

Spain: Country Context on the Employability of Non-Traditional Students and Graduates

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INTRODUCTION

Spain's high rates of unemployment have always been a cause for concern, although the current economic crisis is aggravating the problem to extreme limits. In this context, university degrees have traditionally been an advantageous starting position in that the unemployment rate of this group has been very much below the national average.

According to a report of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2014), Spain remains among the OECD countries with a greater proportion of their population which has only attained a Compulsory Secondary Education level or less (45% of the adult population between 25 and 64 years old), far above the EU-21 average (23%) and that of the OECD (24%). In the period of growth before the crisis, many young people did not finish compulsory secondary studies or dropped out of the educational system just when they attained this level. This was because the labour market offered them work contracts in sectors such as the construction industry in which they could obtain good incomes without the need of being qualified.

However, the economic crisis has favoured a delay in incorporating young people into the labour market and an increase in the population's training. In recent years, the rate of access to universities¹ has increased by 5% (from 47 to 52% between 2000 and 2012). Something similar has happened in the graduation rates in Post-Compulsory Secondary Education, where the increase in this stage of the percentage of graduates of

¹ The access rates represent the estimated percentage of an age cohort which is forecasted to access to a studies programme during their life.



the population with the typical age of graduating has been 27% (in the period 2001 to 2012), the current total now being 93% of graduates (compared to 84% of the OECD and 83% of the EU-21).

The level of education is associated not only with a higher employment rate and a higher salary level, it is also a factor of protection for people against the loss of employment even in times of crisis (MECD, 2014). Moreover, as the educational level increases, the probability of being affected by material poverty becomes less (Frutos and Solano, 2014). But after finishing university studies, joining the labour force is complex, as the transition from university to the work market has patterns which are at the moment longer and more uncertain. Currently, 33% of young Spaniards aged between 25 and 29 neither study nor work. This is a very high value in comparison to the other countries of the OECD and EU-21 (19% in both cases). A long period of unemployment before finding one's first job can, on the other hand, have a very negative effect on both social capital and the graduates' professional perspectives (Vuksanovic et al., 2014). Thus, those who are out of both the educational system and the labour system cease to accumulate the key competencies which are acquired by formal learning or through work experience.

In this context, some of the characteristics linked to non-traditional students (disability, mature age, ethnic origin, low socio-economic capital, etc.) could aggravate the situation of this group with respect to their employability. The level of employability of those with new degrees is going to be determined by various factors related to both the economic situation and some personal and social determining factors. It is therefore necessary to investigate what is the starting point in Spain in terms of the statistics and policies of employability for university graduates and to what extent these statistics and strategic lines consider the differential aspects which characterise the population of non-traditional students and graduates.

1. POLICY CONCERNING EMPLOYABILITY, NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN HE AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THEM

According to Lenart et al. (2014), the structural weaknesses of youth employment in Spain are the following:

- High school dropout rate, which doubles the values of the EU27.
- Strong polarisation of the labour market, where there are low-skilled potential workers and highly qualified potential workers who are underemployed.
- Low relative weight of the vocational training level.
- Low employability of young people, especially regarding the knowledge of foreign languages.
- High levels of temporary work, with 82.3% of young people working temporarily involuntarily.
- High numbers of part-time work offered, with 51% of young people working part-time, waiting to sign a full time contract.
- Difficult access to the labour market of groups at risk of social exclusion.
- Need to improve levels of self-employment and entrepreneurship among young people.

In Spain in fact, there is a considerable tradition of subsidies and special contract arrangements to hire young unemployed people (Calvo and Fernández, 2013). Alternatively, and in line with recent recommendations from the European Union and other international organisations, recent initiatives in Spain have tried to promote entrepreneurship in general, and youth entrepreneurship in particular.

