-



The students prepare to tackle a CRE8® challenge at ULBS, Sibiu, November 2019

icine. One student from each country shared their thoughts about CRE8 project; Ximena Deramond, the project manager, Daniela Preda, ULBS CRE8® manager and the Vice-Chancellor also addressed the guests and the press members present at the opening. Being a historian, the Vice-Chancellor also gave a short presentation on the history of Sibiu.

After lunch, a group bonding activity was organised for the students in the form of a treasure hunt-like city tour of Sibiu, via the Questo app (developed by an ULBS alum). Getting to know the city in this way, in a competitive way, was appreciated by the students and staff.

Much of Tuesday was spent addressing the week's first CRE8® challenge, from a local bakery, TransAgape, who wanted to establish the best way to develop a healthy and sustainable food package for children. Wednesday began with a visit to the Faculty of Engineering to observe the activities of the host university first hand, and later the students visited the premises of the previous day's task-owner. The students were keen to see each step of the production process and were given the opportunity to model and bake their own products. Afterwards, a visit of the Faculty of Sciences and lunch took place, followed by a visit to the Astra Museum of Traditional Folk Civilisation. In the afternoon, the cohort and staff departed to Paltinis, a mountain resort where ULBS has an education centre. One reflection from participants was that the visits to the faculties were less engaging than the time spent with the task-owners and at cultural institutions, and perhaps future CRE8® Europe programmes could find better ways to convey the value of activities within host universities.

Thursday saw the second CRE8® challenge of the week, this time from Hug The Mug, a local coffee shop who wanted the students to think of innovative ways in which they could best support their employees. This second task was preferred to the first by the students, since it was more concrete and tightly-focussed. The day ended with a dinner at the task-owner, where the cohort could see exactly how the business they had talked about the whole day was performing.

On the final day (Friday), the group met at the ULBS Academic Centre and conducted an evaluation of the week. Overall, the CRE8® Europe week in Sibiu turned to be a successful event, appreciated by both students and staff. The schedule was evaluated as being balanced and suitable, as may be seen from the comments presented in the Materials Folder for the project: document CE-RWSC4.

Future directions

International cooperation and skills development in an online environment: lessons from Covid-19

All professional and personal communication, including CRE8® Europe activity, moved online during the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore the structures, duration, inputs and outputs of each activity leading to skills formation within the project also required adaptation. This presents some valuable lessons for future projects.

Despite the fact that technological advancement has made it possible to intensify information exchange and communication, 'statistics show that 70% of projects fail, failing to achieve their goals regarding time, budget and performance'.¹⁹ Under these conditions, we can consider that the project teams do not work properly or are not sufficiently prepared to cope with the new work environment in which the project takes place. As early as 1995, Charles Handy stated that work would be defined as 'what you do, not where you go', and 'in reality, the converging economic, technological and geopolitical factors have led to a new working model and a new understanding of the workspace. We are in the era of the international team in the virtual environment'.²⁰ There are more and more organisations that 'no longer have assigned offices and it is increasingly common to promote teamwork in the virtual environment. Laszlo Bock, vice president of 'People Operations' at Google, says that at least 50% of Google employees work in virtual teams at all times.²¹ 'Virtual teams are able to collaborate in certain ways to bring success to the organisations they belong to'.²²

As the physical connection disappears in case of online collaboration, the literature on virtual teams (Brewer PE, 2015; Lee R. Margaret, 2014) and international projects (Binder J., 2007; Koster, Kathrin, 2013) gives special importance to the way in which communication is achieved between the members of the international team in the virtual environment: the main element of the team building is now the presence of multiculturalism. In our opinion, team members in the virtual environment, in order to communicate and collaborate successfully, must have or acquire specific skills, which must be established in the project planning phase, in accordance with its purpose and objectives. As a result of the bibliographic research, starting from the characteristics of international projects and international teams in the virtual environment, we identified the main

competencies, which must be taken into account when building an efficient international project team in the virtual environment.

Seeking to create a template for recruiting the right members for international projects carried out online, we will take into account the categories of competencies proposed in the ICB-IPMA Competence Baseline:²³ technical skills (20 elements), behavioural skills (15 elements), contextual skills (11 elements), from which we will select those elements that we consider specific to the members of the international team, as well as the concept of 'intercultural intelligence' (cross-cultural intelligence), proposed by Grisham TW. Thus, we propose the following competencies necessary for the members of the international project team in the virtual environment, both in terms of soft skills and hard skills, thus answering one of the most important questions regarding the creation of an international team in the virtual environment, so that its activity can be carried out in an efficient way:²⁴

- Soft skills
 - linguistic competences: fluent speaking and writing skills in the established language; active listening;
 - intercultural intelligence: emotional intelligence; cultural intelligence; sensitivity for cultural differences; no preconceptions; understands how culture influences work and collaboration;
 - collaboration competences: sociable; team work ability; correctness; inspires trust; patient; ethical;
 - behavioural competences: self-motivating; ability to understand ambiguity; proactivity; confidence; creativity.
- Hard skills
 - technical skills: understands the instruments used in virtual communication; knows when and how to use each instrument; is comfortable using online instruments;
 - organising skills: disciplined; respects the established protocol of the project; respects deadlines without the need of further memos; researches on his/her own;
 - time management skills: realistic about the time needed for certain tasks to be fulfilled; able to adapt his/her timetable according to the needs of the project.

Projects have limited time resources, so candidates with a profile according to the skills list presented above are preferable, without the need for speciali-

sed training, to acquire the minimum skills required. 'Creating teams in the virtual environment gives organizations the opportunity to attract talent quickly from a variety of positions, locations and organisations. The goal is to obtain intellectual capital and use it as quickly as possible. The methods used by the organisation to manage this process can make the difference between success and failure'.²⁵

In conclusion, we want to highlight that those skills, abilities and knowledge mentioned above were achieved and acquired from the planning phase of the CRE8® Europe project. In addition, while the Covid-19 pandemic was a hindrance to the project, the skills of the students, as well of the staff involved were equal to meeting the challenge, and the virtual activities created the means for new capacities and competences to be developed.

How can we contribute to graduates' employability?

In every country, employability stand as both an economic and social indicator, showing the stability of the labour market as well as the quality and adequateness of formal and informal education. Employability of graduates can be boosted through the involvement of many market actors, starting with the ministries of education and labour, continuing with the media, the civil society and community, decisional entities, the business environment and people with expertise and, of course, through the involvement of education entities, from institutions to single individuals such as educators, teachers or staff. So how can we, members of higher education institutions contribute to the development of students' employability? Firstly, students need to be encouraged at every step to get involved in new projects, to accept challenges, to develop their knowledge and networks. Research and entrepreneurial projects are example of profession-related challenges, while projects like CRE8® Europe stand as a witness to the value of international collaborations and networking to the development of self. Besides promoting certain opportunities to students, it is important that both support staff and faculty are present and willing to dedicate their time and energy in counselling and identifying, together with their students, what job or job field suits them best; early establishment of the right field of activity can lead to fewer disappointments, more motivation and better professional results. At an institutional level, university management should constantly update the study plans according to the market needs and continuously increase the partner's network, thus offering more possibilities for internships and other project for students.

Recruiting skilled graduates in Romania

Labour market dynamics have increased considerably in recent times. The Covid-19 pandemic brought major and quite unpredictable changes. Things seem more insecure than ever. The good part is that this transition period can be an opportunity to develop new individual qualities.²⁶ In 2021, employers are looking for employees who are good specialists in the field, have technical skills and, equally, soft skills. Whether you work in marketing, journalism, law or research, technical skills will help you evolve in the field in which you work.²⁷

In terms of competences, the skills sought by the employer for a candidate can be divided into hard skills and soft skills. Hard skills vary from one field of activity to another. Instead, the soft ones are applicable in most industries, regardless of the level of experience, both to professionals and to students and graduates. Graduates with these skills demonstrate better performance in the workplace and are more likely to pursue a successful career path. Therefore, companies want to identify candidates who hold such competencies, from the earliest stages of the selection process.²⁸

Following discussions with employers, it was revealed that the soft skills they value in the selection and recruitment stages are:

- customer orientation (53%);
- teamwork (47%);
- agility and adaptability (47%);
- effective mode of communication (41%);
- lifelong learning (41 %);
- planning and organization (29%).

The hard skills that employers look for in candidates during the selection and recruitment process are:

- computer skills (Outlook, Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel, PowerPoint) (88 %);
- programming languages (Java, C ++, Smalltalk, PHP, .NET) (41%);
- knowledge of foreign languages (41%);
- Project Management (Waterfall, Agile, SCRUM Methodology, Business analysis knowledge, PMP certifications, PRINCE) (29%);
- knowledge of accounting or financial reporting (29%).

The most desired skills in the job market over the next decade

Certain skills seem likely to become very important in the next ten years, and holding them could make the difference between keeping or losing a job. Continuous development of these skills is needed for a

candidate to remain competitive in the labour market. The analysis carried out with the help of companies draws attention to the importance that employees/ graduates must pay to the way they manage their own career, paying constant attention to trends and the way the industry in which they operate evolves.

Discussions with university stakeholders highlight the following skills as likely to be the most important in the labour market over the coming decade:

- the ability to adapt to different tasks and to find innovative solutions (59%);
- the ability to work in diverse cultural environments (59%);
- understanding tasks and results orientation (41%);
- agility in learning (41%);
- cognitive - the ability to think about several concepts simultaneously (29%);
- the ability to act in a business environment with a lower level of predictability (29 %).²⁹

Soft skills can be developed through a wide range of activities, CRE8® Europe included. The following can be considered the top five most valued soft skills:³⁰

Adaptability

During the pandemic, being adaptable helped enormously, especially for those who moved their jobs home. Also, from the moment of the interview, the employer can test this quality, through your willingness to be flexible. We can improve this ability by changing the perspective on the things we have. We can look for more than one solution to a problem, which trains our brains to see possibilities. Whoever is adaptable is not scared of a problem and will know how to handle it. They will remain productive, being able to immediately find the comfort of work.

Creativity

For most, being creative makes them think of art; but being creative doesn't mean you have to paint or write poetry. Creativity means perspective, the ability to make connections and the understanding of personal intuition. We can improve creativity by experimenting and constantly learning new things, thereby developing imagination. If adaptability helps us when we need to find solutions with existing resources, creativity is based on 'thinking outside the box'. A creative employee is helpful when it comes to competition.

Time Management

The ability to be organised is crucial. However, very few of us are able to organise effectively. During the pandemic, due to the remote option of employers,

many had problems managing time correctly, so as not to disturb the balance between personal life and work. We can improve this ability by planning time and prioritising activities with the help of 'To Do' lists. In this way, we can identify the loss of time and gain more time for ourselves. A productive person sets a time and work plan, avoids interruptions and excessive socialising and learns to manage perfectionism.

