COUNTRY STUDY

THAILAND

ASK Asia

Erasmus Mundus Alumni Employability Study in the Field of Agriculture and Related Life Sciences

Agriculture
Skills
Knowledge
Asia

With the support of the
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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CIA Central Intelligence Agency

EU European Union

FAO Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

IELTS International English Language Testing System

SEA South East Asia

SME Small and medium-sized enterprises

TOEFL Test of English as a Foreign Language

UN United Nations

WB World Bank

Executive Summary

In recent years, the Thai job market has seen the arrival of Erasmus Mundus (EM) graduates returning from various European countries. This study aimed to analyse how they perform on the local job market and whether they meet the expectations of the employers. To conduct this study, a quantitative online questionnaire among Thai EM graduates, qualitative personal interviews with selected employers of EM graduates and a common discussion of the resulting issues were used.

In recent decades, Thailand has gone through many reforms and had to face economic crises, natural disasters and riots which influenced the stability of the country. In 1997-1998 it was hit by the Asian Financial Crisis and, according to the Library of Congress (2007), the country only stabilized in 2002. Later, in 2008, the Global Economic Crisis started. Real GDP growth was influenced by the above mentioned factors and growth rates were unstable. The agricultural sector of the country creates 12% of GDP (WB, 2013) and occupies 39.6% of the labour force (WB, 2012). The Overseas Development Institute (2011) says that Thailand is a prime example of successful agricultural development in an industrialising country. The structure of its agricultural regions varies, creating different demands on the labour market. The southern parts of the country are partly focused on agro-industry, while the northern parts are more focused on rice production. Unemployment rates in Thailand are some of the lowest in the world; according to the WB (2013) the unemployment rate reached 0.7%. Enrolment rates in higher education in agricultural and related life-sciences in Thailand is 2.4% of student totals. According to the ICDE (2015), one of the main challenges for students is their low level of English.

Based on our results, employers were principally pleased by the level of English of the EM graduates in comparison with local graduates. The graduates themselves saw English as a crucial skill which positively influenced their employability. Both employers and EM graduates agreed on the importance of responsibility. Preferences in skills differ by sector of employment; private sector employers are more interested in computer skills, self-confidence and the ability to interact with other cultures. Public sector employers wanted the ability to make one's way through problems, creativity, and the ability to apply knowledge in practice. Among the skills which were in overall high demand, but which apparently were not improved much during EM, were time management, the capacity for analysis and synthesis, and team work.

Graduates were not satisfied with the opportunities provided for doing internships. PhD graduates complained about a lack of time and wanted an extension of the duration of their scholarship; others mentioned problems with the local EU language. Even though some of the graduates did internships elsewhere, the employers declared they were not satisfied with the alumni's application of knowledge in

practice and recommended implementing some practice-oriented study programmes. A mismatch in the supply of graduates and their quality was mentioned several times by the employers.

Employers also think that graduates lack entrepreneurial skills, economic perspective and social responsibility. These abilities are now highly sought-after, as the development of the agricultural sector is becoming more and more multidisciplinary. The development of science and technology and the combination of related fields has lead to significant economic development, according to employers. Fields which are now growing are e.g. agribusiness, agro-tourism, agro-industry; adding value to local production is seen as a prerequisite to future sustainability.

To conclude, even though local graduates have their own advantages (e.g. in local networks or familiarity with the working environment), EM graduates benefited from a shorter period of job search, better career advancement and consequently better social status. Apart from their English language skills, employers especially valued EM graduates´ global perspective, open minded way of thinking, creativity and their ability to come up with new ideas. Networks built during the EM stay can bring new contacts or ideas useful to the companies. According to employers, career advancement is not a direct effect of being an EM grantee, but it often reflects personal characteristics, such as the ability to accept criticism and the ability to adapt to the work environment. EM graduates think that EM does not ensure a better work life, but may be a good starting position for the job market.

Introduction

Thailand is one of the countries that benefiting from the Erasmus Mundus Programme that provides scholarships and mobility for Thai students to study at selected European universities. Such cooperation aims to build human resources for the future development of the country. So far over eight hundred Thai students, scholars and fellows have been selected to take part in the EM mobility and to experience educational excellence at European universities, 295 of them under the Action 1 programme and 561 under the Action 2 programme (European Commission, 2014). The second phase of Erasmus Mundus was run between early 2008 and 2014 and thus the question of its success now arises.

This country report is a part of comprehensive study that was conducted under the ASK Asia project. The project ASK Asia ("Agriculture, Skills, Knowledge in Asia: Competences and employability of Erasmus Mundus Graduates in Agriculture on the Asian Professional Market") is an Erasmus Mundus Action 3 project funded by the European Commission (EACEA) in the period from 2013 to 2015. The main objective is to assess how Erasmus Mundus graduates in Agriculture and related Life Sciences perform on the professional job market in Asia and to identify specific competences and skills that provide these graduates with a comparative advantage in meeting the expectations of their employers following the education/training period.

Brief overview of Thai higher education and labour market

Development of the economy and the agricultural sector

The Kingdom of Thailand, according to the WB, is an upper-middle income country. Since the 1980´s it has had noted success in its development. Poverty reduction and growth sustaining strategies were well-managed, but certain constraints have decelerated further development. These constraints were mainly caused by the many changes of political governance. Shifts between military and democratic rule lead to considerable instability, which still remains the case. Instability was in part caused by riots in the Southern part of Thailand where the Muslim-majority provinces are situated. Independently of the political situation, the country underwent two financial crises: the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998 and then, in 2008-2009, the Global Economic Crisis. After the first crisis, irregularities and mismanagement in the economy were discovered, but recovery plans lead to re-stabilization and in 2002 the living standard of the country reached pre-crisis levels (The Library of Congress, 2007).

Unfortunately natural disasters (e.g. avian flu and the tsunami in 2004, floods in the Bangkok area in 2011) strongly influenced the stability of the economy yet again, especially in the agricultural sector. After the floods in 2011, manufacturing was severely affected. The government then prepared plans to prevent similar economic damage in future. During the Global economic recession, the opportunities for Thailand´s exports were limited. However, recovery mechanisms reflected the benefit of reform measures tied to assistance by the International Monetary Fund, increasing direct investment from Japan, the United States, Singapore, and other nations, and surging exports (The Library of Congress, 2007).

Current GDP (PPP) is 387 billion dollars (WB, 2013 est.). The GDP growth rate, adjusted for inflation, has fluctuated. Falls in real GDP growth in 2009 and 2013 were affected by recurring political instability accompanied by riots and demonstrations. The fall in 2011 was influenced by the above-mentioned natural disasters.

Table 1 Overview of Thai economy and demography

	2000	2003	2006	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
GDP per capita (constant 2014 US$)	1,968.5	2,211.9	3,143.2	3,978.9	4,802.7	5,192.1	5,479.8	5,779.0	-
Agriculture value added (% of GDP)	9.0	10.4	10.8	11.5	12.4	13.3	12.3	12.0	-
Value of agricultural production (1000 intl.$	23,651,620.2(	26,721,023.6	26,476,030.3	29,291,789.5	28,975,141.4	31,128,343.8	33,309,696.7	33,341,484.2	-
Population (1000)	62,343.4	64,488.3	65,884.0	66,277.3	66,402.3	66,576.3	66,785.0	67,010.5	67,223.0
Agricultural labour (1000)	19,826	19,906	19,567	18,800	18,537	18,282	18,032	17,781	17,521

Source WB, FAOSTAT, 2015

The first national development plan in 1963 spurred the shift from agriculture to industry (Keyes, 2015). Many people moved to urban areas and the lack of labour was replaced by machinery. Access to information about current research and development changed people´s approach to agriculture and made them decide to invest in new technologies, focus on intensification, specialization and forming links with higher-value markets. With these shifts from the mainly agricultural basis of occupation, GDP share by sector soon changed. In 2013 GDP share by sector was mainly made up of services (45.5%) and industry (42.5%). The agricultural sector contributed only 12% (WB, 2013). On the other hand, the agricultural sector employed 39.6% of the labour force (WB, 2012).

Between the years 2002 and 2007, Thailand displayed robust growth of around 5% according to the WB. Current growth is projected at 1.5% (WB, 2014). This steady growth is attributable to strong export industries, a well-developed infrastructure and strong agricultural exports (CIA, 2014). Exports are responsible for 73.6% of GDP (WB, 2013).