Another relevant feature regards the relative complexity of the general governance structure in Spain, which has a considerable level of decentralisation. Regions enjoy a notable degree of autonomy in several aspects, including employment and their labour market policies (Weishaupt, 2014). In this sense, the National Employment System² is comprised of the following:

- The SEPE (State Public Employment Service), which is responsible for managing employment benefits, as well as for developing, mandating and

² As defined in the Law 56/2003 “on Employment”.



monitoring employment policies and measures, and coordinating the regional network;

- The Regional Employment Services in each autonomous community (region), which are responsible for managing assistance for the unemployed, the employed and employers.
- Other actors collaborating with the Public Employment Services (PES) such as local governments, businesses and trade unions as well as private employment agencies.

The functions of the SEPE include the arrangement, development, and monitoring of the labour market policy, including the coordination of the National Employment System. The delivery of active measures, in turn, is the responsibility of the 17 Regional Public Employment Services of the Autonomous Communities (regions). However, the public employment services have been demonstrating that they are totally inefficient when searching for jobs. Right now, they are only controlling the unemployment benefits and registering unemployed people who need a subsidy (Lenart et al., 2014).

It is also important to mention here the career guidance services for the adult population, because they are expected to contribute to workers and the employability of the unemployed. Since 1998, a programme named *Career Guidance for Employment and Assistance to Self-employment* has been developed. Though new regulations have improved the initial programme, the general idea was for public and private entities to deliver counselling activities to promote adult people's employability. This was especially aimed at groups at risk of social exclusion, such as women, the long-term unemployed, disabled people, low-qualified youngsters, and migrants. As a consequence, career guidance for unemployed adults has been consolidated nationwide, but the activities and programmes are funded yearly, so there is a problem of continuity that affects the dynamics of the services (Chisvert, 2014). In addition, a good information system is currently lacking, as well as a good professional guidance that can match training and employment offers (Gehrke et al., 2014). Some critics also point out that these services only supply partial solutions to the most urgent needs of the population, instead of providing an integrated career guidance system with a more preventive approach (Suárez, Padilla-Carmona and Sánchez, 2013).

With respect to the policies concerning non-traditional students, Spanish Universities have a certain tradition of being open to these groups, with the aim of compensating for inequalities in access, favouring those groups which had had scant presence in higher education. Since 1971, the Spanish university system has had a special channel for older students – over 25 years old – who do not meet the requirement of having come through secondary education studies. For various decades, this route has enabled a considerable number of adults who could not finish secondary training to access to university by passing a special access test. In recent years, furthermore, there has been an important advance in this sense with the creation of new non-traditional access routes. Thus, the Royal Decree 1892/2008, of the November 14th ³, establishes measures of positive discrimination to favour the including in universities of other, disadvantaged groups. Among other matters, two new access routes have been created, for which specific percentages of the reservation of places have been established: one for people over 40 who can show professional experience related to the degree that they wish to study for and another for those over 45 who pass an adapted test. There is also an access quota for disabled students.

Though other regulations (Statute of the University Student, RD 1791/2010⁴) have introduced improvements in the services offered by the university to non-traditional groups (i.e., by creating new tutorial schemes, such as tutors for disabled students, or by incorporating ways to combine study with work), we find that the support for these students still remains insufficient and, especially, unspecific since they are incorporated into the general services of support for all students.

³Royal Decree 1892/2008, of November 14th, by which the conditions of access to official university Degrees and the procedures of being admitted to Spanish public universities are regulated. Retrieved from <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2008/11/24/pdfs/A46932-46946.pdf>, repealed by the Royal Decree 412/20143, of June 6th, which establishes the basic regulations of the procedures of admission to official university Degrees.

⁴Royal Decree 1791/2010, of December 30th., by which is adopted the Statute of the University Student. Retrieved from <http://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2010/12/31/pdfs/BOE-A-2010-20147.pdf>

That is why, if we speak about the inclusiveness of the Spanish university system, we can note some factors which have contributed to improving its equality in recent years (from 2007 –Eurostudent III- to 2010- Eurostudent IV):

- The already mentioned creation of new access modalities.
- The increase of open universities which offer online programmes with flexible schedules.
- A policy of low costs of university fees added to the grants system, from before the economic crisis.