Communication

Most of us think we can communicate. A positive attitude, effective communication of information, the ability to listen and filter things, persuasion and non-verbal means of communication are some of the mandatory requirements when it comes to communication. We can improve our communication skills by exercising it. Poor communication is also due to a lack of focus on the subject.

Self-confidence

Having self-esteem transforms us into balanced people. Everything that means balance, attracts and builds relationships based on trust. When we do not trust ourselves, we are not productive, we become perfectionists, we try to strive for something that is not authentic, we are critical and we are not able to support those around us. We can improve our self-confidence by imagining that we are the person we want to be. We identify the obstacles to achieving this and try to take risks. Those who have self-confidence easily take risks, which means they are ready to face any challenge.

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Spain (Jaume I University)

National overview

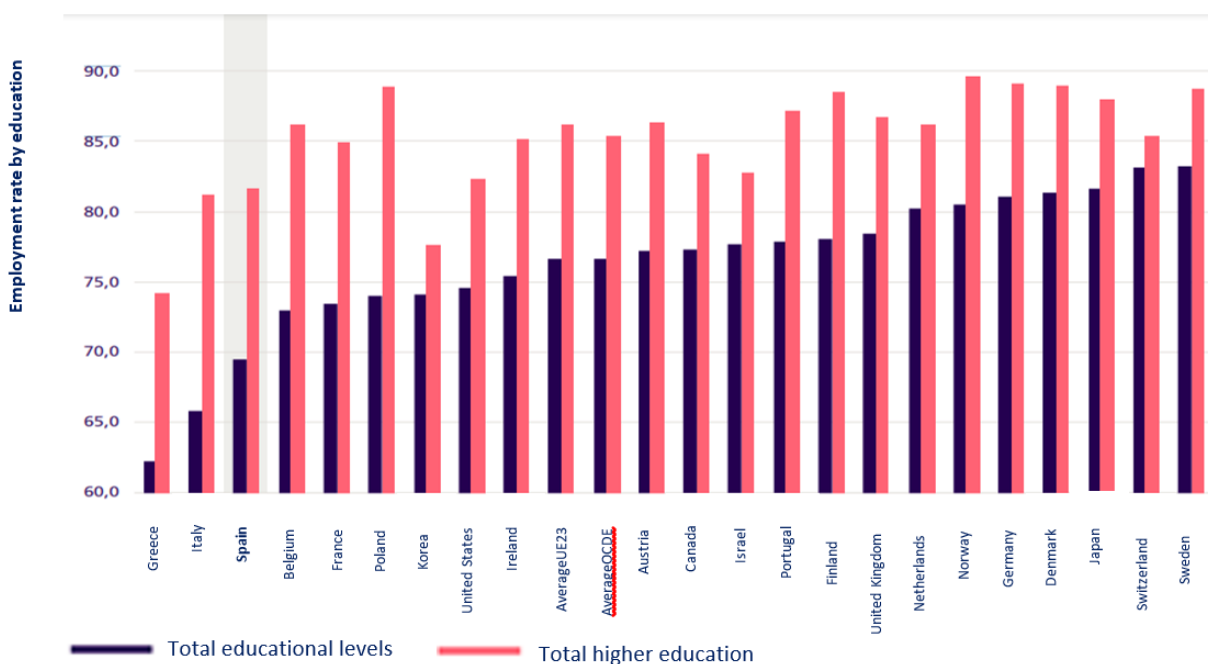
The result of a study recently carried out by the *Fundación Universidad-Empresa* has shown university students' employability to be one of the 'hot' subjects at Spanish universities.¹ However, this conclusion contrasts with the official data published by the *Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas* (CRUE) in their 2020 report: *The Spanish University in Figures*.² From this report it can be concluded that university degrees are more important for young Spanish people in terms of their employability than professional development activities undertaken at university, just as it is for other undergraduate students across Europe. As it can be seen in figure 1, in 2018 the general employment rate of Spanish people was 69.5 %; meanwhile the same rate for the population with higher studies was 81.6 %. Focusing on the same employment rates, but for the non-graduate workforce in the OECD and in the UE 23 countries, they are respectively 76.7 %. For undergraduate students, however, these rates rose to 85.4 % for the OECD countries and 86.1 % in the UE 23 countries respectively. These data seem to indicate that Spain's

undergraduate employment rates are similar to that of its neighbouring countries. Specifically, for the Spanish active population with higher education, the negative differential was only 3.8 percentage points with the OECD and 4.5 percentage points with the EU to 23.

This reality is also observed in the growing demand for higher studies by young people according to the CRUE report. The preference of young people to pursue undergraduate studies has increased by 8.2 points, from 24.3 % in 2008 to 32.5 % in 2017, and this demand has been met by both public and private Spanish universities.

However, if we analyse how employability indicators perform according to the fields of knowledge, we observe that a certain imbalance does exist in favour of employability for engineering and health sciences the undergraduates. The CRUE report mentioned above shows that the highest employment rate is registered in the fields of ICT, Health and Engineering, and Architecture, with more than 10 points of difference with the least employability field: Education (see figure 2).

Figure 1. Employment rate of the population aged 25 to 64, by education level.



Source: *Education at Glance*, OECD (2019)

In addition, higher education has also consistently shown its influence on the quality of employment and on undergraduate salaries. In essence, an adult with a bachelor's degree or equivalent level of training receives on average an annual income that is 52 % higher than that of a person with just a higher secondary education level. If the education is at the master's level, then, on average, the annual income is 85% (see figure 3).

Interestingly, according to the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística (INE)*, during the global financial crisis (2008–14), the Spanish economy lost 3,813,000 non-graduate jobs, meanwhile 506,000 with a higher education requirement were created. In other words, only jobs with a higher education profile registered net job creation (figure 4).

With the beginning of the recovery, in the period 2015 to 2019, a total of 2,016,000 jobs were created, of which 1,135,000 required higher education.

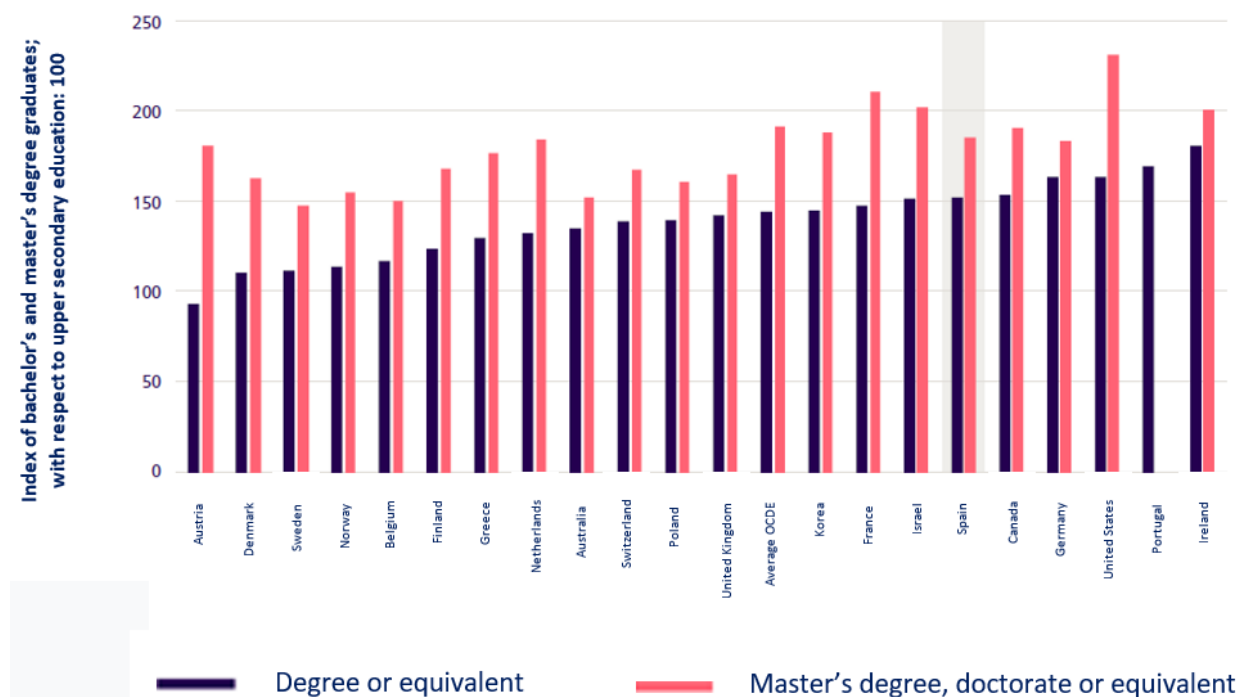
Figure 2. Employment rates of people aged 25 to 64 with higher education by field of knowledge

Education at a Glance 2019: OECD Indicators – OECD 2019

| Fields of study | Spain | Average OCDE | Average EU 23 |
|---|-------|--------------|---------------|
| Education | 75,7 | 84,3 | 84,8 |
| Arts and humanities, social sciences and journalism | 78,8 | 83,3 | 83,7 |
| Business administration an law | 80,9 | 86,1 | 86,5 |
| Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics | 80,5 | 84,3 | 85,0 |
| ICT | 86,5 | 90,1 | 91,0 |
| Engineering and architecture | 85,1 | 88,5 | 88,9 |
| Health and wellness | 85,5 | 87,5 | 88,1 |
| Total | 81,6 | 85,4 | 86,1 |

