

Foreign Language Skills for the European Labor Market

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Abstract

Current changes in the international labor market require a new approach to higher education, including acquisition of advanced professional foreign language skills at university. The European Commission has emphasized in its Initiative New Skills for New Jobs. Anticipating and matching labor market and skills needs: "A highly skilled and adaptable workforce both helps boost the competitiveness of the economy as a whole, and benefits employers and employees. Developing skills ensures greater employability in the long term, and can lead to better job opportunities, and wage increases...For employers, investing in skills is a way to enhance their employee motivation and productivity, and to boost capacities to innovate and adapt."

A research study was conducted to find out the perceptions of students and graduates with regard to their professional foreign language skills and matching the European labor market needs.

The paper presents the opinions of 115 respondents from the Latvian University of Agriculture on the usefulness of foreign languages learned at school for their intellectual development, support of individual language needs and future professional development. Evaluation of the levels of their professional foreign language skills acquired at university, which facilitate employment opportunities and successful work performance, has also been carried out. The article focuses on professional foreign language skills as a factor, fostering the mobility of the labor force and its flexibility. In addition, it analyses the respondents' perceptions of the usefulness of particular foreign language skills for working in local and national businesses. This research study helps evaluate and match the current needs of national businesses for particular foreign languages, as well as to anticipate the mid-term needs of the national and the European labor market.

The available resources and opportunities for developing professional foreign language skills independently by the respondents are also analyzed. Suggestions are given for changes to be introduced at university level to enhance the acquisition of foreign language skills to match the needs of the international labor market.