

Higher Education and the Changing Labour Market

Employment structures are changing as societies progress and machines replace human beings: the number of manual workers is declining, whereas supervisory, managerial and organizational tasks are expanding, thus increasing the need for intellectual abilities in employees at all levels.

Qualification requirements are constantly rising. In industry and agriculture, the pressure of modern technologies puts a premium on those capable of understanding and coping with them. The ability to solve new problems and to take initiative is increasingly demanded by employers. In addition, the service sector which is coming to predominate in the long-industrialized countries, often calls for a general education and an understanding of the human environment that makes new demands on education. Innovative forms of development call for perceptiveness and imagination.

Universities have come to place more emphasis on training in science and technology in response to the demand for specialists familiar with the most recent technologies, capable of running increasingly complex systems. As there is no reason to think there will be any reversal of this trend, universities must continue to be in a position to meet the demand and thus must constantly adapt specialized courses of study to the need of society.

The difficulty of the task must not, however, be underestimated. There is often rivalry between research and teaching. The division of subject – matter into separate disciplines may be just what the labour market does not need and the most successful institutions are those that have evolved flexible, co-operative forms of cross-disciplinary teaching. Although many scientific universities face the question of whether to steer the best students towards research or towards industry, flexibility dictates that, wherever possible, the multi-dimensional character of higher education must be protected to ensure that graduates receive an appropriate preparation for the labour market.