Source: *Education at a Glance, OECD (2019)*

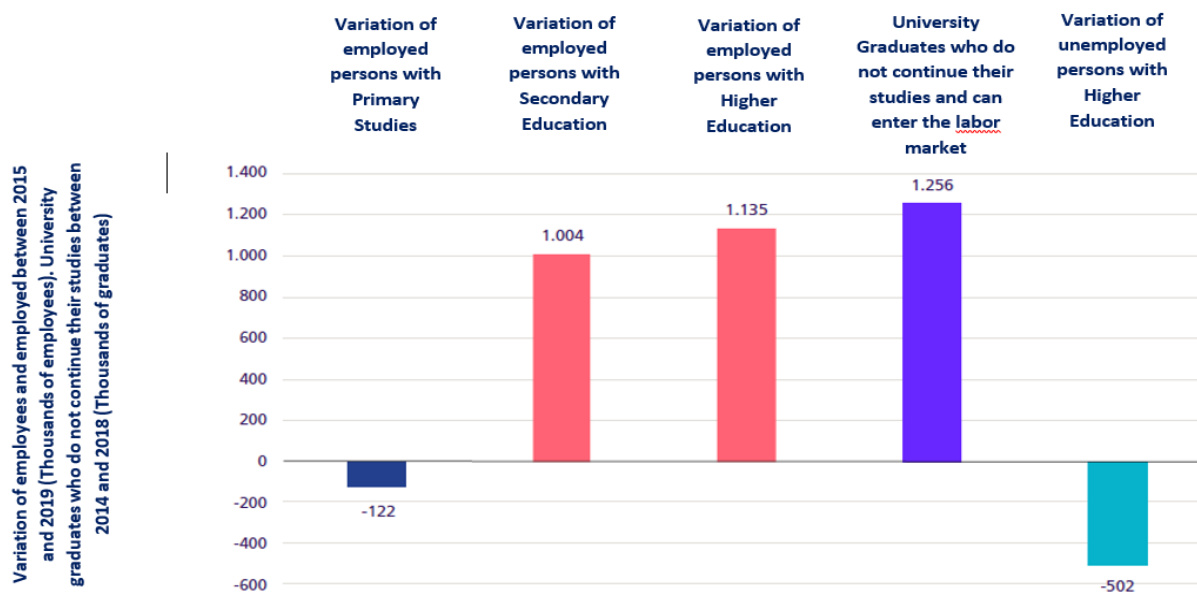
Figure 3. Relative income of adults with higher education



Source: *EUROSTAT (2019)*

Figure 4. Variation of employed and unemployed persons by level of training attained

Source: INE.2019. MCIU. 2019. Self-made



Source: INE (2019)

Therefore, from the joint reading of the data presented above, it can be inferred that employability could hardly be considered one of the unresolved matters for the Spanish university system. However, the opinion of university undergraduates reveals a very different picture. In general, Spanish students do not perceive their higher studies to prepare them properly for the challenges to come during their working life. Specifically, six out of ten Spanish university students express themselves in these terms, according to a survey carried out by the *Fundación Universidad-Empresa*.³ In addition, the opinion of the employers also seems to pinpoint the existence of a mismatch with regard to the so-called ‘soft skills’ or transversal competences.⁴ That is, in terms of employability, this information seems to indicate that the great challenge of the Spanish university in the 21st century is to promote different mechanisms to facilitate the development of transversal or soft skills in university students, such as entrepreneurial and creative skills.

Organisations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD, and the EU clearly state the importance of stimulating an attitude that promotes entrepreneurial values and behaviours among young university students.⁵ The expert group on Learning and Entrepreneurial Skills within the EU recognised in its 2014 report that promoting these skills, among which creativity stands out, contributes to students’ integral development. This report indica-

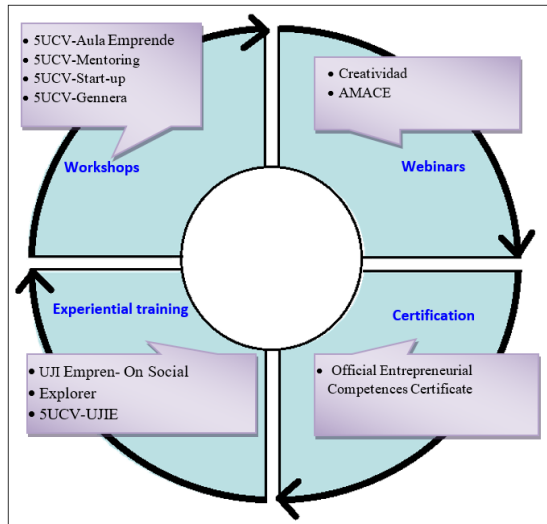
tes that students who have attended entrepreneurship courses tend to show a more committed attitude to their training, which implies taking full responsibility for their own learning. These students are usually more qualified to solve working and academic challenges in a creative and innovative way. Moreover, as regards being more creative, students who have followed entrepreneurship programmes also tend to have a more analytical mindset, leadership skills and also a great capacity to adapt to different situations. In addition, data suggests that students who have received entrepreneurial training tend to find a job earlier than students who have not attended entrepreneurship courses, and that their income level is usually higher. Finally, and in terms of the social contribution of learning in entrepreneurial and creative skills, the EU group’s report clearly states that students who have participated in these training programmes are more socially committed than other students, since the percentage of these students who are participating in voluntary work is significantly higher than that of students who have not received such training.

Non-formal entrepreneurial learning

Jaume I University (UJI), within its non-formal education offering, has designed a strategy to stimulate the learning of entrepreneurial skills among its students. The main challenge of this strategy is to guarantee the learning of codified knowledge, but

also of tacit knowledge linked to the development of entrepreneurial skills. Figure 5 describes the main entrepreneurial programmes within the UJI entrepreneurial strategy.

Figure 5. Non-formal entrepreneurial education at UJI



Source: Elaborated by authors

In general terms, all these programmes, with their particularities, have been designed considering the phases of the Kolb's learning cycle,⁶ therefore they all share four learning phases:

- (1) Definition of hypotheses on the concept and the business model,
- (2) Validation of these hypotheses with real agents,
- (3) Transformation of hypotheses into new courses of action
- (4) Management of social networks to advance the entrepreneurial learning process.

In each programme, specific tasks are carried out and cards are used as the main instruments of student learning. Both the tasks and the cards are prepared considering the distinctive features of each program and the particular learning needs of each student. In general terms, each work session begins with the presentation by the instructor of the codified knowledge programmed for the session, followed by the explanation of the learning tasks and the delivery of the corresponding cards to the students. It is important to note that the instructor works individually with each student to adapt the tasks and cards to the particularities of each entrepreneurial project. In the second part of the session, students present their entrepreneurial project progress. After each presentation a collective debate follows, in which all participants contribute to the improvement of the project

and new entrepreneurial knowledge is generated by means of social interaction. Finally, the session ends with a general reflection by the instructor. In the time that elapses between the different working sessions, students must carry out their tasks looking for secondary information on their market and validating their entrepreneurial project with real information. Therefore, each session is followed by a period of work outside the classroom in which students interact with their environment and acquire real information on their project.⁷

Event report

Challenges and task-owners

UJI's CRE8® Europe event (2 – 6 March 2020) was a positive experience for both project staff and participants. To shape the CRE8® challenges, UJI invited local entrepreneurs to participate in the programme. They were both UJI alumni and entrepreneurs of recognised prestige in the local community with whom the university had previously collaborated in training activities. The two CRE8® task-owners selected were Nayar Systems, a telecommunications engineering company, and the Castellón local authority. Their tasks dealt respectively with the optimal use of the Internet of Things and the problem of rural depopu-



Cohort group work at UJI, Castellón, March 2020

lation. Details of the full tasks may be found in the Materials Folder for the project: document CE-EAE4 - CRE8® Europe Project Task Examples.

The information gathered from UJI event participants through personal interviews and online questionnaires show positive results that are worth highlighting, as well as aspects that require improvement in future CRE8® Europe events. In essence, the main goal of the UJI event was to develop problem-solving skills and creativity among the undergraduate student cohort. To analyse this goal, personal interviews with students and task-owners were carried out. Additionally, assuming that the heterogeneity in the background of participants was an important element in enlarging cross-cultural competences, the need to establish a mechanism to measure them appeared necessary. To this end an online test was administered before the first CRE8® event (Karlstad, September 2019) and at the end of the final event, which was held online (May 2020). From the main conclusions, which are delineated below, it can be seen that students did develop cross-cutting skills such as creativity, cross-cultural competences, and pitching. However, some suggestions for improving future CRE8® events have been also evidenced.

Future directions

Creativity and entrepreneurial competencies

From the personal interviews conducted by staff after the conclusion of the UJI event, it can be seen that, for both the students and the task-owners, working with a real challenge was of great value. The students appreciated the chance to gain first-hand knowledge of the real business world and the opportunity to experiment with real challenges and to enhance their creative skills. Students' and task-owners' opinions seem to highlight the working methodology used. For example, one UJI-task owner stated that 'we are used to carrying out creativity sessions in our organisation, and we have even worked on the challenge posited here; however, I am really surprised by the solutions proposed. Never could I have imagined them'. Another UJI-task owner expressed the same opinion: 'it is gratifying to see how the challenge has been tackled from multiple angles, which each suggest new ways forward'.

The results from the event seem to support the benefits of social and experiential learning in terms of creative skills, which have been the pedagogical underpinning approach. However, some Spanish students also suggested that CRE8®Europe was lacking an integrative approach to link creativity

with other entrepreneurial competencies. The need to practice with entrepreneurial tools to explore the future potential of the solutions presented was evidenced by almost all the Spanish students as a way to improve CRE8® Europe in the future. One stated that 'it is very gratifying to win a challenge but now I don't know how the solution can be moved ahead'. Another student reflected that 'now I know the importance for real challenges to be creative, but I am still missing how to be entrepreneurial'.

Taken together, these reflections suggest that CRE8® Europe should evolve by widening its approach to include the practice of other entrepreneurial competences related with creativity. In fact, creativity is important for students' employability, but its potential is enlarged when it is related to entrepreneurship. To help future CRE8® Europe programmes to link creativity with entrepreneurship the following teaching materials (which may be found elsewhere in the project's outputs) have been developed by UJI: the CRE8® entrepreneurial method, pedagogical foundations and templates.

The post-Covid 19 context, on the other hand, suggests also the need to link entrepreneurial creativity with sustainability. Therefore, future CRE8® Europe programmes should embrace a range of tools to encourage students to propose challenging solutions to sustainability problems and to study how these solutions can evolve from an entrepreneurial point of view.

Teamwork competences

Working in teams was also highlighted as a positive factor in the CRE8® Europe experience. The student teams were designed to be multidisciplinary and multinational. For the Spanish task-owners, the variety of backgrounds mixed in each team enabled the challenge to be approached from different perspectives and enriched the solutions proposed in terms of creativity and applicability.

For instance, one of the UJI task-owners reported that 'for us it is an opportunity to approach a real challenge from different cultural viewpoints. It improves the relevance of the proposed solutions, for sure'. Another UJI task-owner considered that 'the mix of students with different backgrounds improved the solution. From my point of view the solution proposed to my challenge was technologically flawless, but also took into account different social factors'.

However, some students also stated that the level of involvement of their teammates was not always as high as could be desired. The combination of different profiles is an important factor in enhancing

creativity, but it should also be accompanied by different individual learning purposes, which should outline the expectations of individual activity. This is an interesting point and suggests the need to homogenise not only the students' selection criteria, but also how these criteria are implemented in the recruiting process. The need to create a committee responsible for the selection of all the participants, instead of one committee in each university, is an important learning for future CRE8® Europe programmes. By doing this, the level of students' heterogeneity in terms of learning goals and interests could be reduced.