According to the Overseas Development Institute (2011) Thailand is a prime example of successful agriculture development in an industrialising country. Some 40% of Thai land area (total of 51.31 million ha) is agricultural, largely allocated to crops (The Overseas Development Institute, 2011). The main agricultural products which are traded are: rice, rubber, soya beans, coconut, sugar cane, palm oil and fishery products. All of those agricultural products are exported either raw or as processed foods. According to the Library of Congress´ country study (2007) and the Overseas Development Institute (2011), Thailand is a major exporter of rice and shrimps; according to the FAO (2011) it is one of the world's major exporters of sugar and rubber.

Thailand can be divided into 4 main agricultural regions: the central, northern, north-east and southern regions. Each region is distinct, because of its topography and weather conditions, therefore the demands on agricultural production vary considerably. The central region is very rich in rice production, due to a strong tradition of land irrigation and historically it was the region where commercial agriculture developed first. Despite achieving high agricultural productivity, its share of agricultural production in the Thai economy is the lowest (The Overseas Development Institute, 2011). The northern part of the country is very mountainous, which explains the location of mainly farmers specialised in high-value crops such as fruit and vegetables there. The north-east region, which is quite far from the main cities and the sea, is the most agriculturally active, with almost half of all farmers living there. Despite this, this region experiences the lowest agricultural productivity in the country and the highest incidence of rural poverty (The Overseas Development Institute, 2011). The southern region is very suited to agro-ecology. The rainfall is evenly distributed throughout the year. The area is widely planted with rubber trees and therefore this region is one of the most important for rubber production for export (in terms of value).

Labour Market Assessment

Out of a total recorded population of 67,010,502 (WB, 2013), 59.2% are in the economically active labour force. The labour force is divided (by sector): 48.2% work in services and 13.6% in industry. According to the WB (2012) employment in agriculture reached 42.6% in 2006 and in 2012 it decreased to 39.6% (of the total labour force). The male-female ratio in agricultural employment is 1.23 to 1, i.e. 9,937,000 males to 8,095,000 females (FAOSTAT, 2012).

According to the Overseas Development Institute (2011) the decrease in the agricultural labour force was caused in part by mechanization, which has been on the increase since the 1980s, with a lot of people being attracted by the possibility of higher incomes in the industrial and services sectors. Farm wages have since increased thanks to higher labour productivity. Increases in the average wages in agriculture (between 1991 and 2004) rose above increases in wages in the manufacturing and services sectors in the south and in the

north-east; in the north, from 1996 onwards, agricultural wages grew quicker than those in the manufacturing and services sectors.

Every five years the government creates a national economic development plan, which is dedicated to poverty elimination (Jitsuchon et Richter, 2007). Although the country has registered significant positive growth rates, poverty would appear to have remained quite high, as, according to the CIA, 13.2% of people still live below the poverty line. Accordingly, the Thai government has formulated various strategies in order to achieve a fairer distribution of income and social services, to create more employment opportunities in the rural areas, to assist parents in their children's education and to provide credit facilities for small business ventures. To address the poverty in Thailand, it is necessary to take into account the factors which are sustaining it. Among these factors can be considered the fact that majority of economic activities are located around Bangkok and other big cities. Therefore, there is a need of a stronger effort at decentralization, increases in regional investment and employment opportunities, and the enforcement of equal income distribution between rural and urban areas (Nations Encyclopedia, 2015).

The labour force in Thailand is also strongly impacted by migration from neighbouring countries. According to the CIA, there were 2.5 million migrants, not considering large numbers of illegal migrants. Klyuev (2015) mentions about 1.5 million registered migrant workers; the bulk of whom are unskilled workers coming from Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia—countries where the majority of their populations are engaged in agriculture; and according to him a considerable fraction of undocumented migrants are currently employed precisely in the agricultural sector.In this context, it is noteworthy that the unemployment rate in Thailand remains one of the lowest on the world. Since 2006, when the unemployment rate, was according to the WB, 1.2%, it had fallen to 0.7% in 2013. To compare these numbers with the SEA countries, the areal average was between 4 and 5% in the same period. Upper middle income countries generally had rates of unemployment of 5 - 6% at that time.

Higher Education

In 1960, there were only five universities in Thailand, and all of them were situated in Bangkok (Metzger, 2010). During recent decades, and especially after the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998, a demand for improvements in education and human resources development appeared, leading to the Thai educational system going through decentralization reforms and a great boom in tertiary education followed. According

to the International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE, 2015), these reforms allowed free access to education and also improved its quality for the youth in rural areas; a quota system for regional universities was set up to prevent inequalities resulting from differences between these students´ backgrounds and those coming from the better secondary schools in urban areas. These decentralization efforts resulted in fostering public universities, allowing them control their own affairs, despite the fact that they were getting budgetary support from the government. These public universities, which are independent of central government, have greater scope for institutional decision-making in terms of academic policies, personnel management and resource allocation (ICDE, 2015). Universities are administered by different organizations than other higher educational institutions. Currently there are three governmental agencies which are responsible for the Thai educational system (AngloINFO, 2015):

- The National Education Commission – responsible for educational policies, planning and research
- The Ministry of Education – responsible for pre-school education, primary education, secondary education, teacher education, vocational and technical education, curriculum development; under this Ministry there are a small number of Commissions, which take care of specific types of educational institutions
- The Ministry of University Affairs – responsible for managing state universities

After passing a standardized national university entrance examination, students are allowed to enter higher education institutions. Among these can be numbered: public and private universities, technical institutes and colleges (including vocational and teacher colleges). At present there are, according to UNESCO (2015), 146 higher education institutions and community colleges, which are supervised by the Ministry of Education, specifically by the Commission for Higher Education. Metzger (2010) also mentions that in 2006 there were another 411 public vocational colleges and 401 private vocational colleges, which are supervised by the Commission for Vocational Education.

Study programmes, which are offered at the above-mentioned higher education institutions cover the following types of degrees: Associate Degrees, Bachelors' degrees, Graduate Diplomas, Masters' degrees, Higher Degree Diplomas and Doctoral degrees. Studies at the Bachelor's level require four years full time attendance; the Master's level takes usually one or two more years. Total enrolment in tertiary education in 2013 was 2,405,109 students, out of which 57.1% were females (UN Data, 2015). The latest data about tertiary enrolment in agriculture-related fields are from 2011: there were then 59,952 students, out of which 53% were women. From these data we can infer that 2.4% of all tertiary enrolled students are pursuing studies in the field of agriculture and related life-sciences fields. It is possible to study agriculture in 31

universities.[1] According to the study Higher Education in Asia (2014) Bachelor's level enrolment ratios were 37.1 in 2010 and the level of graduation was 30.8 in 2008. The enrolment ratio for both Masters' and Doctoral degrees was 5.15 in 2010; the numbers of enrolled students in 2012 were as follows: 175,100 at Bachelor´s level, 174,000 at Master´s level and 21,000 Doctoral students. According to UN data in 2011, there were 25,191 tertiary students studying abroad, regardless of region.

Even though many adjustments to the educational system have occurred during the last few decades there are still some challenges to be overcome. One of the challenges according to the ICDE (2015) is the low levels of spoken English, the only exception being among the well-educated upper class. Sivarnee (2013) points out the absence of critical thinking skills. Better performance in problem solving, communication and management skills may help to improve productivity according to the WB Lead Economist Emanuella di Gropello (WB News, 2011). On the other hand, there are also challenges in the system itself. Pattaya Mail (2013) sees the main reasons for weakness in the educational system as: the omnipresent corruption and clientelism, low reliability and policy instability. According to the Overseas Development Institute (2011), well-targeted investments in education can greatly impact the growth of agricultural labour productivity; and Annette Dixon (World Bank Country Director for Thailand) confirms this for the WB News (2011): '*Improving the quality of higher education can be a key driver to help Thailand become a higher income country…it may help sustain growth and climb the income ladder, requiring further improvements in productivity.'* The World Bank East Asia and Pacific Report (2011) verifies much of the above and accordingly suggests 3 priority areas for improvement of the educational system:

- effectiveness and efficiency in financing
- better management of public institutions
- better stewardship of the higher education system: e.g. ensure stronger links between industry and universities

A weak educational system in its entirety is perceived as one of the factors influencing poverty, because unequal or inadequate education may create an income gap between city dwellers and villagers (Nations Encyclopedia, 2015). Parents may not be able to send their children for further education after basic school, and therefore children are disadvantaged on the labour market, not being able to avail of better-paid employment opportunities in manufacturing and the services sector. Metzger (2010) confirms that

[1] This number is based on original research done via the Office of the Higher Education Commission Database. Considered only are agricultural universities and universities with agricultural faculties; life sciences are not included.

education is still perceived as a prerequisite for successful employment, which often leads to increased social/economic mobility.

