

Master's thesis

‘Putting ‘Bologna’ to work’

The influence of the Bologna process on the employability of higher education graduates



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I, Margot Koenders, hereby declare that I have worked on this thesis, “Putting Bologna to work”, independently and it is entirely my own work. It has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work. All sources of information and references used in this thesis are listed at the end of the work.

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Abstract

The transition from higher education to the labour market is a topic of discussion amongst scholars. Throughout the last 50 years, the demands of employers have changed. An emphasis is now put on the need that higher education graduates need to have certain 'hard' and 'soft' skills in order to be fully equipped to enter their first jobs. The concept of graduate employability entails the competences graduates need to have in order to meet the demands of the labour market. At the same time, higher education has been internationalised and student mobility is argued to be a catalyst for acquiring competences that could increase employability. The Bologna process has put employability and mobility high on its agenda. This master's thesis examines in which way the process influences students' employability. The perception of stakeholders is taken as the basis for an analysis of this process within Germany and the Netherlands. It is concluded that employability may not be fully enhanced through the Bologna process and that it is desirable that mobility be fostered further, either in the form in which it is known now or in other ways. It is argued that it is more a case of the perception of stakeholders and their involvement in the process, than that there is not enough recognition for the demands of the labour market within the process' instruments.

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List of abbreviations

ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

HEI – Higher education institution

NQF – National qualifications framework

UAS – University of applied science

Introduction

The Bologna declaration was signed in 1999 and its emphasis was on increasing and improving student mobility, supported by a range of instruments such as degree recognition, a double-cycle system, a system of transferable credits, a quality assurance system and the promotion of European cooperation in the field of higher education (HE). Initially, the idea was to strengthen a “stable, peaceful and democratic society” with an additional meaning of strengthening the notion of European citizenship and providing students with tools to deal with the challenges of a knowledge-driven economy.

In later ministerial meetings, the aim of connecting higher education with the labour market has become an important second goal of the Bologna Process (Schomburg & Teichler, 2011). These two basic goals of the process can also be found in the 2009 and 2012 Bologna Process Implementation Report and other supporting stocktaking reports. Additionally, the formation of the European Higher Education Area has become an important aspect of the process. Besides an assessment of the abovementioned goals, the report includes scorecards on the degree of implementation of instruments within the member countries. The Bologna framework is based on voluntary international cooperation that has an intergovernmental basis. Currently, it has 48 member countries supported by several consultative members such as the Council of Europe, UNESCO and BUSINESS EUROPE.

The Bologna Process has been implemented in the context of a massification of higher education and an expanding labour market with blurring borders. Improving employability and mobility can be seen as policy instruments to form a basis for internationalisation policies.

In this thesis, the focal point of research is the concept of employability, for which the Netherlands and Germany serve as examples. The implementation of the Bologna process in both countries differs. These two countries are taken as an example of how the Bologna process functions in practice, with a focus on the issue of graduate employability. The scope of this thesis is to determine how the Bologna instruments affect the employability of graduates.

The research questions that will be examined in this thesis are described below. I will argue that using the concepts of employability and mobility as a parameter for the effectiveness of an internationalisation policy comes with various implications, derived from the incorporation of different definitions, different outcome perspectives and different governing processes.

This thesis aims to combine these insights in the answers to the following question:

To what extent are Bologna instruments effective in increasing perceived graduate employability in Germany and the Netherlands according to the stakeholders involved?

To support the analysis made in this paper, the following sub research questions have been asked:

How do Bologna instruments influence graduate employability according to the stakeholders involved?

To what degree does mobility influence graduate employability according to the stakeholders involved?

How does the role of stakeholders influence the effectiveness of the Bologna process in increasing graduate employability?

Structure of this document

In order to answer these questions, a qualitative research has been conducted. The results, the conclusions and the policy recommendations that follow from the conclusions are depicted in this documents. This paper is structured as follows.

First an overview is given of the literature that exists regarding graduate employability, internationalisation policy which provides tools to enhance employability and the role of stakeholders within the process. Following this literature review, the methods section described which methods have been used to come to an answer to the posed research questions. In the next chapter, the results of the data analysis are presented, which are discussed in the light of the literature in the discussion section. The conclusion then, gives an answer to the research questions posed above. From this several policy implications and recommendations have been drawn and form, which are outlined in the chapter following the conclusion.

Background

In this chapter, the background to this research is given, as well as some numbers on the recent developments that involve the link between higher education and the world of work. First, the notion of employability is described. Second, student mobility as a concept is explained and lastly, the governance of international employability enhancing policies is discussed.

Labour market demands and graduate employability

In the introduction of this document, it has been made clear that this thesis aims to connect the notion of employability to the Bologna process. In order to understand how the Bologna instruments can influence the employability of graduates in the European Higher Education Area, it is first important to establish what employability is and how it can meet the demands in the current European labour market.

Changing labour market demands

The connection between higher education and the world of work has undergone a lively debate. Notable work has been done by Ulrich Teichler on this. As he states, the role of higher education has changed over the years, from serving economic wealth in general in the 1960s, to the view of the 1970s that “the expansion of higher education had gone too far and that graduates’ skills no longer matched the needs of the employment system” (Teichler, 1999). The topic of connecting higher education and employment has currently come back on the agenda, after interest in the topic was lost in the 1980s. According to Harvey (2000), organisations have faced changes towards the 21st century, including an aim for efficient working, increasing responsiveness to clients and stakeholders, and the “need to adopt an international perspective”.

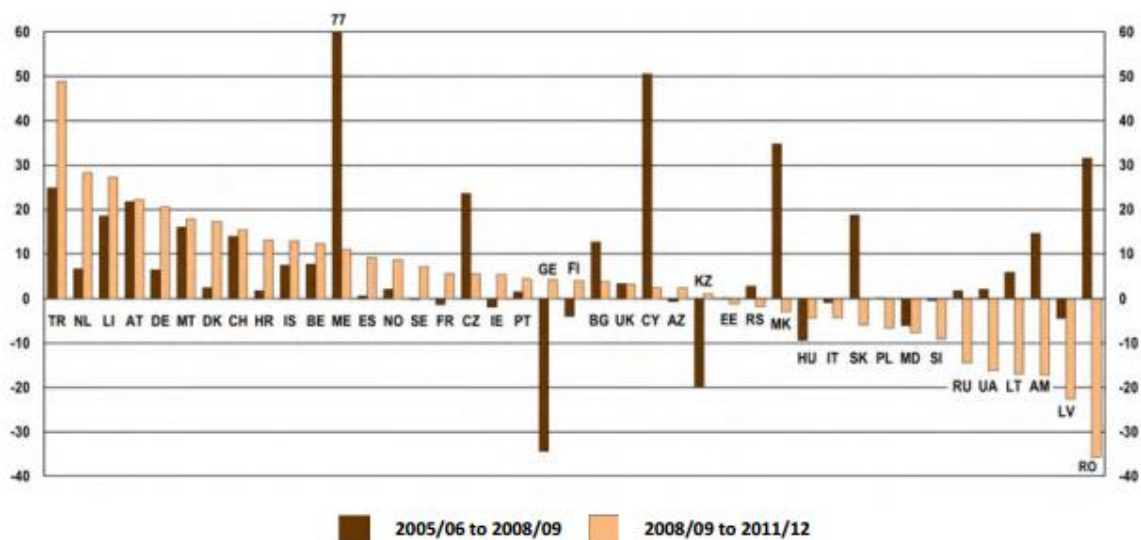
This issue has come back on the agenda since employers’ demands have changed, because of two processes, namely technological changes and globalisation. As technology has advanced significantly and computer skills are needed in all kinds of enterprises and in all kinds of organisational layers, young workers are now expected to be able to work with technological equipment. Technological advances within a company are seen to be adding to a company’s competitiveness, which is more and more important in a global competition market (Stuart & Dahm, 1999). Also, technological developments decrease the need for specialised knowledge of employees, and therefore employees need to be able to be flexible to take up a variety of tasks. These developments take place in a global market, in which not only big multinational companies, but also small and medium

enterprises compete. Worldwide economic development and opening up domestic markets has led to this process (Hitt, Keats & DeMarie, 1998). Opening up the markets was supported by free trade agreements all over the world. The challenges that come with globalisation are for example the incentive for innovation and an increased need to stay competitive in a bigger marketplace with more players (Hitt, Keats & DeMarie, 1998). These two processes have led to the need for flexibility, and a constant search for ways to be more productive so as to stay competitive.

Organisational structures have changed, to where workers have multiple responsibilities and broad knowledge, horizontal communication and cooperation is key, and organisations are more prone to adapt to changes to stay competitive (Stuart & Dahm, 1999). Hence, the skills that employees should have according to employers also change.

Besides these developments, the number of students enrolled in tertiary education has risen significantly within the European Higher Education Area. This is also the case for Germany and the Netherlands, which are the two case study subjects in this research.

Fig. 1. Change in the total number of students enrolled in tertiary education between 2005/6 and 2008/9 and between 2008/9 and 2011/12



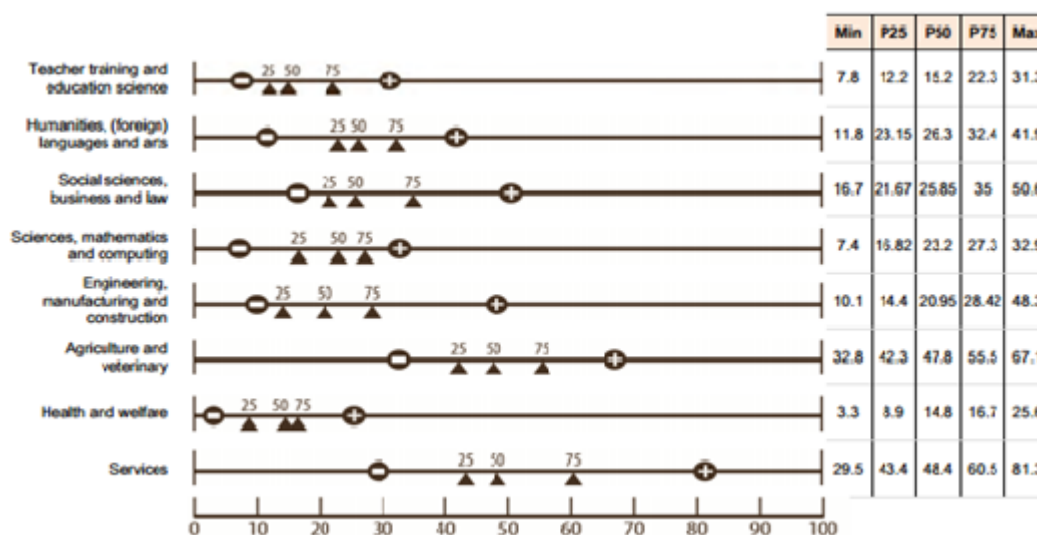
Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015)

The debate has since evolved to a presumed ‘mismatch’ between the skills that are wanted in the world of work and the skills that students acquire during their studies, in the sense of dissatisfaction of employers (Kemp & Seagraves, 1995). Despite the actual existence of a skills mismatch being brought into question, according to Sala (2011), there is indeed an ‘inadequacy’ between training and employment. On the other hand, there has been a concern amongst scholars that overeducation is an aspect that has

negative consequences for graduates in finding a job that matches their education level, as well as a shortage of skills required by employers being overlooked in the debate.

