



Establishing a European graduate survey

Research proposal for a EUROGRADUATE full study



Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Maastricht University



German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies



Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna

Intention

The recently published feasibility study¹ of the EUROGRADUATE project shows that there is considerable demand for a European graduate study among stakeholders at national and European level, such as decision makers, institutions, students, employer organisations, and unions. This paper sketches a research proposal based on and developing further the recommendations for the design and organisation of a European graduate study as provided by the EUROGRADUATE report. The authors² suggest ways to implement a sustainable European graduate study in order to increase transparency on European higher education and support decision makers and stakeholders with relevant information to improve European higher education.

Background – social & political challenges for 21st century higher education

Policy makers see serious challenges for the countries of the European Higher Education Area, such as “continuing economic and social crisis, dramatic levels of unemployment, increasing marginalization of young people, demographic changes, new migration patterns, and conflicts within and between countries, as well as extremism and radicalization” (Yerevan Communiqué 2015). Higher education is expected to play a key role in addressing these challenges by ensuring that graduates are equipped with the competencies to successfully enter labour markets and keep being employable throughout their working lives. Higher education institutions are expected to develop creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship among their graduates, for economic growth, to boost innovation capacities of societies, and keep up with rapidly developing knowledge and technology. Higher education should also promote engaged citizenship and democratic values, such as tolerance, critical thinking and thus contribute to social cohesion and trust. In this vein, international mobility is regarded as a powerful means to add to intercultural understanding but also to expand competencies and work options of graduates.

More transparency on higher education graduates needed

Monitoring progress towards these goals and analysing how higher education contributes to them requires data on e.g.:

- the transition of graduates to the labour market (unemployment, job search),
- quality of the job match (education level and field, skills),
- career prospects (e.g. salary, upward mobility),
- skills, competencies, and values of graduates (e.g. professional expertise, transversal skills, entrepreneurial skills, innovative skills, civic skills, and democratic values),
- mobility behaviour (during and after studies), as well as
- detailed information on the higher education received by graduates (course of studies, teaching, learning, modes of studying, evaluation of studies etc.).

¹ Mühleck et al. 2016; download the report from <http://www.eurograduate.eu/results/reports>.

² The authors are (in alphabetical order): Jim Allen, Christoph Meng (both ROA), Kai Mühleck (DZHW), Martin Unger (IHS), and Rolf van der Velden (ROA).

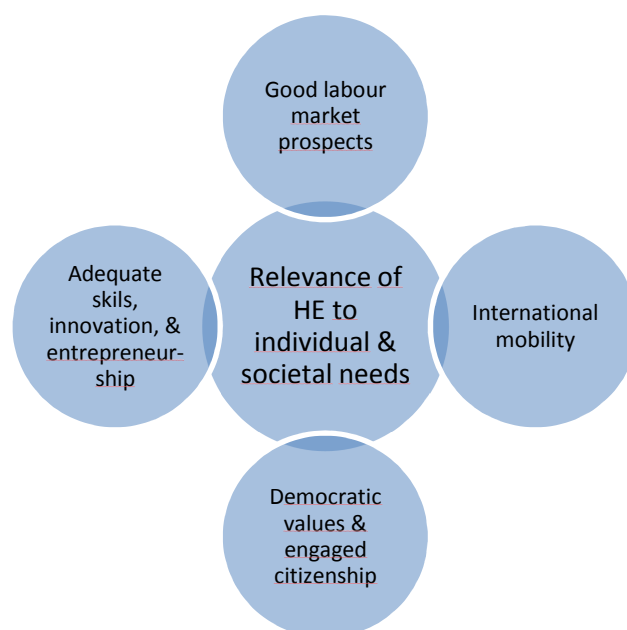
Such information is only partially available in current international data sources, like the European Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS) or the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) and often small numbers of respondents severely limit possibilities to analyse higher education graduates. The lack of suitable information on higher education graduates has been confirmed by the EUROGRADUATE feasibility study while the goal of improving transparency is supported by Europe's decision makers. The Bologna ministers have committed to ensuring reliable and meaningful information on higher education graduates (Yerevan Communiqué 2015). The European Commission plans to propose an initiative on tertiary graduate tracking for the 2nd quarter of 2017 (New Skills Agenda for Europe 2016).

Relevance of higher education as overall focus topic

At the background of the present social and political challenges this research proposal puts the question of how to enhance individual as well as societal relevance of higher education at the focus of a European graduate study. Four main dimensions of relevance are distinguished addressing crucial goals of the political agenda as formulated by European policy makers at national and European level (figure 1):

- (1) Innovation, entrepreneurship, and adequate skills, e.g. creative skills, entrepreneurial skills, professional expertise, transversal skills
- (2) Good labour market prospects, e.g. successful transition to the labour market, promotion in the labour market, adequate employment, or job security
- (3) International mobility during and after studies
- (4) Democratic values, and engaged citizenship, i.e. critical thinking, tolerance, attitudes towards democracy, political participation, or civic engagement

Figure 1: Dimensions of the relevance of higher education



These dimensions reflect crucial functions higher education is expected to fulfil in modern societies. They are interrelated in the sense that they can mutually enforce each other, e.g. critical thinking contributes to innovation and creativity and at the same time can be regarded as a democratic value, and is likely to contribute to success in the labour market. Similarly, international mobility is perceived to increase labour market opportunities, intercultural tolerance, and creativity.

