



IMPROVEMENTS USING THE RESULTS OF GRADUATE CAREER TRACK SYSTEM

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Abstract:

Our institute carries out surveys on four levels based on the extension of the management system. The surveys reflect several aspects, the respondents (students, alumni, lecturers and the labour market) assessing process efficiency and results. We carry out extensive research in order to develop the adequate rate of theoretical knowledge and practical skills in the curricula, and improve testing and teaching methods in the framework of a given resource background.

The Bologna process fulfilled the requirements of short-term and long-term knowledge elements in a conflicting way. Our poster presents a case study which – in harmony with the issues of the present congress on education methods and design –, belongs to the field of education improvement aiming to provide more competent and adequate knowledge for the labour market. We present the assessment and improvement processes using a special indicator to measure efficiency.

Keywords:

higher education, career track system, education improvement, labour market

1 INTRODUCTION

We have carried out conscious quality development in our institution to maintain the values of earlier decades. Our institution is ISO 9001 certified, which provided the opportunity and the background for the developments. Today our institution operates a TQM-based management system adapted to the education environment. The basis of quality development is a multi-cycle assessment system. The internal surveys have provided us with information for several years. Besides that, our institution won an application which allowed us develop a new career track system (CTS) for graduates. [1]

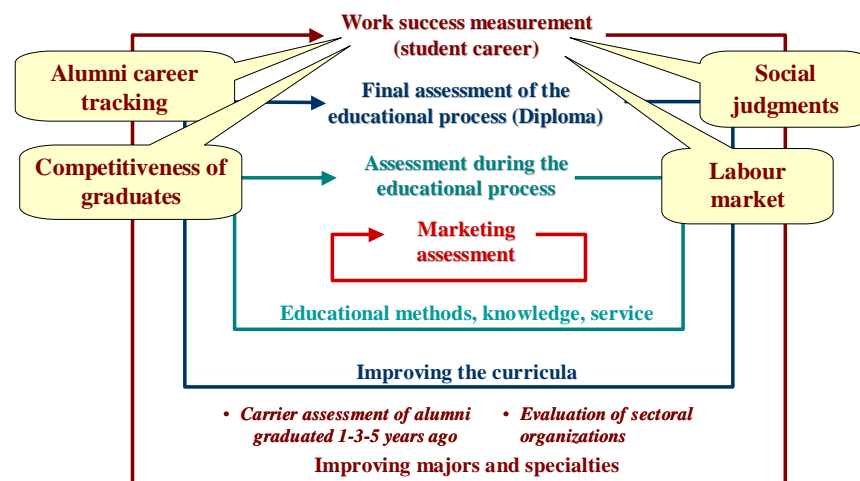


Figure 1: The place of CTS in the multi-cycle assessment system



2 THE AIM OF THE SURVEY

The aim of our student motivation survey is to gather information about our active students' ideas and plans for the future. For this, we need to improve the education and stay in close contact with our students in the future. As for graduates, we wish to collect information about their future plans and current job opportunities. We are also interested in how they see our institution from a few years perspective. Our aims are: to provide support and information for graduates about the labour market so that they can make adequate decisions; to inform them about their chances of gaining knowledge; and to help them find their place in a competitive professional environment. Our other objective is to improve operation efficiency in our university with help of the responses.

As part of the career track system, we will send our questionnaires to the students on a yearly basis in the future. Graduates will be asked less often, but also on a regular basis. The respondents will receive the latest information and news about their current status and their further education possibilities, through which they can raise their labour market awareness.

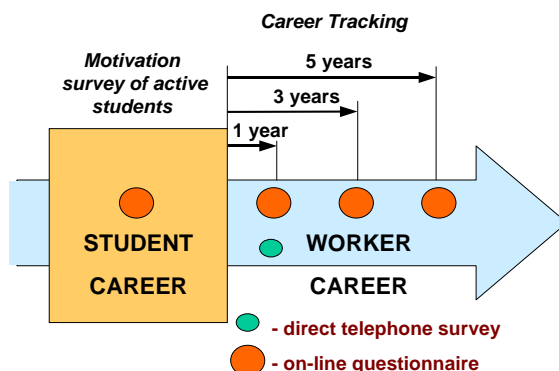


Figure 2: Surveys at different points of the student and worker career

The central part of the newly developed system is a communication system. As part of this system, we ask graduates' opinion about obtaining their degrees, and the usability of them. The communication is implemented through an online newsletter specially developed for this purpose. The list of the addressees is based on the student/graduate database of the institution (with permission of those concerned). Graduates on the list receive the newsletter with the attached questionnaire every second or third month. This way we can follow the opinion history of each person, showing their ideas at different points of their student and work career. The results are also connected to the graduates' university results and motivation as a student.

