



Employability skills of the young people in Bulgaria

Business Foundation for Education
December 2010

Content

- **About the report** – page 3
- **About the survey** – page 4
- **Employability skills** – page 5
- **Information about the participants in the survey** – page 8
- **Results from the survey** – page 10
- **Conclusions** – page 22
- Appendix 1 - **Suggestions from the participants in the round table**
- **Employability skills** – page 23
- Appendix 2 – **An example: Career Education in Australian schools** – page 28
- Appendix 3 - **European directions in developing employability skills** – page 29

About the report

This report has been prepared by The Business Foundation for Education (BFE), as part of our work on the „Survey of Bulgarian youth employability skills among employers and young people” project. The project has been funded by the National centre „European Youth Programmes and Initiatives”, ПМД - ПЗ.1-160-2010.

The project aims to assist the preparation of policies in the field of youth employability, education and vocational guidance with an current information about the employability skills of the young people in Bulgaria as well as to suggest directions for the upcoming activities that would address the improvement of the employability skills of the Bulgarian youth.

The report represents a snapshot of the situation in Bulgaria in the end of 2010. It also provides information about the employability skills that the employers believe will be necessary for their companies in the next few years.

The survey aimed to determine the degree in which young people in Bulgaria possess skills to find and retain a job, adequate to the skills required by the employers.

It compares the evaluation given by the employers with the self-evaluation that the young people have given themselves for the employability skills they possess. It also aims to find an answer to the questions when, by whom and how can these skills be developed most efficiently.

The information, provided by the survey, was presented to the public at a national conference, held in December 2010, in the presence of educational experts, employers, career consultants, leaders of youth organisations and media.

The first part of the report contains data and conclusions from the survey. In the appendix, we have included suggestions and opinions from the participants in the discussion that followed the presentation of the results from the survey. The discussion aimed to gather ideas, constructive proposals, examples, methods and good practices how to develop young people’s employability skills.

The report also contains conclusions, recommendations and foreign experience with policies and strategic actions aimed to improve the employability skills of the young people.

About the survey

The survey was conducted by The Business Foundation for Education during September – November 2010 among employers and young people in different parts of the country. It was carried out through a structured questionnaire, distributed on-line and through paper copies. A total of 119 human resource managers, company owners, managers and key employers participated in it. Parallel to that, from all over the country were surveyed 1023 young people below the age of 35.

A broader age range of the notion of the term “youth” has been adopted for the purposes of the survey – in compliance with the European Commission’s policy.

In order to conduct the survey and reach the required target groups help was provided by the Youth Information and Counseling Centre, the career centers at the universities, teachers and directors working in the secondary education, NGOs and medias as well as the Bulgarian Human Resource Management and Development Association, to which we would like to express our gratitude.

The structure of the survey was prepared by BFE, whose team has experience in the field of such initiatives.¹

What type of questions does the survey include?

We asked a few similar questions to the employers and the young people:

- Which are the most important skills for employers when hiring new employees?
- In what degree do the young people possess those skills?
- Are the young people prepared to start work after they have finished their education?
- When do we have to begin to develop employability skills?

The parallel survey among employers and young people, with similar questions to both target groups allowed us to make useful comparisons and conclusions about the meaning, the development and the evaluation of the employability skills.

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- ¹ [First National Study of Students' Professional Orientation and Motivation in Bulgaria](#) (November 2007 – February 2008). Its aim was to follow the expectations, the attitude and the preparation for professional realisation of the Bulgarian students. The study was conducted together with Hewitt Associates and their strategic partner for Bulgaria Monday Insight. In the survey participated 12 477 students from all over the country. The information was gathered through standardized questionnaires, filled-in by the students on-line or on paper copies at the universities.
 - [The Business Foundation for Education's Survey of Pupils' Professional Orientation](#) (September – October 2008) The project started with a research comprising of 181 parents and 610 pupils (2-11 grade) in 3 schools, situated in Sofia. The vocational interests and intentions of the pupils were surveyed as well as their attitude towards participating in school activities for career counseling. The initiative was part of BFE’s project “Career Club”, funded by European Social Fund.

Employability skills

In the last few years the improvement of the employability skills of the young people plays a key role in the European countries' policies. The strategic goals related to high economic competitiveness, social prosperity and well-being of the citizens require purposeful investments in order to cultivate a combination of skills that aid the performance on the labour market.

The technological development, the globalization and the longer period of active life require from us to constantly adapt our personal skills related to the numerous changes, challenges, transitions and professional development decisions. We are no longer talking about a vocational choice but about lifelong career management, which demands a broad variety of skills and knowledge. They provide the opportunity for successful job hunting, quick adaptation and professional development, accomplishment of the job tasks, contentment and adequate remuneration for the labour.