In the opinion of Ariño (2014), in Eurostudent IV (Ariño and Llopis, 2011) Spain was found to be well placed in a clear transition towards inclusiveness regarding the percentages of representation of students having parents of a low educational level and those of a high educational level. However, the irruption of the conservative politics of recent years and the cuts due to the model of austerity put these advances at risk, basically for two reasons: the increase of the enrollment fees and the applying of very restrictive criteria to obtain grants⁵. Until 2011/12, Spain was already the ninth country of the EU with the most expensive studies (Elias and Daza, 2014). But the austerity policy in 2012-13⁶ meant an increase in the cost of university enrollment of between 15 and 25%. With respect to the grants system, it is important to point out that the public expenditure on grants in Spain is only 9.4% of the total investment in education, while in the EU-27 it is 18.2% (Río, 2014), and that our country is among the OECD countries which have the lowest percentage of students with grants (34%) (OECD, 2012). Yet in the rest of the European countries, the tendency has been to increase the fees but also to augment the number of grants (Hernández Armenteros and Pérez García, 2013).

It is also necessary to mention the great territorial dispersion which exists in university grants, as each autonomous region sets the public prices within a national range based on the experimentalism of the qualifications. Thus, with the exception of Andalusia, to study certain degrees is considerably more expensive than to study others that have a

⁵ A further indicator of the consequences of applying conservative policies is the lack of participation of our country in the project Eurostudent V, which prevents the monitoring of the advances and regressions in equality in Spanish universities.

⁶ Academic course in which the RD 14/2012 began to be applied, which increases the public prices of university degrees and sets a more restrictive grants system.

lower degree of experimentalism. In parallel, the same type of studies can be more expensive according to the geographical location.

1.1. Employability and (non-traditional) HE students

Regarding policies of employability for non-traditional graduates, we find that they do not exist. On the one hand, the actions aimed at this group occur in the already mentioned programmes of professional orientation for adults, which attend to all the population and not specifically to university graduates, although it is true that their main target is groups at risk of social exclusion (women, immigrants, disabled people, etc.). On the other hand, it is important to mention the active role that Spanish universities are playing when favouring the laboural integration of their graduates, though also in this case there are not strategic lines or services specifically aimed at non-traditional students and graduates.

All the same, it is necessary to review what Spanish universities are doing to improve the employability of their graduates, a challenge which they tackle in two ways:

- On the one hand, through a training offer which responds to social needs and the labour market. This is precisely one of the driving forces of the Bologna reform which, among other matters, has facilitated the design of study plans which mean to optimise employability, considering the competencies and capacities which fit the social and labour demand.
- On the other hand, facilitating support and orientation in the uncertain process of transition to employment. Thus, as well as the traditional support mechanisms for students, in recent years universities have been incorporating their own programmes and services as a part of their commitment to centralise and integrate the orientation and support processes in socio-laboural integration and their graduates' transition to active life.

84% of Spanish universities have orientation services specifically aimed at their students and graduates (Suárez Lantarón, 2014) which mean to increase the

competencies for seeking employment and, on occasions, act as a placement agency. The management and organisation of these services is quite heterogeneous. This without doubt stems from the autonomy of each university. Thus, there are diverse profiles of the professionals who work in them and of the sources of financing, although in most cases the universities themselves are the main source of incomes.

In spite of the heterogeneity of their denominations and operating regulations, there are quite a few coincidences in the type of services that they offer university students and graduates:

- 93.3% offer information and orientation.
- 86.7% run academic internships.
- 71.1% have a job exchange and act as a placement agency.
- 71.1% offer training activities.
- 53.3% facilitate the mechanisms necessary to foster entrepreneurship.
- 57.8% act as a professional observatory.

These services make use of, among other things, Internet and social networks as resources to boost the employment of their users. We can cite as an example the Bureau of Internships in Firms and Employment (SPEE) of the University of Seville, which has more than 8,000 followers in Twitter.

