
Tertiary education and labour market in Slovenia – a case of ISSBS master students’ study and employment satisfaction

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Abstract: The paper explores issues related to tertiary education (TE) graduates’ unemployment and labour market conditions in Slovenia. The contribution of this research is an empirical analysis and a case study, which uncovers the attributes and weaknesses of TE labour market and their divergence and failure, supported by the analysis of master students’ survey. Students lack opportunities to gain new knowledge and opportunities for personal and professional development when they finally enter the labour market. Entry into the labour market is particularly difficult for female TE graduates and graduates with social sciences, business and law degree. This research contributes to greater integration and to the achievement of strategic objectives of both TE and employment policies. Thus, it can help define the appropriate TE policies, objectives and particularly measures and mechanisms, which could encourage TE institutions management to decrease graduate unemployment and contribute to greater TE success. We realise and stress that policymakers need to do more to synchronise TE and employment policies to stifle the employability of graduates.

Keywords: tertiary education; learning; study; graduates; labour market; satisfaction; unemployment; International School of the Social and Business Studies; ISSBS; Slovenia.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Skrbinjek, V. and Lesjak, D. (2020) ‘Tertiary education and labour market in Slovenia – a case of ISSBS master students’ study and employment satisfaction’, *Int. J. Innovation and Learning*, Vol. 27, No. 1, pp.79–92.

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This paper is a revised and expanded version of a paper entitled 'Tertiary education and labour market' presented at MIC 2017: Managing the Global Economy, Manastier di Treviso, Italy, 24–27 May 2017.

1 Introduction

According to European Commission for the year 2016 in the EU, 4.2 million young people aged under 25 were unemployed. Youth unemployment rate has decreased from more than 23% in 2013 to less than 19% in 2016, but is still very high. The EU youth unemployment rate is more than double the overall unemployment rate (around 19% compared with 9% in 2016) and masks big differences between countries. There is a gap of more than 30 percentage points between the member state with the lowest rate of youth unemployment (Germany at 7%) and the member states with the highest rates (Greece 47% and Spain 44%) (Youth Employment, 2018). In the age group of 15 to 24, unemployment had already increased from 10% in 2008 (3% above total unemployment which was 7%) to more than 20% in 2013 (7% above total unemployment which was slightly over 13%), however it decreased to 15.3% in 2016 (more than 5% total unemployment which was almost 10%) (Statistical Office of Republic of Slovenia, 2018).

High youth unemployment co-exists sometimes with increased difficulties in filling vacancies. Consequently, this implies the existence of labour market mismatches, due to inadequate skills, limited geographic mobility or inadequate wage conditions (Youth Employment, 2018). Bol (2015) argues that the labour mismatch occurred with the expansion of education. His research suggests that the 'way education functions in the labour market has changed' [Bol, (2015), p.117]. While the reasons for a worker to get a labour market return, is no longer the worker's absolute skill level, but his or her relative position among other jobseekers [Bol, (2015), p.107]. In Slovenia, among all temporary (fixed term) employments (which represent more than 80% of new employments in 2016), young in age group of 15–29 years account for 53% (STATOPIS, 2017). This suggests that young, mostly highly educated graduates encounter uncertain forms of employment from the beginning of their career path struggling to get a permanent employment.

A pressing issue is that of unemployment among tertiary education (TE) graduates, a degree is no longer as valuable as assurance for a safe entrance into the labour market [European Commission, (2009), p.30; Bol, 2015]. In Slovenia, the registered unemployment rate among TE graduates is still increasing as it was 1.9% in 2016 (compared to 1.6% in 2011 and 0.8% in 2006) (Marjetič and Lesjak, 2013). The TE graduates employment rate in Slovenia is 84.4% and is slightly above the EU average for 2015 (84.1%) (Evropska Komisija, 2016).

Until recently, the labour market did not concern tertiary education institutions (TEIs) as graduates were employable. Thus, they did not monitor/examine the inclusion of graduates into the labour market, or if objectives, curricula and the expected study programme graduate competences were correctly set. Very few researches are done to monitor the TE students. Schnepf (2017) research provides evidence about students who enrol in TE and dropout fare better in labour market than those who do not enrol at all.

