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## THE IMPORTANCE OF SOFT SKILLS IN THE CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY ECONOMIC RELATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

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Graduates' labour market success increasingly relies on soft skills, best developed through international study experiences. With the changing economic landscape post-COVID-19, adapting to various cultures and environments is valued by employers. This is crucial for university internationalization. The study focuses on how skills from international mobility align with EU labour market needs, particularly for Prague University of Economics and Business's International Relations students. Research included surveys and interviews with employers, yielding recommendations for the Czech educational system and underscoring international mobility's importance for student skills.


Key words: international economic relations, tertiary education, employability, international mobility, soft skills, labour market

JEL: I23, I25, F69

### 1 INTRODUCTION

In modern times, when international economic relations are dynamically changing and adapting to new global challenges, it is necessary to look for factors that promote long-term economic growth and social stability of countries. A significant issue in contemporary economic relations is undoubtedly the demand for knowledge in industry and services. This trend can be observed globally, where the need for skilled and adaptable workers is increasingly emphasised.

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A country's education policy is an important aspect because how a population is educated determines how effectively it will respond to economic challenges. Tertiary education, which prepares students for future professions, is key in this respect. Their preparation must be up-to-date, and therefore, universities must respond flexibly to changing labour market needs.

The recent COVID-19 pandemic, which has precipitated many changes in the work environment, also plays a role. Although technical skills (hard skills) are still valued, more emphasis is now being placed on soft skills. Adaptability, problem-solving, initiative or logical thinking are becoming essential.

Many of these skills can be developed through study abroad experiences. International mobility, through which students gain invaluable social and intercultural experience, is the key to higher employability and better adaptability in the labour market.

Universities, especially the Faculty of International Relations of the Prague University of Economics and Business (FIR), try to promote international mobility of their students, as this experience is increasingly valued in today's globalised world. Research in this area can help to understand better how graduates with international experience are perceived in the EU labour market.

Given the above, the article focuses on a critical assessment of how international mobility affects the readiness of tertiary graduates in the Czech Republic to enter the labour market from the perspective of potential employers. The intention is also to contribute to the scholarly and societal debate on how tertiary education, especially in the field of international economics and international relations, can better prepare students for professional life.

The research combines literature analysis with primary questionnaire research and in-depth interviews with potential employers. This combination provides a comprehensive view of the issue and enables the formulation of recommendations for higher education institutions to better respond to current labour market needs.

The aim of the paper is to contribute to the understanding which competencies acquired through international mobility in tertiary education increase the chances of graduates on the labour market, and whether these competences are in demand by the labour market. The article fulfills its goal by thoroughly analyzing existing sources and conducting primary qualitative research, mainly using a questionnaire survey, supplemented by in-depth interviews.

In accordance with the aim of the paper, the following research question is formulated: What is the impact of international student mobility on the quality and readiness of tertiary education graduates in the Czech Republic to enter the labour market - from the perspective of entities cooperating with the FIR?

## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Gawrycka (2020) and Pabian (2011) highlight a significant gap between the competencies imparted by higher education and those required in the labour market, emphasizing the need for education systems in Europe, including the Czech Republic, to adapt to practical skills and employer needs. Gawrycka's survey among Polish recruiters and students revealed the importance of aligning graduate competencies with labour market demands, while Pabian noted that despite a theory-centric education approach, Czech graduates fare well in employment outcomes, underscoring the potential benefits of aligning education more closely with market needs.

Tertiary education's employability depends on aligning graduate skills with market demands, a need emphasized by the European Union's Bologna Process (Nada 2006). The process highlights the importance of lifelong learning and quality assurance in education, underscoring the role of market orientation in the sustainability of higher education. While Suleman (2018) notes the challenges in pinpointing specific employability skills, the emphasis remains on the importance of soft skills in education policy. Bracht (2006) underscores this by illustrating the positive impact of the Erasmus mobility program on professional development, where participants gain both international competencies and soft skills, enhancing employability.

Those who participated in international mobility during their studies also reported that this part of their educational process had a positive impact on their first job. The evaluation study also confirmed findings from previous surveys that former Erasmus students perceive their study abroad experience as beneficial for international mobility due to their international competencies and that they are more prepared to work on assignments with an international element. Other actors and observers interviewed believe that Erasmus also contributes to general career development (Bracht 2006, p. xxii).