Research design of a EUROGRADUATE full study

The research design suggested for a EUROGRADUATE survey is based on the conclusions of the EUROGRADUATE feasibility study. Key features of the design are:

- **Focus on EU countries and open to further European countries:** The first round of the EUROGRADUATE survey aims at covering as many EU countries as possible. It is open to further non-EU European countries. As a long-term goal the survey strives to cover most countries of the EHEA.
- **Graduates with Bachelors' and Masters' degrees:** Graduates with a degree at ISCED levels 6 and 7 are the main target groups of a EUROGRADUATE survey that would need to be covered in all participating countries. Short-cycle higher education degrees (ISCED 5) should be covered if they are considered to be relevant in the respective national context.
- **Panel surveys 1, 5, and 9 years after graduation:** To cover both, early transition as well as mid- and long term developments the study will have a panel design with three waves.³
- **Study repetitions every four years:** Regular repetitions of the EUROGRADUATE survey are necessary for monitoring developments of higher education systems. A moderate pace of every four years is economic and at the same time assures up-to-date information. The combination of study repetitions every four years with panel waves at an interval of four years (1, 5, and 9 years after graduation) has an additional advantage: up to three cohorts are surveyed in the same year, allowing for cross-cohort comparisons (see figure 2 below).
- **Start with cohorts 1 and 5 years after graduation:** Mid- and long-term developments of graduates are seen as of high importance across all stakeholder groups at national as well as European level. To provide information on both, early transitions and career trajectories, the EUROGRADUATE survey directly starts with two cohorts, 1 and 5 years after graduation (cohorts A and B in figure 2 below).
- **A centralised online survey with country- and institution specific extensions:** The data will be collected by an online survey facilitated by one central server to assure equivalent questionnaire design and comparability. Questionnaire versions in all official languages of participating countries will be offered. Participating countries and institutions are offered to add a limited set of specific questions complementing the international core questionnaire.
- **A decentralised recruitment of graduates:** Graduates will be approached to take part in the surveys through the participating countries. Using a decentralised approach to invite the graduates, EUROGRADUATE will allow for flexibility according to the availability of contact addresses (postal, e-mail, phone numbers) in the participating countries.

Core and focus topics by repetition and panel wave

Each repetition of the EUROGRADUATE full study will cover the three dimensions of relevance of higher education. Certain repetitions will feature specific focus topics from this core or cover additional focus topics seen as particularly relevant by stakeholders. The EUROGRADUATE full study can thus monitor developments in the European higher education systems regarding the focus topics while at the same time being flexible to react to newly emerging topics. Figure 2 suggests core and focus topics for the first three repetitions of the study.

³ In a panel study, the same respondents are surveyed repeatedly at different points in time, e.g. 1 and 5 years after graduation. Thus individual developments and the effects of education can be observed and analysed.

Figure 2: Core and focus topics of a EUROGRADUATE full study

Repetition Cohort.years after grad.	EUROGRADUATE I		EUROGRADUATE II			EUROGRADUATE III		
	A.1	B.5	C.1	A.5	B.9	D.1	C.5	A.9
Explanatory factor: properties, course & evaluation of HE	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Core topic „relevance of HE“								
Labour market prospects								
Transition after degree	++	+	++	+	+	++	+	+
Career trajectories	+	++	+	++	++	+	++	++
Skills, innovatn., entrepreneurship.	+	+	++	+	+	+	++	+
Democratic values & citizenship	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
International mobility	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Focus topics, e.g.								
Immigrants in HE	+			+				+
Work-life balance		+			+			
Inclusive HE systems						+		
...								

+ = topic covered, ++ = focus topic

Products

(1) Comparative monitoring report

A comparative report will be published promptly after the joint data set of the EUROGRADUATE full study is ready. It will provide sound comparative statistics on the core and focus topics of the respective repetition of EUROGRADUATE.

(2) Online reporting tool for participating countries and institutions

Participating countries and institutions will be given password secured access to the EUROGRADUATE online reporting tool for tailor-made comparisons of their own results against national or international figures.

(3) Public online database for students, graduates, and the interested public

A user-friendly, publicly available online database can be used by students to research on, e.g. the labour market outcomes of graduates of specific fields and subjects. This will add to a better informed study choice. Graduates can compare their own career trajectories against national or international averages. The media and the interested public will be free to use the online database.