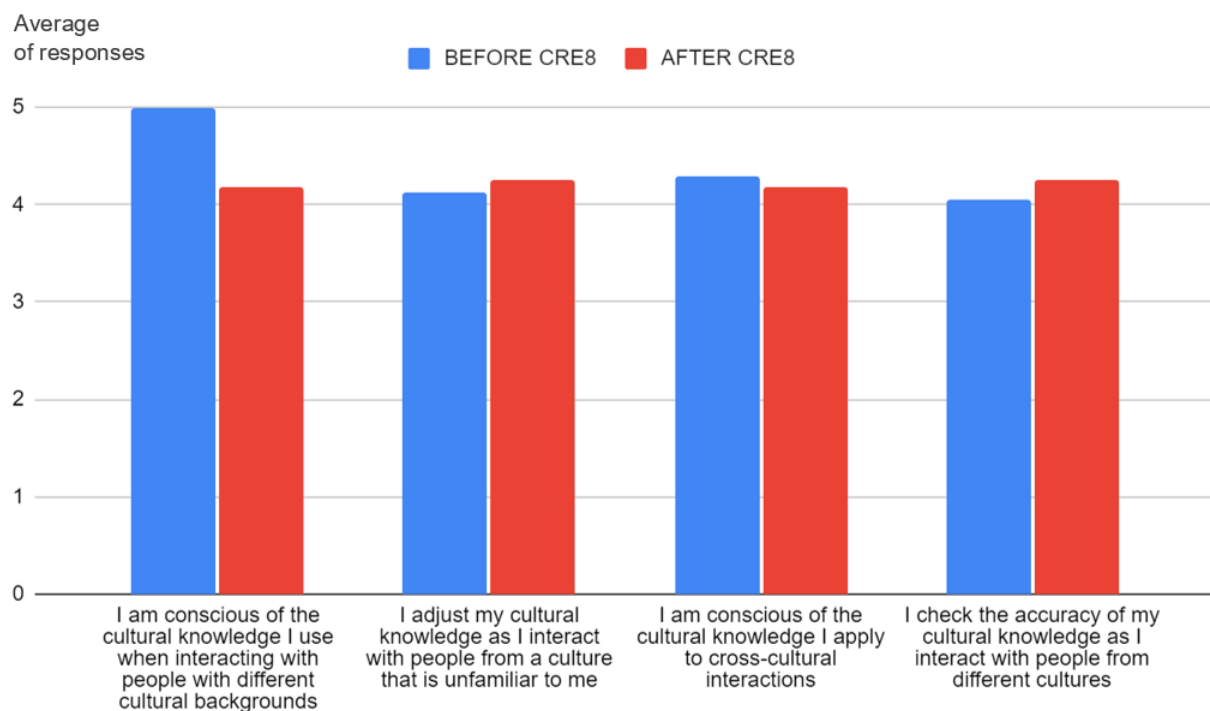
Cross-cultural competences

A further point of reflection from the UJI event, as well as from the CRE8® Europe project more broadly, is that of cross-cultural competences. This refers to 'the ability to develop and interpret criteria for personal and business performance that are independent from the assumptions of a single country, culture, or context; and to implement those criteria appropriately in different countries, cultures and contexts'.⁸ Past research suggests that cross-cultural competences are a significant factor behind opportunity identification in a global context and that educators need to create learning environments which allow students to be familiar with different cultural

values, patterns of thinking, feeling, reacting, and problem-solving.⁹ The CRE8® Europe model can be useful in this regard. Being aware of the importance of multiculturalism, the CRE8® Europe staff were interested in measuring the extent to which participants improved their cross-cultural competences as a result of their participation in the programme. To this end a questionnaire (annex 1) was circulated before the first CRE8® Europe event and as a final activity at the end of the fourth event. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a scale from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree) with different statements related to cross-cultural competences and international opportunity recognition. All the students participating in the CRE8® Europe project answered the two online questionnaires, (so 20 respondents for each questionnaire). The main results are presented below.

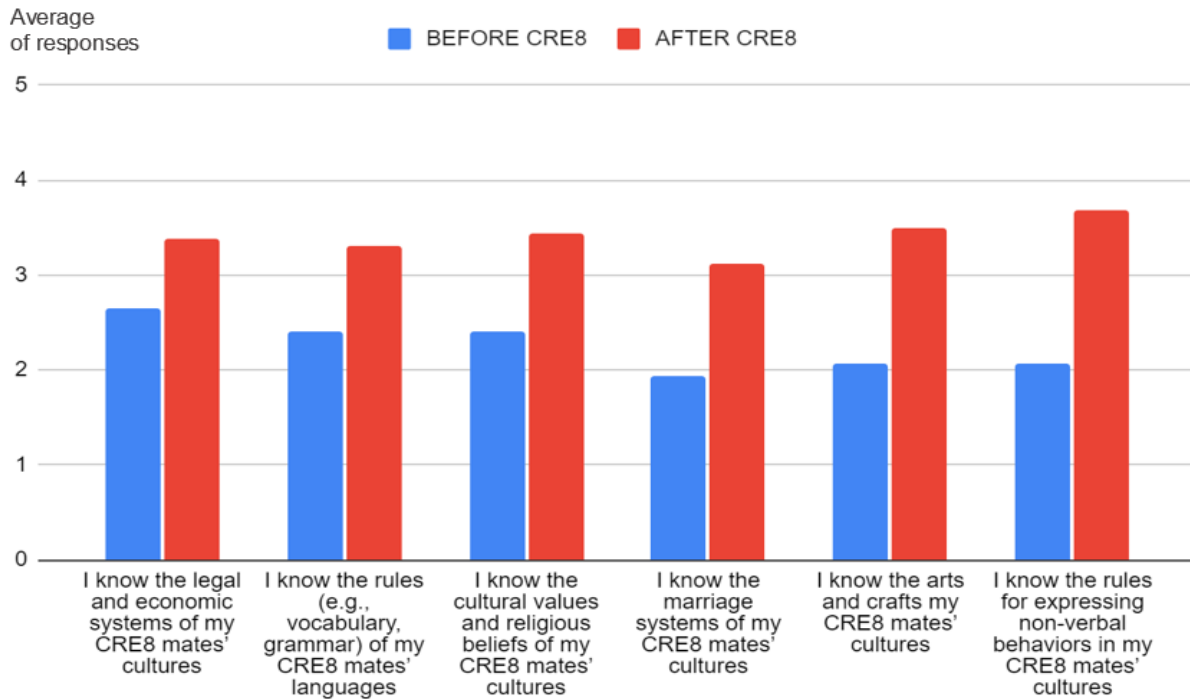
Metacognitive cross-cultural competences reflect the processes individuals use to acquire and understand cultural knowledge. Figure 6 seems to indicate that CRE8® Europe experience should be considered as a sound experience facilitating students' adaptation to other cultural contexts. For example, the results clearly show that students are now more eager to adapt their cultural knowledge when interacting with people from other cultures, and it seems they do more naturally. In fact, they indicate that after the CRE8®Eu-

Figure 6. Metacognitive cultural competences



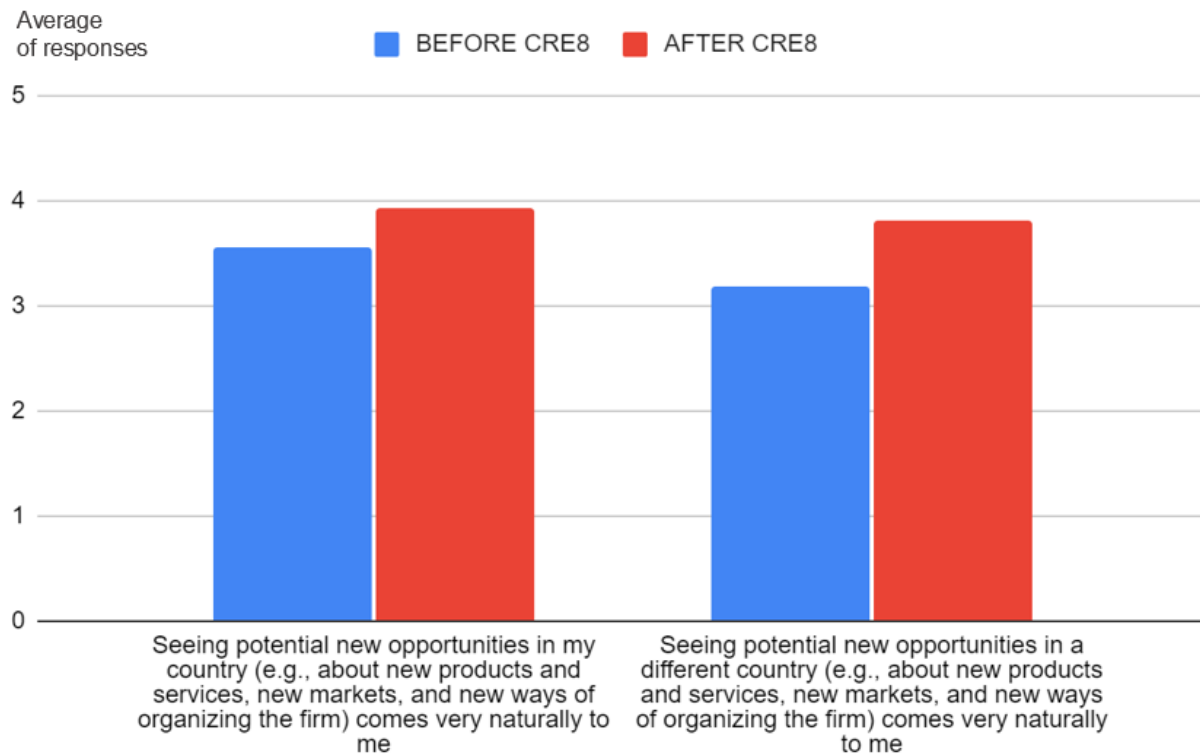
Source: *Elaborated by authors*

Figure 7. Cognitive cultural competences



Source: Elaborated by authors

Figure 8. International opportunity recognition



Source: Elaborated by authors

rope experience their level of conscious of the cultural knowledge used when interacting with people from others cultures has decreased (see figure 6).

Cognitive cultural competences represent the actual culture-general and culture-specific knowledge of the environment. Figure 7 clearly shows the advances CRE8® Europe participants have made in terms of cognitive cultural competences. Participants declared that after taking part in the project they have improved their knowledge of their fellow participants' cultures in terms of: legal and economic system languages, values, marriage traditions, arts and crafts and interpreting non-verbal language.