As the number of students has risen, the concerns of skills mismatches and overeducation become more and more relevant. Even though overeducation can be seen as a ‘normal’ phenomenon for entry-level jobs (Treu, as cited in Dekker et al., 2002), the implications are twofold. Skills mismatches and overeducation can lead to graduates finding jobs below their level of education, which can later on affect their productivity (García-Aracil & Van der Velden, 2008) and their upward mobility, as far as this is still relevant (Dekker et al., 2002). It is argued that employment is found, primarily due to the overall increase in the number of students participating in and successfully graduating from higher education. There are statistics on the occurrence of overeducation within the European Higher Education Area.

Fig. 2. Percentage of people aged 25-34 with tertiary education (ISCED 5-6) who are vertically mismatched (in ISCO 4-9) by field of study.



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015)

The figure above shows that overeducation occurs primarily in the services sector, the agriculture and veterinary sector, and to a lesser extent in the social sciences, business and law sector, as well as the humanities, (foreign) languages and arts sector. Overall, the higher education graduates from the exact sciences and education science tend to encounter overeducation to a lesser degree. There is a lack, however, of measurements of horizontal skills mismatches, which occurs when someone has the appropriate educational level, but does not have the skills that are needed in a certain job (CEDEFOP, 2009). In the light of the changing demands of the labour market, the next paragraph examines which skills are needed to increase a graduate’s employability so as to increase

their personal chances of finding a job that matches their education, but also, from a human capital point of view, to allow for a better allocation of entry-level workforce.

Graduate employability

In line with the literature presented above, the focus of the discourse on employability has been on the economic appraisal of education institutions, as well as on the relationship between higher education and the labour market (Clarke (1930) as cited in Boden & Nedeva, 2010:41). Later, a more personal approach came to play a bigger role in the form of a focus on graduates' competences and knowledge (Boden & Nedeva, 2010:41).

In recent decades, graduate employability has often been used as a policy aim or an instrument that facilitates the transition between higher education and labour entry, but despite this development, it is a concept that is addressed by and described with various (ambiguous) definitions and practical concepts.

Discourse and theory on employability

The scholarly debate can now be divided in different perspective approaches. A literature review suggests that these discursive perspectives vary according to the variety in stakeholders that is involved in the debate, which is described below.

Holmes (2013) has, amongst others, paid particular interest to this issue and he argues that there are three competing approaches on graduate employability, which each have their own implications (Holmes, 2013:539). His article provides a clear introduction to understanding the prevailing discourse on graduate employability. According to Holmes, the practicalities in policies are underlined by a possessive approach, a positional approach or a processual approach within the United Kingdom. The possessive approach focuses on the achievements or characteristics that individuals have (or have obtained) after graduating from higher education, which is otherwise referred to as a skills and attributes approach by the UK Higher Education Academy's Enhancing Student Employability Co-ordination team. These skills or attributes improve an individual's employability in the sense that a set of these characteristics will enhance the chance of gaining employment and increase 'success' in one's career (Yorke (2004) as paraphrased in Holmes, 2013:542). The skills that Holmes has depicted from a review of the relevant literature include communication skills, numeracy, information technology skills, working with others, the ability to learn and problem-solving skills. The second approach entails a focus on social positioning as a perspective on graduate employability. In the most recent debate, it is argued that a person's societal position influences their notion of graduate skills. As Holmes (2013) points out, a study by Brown and Hesketh elaborates

on this perspective. Brown, Hesketh and Williams (2003), in their article, argue that 'absolute' skills and knowledge are only one dimension of the relationship between education and the labour market in a knowledge-driven economy. The 'relative' employability of a person is the second dimension of what they call the 'duality of employability' (Brown et al., 2003). This second dimension takes into account labour market conditions such as a high number of graduates with a tertiary education degree, in order to explain someone's relative employability.

Therefore, as a third distinctive approach, Holmes (2013) mentions a processual approach. This approach distinguishes itself from the aforementioned possessive approach in the sense that graduation is not considered to be the end of the skills building trajectory, rather it is the first step of the social process towards a graduate's "satisfactory and settled position in employment" (Holmes, 2013:549).

The three abovementioned perspectives make clear how differentiated views on the term graduate employability can be. Bearing in mind that these conclusions rest primarily on graduate surveys and literature observations, the other axis along which differences can be depicted is not yet even described here. This axis would provide differences in stakeholders' perceptions of the concept. It should be noted that a majority of the literature reviewed in this second paragraph of chapter 1 has as its focus the debate within the United Kingdom. It is, however, useful research to provide an introductory understanding of the concept of graduate employability.

As a consequence of varying discursive perspectives on the concept of graduate employability, there are several authors that have claimed different definitions of the concept. Therefore, several models for conceptualisation of graduate employability exist.

The USEM model for instance, as provided by Knight and Yorke (2002), is the most often cited model (mentioned amongst others in Holmes (2013) and in Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007)) where the concrete conceptualisation of employability is concerned. It entails four aspects of employability, namely understanding, skills, efficacy beliefs and metacognition (such as reflection). The two latter, they argue, are often underappreciated in the curricula of students. In order to connect the concept of employability with labour market desires, Rae (2007) and Dacre Pool & Sewell (2007) have argued that a more practical approach should be desired with components that employers ask for. The main components of Dacre Pool and Sewell's model entail career development learning, experience, degree subject knowledge, generic skills and emotional intelligence (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007:281-287).

Concluding, increasing a student's employability should entail two components: on the one hand course-specific knowledge should be gained, which can be described as 'hard knowledge', and other personal skills that are needed, which can be referred to as 'soft skills' (Andrews & Higson, 2008). These soft skills deserve some more attention.

Skills

Considering that different models for employability exist and the variety of stakeholder perceptions on what employability is is big, it is difficult to define exactly how certain skills can make higher education students more employable. Some key components of desired skills have already been mentioned in the former paragraphs, as well as the context in which these skills are needed in 21st century firms. In their article, Andrews & Higson (2008) have lined up the key transferable soft skills that can be found in the literature available. The specific skills that were depicted are:

- “- Professionalism;*
- Reliability;*
- The ability to cope with uncertainty;*
- The ability to work under pressure;*
- The ability to plan and think strategically;*
- The capability to communicate and interact with others, either in teams or through*
networking;
- Good written and verbal communication skills;*
- Information and Communication Technology skills;*
- Creativity and self-confidence;*
- Good self-management and time-management skills;*
- A willingness to learn and accept responsibility (Adapted from: McLarty, 1998; Tucker et al., 2000; Nabi, 2003; Elias and Purcell, 2004).” (Andrews & Higson, 2008).*

This list of skills illustrates how broad the notion of 21st century skills can be. Also, it should be noted that there is somewhat of a divide in the literature. Most scholars that elaborate on which skills are necessary do not take an employers' viewpoint, but rather they go by graduates' perceptions. The concept of which skills are needed and what employability should entail, therefore can become rather vague. When linking employability to higher education policies, however, some practical implications do come

to light. As early as 1993, Raymond and McNabb have identified that increasing soft skills through incorporating practical elements into higher education can help to enhance students' employability. Higher education can then increase the development of these skills through four different activities:

- *“Enhanced or revised central support (usually via the agency of careers services) for undergraduates and graduates in their search for work. To this can be added the provision of sector-wide resources.*
- *Embedded attribute development in the programme of study often as the result of modifications to curricula to make attribute development, job seeking skills and commercial awareness explicit, or to accommodate employer inputs.*
- *Innovative provision of work experience opportunities within, or external to, programmes of study.*
- *Enabled reflection on and recording of experience, attribute development and achievement alongside academic abilities, through the development of progress files and career management” (Harvey & Bowers-Brown, 2004).*

The link between higher education and the skills that employers demand of graduates can thus be brought into practice through including the practical elements of the world of work into study programmes. Below is a description of how this can be linked to higher education policies. In the next chapter, several other factors are depicted that can influence graduate employability.

The effectiveness of employability policies

When looking not at internationalisation policies in general, but rather at the aim of increasing graduate employability as a desired policy outcome, it becomes clear that a couple of issues should be taken into account. First, it is argued that enhancing graduate employability through the skills models and concepts (including ‘soft skills’ such as emotional intelligence) described above might not be realistic. Cranmer (2006) in her study on the Higher Education Funding Council for England describes that higher education institutions may not be able to effectively develop the aforementioned skills. She argues that some skill building efforts should be managed by other stakeholders, such as employers. This statement is underlined by Harvey (2005), who also underlines that it matters which stakeholders are funding employability initiatives and how the policies are being enforced and monitored.

In an international policy environment, this raises the question as to how employability can be enhanced practically and which concepts should lie at the basis of this process. Besides this, it matters how this process is operationalised and monitored, and how different stakeholders are involved in the policies.

Conclusion

In the former chapter it is described that technology, globalisation and rising insecurity have shaped employers' needs for practical and personal skills and that mismatches can influence the productivity and job satisfaction of graduates. Besides this, from a student perspective, the need to develop these skills has to do with the increasing number of higher education graduates and the results that overeducation and a skills mismatch can have. In order to be more competitive, one has to adjust to the needs of the labour market. employability can be seen as being something more than attaining a certain level of education and afterwards carrying on to find employment. It is a concept goes beyond finding employment after obtaining a higher education degree. In line with the demands that have evolved in the labour market, employability can be increased by enhancing certain practical skills that go beyond subject-specific knowledge.

The internationalisation of higher education and employability

In the former chapter, it has been explained how employers' demands have changed with regard to graduates and how this can be adhered to. In addition to an increase in the supply of highly educated labour market entrants, the competitiveness of higher education systems is tested by the increase in mobility of students. The concept of employability can be implemented in higher education policies at different levels. An often cited policy response to this issue is internationalising higher education. Even though policies may not always be aimed only at improving the transitions from school to work, employability is for the most part an important aspect of these policies. The Bologna process can be seen as an example of such a policy, which has adopted graduate employability as one of its major pillars. One can observe in the literature that there is much research done on the link between higher education and the world of work. The concept of internationalisation policies as a catalyst for employability, however, is often neglected. Therefore, this chapter aims to provide the link between these two aspects, which will serve as a basis for the research of this thesis.

Student mobility

The most often cited advantage of internationalising higher education systems is that it fosters student mobility. On an operational level, this means that the relevant policies remove any existing obstacles, or that mechanisms be put into place that can actively contribute to the number of students (and personnel) that has international experience.