(4) Focus reports on specific topics

Reports on specific topics seen as particularly relevant by stakeholders will provide in-depth analyses covering all or a choice of countries.

(5) Scientific use file

An anonymised individual level data file will be made available for use by interested researchers. This provides opportunity for stakeholders and science to research on questions they are particularly interested in and ensures intensive use of the data collected.

(6) Publications by external users

The provision of the EUROGRADUATE scientific use file can be expected to yield a considerable number of publications by researchers beyond the EUROGRADUATE research consortium.

Global planning and schedule

EUROGRADUATE Pilot (2017-2019)

The full study is preceded by a 24 months pilot study. The indicative timeline of the European Commission's New Skills Agenda suggests that a EUROGRADUATE pilot could start in the 2nd half of 2017. If the start is postponed to a later stage, the overall schedule shifts accordingly. Countries will decide on their participation in the full study after the piloting phase. Tasks of the pilot study are:

- (1) Further develop tools and processes for the central data collection:** online survey tool, language versions of the questionnaire, data preparation, production of a merged data set
- (2) Give opportunity to decision-makers to codetermine the contents of the full study**
- (3) Set up detailed plans on how to implement the data collection in each participating country:** sampling of graduates, contacting graduates, coordination with existing national studies, preparation for subsequent panel waves, data protection and privacy issues
- (4) Explore ways of cooperation and coordination with existing graduate studies in the country**
- (5) Test, and where necessary refine, the data collection strategy and functionality of the questionnaire in a field trial among a limited number of respondents in the participating countries**

The pilot study should already include the majority of countries who would want to join the full study. The field test could be accomplished in a smaller number of countries, but tasks (1)-(4) should be completed in all participating countries of the pilot study. Insights gained in the piloting phase are likely to prove advantageous for implementing an EGS in additional countries as well and the full study should be open to add countries. The pilot study is expected to considerably help to ensure a smooth start of the full study, provides the opportunity for decision makers to decide on participation in the full study on already elaborated tools and experiences made during the pilot study.

EUROGRADUATE I (2019-2022)

Organisational set-up of first round of EUROGRADUATE: 2nd half of 2019 to 1st half of 2020

- Decisions on participating countries for first round of EUROGRADUATE
- Set-up organisation of the project (international research consortium, technical advisory board, board of participating countries and funding agencies, national research coordinators)
- Field tests of questionnaire in countries not covered in pilot study
- Finalize questionnaire, central data collection tools and guidelines, and national sampling design

Field phase: 2020

The first EUROGRADUATE survey takes place in autumn 2020 with a survey among 2 cohorts:

- Degree in study year 2018-2019 (cohort A in figure 2): Survey 1 year after graduation
- Degree in study year 2014-2015 (cohort B): Survey 5 year after graduation

Data cleaning & preparation of international data set: 2021**Data analysis and reporting: 2022**

- The first international report on EUROGRADUATE will be published in 2022.
- Country- and institution specific reports
- Scientific use file

EUROGRADUATE II (2023-2026)**Preparation of second round of EUROGRADUATE: 2023**

- Decisions on participating countries for second round of EUROGRADUATE
- Set-up organisation of the project for EUROGRADUATE II (international research consortium, technical advisory board, board of participating countries and funding agencies, national research coordinators)
- Decisions on focus topics for EUROGRADUATE II by board of participating countries and funding agencies
- Finalize questionnaire, central data collection tools and guidelines, and national sampling design
- Field test

Field phase of EUROGRADUATE II: 2024

The second EUROGRADUATE survey takes place in autumn 2024 with a survey among 3 cohorts

- Degree in study year 2022-2023 (cohort C in figure 2): Survey 1 year after graduation
- Degree in study year 2018-2019 (cohort A): Survey 5 year after graduation
- Degree in study year 2014-2015 (cohort B): Survey 9 years after graduation

Data cleaning & preparation of international data set: 2025**Data analysis and reporting: 2026**

- The second international report on EUROGRADUATE will be published in 2026.
- Country- and institution specific reports
- Scientific use file

Initiating organisations and contact persons

This research proposal is initiated by the Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Maastricht University, the German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies, and the Institute for Advanced Studies, Vienna. For further information, please get in touch with the contact persons at the initiating organisations:

Rolf van der Velden

Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Maastricht University

P.O. Box 616, NL-6200 MD Maastricht

The Netherlands

+31 43 3883647

R.vanderVelden@MaastrichtUniversity.nl

Kai Mühleck

German Centre for Higher Education Research and Science Studies

Lange Laube 12, 30159 Hannover

Germany

+49-511-1220-456

muehleck@dzhw.eu

Martin Unger

Institute for Advanced Studies

Josefstädter Straße 39, 1080 Wien

Austria

+43-1-5991-133

unger@ihs.ac.at