Finally, an additional question was added in order to explore if the CRE8® Europe experience had facilitated participants' international opportunity recognition. The results also suggest that the CRE8® Europe project can help participants to develop their skills in identifying new opportunities both in their national context and in international contexts (see figure 8). All in all, it can be clearly posited that the CRE8® Europe project was valuable in terms of transversal competences development and should be extended to other countries.

Annex 1. Cross-cultural questionnaire

| | |
|---|---|
| CRE8 EUROPE STUDENTS. Cross-cultural competences | |
| Cultural Competences | |
| Metacognitive | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I use when interacting with people with different cultural backgrounds. 2. I adjust my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from a culture that is unfamiliar to me. 3. I am conscious of the cultural knowledge I apply to cross-cultural interactions. 4. I check the accuracy of my cultural knowledge as I interact with people from different cultures. |
| Cognitive | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I know the legal and economic systems of my CRE8® mates' cultures. 2. I know the rules (e.g., vocabulary, grammar) of my CRE8 mates' languages. 3. I know the cultural values and religious beliefs of my CRE8 mates' cultures. 4. I know the marriage systems of my CRE8® mates' cultures. 5. I know the arts and crafts my CRE8® mates' cultures. 6. I know the rules for expressing non-verbal behaviours in my CRE8® mates' cultures. |
| International Opportunity Recognition | |
| <p>While going about day-to-day activities, I see potential new ideas (e.g., on new products and services, new markets, and new ways of organizing firms all around me)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In my own country • In other countries | |

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Norway (Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences)



National overview

Norway has achieved high levels of socio-economic development with stable economic growth, a highly qualified population, and high levels of employment. However, the country faces slowing productivity growth in the mainland economy, high real labour costs, and underuse of skills for entrepreneurship and innovation, which are key to leverage the economic and social benefits of skills. Therefore, measures should be taken to ensure that Norway is prepared for a future that is more innovative, knowledge-based, and productive. In order to achieve this, the country should improve the coordination between stakeholders in education, the labour market, and the business and policy sectors, both nationally and regionally. The OECD advised Norway to set up a skills strategy incorporating a 'whole-of-government' approach and strong stakeholder involvement.¹

They highlighted the need for improvement of the supply of strategic skills for economic and social development, such as STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) and entrepreneurship.

As a result, the Norwegian government in partnership with employers' associations, unions, voluntary sector and adult learning associations has developed a strategy for skills policy. The objective is to ensure that individuals and business have skills, which favour a competitive business environment, a sound public sector and an inclusive labour market.² Among the objectives that the strategy partners agreed on is to work more systematically to link skills needs in businesses and various clusters and business environments with education and training providers in order to develop relevant continuing education. In addition, a more innovative workforce is one of the goals set by stakeholders to guide the development of effective skills systems, since one of the detected challenges is to promote innovation and entrepreneurship.

Innovation is important in the public sector because Norway is one of the OECD countries with the highest proportion of public expenditure and labour force in this sector (Figures 1 and 2). Despite a relatively efficient public sector, there is reason to fear that the level of public expenditure is higher than optimal.³

Figure 1. Public employment as a percentage of total employment and of the labour force in selected OECD countries in 2013. Source: OECD (*Government at a Glance 2015*). Andel av total sysselsetting: percentage of total employment; Andel av arbeidsstyrken: percentage of workforce.

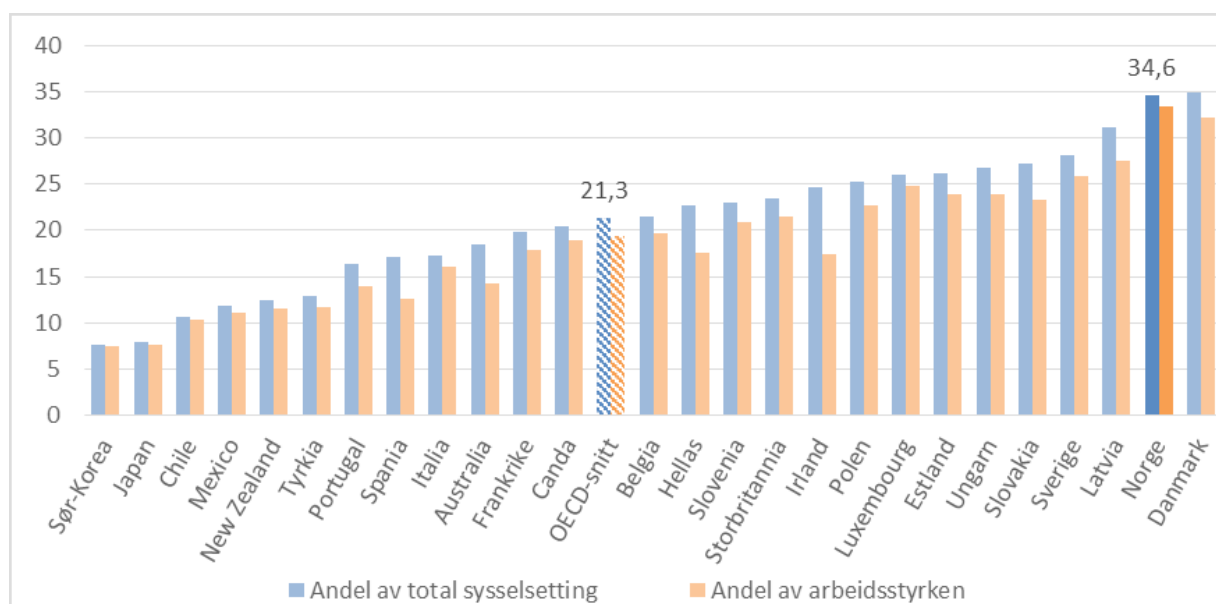
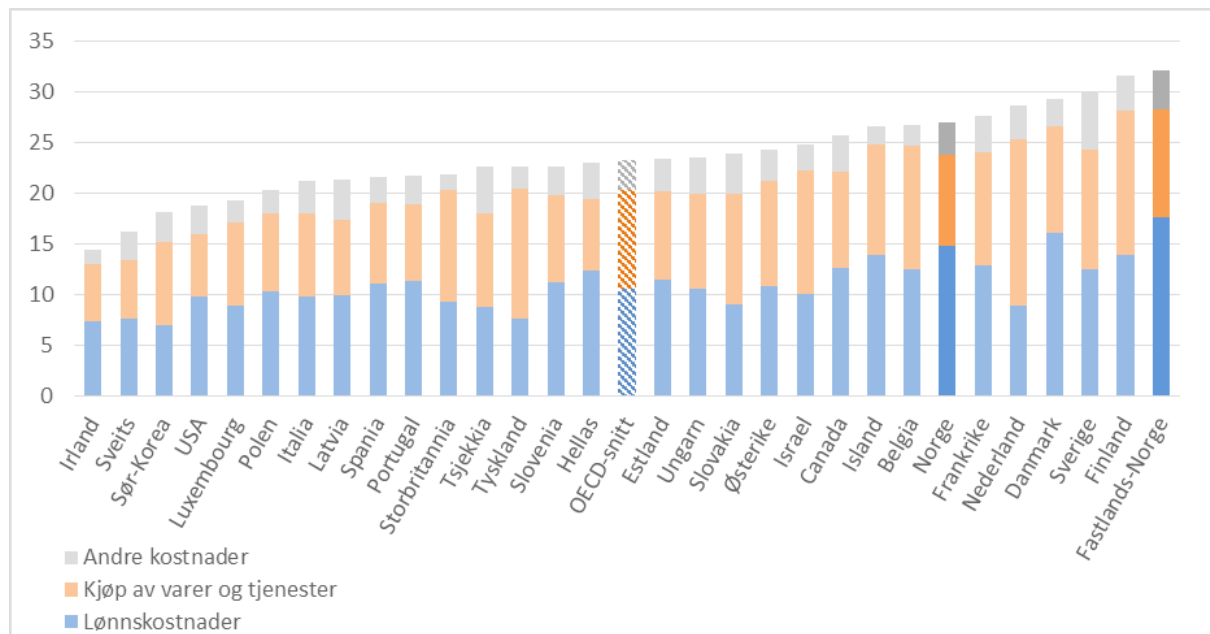


Figure 2: Costs of public services and production, as a share of GDP by type of cost, for the OECD countries in 2015. Source: OECD and Statistics Norway (andre kostnader: other costs; Kjøp av varer og tjenester: purchase of goods and services. Lønnskostnader: salary costs).



White papers ('Melding til Stortinget') are documents drawn up when the government wishes to present matters to the Parliament ('Stortinget'). These documents, and the subsequent discussion of them in the Parliament, often form the basis of a bill at a later stage. The white paper 16 (2020-2021): *Increased working life relevance in higher education* began in 2019 and highlights the need for close collaboration between educational institutions and working life to equip a society under continuous change.⁴ Global trends, such as demographic change, digitalisation and climate and environmental threats, mean that Norway, like all other countries, face challenges that require changes in society. For example, Covid-19 led to the most intrusive measures Norway has experienced in peacetime and the need for restructuring became acute. These challenges can successfully be tackled if the country adopt measures to develop an adequate set of skills and competences in the work force.

Different surveys aimed to map competence need and employability in Norway showed that communication and teamwork were the most sought skills by most employers.⁵ An interpretation of these results is that skills that are relevant to the company are learned on the job, and therefore collaboration and communication skills are more important in relation to employability and learning new professional skills.⁶

The development of generic skills in students in Norway is in part mediated by Young Entrepre-

neurship (UE: 'Ungt entreprenørskap'), a non-profit organisation partially supported by the government. Young Entrepreneurship is part of the network of Junior Achievement Europe (JA Europe), the largest non-profit in Europe co-founded by the Erasmus+ programme and dedicated to preparing young people for employment and entrepreneurship. JA Europe is a member of JA Worldwide® which for 100 years has delivered hands-on, experiential learning in entrepreneurship, work readiness and financial literacy. Young Entrepreneurship collaborates with HE institutions to develop innovation and entrepreneurship, and together with INN organises active learning activities within the programme 'innovation camp'. This is an idea competition for students, and a learning method for creativity and innovation. During a three-day workshop the students must deliver good solutions to real challenges provided by external clients. Innovation camp is an innovative learning method based on a collaboration between local business and industry, the educational institution and UE. This is a programme that is flexible in scope and goal formulation but follows a fixed structure. Each year the students participate in the innovation camp as part of the courses offered by INN.