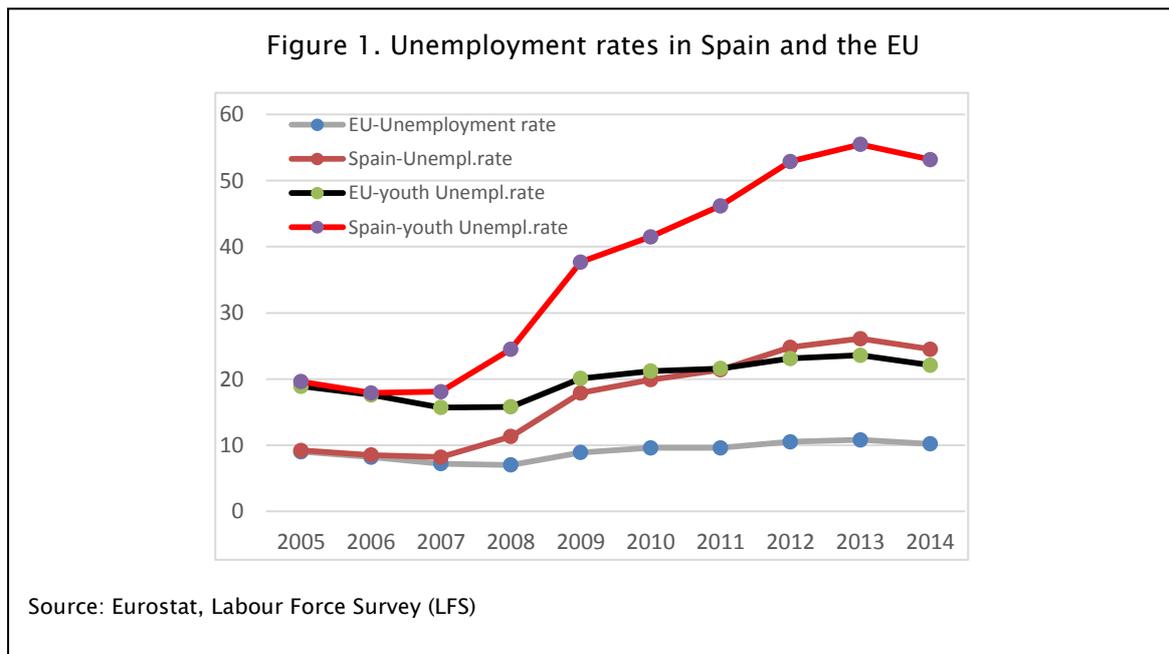
Internships deserve a special mention. There is currently no doubt about the important role that they play in the employability of university graduates. Along with the fostering of entrepreneurship, professional internships have become the firmest bet of higher education institutions to combat the unemployment of their graduates. This is why in the majority of degrees and masters this type of internships are obligatory.

To broaden the offer of internships, the regulation has been flexibilised in such a way that it is not obligatory for students to receive a salary, or even for the firm to provide the corresponding insurances (Lenart et al., 2014). The student unions are at the moment demanding the Ministry of Work to remunerate these internships and pay social security when unemployment benefits are requested.

As well as these actions, which are more or less generalised in all Spanish universities, there are specific initiatives in each of them which also have the aim of improving the employability of their graduates. Such is the case of Employment Fairs (in universities such as those of Seville, Salamanca, Zaragoza, etc.) which have them every few months, alternating face-to-face and virtual formats, and in which there is a high percentage of participation of students and graduates. The results of these events are very positive as the graduates come into contact with their community's business sector (and vice versa).

2. NATIONAL STATISTICS CONCERNING EMPLOYABILITY, NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN HE AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THEM

Unemployment rates are now significantly higher than they were in 2007. In Spain, the figures have more than doubled. Consequently, as shown in Figure 1, the youth unemployment rate is now 22.1% in the European Union and 53.2% in Spain⁷. Figure 1 also shows how the evolution of general and youth unemployment rates in Spain has moved in parallel. In both cases, the rate was similar to the EU average before the



economic crisis and is now more than double. Thus, the effects of the economic downturn on unemployment –and particularly on youth unemployment- have been especially severe in the case of Spain.