The aim of studying or starting employment abroad is believed to serve cultural, economic and social enhancement (Teichler & Jahr, 2001:444). Rivza & Teichler (2007) first argue that four objectives of student mobility exist, namely the promotion of the formerly noted 'vertical' as well as a 'horizontal' mobility as goals, a mutual understanding and recognition between countries and individuals and financial advantages of hiring foreign graduates (this includes competitiveness motives). In terms of incentives of transnational co-operative bodies, Papatsiba (2006) groups four rationales for adopting promotive policies for student mobility in the light of the ERASMUS programme and a French regional scheme. They entail promotion of the relevant international labour market, supporting the transfer of skills and technology and a more socially oriented goal of reaching international understanding (Papatsiba, 2006:174). In accordance with enhancing graduate employability, student mobility can thus also be seen as being part of an answer to the demands of employers. This is underlined by an analysis by Crossman & Clarke (2010) on different stakeholders' perceptions of international experience as an enhancing mechanism for students' employability (Crossman & Clarke,

2010:504-606). Within this context, the development of certain skills is a particular motivation for internationalisation of higher education.

Skills development

Student mobility is believed to foster the acquisition of certain skills that would, over time, add to a person's employability or even to his or her motivation and ability to take up a graduate job abroad or at home. As has been noted before, there are several types of skills. Particular skills are related to policies to promote student mobility. First, amongst so-called 'hard skills' are competences that are relatively easily operationalised in terms of policies. Amongst these competences, then, are language skills in particular, as well as academic knowledge acquired abroad (Teichler & Jahr, 2001). Second, soft skills are also considered to be important (Williams, 2005). The intercultural component of studying abroad is perceived to add to a student's skills package. According to Williams (2005), some prevailing traits can be distinguished in research that form the elements of intercultural communication skills. The first trait of attributable skills include flexibility and open-mindedness. Besides this, cultural empathy and perception that is not judgmental are important. Additionally, a person's strength and stability matter, together with resourcefulness and an ability to deal with stress (Williams, 2005). Lastly, Dearnorff (2006) distinguishes some elements that are specific to intercultural competences. These include interactive skills and understanding skills, such as awareness of one's own culture and understanding other worldviews. Other components such as flexibility and respect are also included.

Individual motives for studying abroad

Of course, mobility can be enhanced by all kinds of policy makers' rationales, but what lies at the core of the functioning of student mobility is whether students are incentivised to opt for international experiences. This perspective can, in contrary to what has been described above, be seen a 'demand-side' approach to student mobility (Carlson, 2013:169). A lot of research has been done on this topic, of which the aspects mentioned below are most often cited as incentives for students to 'go mobile'.

In a very systemic review, the econometric model Rodríguez González et al. (2011) have applied to Germany shows that the most important motives for students' mobility are differences in the cost of living (i.e. the bigger a positive difference is, the less motivated a student is for going abroad to a certain country), distance between countries, a high ranking of the foreign university and leisure purposes in the prospective country.

Lastly, Carlson (2013) notes that mobility amongst students can be seen in the form of a process. Previous experiences with mobility may enhance the probability of a student going abroad. Additionally, he highlights that social networks and a stimulating peer environment may also intrinsically motivate an individual's mobility.

Conclusion

An important aspect of internationalisation policies is increasing student mobility. Student mobility can be seen as a catalyst for employability. The most important reason for this is that it fosters personal 'soft' skills that can enhance employability.

Governance and the role of stakeholders

An important aspect of making these instruments ‘work’ is governing the policy process. The Bologna Process and its implementation are influenced by their governance structure, which operates in a complex multi-level multi-actor landscape. The Bologna Process is unique, in the sense that it is shaped primarily within the European Union and neighbouring countries, but it does not have the legally binding status of European Union legislative actions (even though the European Commission has had an important role in the process (Ravinet, 2008)). The system of the European Higher Education Area derives its legitimacy from an intergovernmental basis and there is a follow up mechanism in place that may account for national and sectoral commitment to its implementation (Ravinet, 2008:363-365).

As Verger & Hermo (2010) argue, the degree of implementation is heavily dependent on internal and external interests of stakeholders from different levels, which is in line with the theory on internationalisation presented earlier. Different stakeholders carry different opinions on what their desired input, process and outcomes are. The stakeholders that are directly involved in the Bologna process are evidently students and HEIs, but also employers, labour unions and accreditation organisations. Evidently, the governance of the Bologna process is influenced by the roles the different stakeholders play and their aggregate roles.

According to Lažetić (2010), the unbinding character of the Bologna process leads to a heavy reliance on voluntary cooperation of stakeholders. It also allows for a deepening of topics such as mobility amongst stakeholders and their networking partners. Because stakeholders have this amount of leeway on the national level, a new relationship between universities, students, employers and accreditation bodies has emerged.

Internal and external governance

When looking at the organisational structure of higher education institutions, it can be argued that the motives for regional players to participate in internationalisation or regionalisation policies are in line with the motives described above. It seems, however, that the motive for these institutions that is most important is based on an economic rationale, which focuses on competitiveness and market-led concepts (Chan, 2004: 36). Within this context, organisational strategies can only be successful if governance (commitment), organisational structures, staff resources, financial resources and support services are all aimed at achieving a higher degree of cooperation with other international partners (Chan, 2004: 40-41). Even though this may not directly be aimed at explaining

success in international cooperation between countries rather than institutions, it does reveal that in a multilevel context every governance level matters in making internationalisation policies successful.

In the broader context, the relationship between higher education institutions, the state and other actors logically also matters, which recognises the multi-level governance and the fact that actors from several different levels are involved. Literature suggests that is no longer sufficient to look at the relationship between just the state and HE institutions, rather the whole cycle from policy making to its evaluation matters. In a multilevel context, this means that steering instruments such as funding and evaluative tasks should be considered to assess the effectiveness of the internationalisation policy from a governance perspective (Boer & File, 2009:11). The policy instruments that are most important to facilitate success are then degree recognitions, quality assurances, support for resources and financial support and a clearly articulated set of goals (Qiang, 2003). Besides this, mutual trust and reinforcement matter.

The effectiveness of internationalisation policies

Considering the observation that definitions, rationales and governance may vary has implications for the assessment of internationalisation policies. Many studies are based on an inductive starting point in their evaluation of internationalisation policies. Often studies focus on perspectives by higher education institutions or governmental perspectives. As can be seen in the next chapter, the focal point of effectiveness matters significantly when comparing this view with the view of graduates. Bearing in mind that the theoretical framework described above does not include labour market conditions or social conditions within a country, this leads to the conclusion that many factors may predict or observe differentiated views on the effectiveness of international higher education policies.

Conclusion

Besides the aforementioned procedural elements, another way of determining the effectiveness of internationalisation policies is to evaluate its effectiveness in terms of stakeholders' perceptions. I therefore argue that a two tiered approach is helpful in the assessment of the Bologna process and its link to employability in particular. This means that I will take into account stakeholders' perceptions to evaluate to what degree the Bologna process influences employability.

Relevant developments within the Bologna process

The Bologna process and graduate employability

In this thesis, the focus is on one of those policy programmes in particular, namely the Bologna process. This is an international initiative and it was not solely aimed at increasing the employability of students within the European Higher Education Area, but it is an important focal point of the policy that aims to achieve this by unifying higher education systems to a certain degree through the process of internationalisation of higher education. It is therefore that the next chapter looks at the connection between higher education internationalisation and employability.

In the context of the Bologna process, the first step that was taken included convergence of higher education systems through the implementation of policies aimed at producing expected learning outcomes (Leoni, 2014). These expected learning outcomes ought to be operationalised in order to be measured adequately. This has been done through the implementation of the three-cycle system (the so-called Dublin descriptors), with each cycle having a certain set of competencies as learning outcomes. Besides this, career opportunities are related to the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) and the conditions for employability are said to improve with the implementation of for instance quality assurance systems and national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) (Leoni, 2014:451). These parameters can then be used to 'score' countries on their improvement of graduate employability.

However, as the former paragraph on graduate employability suggests, there has been a shift in competences and skills that are desired and that are suggested to improve graduate employability. Although the Bologna Process Implementation Reports suggest that graduate employability should improve with the instruments adopted, a recent article by Leoni (2014) suggests that this is not yet the case. It seems that the Bologna framework might not yet be adequately responding to the theoretically suggested conditions.. This mainly has to do with the fact that there is a lack of initiatives that allow for skills development to take place within a study curriculum. This leads to a discrepancy between the competencies acquired within a study programme and those that are needed within a knowledge-driven economy (Leoni, 2014:464).

Besides this critical note, Teichler (2011) suggests that it should be questioned to what extent universities should be 'carrying the burden' of reforming their study programmes and institutions so as to link the labour market with higher education. Also, it should be

noted that the Bologna Process identifies a Bachelor's programme as being an adequate degree for increasing employability through relatively short programmes (Haug, 2004). The Master's or PhD degree (sometimes called the doctoral degree) is then aimed more at supporting scientific careers. The question that arises is whether shorter programmes would facilitate students with acquiring the necessary skills and studying abroad so as to increase their employability. In their book Schomburg & Teichler (2011) address this issue, by means of a comparative study under graduates. I argue, however, that in addition to other studies that have also focused solely on graduate surveys or quantitative studies (see Teichler (2011) and Leoni (2014) for an assessment of these tools), incorporating stakeholders' perception on the promotion of graduate employability by the Bologna framework would make for a more integrated assessment of the effectiveness of the Bologna Process regarding this topic in general. A notable addition to this literature is the REFLEX project, conducted by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market (ROA, 2015). This project has resulted in the publication of several reports, which examine the relationship between higher education and the world of work, primarily through the use of graduate surveys. Again, this research aims to look beyond that by examining the perceptions of stakeholders, rather than just students, in a qualitative manner.

Graduate employability in Germany and the Netherlands

As was mentioned in this chapter, the number of students enrolled in tertiary education has risen significantly, also within Germany and the Netherlands. As the case study of this thesis is conducted for Germany and the Netherlands, some additional statistics are shown below to get a more concrete picture of what the context of this research is.

In Germany, in the college year 2014/2015, 2.7 million students were enrolled in a programme in higher education. In 2014, a total of 14.9% of the total population has obtained a diploma from a higher education institution, which includes a Doctor's degree (Ph.D). The number of students enrolled in different areas of study is shown below.

Fig. 3. Total number of students enrolled by area of study in Germany

Total by area of study

Area of study	Winter term		
	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015 ¹
Languages and arts	476,958	491,327	497,357
Sports	27,367	28,063	27,966
Legal, economic and social sciences	759,610	797,243	824,598
Mathematics, natural sciences	449,758	472,840	487,931
Human medicine	139,422	147,764	155,553
Veterinary medicine	8,230	8,161	8,101
Agricultural, forestry and food sciences	47,766	50,329	53,075
Engineering	499,419	528,420	542,048
Art	88,329	89,956	91,783
Other subject or unclear	2,550	2,778	6,167
Total	2,499,409	2,616,881	2,694,579

¹ Preliminary result.

Source: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2015.