In his survey of experts (employers), Bracht (2006, p. 217) also found that "they (have) a positive view of Erasmus students. The academic knowledge of Erasmus students on their return from a study abroad placement is considered by 73% to be better than that of students who did not participate in mobility, and 82% consider them better prepared for future employment and work. In addition, almost all experts report that Erasmus students have higher social-communication competencies at the end of their studies than non-participants, and around three quarters believe that they excel in problem-solving and people management competencies." Moreover, the study confirms that those who have been mobile as part of the learning process are significantly more prepared to work on international projects than those who have not participated in mobility.

López (2019) and Lazíková et al. (2022) emphasize the value of intercultural competence, highlighting how international experiences, such as studying or working abroad, foster cultural fluency and enrich soft skills like empathy and understanding of

diversity. These competencies, acquired through international mobility, are increasingly recognized as vital in the global labour market and can provide a competitive edge for graduates. Hagan (2011) further notes that such mobility experiences are not just beneficial but are often integral to skill development, offering significant advantages in the labour market.

Kahanec and Kralikova (2011) and Levent (2016) discuss the significance of international student mobility as a response to globalization, highlighting its role in enhancing the quality and international appeal of higher education institutions. This mobility not only enriches the students' educational experience but also contributes economically to the host countries. The Europe 2020 strategy underscores the importance of quality education in fostering economic development and employability. Hanushek and Woessmann (2012, 2015) further emphasize the critical role of competencies in economic development, noting a mismatch between the skills provided by tertiary education and those demanded by the modern labour market. This gap, influenced by rapid technological and societal changes, challenges the ability of educational systems to adequately prepare students for future careers.

Gilbert (2014) and Voogt et al. (2013) address the challenge current education systems face in equipping graduates with 21st-century skills. They emphasize the need for integrating digital literacy and other key competencies such as collaboration, communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking into educational curricula and practices. However, they observe a gap in the effective implementation of these skills in education, attributed to factors like inadequate curriculum integration and teacher training. Habets et al. (2020) also highlight the importance of these "21st Century Skills," underlining their role in achieving sustainable development goals as outlined by the United Nations (2022). This alignment of education with broader societal and developmental goals is essential for shaping graduates who are well-equipped for contemporary challenges.

Habets et al. (2020) and Tomlinson (2017) stress the importance of aligning higher education with labour market demands, highlighting the need for continuous enhancement of 21st-century skills. They emphasize the growing demand for 'work-ready' educational programs that prepare students with a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes beyond traditional academic learning. This approach is critical in a labour market characterized by uncertainty and the need for adaptability in careers. Habets et al. further advocate for the ongoing revision of training programs and curricula to ensure they meet evolving market needs, urging stakeholders in education to closely monitor and respond to labour market trends.

The World Bank (2011) and the World Economic Forum's (2023a, 2023b) Education 4.0 initiative emphasize the need for education systems, particularly in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, to focus on actual learning outcomes rather than just educational inputs. They highlight a growing demand for graduates who possess not only technical

and professional knowledge but also behavioral and soft skills. This shift towards competency-based education reflects the evolving needs of the labour market, with an emphasis on skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability. Wilkie (2019), in her study for the Society for Human Resource Management, reinforces this by noting that many employers find a significant skills gap in recent graduates, particularly in soft skills like innovation, creativity, and communication. These findings suggest a need for education systems to evolve in a way that prepares students for the challenges of a rapidly changing job market, emphasizing skills that are less likely to be automated.

Cook (2020, p. 29) highlights the uncertain landscape regarding the specific 'sustainability skills' required in the modern workforce and the need for closer collaboration between educational institutions and the business sector to address this. He identifies key skills gaps in graduates, such as lateral thinking, systems thinking, creativity, negotiation, presentation skills, and professional confidence. These gaps suggest a need for educational programs to more effectively integrate skills that align with both academic and industry requirements. Additionally, the World Bank's research (2011, p. 47) underscores the challenge of accurately assessing whether graduates possess the skills and competencies demanded by the labour market. Their findings point to the importance of international assessments and comparisons in evaluating the effectiveness of education systems in preparing students for the workforce, with specific reference to initiatives undertaken in the Czech Republic for measuring student learning outcomes.