Methodology

Our data were collected by ASK Asia project experts from the Czech University of Life Sciences and local consultants according to a common methodology (see the ASK Asia Erasmus Mundus Alumni Employability Study). In the following paragraphs, the specifics of data collection in Thailand are described. All activities connected with the collection of this data took place between March and August 2014.
A common online questionnaire was used; this was the same for all selected countries. The sampling strategy for alumni was non-random; the respondents were all graduates of the Erasmus Mundus programme who had finished studies in agricultural or related life-sciences fields between 2004 and 2013. The graduates were contacted via the partner universities´ databases (both European and Asian), they were also contacted using the snowball technique through social media (Facebook groups of EM Alumni, Facebook pages of universities offering agricultural or related life-science fields and through the Facebook group of the Ask Asia project)[2].

The total number of Thai respondents was 24. The final number used for the data set was 21, due to the fact that two respondents filled the questionnaire in twice and one declared he was studying chemistry, which was not accepted as agricultural or related to the life-sciences.

In 2011, 2.4% of all Thai students were enrolled in agricultural or related life-sciences fields. As there were 856 students participating in the EM programme (European Commission, 2014), 21 respondents are a little less than 2.5% of the total number of these Thai EM students.

To ascertain the opinions of employers on the EM graduates' performance in their jobs, we asked the respondents who were currently working to fill in their employers´ contact details. The total number of currently employed respondents was 15; however the contact details were often not exact. Subsequently 12 of them were reached and agreed to cooperate. The 12 respondents asked their employers for a personal or phone interview; the majority of these employers were located in Bangkok or in other main cities. Two employers who were not employing EM graduates were also interviewed. The interviews were carried out according to the common guidelines and took around 40 minutes, depending on respondents´ willingness to go into greater detail. The interviews took place from July to August 2014.

After the collection and analysis of the relevant data, a national workshop acting as a discussion platform for selected employers and employees was organized. Participants were chosen according to the relevance

[2] ASK Asia Facebook group: https://www.facebook.com/groups/ASKAsia/

and detail of their answers so as the discussion of the topics would be more fruitful and come up with useful new ideas.

The national workshop was co-organized with the Prince of Songkla University in Hat Yai, in the south of Thailand. The workshop was conducted on 22nd August 2014 and was held in the Learning Resource Center of the University. There were 35 participants, composed of local students, university staff, representatives of selected Thai companies, grantees of the EM programme (usually in pairs of employer – employee) and some of the ASK Asia team members. First, the results of the survey on EM graduates and employers were presented, and then there was a common discussion.

After finishing all national workshops of the project, the regional workshop on the Employability of Erasmus Mundus Graduates took place in the Prince of Songkla University, Thailand on 2nd to 4th February 2015. During this workshop, the main findings of all six participating countries were presented. Discussion of the results led to the development of our overall conclusions and recommendations.

Erasmus Mundus Alumni experience

In this chapter the results from the alumni online survey are presented, including general demographic information about the respondents, their study background, professional experience and skill development as gained through the programme along with the current employment situation of EM alumni in the field of agriculture and related life-sciences. The statistics are expressed in real numbers (up to 3 respondents) or in percentages (over 4 respondents, which represent 19% of the sample).

Sampled alumni characteristics

The total number of respondents was 21. Out of this number the great majority were female respondents (86%) and the remaining 3 respondents were men. The majority of the respondents (62%) came from urban areas, some from suburban and three respondents came from rural areas. The age of the respondents was distributed quite equally: one third was between 20 and 25 years old (33%), 24% were aged 31 – 36, another 24% were aged 26 – 30, and 19% of the respondents were over 36 years old. 43% of the respondents studied in Europe during their Master's, which in Europe is usually between the ages of 22 and 25. 24% participated at a Doctoral level, 19% at a Bachelor's level and three respondents participated at a Post-Doctoral level.

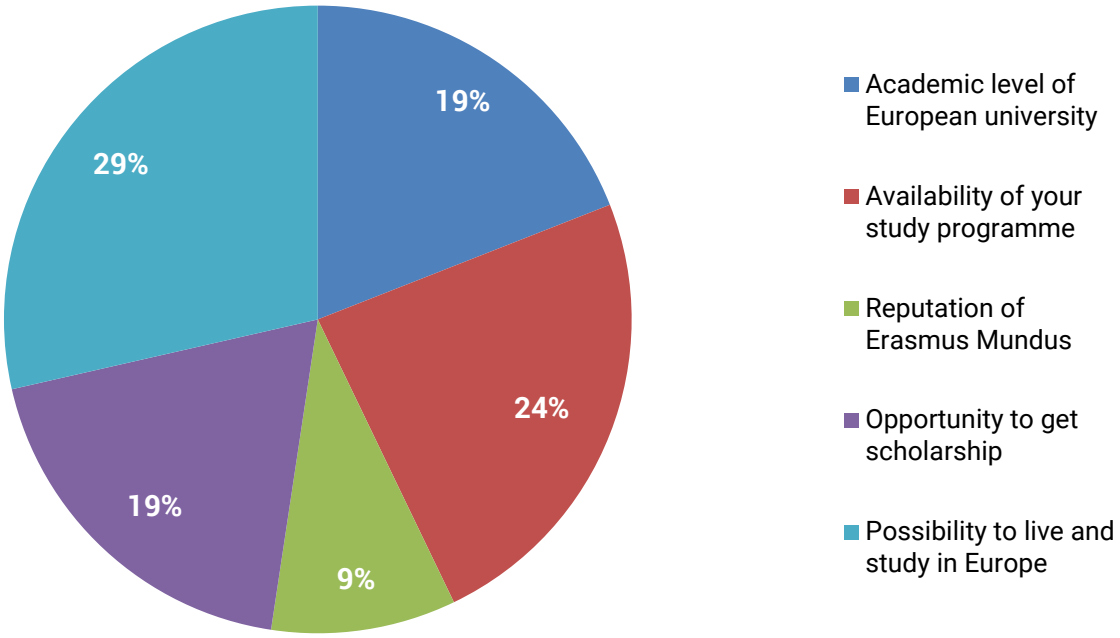
The most frequently chosen EM project among the respondents was Eurasia 2 (chosen by 43%). 19% of the respondents chose Eurasia 1; two respondents chose Lotus II and one chose Lotus I and another one IMRD. The remaining 19% declared they participated in “other” projects; namely: Action 2, the e-link project, EM Action 1 and Eunice. The most often chosen length of study in Europe was 10 months (chosen by 29%); then 6 months were chosen by 24% and 36 months were chosen by three respondents. The rest of the respondents spent up to 5 months in Europe (two respondents), 24 months and 18 months (both chosen by one respondent). Three respondents gave yet another length of study; 22, 30 and 34 months.

Students who stayed in Europe for 10 months did so usually during their Master's studies and they decided to study in Europe through the EM programme because of the academic level of the exchanging university

The decision to study in Europe through the Erasmus Mundus programme (shown in Figure 1) was mainly (29%) motivated by the fact that the respondents wanted to experience living and studying in Europe. 24% of the respondents chose the EU because of the availability of concrete study programmes at the European universities. 19% decided according to the academic level of the European university, another 19% of the respondents chose EM because they wanted to take advantage of getting a scholarship. Two respondents

chose to study in Europe because of the reputation of the Erasmus Mundus programme. No one declared a primary interest in the possibility of receiving a multiple degree.