This totality of skills and competences is what we call employability, or **employability skills**. They are often defined as:

- „key” - due to the fact that they are fundamental for the further development of other competences;
- „soft” - they can supplement specific professional competences;
- „transferable” - as they can be developed throughout life in different situations and they are applicable in every professional sphere;
- „hidden” - as it's quite complicated to be measured and evaluated, but they are easily distinguishable at the workplace;
- The countries that are members of the European Union summarize them with the concept of „career management skills”. CMS can be regarded as a competence which helps individuals to identify their existing skills and necessary learning goals, to improve employability and social inclusion. The Committee decided to use the following definition:
 - „Career management skills refer to a whole range of competences which provide structured ways for individuals and groups to gather, analyse, synthesise and organise self, educational and occupational information as well as the skills to make and implement decisions and transitions.

The employability skills are the common language in which the employers and the employees communicate. They show the quality of an individual's social and personal orientation in the labour market. With the development and the ongoing changes of the labour market, the demands on the work force develop and change as well.

The completion of a comprehensive list with descriptions and definitions of the employability skills is a challenge for all the European countries. The

preparation of such a list is a dynamic process, as the economy and the demands of the business are changing each year. It requires a constant observation of the labour market and a periodic (yearly) feedback from the employers.

For the purposes of the survey we created a list of **20 sets of competences** and included a short definition and description so that we have definitions which are standard and comprehensible to both groups.

Skills

- **Adaptability** – ability to adapt to the company’s culture, flexibility, quick orientation towards the demands of the changing environment, including ability to work under stress and with short deadlines
- **Willingness to learn** - receptivity, studiousness, desire to improve oneself, looking for and accepting feedback
- **Ethics** - loyalty, propriety, honesty
- **Efficiency** – ability to cope with the job tasks and achieve good result
- **Computer skills** – using word processing programmes, tables, internet applications
- **Leadership skills** – ability to plan, manage and motivate people, decision making, negotiating and others
- **Mathematical skills** - working with numbers, accuracy, orderliness, precision
- **Interpersonal skills** – ability to work in a team, cooperation, overcoming of conflicts, sociability, creating contacts
- **Motivation** – enthusiasm, positive attitude towards work
- **Professional skills and knowledge** – specific skills and knowledge in the professional area, adequate notion about the job
- **Communication in the mother tongue** – clear, convincing and grammatically correct communication in verbal and written form
- **Critical thinking** – analytical, logical, without prejudices, precise, in-depth
- **Office skills** – finding and organising information, documents, records; work habits; using office equipment
- **Entrepreneurship skills** – initiative, entrepreneurship, proactiveness, business knowledge, decisiveness, ability to take decisions and take risks
- **Self-promoting skills** – ability to successfully present oneself (incl. When applying for a job and during an interview), confidence in one’s abilities, positivism, persuasiveness, good command of formal communication and etiquette
- **Creative skills** - creativity, innovativeness, resourcefulness, inventiveness, ability to think outside of the box
- **Technical skills** – specific abilities to use software, programmes and equipment

- **Customer service skills** – responsiveness, empathy, positive attitude, tactfulness, tolerance, patience, polite attitude
- **Self-management skills** – responsibility, self-dependence, management of time and job tasks
- **Communication in foreign languages** – using (in written and verbal form) a foreign language, cross-cultural experience and knowledge

The above list was prepared for the purposes of the survey and the following things were taken into consideration:

- The formulated by the European Commission **key competences**;²
- **Strategic documents** of national and international institutions about youth employment and employability skills;
- Preliminary analysis of **similar surveys** done in Europe and worldwide during the last few years³;
- **Job advertisements**: review of the most common skills and qualities that are required by the applicants
- Organising **consultations with employers**, educational experts and career consultants, which helped to summarize the skills into 20 sets of competences and to introduce definitions for working purposes

² The Definition And Selection Of Key Competencies <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/47/61/35070367.pdf>

³ Employers' perception of graduate employability, Flash Eurobarometer, 2010

(http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_304_en.pdf);

Ready to grow: business priorities for education and skills. Education and skills survey, 2010

(<http://www.cbi.org.uk/ndbs/content.nsf/802737AED3E3420580256706005390AE/C4393B86D00478E802576C6003B0679>)

Graduate Employability: What do employers think and want? 2008

(http://ec.europa.eu/education/higher-education/doc/business/graduate_en.pdf);

http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/Files/3056_en.pdf

Information about the participants in the survey**1023 young people (327 – men and 696 – women).****Age:**

Under 18 years	7%
18-25 years	36%
26-30 years	34%
31-35 years	23%

Education:

High	41%
Secondary	52%
Primary	7%

Current Status in the labour market:

Employed	48%
Students	53%
Pupils	12%
Raising a child	2%
Unemployed	8%

* The total sum is more than 100 % as some of the participants have given more than one answer.

Work experience until the present moment:

None	9%
Less than 1 year	18%
1-3 years	19%
3 – 5 years	33%
Over 5 years	21%

Regional Representation

Sofia	65%
Varna	8%
Plovdiv	6%
Burgas	2%
Veliko Tarnovo	1%
Others (total)	13%

Employers: 119 human resource managers, company owners, managers and key employers. 34 – men and 85 – women.**Organisations:**

Less than 10 employees	84%
10 – 50 employees	4%
50 – 250 employees	6%
More than 250 employees	5%

From where have you formed your opinion about the employability skills of the young people:

Employees in the company	82%
Job candidates	64%
Meetings with young people	35%
Personal contacts	72%

* The total sum is more than 100 % as some of the participants have given more than one answer.

