

EXISTING COOPERATION AGREEMENTS BETWEEN UNIVERSITY AND INDUSTRY IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

Albania

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Introduction

Sustainable University – Enterprise Cooperation for Improving Graduate Employability (SUCCESS), a project funded by the European Commission brings together universities and various enterprises from Albania, Bosnia & Hercegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and some EU countries like Germany, Spain and Poland aiming to strengthen the University-Enterprise partnership in areas of education and knowledge transfer based on the market needs and to improve student employability. Furthermore, the project aims to enhance international cooperation and networking at the Regional/international level between universities and enterprises. SUCCESS targets students of the Universities, Academic and Administrative staff as well as the Industry.

In the framework of the project, two surveys were conducted to universities and the industry, and the collected data were analyzed to identify the various stakeholders, to understand the variety of interactions, and to explore the motivations for collaborating between Universities and the industry. Albanian Partners are Epoka University, University “Ismail Qemali” Vlore, University Shkodres Luigj Gurakuqi Shkodra and under the supervision of these universities were collected 67 responses regarding the Survey for Universities and 60 responses regarding the Survey for Companies.

"EPOKA" University has a wide variety of study programs and the number of cooperative agreements is large, it offers a great variety of employment opportunities. A considerable part of the agreements is offered internship opportunities during university time and after their graduation, they are offered employment opportunities. The institution has established cooperative relations with public, private, and non-profit employers in Albania for carrying out and supporting the professional practice of students. Numerous agreements make it possible for students to carry out a professional practice that has already become mandatory for all study programs for a full 30 working days.

"EPOKA" University has cooperation agreements with over 54 companies which aims to organize activities such as: Open Forum, Information Session, Company Visits, other events such as Career Fair for employment opportunities, while we cooperate with over 150 other companies for vacancies and Internship opportunities.

University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali”

The Department of Business is part of the Faculty of Economy, University "Ismail Qemali" Vlora. The establishment of the Department of Business coincides with the opening of the University of Vlora "Ismail Qemali" and the opening of the Faculty of Economy on 28 February 1994. The Department of Business was organized with three sections: Management section, Marketing section and Tourism section. From the beginning it was called the Faculty of Commerce and has operated with two branches: Business and Tourism and the relevant departments.

The cooperation of the University of Vlora with the industry has been:

- In the framework of professional practices where students have the opportunity to benefit through the concretization of theory in practice,
- In the form of generating the human resources needed by them to be recruited,

- Assessment of labor market needs related to diplomas offered by the university, through market studies or workshops
- Support in the design and implementation of national and international projects.
- Their participation with real presentations in Conferences organized by University of Vlora

Referring to the indicators for different types of cooperation of the University of Vlora with industry, there are specific data.

University of Vlora (UV) has offered continuing education study programs, which are mainly offered in the framework of international projects. From December 2016 at the Faculty of Technical Sciences, in the framework of the Tempus MARED project, several continuing education courses have been offered to students and sailors, to supplement the knowledge of students and sailors according to the requirements of the labor market. Currently in the framework of the TEAVET project, continuing education courses are being offered to teachers.

There is also an interdisciplinary study center of regional development which has the main goal the development of the third mission of the University, including the organization, management and development of continuing education and training activities for students, alumni, academics, professionals and the community.

In 2020 UV has applied in 22 ERASMUS + projects, in 2019 in 33 projects and in 2018 in 21 projects. UV is currently implementing 11 projects funded by European programs and beyond; five ERASMUS + projects, two INTERREG IPA Cross Border Albania-Greece, one Adriatic-Ionian INTERREG, one EASME, one project funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and one project funded by Global Bridges.

University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi”

The cooperation university - companies and the scholarships awarded from the companies to students / researchers for the most part has as main motivation the finding of qualified employees; the completion of the staff with human resources seems to be the main motivation of this cooperation, while with less interest show research and development activities. The engagement of university experts finds consensus and readiness from the interviewed businesses in theory, but in practice it remains a problem due to the legal basis "incomplete engagement and relatively unregulated area". The gap cooperation university - enterprise on joint scientific projects becomes clear when businesses asked what the main problems in cooperation with the university are, the most common answers are "institutional indifference and lack of understanding of the non-academia sector needs" by universities".