Figure 1 Reasons for studying in Europe through the EM programme

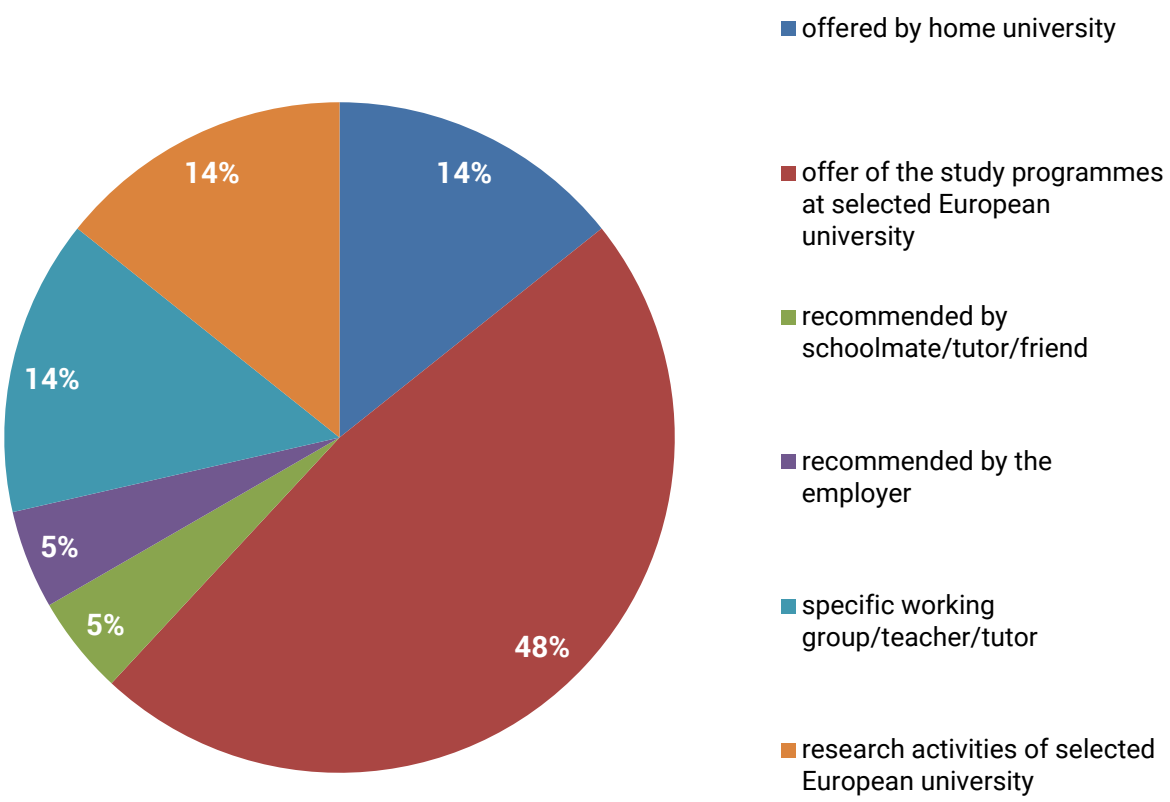


Source: Online survey on Alumni experience with the EM programme

The reason for choosing a particular university (shown in Figure 2) was mainly (48%) the fact that their study programme was offered at the European university. Three respondents chose the host university because it was suggested by their home university; the same number of respondents was interested in the research activities of the specific university; another three were interested in a specific working group/teacher/tutor. Only one person followed the recommendation of their employer, another one was motivated by the recommendation of a schoolmate/tutor/friend. No one was interested in a specific university owing to the ranking of the university or as a result of searching on Web Pages.

The respondents who were interested by a specific working group/teacher/tutor chose to study in Italy (in the field of Engineering), Germany (in the field of Rural Development) and France (in the field of Biotechnology). Interest in the research activities of a specific university were associated with Greece (Engineering) and France (in the fields of Crop Sciences and Plant Pathology). The employer's recommendation was for Estonia in the field of Sustainable Development in Agriculture.

Figure 2 Reasons for choosing European university



Source: Online survey on Alumni experience with the EM programme

The most often chosen fields of study among the participants were Engineering (19%) and Agricultural economics (chosen by 3 respondents). Rural development and Sustainable development in agriculture were each studied by two respondents; Biotechnology, Crop sciences, Food sciences, and Management of Natural Resources were studied by one respondent each. 29% of the respondents did not record their field of study among the possibilities offered in the questionnaire, but specified their fields under the option "other": Tropical Crop Management and Ecology, Economics and Law, Plant Pathology Detection, Comparative Local Development, Environmental Policy and Business Analysis.

Out of the 41 European countries offered, 15 were chosen by the respondents as their country of stay during the EM programme.

Among the most often chosen countries for study were: the Czech Republic, France and Germany; those countries were chosen by three respondents. Hungary, Italy and Portugal were chosen by two respondents

and Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden were each chosen by one respondent respectively. One respondent reported staying in several countries during the study period (Belgium, Slovakia and Germany) and another respondent stayed in both Hungary and Italy.

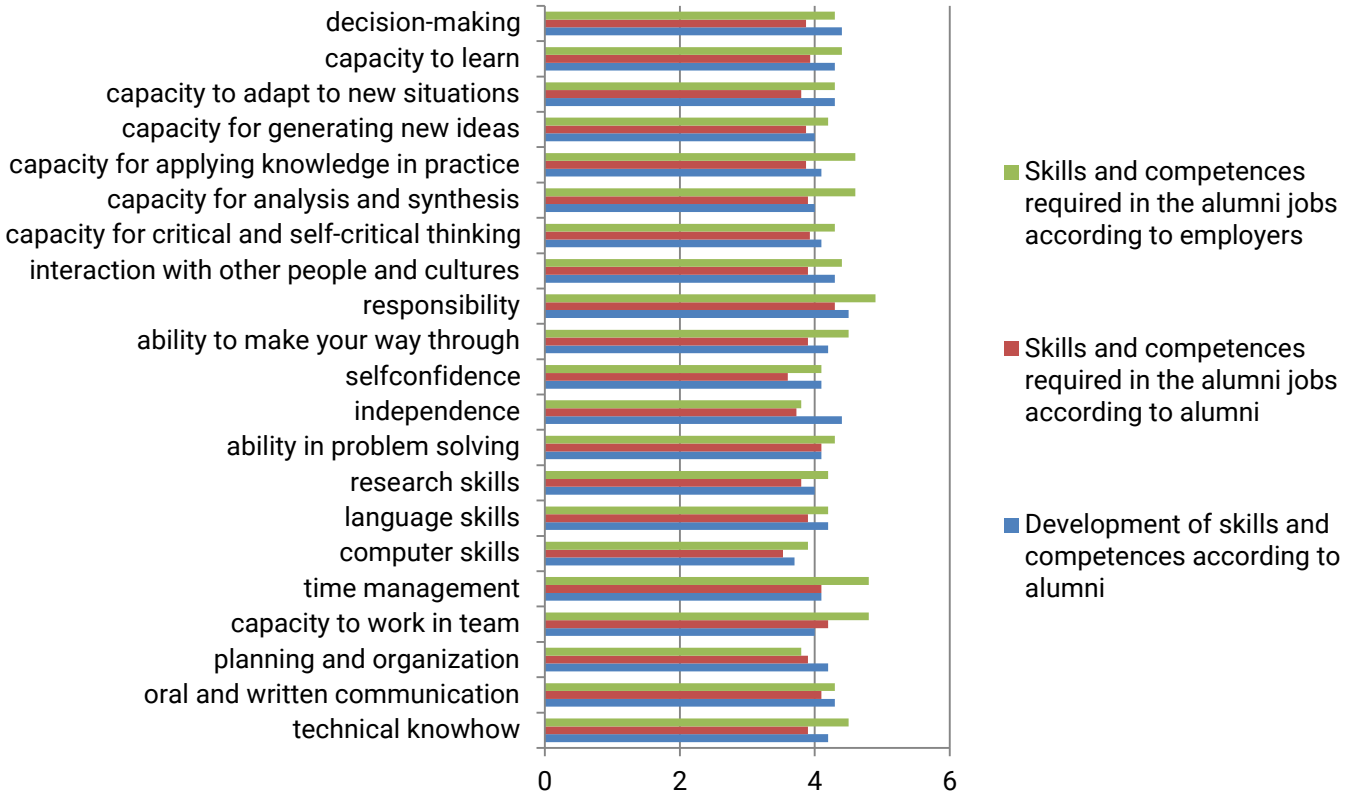
Studying and living in another country may be connected with misunderstandings caused by cultural differences. Integration into the host (European) society was likewise a topic of study. In a majority of cases (62%) the perception of integration into the host society, regardless of the country selected, was good (only with some small problems). 33% declared their integration as perfect (without any problems); these were the graduates staying in Sweden, Portugal, Germany, France and the Czech Republic. Some of the other graduates had some minor problems in their host countries. Only one respondent had real problems with integration into the host society, because of the "unfriendly people" in his/her view (the respondent staying for 32 months in Estonia).

The reasons for choosing a certain country are quite evenly spread among three options. The most frequent reason was a person´s interest in that particular university (33%) (these universities were located in the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Germany, Italy and Greece); 29% of the respondents chose the country because it was suggested by their home university, another 29% wanted to know about the country (history, culture, etc. of the following countries: the Czech Republic, Sweden, Germany, France and Portugal). One respondent wanted to improve their language skills (the case of person staying in 3 countries: Slovakia, Germany and Slovakia; this person declared he/she improved their German most during his/her stay); another was motivated by the lower cost of living (the case of a person studying in Poland).