Regional representation

Sofia	68%
Plovdiv	11%
Varna	26%
Ruse	9%
Burgas	7%
Veliko Tarnovo	5%
Shumen	4%
Others (total)	12%

* The total sum is more than 100 % as some of the participants have given more than one answer.

Results from the survey

The most important skills for the employers when hiring new employees

We asked the young people and the employers to identify (among the provided 20 skills) the 5 most important skills to the employers when hiring new employees. In this way, we created a profile for the "ideal employee":

Skills that the employers expect the most from their new employees when they are hiring them :	Significance Level			
	1 – highest 20 - lowest			
	according to the employers		According to the young people	
	ранг	брой	ранг	брой
Professional skills and knowledge	1	78	1	532
Willingness to learn	2	69	2	382
Adaptability	3	59	4	345
Interpersonal skills	4	52	3	361
Efficiency	5	37	5	332
Self-management skills	6	31	8	301
Motivation	7	30	6	324
Communication in the mother tongue	8	25	12	253
Communication in foreign languages	9	28	7	311
Self-promoting skills	10	25	11	265
Computer skills	11	23	13	241
Office skills	12	22	10	286
Customer service skills	13	21	17	138
Ethics	14	20	9	295
Critical thinking	15	19	18	115
Creative skills	16	18	16	145
Entrepreneurship skills	17	14	15	168
Leadership skills	18	12	14	223
Technical skills	19	8	19	78
Mathematical skills	20	6	20	31

Conclusions:

1. On the whole, the young people's concept of what companies are looking for when they are hiring new people corresponds to the skills that are demanded by the employers.
2. The 5 most important skills, which are required by the companies when hiring a new employee, both for the employers and for the young people are:
 - Professional skills and knowledge
 - Willingness to learn
 - Adaptability
 - Interpersonal skills
 - Efficiency
3. The least important skills for hiring a candidate/or to be hired, according to the employers and the young people are the technical and mathematical skills.
4. There is a visible difference between the significance of some skills to the employers and their presumed significance by the young people:

The young people attribute more significance to the following skills (in comparison to the significance given by the employers):	Significance when hiring	
	1 – highest 20 – lowest	
	according to the employers	According to the young people
Ethics	14	9
Communication in foreign languages	12	10
Entrepreneurship skills	17	15
Leadership skills	18	14

The young people attribute less significance to the following skills (in comparison to the significance given by the employers):	Significance when hiring	
	1 – highest 20 – lowest	
	according to the employers	According to the young people
Self-management skills	6	8
Communication in the mother tongue	8	12
Customer service skills	13	17
Critical thinking	15	18

A comparison between the skills, which the employers value as being the most important ones for their business at present and the skills that would be important for them in the next years?

	today		tomorrow	
	grade	number	grade	number
Professional skills and knowledge	1	78	1	93
Willingness to learn	2	69	2	91
Interpersonal skills	4	52	3	71
Efficiency	5	37	4	65
Motivation	7	30	5	53
Adaptability	3	59	6	50
Customer service skills	13	21	7	46
Self-management skills	6	31	8	38
Communication in foreign languages	9	28	9	35
Leadership skills	18	12	10	32

The employer's expectations about the skills they will need in the next years are different from the ones they have selected as the most important for their business at present:

The professional skills and knowledge and the willingness to learn continue to be at the top of the scale. The interpersonal skills, efficiency and staff motivation will have an increasing significance for the companies. The self-management skills will be more and more required from the new employees. According to the employer's forecasts the customer service skills and the leadership skills will have almost doubled their significance in the future.

As it is stated in the report by the Lisbon Council „Europe 2020: Why Skills are Key for Europe's Future“ in the coming years the most important skill will be to define complex decisions for new and unfamiliar problems, as well as the ability for lifelong learning of new and different skills.⁴

⁴ Lisbon Council - „Europe 2020: Why Skills are Key for Europe's Future“, p. 14
<http://www.lisboncouncil.net/publication/publication/54-skillseuropesfuture.html>

To what degree do the young people posses those skills? A comparison between the employer's evaluation and the self-evaluation of the young people	1 – lowest 4 – highest			
	1	2	3	4
1. Professional skills and knowledge				
evaluation	72%	11%	8%	9%
self-evaluation	53%	22%	12%	7%
2. Willingness to learn				
evaluation	2%	5%	11%	82%
self-evaluation	0%	0%	2%	98%
3. Adaptability				
evaluation	52%	34%	8%	6%
self-evaluation	11%	17%	29%	43%
4. Interpersonal skills				
evaluation	24%	38%	26%	12%
self-evaluation	1%	15%	21%	63%
5. Efficiency				
evaluation	22%	39%	27%	12%
self-evaluation	14%	21%	37%	28%
6. Self-management skills				
evaluation	41%	23%	22%	14%
self-evaluation	31%	34%	25%	10%
7. Motivation				
evaluation	2%	6%	14%	78%
self-evaluation	0%	0%	7%	93%
8. Communication in the mother tongue				
evaluation	4%	7%	25%	64%
self-evaluation	0%	4%	21%	75%
9. Communication in foreign languages				
evaluation	20%	23%	32%	25%
self-evaluation	23%	31%	24%	22%
10. Self-promoting skills				
evaluation	31%	34%	24%	11%
self-evaluation	24%	28%	27%	21%
11. Computer skills				