In this manner, from 2008 to 2014 employment in the younger age segment (16-24) has been reduced by 1,164,600 people, representing a 62.2% reduction⁸. This loss was concentrated on low-qualification activities. The construction sector has reduced the number of young workers (16-24 years of age) by 265,700 (an 89.9% reduction), while

⁷ Eurostat, Labour Force Survey (LFS): European Harmonised Unemployment Rate, age group 15-24. Average 2014.

⁸ According to the Spanish Labour Force Survey, total employment in the 16-24 age segment was down from 1,871,700 (in the 1st Quarter of 2008) to 707,100 (in the 1st Quarter 2014). Additionally, employment in the 25-29 age segment was also down by 1,232,000 (a 43.9% reduction).

the trade sector⁹ lost 248,000 young workers (a 59.0% reduction). Similarly, hostelry employment in this age segment has declined by 78,900 (-41.5%). These three activity sectors, together with manufacturing¹⁰, have reduced youth employment by 812,400 workers from 2008 to 2014.

To these data on youth unemployment in Spain, we must add the more general information contributed quarterly by the Labour Force Survey (EPA), carried out by the National Institute for Statistics (INE). According to the data for the first quarter of 2015, the rate of unemployment in the country is 23.78%, although this national data masks important regional differences and inequalities. While in autonomous regions such as Navarre and the Basque Country the unemployment rate is 15.66% and 16.43%, respectively, in other regions it is double, as is the case of Andalusia (33.62%) and the Canary Islands (30.81%).

Table 1 shows the unemployment rates in Spain according to the level of education. It is observed that the percentages decrease progressively the higher the educational level. If we compare the unemployment rate of those who have at least compulsory education (first stage of secondary school) with that of university graduates, we can note that for the latter it is less than half. From these data, we can unreservedly state that higher education is a decisive factor in employability.

Table 1: Unemployment rates in Spain according to education level and gender

Education level	Total	Men	Women
Illiterate	54.16%	48.80%	60.55%
Uncompleted primary studies	42.54%	42.34%	42.86%
Primary studies	38.44%	38.56%	38.27%
First stage of secondary education	31.45%	29.45%	34.41%
Second stage of secondary education with general orientation	22.07%	19.75%	24.83%
Second stage of secondary education with professional orientation and non-higher postsecondary	25.33%	23.43%	27.42%
Higher education	14.03%	12.10%	15.80%

Spain: EPA (1st. quarter 2015)

⁹ Including wholesale and retail trade, and car repair services.

¹⁰ Youth employment (16-24) in manufacturing was down by 219,800, representing a 76.9% reduction. Although manufacturing is a more diverse sector including highly-qualified jobs, young workers tend to be employed in the low-qualification occupations.

However, the official statistics offered by the EPA do not differentiate the university graduates according to the variables which are relevant to characterise non-traditional students. We have to turn to general statistics (of the whole population, irrespective of their educational level) to see the influence of variables such as age and nationality.

In Table 2, we show the unemployment rates differentiated by gender and age. It stands out that young people always have greater unemployment, both if we speak about the under 25 years old (51.4%), and if we differentiate between the sub-group of 16-19 years old (70.5%), and those who are between 20 and 24 years old (47.7%). Unemployment is in general higher for women, although in some age groups it is below the male rate (especially the 20-24 year old group).

Table 2: Unemployment rates in Spain by gender and age group

	Total	Men	Women
Unemployment rate (EPA)	23.8%	22.7%	25.0%
Under 25 years old	51.4%	52.6%	50.0%
25 years old and over	21.8%	20.6%	23.2%
Between 16 and 19 years old	70.5%	68.9%	72.5%
Between 20 and 24 years old	47.7%	49.2%	46.0%
Between 25 and 54 years old	22.4%	21.0%	24.1%
55 years old and above	18.4%	18.8%	17.9%

Spain: EPA (1st. quarter 2015)

Furthermore, within the group of young people (20-24 years old), the lower the level of education unemployment is considerably greater. Thus, those who have only completed compulsory education have an unemployment rate of 56.10%, while this goes down to 35.01% in the case of young people of the same age with higher studies.