Knowledge and professional skills of graduates

As education and the practical application of skills and knowledge are perceived as a prerequisite for successful performance in the job market, the graduates were asked to compare their knowledge, skills and competences before and after the EM programme. General self-evaluation of skills and competence improvement was rated 4.18 out of 5 points (5 meaning the maximum improvement). The skills and competences which were developed the most were the following: responsibility (rated on average 4.5), decision making (on average rated 4.4) and independence (on average rated 4.4). The least improved skills were computer skills (a rating of 3.7). A rating of 4 was observed in the following skills and competences: the capacity to work in a team, research skills, the capacity for analysis and synthesis and the capacity for generating new ideas (creativity). Rankings of improvement of all examined skills and competences are shown in Figure 3. In this figure the perception of the graduates about their employers' expectations in skills and competences as well as the real employers´ expectations can also be seen.

Figure 3 Comparison of skills and competences development and demand



Source: Online survey on Alumni experience with the EM programme and Personal interviews with employers

Among the skills and competences which were improved were language skills. In general, 100% of the respondents improved their level of English language. Improvement of specific languages was always connected to the fact that the respondents stayed in the country of the language (except for English). Opportunity to improve specific skills and competences, as well as acquiring knowledge, were only marginally connected to the quality of teaching. On average, the appreciation of the European teaching and learning style was rated at 4.17 points out of a maximum 5 points (meaning the best). Overall high appreciation (4.57) was assigned to the academic facilities/IT/campus/laboratories etc. A relatively high rating of 4.38 was assigned to the scientific level of the teachers. The highest appreciation (rating 5 on average) was expressed by a respondent staying in the Netherlands; very highly appreciated rates (4.88) were reached by Italian institutions.

The worst rating (3.33) of all was assigned to the opportunity for internships; the relationship with professional sector/courses given by professionals was rated as second worst (4.05). Internships within their studies were not done by the majority of the respondents (81%); the remaining 19% did an internship within their studies. Out of those 19%, three respondents participated in mandatory internships (in Germany, Hungary and Italy), and one in a voluntary internship (in the Czech Republic).

Employment

Before the respondents participated in the EM programme, 24% of them had some experience with a study programme/work/research from abroad. During their studies in Europe, 71% of the respondents declared they gained some professional experience. Out of this 71% of respondents, seven participated in training/internships (The internships were only within the studies in two cases). Training/internships were carried out in the following countries: Italy, Hungary, Germany, France, Estonia and Austria. Six respondents did a student job (in Sweden, Slovakia, the Netherlands, Germany, the Czech Republic and Belgium), and two worked voluntarily (in Portugal and Italy). The majority of the respondents (62%) did not have any work experience before they participated in Erasmus Mundus. Those who had some experience were working in the same organization in same field (19% of the respondents), two respondents worked in a different organization in the same field; one has experience from the same organization in a different field and another one in a different organization in a different field.

In the period of data collection, the majority of the respondents (71%) declared they were working. The remaining 29% were not working; 19% were currently searching for a job and the two remaining were on holiday. Out of those respondents who were currently working, eight said that their current position was not their first employment after EM.

Based on our results, the respondents stayed mainly in the same or similar fields, when comparing their field of study and their current jobs. 80% of currently working respondents think that there is a demand for specialists in their fields in the Thai job market.

The majority (66%) of the respondents who were currently working had a position in the public sector; that means they were working for educational or research institutions or in banks. 27% of the working respondents were working in private companies and the remaining one respondent worked in a non-governmental organization.

Three working respondents were currently employed as qualified employees; two were working as research assistants, another two as public servants at a lower/middle level, another two as academically qualified employees with low level management functions (e.g. project manager), another two as academically qualified employees without management functions and two other respondents were self-employed. One respondent identified himself as an ordinary employee (e.g. salesperson/secretary); another one was a public servant at a higher level. This last mentioned refused to give any employment details.

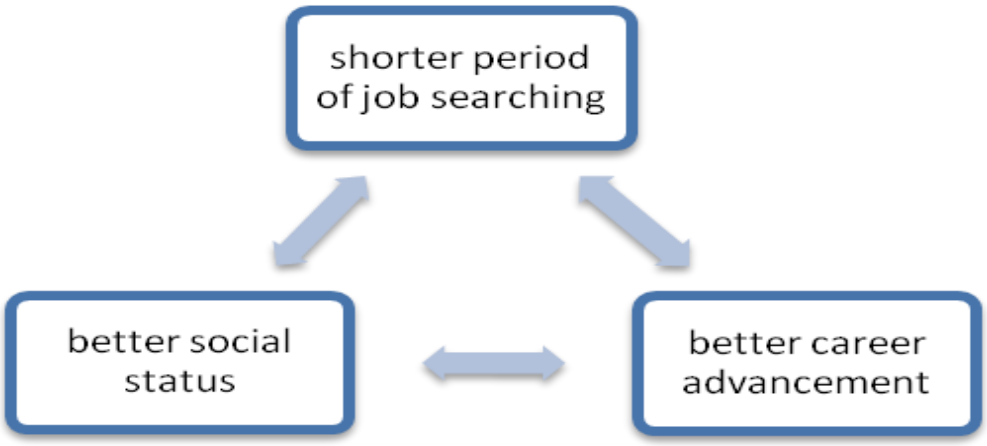
Each of the above positions require different types of skills and competences, but overall the most needed (according to the alumni) are: responsibility (rated 4.3 out of a maximum 5 points) and the capacity to work

in a team (rating of 4.2). The skills with the lowest requirement rating were computer skills (3.5) and self-confidence (3.6). Comparing the requirement for skills with their reported improvement, responsibility was the most improved and at the same time the most required according to the alumni themselves. Detailed skills and competences requirement rates and comparison with the employers´ opinions, are shown in Figure 3.

Alumni perception of their position in the labour market

Satisfaction of the graduates with their professional life can be linked to their satisfaction with their salary, social status and professional relations. Graduates´ perception of major EM advantages are shown in Figure 4, the numerical results are the following: 67% of employed graduates confirmed that they, as EM alumni, were advantaged, enjoying higher social status than their colleagues, who did not participate in EM. The same number also agreed they have better opportunities for career advancement. 60% of the employed respondents think that thanks to their EM experience the period of time they were searching for a job was shorter than for other job applicants. Only 27% of working respondents think that EM graduates have higher salaries as a result.

Figure 4 The greatest advantages of the EM alumni



Source Online survey on Alumni experience with the EM programme

Based on our results, being an EM graduate can bring an advantage in searching of a job: 73% of working respondents strongly agreed (or agreed) with this statement; while only 2 people did not think their stay in Europe helped them in searching for a job.

As was mentioned above, some of the working respondents agreed that EM graduates have an advantage in the shorter periods of job search. Usually (47%) currently working respondents arranged their

employment already before they came back from their EM stay. The others required less than 3 months (27%), less than a month (1 case), less than 6 months (1 case) and less than a year (2 cases). The most frequent method of searching for a job after coming back from EM, (apart from the 27% of respondents who went back to their previous jobs), was a direct application at the selected company (chosen by 27% of working respondents). The rest answered an advertisement (3 respondents); 27% used their networks. Out of those who used their networks, two used their own personal networks; one used networks established during EM and another used networks at the home university. No one was directly approached by any company.

Professional networks are one of the main resources for job search for graduates. 80% of working respondents declared that EM studies helped them gather important contacts for their professional lives. Out of these, eight made contacts with academic staff, three with classmates and one with companies (private sector). The remaining three respondents did not gather any important contacts.

According to the graduates, among the factors which most influenced their employability were definitely language (mainly English) and experience from abroad. Graduates also mentioned the good reputation of EM, technical know-how and computer skills, research skills and the capacity for analysis and synthesis. Regarding horizontal skills and competences, the following were mentioned as also influencing employability: responsibility, adaptability, the ability to work in a team and the ability to use networks, communicate well and, last but not least, a positive attitude.

87% of working graduates declared satisfaction with their current position in the Thai labour market and their job positions. One of those not satisfied specified the problem as the following:

> *'The most important thing is about the major I graduated in. It is about Environmental Policy which is not in the labour market of Thailand. However, in my point of view, this field is still interesting for the future. The field I graduated in seems not interesting for Thais, so at first I struggled in order to find a job. However, at least the degree from the EU encouraged me to get a good position and higher salary than others at my first workplace. …Last but not least, I can be an English tutor to have extra money.'*

The following are some of the comments given by the respondents who were satisfied with their current position:

> *'It is a new chance for me to work in an audit job. Reporting and cause analysis skills are required for my current job; that was improved by EM.'*

'I am satisfied to be a Food researcher. I can pass on my scientific knowledge to students and business operators in Food Safety concerns.'