What is interesting here, is that a high number of students are enrolled in legal, economic and social sciences. These students, according to figure 2 of this document, run a relatively high risk of being overeducated and it is to be expected that in these fields of study, employability initiatives should play a more important role. The implications that this has are examined in the research conducted for this thesis. The majority of students from all areas of studies find jobs in the services sector and in the industry (Statista, 2015). Unemployment amongst tertiary qualified people in Germany is low, at 2.4% (OECD, 2014).

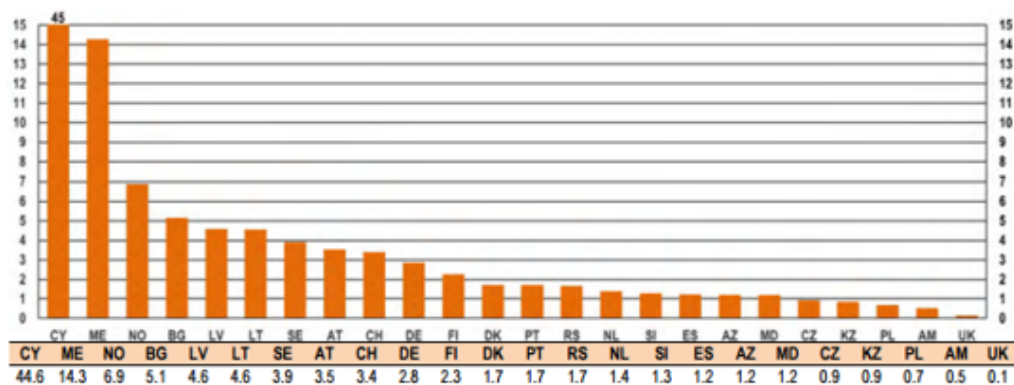
In the Netherlands, 698,600 students were enrolled in study programmes at universities of applied sciences and research universities in 2014. From UASs, some 71,000 students have graduated in 2014 with a bachelor's degree, and 3600 students have graduated with a UAS master (Onderwijs in cijfers, 2015). From research universities, some 35,000 students have graduated with a bachelor's degree and approximately 38,000 students have graduated with a master's degree (Onderwijs in cijfers, 2015a). The most popular study programmes for the year 2013/2014 for both universities of applied sciences and research universities were business administration and management (CBS, 2015). The differences in unemployment per area of study for research university graduates are minimal, and in

average 28% of graduates are unemployed, without receiving benefits. For university of applied sciences graduates, this number is 19% (Onderwijs in cijfers, 2015). The number for UAS graduates appears to be lower, and the reasons for this are examined in the research conducted for this thesis.

Mobility and the Bologna Process

Within the Bologna context, the aims of enhancing student mobility are the same as the ones mentioned in the former chapter, namely allowing students to develop intercultural skills and increasing the quality of higher education within the member countries, so as to foster intra-European mobility and to make studying in the European Higher Education Area more attractive to students from other parts of the world (Teichler, 2011). This includes the emergence of temporary exchange programmes, as well as the option to conclude a full degree abroad. In the European Higher Education Area, there are some 37.2 million students that are enrolled in higher education programmes. In 2009, an EHEA mobility target was set at 20% for outward mobility, which means 20% of all students enrolled in higher education programmes should have been outward mobile for a temporary amount of time or a degree programme at some point in their studies. The mobility initiatives within the Bologna process have led to the outcomes of degree of mobility within the EHEA shown in the graph below.

Fig. 4. Outward degree mobility rate - mobile tertiary education graduates within the EHEA as a percentage of all graduates of the same country of origin, by country of origin, 2011/2012.



Source: European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice (2015)

As can be seen in this graph, the number of students studying abroad from the total of students enrolled in tertiary education within the EHEA varies significantly. Some countries have, to the end of increasing mobility, adopted targets so as to meet the 20%

target of the EHEA mobility initiative. Numbers on temporary credit mobility are not yet available for the EHEA at the moment of this writing.

Quality assurance and recognition of degrees

Even though the Bologna process is not only aimed at increasing mobility and employability, the other aspects that have to be implemented are of much importance to actually achieve this goal.

First, quality assurance is of importance. In the Bologna process, this is primarily done through semi-harmonised accreditation processes that set up programmes in accordance with European qualification standards (in line with EU efforts). Van Damme (2001) argues that transparency of curricula can foster the recognition of courses and programmes within the 'home' university. A second important instrument that can foster or either hinder mobility is the recognition of degrees. As Van Damme (2001) notes, the differences between higher education systems and study programmes require above all transparency about degrees or courses within member states.

Although Van Damme's paper is somewhat outdated in the light of more current efforts to enhance quality assurance and recognition within the Bologna process and related programmes such as ERASMUS, it is nevertheless important to bear in mind that these issues are still on the agenda.

Implications

Theoretically, there are a couple of implications that come with combining these two goals in the policy. As has been noted earlier, student mobility can either entail vertical and horizontal mobility. As the aim of the Bologna Process is to foster both, both of these elements can be analysed. Bearing in mind the theory on student mobility that has been presented earlier, human capital in an internationalised graduate market may not be allocated appropriately to achieve an equilibrium so as to increase competitiveness.

Also, quality assurance and degree recognition are assumed to play a role in increasing student mobility. The implication derived from this is that if these two elements are not warranted successfully, being 'mobile' may not be possible for all students. Hence, the division of skills within higher education graduates may then be skewed, which in turn may lead to an underdevelopment of the skills demanded by the labour market.

The question becomes how mobility is used as a catalyst for employability within the Bologna countries. Are the underlying assumptions about motives and outcomes of the international policy shared by all stakeholders and are the practical outcomes those that

can be expected from this theoretical framework? Also, does the Bologna process successfully remove obstacles and support mobility in the right way?

Student mobility in Germany and the Netherlands

In the context of the thesis, some background statistics on student mobility for Germany and the Netherlands are presented here. The most recent numbers show that in 2012, 6.2% of German students has studied abroad (DZHW & DAAD, 2015). The largest population of German students has studied abroad in Austria, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States between 2002 and 2012. The highest number of students going abroad is amongst language and cultures students, as well as healthcare students. In terms of degree mobility, 20.1% of students studying in Germany at one point are foreign (DZHW & DAAD, 2015).

The most recent numbers from the Netherlands show that in 2010/2011, some 7.5% of Dutch students had gone abroad. The most popular countries were the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, Spain and the United States. As inward mobility is concerned, about 13.8% of students in the Netherlands were foreign. These students were primarily from Germany, China, Belgium, Spain and France (Nuffic, 2013).

Methods

In order to be able to answer the research questions posed in the introduction, the following approach has been adopted in this thesis.

Case studies

For the purpose of answering the research question posed in this thesis, the choice has been made to conduct case studies. This form of research can be split up into intrinsic, instrumental or collective case studies (Stake (1994;1995), as paraphrased in Berg, 2009:326). In this paper, two intrinsic case studies have been made, which serves the purpose of getting a better understanding of the working of the Bologna process in terms of employability at the national level. The type of case study can be defined as snapshot case studies. These types of case studies are characterised by detailed research on one case study at one point in time (Berg, 2009:328). The major disadvantage of this kind of study is that no longitudinal element is included in which changing perceptions may be captured over time. However, for the purpose of this thesis, a stocktaking of one point in time is chosen due to time frame restrictions.

Case study selection

The instrumental case study approach implies that the cases are selected upon their illustrative value for the existence of certain issues within the broader policy context. For this research, the cases of the Bologna process outcomes in Germany and the Netherlands have been chosen. The subjects of this case study have not been randomly selected, i.e. they were selected on the basis of several characteristics. First, these two cases illustrate well that similar institutional governance designs do not always account for similar outcomes of policies. Second, there is potential in comparing the two cases in terms of the degree of implementation of the Bologna Process, as in Germany this has taken considerably longer than in the Netherlands, one might find interesting differences. Third, there are practical considerations that underlie this choice for case selection. Due to time restrictions, no more than two cases were selected. Additionally, these cases were chosen, because they provide high accessibility of data to the author.

Disadvantages of this selection should be noted. First, there is a question of objectivity of the author, who has lived and worked in both countries, and is additionally a joint-degree student. The objectivity has been attempted to be guaranteed through the use of objective sample selection and interview methods. Another major issue is that these countries both have high supply of graduates and their economic conditions are both relatively high.

Also, they have highly integrated governance structures. Although the objective of instrumental case studies is not to draw generalisable conclusions, this may indicate that there are other cases that provide other outcomes. From this point of view, further research could be conducted in order to obtain more general results.

However, considering the time frame for this research and practical matters such as taking the option to hold interviews in person, the advantage of the quality of the case study outweighs these disadvantages here.

The case study approach can be seen as a research method in sich, but data collection within case studies can strengthen its value according to the methods used (Berg, 2009:317). Therefore, to illustrate the cases, interviews have been conducted.

Data collection

The data collection has taken place in the form of interviews. This method is chosen to complement statistical data, so as to be able to interpret stakeholders' views on employability in the Bologna process. As has been described in the theoretical framework, definitions of skills and motives for mobility vary significantly, which is why methods depicting perceptions of stakeholders may add to the understanding of the topics addressed. The interviews have been held in the form of semistandardised schedule. The questions may have been reordered during the interview and the wording of the questions can vary. Probing is an important part of this kind of interview, with the goal of eliciting additional information (Berg, 2009:107-108). The considered advantages of this type of interview in this case is the fact that not all interviews need to be fully comparable in their answers, because not all stakeholders serve the same interests. The goal is to have an integrated answer to the aforementioned research questions.

The majority of interviews was conducted via telephone. This affects the interpretation of answers in the sense that non-verbal expressions cannot be registered by the interviewer. The option to use telephone interviews was chosen mainly due to geographical issues and availability concerns of the interviewees. The interviews have been recorded with permission of the interviewees, so as to guarantee a sound transcription which can be used for analysing the data.

Sample

The research within this paper was first addressed at one group of subjects, namely employers' organisations. The connection between all stakeholders and the issue of employability, in combination with very restricted accessibility to data have led to the incorporation of all stakeholders involved in the Bologna process as regards

employability issues. The stakeholders were chosen according to the depiction of stakeholders that are involved in the Bologna process as consultative members. These stakeholders include at the national level employers' organisations, HEI associations, students' unions and quality assurance agencies. (EHEA, 2014). Due to restricted time and within the scope of this thesis, only representative bodies have been approached for this thesis. These bodies are presumed to be aware of what their members' perceptions are of certain issues.

