

Higher Education Institutions of Georgia Aiding Student Employment

Research Project Report
Executive Summary
(full text available only in Georgian)

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Introduction

Student employment is an important issue for universities of developed countries (USA, Canada, Australia, Eastern and Western Europe). The universities monitor development of their students' careers, their achievements on a job market and use these data to attract new students. Hence, the universities have student employment databases. Additionally, the universities are interested to raise qualified, competitive specialists and hence, they establish career service or similar units that provide important information for the students help them meet potential employers train them in writing CVs and preparing for job interviews. Moreover, the universities take into account demands of employers and a job market to develop curricula. To do so, the universities consult the employers; consequently, they identify lists of skills that their students can use in future to transfer to the job market.

The aim of the following study is to determine whether the above-mentioned components are present in Georgian universities and if they are, how effective? Are there any specifics in Georgia? Is there a unified, standard model or do different approaches take place? How do universities see student employment concept and connections with the job market?

Methodology

The study was conducted utilizing qualitative methodology. The research instrument consisted of the two semi-structured questionnaires. One was designed for the university representatives and the other - for the employers.

Using multi-stage stratified sampling, we initially selected 10 universities based on the following criteria: state-private and Tbilisi-regional universities. Next, two representatives of every university, the so-called upper management - rectors, deputy rectors, deans, heads of departments - were interviewed. In total, 20 respondents from 10 universities were surveyed.

The employers were also interviewed, in total, 12 interviews were conducted with human resource management officers of large organizations.

Additionally, in the frames of the project, we have researched relevant literature and documentation, visited web pages of Georgian and foreign universities, since we were interested what career services they could offer. We also got acquainted with the experience of the developed countries and studies conducted in Georgia in this field.

Main Findings

The analysis of the results showed that the connection between the universities and the employers is weak; if there is any, it is mainly based on personal communication and contacts. Often, neither party trusts in and avoids drafting contracts.

The universities and the employers do not seem to want to collaborate. Both parties express concerns about the other side, but they do not share these concerns with each other and do not engage in a dialogue. Even when the employers discover faults and gaps in future employee's education, they do not try to approach education institutions to improve the situation, and the education institutions almost never approach the employers to incorporate their ideas into curriculum.

The employers also often do not understand the need and the potential of collaborative work on curricula. The university representatives claim that the higher education institutions always try to develop subject specific and transferable skills in their students. However, as demonstrated by the study results, they often do not contact the employers and rely on common knowledge and their own view of what students might need for a job. As a result, the employers and the universities emphasize different competences. Thus, the supply only partly satisfies the demand. Several private universities in Tbilisi have better results in this area.

One of the reasons of the employers' passive approach is that they do not have a developed human resource policy. Human resource services and people working in this field are relatively new in Georgia, many of these workers lack qualification, even the top managers of business organizations often do not realize the meaning of such services and do not set distinct goals to their representatives.

Another reason of the employers' passive approach is that they still get adequate staff from a small number of universities that supply them with students, specifically: Free University, Caucasian University, and the Georgian-American University. All of these universities have career services and thus they understand its meaning.

The study revealed that student career services are not sufficiently developed in the public universities and, even when it appears that the university leaders deem them important, they are still given lower priority than other services.

No unified, standard model of activities that help student employment exists in the universities; however, the universities express content regarding present situation and usually bring employment statistics as evidence, though it is not clear whether or not these numbers reflect the role of the education institution and its work in this area. This is why it would be interesting to find out from students to what extent did the university help them find a job.

The results of our study resonate with the research "Results of the Higher Education Reform" conducted in 2008 by International Institute of Education Planning and Management. This research showed that private education institutions are more interested in registering student employment, which is also apparent in our study. Private universities usually have student career services and they support student employment more than state universities. It is also interesting that during the time of the mentioned study and at present, employers do not see difference between B.A. and M.A. qualification and view it as a formality.

The state universities show no significant progress in the field of student employment, and the recommendations suggested by Georgian experts in 2009 are not taken into account. In order to ensure that universities offer students qualification that corresponds with the demands of the contemporary job market and to improve given knowledge, Georgian experts have advised the universities to record professional development of their graduates, to create programs together with the employers, and to improve internship/practice issues; the recommendations are only partly followed or not followed at all.