The OECD (2017) report stresses the importance of adapting educational curricula to the evolving social and economic landscape, including technological changes, workforce dynamics, and global trends. Employers highlight a significant skills gap in areas such as teamwork, adaptability, and communication. To effectively respond to these changing labour market needs, higher education institutions must utilize tools like labour force surveys, employer surveys, and graduate feedback to identify and integrate the skills in demand. However, it is noted that in the Czech Republic, such practices are not as prevalent as in other OECD countries, indicating a need for more active engagement and data collection to align educational offerings with labour market requirements.

A survey by the Society for Human Resource Management (2019) highlights a persistent skills gap in the labour market, with recruiters citing deficits in problem-solving, critical thinking, innovation, creativity, and communication skills. This gap underscores the growing challenge of finding qualified candidates, with many organizations reporting a worsening situation over time. To address this, there is a trend towards employers investing in training programs and seeking collaboration with educational institutions. Allen (2011, p. 277) points out the importance of internships in developing competencies but warns against over-reliance on such experiences. Furthermore, studies suggest that international experiences, including study abroad programs, are highly beneficial in equipping graduates with the skills required for

globally oriented careers. Valentine and Keating (2020) emphasize the value of extra-curricular activities and work experience in enhancing students' employability, as employers often value practical experience and soft skills alongside academic knowledge.

Studies by Lazíková et al. (2022) and Lisá, Hannelová, and Newman (2019) focus on the skills gap in Slovakia, highlighting a disparity between the skills graduates possess and those demanded by employers, particularly in soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and adaptability. This gap suggests a need for universities to integrate more practical learning methods and receive regular feedback from graduates to align educational programs with labour market needs. Additionally, these studies indicate a growing demand for soft skills in the face of technological advancements and societal changes. Low et al. (2016, p. 53) suggest that higher education should incorporate practical case studies, internships, and interactive group work into their curricula to foster these essential non-technical skills, thereby enhancing graduates' employability and meeting employer expectations.

### **3 METHODS AND DATA**

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, underpinned by an extensive literature review and primary qualitative research methods. The research is primarily aimed at exploring the nuanced impacts of international student mobility on labour market readiness, with a specific focus on graduates from the Faculty of International Relations (FIR). The methodology is designed to uncover various perspectives on this issue, integrating insights from the literature review informed by the Education 4.0 framework. This framework, reflecting the need for educational competencies that balance cognitive, analytical, intrapersonal, and physical skills along with values and information processing abilities, guides the study's approach.

The literature review critically analyzes scholarly work on the alignment of tertiary education skills with labour market requirements, paying particular attention to the role of international mobility and the development of soft skills. This process helps to identify gaps between traditional tertiary education skills and employer requirements, especially in areas like soft skills and practical experiences. These insights not only inform the study but also contribute to a broader understanding of how education can align with evolving labour market demands.

The primary research component of this study is composed of a qualitative questionnaire and subsequent in-depth interviews, both of which were designed by the author. The questionnaire, which consists of 40 questions, draws inspiration from existing questionnaires and studies on international mobility, notably those by the European Commission's Mobility Tool and the insights from Almeida (2020) regarding student mobility in Europe. The aim of the questionnaire is to assess perceptions regarding the benefits of international mobility in education among students, graduates, and employers. The reference to the Mobility Tool is particularly relevant, as it was a web-based platform

used for collaboration, management, and reporting on mobility projects under the Lifelong Learning Program (LLP) and the European Commission's Erasmus+ program. This feedback is essential in shaping future educational programs and strategies. Distributed via the Microsoft Forms platform, the questionnaire includes a variety of question types such as Likert scales, binary (yes/no) options, and open-ended questions. This approach ensures a comprehensive and unbiased collection of responses.

The survey targeted individuals and entities associated with FIR, specifically focusing on those involved in work placements and internships, including direct representatives from companies and HR professionals who had interacted with FIR interns. This selection ensured the collection of relevant and industry-specific data, particularly regarding satisfaction with FIR graduates, the importance of specific skills for university graduates in the workplace, experiences with employees who had international exposure during university studies, and opinions on collaboration mechanisms between universities and industries/organizations.