HE policies and higher education institutions (HEIs) are not suitably prepared for the unpredictable socio-economic and labour market conditions, especially because changing enrolment policies and the study programmes offered has an influence on the workload of their human resources. Therefore, it is about finding a balance between:

- what candidates want to study
- assurance of appropriate professors for conducting study programmes
- the needs of labour market and society for appropriate (knowledge and competences of) graduates.

As UNESCO (1997) says, (inter)dependent operations and results of TE and the labour market are among one of the most important factors to highlight the issue of directing people into education and work. The field of directing people into education and work is the subject of different international legal instruments whose values are the base on which international and national education and employment policies are designed.

Objectives of the research stemmed from the needs of the society and TE labour market and theirs' analysis for the last ten years and refer to:

- unemployed TE graduates with regards to their attributes
- available job positions for TE on the standard occupational classification (SOC) by activity
- employability of TE graduates on SOC by activity
- a case study of a four-year research of master students' satisfaction with prior and current studies and job satisfaction of the employed ones.

We retrieved the data form the employment service of Slovenia and Slovenian Statistical Office (SORS) and we conducted a survey among the students of the master study programme knowledge management at the International School of the Social and Business Studies (ISSBS). The reason we choose the ISSBS and its master students to be analysed is because the ISSBS is a typical Slovenian HEIs, having master students coming from almost all regions of Slovenia, what we believe could be a good example of Slovenian students in the field of social sciences. We have distributed the questionnaire to four generations of students at ISSBS in academic years from 2013/2014 until 2016/2017.

2 Higher education graduates' unemployment in Slovenia

In 2004, Slovenia first introduced a Bologna – harmonised structure of TE. When the first students finished the new Bologna programmes, it was in the time when economic crisis

also hit the Slovenian economy and consequently the labour market (Farčnik and Domadenik, 2012; Skrbinjek et al., 2018). The study of Farčnik and Domadenik (2012) estimated the probability of employment in 2008 and 2009 for the new Bologna graduates compared to pre-Bologna graduates and found a statistically significant negative effect for the Bologna graduates. The statistical data support their claims as the share of unemployed people with at least TE has grown since 2006 when 9.4% of 78,303 were unemployed compared to 2016 when 17.7% of 99,615 were unemployed. Table 1 illustrates that the share of unemployed people with TE as well as the share of working age population with TE is increasing yearly. However, the share of registered unemployed with TE among working age population was highest in 2014 (7.3%), and has reduced by one percentage point in 2016 (6.3%) (Lesjak and Skrbinjek, 2017).

Figure 1 Unemployed TE graduates by gender (see online version for colours)



Source: Statistical office of Republic of Slovenia

Number of registered unemployed people with TE increased the most in 2009 (by 55.9% compared to 2008 or by roughly 3,600 persons) and reached its maximum in 2013 when there were almost 19,500 persons with TE unemployed (see Table 1). Since then the numbers declined to 17,651 persons in 2016.

The fact that the number and the share of registered unemployed graduates increased in the last ten years is more or less expected due to three main reasons:

- 1 changes in the TE structure due to Bologna process implementation
- 2 the economic crisis which hit Slovenia to a great extent (–7.8% drop in 2009 (SORS))
- 3 the big increase of graduates with TE among all working age population – the number of graduates increased by more than two-thirds from 2006 to 2016, yet the number of working age population increased only for 3.3%.

What is unexpected is the fact that the percentage of registered unemployed with TE degree among working age population with TE is relatively stable and it varies from 3%

to 7%. When comparing with the registered unemployed with the primary education, it varies from approx. 12% to close to 30%, despite the fact that we have more than 1/3 of working age population with the TE.

The transition to the labour market is particularly difficult for women with TE. Two-thirds of all unemployed TE graduates are females (Figure 1). This is mainly due to the study fields, which are more popular among women and for which unemployment rate is much higher than for the others.