Survey for Universities

Survey for Universities targeted the Academic Staff of the Partner Universities of SUCCESS Erasmus+ Project, and there were conducted 67 surveys among Epoka University (20 surveys), University of Shkodra “Luigj Gurakuqi” (27 surveys) and University of Vlora “Ismail Qemali” (20 surveys).

Below there is a short summary of the results of 67 responses, of which 70 % are part of public structured universities and 30% from private structured universities. Majority of the responders 53.7% are Lecturers of these institutions. Results of other questions are explained also graphically as:

1. Is there any research & development, or other professional cooperation between the university and industry/company?

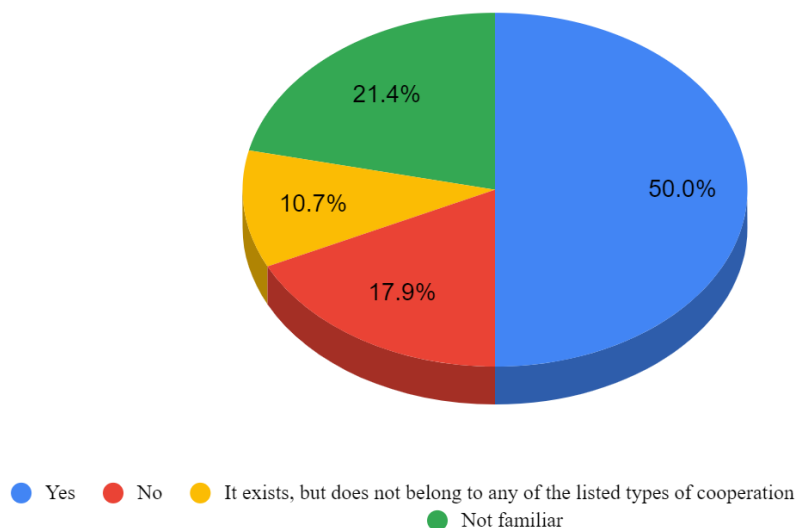


Figure 1

The majority of both parties, universities and companies, accept that there exists some degree of cooperation. This cooperation may have been regulated both through formal models of cooperation and through personal contacts, alumni networks, and other ad-hoc cooperation opportunities. In any case it results that it is the institution that initiates the formalities of the cooperation. (Fig.1)

2. Which of the following types of cooperation have been created between the universities and industry/companies?

Universities list the followings as the most prevailing types of cooperation,

- Cooperation within teaching activities: involvement of non-academic partners in student trainings (e.g. guest lecturers, development of student projects and theses)
- Activities aimed at commercializing academic research
- Joint research projects

Companies list the followings as the most prevailing types of cooperation,

- Internship programs for students
- Recruitment of graduates
- Cooperation within teaching activities: involvement of non-academic partners in student trainings (e.g. guest lecturers, development of student projects and theses)

3. When faculty are asked whether they would be interested in devoting part of their time to cooperation with industry/company and share their expertise with the business sector?

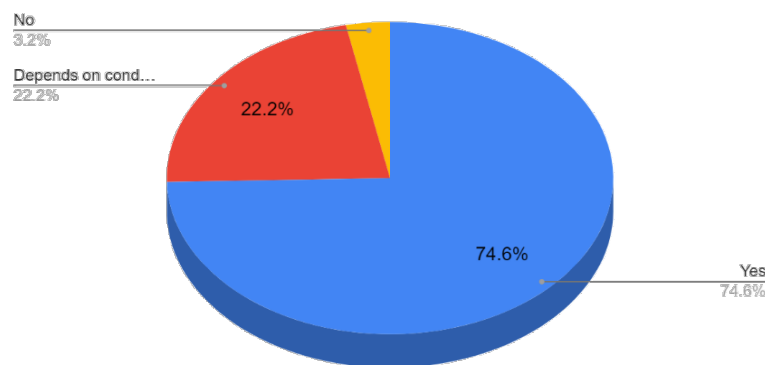


Figure 2

The vast majority of respondents unconditionally express their willingness to cooperate and contribute to the industry. They would divide their working time and move to a percentage of working time in industry/company, however legal and career interferences are discussed too in this aspect. (Fig.2)

4. Regarding the participation of the faculty in national and international projects it seems to have an average to low participation in projects or capacity building projects, despite the high interest expressed. While if there would be cooperation or a project applied or funded from the industry, faculty responders claimed their interest under some conditions as the good work site, lower teaching workload, flexible schedules and added financial income.
5. When faculty are asked about the advantages of cooperation between universities and industry/company,
- They list Raising the quality of scientific research outputs, improvement of teaching conditions, and additional personal income as the most significant advantages.
6. When faculty are asked about the main obstacles in the implementation of cooperation between university and industry/company