	evaluation	3%	17%	26%	54%
	self-evaluation	2%	8%	31%	59%
12. Office skills					
	evaluation	26%	34%	23%	17%
	self-evaluation	19%	33%	29%	19%
13. Customer service skills					
	evaluation	35%	29%	24%	12%
	self-evaluation	16%	23%	37%	24%
14. Ethics					
	evaluation	23%	29%	23%	25%
	self-evaluation	0%	0%	17%	83%
15. Critical thinking					
	evaluation	34%	27%	23%	16%
	self-evaluation	27%	28%	24%	21%
16. Creative skills					
	evaluation	16%	23%	34%	27%
	self-evaluation	14%	21%	34%	32%
17. Entrepreneurship skills					
	evaluation	49%	23%	19%	9%
	self-evaluation	34%	27%	24%	15%
18. Leadership skills					
	evaluation	54%	32%	11%	3%
	self-evaluation	47%	29%	16%	8%
19. Technical skills					
	evaluation	32%	33%	23%	12%
	self-evaluation	41%	26%	16%	17%
20. Mathematical skills					
	evaluation	79%	16%	4%	1%
	self-evaluation	58%	24%	11%	7%

Conclusions:

- The skills, mastered most efficiently by the young people – both by their own self-evaluation and by the employer's evaluation are:
 - Willingness to learn⁵
 - Motivation
 - Communication in the mother tongue
 - Computer skills
- The skills, which the young people possess the least - both by their own self-evaluation and by the employer's evaluation are:

⁵ Later on this information will be analyzed again.

- Mathematical skills
- Entrepreneurship skills
- Professional skills and knowledge
- Efficiency
- Leadership skills
- Technical skills
- Self-management skills
- Critical thinking
- Self-promoting skills
- Office skills

3. The young people's self-evaluation is situated in the higher part of the evaluation scale (3 and 4), while the evaluation given by the employers is in the lower part (1 and 2).

Interesting conclusion:

Most of the employers value as relatively good the foreign language skills of the young people, while they themselves do not value them as sufficient.

A few possible explanations:

- Looking at this conclusion from the employer's point of view and their fluency in foreign languages they evaluate the young people's foreign language skills as better than their own;
- An expectation that young people's foreign language skills are good as they use foreign resources, media and information on a daily basis;
- Foreign language skills demand, most of all, to be actively applied - i.e. speaking and writing, and most probably young people understand the difference between active and passive use of the foreign language;
- Europass language passport, which is being actively used in our country for a few years now, provides a frame for self-evaluation of the foreign language competences through specific descriptive indicators, which helps the objective evaluation of the level of fluency in the foreign language.

4. There is a mismatch between the employer's evaluation and the young people's self-evaluation regarding the degree in which they possess the given skills.

The biggest difference is between the evaluation and the self-evaluation of the following skills:

- adaptability
- customer service skills
- ethics
- interpersonal communication
- creativity skills

Among them are two of the most important for employers - adaptability and interpersonal communication, which young people consider to have a greater degree than demonstrated by employers. This shows that it is necessary to give sufficient time for the practical development and application of each of the soft skills.

Are the young people in Bulgaria prepared for work after finishing their education?

We identified 11 key indicators that show if a young person is prepared to start working:

- Clear idea about their desires and aims
- Clear notion about their skills
- Knowledge about the different ways and resources to search for a job
- Being able to present their experience and skills in a CV
- Being able to prepare a convincing motivation letter
- Self-presentation during the interview
- Knowledge about labour rights and duties
- Behavior at the working place
- Overall notion about the world of work
- Adequate salary expectations
- Ability to learn

We asked the employers and the young people to mark with YES or NO their opinion if young people possess the given competences after finishing high school and after graduating from university – and we compared the results.

Are the young people in Bulgaria prepared for work after finishing their education?				
A comparison between the employer's evaluation and young people's self-evaluation				
Indicators showing to what extent young people are prepared to start working:	after high school		after university	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
They know what they want	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	21%	79%	44%	56%
self-evaluation	78%	22%	31%	79%
They know what they can	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	11%	89%	37%	63%
self-evaluation	58%	42%	76%	24%
They know how and where to search for a job	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	18%	72%	55%	45%

self-evaluation	48%	52%	57%	43%
They know how to present their experience and skills in a CV	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	17%	83%	61%	39%
self-evaluation	36%	64%	72%	28%
They know how to prepare a convincing motivation letter	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	6%	94%	22%	78%
self-evaluation	8%	92%	18%	72%
They know how to present themselves in an interview	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	8%	92%	31%	69%
self-evaluation	13%	87%	39%	61%
They know their labour rights and duties	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	0%	100%	3%	97%
self-evaluation	5%	95%	10%	90%
They know how to behave at the work place	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	7%	93%	29%	71%
self-evaluation	18%	82%	43%	67%
They have an overall notion about the labour world	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	34%	66%	55%	45%
self-evaluation	43%	67%	62%	38%
They have adequate salary expectations	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	12%	88%	18%	82%
self-evaluation	14%	86%	27%	73%
Ability to learn	YES	NO	YES	NO
evaluation	29%	71%	68%	32%
self-evaluation	72%	28%	94%	6%