In addition, INN closely collaborates with different actors to facilitate the development of skills and competences important for employability in public and private sectors. One example of such a collabo-

ration is NCE Heidner Biocluster, a business cluster focused on bioeconomy (biotechnology, agricultural sciences and forest management) and sustainable food production. The dean of the Faculty for Applied Ecology, Agricultural Sciences and Biotechnology is part of the board of directors of NCE Heidner. The Biocluster is supported by Klosser Innovation, a regional innovation company owned by the Industrial Development Corporation of Norway (SIVA: 'Selskapet for industrivekst'), Inland county and Hamar municipality. This is an example of numerous state-owned, business-oriented enterprises and institutions that are intended to support business development, jobs and value creation in Norway (figure 6, annex 1).⁷ The master's study programme in Applied and Commercial Biotechnology is closely integrated to the Heidner Biocluster activity through real life, case-based examples and topics for master's theses. Many of the graduate students have been employed in the region, both in Klosser Innovation and in Heidner Biocluster. Other students have continued their education to a PhD with a topic relevant to Heidner Biocluster. The company also runs an innovation centre which aims to assist the business community in Inland County with innovation projects, business development and research projects. Many students can use the centre's expertise after they have completed their master's degree.

The CRE8® Europe project provides one more way to reinforce the activities mentioned above because it focuses on two important areas according White Paper 16: 1) reinforcement of collaboration between higher education (HE) and different actors related to employability (public and private sectors), and 2) student active forms of learning and teaching. In addition, a strengthened culture for innovation and entrepreneurship is a cross-cutting priority, which the focus areas build upon. The document also recommends that all study programmes must provide candidates with generic skills that enable them to develop throughout their working life. These are key skills that go across different subjects and education programmes, such as written and oral formulation skills, basic digital competence, ability to collaborate, problem solving, independence and responsibility.⁸ White Paper 16 also highlights the importance of skills related to innovation in the public sector, which, as mentioned above, employs the highest proportion of the labour force and requires the highest level of public expenditure compared to other OECD countries.

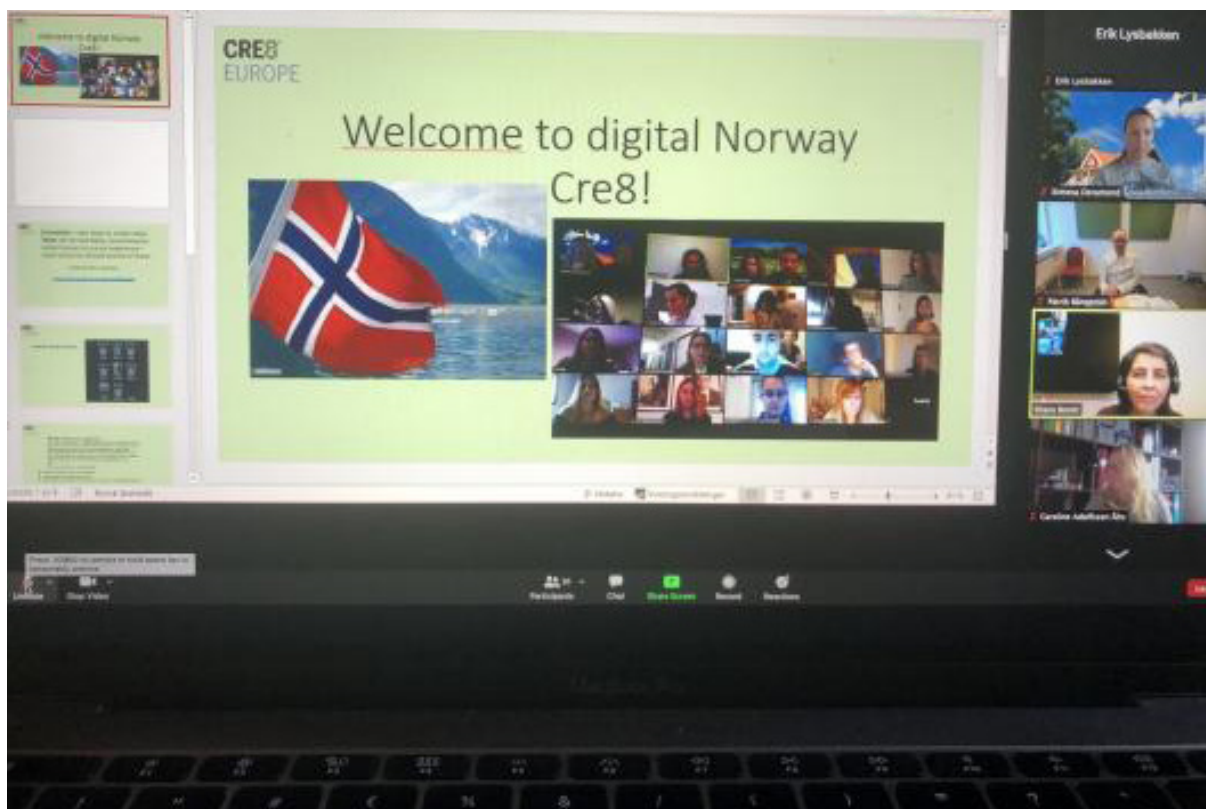
Event report

The fourth CRE8® event was held digitally on 30 September 2020. The third workshop was successfully carried out in Spain at University Jaume I (UJI) between 2 – 6 March 2020, just before the World Health Organisation declared a pandemic regarding Covid-19 (11 March). During a steering group meeting at the end of the third workshop, the partners agreed to hold the meeting digitally to monitor the situation. It was clear that it was not possible to plan a regular event in Norway in May. In July the situation was serious in most European countries, and therefore the steering group decided to be flexible in order to ensure the continuity of the project. Therefore, the unanimous decision was to organise a digital workshop in Norway in September 2020.

Students and staff were really committed to continuing the project; this is especially remarkable for the students who graduated in July 2020 and had a job by the time of the fourth event. A digital workshop is a challenge from many points of view, but the group of students consolidated during the previous three events, and this was key for the success of the fourth, digital event. The students' commitment and friendship, together with this completely unexpected challenge, were the perfect combination for an experience that will always be remembered and where the learning outcomes exceeded what was expected at the beginning of the project.

The event was originally planned to have a task owner relevant to the Faculty of Applied Ecology, Agricultural Sciences and Biotechnology and one relevant to Inland School of Business and Social Sciences. Neither of the original task owners could participate in a digital workshop. Therefore, the objectives changed to adapt to a digital format and to a challenge relevant to Covid-19 pandemic. The decisions were taken in agreement with KAU, which had started already to organise digital CRE8® workshops outside the project in Sweden.

A digital dinner was arranged for the first day. A social digital event is challenging, but it was important to check how the students and staff experienced the pandemic and to set the spirit and motivation for the activities during the following day. Everybody exchanged experiences about life under Covid-19. One of the students shared that she had become infected, fortunately without serious consequences. Many students shared experiences about the kind of activities that they carried out, in order to keep themselves motivated and active despite the lockdown and social distancing.



The fourth CRE8® Europe event was adapted for the Covid-19 pandemic and was held in a virtual format, May 2020

The second day started with a presentation showing examples of innovation under Covid-19 with reflections about how such an unexpected and extreme change in society is conducive to increased creativity and alternative solutions to various problems. The objective was to inspire and motivate the students, based on the idea that everybody can develop creativity, and it is important to create the opportunities to develop it.

The task owner was the section for HE pedagogy and quality at INN, who were briefed beforehand on how to present themselves and their values, as well as the challenge for the workshop. The section works for the university to support teaching technology, and to facilitate professional and pedagogical development at different levels, as well as the quality of the study programmes. Following their philosophy, the task owner proposed the challenge of ‘How to get students to turn on their cameras in online lectures?’. The jury of this challenge was composed of two members of the section for HE pedagogy (one of them an alumnus from INN), an associate professor in innovation at INN and one member of the CRE8® Europe project steering group.

The video of the presentations was sent to the partners to be distributed among the students so

they could watch themselves and learn from their own experience. In the final survey the students admitted that this was a double challenge: dealing with a difficult task and communicating with the group members digitally. They expressed in the survey that the task was important because it was related to challenges in teaching and education under the pandemic. They highlighted the improved learning outcomes from previous workshops from the first pitch in Karlstad in 2019, which was key in tackling this new challenge of pitching through Zoom. Everyone had become more confident and fluent, and their communication skills and ability to catch the jury’s attention had also been reinforced.

As mentioned above, the task owner was the section for HE pedagogy and quality at INN. Twelve pedagogical advisors work in this section and their tasks include training in Canvas, Inspera, Web-form and Zoom. Four out of twelve members are alumni from INN. In addition, INN has an IT service and a professional UH pedagogical support system that have facilitated the use of media and ICT for flexible education by the employees for several years. The Covid-19 outbreak is an example of the development of good experience with fully digital teaching

The task title was: 'Think out of the window! Open the window!' and the question was 'How to get students to turn on their cameras in online lectures?'. From the pedagogic point of view, a lecture is not only a one-way transfer of knowledge from the teacher to a student, it is also a meeting between people. This applies to the online, real-time video lectures as well, where the meeting always contains a human dimension through interaction by being present. A significant part of the interaction lies at a non-verbal level, such as body language. It is impossible not to communicate when people see and hear each other.

Many students choose to keep their cameras off during online lectures, something that represents individuals as silent black boxes on the computer screen. Some teachers call this 'the black wall of death'. Students are more likely not to respond to questions asked in this situation. After the lecture it is common that a handful of students don't signing off, which indicates that they are not even in front of their computers. This affects the teachers' and students' experience in a negative way. Both teachers and students report lower quality in education, and the psychological aspects as disheartening and demotivating.

The project leader prepared a survey for the day for the participants in order to evaluate the level of satisfaction during the digital CRE8® Europe activities. The survey included questions about the general satisfaction for the workshop day. A Likert scale was used to measure the degree of satisfaction of the CRE8® Europe participants. Each question was evaluated from 1 to 5 (1 indicating 'highly dissatisfied' and 5 'highly satisfied').

Thirteen out of a total of 17 participants answered the survey. In general terms, most of the participants enjoyed the virtual dining experience, although many of them would have preferred to meet in person, especially to say goodbye, as this was the final event for the cohort. The overall survey indicates high levels of satisfaction with the organisation of the event, encouragement received during the teamwork, the task and the teamwork itself. Nevertheless, most of them would have preferred to meet in person. Some students felt more relaxed online, whereas others found it awkward initially and then grew accustomed to it.

The challenge or task was very much appreciated. It was generally considered to be hard, but also immediately relevant and interesting. Some students reported that they found it an important and current problem, requiring a lot of creativity. The challenge was so inspirational that some of the cohort resolved to turn on the camera in all their meetings henceforth.

One important comment was that the whole CRE8® Europe project was an opportunity to grow personally and professionally. An interesting aspect that was highlighted was the opportunity to meet people with different points of view, but with common interests. Another valuable point is related to differences between countries in terms of the education process and students' rights. These differences affect the possibility of enforcing the use of the camera during digital lectures.