'I am satisfied with my lecturer position because teaching is a part of human resources development.'

'I like it because it's about my field.'

'Engineering is a professional career in the labour market. With good communication in English and experience aboard, I will have a chance for career selection.'

Employers´ perception of the employability of EM alumni

In order to assess how the Erasmus Mundus (EM) graduates in agriculture and related life-sciences perform on the professional job market in Asia and to identify specific competences and skills that provide these graduates with a comparative advantage in meeting the expectations of their employers, this study interviewed employers of EM graduates. To get access to the responding employers, EM graduates who are residing in Thailand were identified through an online survey and contacted for the details of their employers. Although 15 EM graduates were identified, only 12 employers could be contacted. Researchers then contacted the responding employers via telephone and requested an interview. Most of the employers were located in Bangkok and big cities across Thailand.

The evolution of the agricultural sector and characterization of the job market

In the view of the employers, the agricultural sector in Thailand remains a cornerstone of the Thai economy and plays a very important role in GDP composition. For Thailand to harness their potential to become a world-leading food producer, a skilled workforce with specializations in science and technology, economics and management are increasingly needed in Thailand. According to the employers, agricultural production must be infused with new knowledge and technology and become part of a greater value-added economy, especially in agri-business, agro-industry, digital content for agricultural activities; value-added products must be emphasized.

The public sector still plays an important role in the development of Thai agriculture. As revealed in this study most of employers surveyed (75%) are from the public sector, working in universities, research institutions affiliated with a university and government agencies. The employers usually chose a combination of fields to describe the employment, yet the most often chosen field of employment was biotechnology (chosen by 50% of the employers), rural development (chosen by 33%), agricultural economics (chosen by 33%), and others (chosen by 33%), such as: agricultural software, digital media and agri-tourism. These findings indicate that the evolution of the Thai agricultural sector towards a higher value-added economy requires a workforce in agriculture and life-sciences with expertise in science and technology as well as in economics. In the employers´ opinion, there is a need to link the agricultural sector with industry and services and add value to production by using scientific knowledge and more advanced technology to process the raw agricultural products into final or semi-final products with added value so as

to maximize social and economic development in terms of employment, rather than rely on exporting raw materials directly from agricultural production. In addition, according to some employers, with the country´s location, there is considerable potential to promote the agro-tourism in the country.

With this, as recognized by 92% of the employers, the demand for human resources trained in agriculture and related life-sciences fields is increasing. More qualified labour in specific fields is required. However, some respondents mentioned that Thailand lacks this workforce in agriculture because many rural Thais do not want their children to work as farmers due to the perception that this implies hard work with insufficient profits. Moreover, a lack of researchers with the needed qualifications and specialization poses a challenge to many universities especially in provincial areas. Another respondent said that the nation's GDP does not in effect reflect much growth in the agricultural sector. Some respondents also said that there is high demand among people looking for these jobs, especially in rural areas, but few positions are available in the universities. Some respondents from the private sector and from research institutions with university affiliations also agreed that there is a need for the creation of new positions especially in entrepreneurial agriculture.

Although there has been a sufficient supply of graduates in agricultural sectors in recent years (according to 58% of the employers), there is, according to some of them, a mismatch in the workforce. This supply does not meet the demands of the sector. Some respondents reflected that although there are more graduates in agriculture and life-sciences, the quality of these graduates does not meet the employers' expectations. Some employers also stated that many Bachelor's degree holders in agriculture and life-sciences do not work in the agricultural sector but work in other fields, such as marketing, because they can earn greater incomes. Many respondents who were from universities revealed that although many graduate students pursue their study with the aim of becoming a researcher or academic, their final qualifications and specializations do not always match the positions available.

Visible impact of international donors and support from government

International donors have, according to 92% of the employers, made a visible impact in the development of the Thai agricultural sector, especially in workforce capacity building and professional networking. One of the most frequently mentioned aspects was the opportunity for Thai people to go abroad, which enabled them to gain international experience, broaden their world view and improve language ability, research capacity, and networking. Some respondents from provincial regions said that support from international donors is much needed in their context, because they have limited opportunities to go abroad. According to 83% of the employers there is also obvious support from the Thai government. Although there is a clear national plan and support from government, including SMEs loans, funding for workforce development, and

various stimulus schemes such as funding for the application of digital data in *longan* production in the north, the funding is as yet very limited and inefficiently used, in the view of some employers. One respondent from the private sector revealed an interesting insight that, although there is support from the government in this sector, those who receive the benefits are the business people and not the farmers.

Although research capacity at university level has been enhanced through the support for capacity building of international donors and through government scholarships, a lack of resources for the support of highly technical equipment and research facilities has hindered the implementation of innovative research projects. The private companies and universities also complained about the quality of education in Thailand; candidates often did not have adequate knowledge related to their specific field, lacked experience and technical know-how; language and communication skills are weak, with a lack of soft skills and graduates were generally not able to work independently. Some employers also mentioned that, whereas large-scale industries have their own resources for in-house training and provide scholarships to their staff for international training, small and medium sized businesses have limited resources for staff training and less access to government scholarships for programmes to study abroad.

Recruitment process

This study found different procedures in the recruitment process comparing public (75% of the respondents) and private sectors (the remaining 3 respondents). Employers in universities used an announcement period of up to one month (33% of the respondents) with (33%) already pre-arranged with applicants through their own networks, such as alumni and professional networks. They regularly targeted potential applicants and pre-arranged with them to apply for positions. However, respondents from the universities in regional areas offered more time for the announcement period due to the limited number of applicants in provincial areas. Two respondents advertised up to 3 months, 33% of employers reported leaving announcements up for different lengths, depending on the specific position and its requirements. Employers who work in research institutes and governmental agencies frequently promoted their temporary staff to permanent staff positions. Employers in the private sector (3 respondents) used advertising periods that stretched all year round. All employers used a combination of various means to announce when a new position was available; 67% of the respondents used the internet, the same number used their own websites or other media such as local TV, or sending a letter direct to those graduating from other universities. 3 employers used newspapers (usually local ones), 33% of the respondents spread the information via alumni associations and one employer reported using professional head-hunters.

Although the most commonly required documents were a CV (100% of the respondents) and a letter of recommendation (92%), employers also ask for other documents such as transcripts and identity cards;

many organizations require documents of English proficiency. While most universities require TOELF or IELTS, private companies have their own testing systems. In addition, many organizations have pay scales based on the level of qualification; transcripts and diplomas are often required.

100% of respondents confirmed that an interview panel is commonly used in the recruitment process to ensure transparency. Another reason mentioned was that most recruitment panels consist of a supervisor and members of staff with whom the applicant will be working in the organization. These people can provide analysis and justify the skills and competences needed for the position. The approximate number of members on such panels was 3-5 people. While most respondents from universities reported having an independent interview panel, those from private companies had both panels run by the central human resources manager and divisional recruitment panels.

The number of responses to a single vacancy was found to be decreasing, especially in the public sector. Some employers mentioned that this may because of the lack of interest of graduates in working in the agricultural sector and in academic professions, and that there are more academic institutions competing in the same job market. As revealed by some respondents, in the past it was a very competitive thing to get into an academic profession. Another reason mentioned was the short advertising period and the prevalence of pre-arrangements with potential applicants. 82% of the respondents said they receive between 1 and 5 responses per single vacancy; one respondent receives between 21 and 50 responses and another between 51 and 100 responses per vacancy. Private companies were found to receive more responses than public.

Employers in this study revealed their preference for people with experience abroad because they tend to have a broader world view and better English proficiency, which are considered to be crucial in their positions. 92% of the employers have responses from candidates who have studied in foreign countries such as England, France, China, Taiwan, the U.S.A. and Australia, or in the country of the company´s origin. Although the employers tend not to look for people returning from specific countries.

- because normally there are not many applicants with experience from abroad - 33% of the respondents prefer applicants who have experience in an English speaking country. The most important aspects for them to look for are the quality of the institution and the network of these alumni. Some respondents from the north of Thailand look for people from China because their geographical area is closer to China and they require staff who can speak Chinese. 83% of the respondents would recommend their colleagues recruit an EM graduate.