Supplementing the questionnaire, follow-up in-depth interviews averaging around 30 minutes were conducted with a subset of respondents. These interviews, carried out both in-person and via online platforms like MS Teams, were designed to delve deeper into the questionnaire results, clarifying responses to open-ended questions and gathering detailed insights into specific answers. All interviews were recorded with the respondents' permission, transcribed in Microsoft Word, and analyzed by grouping themes. This provided a rich exploration of the perspectives and experiences of the respondents, deepening the study's insights.

In terms of data analysis, responses to the questionnaire were analyzed using Excel software, employing descriptive statistical tools due to the nature of the data. This analysis enabled a detailed examination of the data, highlighting patterns and trends relevant to the research questions.

#### **4 RESULTS**

In a comprehensive questionnaire involving 33 participants from various organization sizes and sectors, insights were gathered on the effectiveness of university education in preparing graduates for the labour market. The survey revealed a diverse representation, with participants from both public and private sectors and different organization sizes, ensuring a broad perspective. It highlighted key areas where tertiary education succeeds and falls short, specifically in developing skills like leadership, stress management, data analysis, and problem-solving. The survey also delved into the impact of international mobility on student competencies, the effectiveness of university training in skill development, and the necessity of stronger university-industry partnerships. This analysis presents a nuanced view of the current state of graduate preparedness for the workforce and offers concrete suggestions for enhancing the alignment of educational programs with labour market needs.

Table 1: Questionnaire results summary

<b>Category</b>	<b>Detail</b>
<b>Respondent demographics</b>	
Total participants	33
Organization size	< 250 employees: 55%, > 250 employees: 39%
Sector	Public: 48%, Private: 45%
Average new graduates hired	6.4 annually
HR Department representation	18%
<b>Skills and education</b>	
General satisfaction with skills	Yes
Areas of lower satisfaction	Leadership, stress management, data analysis, problem-solving
Important graduate skills	Collaboration, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, time management, adaptability, language skills
University education improvements	Practical/theoretical integration, critical thinking, technical skills, language skills, practical learning, business training
<b>International mobility</b>	
Value rating	4.28/5
Skills gained	Adaptability, intercultural communication, foreign language, independence, problem-solving
Additional skills gained	Personal maturity, open mind, effective time management
<b>University training effectiveness</b>	
Effectiveness in skill development	Affirmative: 27%, Insufficient: 21%, Uncertain: 48%
Average effectiveness rating	3.38/5
<b>Industry-university collaboration</b>	
Advocacy for partnerships	91%
Collaboration suggestions	Internships: 39%, Guest Lectures: 25%, Curriculum Development: 16%, Job Fairs: 12%
<b>Innovations for tertiary institutions</b>	
Suggestions	Crowdfunding, intensive language courses, critical thinking development, team-based tasks, industry cooperation, practical learning emphasis
<b>Educational focus areas</b>	
Important areas	Practical skills, technologies, entrepreneurship, innovation, industry trends
Lesser focus	Ethics and social responsibility: 6%
<b>Collaboration with FIR</b>	
Engagement	Regular: 55%
Benefits	Talent identification, career insights, intern potential

Source: author's own processing.



The survey garnered responses from 33 participants, ensuring a diverse representation across different organization sizes: 55% from organizations with fewer than 250 employees and 39% from larger entities. This diversity adds to the sample's comprehensiveness. Sector-wise, the respondents were almost evenly split between the public (48%) and private (45%) sectors. In terms of direct influence on recruitment and selection processes, a notable portion of respondents (18%) were from HR departments.

When asked about the necessary skills for graduates, respondents generally expressed satisfaction with the current skill levels. However, they noted lower satisfaction in areas such as leadership, stress management, data analysis, and problem-solving abilities, indicating areas where tertiary education might need to focus more to meet the labour market demands.

When queried about potential improvements in university education, 70% of respondents did not identify specific areas for enhancement. However, 27% suggested several improvements, including enhanced integration of practical experiences with theoretical learning, a greater emphasis on developing critical and analytical thinking skills, improved language skills, an increased focus on practical learning through real business cases and case studies, and the inclusion of business negotiation and sales training to equip students with essential skills for the business environment.