To organise a regular CRE8® week with physical meetings requires many considerations in terms of logistic related to extra activities, visits, meals, travel and lodging. In that sense the virtual workshop is less time consuming. However, the virtual event requires a completely different type of preparation, which may be demanding and stressful especially when it is the first time that it is carried out digitally. For example, it is very important to have at least one IT support staff with experience in Zoom who helps the participants when they become disconnected and who controls the dynamic between the main Zoom room and the breakout rooms where the teams work and where the jury meet with one team at a time for the pitching. For the INN event, a schedule was made to clarify who the host was at any given moment. Some of the activities were recorded with the authorisation of the participants, something that could be useful for future organisers. The organisers met several times with IT support in order to ask all possible questions and to better understand the possibilities and limitations of Zoom. Another important aspect is to be in constant communication with the participants and to encourage them, so they do not feel isolated and the virtual meeting is not an obstacle for the development of creativity and teamwork. The pitch time was on average two minutes longer than the usual five minutes, and the jury discussion was longer than usual. The students were also allowed to use one hour extra for teamwork, because of the limitations of not being in the same room, the absence of a flipchart for the easy summary of ideas, and the likelihood of occasional disconnections from the Zoom room.

Future directions

Studies based on employer surveys in Europe highlight the role of a combination of social and emotional skills, technical skills and cognitive skills for firms' performance. Some specific skills such as communication, management, self-organisation and problem solving are highly valued by employers and contribute to firm performance.⁹ Education poli-

2006-2016

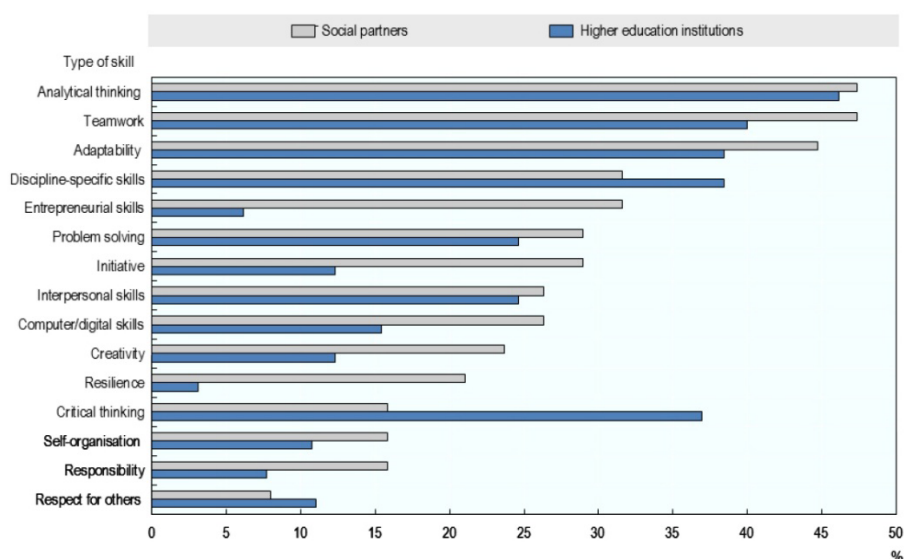
| Indicator | Norway | OECD | Trend in Norway (2006 to 2016) |
|--|--------|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Labour force participation rate (15-64) | 78.2% | 71.7% | Stable |
| Employment rate (15-64) | 74% | 67.4% | Stable |
| Self-employment rate (% of employment) | 7% | 16.1% (European Union) | Slight decrease |
| Temporary work (% of employment) | 8.7% | 11.2% | Decrease |
| Share of involuntary part-timer workers as a share of employment | 2.3% | 5.2% | Slight decrease |
| Unemployment rate (% of the labour force) | 4.4% | 6% | Slight increase |
| Long-term unemployed (% of unemployed) | 12.5% | 30.5% | Slight decrease |
| Youth Unemployment (15-24-year-olds) | 11.1% | 13% | Increase |
| Youth not in education, employment or training (15-29-year-olds) | 9.4% | 13.9% | Increase |

Source: OECD Employment and Labour Market Statistics.

Table 1. Key employment indicators in Norway and the OECD¹⁷

Figure 3. Key skills for the labour market, by type of HE stakeholder

Share of workshop participants who identified a particular skill as key for the labour market



Note: Each workshop participant selected 5 skills from a list of 33 types of skills. This table presents the 15 most common responses. All other skills were selected by less than 10% of respondents. Social partner results are based on the responses of participants at two workshops (Bergen and Trondheim). Results for the higher education institutions are based on the responses of participants at three workshops (Bergen, Oslo, and Trondheim). The workshops were organised by the OECD team as part of the in-depth analysis of the labour market relevance and outcomes of Norway's higher education system project.

Source: OECD workshops with stakeholder representatives of Norway's higher education system in Bergen, Oslo and Trondheim, September 2017.

cies are key to develop skills mixes that match national and international requirements.¹⁰ Innovative teaching strategies in tertiary education are important to facilitate learning of social and emotional skills and development in multidisciplinary groups.¹¹ In addition, some rapid changes previously mentioned demand multidisciplinary approaches in education. Internationalisation also gives an advantage in multi-cultural and multi-lingual business environment.¹²

Some of the trends observed in Europe more widely also apply to Norway, since globalisation, demographic change, climate change challenges and advances in digital technology, are transforming its economy and thus, its skills needs. New economic sectors and jobs are emerging, while others, particularly the oil and gas sectors, are experiencing slowdown in productivity. The skills needed to carry out ongoing and new tasks are undergoing significant change. However, the pace of economic transformation may pose a challenge to the country's education system, which will need to be increasingly responsive to provide the right mix of skills.

In order to understand skills training, it is important to mention that unemployment is generally low in Norway and HE graduates experience high employment rates (74%), compared to other OECD countries, and one of the lowest unemployment rates (4.4%) in 2016 (Table 1).¹³ Most HE graduates find relevant work and employers are generally satisfied with the candidates' competences.¹⁴ However, the OECD report points out that the cooperation between HE institutions and working life is less developed in Norway compared to Finland, Sweden and Denmark, when it comes to designing study programmes. There is a lack of agreement between social partners (mainly employers) and HE on what skills are important for successful employability in the future (Figure 3).¹⁵ The misalignment between employers' expectations and HE views should be addressed by improving communication and cooperation between these stakeholders. A close alignment with social partners and the labour market is essential to tackle the previously mentioned fast changes in the society and the economy.

An additional challenge in Norway is that the various data sources are not maintained and disseminated jointly, and they are not easily accessible and useful to students, HE institutions, employers and policy makers. This information is vital for effective skills assessment and best practice which has into account skill demand and the available skill supply.¹⁶

Despite the overall high employment rate in Norway, there are regional differences, with the Oslo and

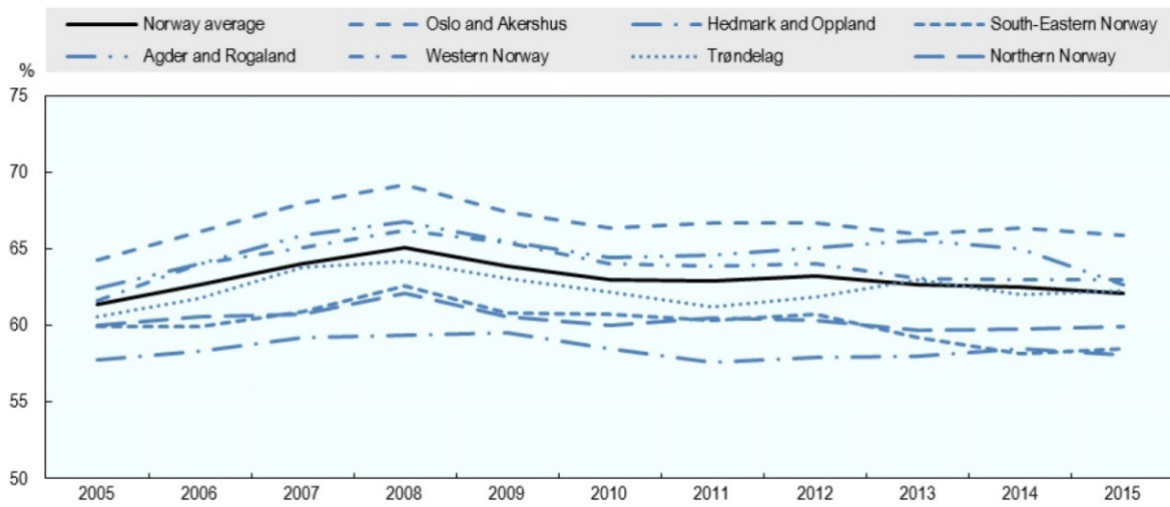
Akershus regions showing the highest levels of employment. This is strongly connected to the large services sector and national government employment in this region. Western Norway, as well as the Agder and Rogaland regions, have also traditionally had some of the highest employment rates due to local maritime and oil and gas sectors. Inland county (previously Hedmark and Oppland counties) exhibits the lowest employment rates (Figure 4) and therefore the role of a HE institution like INN is especially important for skills training and student-employer connections aimed at improving competitiveness and employability. In this regard, transversal skills are important, according to Norwegian employers. They find that Norwegian graduates leave HE with the ability to learn on the job and acquire knowledge that is relevant to the business. In a survey carried out by the Norwegian Institute of Science and Technology (NTNU), employers valued the oral communication and writing skills of NTNU graduates, as well as their ability to work independently. However, employers state that they expect an improvement in management skills, creativity, insight and the ability to combine ideas from diverse fields. Norwegian employers also expressed in a workshop organized by OECD that HE should play a stronger role in developing teamwork, adaptability and entrepreneurial skills (Figure 5).¹⁸

Based on OECD reports and other national surveys, White Paper 16 recommends a series of measures to improve the HE approaches to work relevance; for example, by signing binding agreements between working life and the educational institutions. This document also recommends focusing on student-centred and active learning approaches, which support the development of professional and transversal skills. Multidisciplinary approaches are also recommended to prepare the students for complex problems in society.²⁰

The CRE8® Europe model provides opportunities for active- and case-based learning in a multidisciplinary and international environment. The students who participated in CRE8® Europe have expressed the value of these learning outcomes in the surveys carried out at the end of each event. The next step at INN is to incorporate the CRE8® Europe model as a regular learning activity in different courses and across faculties to ensure multidisciplinary work. CRE8® workshops would be a good starting point to the 'innovation camps' organised in collaboration with Young Entrepreneurship mentioned above. A next step would be to support the students who wish to develop a project or company based on the ideas which arise from CRE8® workshops.