For the questionnaire we identified those areas for which useful feedback can be expected and interventions can be developed. The management system of the institution claims for the assessment of the educational system (BSc, MSc etc.) and the feedback. The primary aim of the improvement is to modify the training programs to adjust them to the real needs of the labour market. For this, we develop a continuous, multi-level asking and regulation system for each education forms, based on data sufficient for a representative sample. As a direct result of this system, modernization of the content and form of education can be realized for each existing university majors. This can indirectly contribute to the development of new majors, new special training programs and new training forms (life-long learning). [2]

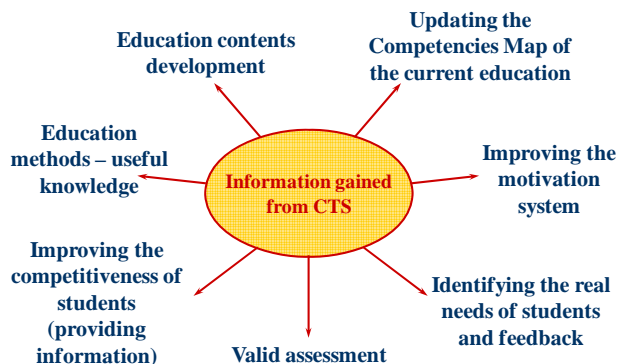


Figure 3: The planned usage of career track system (CTS) data

The opinion of graduates is closer to reality, since their answers are free from anxiety, fear and emotions. At the same time they see facts from a different angle in a few years perspective. In the present system, the assessment of our lecturers' work is almost exclusively based on student opinion. This assessment does not reflect the long term interest of students, and can considerable be distorted by the actual emotions of the students and the lack of perspective.

Our aim with this project is to provide value-added service for our graduates. The sources and areas of the service are:

1. Using the feedback about education methods. It is necessary to improve the costly practical courses effectively, and exploit well-established, successful education forms.
2. The most important beneficiaries of the results are teachers responsible for the improvement of graduate training (heads of majors and special training courses), who can heavily rely on valuable feedback implementing the methodical and infrastructural updating of the curricula. We also ask for the opinion of professionals about the knowledge transferred, since they place their assessment in the context of the labour market.
3. Besides the improvement of the curricula, the answers help us to set the hierarchy of the subjects more consciously, and also to identify and compare the competencies these subjects convey.
4. Successfully extended adult education can channel alumni back into the connection network of the institution, so we can address even further professionals. The feedback and the needs information provided by graduates allow the institution to develop new services based on career track. One of our important aims is to find and express in numbers the correlation between life career parameters and career profiles. Such indices would allow us to map the successful ways of realizing certain carriers and professions for our graduates. This would practically mean that if one identifies a certain element of a career profile (e.g. managerial work in a creative work environment, at the product development area of the learned profession), we can define that method and order of gaining competences which have proved successful for many, having the same expectations.
5. Up-to-date information about the weaknesses of the education system and certain expectations in the labour market allow the adequate development of the adult education system. This can result in modernized contents, and the different education forms adjusting to the graduates' work order, for example courses of different length and value (graduate courses, accredited trainings, transferring current knowledge at different degree levels). Based on student opinion (data from the motivational questionnaire), it is possible to demonstrate the changes in needs and attitudes – which can serve as a good feedback for students as well.



6. The CTS uses a more credible teacher assessment system, showing those lecturer values which support the education development on the basis of real performance.
7. Graduates receive information about their knowledge, as compared to other graduates, highlighting their personal strengths and weaknesses. This supports realistic career orientation; a good choice of necessary further education forms; a more conscious carrier building, and raising competitiveness in the labour market.

After making the first surveys, we present the results concerning response rates, and feedback about the changes in needs. In our research we assumed that students in different years form their opinion about the same events from the same viewpoint, and their opinion is modified by labour market experience. It is important to note that those who graduated in 2007 started their studies before the introduction of the Bologna system, while active students and most of whom graduated in 2009 were educated in the new Bologna system.

3 RESULTS OF THE SURVEY IMPLEMENTED IN SPRING 2010

3.1 Response rates and representativeness

Students with active student status participated in our student motivation survey. The survey ranged over every university year and every major. Students received a message via the Neptun system about the survey, asking them to fill in an online questionnaire. The survey was implemented in May 2010. Students received a message before closing down the survey.