Table 1 Registered unemployed people with TE and working age population

Year	Registered unemployed			Working age population		
	All	with TE	%	All	with TE	%
2006	78,303	7,391	9.4	911,306	186,817	20.5
2007	68,411	6,963	10.2	932,762	196,813	21.1
2008	66,239	6,435	9.7	996,000	238,000	23.9
2009	96,672	10,030	10.4	981,000	247,000	25.2
2010	110,021	12,791	11.6	996,000	253,000	25.4
2011	112,754	14,708	13.0	936,000	265,000	28.3
2012	118,061	16,871	14.3	924,000	276,000	29.9
2013	124,015	19,491	15.7	906,000	286,000	31.6
2014	119,458	19,006	15.9	917,000	291,000	31.7
2015	113,076	18,852	16.7	917,000	308,000	33.6
2016	99,615	17,651	17.7	941,818	316,000	33.6
2017	NA	14,812	NA	NA	NA	NA

Year	Registered unemployed with (%)		
	Tertiary education	Secondary education	Primary education
2006	4.1	8.6	16.7
2007	3.8	6.9	14.0
2008	3.2	5.9	12.6
2009	4.1	8.1	18.3
2010	5	9.6	22.2
2011	5.9	10.7	24.5
2012	6.2	10.7	26.0
2013	7.2	11.9	28.4
2014	7.3	12.8	26.4
2015	6.8	11.8	26.8
2016	6.3	10.6	26.7
2017	NA	NA	NA

Note: NA – not available.

Source: Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS), Statistical office of Republic of Slovenia

In 2016, as in years gone by on the labour market, the most registered unemployed with at least TE degree came from the following study areas (KLASIUS-P):

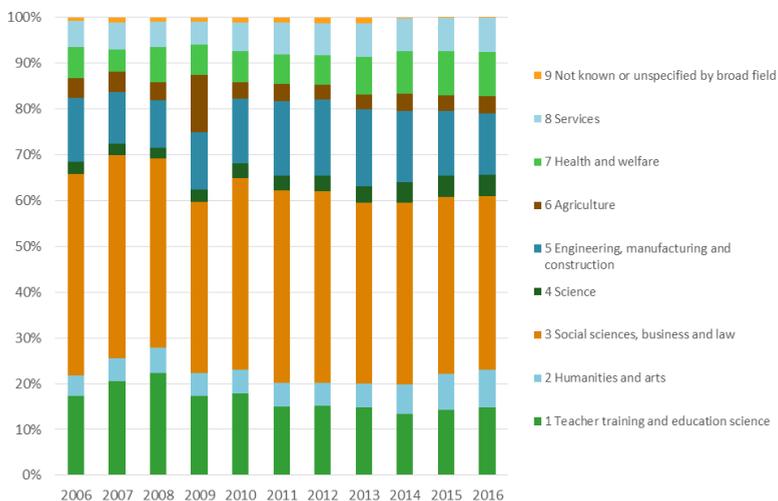
- 3 – social sciences, business and law 43.2%
- 5 – engineering, manufacturing and construction 14.5%
- 2 – humanities and arts 11.0%
- 1 – teacher training and Education science 9.8%

The smallest share of the unemployed graduates was in area 6 – agriculture, forestry, fishery and veterinary 3.7%.

That to a great extent reflects the fact that the most popular study area are social sciences business and law (27.8% of all students were studying in this study area in 2016/2017 and 34.6% of all graduates in 2016 were graduates from this study area).

Considering also the number of employed persons among those who were previous registered as unemployed with TE (Figure 2), it can be observed that the numbers are increasing yearly. In 2016, there were 17,762 persons with TE who found an employment – which is 22% increase compared to year 2013 (14,460 persons) and more than double increase since 2006 (8,735 persons).

Figure 2 Share of employed among registered unemployed TE graduates by study fields (see online version for colours)



Source: Statistical office of Republic of Slovenia

As we can see from Figure 2, the largest share of employed among registered unemployed TE graduates belong to the social sciences, business and law study field, more precisely business, management and economics. The most wanted are second

cycle/master graduates (or equivalent) comprising 47% of all employed among registered unemployed TE graduates.

3 A case of ISSBS master students' study and employment satisfaction

3.1 Survey analysis

The second part of our research is based on a quantitative analysis of why students choose to study and how satisfied are they with their obtained study and current job. We have done a four-year monitoring of second year master students enrolled in study programme knowledge management on their study and job satisfaction by a questionnaire. Altogether, we received 151 responses, from ultimately 205 students, which is a 73.7% response rate. The numbers of students participating in the survey were 36, 47, 29 and 39 in academic years from 2013/2014 until 2016/2017, respectively.

