

Graduate Follow-Up System at the University of Pécs¹

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Our aim is to present the experiences of professional practice and the ‘Graduate Follow-up Programme’ at the University of Pécs (UP). In this paper we examine the talent management and human capital management from two perspectives. The first is the connection between the management of an institution of Higher Education (HE) and the business world (e.g. via a career office) and the second relates to the transition from HE to the labour market (a particular phase in talent management). Our database, which we used in our practice-oriented, empirical research, consists of two main parts: the Graduate Follow-Up System (GFS) and the UP questionnaire regarding students’ professional practice. The multilateral approach helps us to achieve a realistic picture of which processes and peculiarities characterise a student’s (pre- and post-graduation) placement in the labour market. We draw conclusions and formulate recommendations based on criteria for the most significant factors relating to new recruits from both corporate and HE perspectives. The system of professional practice serves as a highly effective feedback, and this shows that removal of the conventional knowledge fetish. Secondly, there is a demand for bipolar system of knowledge and skill-application (that manifested in competence-principle).

Keywords: higher education, Graduate Follow-Up System, talent management, human capital, labour-market skills

1. Introduction

The study presents a research carried out among students of one of the most successful university faculties of Hungary: University of Pécs Faculty of Business and Economics (UP FBE or ‘Pécsi Közgáz’).

We focus on the relationship between higher education institutions and labour market. We examined the transition of students in the labour market. Connecting to this there is the present of the talent management approach of UP FBE. The data used for empirical analysis are provided by the results of questionnaires which were filled by students and companies during professional practice and the results of the GFS.

The most important aspect is the way the skills of students are able to meet the needs of corporate and labour market. Our conclusion is that employers are not expected to focus on creativity. In employing of a new staff member is more important the fast integration, adaptation, diligent and precise work. On this basis it is formulated that the key to success for the students in the labour market is matching the needs of corporates. If the personality and competence of the entrant is similar to the characteristics of the optimal worker imagined by the employers they prefer to employ. We can imagine this relationship as a balance, where in one of the pans there are the business expectations and the other side the competencies of the job candidate. Cooperation will be successful if the two-pans are in balance: it is a mismatch if an entrant wants to find a job with too many powerful features and it is also not acceptable if they don’t have enough skills for that job.

The results of our research show that the employers want to apply primarily appropriate staff in the corporate culture (Nunes–Breene 2011). The UP FBE students have developed emotional intelligence (EQ), which facilitates better integration.

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The concept of EQ includes own thoughts, feelings and knowledge and its use to manage their own behavior (Neale et al 2010). The four components of EQ: emotional literacy (knowledge of their own emotions and functioning), physical fitness (endurance, flexibility), depth (intensity, emotion differentiation), and alchemy (the emotions of the creative use) (Cooper–Sawaf 1996).

Beside the Faculty's own research even the experience of the Graduate Follow-up System (GFS) under circumstances of acute competition among HE institutions are highly important, since the results are part of performance measurement. Competitiveness in HE is a complex and strategic concept (Barakonyi 2004, 2009), and we deal with one element, namely the consistency between the student output of HE institutions and labour market requirements. The information on graduates entering the labour market provides serious feedback for the training-provider institutions. If students from an institution consistently find jobs sooner than those from another, this means that the first institution is more competitive, and, probably, that its students are more likely to meet the needs of the labour market (Falusné 2001; Farkas et al 2010; Galasi 2004). The converse is not necessarily true, in the sense that the career opportunities for a student are not necessarily linked to the degree classification. The aim of the GFS research (Garai 2010; Kuráth et al 2011a, 2011b) is to measure information on the career, status, working conditions and income of new graduates, and to provide feedback for their institutions of education. In our study we discuss the methods and techniques used at the UP FBE to study and manage the career of talented students before turning to the latest data and analysing of the students of the Faculty to draw our conclusions.

2. Professional practice – The success of the students in the labour market

Faculty of Business and Economics considers the comprehensive understanding of the connections of students with the labour market an important task. Accordingly, it carried out researches of the characteristics of internship work during the professional practice, and it collects the experiences of the alumni organization, the social-senate, training, teaching (guest speakers), career days, business projects, case study competitions, student academic conferences, scholarships, too. It is very important, because we can draw a conclusion from the labour market and the integration of expectations of students and employers. It should be noted that many students after graduation were applied at the company, where they worked previously as trainee.