Respondents highlighted key skills for university graduates, including collaboration, teamwork, communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, time management, adaptability, language skills, reliability, and independence. A notable concern was the lack of presentation skills, negotiation abilities, and confidence under pressure, particularly in challenging situations like client meetings or public discussions.

Furthermore, the survey revealed a strong consensus on the value of international mobility during university studies. Participants rated the development of intercultural communication and adaptability in uncertain environments highly, averaging 4.28 out of 5 stars. These experiences were deemed crucial in enhancing professional skills and workplace adaptability, demonstrating the significant impact of international exposure on graduate competencies.

However, there are also areas in which respondents expressed neutrality. It is particularly noteworthy that 17% of respondents did not express a clear position on the importance of critical thinking and complex problem-solving skills. This suggests that while international mobility can be a valuable experience for students, it is also important that universities and collaborating bodies continue to seek optimal ways to further develop and strengthen these key skills during their studies and work placements.

The responses of the FIR collaborators show that the five skills that graduates report as having been acquired during their studies or internships abroad correspond exactly to the five skills that they identify as outcomes of international mobility. These skills include adaptability and flexibility, intercultural communication skills, advanced

foreign language skills, independence and autonomy, and the ability to solve problems in unfamiliar environments.

Also of interest are the additional insights that respondents shared in their open-ended responses. Other valuable skills that students can gain during international mobility, according to them, include personal maturity, an open mind, and effective time management.

On the other hand, respondents observed that students who have not participated in international mobility often do not show such strong openness, independence, and curiosity. They also mention that these students may have less experience in coping with stress under time pressure, proactivity, and openness to a diversity of cultures and opinions, which is sometimes referred to as a 'world citizen' mentality.

The survey results indicated mixed opinions on the effectiveness of university training in developing key skills: only 27% of respondents affirmed the university's effectiveness in this area, 21% viewed it as insufficient, and 48% were uncertain.

A significant 91% of respondents advocated for stronger partnerships between universities and industry to better align student skill acquisition with labour market needs. Suggestions for enhancing university-industry collaboration included prioritizing internship programs, incorporating guest lectures from industry professionals, and involving respondents in curriculum development to directly influence the skill sets taught. Job fairs and career events were also recommended as valuable networking opportunities for students.

Respondents proposed several innovations for tertiary institutions to enhance student readiness for the labour market. These included implementing crowdfunding projects to give students practical experience in financing and marketing, offering intensive foreign language courses, focusing on developing critical thinking skills to enhance decision-making capabilities, integrating team-based tasks and thesis projects to foster collaboration and coordination skills, increasing cooperation with industry to align education with current market needs, and shifting towards more practical learning, emphasizing real-life applications over theoretical knowledge.

The majority (87%) of respondents emphasized the importance of practical skills and new technologies in education, viewing them as crucial for labour market preparedness. Other significant areas highlighted for educational focus included entrepreneurship, innovation, and staying abreast of industry trends. Interestingly, a minority (6%) viewed ethics and social responsibility as less critical in the curriculum, suggesting these might be better addressed in general education or informal settings.

Regarding collaboration with FIR, 55% of the entities regularly engage in activities like job fairs and advisory roles, finding value in this cooperation for talent identification and offering career insights to students.

Table 2: Proposed collaboration strategies

<b><i>Collaboration strategy</i></b>	<b><i>Description</i></b>
Dialogue	The focus is on starting and maintaining dialogue with these actors. The FIR should lead in establishing and maintaining relationships with relevant organisations, enabling it to understand their specific needs and expectations better.
Feedback	FIR should integrate feedback from companies and organisations into its programmes and strategies. This feedback can provide valuable suggestions for adjusting training programmes to reflect the industry's needs better.
Communication	Communication should not only be regular but also continuous. This could mean organising regular meetings and visits between the FIR and industry, setting up discussion platforms for the exchange of ideas and opinions, and other forms of regular contact where the expectations of both sides can be aligned.
Proactive approach	FIR should show a proactive approach to interacting and collaborating with the industry. Instead of passively waiting for opportunities, the FIR should actively seek partnerships, collaboration and knowledge exchange opportunities. This may include looking for potential partners, submitting project proposals or finding new ways to engage with industry initiatives.
Transparency and openness	The Faculty should be open and transparent about its intentions when communicating with the industry. This means openly sharing its goals, expectations and plans. It should also identify and discuss key and relevant topics that are mutually beneficial and attractive.
Workshops and meetings	The FIR should organise workshops and meetings with industry to discuss potential opportunities for cooperation and partnerships. These meetings offer a platform to exchange ideas, discuss potential opportunities and identify areas for further collaboration. These meetings can also provide an opportunity for FIR to showcase its research projects, curricula and student talent, which can lead to greater industry involvement.