The following organisations have been approached to this end:

	Netherlands	Germany
Accreditation institutions	NVAO (Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders)	ACQUIN (Accreditation organisation) Akkreditierungsrat (Accreditation Council) AQAS (Accreditation organisation)
Employers' organisations	VNO-NCW (Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers) MKB-Nederland (Confederation of small and medium enterprises-the Netherlands)	BDA (Confederation of German Employers)
Higher Education Institutions associations	VSNU (Association of Universities in the Netherlands) Vereniging hogescholen (Netherlands Association of Universities of	HRK (German Rectors' Conference)

	Applied Sciences)	
Students' unions	ISO (Forum for Student Councils)	FZS (Association for Student Affairs)

Method of analysis

The data collected have been analysed by way of content analysis for the organisations that were unable to provide for qualitative data in the form of interviews. Additional data have been collected in the form of interviews. These interviews have been recorded and transcribed, after which a systemic ordering of the data has taken place. The data have been ordered along the issues described in the theoretical framework and according to the topics addressed in the different research questions. Codes have been added to the transcripts so as to categorise answers. The attempt has been made to complement the analysis of transcripts with the consideration that latent content may be influenced by the stakeholders' interests. To this end, the stakeholders' interests have been outlined in a later chapter. Also, notes have been included in the analysis of the data. The analysis has been conducted with the supportive qualitative analysis programme NVivo. The results were then presented along the lines of the most relevant codes depicted.

Reliability

Analysing publications and their content has been used as a method here, so as to provide data for organisations that were not able to be interviewed during the course of the writing of this thesis. An advantage of this kind of analysis, is that documents were used from various moments in time, allowing for a deepened look into the issues. The data obtained have a strong reliability weakness in them on the other hand, in the sense that they do not always represent actual views of stakeholders. Also, official publications were used, for example letters to ministries, which allows to probe on perceptions to a lesser extent than interviews. Besides this, the links between certain topics, such as employability and mobility could not always be found in separate documents. In particular data for the Netherlands are scarce due to this approach, which is a weak spot in this thesis. Given the time and the resources, however, content analysis of publications was considered to be the second most reliable source for data.

Results

In the following chapter, the results of the research are presented in accordance with the codes that were formed during the analysis of the data. First, the research results for Germany are presented, and in the second part the results for the Netherlands are set out.

Germany

Interviews with relevant stakeholders provide data on the link between the Bologna process and employability in Germany. The first topic that is discussed here is employability.

Employability

In order to understand the perception of graduate employability, the different stakeholders were first asked what defines graduate employability to them. Four different comments below highlight which elements are important in this matter.

“Some people say that employers want robots that sit in their positions, without any critical opinions and they just want fully sized graduates for their company, but this is totally not the case, we have to underline this. ... The main purpose of HEIs is that they prepare for sustainable employment and that they prepare for life as active citizens in democratic societies, this is also an important issue for us. And that they prepare, or foster personal development. So, employability does not mean that we want education and labour market to match 100%” (Employers’ association)

“... Employability is not to have the short-time skills to get a first job, but to have permanent skills that would lead to have a critical opinion on the labour market. To define your own working environment.” (Students’ association)

“German universities’ viewpoint is that they are not offering training to students to match a specific job profile, but an element of the academic self-perception is that universities are responsible for equipping graduates with the tools to use on the job market, like important work methods, problem-solving skills. ... That as a graduate you have the skills to work in many many jobs.” (Rector’s conference)

“I would say it’s not only to get a job at all, but employability for me is really to have a job perspective in a part of the labour market which is closely connected to the main profile of your study programme. This is on the one hand the competences of course, on the other hand also the knowledge that is a part of a study programme”
(Accreditation body)

When asked how this can be achieved, the perception of employers shows that incorporating practical elements from the world of work into study programmes is important.

“They [students] have to be prepared for this labour market [outside of HEIs or science] [by] for example work placement, practical training and part-time lecturers from companies in higher educations.” (Employers’ association)

What can be derived from this quote is that employability has a lot to do with preparing students on a personal level and that higher education institutions can make this happen. Also, flexibility is often implicitly mentioned as an aspect that can increase employability, primarily to be able to work in different sectors after graduating.

Differences between study programmes

The difference to which employability enhancers should be integrated in study programmes deserves some attention. It is noted that in some programmes or specific sectors, employability plays a different role.

“When you talk about science, so maths, chemistry, real science, for them it’s rather easy to say “one option is always to stay at university to do research, on the other side you go to the industry. For each sector you must have certain parts of the education. And they can really say very well what is necessary for example for biochemistry in a pharmaceutical company. There we talk about employability with a tight connection to the labour market” (Accreditation body)

“In subjects like engineering they didn’t have to do so much, just pointing out how engineering has close links to industry, as engineering was never so far away from the working world. ... Many people in Germany go into humanities, but there is no clearly defined profession outside of a university career for these graduates. For quite a long time it was difficult for these graduates to find employment. ... On the other hand more general programmes as for example chemistry or even business in some regards, this is more general education that should give you skills, knowledge and competences to adjust yourself with a changing world” (Accreditation council)

It appears that the degree to which the incorporation of employability instruments is incorporated differs between study programmes. The quote above implicitly shows that for some sectors there may be a bigger need to involve employability efforts within curricula, in the cases where finding employment is more difficult. In the programmes in which there is already a closer link between higher education and employment, be this through provided subject knowledge, or through a ‘necessary’ implementation of

practical elements, the employability appears to already be implemented in a desired way or the need to implement soft skills is not that big.

Bachelor-Master

In Germany, it is common to do a master's programme after getting a bachelor degree. The introduction of the Bachelor-Master system was accompanied by many discussions in Germany, seen as how the time to obtain an endqualification in the form of a bachelor has been reduced significantly when compared to the old system. The question that was asked is whether the differentiation between the two levels has an impact on the competencies students gain, and therewith on their employability.

“For a master the focus is on knowledge and understanding, capability for problem solving, to be able to adapt to situations not known before. And these competences are less for the bachelor level” (Accreditation body)

“We see that the students with the bachelor degrees have less skills than the Diplom students. ... The students become younger and younger and they have less time in these three years bachelor degree to learn on their own to define what their interests are and things like that. ... The year we lose with the bachelor of the Diplom or the Magister is the thing we are missing. We see that the students with the bachelor degrees have less skills than the Diplom students. ... I don't mean things related directly to the subject, but because the students are younger.” (Students' association)

These two quotes illustrate that the time given in the bachelor degree to obtain certain competences is seen as limited. Both from the perspective of accreditors and of students, it is perceived that bachelor graduates are not equipped with the right skills to enter the labour market. In particular the time that is apparently needed to develop certain skills seems to be too short.

The employers' association, however, gives an entirely different perception.

“They [bachelor graduates] are adequately educated in universities and they feel comfortable with their positions in the companies and what we also see from the data now is that the relevance of a master degree is decreasing from the perspective of employers” (Employers' association)

“It is an important message to the universities from our side and as well to students, saying it makes a lot more sense to enter the labour market with a bachelor degree, then working for a time, and then maybe coming back for a part-time study programme at the master level” (Employers' association)

Additionally, the German employers' association has had an initiative called 'Bachelor Welcome', which emphasises that a bachelor's degree is seen as valuable by employers for entering the labour market as it is.

The German Rector's conference, in turn, summarises these comments in the sense that not the bachelor degree itself, but rather the perception of the degree is at the core of the debate.

"On the other hand it's [employability] about the perception of the bachelor's degree. ... Especially the introduction of the three-year bachelor is still a point of discussion in Germany. It's important to get those students out of university with the right skills we need in a fast evolving labour market we have today. And you can't just do theory for the first three ears, so you have to bring practical elements in in the early stages of studies" (Rector's conference)

What is implied here, is that the bachelor's degree can be made more relevant for the labour market if implementing employability enhancing instruments like skills building through practical elements are incorporated in bachelor study programmes, so at an early stage of studies.

Learning outcomes

To deepen the debate further, it was asked how learning outcomes can influence employability. This instrument was designed to give all stakeholders a clear vision of which competences students should have obtained in their studies, inter alia making it easier for employers to know whether someone with a certain degree would be fit for a particular job.

However, this seems not to be the case yet, given also the discussion presented above on the acknowledgement of the bachelor degree by all stakeholders but employers.

"At least one solution would be to start with awareness raising in professional associations, for example. And if these professional associations take it [for] granted that this framework [NQF] exists, and try also to support their members, so companies. So say "if you want to see what a student is able to do when you hire him, maybe you should get in contact with universities and certain councils, programmes that exist already. You can also talk about certain competences and profiles and connect this with the level qualification framework". (Accreditation body)

In addition to the paragraph on the difference between bachelor and master degrees, this quote reveals that producing clear learning outcomes within the accreditation of study

programmes could help clarify which competences students have when entering the job market.

Improving employability

The majority of stakeholders indicate that students and employers are often unaware of the competencies they have gathered and respectively the competencies that students have after finishing a certain programme. To the question how employability can be improved within bachelor and master programmes, the answer is primarily that the competency based learning should result in the students knowing what they can do after leaving higher education, and in employers knowing what students are capable of after they graduate, both in terms of hard skills and of soft skills.

“So, it [employability] could be fostered on the study programme level, in the quality assurance I already spoke about and within the institutional structure.” (Employers’ association)

In line with what has been mentioned in the former paragraph, transparency of learning outcomes seems to be a point for improvement.

“There is a broad range of programmes, some near the labour market, some far away. There are these transparency issues that are important. That school leavers understand what they can do with these programmes. This is a very big challenge of course. Teachers are not experts in how the labour market and the universities have developed after they left university and this is one of the fields where there is a ton of work to do.” (Accreditation body)

In practical terms, according to universities, way to achieve building competencies, is by including certain tasks in study programmes.

“A lot of students will work outside the science community and will have to apply their academic skills in various areas and with changing challenges and tasks. To include this perspective in the study programme is the main focus: like doing a case study for a company, a simulation game, or study projects.” (Rectors’ conference)

The employers’ association also highlights that employability should be included more in study programmes.

“Although there always has to be somebody from the labour market or from the company within the peers group [of accreditation] ... from our point of view this issue is not as much highlighted as it should be.” (Employers’ association)

“It will be a process within the next two years of the accreditation council so that within every accreditation employability of graduates has to be checked and [employability] has to be much higher on the agenda.” (Employers’ association)

This vision is underlined by both accreditors and the students’ association.

“What is a good idea is for example the bachelor plus programme. They have the integration of one semester or one year most of the time within the programme, so the time of studying is longer already. ... for students, apparently, that is rather attractive, for universities also.” (Accreditation body)

“To have more modules where you can choose what you want to do. And that is one of the points where we need change to more different possibilities to define what is your interest and what you want to do with your life and how you want to make and impact on the topic you work on.” (Students’ association)

From these comments it can be concluded that the Bologna process can foster employability, primarily through implementing the competency based learning in a certain way and this is a desirable issue. The phase that allows for this to happen is the accreditation process of programmes. Employers want to be involved in the process of accreditation, where it is checked whether employability is incorporated in the study programme in the right way. But they also want to be incorporated during the study programmes to put this into practice.

Student mobility

Mobility is an important catalyst for employability, as was stipulated in the literature review. This view is shared by employers in Germany.