2.1. The practice of talent development at the UP FBE

The concept of talent management involves a broader perspective than basic professional practice. It can, in fact, be described as an inspirational concept at the UP FBE for MA (master's degree) students, as every tool is regarded as a talent management tool which seeks to develop talent. However, what should also be borne in mind is the mandatory nature of professional practice in respect of a number of majors – as laid down in Act. CXXXIX. of 2005: “in practice-oriented undergraduate courses it is obligatory to organise a one semester-long period of professional practice.” In other words, the mandatory nature of the scheme applies only to professional practice.

An examination of a student's career between Higher Education and the labour market should be approached with caution, and as a complex question, since feedback has a significant role to play in talent management and in professional practice. Utilising the information obtained will give us a more complete picture of the results of the Graduate Follow-Up System.

The talent does not break its way, so it is to assist in the talent-development. During the development of talent the higher expectations must be combined with the recognition, support and skills development (*Csikszentmihályi* 2010). It is very important aspect that the full-time students are in most cases the members of so called Generation Y. From the employer's point of view the members of Generation Y have some characteristics, they are not manageable or subservient, they have rather autonomous personality, and a job is just one of the many jobs for them, what can be changed at any time. Generation-Y-members don't want to stay in a place, where the company's expectations for loyalty are too high (*Tari* 2010).

Our analysis of the student-life and labour market-related section is supported by two systems at the Faculty – by feedback from questionnaires relating to the professional practice system, and by the Graduate Follow-Up System.

3. Methodology

The first methodological research field is based – due to considerable overlap in the above sample – on the professional practice surveys. One of the main tasks the Faculty was to offer professional practice opportunities to their students throughout the year to further strengthen the relationships between students, the institutions and the business sphere. The organisation, Total Quality Assurance and the documentation relating to professional practice were the responsibilities of different Faculty organisations (Relationships Directorate and the Careers Consulting Office (CCO)) (*Farkasné et al* 2011a).

In the 'old', undivided education system, with the approval of the Faculty Council, we launched in 2004 the Professional and Working Practice course to provide a credit- and grade-based evaluation system for professional practice, to come into effect from the autumn of the 2006/2007 academic year. This is a unique opportunity for FBE students, since they can have closer contact with players in the labour market in their two last years before graduation. To complete this course it is mandatory to complete the student and corporate surveys and so we have a 100% sample for drawing conclusions. From autumn 2005 until spring 2010 we received completed questionnaires from 463 students² from the integrated education system – in fact, three³ from each, which represents a total number of 1,389 questionnaires. To this we added 333 questionnaires relating to BA students' 3rd year mandatory practice. In our research we studied the reactions of both students and companies, and concluded that it would be profitable to continue to provide MA students with opportunities for professional practice throughout the year on a credit-based system, although it would also be necessary to employ a teacher and full-time administrator to handle this.

The second examined research field is based on the GFS (Graduate Follow-up System) survey. Every HE institution has to develop its own system which allows it to keep track of its graduates. GFS creates a bridge between the worlds of HE and labour. This means that the results should be comparable whilst, at the same time, they need to be useful in making strategic decisions related to improving educational structures and goals. To achieve this, each year we need to question those who graduated 1, 3 years earlier. It is accepted that the graduate labour-market situation does not change significantly in 1 or 3 years and should, rather, be examined only very 5 years, although in the start-up phase, important information can emerge. In the long term, maintaining continuous contact may well increase the willingness to complete the questionnaires.

The University of Pécs joined the GFS nationwide research programme in 2010. The researches carried out in 2010 and 2011 (*Kuráth et al* 2011a, 2011b) at the UP within the

² Since the sample comprises 4th and 5th year students from the earlier, integrated system, the sample is not affected by the mandatory professional practice of the Bologna system.