Source: author's own processing

The collaboration is also seen as beneficial for companies, providing fresh perspectives and helping them understand graduate expectations. Interns are often valued as potential full-time team members, as evidenced by one respondent's positive experience with interns during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2022.

Organisations working with the Faculty of International Relations (FIR) are proposing several methods to improve interaction between higher education institutions and industry organisations, see Table 2.

#### 4.1 In-depth interviews

In the survey conducted among the entities cooperating with the FIR (i.e., recipients of graduates/students/interns), the questionnaire asked respondents about the possibility of a follow-up in-depth interview. Of the 13 subjects who responded positively, a total of 9 respondents eventually gave their consent for an individual in-depth interview. Of this number, 6 in-depth interviews were successfully conducted. Supplementing in-depth interviews were chosen as a follow-up qualitative method because they help explore respondents' views, experiences, emotions, and relationships, which may be unrealistic to capture through the original questionnaire. The author of this paper took into account the fact that after six in-depth interviews have been conducted, there may be a situation where further in-depth interviews may not yield substantial new information.

The interviews were semi-structured and focused on the key themes in the original questionnaire, with an average length of around 30 minutes. The choice of format was left to the preferences of the respondents (hereafter referred to as RF), with one interview taking place in person at the company's premises, while the others were conducted online via the MS Teams platform. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the respondents. The recordings enabled the author of this paper to analyse the information and insights provided by the respondents effectively.

Common findings from in-depth interviews with FIR collaborators, focusing on various themes like knowledge and skills, international experience, university-business relationships, and work placements, are mapped in Table 3.

Table 3: Consensus spectrum: map of respondents' opinions to the themes

<i>Theme</i>	<i>RF1</i>	<i>RF2</i>	<i>RF3</i>	<i>RF4</i>	<i>RF5</i>	<i>RF6</i>
Knowledge and skills	+	+	+	+	+	+
International experience	+	+	o	+	+	+
University-business relationship	o	o	o	+	o	+
Work placements	+	+	o	o	o	+

Note: „+“ indicates agreement or emphasis, „o“ indicates neutrality.

Source: author's own processing

**Knowledge and skills (including soft skills):** All subjects emphasise the need for students to develop soft skills such as emotional intelligence, communication skills, adaptability, and critical and analytical thinking for their successful integration in the workplace. Among other skills, the need for better understanding and application of mathematics, statistics and databases is mentioned.

**International Experience:** RF1 and RF2 both assess international experience and practice that can provide students with valuable skills and perspectives as well as the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-life situations. RF4, RF5 and RF6 also consistently recognise the importance of international experience, whether study or work experience. These experiences appear to be advantageous not only because of their contribution to the CV, but also because they help students better adapt to new environments, manage stress and interact with people from different cultures. RF3 does not emphasise this as much but does not dismiss the importance of these experiences.

**University-business relationship:** The potential benefits of university-business collaboration, whether through internships, workshops, case studies or other initiatives, are mentioned. In their view, such cooperation could benefit both students and employers. RF4 and RF6 also talk about potential ways to collaborate with tertiary institutions. They both believe that it would be beneficial if lectures and presentations included more case studies and stories to help students better empathise with real-life situations.

**Work placements:** Across the board, placements are seen as important for students to gain practical experience. On the other hand, the demands on organisations to provide them and to integrate interns into the workforce are also mentioned, especially if they are smaller organisations (RF6). RF1 and RF2 consider financial support for internships to be important, although their views differ on whether internships should always be paid. RF2, on the other hand, believes that students may be more motivated if they earn university credits for internships, even if internships are not always paid.