“Language competences and intercultural competences are important elements of employability ... as the economy is getting more and more globally founded or globally structured.” (Employers’ association)

To the question what the motivation of students is to go abroad in Germany, the students’ association commented:

“I think there are always some places that are popular, because they have been, like the United States, Great Britain, where also the language has important impact. But also the sunny states like Italy and Spain I think are also important. I think for some students it’s an opportunity to combine the learning and the sun.” (Students’ association)

Although these perspective differ a little, mobility is desirable according to both employers and students. But is mobility fostered in the right way according to the stakeholders?

First, the importance of recognition of degrees and credits is mentioned as a stimulus for more students to go abroad.

“Recognition is effective to encourage more students to go abroad.” (Rectors’ conference)

Additionally, there are some obstacles that need to be overcome according to several actors.

“We always look for mobility windows, we see that universities have big problems with this. With the transfer from the old Diplom and Magister programmes, ... our bachelor’s programmes are overloaded and master’s programmes from [HEI’s] perspective are too short. So what we see very often is that there are formal mobility windows integrated, but it’s not so easy for students to use them.” (Accreditation body)

“To make the step of going abroad, I think there are so many difficulties summing up. For example, the financing of going abroad. ... and how to get all the things recognised. It’s a thing you do easier if you have a background where you are supported and where you have enough money to organise all those things.” (Students’ association)

“Studies have shown that the financial support of studying abroad is an issue for many students. So if they lose a year by going abroad, some students might not be able to afford it.” (Rectors’ conference)

Summing up, there appear to be some difficulties in implementing mobility windows into study programmes and the financial support for going abroad seems to also be an issue.

An interesting additional comment is that the portability of grants and loans as a means to enhance mobility is acknowledged by employers, even though they do not perceive this to be an obstacle in Germany.

“The lack of funding for students in many countries is an obstacle for mobility, and they can’t get the grants and loans with them when they go abroad. This is not the case in Germany. You can study your whole programme outside of Germany and get Bafög¹ money for that.” (Employers’ association)

¹ Bafög is financial support from the German government for students.

This can imply that either there is not a clear perception of the ability of students to go abroad, or that due to the large supply in students that already have international experience, employers do not see the need to further promote mobility. It seems that students and universities are more eager to provide the possibility of going abroad to all their members.

Improving mobility

The importance of degree or ECTS recognition for mobility has already been mentioned in the interviews. According to the Rectors' conference, this can primarily be improved by a thorough implementation of the Lisbon Recognition Convention rules (albeit that this is not a 'Bologna' instrument by origin).

"... Many universities have ... introduced so called 'mobility windows' in their study programmes. ... I guess there are concerns about the comparability. ... If you want a big number of students to go abroad, it's important to implement functioning procedures for recognition." (Rectors' conference)

Two rather interesting additional comments were made regarding the topic of mobility.

"I think a lot of employers look if you were mobile in your studies. ... I think the most competences and qualifications that you get during a semester abroad could also be reached in other ways, because I think the most important one is the learning to stand on your own feet. But you need the mobile semesters in most cases for the cultural competences and things like that. And I don't see that the most employers, especially that of the small businesses know a lot about the cultural competences. ... I think the cultural part you can own best on a mobile semester. But you should also implement internationalisation at home in our home university to give all the students who don't have the possibility to be mobile and to go to other countries to get these competences. ... The most common thing are some courses in other languages. What is also helpful if you want to have students from other countries in your university. And to be at university and to teach the students to be cultural sensitive." (Students' association)

"It's also the perspective to see we don't have to go somewhere and to study there, but we also read literature from other countries, we can [take] this perspective into account." (Accreditation body)

These comments imply that even though there are some obstacles that need to be overcome in order to further enhance mobility, there are other ways of promoting intercultural skills and language competences. The concept of 'internationalisation at home' seems to be a policy alternative that is worth considering.

The role of stakeholders

In the data for Germany, one important implication has arisen. Where the (aggregate) role of stakeholders is concerned, there are some issues that come to the surface. This primarily has to do with the communication between stakeholders concerning who is responsible for which kind of aspect.

“So we try to push universities now to use the NQF and to take that as a guideline for defining learning outcomes, to have descriptions in place in the module handbook, which are really helpful for them and for students and also for the assessment. At the same time we see that there is not yet really a connection between the labour market and this NQF.” (Accreditation body)

“We try to find a balance between compliance with the rules and flexibility. ... Because quite often HEIs say “well, these common structural guidelines are too narrow” and many times in that case the answer is “well, look at the guidelines. It is written ‘as a rule’ and ‘in general’ so you can do it your way but you have to describe why it’s working”. ... I am very happy to see that this idea is spreading around. So that this is not about abiding by rules, but to achieve objectives.” (Accreditation council)

These comments reveal that the process of accreditation may not always have the desired outcomes. The guidelines and rules may be perceived as a burden to universities, even though the situation is improving. This is an important reminder that the voluntary basis does not always mean that all stakeholders agree to all the implementation measures. What is important for procedures or for the labour market may not always be equally important to other stakeholders.

The same goes for the importance of incorporating employability into study programmes at universities. There is a question of who is responsible for improving the situation as it is now or to which extent this is desirable.

“I don’t think it’s the major task of higher education to prepare employability.”
(Students’ association)

“What we want the HEIs offering now is more master programmes on a part-time structure, so that employees could work part-time and that companies are not losing their employees, which then are performing well in the company.” (Employers’ association)

“The dialogue between HEIs and employers is fundamental .. The main purpose of HEIs are that they prepare for sustainable employment and that they prepare for life as active citizens in democratic societies, this is also an important issue for us. And that they prepare, or foster personal development.” (Employers’ association)

Here we can see that the perceptions that stakeholders have of their own and of each others’ roles matters when making certain policies. This has implications for policy making, which are discussed in a later chapter.

Other factors

It was already noted that evidently, also labour market conditions play a role to the degree to which employability is seen as an important part of study programmes.

“We had discussions in the last year with the economic crisis affecting many of our colleagues in the south for example, they have very much put forward to take employability into account while assessin study programmes. This is of course a reaction to the crisis and we are not under that pressure at the moment.”

(Accreditation council)

“But of course the influence [of labour market conditions on achieving more employability] ... is limited, it is a question of the economy itself, how they recover and how labour markets could recover. This has a lot to do with the overall politics, not only with the higher education policy.” (Employers’ association)

This quote illustrates that employability to stakeholders other than employers, varies in significance per labour market condition. This is another important reminder that the degree to which it is desirable that higher education systems be fully adapted to the current labour market demands may be debated.

As a final comment, the Rector’s conference implies that including employability into study programmes in the way it is done now is part of a process, of which the desired outcomes can change as labour markets change alongside them.

“It’s ongoing, because labour markets and society are changing continuously, so study programmes will have to change and develop also continuously.” (Rectors’ conference)

The Netherlands

The data used for the Netherlands are comprised of primarily official publications and two supportive interviews, as has been mentioned in the methods chapter of this document. In accordance with the theory, it is first important to discuss what the concept of graduate employability means to the different stakeholders, and how this concept fits in with the current labour market demands and conditions.

Employability

Employability appears to be a salient topic for all stakeholders involved in the Netherlands. In publications of employers' organisations and of university associations, the transition from higher education to the world of work is a topic that is discussed broadly. The first question that arises is 'what is employability?'. According to the Dutch Students' Association, employability is

“That is [employability and employment] something that is very often confused with one another. The main difference is particularly in the fact that you can move across the labour market ... So the most important is that you are able, by means of amongst other things your education, to move across the labour market quite freely. ... Something that is very important, is the independence of students.”

It appears that graduate employability is thought to be more than just finding a job after a person graduates from higher education. It is mentioned that employability should not be confused with employment. Also, flexibility is an important aspect of employability, according to the Dutch National Students' Association.

Differences between study programmes

To the question whether there are differences between study programmes in terms of the need or the way in which employability can be increased, the data show that there is a difference between sectors. In a letter from the Confederation of Netherlands Industry and Employers and the organisation for small and medium enterprises in the Netherlands (MKB-Nederland), it is stressed that

“It is important that education (in quality and in quantity) and research correspond with the needs of the labour market with extra attention for the economic top sectors ... One of the most important areas of concern is the quality and quantity of beta engineers” (VNO-NCW & MKB-Nederland, 2011)

The differentiation between sectors is also underlined by students in the degree to which certain skills matter.

“I think that that is very [sector]specific ... I think definitely for example when you look at the beta sector, there it’s just very clear. ... There the content of the course is much more important, whilst with the more soft study programmes ..., you need the 21st century skills more. So communicative skills, working together, presentation training, that kind of skills are much more important there than course content, because the course content fades much faster there.” (Students’ association)

What becomes clear from these quotes is that the need to integrate employability within curricula differs per study programme. It is perceived that soft skills are more important for studies that educate students in disciplines where subject-knowledge in itself is more closely related to the work they will be doing in the labour market later on.

Bachelor-Master

Besides this, the question has been explored in which way the differentiation made by the bachelor-master system, a typical Bologna instrument, affects graduates’ employability. The first aspect of this topic is the link between this differentiation and the skills students learn that can enhance their employability.

More and more Dutch students enter the labour market with a master’s degree, which has been recognised in the accreditation process.

“Usually, one goes on from a bachelor at university to a masterprogramme at university, so then the question comes of the connection to the labour market. And what you will do after your studies, in your job, that is more reflected in the university master’s. I think that is where the difference lies, even though formally it is of course the case that a bachelor’s degree is also an endqualification of Bologna, or at least it should be. But in reality it is nevertheless a common that students go on to [do a master’s programme] afterwards. ... With a university master there is more regard for how that is connected to the professional field you are going to work in.”

(Accreditation organisation)

The question then arises why students go on to obtain a master’s degree and whether this trend is in line with employer’s demands.

“Well, in the Netherlands it is very institutionalised. When someone says: “I am going to quit after my bachelor’s”, then they get looks as though it is strange. ... I think it is primarily socialised. ... And for employers it has become normal, too. When you enter

the labour market with a bachelor degree only, especially now, then your opportunities are quite limited” (Students’ association)

This last comment hints to a trend where a bachelor degree is not regarded as sufficient to enter the labour market with by employers. Two employers’ organisations have underlined this in a published joint letter that was sent to the Dutch ministry of education, culture and science in 2013 regarding the university bachelor as a relevant qualification for entering the labour market.

“The industry sees the university bachelor as a transitory diploma. Companies generally hire university masters for jobs of academic level. The university bachelor is a degree that is barely asked for and following what is said about this by companies, this will continue to be the case in the near future.” (VNO-NCW & MKB-Nederland, 2013)

A link is made in the letter between the competencies that university bachelors have acquired and how this is not compatible with the competencies either bachelors from the universities of applied sciences have acquired, nor with university masters.

“A bachelor from a university of applied science is ready for the labour market and is adequately equipped for jobs at applied science-level. This, however, does not count for university bachelors. ... The university bachelor [in other European countries, like the United Kingdom] contains practical elements. That is not the case here [in the Netherlands].” (VNO-NCW & MKB-Nederland, 2013)

In a joint statement by European universities of applied sciences of 2007, there is already a clear call for the ministers at the then following Bologna meeting, to

“stress the importance of professional first cycle and second cycle degree programmes and to recognise them as fully equal to other degree programmes” (Vereniging hogescholen, 2007).