We received 1938 evaluable answers, with 10 students expressing their opinions about two majors. This means a response rate of 19,4 per cent (total number of students is 9982).

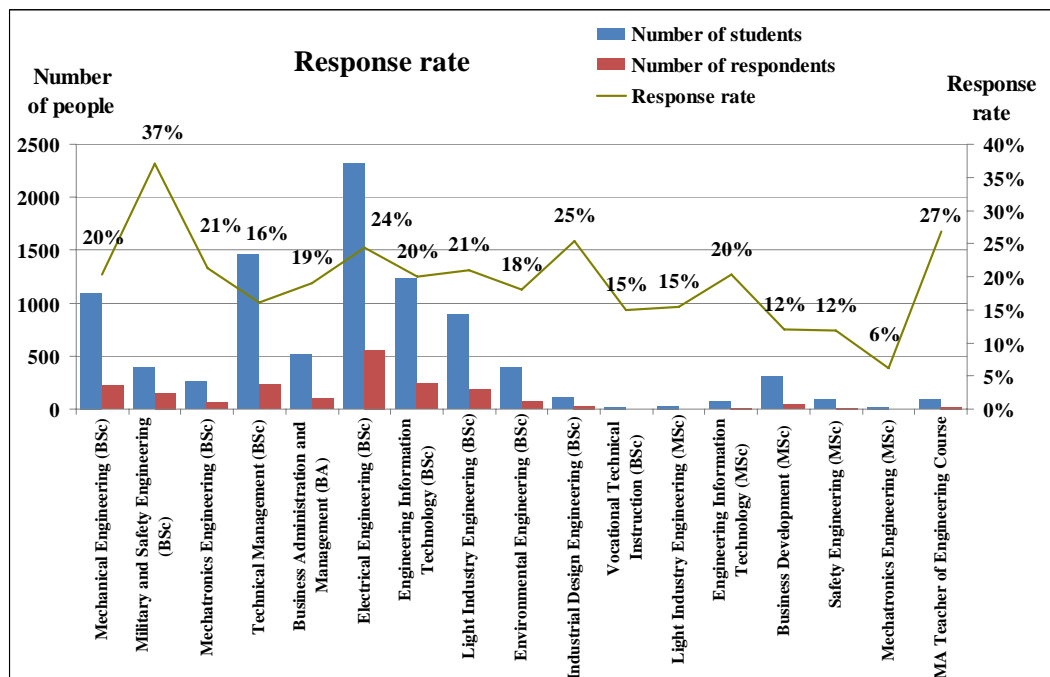


Figure 4: Response rate in BA/BSc and MA/MSc education

Considering the specific indices and the distribution, the survey can be considered representative. The results allow us to draw conclusions mainly about full time education. The rate of students and



graduates in different groups, which were segmented by our factors, do not significantly differ from the rate of responses received from the different segments.

We collected data about graduates years before making the present survey: we asked them to participate in a career track system when they were taking their final exams. As part of the survey, we asked graduates in an email to fill in an online questionnaire. Response rate was lower than expected, presumable because graduates were busy finding their place in the labour market. Response rate can be considered representative only in case of some majors.

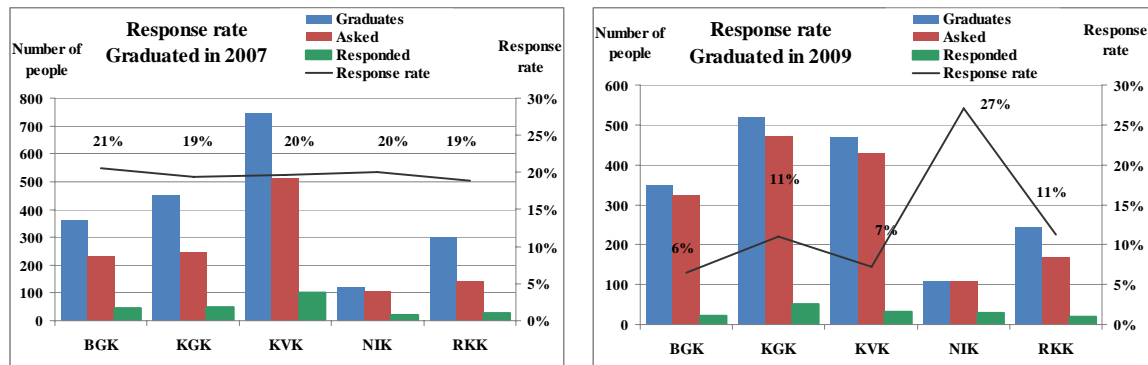


Figure 5: Response rate in CTS

Based on the results, our main objective throughout the survey development is to increase response rate. For this we announce a competition between the faculties, and expect that the competitive attitude which characterized the graduates when they were still active students will constitute a strong motivation force. The winner of the competition will receive support for organizing alumni events, and we can use quality feedback to improve our results.