- They list lack of understanding of university needs from the industry, institutional indifference, and increased workload as the main obstacles.
- 7. Beyond personal interests, when faculty are asked whether they would cooperate with the industry / company if the only benefit would be achieving better teaching conditions, laboratories, more modern curriculum, practice for your courses (subjects)?
 - The vast majority of respondents are very positive to go beyond personal interests for the sake of improving educational conditions.
- 8. When faculty are asked whether they would modernize the curriculum based on input from industry/company?

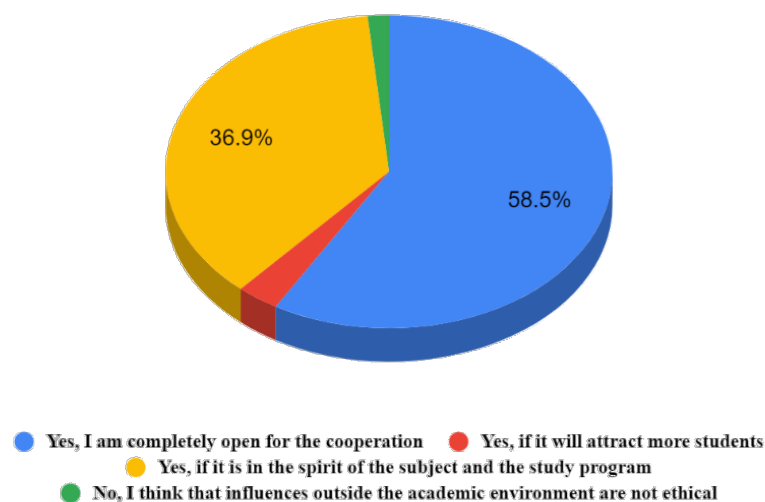


Figure 3

- They seem to be completely open for such contributions from the industry/companies, and they even support the idea that the industry/companies could offer professional trainings to them in enriching courses with market and practice-oriented applications. (Fig.3)
- 10. When faculty are asked about how the cooperation with the industry should look like?
 - They list some keywords such as mutually beneficial, collaborative and strong; interactive and cooperative; mutually profitable; easy to achieve and concrete; mutual capacity building

What should be done for promoting University-Enterprise cooperation??

- Ensure basic ground for engagement to a long-term commitment in the Partnership
- Involve Decision-makers from both parties
- Communicate to all stakeholders/channels
- Facilitate collaboration
- Prioritize alumni networks

Survey for the Business Sector

There are sixty (60) companies which has participated in the survey for the companies. Most of them are private owned (94.9%) and their structure is national in most of the cases(76.7%). (Fig.4)

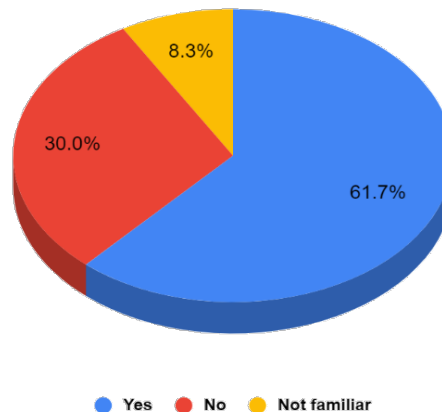


Figure 4

When asked if there is a model of cooperation between their company and university, the majority of them (61,7%) accept it, while there is also 30% of business asked who admit that this model does not exist.

Through personal contacts	22	36.67%
By recommendations	18	30.00%
Institutionally through the university / faculty administration	26	43.33%
Through the administration of the specific department	10	16.67%
Through government bodies	0	0.00%
Through associations of academic institutions	4	6.67%
Alumni	4	6.67%
Other	6	10.00%

Table 1. Methods of achieving the cooperation of the industry with the business

As the Table 1 shows, the great majority of the respondents (26%) say that they collaborate institutionally through the university /faculty administration, while 22% through personal contacts. When they are asked about the type of the cooperation the business has with the academic sector, some of the most important answers were; through mentorship programs for students (32%), recruitments of the graduates (28%), while they also mentioned cooperation in teaching activities and involvement in student trainings as two other important type of cooperation.