These results concerning the difference between the skills acquired in bachelor and master’s programmes and their influence on the employability of students have implications that will further be discussed in the next chapters.

Learning outcomes

One aspect of employability within the Bologna process that has been mentioned in the literature review, is that learning outcomes may help to clarify both to students, universities and employers which competencies bachelor and master graduates have acquired, so as to link the world of work better to higher education.

“Those learning outcomes are not always formulated in the right way. ... Sometimes they are formulated as kind of the maximal result for a particular study programme, when it should be the minimum standards that everyone should actually achieve. ... It is then not the case that students have actually achieved these standards. ... Employers see such a diploma supplement and they should be able to expect that that is right. ... Sometimes there is still a discrepancy between whether students have actually achieved [the outcomes] and whether they have come very close.” (Students’ association)

From this quote, it becomes clear that the role of learning outcomes for employability is rather vague. It appears that it may be unclear to students and employers how to use learning outcomes in assessing the competencies a graduate has acquired during a certain study programme. A bigger role could be attributed to this element, which will be mentioned in the following chapter.

Student mobility

In the literature review, it was concluded that student mobility can be seen as a catalyst for employability. This is underlined by the Dutch students’ association.

“Almost every job has an international component to it nowadays. You become a part of an international environment, wherever you may end up. Whether this is the municipality ... or a supplier of products. In some sectors this may be the case to a lesser extent ... But you are involved in it in most jobs” (Students’ association)

Hence, the motivation of students to be mobile during their studies is a topic that deserves attention.

“What is the motivation of students to go abroad?”

That is primarily because there are more possibilities to go abroad, for this reason simply more people go abroad. The facilities are even more important than the fact that everybody goes abroad, which is not the case when following a master’s programme. But that is also quite normal now. ... It is kind of the case that you have a disadvantage when you didn’t do it, instead of it really giving you an advantage directly. ... I am convinced that it is very valuable for both students and for society and employers, but it is just becoming a more common phenomenon.” (Students’ association)

For HEIs, there is a different kind of motivation to foster mobility.

“Learning mobility offers opportunities for acquiring more in-depth knowledge from an entirely different perspective, but this is not yet a reality for most students. The challenge for higher education lies in increasing outgoing credit mobility as this has significant added value in qualitative terms.” (VSNU & Vereniging Hogescholen, 2014)

Two particular comments make it clear that there may still be obstacles for students within the Netherlands that require attention.

“There are still students who can’t financially bear to go abroad.” (Students’ association)

“The many analyses exploring the causes of the Netherlands’ credit mobility deficit show that this is mainly due to formal reasons, such as financial implications” (VSNU & Vereniging Hogescholen, 2014)

From these comments, it can be derived that the main issue that arises when fostering mobility for students from the Netherlands and to the Netherlands, is having the financial resources to be mobile. This issue has also been mentioned in the literature review as a possible obstacle that could hamper mobility.

To overcome these obstacles, there are some suggestions to improve mobility amongst students or to have them acquire the desired competences in another way. For instance:

“Increasing the quality [of study programmes] in the countries students go to.”
(Students’ association)

This quote underlines that socialisation may not be the only reason for students to go abroad. At least the quality of the programmes in the countries students go to matters too, to a certain degree.

The importance of having the possibility to go abroad may also be influenced by the opportunity to have a ‘window’ within the study curriculum in which the students can go abroad. Here, the certainty of having degrees and credits recognised is also seen as a factor that decides whether or not students go abroad:

“Boost outgoing mobility, for example by specifying learning mobility as a part of the curriculum. Coordinated mobility windows and automatic recognition of credits can provide certainty about the programmes on offer and clarity with regard to their recognition.” (VSNU & Vereniging Hogescholen, 2014)

Thus, the certainty of quality of study programmes abroad, the incorporation of a ‘mobility window’ in a study programme and the certainty of recognition of the credits or

degrees obtained abroad are elements that can be improved in order to foster mobility further.

What is a notable addition to this comment is the mention that is made in several publications, that so-called ‘internationalisation’ at home could overcome the obstacles mentioned earlier.

“Setting up a truly international classroom (student mix, design, student cooperation).” (VSNU & Vereniging Hogescholen)

It is thus believed, that the skills one acquires during their studies abroad can to a certain degree also be acquired ‘at home’. This leaves room for policy options to foster mobility in a different way. Of course, it does not yet remove the obstacle of financial disability to ‘go mobile’, but it is an interesting comment nonetheless.

Discussion

In both Germany and the Netherlands the Bologna process has been a source for discussions on topics such as employability, mobility and the stakeholders' roles in the processes of implementing instruments that are related to these concepts. In this discussion, the results of the data analysis will be compared to the literature that was presented before. It is discussed in which way this research can contribute to the literature. It is an overall assessment of how this thesis can provide new insights that can be helpful to the recommendation of policies.

Employability

In this paragraph, the aim is to connect the literature on employability with the results presented in the former chapter.

First, as was presented in the former chapter, the definition of employability is a topic of interest. Overall, a possessive approach (Holmes, 2013) can be applied to what the stakeholders define as employability, which means that skills or attributes acquired during someone's studies can enhance one's employability in the sense that it is easier for them to gain employment and to be successful in one's career. One important note, however, is that stakeholders in both countries underline that employability is more than just finding a job, rather the focus should now be on developing certain skills in graduates. Within the Netherlands and Germany, there is also the viewpoint that being able to move freely across the labour market after graduating, thus being flexible, is also an important factor that contributes to graduates' employability. So, increasing employability in both countries is seen as something that can be developed within study programmes, but it should result in long term effects, so that graduates can take up different jobs after they graduate.

No specific skills were mentioned as being important, besides from soft skills, which is in line with the literature. It may point to a viewpoint that concretising the skills that are necessary is not desirable per se. The advantages of soft skills, however, are shared by almost all stakeholders in both countries.

Differences between study programmes

There is a difference, however, between study programmes. In particular exact sciences are seen as studies in which disciplinary knowledge is an aspect that is closely related to employers' demands for a first job. The desirability of incorporating practical elements within the study programme therefore differs. The 'inadequacy' that Sala (2011) describes between training and the skills needed in employment exists primarily in what

the Dutch students' association calls 'soft study programmes'. The view between the two countries is shared that in beta-studies, such as engineering, this inadequacy is present to a much lesser extent. In the Netherlands, however, it is emphasised that the link between training and employment is more important for beta-studies. This may have to do with the fact that the supply of graduates from these fields of study is smaller. In the Netherlands, there may be more of a discrepancy between the motives for increasing employability between employers and students. Improving the employability of economic 'top-sectors' (such as information technology) may lead to more competitive advantage and economic gain, whereas students may seek to improve employability of students from all kinds of different disciplines. This can be aimed more at improving students' positions when entering the labour market.

Bachelor-master

The differentiation between bachelor and master programmes as a Bologna instrument can be seen as adding to the 'inadequacy' between higher education and the labour market. In both Germany and the Netherlands, the bachelor degree is not seen to be an endqualification with which students can enter the labour market by students and accreditation bodies. In the Netherlands, the accreditation organisation mentions that the transition from higher education only comes into play, when a student graduates from a master's programme. When the students associations were asked why they think this is the case, two different answers were given. The German students' association argued that students that have a bachelor degree are not equipped with the right skills, such as being able to think critical and to determine what their interests are. It was mentioned that this has to do primarily with the fact that a bachelor programme is shorter than the former Diplom. In the Netherlands, students seem to recognise that a bachelor degree gives limited chances when entering the labour market, and that socialisation has led to the fact that doing a master's programme after a bachelor has become a 'normal thing'.

German employers have welcomed the bachelor degree as a fully recognised degree with which students can enter the labour market; it is encouraged that bachelors start their first jobs, after which there is a possibility to gain more job-related knowledge within companies. In the Netherlands, however, employers' associations have expressed the opinion that students with a university bachelor degree are not equipped with the right skills to enter the labour market. It is not expressed explicitly which skills this concerns.

It should be noted here that, in accordance with the viewpoint expressed by the Dutch employers' association, the differentiation between bachelors of universities of applied sciences and those of universities also plays a role. The fact that in the Netherlands

employers think that bachelors from UASs are adequate to enter the labour market with implies that it may not be very desirable in the Netherlands to make the bachelor degree of a university and endqualification and that a status quo is accepted. In Germany, however, the competition between UAS bachelors and university bachelors has not been mentioned as an explicit issue. In this case, the perception of a bachelor by students and universities can be considered to be more important.

Learning outcomes

An important part of determining the worth of either a bachelor or a master programme, is the attribution of learning outcomes to programmes. Through communication of which learning outcomes are relevant for which sturdy programmes and their level, universities, students and employers can be aware of which skills a students has acquired. Even though the former paragraph shows that the opinion on the competencies graduates have is quite clear, it appears from the research results from the Netherlands presented in the former chapter that the trustworthiness of learning outcomes can be debated. In Germany, the link between employability and learning outcomes has also been made, but it is not deemed such a priority. As the results have shown, national qualifications frameworks can help to define learning outcomes. More narrowly defining standards may help overcome these issues that were also concerns expressed by Leoni (2014), but German stakeholders have already expressed that narrowing rules may not be desirable for all parties.

The results are complementary in a way. Whereas concerns about the employability of students through Bologna instruments are not always shared by stakeholders in the Netherlands and Germany, implications for policy making can be found in the research results for both countries. These common solutions are described in a later chapter.

Mobility

In accordance with the literature, mobility can be seen as an important catalyst for employability. Stakeholders, amongst which are employers, in both Germany and the Netherlands agree that this is a process that occurs through the development of certain skills and knowledge, such as language competences and intercultural skills.

Motives for students to go abroad differ, however. In the Netherlands, going abroad seems to be as much a consequence of socialisation as it is to follow a master's programme after obtaining a bachelor degree. In Germany, the language in the country abroad seems to matter and there are also different incentives to go abroad.

Both in the Netherlands and in Germany, stakeholders have mentioned that there are still some obstacles that can be overcome in order for mobility to be fostered further. In light of developing the skills to further increase employability, this can be seen as something that is desirable. The literature on this topic suggests that the most important concerns are with quality assurance and degree recognition, but the difficulties brought forward by the stakeholders differ, even though these are aspects that were sometimes mentioned as well. It was mentioned by two Dutch stakeholders that primarily having the financial resources to go abroad is an issue that needs addressing if enhancing intercultural and language skills are to be fostered further by higher education. In Germany, some obstacles also seem to exist according to the research results. The difficulties brought forward by the stakeholders have to do with implementing mobility windows into study programmes, and in line with stakeholders in the Netherlands, with financing an international experience by stakeholders. It appears that in both countries providing opportunities to go abroad are deemed a greater concern than quality assurance and degree recognition. This may be explained by a satisfaction with these aspects, or a more urgent need to express concerns over financial opportunities.