Regarding nationality, the unemployment rate for the foreign population is 33.65%, 9.87 % higher than for the whole population. There are not official statistics of the employment/unemployment rate for people of different races (for example, the gypsy population, which is approximately 1.87% of the Spanish population), or for disabled people. This lack of data prevents us from knowing to what point the level of education is a positive factor of employability for all university graduates, including those who are non-traditional.

We do have some statistics about the participation of non-traditional students in Spanish universities, although they are not always identified, which makes it difficult to estimate what percentage they represent. According to previous studies (MECD 2015; Orr, Gwosc and Netz, 2011), we can consider that more than a third of Spanish students have characteristics which are different to the usual pattern.

Taking into account only older students, these are 28.2% of the total of students (MECD, 2015). The fact that this percentage is continuously growing stands out greatly. Thus, according to the report of MECD (2015), in the last decade a major growth of the university population over 30 years old has been noted (114%). Moreover, since the economic crisis (2007/08 course), a growth in students of theoretical university access ages (around 18-19 years old) has been observed, and the re-entry into the system of those over 30 years old, to continue their education. Also contributing to this is the adaption of the European Higher Education Area, which has brought with it the implementation of official university masters. This is a postgraduate option which is potentially attractive for adults who wish to complete and improve their professional qualifications.

The demand alone of access to university through new routes for those who are 40- 45 years old, as well as that which already exists of those over 25 years old is quite high, as can be observed in Table 3. To this must be added the adult students who access to universities via traditional routes.

Table 3. University entrance exams statistics (non-traditional routes) (Source, MECD)¹¹.

	N° OF ENROLLED	N° OF PRESENTED	% OF PASSED
OVER 25	28008	21503	66.68
OVER 40	1935	1884	65.98

¹¹ MECD (s.f.). *University entrance exams. 2013*. Available at <http://www.mecd.gob.es/educacion-mecd/dms/mecd/educacion-mecd/areas-educacion/universidades/estadisticas-informes/estadisticas/estadistica-de-las-pruebas-de-acceso-a-la-universidad/ano-2013/Pruebas-de-acceso-a-la-universidad-ano-2013.pdf>



OVER 45	5535	3614	61.64
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Regarding the educational level of the family, Barañano and Finkel (2014), based on the national data of the Eurostudent IV project, observe the over-representation in Spanish universities of students with fathers who have a high education (40.3%), which has remained constant since 2007 (Eurostudent III). In turn, there is an infra-representation of students with fathers who have lower educational levels (28.4% of the total), although this has increased 7.1% since Eurostudent III. With these values, Spain is in an intermediate group of countries in which students with families of a low educational level are approximately 25%.

The study of Barañano, Finkel and Rodríguez (2011) for Eurostudent IV shows that the children of parents with fewer studies:

- Access less to university studies.
- They frequently do so when they are older and follow a delayed transition modality.
- They have a greater share among the students who have a low intensity of dedication to studying.

With respect to knowledge areas, the same study shows that there is a larger share of students with parents who have a high educational level in Health Sciences (55.1%), in Technical degrees (52.9%) and Sciences (51.4%). However, the percentages of these studies are lower in Social Sciences (44.7%) and Humanities (45.8%).

According to Malnes, Viksanovi and Simola (2014), students who work and those who have dependent children are possibly the group of non-traditional students who have greater difficulties in finishing their higher studies. In Table 4, we present the statistics that exist concerning the percentage of students who combine their studies with work. It is necessary to take into account, as some authors have pointed out in previous studies (Ariño, 2008), that the work of university students basically and mostly correspond to jobs which are not very stable, which complement incomes (normally for their own expenses and not for personal maintenance or the developing of processes of

autonomy), low qualified and not in keeping with their professional preparation or career projected from the educational process underway.