Conclusions:

There are major gaps in the young people's knowledge about the labour world, which are identified both by the employers and by the young people themselves:

- **They know their labour rights and duties** – when they can start work, what documents are necessary, the different types of contracts, insurance, sick leave, maternity, taxes, what to do if their right are violated
- **They cannot prepare a convincing motivation letter** – even though it is not required as often as the CV, most probably the motivation letter plays a similarly important part when applying for a job. To write a motivation letter is not even easy for more

experienced candidates, as it requires the ability to express your work motivation in a convincing manner and to present your own advantages in accordance with the needs of the employers.

- **They do not know how to present themselves in an interview** – behavior that is built with experience, can be reversed and studied with the help of a career consultant.
- **They do not know how and where to search for a job** – a serious problem: they do not know the ways to reach the vacant positions and the sources of information.
- **They do not know how to behave at the work place** – employer's expectation, company culture - hierarchy, communication, protocol, dress code, working time, duties and others. Internships help in the development of this skill, meetings with employers and alumni to exchange experience, volunteering.
- **They do not have adequate salary expectations** – this is both true for young people with university and high school education.

Theme for thought:

According to nearly 10 % of the employers the young people with only high school education have a more adequate salary expectation rather than those with university education. This confirms the theory that young people's expectation about their salary is associated with the acquired educational degree (diploma), while for the employers it is formed on the basis of the acquired experience and the displayed skills.

These results show that the educational system does not manage to develop the most important skills and knowledge that are necessary to create a link with the labour market.

1. There is a serious difference between the self-evaluation of the young people and the evaluation of the employers about major indicators of the employability skills, such as: clear idea about the desires and capabilities, ability to write a CV and even the ability to learn.
2. This shows that young people - even if they have those qualities and skills – do not present them convincingly enough.
3. When it comes to the ability to learn – an interesting parallel can be done with the preceding question (see p. 14) for evaluation of the young people's willingness and readiness to learn. It is obvious that the employers make a clear distinction between the **attitude** of the young people towards learning and their actual **skills** to learn.
4. The self-evaluation of the young people is considerably higher than the employer's evaluation in all sections.
15% of the young people give a positive answer to all statements.
8% of the employers give a negative answer to all statements.

General criteria (standards) are necessary for evaluation and validation of the employability skills. They need to be clear and accessible both to the employers and the young people.

A comparison between the most effective practices according to the employers, through which the young people can acquire employability skills and the percentage of young people who have participated in such practices.

1	Student Internships	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	72%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	18%
2	Trainings organised by the employers	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	64%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	36%
3	Early vocational guidance and information	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	42%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	10%
4	Specialized trainings and courses	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	38%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	47%
5	Career counseling at the universities	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	37%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	16%
6	Self-directed learning (in Internet, books, educational materials)	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	32%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	94%
7	Volunteering	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	30%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	22%
8	School practices, school companies and others	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	28%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	12%
9	Joint projects and initiatives done by the educational institutions and the business	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	19%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	3%
10	Lessons on career management, entrepreneurship and employability skills	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	18%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	8%
11	Academic mobility abroad (Erasmus and others)	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	14%

	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	9%
12	Others	
	Percentage of employers who define it as effective	<1%
	Percentage of young people who have participated in it	<1%
13	None	
	No participation	4%

* The total sum is more than 100 % as some of the participants have given more than one answer.

Almost all young people state that they use the method of self-study as a way to acquire employability skills. According to the employers, though, far more effective are the student internships and the different specialized forms of education and consulting which are far less used by the young people.

An important question that needs to be considered is the popularization of all the opportunities, their accessibility and attractiveness to the young people.

According to the employers, who has to play a leading role in the process of teaching employability skills to the young people?

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science	73%
The young people themselves	63%
The universities	54%
The parents	52%
The employers and the employers' organisations	48%
The ministry of Labour and Social Policy / National Employment Agency	36%
Youth organisations, Information-consultancy centers , student councils and others	34%
All of the above	12%

* The total sum is more than 100 % as some of the participants have given more than one answer.

According to the employers the process of developing employability skills is a process of sharing responsibilities between all the concerned subjects at the labour market and educational service providers in Bulgaria.

How and when to develop employability skills?

To create employability skills means to help the young people to develop such skills and competences that allow them to face by themselves the challenges, choices and decisions, to know where to look for information and support, to use their own resources, to manage them efficiently and to fulfill themselves.