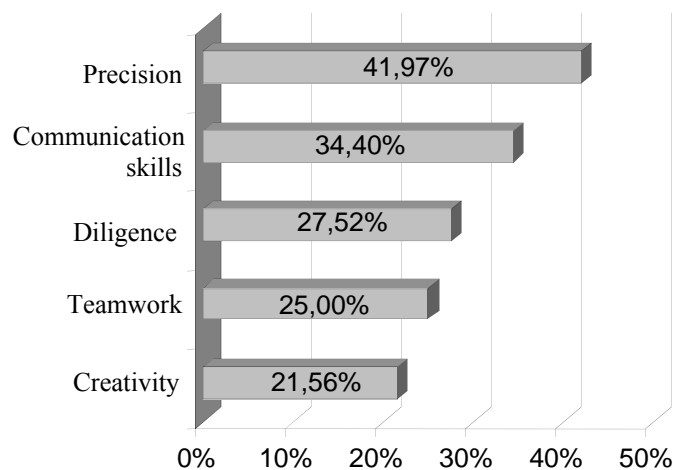
³ Student surveys before and after the practice and a corporate survey.

framework of Graduate Follow-Up System consist of the pre-degree students of 2007 and 2009 then of 2008 and 2010. From the UP FBE 1 714 graduates formed the database who had an e-mail contact. The access rate is above 90%, so the basic population inquiry is almost complete. In the sample there are 384 graduates, which is a good, 22.4% response rate. The response rate exceeded the initial expectations and so high quality estimates allow us to draw reliable conclusions from the sample and from the materials could be evaluated.

4. The experiences of the optional professional practice (related to the undivided education)

As a result of our research we surveyed the preferences of students and companies related to professional practice. By the exploration of students' prior expectations related to professional practice we establish that the students primarily think the precision as the basic competence for the successful internship, followed by communication skills, and third place in the nearly same level of teamwork, diligence and creativity as well. The following chart displays the details.

Figure 1. The most important skills for performance of the trainee's work according to the students before the internship (proportion of mentions, %, N=463)



Source: authors' research

After practice completed questionnaires show that students' previous expectations have proved true to a great extent, and the earlier fears were groundless. Most of the students had the opportunity to understand the organization, work processes and thus they came to know the specifics in the relevant area (for example financial, logistics, accounting specifics etc.).

The practical application of skills and knowledge is in the first place among the expectations. This characteristic achieved 40% rate in the mentions within the examined statistical population, and the conclusion is that the students are fully able to fit into the staff (integration). In addition, the students also experienced skill-development, and they could work together with colleagues very well.

From employers' perspective the students were characterized by accuracy in most cases, which reflects the students' appraisal of the competencies required for work before the internship. Diligence as a typical student property is the second on the list. Interest, confidence, good attitude, cooperation, creativity and communication skills among the criteria of the companies reached about the same level.

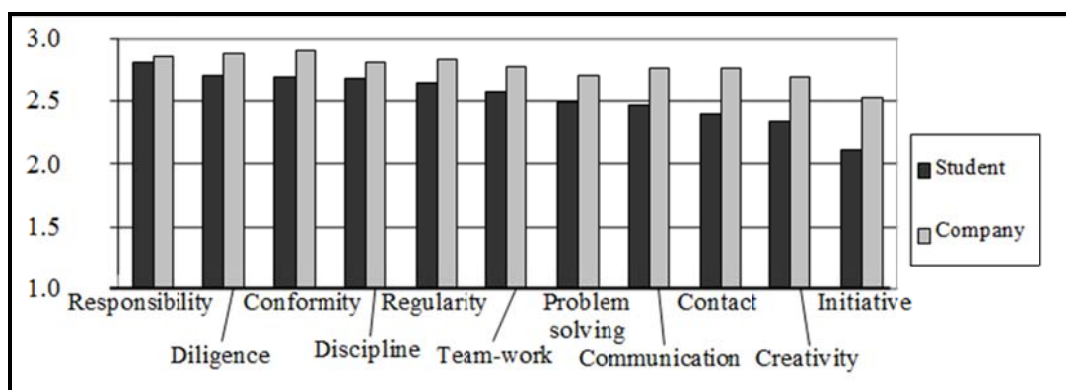
The opinions manifested by companies cover not only students but also the work done by students. Based on the context of our analysis we established that the 'Pécsi Közgáz'

students have the speciality: their emotional intelligence is better than average, namely they can be easily integrated into the community, are cooperative, and show empathy. Also they were reliable, worked usefully and they are characterized by diligence, independence, expertise.

The companies' feedback is clearly positive, according to them the students perform their tasks reliably and their work was really useful. Diligent work, integration, independent tasks and the good cooperation stand approximately on the same level. Negative opinions of the majority of cases are not framed in the corporate respondents, but rather praised the work of trainees.