The relevant literature tends to focus on mobility in the form of ‘going abroad’ (Crossman & Clarke, 2010; Papatsiba, 2006; Teichler & Jahr, 2001; Williams, 2005). The notable comment by Deardorff (2006) in the literature suggests that developing the skills that one can acquire abroad, does not necessarily mean that students actually have to go abroad. The interactive and understanding skills, like understanding other worldviews, can also be fostered by having incoming mobility. It appears from this research that students and accreditors agree that ‘internationalisation’ can also take place ‘at home’. This can be a useful insight for policy makers. Both German and Dutch stakeholders have underlined that this is a good alternative or at least a complementary policy for the opportunity of gaining international experience abroad. Besides this, incorporating mobility windows and opportunities within the study curricula is seen as a positive policy to enhance mobility.

Stakeholder’s roles

The results of this research indicated that the role of stakeholders is an issue that is perceived to be of importance in the case study of Germany, which indicates the primary difference between German and Dutch stakeholders’ perceptions. (It should be born in mind that the majority of the German data was retrieved from interviews, whereas the Dutch data rely also on official publications. This might indicate that implicit views of

stakeholders on their and other organisations' roles may exist, though they are not incorporated here.)

What can be seen in the paragraphs above and in the results section is that there tend to be discrepancies between the stakeholders' views in Germany. To the question how employability can be improved through the Bologna instruments, the results reveal that there may not be enough awareness of the instruments available. But what is more important and underlying, is what Verger & Hermo (2010) have acknowledged, namely the fact that all stakeholders have different interest that they try to look after. In this case, especially the awareness of stakeholders of other perceptions is of importance to reveal discrepancies between certain views so that adequate policies can be made. Evidently, the degree of involvement of the stakeholders in the policy-making process matters for this issue, too.

Conclusion

This chapter will provide the answer to the main research question and the subquestions that have been posed at the end of the introduction of this document. First the subquestions will be answered, after which an answer can be given to the main research question.

How do Bologna instruments influence graduate employability according to the stakeholders involved?

Stakeholders from Germany and the Netherlands perceive both hard and soft skills to be important for employability. The incorporation of skills into study programmes, however, has some instrumental implications to it that can hamper increasing graduate employability. It is believed that in some study programmes, skills are already incorporated in the right way. For the most part however, in particular a transparent involvement of practical elements into study programmes with clear learning outcomes is an issue that influences graduate employability in a negative way. Also, the division between bachelor and master programmes has caused some differing opinions. The most important conclusion is that bachelors from the universities of applied sciences are seen as well equipped to enter the labour market, whereas at university level, a bachelor degree is barely seen that way.

To what degree does mobility influence graduate employability according to the stakeholders involved?

The conclusion that can be drawn from the results of the data for both Germany and the Netherlands, is that mobility is an enhancer for graduate employability, but there are obstacles hampering an increase in student mobility. In particular the financial ability of students to go abroad matters. A solution can be to foster internationalisation at the students' home universities.

How does the role of stakeholders influence the effectiveness of the Bologna process in increasing graduate employability?

It has become clear that the perception of stakeholders matters to the degree in which the Bologna process is effective in enhancing employability. Not only do these perceptions give insight into the opinions of stakeholders regarding their own positions, involving perceptions also allows to see that stakeholders are not always aware of the workings of policy instruments and this can affect their effectiveness.

Now that the subquestions have been answered, an answer can be given to the main research question of this thesis:

To what extent are Bologna instruments effective in increasing graduate employability in Germany and the Netherlands according to the stakeholders involved?

The main conclusion of this thesis is that the Bologna instruments are well equipped to meet employers' demands in the current labour market in terms of skills and competencies. The issue lies, however, with the implementation of these instruments. It can be concluded that stakeholders are divided about whether the instruments are effective in practice. The implementation of these instruments is directly linked to this.

Overall, there is territory to gain in the aspect of consolidating the implementation of the instruments, as well as the involvement of stakeholders in the processes of this implementation.

Besides this, all stakeholders agree that mobility can be seen as an enhancer of graduate employability, as was also suggested in the literature. Here too, however, there are some obstacles in increasing the implementation of mobility enhancers. The obstacle mentioned most within Germany and the Netherlands is financial restrictions of students. Partly, solutions can be found in internationalisation at home policies.

Policy implications

This section briefly sums up the implications that the results of this research have for the role of employability in the Bologna process in Germany and the Netherlands. Because the results have similar implications, the comments made in this section are comprised of implications for both German and Dutch policies.

Graduate employability

In both countries stakeholders' have expressed that including practical elements within curricula can help to develop the desired skills that fit the demands of labour market actors. The degree to which this is a necessity varies per study programme. Particularly, within the 'non-beta studies' the incorporation of practical elements is seen as important to be able to meet employers' demands. It is important to note here that involving these elements in curricula can be seen as a way to determine one's employability, because clearer outcomes of study programmes can be a link between studying and meeting employers' demands. It is thus valuable, to look at employability in this sense, rather than in the sense of quantitative data on whether graduates find employment and how long it takes for them to find it.

Also, in both countries the perception of bachelor degree varies. It appears, that none of the stakeholders find bachelors to be properly equipped with the skills that are needed to enter the labour market, with the notable exception of German employers.

Another policy instrument of the Bologna process that was mentioned was the incorporation of learning outcomes. Here, it appears that there is a lot to gain. Creating transparent learning outcomes might help to solve the 'inadequacy' between higher education and the labour market, be it that they have to be institutionalised to a certain degree.

Mobility

Student mobility within Germany and the Netherlands is perceived to be a factor that contributes to the employability of graduates. In both countries, there are some obstacles that hamper mobility. Particularly the financial ability of students to go abroad is an important issue here. Some policy options have already been carried out by stakeholders, which are incorporated in the policy recommendations in this paper.

The role of stakeholders

The data for both Germany and the Netherlands reveal that perceptions of the role of the Bologna process in employability can be quite different. In particular in Germany there are some discrepancies in what stakeholders perceive to be important. Of course this is a 'natural' thing when assessing stakeholders' perceptions, but alongside an improvement in the use of operational instruments, an integrated approach by the actors involved can lead to more mutual trust and reinforcement of the policy as it was designed.

Policy recommendations

From the policy implications that were set out in the former chapter, a set of policy recommendations can be formed.

Enhancing graduate employability

In order to improve graduate employability through the Bologna process in Germany and the Netherlands, there are several elements that have come to light that may enhance employability, particularly through transparency and a righteous implementation of Bologna tools.

The tools involved in particular are national qualifications frameworks (or qualification standards set up by accreditation organisation). Within these frameworks, the opportunity to include ‘employability windows’, such as an internship can be incorporated as a more strict condition for accreditation. Within the accreditation process, during the qualification of study programmes, involving all stakeholders in this process can also lead to a more integrated approach which is more closely in line with employers’, universities’, and students’ demands.

The last element involves the outcomes of bachelor and master programmes. More awareness should be raised among universities, students and employers about the exact competencies students have acquired during their studies, presuming that employability windows are incorporated in study programmes.

Improving mobility

Given the fact that increasing mobility is a desired outcome of the Bologna process and because it helps to increase a student’s employability, improving mobility can also be seen as a policy goal.

In both Germany and the Netherlands it is acknowledged that financial barriers can form obstacles for students going abroad and acquiring the intercultural skills and language competencies that help increase their ‘success’ in transitioning from higher education to the labour market.

One policy option in particular that has been mentioned by stakeholders in both countries, is to incorporate ‘internationalisation at home’ in the study programmes. This means that the universities ‘at home’ can for example give English-taught courses, which attracts foreign students. In this way both language competences and intercultural competences can be developed. It should be noted, however, that this development should then be

incorporated in the learning outcomes, so as to make employers aware of the fact that even though a student hasn't gone abroad, they have still acquired these competences.

Acknowledging the importance of stakeholder interests and relations

The role of stakeholders' perceptions has been at the core of this thesis. An important lesson that can be drawn is that in order for certain policy instruments to work, such as the accreditation process or the implementation of learning outcomes, stakeholders should to some degree be involved in the processes of setting up these instruments. Also, awareness of the different instruments and their policy goal could help to increase the effectiveness of the Bologna process in terms of enhancing graduate employability.

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Appendices

The appendices outlined below consist of the topic lists that were used for interviewing and coding data from the different stakeholders.

Appendix 1: Topic list employers

Introduction

- How is your work related to the Bologna process?
- What is your general opinion on the implementation of the Bologna process?

Employability

- How can students be best prepared for the labour market?
- What do you perceive to be employability?
Which skills and competences should students have?
- How important is it in study programmes, how to balance subject knowledge and competence building?
- Which competencies do you think should be acquired in a bachelor's/master's programme?
- How do you think the employability of students can be improved through the Bologna process?

Mobility

- How is mobility related to employability?
- Which kind of skills do you think students acquire by going abroad?
- Do you think the mobility of students should be promoted further?
- How do you think the mobility of students could be promoted further?

Appendix 2: Topic list students

Introduction

- How is your work related to the Bologna process?
- What is your general opinion on the implementation of the Bologna process?

Employability

- How can students be best prepared for the labour market?
- What do you perceive to be employability? What do you think is important to employers?
How do you think the skills you acquire will be used in your first job?

- How important is it in study programmes, how to balance subject knowledge and competence building?
- Which competencies do you think should be acquired in a bachelor's/master's programme?
- How do you think the competences can be enhanced? How do learning outcomes work in practice? How do you think they are applicable when entering the job market?

Mobility

- What do you think are the advantages of going abroad? For whom?
- How is mobility related to employability?
- For which students in particular is it interesting?
- How do you think the mobility of students could be promoted further?
- To what degree does quality of other programmes matter?

Appendix 3: Topic list accreditors

Introduction

- How is your work related to the Bologna Process?
- How has your work changed since the Bologna Process?

Competences

- Are there differences between accreditation of a master's and a bachelor's?
What should be the learning outcomes of bachelor or master programmes?
- Which role does employability play in the accreditation of study programmes?
- Which role does mobility play in the accreditation of study programmes?
- Are there differences between studies in the degree in which employability and mobility matter?

Quality

- How is the quality of accreditation process warranted?

Improvement

- How do you think the accreditation of study programmes can be improved through the Bologna Process?

Appendix 4: Topic list higher education institutions

Introduction

- How is your work related to the Bologna process?

- What is your overall stance towards the implementation of the Bologna process in [country]?

Employability

- What is employability according to you?
- Why is it important?
- What kind of competences are important?
- Are there differences in study programmes in the degree to which including employability in a curriculum is important?
- How can higher education institutions support employability?

Mobility

- How do you think mobility can be promoted through study programmes and between universities?
- Why do you think promoting mobility is important?
- What are the advantages for HEIs?
- How can mobility be promoted further through Bologna instruments?