Figure 4. Employment rates in Norway, by region¹⁹

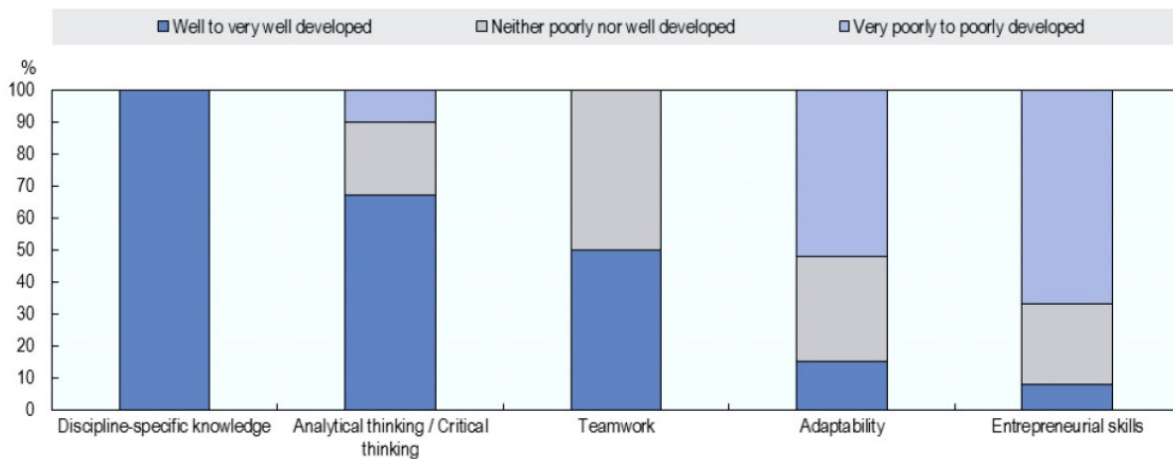
2015



Source: OECD Regional Statistics Database.

Figure 5. Employers' assessment of how well Norway's HE system is developing key labour market relevant skills

Percentage of workshop participants who rated the development of each skill



Note: Results are based on the responses of employers participating in two OECD workshops in Bergen and Trondheim. The workshops were organised by the OECD team as part of the in-depth analysis of the labour market relevance and outcomes of Norway's higher education system project.

Source: OECD workshops with stakeholder representatives of Norway's higher education system in Bergen and Trondheim, September 2017.

Inland University staff have learned from their project partners the importance of having an alumni network and to organise activities to keep in contact with this network. This could be a good starting point to establish contact with company CEOs and to get updated feedback in terms of key combination of skills. CRE8® Europe provides opportunities to interact frequently with alumni and to develop case-based learning for the students. In addition, the companies could benefit by developing the solutions proposed by the students. In addition, the Councils for Cooperation with Working Life (RSA) are the main forum for collaboration between HE and employers.²¹ This council is in the process of organising its activity at INN. Therefore, university support staff could strengthen such a collaboration by disseminating best practice documents and suggesting ways to improve their use at the operational level.

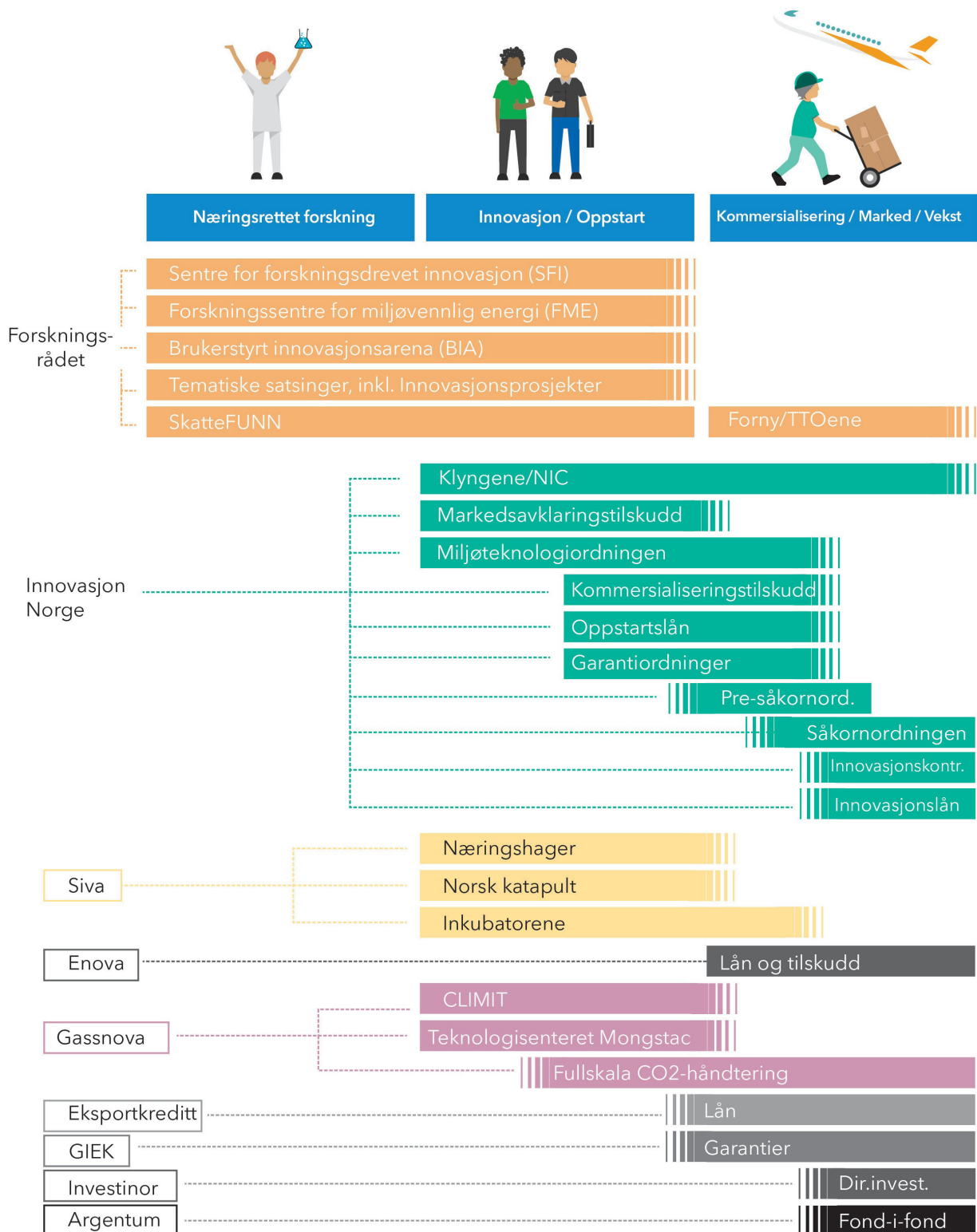
The CRE8® Europe project has been a valuable learning experience, and in order to ensure quality in such projects it is important to have resources at different levels: external relations who keep an updated alumni data base, international coordinators who support the organisation and logistics related to international projects, and professional staff with competences in different disciplines to ensure active learning and multidisciplinary approaches. A network and forum of support staff from national and international HE institutions would be ideal

to exchange ideas and experiences and to carry out such projects in the future. Such fora could help to achieve a consensus within the HE system on the need to align HE with labour market needs and necessary measures to achieve this. An event has already been held at INN as a starting point to discuss the need for administrative support to accomplish better collaboration with the private and public sector through activities like CRE8®, innovation camp, and the periodic evaluation of the study programmes among others.

In summary, support staff could contribute to changes in skills training and mediate student-employer connections at different levels. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to improve the accessibility of various national and regional data sources to staff, employers and students. Communication with RSA is also important for example by providing best practice documents. Multidisciplinary as well as student-centred and active learning approaches can be achieved by creating a database of activities, which could be carried out across faculties at one institution. The external relations department is a key player in creating and maintaining an alumni network as a forum to discuss labour market needs, to create placements for all careers and to create and promote continuous education courses aimed at alumni.

Annex 1

Overview of state-owned business-oriented instruments that are intended to support business development, jobs and value creation in Norway.



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Good Practice Overview:

Consortium building and project planning

The CRE8® Europe consortium was formed initially around previous longstanding collaborations between Karlstad University (KAU) and Inland Norway University (INN) in Interreg Europe and Erasmus+ projects. Contact with Jaume I University (UJI) and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (ULBS) came via the wider networks of KAU staff involved in the project: one the product of contact through an international alumni officers' network and the other the result of an earlier Erasmus+ staff mobility programme.

The experience of the CRE8® Europe project provides several examples of good practice in partnership building and project planning which may be valuable for people engaging in similar activities in the future. Firstly, it is often a benefit to work with partners with whom one has worked previously and whose capacity and expertise are known from the outset. To a certain extent, this was the case with CRE8® Europe, with the institutional relationship between KAU and INN complemented by personal contacts between KAU staff and those at other universities. At the same time, it is also important to recognise when the existing skill-sets within a consortium require more diversity to complement them, and for coordinators to build a consortium with a broad view of the project's ultimate direction in mind.

Secondly, in terms of project planning, a common failing is that many projects are driven to too great an extent by the coordinator at the application stage. Much of the proposal writing and budget creation is done remotely, via email, and there is often minimal input from the other partners. While this can lead to a quicker and simpler application-writing process for the coordinator, it often results in miscommunication and can store up problems for the future. If the proposal is successful and the project goes ahead, there is a danger that projects designed in this way can result in expectations not being met and a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities among partners.

Thirdly, a point can also be made about the importance of good communication and clear decision-making processes in projects once they are in progress. Even during relatively quiet periods, when individual partners were working on their own project-related tasks, the CRE8® Europe coordinators made sure to keep in regular communication with the group and held monthly catch-up meetings via Zoom to monitor progress and to answer any questions which might have arisen.

An additional element which affected the management of the CRE8® Europe project was the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in early 2020. This had implications for the project's remaining events and also for the kind of institutional support and wider teamwork which was required to make them successful. It was apparent by the spring of 2020 that the physical meetings and other events scheduled for the remainder of the project could not go ahead. The consortium was able to respond flexibly to the situation, converting the activities to online formats and finding ways to make CRE8® sessions and ancillary activities with the student cohort work remotely. This was particularly notable for the final CRE8® Europe event hosted by INN in May 2020.

The need to rapidly convert project activities into new formats highlighted two aspects which were vital for the success of the project. Firstly, it was necessary for the project team to have clear communication and quick decision-making among themselves in order to manage the student cohort and the demands of the project optimally. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the project staff required the support of other groups within their institutions; both teachers who were experienced in online learning methodology, as well as IT staff who could support the technical side of running complex online events. Being able to engage the wider institutional resources available to partners is invaluable in meeting unexpected challenges when managing an international project.