The evaluation of students was completed by the companies on the basis of pre-defined skills, which the students also conducted their own self-assessment exercise. A comparison of two ranking presents in the following figure in descending order of the student-evaluation (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Comparison of student and corporate ratings (N=463)



Note: From 1 to 3 scale, where 1 = unsatisfactory, 2 = adequate, 3 = very good

Source: authors' research

From the figure it is clear that the students underestimated their each skill in relation to the companies' assessments. That shows the relationship of students' self-image to external evaluators' perceptions. The hierarchy set up by the two parties, i. e. the sequence of skills is similar. The responsibility, diligence and the adaptation has received the best assessment both on the students' and corporate side. Analyzing the relationship between the central region (including capital, Budapest) and the other regions an important question is raised: what methods can help to teach the students in Pécs for successful appearances, for the appreciative attention using the emotional intelligence and for self-presentation on the labour market.

5. The results of the Graduate Follow-Up System

In the GFS research, 384 students completed the questionnaire, of whom 64% are female and 36% male. After work placement, roughly the same proportions work in business (49%) and in the public sector (44%), while 7% found jobs in the civil sector. In terms of company size, 52% of graduates work for SMEs and 48% for large companies. Of the respondents, 21% are managers (almost two-third of whom took correspondence courses) while 79% are employees (of whom only one-fourth were correspondence course students). The quick change in technology and finance established new operating models and financial products with untraceable complexity (Bélyácz 2010).

Almost half of the graduates (49%) said that it was not difficult to find a job, one fifth (21%) thought it moderately difficult and 30% considered it difficult (22% reported a very difficult labour market integration). The graduates evaluated an average of 3.22 for the job

placement experience (on a 1-5 scale where 1 is very difficult and 5 is very easy) – in other words, a little easier than average. From the regional perspective, 22% of new entrants to the labour market migrated to the capital. In fact, only 2.6% of these lived there on a permanent basis at the age of 14 (71% in other towns or cities, 25% in villages and the rest abroad), and so ten times more went to Budapest as left. This trend clearly shows the talent migration from the provinces and the concentration of the skilled workforce in the capital, which greatly affects regional competitiveness (*Horváth 2001, Lengyel 2000*). One of the major reasons for the migration to Budapest is that a job is easier to find there – and also starting salaries are higher.

In the third quarter of 2010, average net earnings in Budapest was 161,869 HUF, while in South Transdanubia (in the same period) they were only 114,364 HUF (KSH 2011). In the approach and methodology used by the KSH – during the collection and categorisation of the data – the employment rate is the lowest in the South Transdanubia (46%) and in recent years incomes have also been lower than the national average.

In the sample, the average monthly net total income (main and ancillary activities together) is 175,000 HUF. Gender does not show a statistically significant difference. The graduates working abroad earn most (260,000 HUF), in Baranya county the monthly average net income is 162,000 HUF. We shall discuss later the relationship network's impact on incomes. These tendencies also confirmed by the research of AIESEC (*Nagy–Kunsay 2010*).

We also surveyed satisfaction with the current job and other factors, and results suggest that 79% were satisfied with the professional content of the job (39% absolutely), 15% moderately satisfied and only 6% dissatisfied, and so for the most part graduates are satisfied. This can be explained by two factors: they have a meaningful and interesting job (also professionally), or they assessed their abilities realistically and had no exaggerated expectations. Job content proved to be most satisfactory overall, which is evidenced by the fact that the 88% of the graduates think that their work is “largely” related to their qualification (45% opted for “very largely”).

We can see similar results applying to personal circumstances (73% satisfied, 12% moderately satisfied, 15% dissatisfied). With their physical environment 51%, professional prestige 50%, professional development and prestige 47% are satisfied, whilst they are less content with income and bonus levels. Here, 39% are “satisfied” (24% of whom are “fully satisfied”); the dissatisfied proportion is 35% (of whom 13% are “not satisfied at all”). There is, therefore a noticeable difference (40%) between their evaluation of the professional factor and that of their income in the case of the new entrants to the labour market. It is possible that they perceive themselves as under-valued in terms of remuneration due to excessive pre-expectations. Further analysis shows that women – even though they do not earn less – are less satisfied with their income than are men and the managers valued the satisfaction level of the content of the job - and the income – more highly than did the employee-level graduates. In regional terms, comparing workers in Pest and Baranya counties, the first are more satisfied with these factors. Interestingly, full-time students are more satisfied with their income than their correspondent colleagues. Using factor analysis we examined these characteristics and identified two different groups, the results being summarised in Table 1 (*Sajtos–Mitev 2007*).