Regarding soft skills, international mobility and cooperation between industry and tertiary education institutions, the findings from the questionnaire survey and in-depth interviews align with the literature. The study by Lisá, Hannelová and Newman (2019) reports a lack of soft skills among Slovak university graduates compared to employers' expectations. According to the results of the second primary research, the subjects generally appreciated the skills of graduates but also identified deficiencies in leadership, stress management and analytical skills. Cook (2020) stresses the importance of soft skills, especially in the area of sustainability, and points to the extent of collaboration between universities and companies in developing training materials, which is consistent with our respondents' views. Allen (2011) then argues that internships can be vital to developing competencies, but their importance should not be overstated. In contrast, Valentine R. and Keating S. (2020) confirm the importance of work experience in the recruitment process, which is broadly consistent with the responses of our respondents. However, it is important to note that professional publications often present

general trends, whereas the research presented and its results provide specific information based on the particular experiences of those working with FIR and are, therefore, specific to the FIR context.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This research presents insights into the experiences and observations of entities cooperating with the Faculty of International Relations (FIR) in work placements, providing a unique perspective on the employability of graduates in the Czech Republic. The focus is primarily on the impact of international student mobility, like the Erasmus+ program, on professional development. Key findings indicate that such programs enhance not only language skills and cultural awareness but also crucial workplace competencies like problem-solving, organization, and crisis management. The importance of soft skills, such as teamwork, communication, and critical thinking, is also emphasized for career success and leadership roles.

The respondent group, representing a segment of Prague University of Economics and Business graduates, reveals that experiences and skill requirements may vary across different study focuses. The feedback suggests that while international mobility provides invaluable skills, there is a need to make these opportunities more accessible and financially viable, especially for students from diverse backgrounds. Additionally, the research highlights the importance of integrating work placements and practical experiences within the educational framework to better prepare students for the global labour market.

Academic literature and this research point to the necessity of aligning educational systems with evolving labour market needs. Essential future market skills, as identified by Davies et al. (2011) and Habets et al. (2020), include social intelligence, adaptive thinking, intercultural competence, and a range of 21st-century skills like collaboration and critical thinking.

Primary research involving 33 respondents from various sectors revealed general satisfaction with the skills of tertiary graduates. However, areas such as leadership, stress management, data analysis, and problem-solving were identified as needing improvement. Respondents suggested more practical integration, critical thinking enhancement, language skills development, and practical experience emphasis as key areas for educational improvement.

The survey highlighted the significant value of international mobility in education, contributing to skills like intercultural communication, adaptability, and problem-solving. These experiences are seen as crucial for developing open-mindedness, maturity, and time management skills, areas where non-mobile students might lag.

The respondents recommended several methods for enhancing university-industry collaboration, including internships, guest lectures, curriculum development

participation, and practical projects. Emphasis was placed on equipping students with practical skills, new technologies, entrepreneurship, and innovation capabilities.

Collaboration with FIR was viewed positively for talent identification and providing career insights to students. The research suggests a need for continuous dialogue and feedback integration between educational institutions and industry to ensure that curricula remain relevant and effective in preparing students for the dynamic labour market.

In conclusion, the article aims to contribute to the understanding of how competencies acquired through international mobility can increase graduates' chances in the labour market and whether these competencies align with current labour market demands. The research question explores the impact of international student mobility on the readiness of Czech tertiary education graduates to enter the labour market, as perceived by entities cooperating with the FIR.

Overall, the research highlights that graduates who have participated in international mobility programs are more adaptable, flexible, and possess qualities highly valued by employers. These graduates are seen as better prepared for international work environments, showcasing enhanced social-communication, problem-solving, and management competencies. However, there's an identified gap in traditional tertiary education in teaching skills like problem-solving, critical thinking, and innovation, necessitating a closer integration of practical experiences and interactive learning methods in the education process. The research advocates for the importance of integrating international mobility into study programs, focusing on the quality and relevance of such experiences to fully harness their potential in enhancing graduate employability.

The research emphasizes the gap between skills provided by tertiary education and those demanded by the labour market in the Czech Republic, echoing OECD (2017) findings. A critical literature analysis coupled with a comprehensive survey offers valuable insights, suggesting the need for tertiary institutions to integrate employer and graduate feedback into curricula development.

The findings underline the Czech Republic's need to swiftly adapt its tertiary education system to the evolving demands of the labour market. This adaptation includes tailoring curricula to current market needs, embedding professional practice in educational programs, and enhancing the international aspect of education.

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