When do we have to start developing employability skills?	Young	Employers
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	people	
In early childhood	5%	22%
In primary school	8%	24%
In secondary school	10%	14%
In high school	41%	40%
After graduation from high school	7%	0%
In university	29%	0%

Conclusions:

1. Both groups state the **high school as the most appropriate time to start developing employability skills** – their role is most apparent then: to ease the transition between the educational system and the career and the taking of consecutive decisions at a time when young people begin to be more aware and mature.
2. **For the employers this is the last possible moment** in which those skills have to be developed. The majority of the employers (60%) think that the time before high school is the time when we have to start developing the employability skills, while 1/3 of the young people believe that these skills have to be developed after graduating from high school and in university.
3. **Young people do not understand the meaning of the employability skills** – this is clearly visible in the separate inquiries, where the answers contradict each other. Here are a few examples:
 - The respondent has stated that at the moment he is employed and that his work experience is between 3 and 5 years. In one of the questions, in what way he has demonstrated to the employer his employability skills during the past year, he has marked only the option "in personal contact" and he has missed the first two more obvious options – as an applicant for the position and at the work place.
 - Part of the respondents state that they can write a CV and a convincing motivation letter in order to apply for a job, but at the same time they state that they don't know what they can do and what they want.
 - When they were asked to evaluate to what extent they possess certain skills some of the young people give answers that contradict each other, such as:
Adaptability– 4 (highest mark)
Willingness to learn – 1 (lowest mark)

Conclusions:

The employers and the young people have a different understanding about the employability skills and their meaning and application. The employers perceive the development of those skills like a long process, a long term investment, while young people generally perceive it as something within a shorter span of time and connected to the specific stage in life. The results from the survey clearly distinguish two different viewpoints and goals – to be hired (employed) and to always be able to find a job (employable).

It is necessary to create a better understanding of the meaning and application of the employability skills by the young people – not just separate skills, necessary to make the transition from the educational institution to the labour market, or more specifically - to find a job, but a multitude of transferable skills and competences for career management, which a person begins to develop from an early age and that help him to cope with the variety of roles, challenges and decisions during his life.

There are key deficiencies in the young people's knowledge about the labour world, identified both by the employers and by the young people themselves. The educational system at the moment does not manage to provide the employability skills necessary for the business. It is vital to do a thorough reconsideration of the hardships in the dialogue between the education and the labour market, a clearer communication of both party's needs as well as policies aimed at overcoming the identified obstacles, with the participation of all the subjects that can support the change in a national and European context.

We hope that the results from the survey will help us find some answers as well as raise more important questions, which are connected to providing more opportunities for the young Bulgarian citizens, allowing them to develop successfully in a professional and personal sense and to realise their potential on the labour market - both in Bulgaria and abroad.

Appendix 1

Suggestions from the participants in the round table

Here we have compiled the suggestions made by employers, career counselors, representatives of youth organisations, medias, teachers and educational experts and key figures, responsible for the policies in the area of youth employment and education – participants in the presentation of the survey results.

A public discussion was organised as part of the event, following the principles of the „World cafe“⁶, whose aim was to gather specific ideas, suggestions and good practices on how to develop the employability skills of the young people. The participants discussed the most effective measures, how to create the right conditions and environment, how to use and improve the existing opportunities and the challenges we must face.

The participants in the event agreed upon the benefits and the need of such periodic (yearly) gathering of information as well as public discussions with representatives from the institutions involved in the educational policies, labour market and youth organisations. It was stated many times that a leading role in organising such initiatives and the implementation of the expected changes has the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, but also that a preliminary discussion is fundamental for the formulation of adequate policies.

The suggestions can be summarized in a few categories:

To create policies and a system for lifelong vocational guidance and career development in Bulgaria that includes a clear vision and opportunities for funding.

- **Developing career management skills** – incorporating vocational guidance in the goals of schools, VET providers and universities;
- **Career education** through integrating selectble modules or educational forms outside of the classroom (club form) in the general, professional and higher schools' programmes;
- Individual and group trainings, aimed at developing skills for career planning, managing the education process and better coordination of the variety of roles that a person has to play in his personal and professional life.
- Developing a system for vocational guidance and career counseling in high schools - with the help of the pedagogical counselors from all over the country, which have already been trained;

⁶ www.theworldcafe.com

- Providing resources – training teachers and trainers and creating educational materials (incl. web-based) to support the development of employability skills;
- Promoting the existing network of university career centers and the other forms of vocational guidance for young people in the educational, public and private sectors;
- Creating capacity for vocational guidance at the youth **information-consultancy centers**;
- Using attractive marketing strategies to provoke interest and necessity within the young people to use the vocational services;
- Making use of the funding opportunities provided by the European Union in order to provide more initiatives for career development as well as the existing resources – including Euroguidance⁷, a network of centers throughout Europe for cooperation in the field of career counseling.

To stimulate the participation in different forms of lifelong learning and to create mechanisms for validating the acquired skills.