The main statements of Herzberg's motivators and hygiene factors model are visible among the graduates. In essence, his theory declares that only motivators generate the satisfaction, whilst hygiene factors eliminate dissatisfaction but do not motivate workers to exert more effort (*Herzberg 2003*). Overall, based on the feedbacks, the graduates would not object to the job, but, nevertheless, they can become demotivated, due to the lower-than-expected income, and so their performance may be lower than their potential performance capacity.

Table 1. Herzberg 's motivators and hygiene factors within the Pécsi Közgáz graduates

FACTORS	THE JOB CHARACTERISTICS	FACTOR WEIGHTS
Motivators	The professional content of the job	0.844
	The professional development, career	0.833
	Professional prestige	0.842
Hygiene factors	Income, bonuses	0.626
	Personal circumstances	0.804
	Physical environment	0.879

Source: authors' research

In the relationship capital analysis we showed that graduates keep in touch first of all with course-mates (92%). By nature these are friendly (94% of the graduates chose this option), and, in addition, 30% also maintain professional relationships.

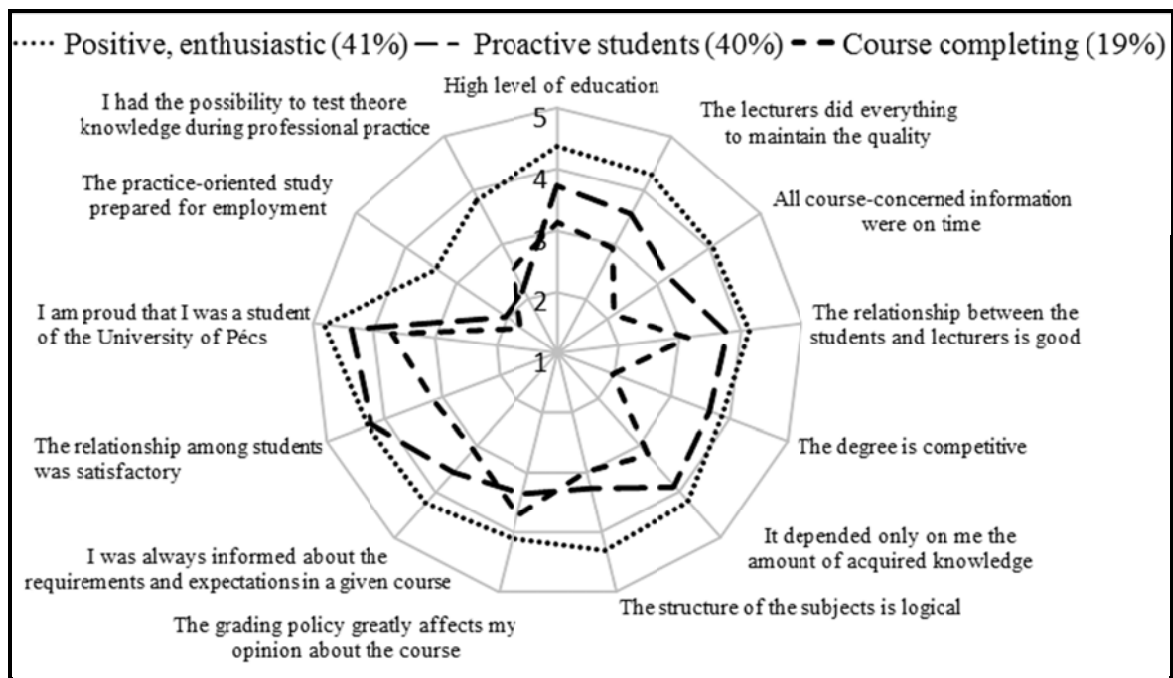
In addition, we observed professional relationships in respect of the CCO (64%) and teachers 59%). To determine the intensity of these, we formed two categories based on their existing number: the first group contains those who have a maximum of 2 connections and the second those who have 3 or more. We saw that the salaries of graduates with fewer relationships are statistically significantly lower (150,000 HUF on average) than those with 3 or more (180,000 HUF on average). The net wage gap of 30,000 HUF is relatively high and, further, it is interesting that the major part of the latter category works in the business sector.