About the business influence on the teaching process and the content of the university subjects and curricula, the majority of the respondents (25%) say that they do not have that opportunity and another 20% say also no, either because they believe it belongs to the domain of academic freedom (11%) or because that is their way of working (9%).

Businesses admit that in the majority of cases (51.1%) there are the companies that initiates the cooperation with the university and only 29.8% say that it is initiated from the university.

There is an average number of 1.8 universities cooperate with the businesses in the region and there are 39 different research groups within university which also collaborate with the businesses.

Regarding business willingness to participate or fund joint research projects within their funds, the majority of the respondents admit it (41.4%), other say bilateral projects (32.8%), while there is a great number of 25.9%, who say no for this question and the reasons here are presented as they do not have any opportunity, it would be an ad hoc process, it is beneficial for both parties, and some other reasons.

Referring to question 9, "Would you agree to hire university experts on a percentage of working time? companies show a great willingness and interest - 66% - to hire relevant university experts to meet their needs for personnel with scientific and technical skills. (Fig.5)

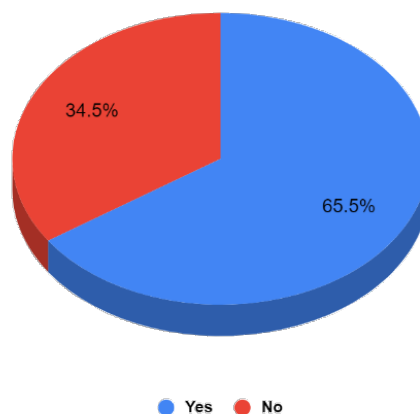


Figure 5

To question 10, "what would be the biggest shortcomings in hiring university experts on the percentage of working time?", 38% indicate "incomplete involvement and the relatively unregulated area", which would be interpreted as the lack of the legal framework in Albania that should regulate these work / collaboration relationships. (Fig.6)

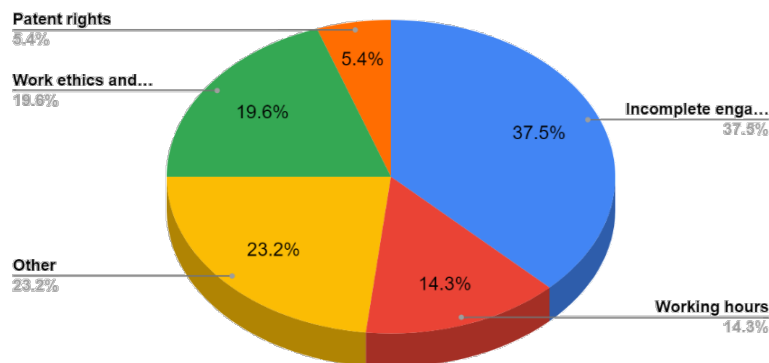


Figure 6

Asked if companies “have ever provided scholarships to students / researchers or helped their work in any way” (question 11), most of them answer affirmatively - 77% - that they have provided financial support to students and researchers. The main motivation that push companies to cooperate with universities (question 12) are qualified staff recruitment - 70% - showing a vital need for qualified personnel by companies, while less interest is shown for "expert knowledge of employees and research and development potential (18%). The interpretation that we can give to these answers, which indicate the recruitment of skilled labor as the main reason for collaboration with universities, is to be found in the structure of the Albanian economy which is composed of companies that operate mainly in traditional services and outsource manufacturing for foreign companies; few companies in Albania add value to the product in the design phase and therefore they do not invest much in research and development. (Fig.7)