3.2 Evaluating plans about further education

As part of the student motivation survey and the graduate career track, we also asked participants about their plans about further education. Results show that the motivation to participate in further education decreases after entering the labour market, except for those participating in teacher education.

The most common idea for those who expressed their wish to continue education was to enter MSc courses, company trainings and specialty education. Those planning to participate in the doctoral programs were considerably high in both groups.

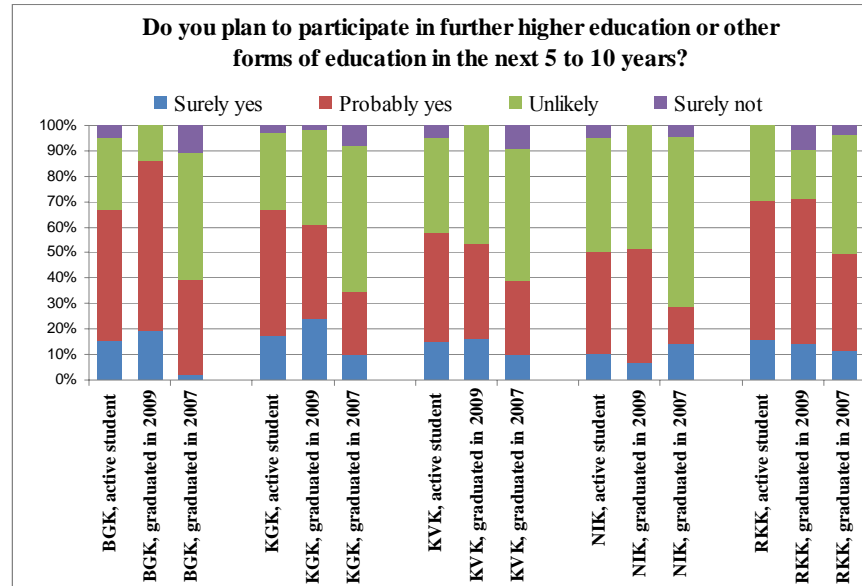


Figure 6: Participating in further education (Student motivation survey & graduate career track)

An important lesson of the survey was that students cannot identify with those forms of education that they have never met. One such form is “specialty education”, in which only 10 per cent of BSc graduates wish to participate. This rate suggests that there is confusion about the concepts and the terminology (next year we plan to use a simple graphic diagram illustrating different levels of further education).

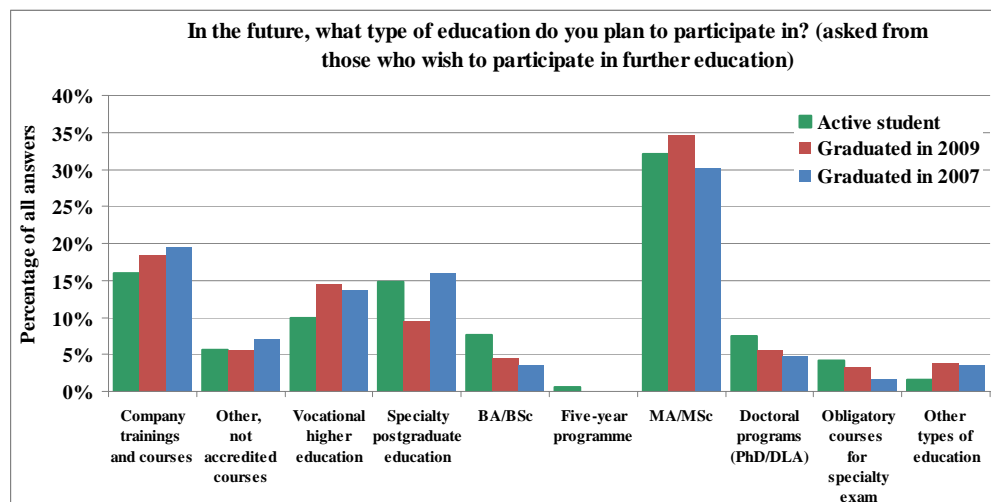


Figure 7: Active students' & graduates' plans about their further education

3.3 Needs concerning adult education

We also asked graduates about different fields of their profession. The responses reflect two important aspects: the answers reflect both the needs for further education and the actual level of knowledge.