It also emerges that language examinations were now given first priority. They had been well aware of this during their student years also, since language skills were ranked first in both cases. Professional practice is ranked second – in both instances – and so it is quite clear that, among 'Pécsi Közgáz' students, it is widely accepted that professional practice increases the chances of finding a satisfactory job, something which is even more highly evaluated by graduates than by undergraduates. Next in ranking come foreign scholarships, other employment, academic and student activities and individual participation in student organisations. Overall, it is totally clear that, apart from foreign scholarships, they ranked activities in the same order. Further, each was recommended to be undertaken even more intensively by future graduates, since, in their view, these can significantly facilitate the process of entering the labour market.

To explore issues of education and other related factors, we asked 14 x 5-grade Likert scale questions. Pride in having studied at the University is extremely high (4.5), and very close to 4 is the satisfactory level of relationships among students (4.1) and the perception of high-quality in the education provided (3.9). Graduates, therefore, have a very high opinion of UP and of the Faculty also. On the lower end of the scale, with values below 3.5, are the opportunities to test theoretical knowledge during professional practice (2.9) and the practice-oriented study as preparation for employment (2.6). These show that, based on their labour market experience, they think that their university years did not prepare them well enough for the world of work.

For a deeper examination we formed 3 homogeneous graduate groups by K-Means Cluster analysis.

Figure 3. The clusters based on the education's characteristics



Source: authors' research

The characteristics of the groups delineated are:

- Positive and enthusiastic: essentially agree with each issue, the perceived value of the practice-oriented education compared to the other two groups.
- Proactive students: they strive to acquire usable knowledge and want to receive all qualification-related information, although they do not think that their education is practice-oriented. In addition, environmental factors and good and positive relationships both with the lectures and the students are important.
- Degree-oriented: the least satisfied group, they gave a low evaluation to the questions in almost every area. Those completing the course-related questions which depend on individual performance are relatively high, but the objective values, especially course-related information are low. They do not want to achieve high skills, but only to complete the course and to take a degree.

We also looked for relationships between some of the groups and our previous results. We could not explain why the average wage (177,000 HUF) of those less satisfied with the University is 20,000 HUF more than that of the positive, enthusiastic group. For a complete picture we decomposed our results to full-time and correspondent students, and we found that there is an increasing difference among full-time students, but positive, enthusiastic correspondent students have a significantly higher average wage (235,000 HUF), probably due to the fact that they were already working before they started their theoretical training.

Matching the above clusters with the Herzberg factors, the proactive students correlate with the motivators and the course-completing and positive, enthusiastic students correlate with the hygiene factors. It is easy to understand if we consider the findings concerning the correspondent students, since graduating has a relationship with a higher wage.

When examining the competencies necessary for the job, we found that employers expect greater autonomy from graduates after their university careers, although these often face conflict situations and, due to their many responsibilities, they need a high working capacity. It is interesting that, among job skills, language knowledge ranks relatively low

compared to its value among the recommendations. It may be the case that a language certificate is required to enter most organisations although not used during everyday work.

These conclusions fully support the results of our faculty research concerning professional practice (Farkasné et al 2010, 2011a, 2011b), in which the dominant factors are the precise work, diligence, responsibility and cooperation skills, whilst creativity, knowledge of foreign languages and innovative skills are relegated to the background. Based on this it can be argued that, during professional practice, students were able to develop self-knowledge and to an understanding of labour market expectations. It is not by chance that 'Pécsi Közgáz' students are aware of the advantages of professional practice and its related benefits. We see from the general GFS report of the University's Faculty of Business and Economics that a high level of significance and importance was accorded to the CCO by the graduates of 2007, 2009. Whilst the other Faculties of the University (10 in total, including FBE) showed an average of 3.7% of contacts maintained with the CCO, at FBE this figure was 12.5%.

Universities have an important role in student 'well-being', and in this context in the achievement and maintenance of the student's commitment, satisfaction and motivation. The appropriate learning form for individuals and a practice-oriented knowledge creation process allow students to develop their potential, to become more motivated and satisfied. If they feel well – and in this context much of the responsibility is their own – they will be active, ready for different relations, willing to learn, and strongly success-oriented compared to graduates who are part of 'the herd'.

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