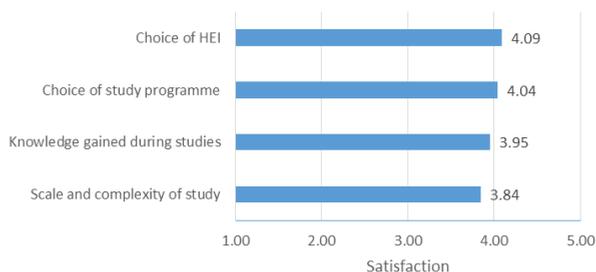
3.2 Descriptive statistics

The majority of students are female (86.2%) and the most frequent age group are students aged 30 years or less (51%), followed by 36 years and over (41.1%). Students were asked to list the type of their previous education (academic or professional) and HEI. The majority of students (75.5%) were previously enrolled in a professional bachelor programme and 44.3% of students have previously studied at ISSBS.

3.3 Findings

The questionnaire was designed in the way to explore their satisfaction with obtained level of education (bachelor degree) and current employment status and then link their employment status with obtained education.

Figure 3 Average satisfaction with obtained study experiences (see online version for colours)



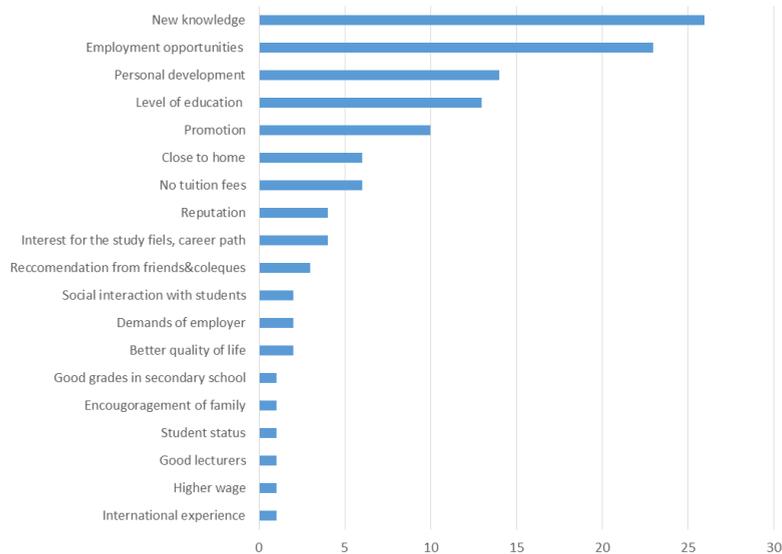
Note: 5-level Likert scale: 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree.

First, we asked students how satisfied were they with the study experiences at their bachelor level. Figure 3 shows the results of their average responses. Students are mostly satisfied with the choice of HEI they selected (average value 4.09) and with the study

programme (average value 4.04). On the other hand, students' satisfaction is lower when considering the knowledge they gained and *scale and complexity of study*.

The next, question was an open-ended question focusing on the reasons why students choose to undertake further education after completing secondary school. The results show that students seek for 'new knowledge' as the most frequent reason to continue with their studies and to increase their 'employment opportunities' as the second frequent reason. Other frequent answers were also: personal development, level of education gained and promotional reasons.

Figure 4 Why did you choose to study? (see online version for colours)



Then, we asked students whether *they are currently employed*. We found that 53.3% of surveyed students (or 81 students) are employed. We found that 79% of students, aged 30 years or less and only 12% students, aged 31 or more, are unemployed (Table 2). It is common for Slovenian students under age 30 to prolong their study after the 1st cycle and not seek for employment, while students aged 30 years or more have already years of employment experiences and want to progress professionally.

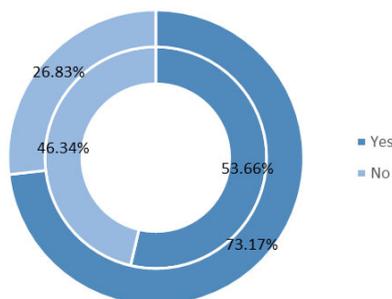
Table 2 Age and employment matrix

Employment	Aged 30 years or less		Aged 31 or more		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No	61	40.4	9	6.0	70	46.4
Total	77	51.0	74	49.0	151	100.0
Yes	16	10.6	65	43.0	81	53.6

Next, we asked students, who were employed, additional questions:

- 1 Does your work require the level of education you have obtained?
- 2 Does your work coincide with your field of study?

