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From Degree to Work: How Employers Evaluate Graduate Employability, Learning Potential and Workplace Development

Prof. Dr. Maria Sytziouki

Maria Sytziouki, Greece

Abstract

Graduate employability is commonly discussed as a question of whether higher education equips graduates with the skills required by employers. This framing, however, can obscure how employability is actually judged during the transition from university to work and how capability continues to develop after recruitment. This qualitative study examines how professionals involved in personnel selection evaluate new higher-education graduates and the factors they consider important for employment and subsequent development. The study draws on structured open-ended interviews with 13 recruitment and human-resource professionals from multiple sectors in Greece. The data were analysed inductively through a Gioia-informed coding architecture. Findings indicate that formal qualifications remain important, particularly as entry thresholds, but are rarely sufficient to establish work-readiness. Employers also consider communication, collaboration, professional behaviour, prior experience, adaptability, willingness to learn and the ability to respond to changing work demands. Importantly, participants did not describe graduate skill mismatch as a uniform deficit: perceived gaps varied across roles and sectors and were also linked to employer expectations and opportunities for practical experience. Participants further emphasised that graduate capability continues to develop through workplace participation, onboarding, feedback, mentoring and supportive learning conditions. The study highlights the need to understand graduate employability as a developmental transition involving higher education, employer judgement and workplace learning rather than as a fixed set of skills possessed at graduation.

Keywords: University-To-Employment Transition; Recruitment; Skills Development; Workplace Learning; Recruitment; Skills Development; Workplace Learning