- **Reforming the educational system:**
- Focusing on the educational results, improving the practical value and applicability of the acquired knowledge; x
- Improving the quality and the European value of the education through better qualification of the teachers and the university tutors;
- A conceptual change in the way of teaching – focusing on the studying individual, stimulating creativity, self-reliance and critical thinking;
- Stimulating project – oriented learning as well as the untraditional approach and innovation in the educational system; encouraging young people to experiment and to be active, not to be afraid of making mistakes or failing.
- **Developing the non-formal education and creating a unified system for validating competences:**
- Creating unified standards for evaluating, validating and acknowledging skills. The participants in the discussion underlined that apart from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science, here an important role is also played by the educational organisations, NGOs and employers' organisations, which could cooperate in the elaboration of pilot projects and the approval of working models for evaluation and validation of the acquired skills in a non-formal environment.

⁷ www.euroguidance.net

- **Promoting certificates for skill validation**, such as Youthpass⁸. It was introduced by the European commission in 2005 for validating the acquired education during the “Youth in Action” programme - for all the participants in youth exchange, voluntary service, trainings and seminars within the frames of the Programme.
- To increase the awareness of the opportunities provided by the certificate for validating acquired skills in a non-formal environment and its application in the process of career development among young people, teachers and employers.

- **Training the young people in voluntary service and active participation in social life:**
- Promoting the benefits of voluntary service among young people , especially in the context of acquiring valuable life experience, skills and contacts;
- Training of youth leaders.

- **Encouraging academic and labour mobility:**
- Stimulating mobility through development of a credit system and validation of competences.
- As stated in the report by The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), „Skills supply and demand in Europe: medium-term forecast up to 2020”: To ensure that people are fit for occupational mobility and further learning, education and training policies should provide occupational skills combined with key competences and transversal skills in initial, as well as continuing training. Sound labour market information and less linear approaches to learning and work combined with effective guidance and recognition of nonformally and informally acquired skills could help people to adapt more quickly to structural changes.⁹

- Popularizing the opportunities to work and study abroad through programmes for academic exchange and student practices in European companies – provided by the European Commission’s Erasmus programme, student exchange (Work and Travel) – they stimulate cultural enrichment and give an opportunity to meet other young people and teachers from all over the world, increase young people’s motivation to learn and develop, to acquire better knowledge about the chosen industry and to be informed about the opportunities to grow provided by the student mobility and to realise the role of education for a successful vocational fulfillment. In addition to that, such non-formal activities play an important role in the formation of the so called “soft skills”, which turn out to be as

⁸ www.youthpass.eu

⁹ CEDEFOP - Skills supply and demand in Europe: medium-term forecast up to 2020, p. 14, <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/EN/publications/15540.aspx>

important and valuable to the employers as the specific professional skills and knowledge. The ability to cope with an unfamiliar environment, to orientate and adapt, to take decisions, to manage yourself, to create contacts, to express your ideas clearly and with arguments (using a foreign language), to manage resources and so on.

- Promoting the European job mobility portal **Eures**¹⁰ and the Portal on Learning Opportunities throughout the European Space **Ploteus**¹¹.

Institutional support and inter-structural cooperation – creating better coordination and effective interaction (synergy) between all the institutions that work in the field of educational policies, employment and vocational guidance:

Improving the relationship between business and education:

- Deepening the dialogue between business and education through joint projects and developments;
- A more active involvement from the employers and the professional organisations in the study and formation of specific skills that are demanded by the different sectoral levels of the labour market;
- Involvement of employers in creating and assessing the quality of the educational programmes;
- Practical training at the workplace – internship programmes and apprenticeship training, coordinated with the educational programmes and providing adequate conditions for training (including mentors) as well as incentives for the trainees such as rewards, scholarships or academic credits;
- Measures (including financial ones) to encourage employers to invest in induction and ongoing trainings for their employees and to alleviate the conditions of employment of students on internships and practices;
- Involvement of the business in the vocational guidance programs at schools and universities - for example with initiatives such as visits to enterprises, visits from professionals, presentation of different professions to the students, direct observation of the daily work ("job shadowing") and lectures by professionals and others.
- Examine the experience and revive the successfully functioning practices in the recent past, such as the centers for vocational information that were part of the employment offices;
- Build a sustainable relationship between the educational system and the labour market through creating partnerships between schools and vocational information centers, financed through European programs;

¹⁰ <http://ec.europa.eu/eures>

¹¹ <http://ec.europa.eu/ploteus>

- Develop the capacity of vocational training centers and vocational information centers and stimulate their participation in joint projects with universities and schools;
- Establish mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and feedback from the business about the necessary skills on the Bulgarian labour market;
- Use the capacity of the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training;
- Improve the connections with international institutions, such as the International Labour Organisation;

Creating a supporting environment for the development of employability skills - domestic, professional, social, educational

- **Create a national database of good practices and standards** – gathering of statistical data, analyses, experience exchange, including use of "forgotten" effective practices and also creating innovations - activities that can be financed through European funds;
- Encourage the participation of parents on topics related to vocational guidance and organising **schools for parents**. Domestic environment is one of the factors that have great significance for the intellectual and career development of young people. The participants in the discussion paid special attention to the fact that it is necessary to help parents become aware of the importance of transferable skills and the need to create supportive environment for their development - by promoting curiosity and self-management, being aware of the importance of independent decision-making (especially vocational decisions), developing learning habits, promoting positive work attitude and others;
- Greater involvement of civil society organisations and social partners in the area of developing career management skills;
- Training the trainers and training youth leaders;