Figure 5 Link between education and employment (see online version for colours)



Notes: Inner circle: does your work require the level of education you have gained?

Outer circle: does your work coincide with your field of study?

The results shown in Figure 5 provide information that almost three-quarters of employed students work in the field they have studied but only slightly more than half of them are working at positions, which require/matches the level of their' obtained education.

Table 3 Work characteristics – level of education and field of study matrix

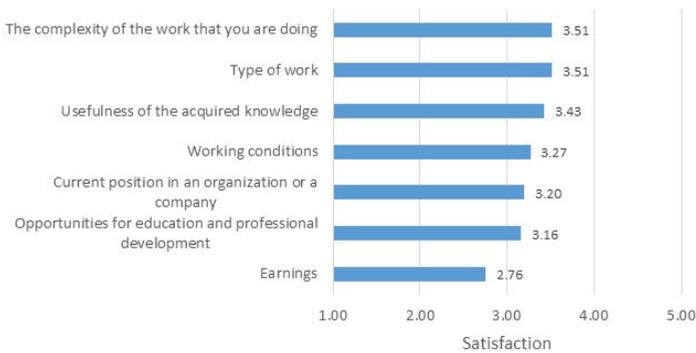
<i>Does your work require the level of education you have gained</i>	<i>Does your work coincide with your field of study?</i>					
	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Yes	38	46.3	6	7.3	44	53.6
No	22	26.8	16	19.5	38	46.3
Total	60	73.2	22	26.8	82	100.0

In Table 3 we find that 46.3% of student whose work requires the level of obtained education also coincides with the field they studied, and on the other hand, 19.5% of students whose work does not require the level of education they have gained does not work in the field they have studied. We can see that the employed graduates believe that their job/work does not require the obtained education to a much greater extent compared to those, whose job/work does match the obtained level of education, yet there exists a mismatch between what they study and what they work.

Figure 6 shows results of their satisfaction with the current job. Average values are profoundly lower compared to satisfaction with their study experience. The most sensible variable are the earnings they receive (average value is below 3), 43.9% of students marked that they are dissatisfied with their earnings. They do not show adequate satisfaction levels with the opportunities for education and professional development (average value 3.16) as well as with current position in their organisation or a company (average value 3.2). The highest satisfaction levels are shown for type of work and

complexity of work they are doing (average value 3.51). So, we could conclude, that their rather moderate (dis)satisfaction with the current job might be one of the key motivators, they go to study on a master level.

Figure 6 Average satisfaction with current job (see online version for colours)



Note: 5-level Likert scale: 1 – strongly disagree to 5 –strongly agree.

Next, results of a question on *if they had another opportunity to make a decision about their choice of study, would they decide the same* indicate that 70% of students answered, that they would make the same decision, while alarmingly 30% of students would decide differently. This question was additionally tested with Pearson's correlation coefficient for significant correlation with employment status. We assumed that *students who are employed would make the same decision about their study*. On contrary, we found that there is no significant correlation (p-value: 0.009, sig: 0.916) between opportunity to reconsider their decision about study and employment status. This means that current employment status is not correlated with their choice of study. As we can see in Table 4, approx. one third of all students, currently not employed, would not change their choice of study and 16% of all students, currently employed, would reconsider their choice of study (Table 4).

Table 4 Employment and opportunity to reconsider the choice of study matrix

Employment	If you had another opportunity to make a decision about their choice of study, would you decide the same?					
	Yes		No		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Yes	55	38.2	23	16.0	78	54.2
No	46	31.9	20	13.9	66	45.8
Total	101	70.1	43	29.9	144	100.0

Note: In the matrix only valid answers are considered, there are seven missing values.

4 Discussion

In our paper, we focused on analysing the data on unemployed graduates with TE in Slovenia. We found that in the last ten years, the number of graduates with TE has been steadily increasing and the rate of unemployment as well, despite the fact that the number of unemployed TE graduates is decreasing. This leads us to the fact that we have already exceeded the number of TE graduates, which the current labour market can assimilate. When we take a closer look, we can observe that majority of unemployed TE graduates are women, aged 25 to 39 years and with a social science degree, what all implies to a structural unemployment problem. Yet, on the other hand, most employed TE graduates are from the social sciences study area – more precisely from the business, management and economics.