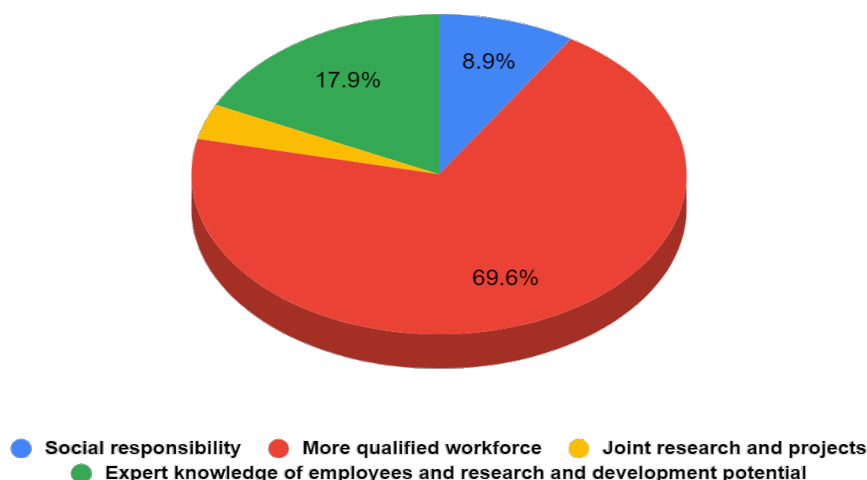


Figure 7

Regarding question 13 addressed to companies, "In the case of joint activities, how do you select associates from the universities?" personal contacts (32%) and traditional HR channels (30%) are the main access channels into companies. (Fig.8) Cooperation in the field of scientific research "number of papers and scientific contribution" is absent, 0% affirmative answers.

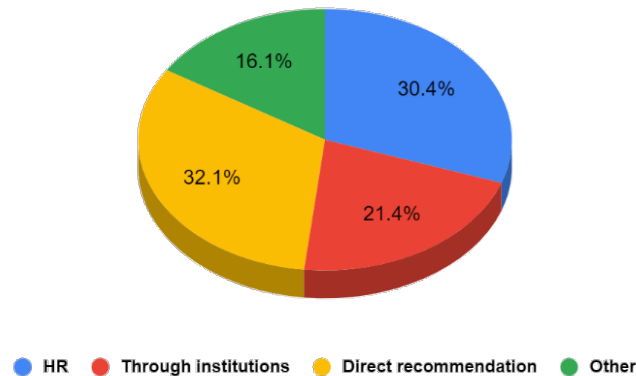


Figure 8

The gap between university and company cooperation becomes evident when companies ask what the main problems are in cooperating with the university (question 14), the most common answers are "institutional indifference" (32%) and "poor understanding of the needs of the non-academic sector by universities" (24%), in addition to the need for time to build a mutual relationship of trust - "it takes years to build good relationships with partners (15.5%). Lack of participation, few common activities, and little interest shown by both sides, seem to be the major deficiencies that limit mutual collaboration. (Fig.9)

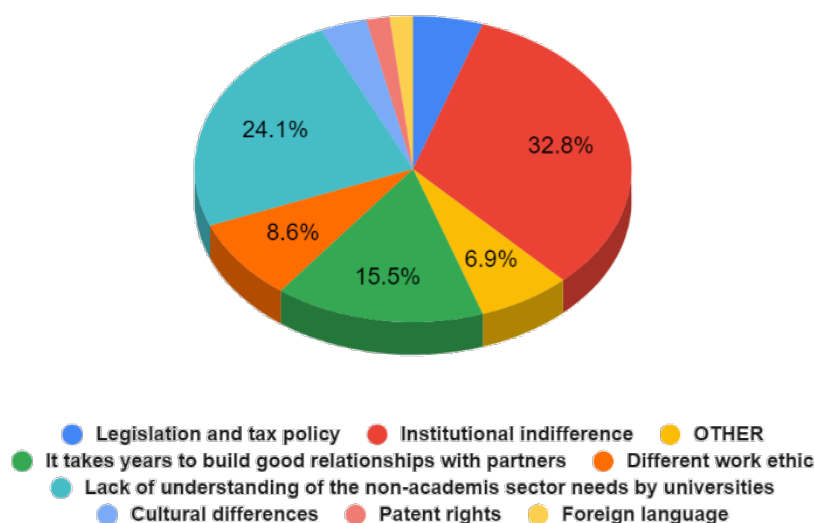


Figure 9

Most firms (67%) have never participated in conferences with a significant number of academic organizations as revealed by question 15; the causes of this lack of participation are poor communication and lack of participation in common development initiatives.

The most cited recommendations of companies in order to develop constructive cooperation with universities (question 16) are the exchange of experiences, the encouragement of common initiatives, the construction of long-term relationships and the development of common communication platforms.

1.4. Conclusions & Suggestions

Our recommendations regarding the solution of the problems of the cooperation between university and enterprise go in two direction: a review of the legal basis in which this cooperation should be included in the future and the creation of a joint forum, a common platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences that can overcome communication problems, because non-communication seems to cause indifference and a lack of understanding of the needs of the non-academic sector.