Appendix 2

An example: Career education in Australian schools

A different focus during the different stages of education:

- In primary school: creating an adequate picture of yourself, skills for effective interaction with others; awareness that change, development and growth are part of life
- In secondary school: a more detailed and focused engagement of the opportunities to learn with the plans for personal development and career; learning how to use career information resources, creating a picture of the labour world, economy and occupations.
- In high school: information gathering, goal setting, decision-making skills, self-management skills and career-management skills.

What are young people's benefits from career training:

- Ensuring an understanding of the role of education and learning within the frames of lifelong development;
- Positive attitude towards change, including change within the career frame, as the idea for a lifelong occupation is hopelessly outdated;
- Developing skills for making independent decisions in the future;

Appendix 3

European directions in developing employability skills

The European Commission underlines the important role of the employability skills and adopts different strategies for promoting their acquisition during the lifetime, especially from youth. Hereby part of the measures envisaged are stated:

There is a growing demand from employers for transversal key competencies;

- There is a need to ensure a better long-term match between skills supply and labour market demand through **improved skills and labour market forecasting**;
- To achieve such a long-term match all individuals need to be equipped through **basic education with the key competences and horizontal skills that** are prerequisites for the subsequent adaptation and acquisition of new specific skills which will ensure their lifelong employability;¹²

In the Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies from 2008, the Council of the European Commission determines the **lifelong acquisition of career management skills** as playing a “decisive role in empowering people to become involved in shaping their learning, training and integration pathways and their careers. Such skills, which should be maintained throughout life, are based on key competences, in particular 'learning to learn', social and civic competences - including intercultural competences - and a sense of initiative and entrepreneurship.”¹³

The Council of the European Union adopted a Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies in 2008¹⁴. The resolution reinforces the mandate that lifelong guidance currently has in European education, training and employment policies. It also reflects the key role that high quality guidance and counselling services play in supporting individual lifelong learning, career management and achievement of personal goals. The resolution identifies four politically significant priority areas:

Priority area 1 - **Encourage the lifelong acquisition of career management skills**

¹² Council Conclusions on New Skills for New Jobs from 9 March 2009 – „Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs” http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/lsa/106549.pdf

¹³ Council Resolution from 21 November 2008 – „Better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies” - http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/104236.pdf

¹⁴ Council Resolution on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/104236.pdf

- In broad terms, measures enhancing CMS give the individual an opportunity to explore career-related issues (self-knowledge, career planning, etc.) with a professional guidance counsellor, mentor, teacher or trainer.
- Differing approaches or a mixture of them, to promote the acquisition of CMS can be found in Member States. In education, CMS are usually an integral part of the curriculum: subject-based; cross-thematic and extra-curricular. Labour market approaches use diverse programmes including guidance support with traditional and online tools (for personal action and/or career plans, interactive assessments, occupational interest tests).
- As it is stated in the report "Access to success. Lifelong guidance for better learning and working in Europe", one of the main policy and strategy challenges identified by Member States for the future is the conceptualisation, **design and delivery of a CMS framework that would be easily applicable to different target groups in different contexts throughout life.**¹⁴

Businesses have a key role to play in the assessment of skills needs, and should be actively involved in this initiative. The Commission will:

- Promote dialogue between business and education and training providers, for the **establishment of partnerships to meet medium-term skills needs; and provide insight on the expectations of employers with respect to students and graduates, through qualitative prospective studies;**
- Enhance knowledge, awareness and involvement of businesses in forecasting skills needs, through an **employers' survey tool and qualitative studies on the skills needs of business**, notably SMEs;
- Support platforms of companies, training providers and recruitment specialists to **jointly design targeted training courses** and organise an annual "Partnership for skills and employment" event, to **recognise the most innovative partnerships matching skills supply and demand.**¹⁵

Strengthening the Union's capacity for forecasting and anticipation

Most Member States are already developing forecasting and anticipation tools. However, these initiatives vary significantly in scope and methodology and need to be brought together into an orchestrated effort. The resources and expertise of Cedefop and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions must be harnessed for this purpose. The Commission will:

¹⁵ New Skills for New Jobs - Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs, p. 13 - http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/com868_en.pdf

- **Establish a regular, systematic assessment of long-term supply and demand in EU labour markets up to 2020**, broken down by sectors, occupations, levels of qualification and countries. Updated projections will be published every two years starting in 2010, along with ad-hoc early-warnings of potential labour market imbalances;
- Increase EU methodological, analytical and mutual learning capacities for skills and jobs anticipation. As of 2009, the Commission will concentrate efforts under the PROGRESS and Lifelong Learning programmes to **develop new ways of measuring competences**.¹⁶

¹⁶ New Skills for New Jobs - Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs, p. 13 - http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/com868_en.pdf