Our case study confirmed the above findings. In our research, half of the master students were employed, however, only half of the employed are working at positions which require the level of education they have and 30% do not work in the field they have studied. Moreover, the study experience is perceived more positive by students compared to employment experience; therefore they prefer to continue with their study at the master level. We could say that the specifically expectations of students with obtained economics and business degree do not meet with their labour market expectations. Students were in general more satisfied with their study experience and less satisfied with their current job experience. The mismatch between knowledge and competences graduates gained during their studies and the demands of employers can be confirmed through the case study. Students feel dissatisfied the most with the earnings for their work. Majority of students who are employed are aged 31 or more, while 88% students aged 30 years or less are not employed and are only at the beginning of their career path. The second important aspect concerns the opportunities in organisations and companies to gain new knowledge and to progress professionally. Students lack the opportunities to increase their personal and professional development; therefore they seek new knowledge in TE, prolonging their study experience at the master's level. Thus, increasing the employment opportunities is one of the most frequent reason for students to decide for continuing education at the tertiary level.

Kostoglou and Paloukis (2007) argued that even before the economic crisis the majority of graduates were not well prepared for real world's working conditions and therefore they could not select jobs related to their educational background. The growing gap between graduate's competences and labour market needs calls upon 'a global' redesigning of the study programmes (Raissi, 2018). This includes teaching and learning methods, learning activities, quality assurance and monitoring processes of assessment and a review of the progression of students towards expected and desired employability skills from enrolment to graduation (Cavanagh et al., 2015; Memiyanty et al., 2010) and nevertheless using the information technology for effective management (Bubel and Cichoń, 2017). The importance to provide a clear study programme profile and identifying key graduates' learning outcomes and competences is crucial for curriculum designers (Skrbinjek and Dermal, 2016) to overcome the negative trend of youth unemployment.

5 Implications and conclusions

The current and future conditions of the labour market are factors, which educational policy makers and curriculum designers need to take into account when designing the development and (annual) offers of study programmes and the number of enrolment places, what could be taken into account regarding the current conditions much easier than the future ones.

The findings of the research stress the need and therefore contribute to greater integration and to the achievement of strategic objectives of both TE and employment policies. Thus, it can help define the appropriate TE policies, objectives and particularly measures and mechanisms, which could encourage TEIs management to decrease graduate unemployment and contribute to bigger TE efficiency.

The main contribution of this research is the empirical analysis, which uncovers the attributes and weaknesses of TE labour market and their divergence, incoherence and failure, supported by a case study (a study and employment satisfaction survey) among typical master students in the field of social sciences in Slovenia.

The development of study programmes, number of enrolment places and offers of TEIs are currently based mostly on the following key factors:

- 1 Spatial personnel and other TEIs capabilities. Human resources are proving to be an important factor in relation to social change in the quality of personnel and their motivation for creating work, which is dependent on the appropriateness and/or inappropriateness of working conditions and characteristics of TE teacher/researcher employment.
- 2 Available funding and attributes of financing education at TEIs.
- 3 Interest of candidates to study, which to a certain extent is reflected in demographic movements, illustrated as well as in our case study, which illuminated the mismatch between the TE system on the one side and expectations of employed students and their main motive to study on the other. Their motives are alarming as they demonstrate weaknesses of the labour market – not enough opportunities to gain new knowledge to progress professionally in their working environment.

As the results of our research show, far more should be done to synchronise:

- TE policies, their objectives and measures and/or mechanisms
- employment policies, their objectives and measures and/or mechanisms
- TEIs management, which leads to the achievement of TE policies and objectives on an institutional level.

Due to this, the TE enrolment policy should be seriously reconsidered, especially in study areas, which the labour market needs or does not need. Considering our findings, designing enrolment policies should essentially be within the context of cooperation between TEIs, employers and government as well as annual tenders for TE enrolment, which TEIs set forward to government to confirm. In addition, enrolment policies should be based on data and trends in TE and on the labour market characteristics, the strategic direction of the country as well as long-term development projections of Slovenia and the labour market.

The above-recognised implications would definitely contribute to better employability of graduates, satisfaction of social needs, higher quality of TE and better use of (public) funds in Slovenia as well as in other emerging and established markets.

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