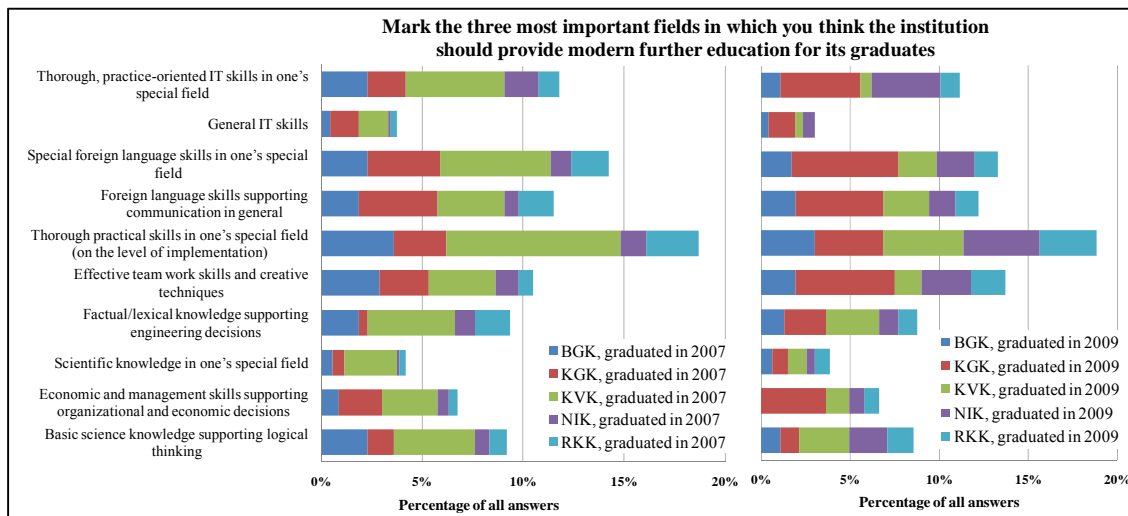


Figure 8: Needs for further education I (Graduate career track)

The results serve as an important input for the institution's adult education development plans.

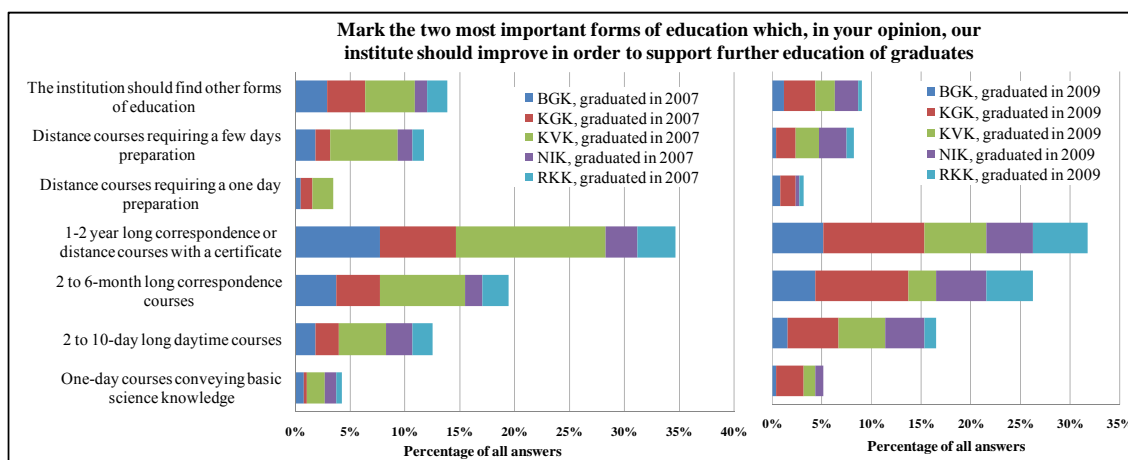


Figure 9: Needs for further education I (Graduate career track)

The needs concerning the length of the courses are useful in the development the content and form of education. Based on the results, the most important are: the standardization of education forms, the development of the modular system and the acknowledgement of personal needs.

4 SUMMARY

The analysis of career track data allows a critical view of the system, and serves as the basis for improvement. In the next phases of our research we will make corrections both in the contents and the format of the surveys in order to support more efficient institutional developments. We wish to improve response rate by using powerful motivating tools. The first phase of data collection and analysis was successful, but there are several points where further improvements are necessary. We



started using the data in several ways, but there are some areas where we need to collect more information. We can conclude, however, that the surveys represent new opportunities in regulating the higher education system.

Acknowledgements

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