Employee´s Background

Most important points in a candidate's background

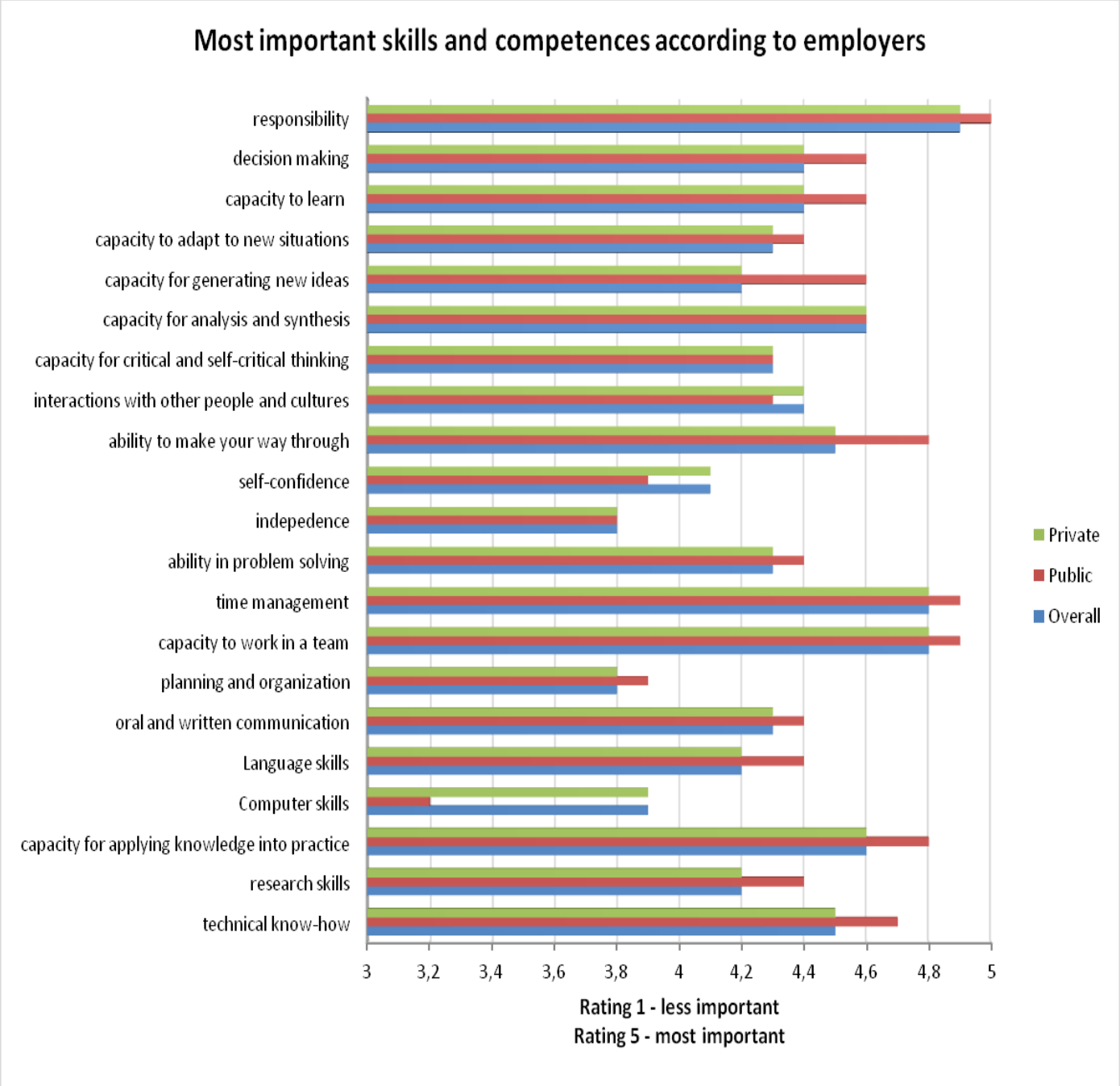
The most important points in the candidates' background in respective order are: languages (rated 4.2 points out of a maximum 5 points - meaning the most important), education and training (4.1), practical experience (4.1), professional networks (3.8), excellence of the university (3.6), experience abroad (3.5), and knowledge of the European context (3.1). Many employers complained about graduates who cannot apply knowledge in practice. They therefore look for skilled workers with practical experience obtained through work-based/work-integrated learning.

50% of the respondents consider that local students had no particular advantages, because students with foreign experience have better skills in English and a broader world view. However, 42% pointed out some advantages among local students, such as a better understanding of the local culture and work practices and having more local networks. As commented by one employer: *"We found that our workers who receive education in Thailand have a better understanding of Thai working culture. Sometimes those with education abroad lack understanding of what can and should be done in the Thai context and they can be disappointed."* This employer mentioned that Thai people value homogeneity and seniority and local students are better trained to work in the local environment. In addition, more local networks have developed due to the trend towards greater regionalization and localization.

The most important skills and competences according to the employers ranked in respective order of mean score from the highest to lowest (see the Figure 5) were: responsibility, the capacity to work in a team, time management, the capacity to apply knowledge in practice, the capacity for analysis and synthesis.

Employers in the public sector value the higher skills and competencies of their candidates more than those in private sector, who preferred computer skills, self-confidence, and the ability to interact with other people and cultures. This could be explained by the nature of the job placements of EM graduates in each sector. According to employers, most EM graduates in the private sector are at an operational level with some international engagement which requires them to have more skills in computer and information technology, and international/intercultural competences. Computer skills, however, were found to be least valued by employers from university and research institutes, the nature of whose work requires people with specific knowledge and expertise. Further, employers in the public sector do not much favour self-confidence as revealed by an employer from university thus: *"Often, persons with high confidence are not good team members because they may not listen to other people."*

Figure 5 The most important skills and competences in the candidates' background



Source Personal interviews with employers

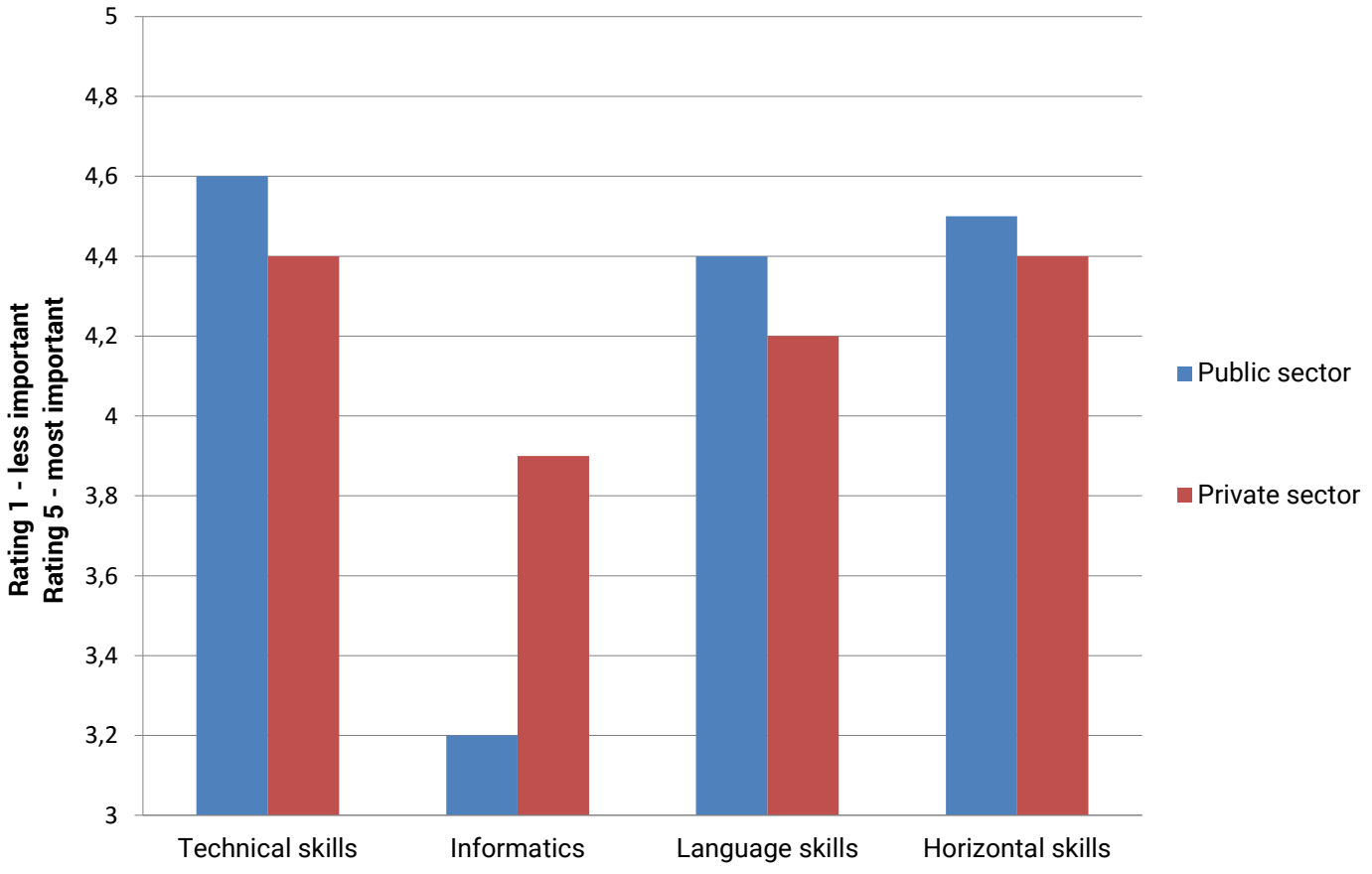
The aforementioned skills and competencies can be grouped into 4 domains of:

- technical skills: technical know-how, research skills, the capacity for applying knowledge in practice
- informatics: computer skills
- language skills: language skills
- horizontal skills: oral and written communication, planning and organization, the capacity to work in a team, time management, ability in problem solving, independence, self-confidence, the ability

to make your way through, responsibility, interaction with other people and cultures, the capacity for critical and self-critical thinking, the capacity for analysis and synthesis, the capacity for generating new ideas, the capacity to adapt to new situations, the capacity to learn and decision making. As indicated in the accompanying table, employers in public sectors look for applicants with higher skills and competences than those in the private sector in all domains except for informatics.

These findings indicate that technical scientific skills and horizontal skills are the most required in both public and private sectors. Although not much difference is found in terms of the horizontal skills, the public sector requires people with technical skills more than the private sector does (see the Figure 6, where 5 indicates maximum importance).

Figure 6 Most important skills and competences according to employers divided by sector



Source: Personal interviews with employers

Skills lacking in the candidates

According to 42% of the respondents there are no skills lacking in the job candidates. The employers who think there were some skills missing in the candidates mentioned the following: social responsibility (4

respondents), business and entrepreneurial skills (2 respondents), and one mentioned economic ability. This finding is also reflected in the earlier section on the most important skills and competences according to the employers, where it was concluded that responsibility is the most important factor. Further, since the development of the agricultural sector is moving in the direction of agro-industry and a value-added economy, the workforce in this sector must be, in the opinion of the employers, equipped with the appropriate skills and competences to foster economic competitiveness.

Advantages of EM graduates in comparison with other graduatesIn the employers´ opinion, EM graduates, in comparison with other graduates, are advantaged via a shorter period of job search (mentioned by 83% of the employers); they have more professional networks (mentioned by 83%); they have more opportunities for career advancement (75%); according to 75% of the employers EM graduates also have higher social status. 50% of the employers think EM graduates get higher salaries and 33% mentioned other advantages such as languages and world-view. Since most EM graduates have better English proficiency, which is a skill needed in many jobs, they have, according to the employers, more opportunities to get a job than those who do not; also, positions of leadership require workers with a broader world-view who can contribute new ideas to the organization. Experience from abroad allows EM graduates develop more professional networks and a broader global perspective which they can bring to the organization and thus advance in their careers, as was also indicated by employers.

Although most employers noted that candidates with European experience have promising career perspectives, the reality also depended on each individual's characteristics and their own career ambitions. The employers also mentioned that there were various factors affecting career progression such as organizational structure, organizational culture, etc. However, some respondents said that candidates with European experience can expect a promising career because they have a greater capability of adjusting to a new learning and working environment as well as being capable problem solvers. In terms of salary, candidates with European experience may want to have higher salaries but they are aware of the limited opportunities because most organizations in Thailand have a fixed pay scale based on educational attainment. Some employers said that some organizations may pay some extra money for those with special skills and experience but normally the salary level is based on the qualifications obtained and not on the level of skills and competences that an individual has.

Outcomes from the national workshop

The results from the graduates´ and employers´ surveys (see chapter 4 and 5) raise uncertainties in a number of areas. The national workshop which took place on 22nd August 2015 in the Prince of Songkla University was a great opportunity to discuss these topics. The workshop was fruitful in bringing forward new ideas and different points of view and consequently suggestions for recommendations to the universities.

One of the questions raised during the results presentation was the lack of opportunities to do internships within the studies. The graduates mentioned that they lacked practical experience, which was, in their view, highly valued. Among the reasons for not participating in internships was the language barrier, meaning that EU companies required a knowledge of the local language; another reason was that PhD students especially lacked the time to participate in an internship. They mentioned that the period of stay in Europe is too limited; they are supposed to work on their research and they do not have enough time to do an internship for a couple months. A need for a longer period of stay and an opportunity to do validated internships/practical training were underlined by the fact that, apparently, 50% of PhDs now go into the private sector. Consequently universities should emphasize more practically-oriented programmes, in the opinion of these graduates. EM graduates more generally tend to stay in the university sector even if the private sector offers higher salaries; according to employers this may be caused by the prestige of being an academic worker.

Another question which arose was the necessity of holding a language certificate. An English language certificate (e.g. TOEFL or IELTS) is required by younger and forward-looking organizations; in internationally recognized companies, English language is required as standard, the employers confirmed. Most of the graduates were employed precisely because of their good knowledge of English. Those who entered the public sector needed a certificate, whereas those in the private sector were tested by the company itself.There was a very limited number of private sector employers in the study, but one of the representatives of local enterprise summarized demands on graduates who were willing to enter the private sector. Among the most important he mentioned were the ability to work in a team, discipline, respect for different opinions and practices, the ability to accept criticism, comments and advice. All these abilities were also mentioned by the employers during the interviews. The only new thing which was mentioned by him was that the employees need to have some kind of goal in life and not just work day to day.

Implications and outlook

Based on these results, the local employers of EM graduates are satisfied overall with their employees. Nevertheless there are some points which could be improved in the employers' opinion. Due to the development of science and technology and their influence on recent economic development, some of the employers reported that they also do work in related areas, such as digital media and software (applied to the agricultural sector). The tendency of the agricultural sector to become more multidisciplinary was the main reason for these developments mentioned by the employers. They see further developments in agriculture in fields which combine science and technology, economy and management e.g. agribusiness, agro-industry, and agro-tourism. Adding value to agricultural products can, in their view, help sustain and retain competitiveness in the global economy. A professional approach in multiple fields was one of the skills missing in their applicants; they mentioned a lack of business and entrepreneurial skills, as well as of economic perspective and social responsibility.

Another weak point of the EM graduates, according to the employers, was their low level of ability in applying knowledge in practice. The graduates themselves felt they did not improve much in this ability during their EM stay. This was partly connected with impossibility of participating in practical training or internships. Some mentioned that the local EU language was required; therefore some basic local language course could help EM students applying for internships in their selected country. The graduates also criticised the low level of cooperation between universities and the professional sector, because, according to them, stronger relations might increase the opportunities of learning how to apply knowledge in practice and therefore help future capacity building.

The ability to apply knowledge in practice is important for employers both from the public and the private sector. Private sector employers also demand computer skills, which had, according to EM graduates, not much improved. Computer skills are not usually improved at university in any special courses; the fact that they were not much improved could be due to the fact that the level of these skills was already high and therefore could not have improved much. Some employers would prefer if their employees (EM graduates included) had greater ability for time management, the capacity to work in a team and the capacity to analyze and synthesize. Therefore one recommendation for the universities, both local and European, is to focus more on practically-oriented study programmes. As was mentioned by some employers, the problem for regional employers is a lack of workforce and researchers. According to employers, young people associate studying in areas related to the agricultural sector with becoming a farmer and they do not want to become farmers, because they cannot expect sufficient profit for their hard work. Education about the real variety of agricultural fields could increase the interest of future students. According to employers and

students alike, there is a demand for graduates in the agricultural fields and there are new job opportunities which nowadays combine more varied disciplines, such as entrepreneurial agriculture.

Despite some weak points the employers were overall satisfied with their employees with an EM background. This was especially due to their ability to use English on a daily basis. Usually, some official or at least university English language certificate is required. The graduates would value the opportunity to obtain this kind of certificate during their course of study in the EU. Local graduates, on the other hand, have advantages in their better understanding of the local situation and work culture, possessing local networks, which are useful in some specific jobs. Thus studies completed partly in the EU and partly in the home country could have real advantages.

The employers especially appreciate that EM graduates are more open-minded, accountable, responsible and trust-worthy, and bring useful networks which can benefit both universities´ and companies´ international connections. The employers consider individual characteristics and personality more important than just skills and improvements in knowledge acquired during their EM studies as a prerequisite for successful employment back home. The advantages, according to the EM graduates themselves, are mainly a shorter period of job search, better career advancement and higher social status.

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