Table 4. Percentage of young people doing university studies who carry out some kind of work as well as studying (Finkel and Barañano, 2014)

	Spain	EU21 average
Full-time work	5.70%	7.60%
Part-time work	2.70%	4.80%
Part-time involuntary work	1.00%	0.70%
Total	9.40%	13.10%

It is even more difficult to obtain statistics which inform about other characteristics of non-traditional students, such as race and if they have dependent children. We only have information about the percentage of international students, which in Spain is 2% (OECD, 2014). Regarding disabled students, we have as a reference the 5% of places annually reserved for this group in all Spanish universities, but which is not necessarily always met, at the same time that disabled potential students can make use of the traditional access routes and quotas. This is why we do not have reliable statistics about this group.

The inexistence of some non-traditional subgroups and also, in general, about their progress at university and their rate of labour integration after graduating seems to indicate that once non-traditional students access to the institution, this includes them in the general group of students and does not pay attention to the possible needs that they have and which could be disadvantages. It is therefore not sufficient to facilitate access to university, it is also necessary to assure the academic progress of all the students, especially those whose socio-personal conditions could place them at risk of exclusion.

In this sense, the data reflect that adult students have greater difficulties finishing their higher education. Their performance at university is relatively poorer than that of younger students, especially in the group of 40 to 45 year olds, as can be verified in Table 5. Nevertheless, if we address the success rate, the percentages are somewhat higher for students who access via non-traditional routes. In other words, these students are examined in fewer subjects (see the evaluation rates of Table 5) but their results, in the exams they sit for, are even better than those of students who access by the traditional route.

Table 5. Rates of performance¹², success¹³ and evaluation¹⁴ in Degrees by way of access to university. Course 2012/13 (MECD, 2015)

	Performance rate	Success rate	Evaluation rate
Total	77.9%	86.1%	90.5%
Traditional Access (Baccalaureate + Access exam)	78.1%	85.6%	91.3%
Over 25 years old	75.0%	86.6%	86.7%
40 to 45 years old	72.9%	86.5%	84.3%

We nevertheless lack data which enable us to analyse the performance in university of other non-traditional groups (those who harmonise study with work, those who have dependent children, those who are disabled, etc.). The entrance of new publics brings with it a diversification of the students in university classrooms (García-Rodríguez, et al., in press) which is not always well addressed by the orientation services. It is obvious that these students and their life and professional experience can enrich the learning processes. But it is necessary to have mechanisms which guarantee the continuity of their education and an access to quality employment that other university students achieve, in spite of the special difficulties which they show at times.

2.1. Statistics concerning employability of (non-traditional) students in HE.

There are not statistics which shed light on the employability of non-traditional students and graduates. As has been indicated, all the studies point to the process of integration into the labour market being more satisfactory and successful for university graduates in comparison to the rest of the population. Both if we speak about the labour participation and the probability of unemployment or labour stability or salary incomes, people with a university degree benefit from better conditions (Pastor and Peraita, 2014). That is to say, university studies provide people with a series of specific and generic competencies which make them more attractive for firms and more employable than the average of

¹² The performance rate is the relation between the credits passed and the credits enrolled.

¹³ The success rate is the relation between the credits passed and the credits for which students sat exams.

¹⁴ The evaluation rate is the relation between credits for which students sat exams and the total of the credits for which they enrolled.

workers with lower qualifications (European Commission, 2010; Pastor and Serrano, 2005). The specific competencies of university students make them more productive, with less learning costs for firms, in comparison to people of a lower educational level.

On the other hand, their generic competencies give them a greater functional, occupational, sectorial and geographical mobility than that of other workers, as they enable them to adapt at a lower cost to possible changes in the production structure. Furthermore, the impact of the crisis has been different according to the educational level. The analysis carried out by Pastor and Peraita (2014) with INE data from 2007 to 2013 shows that employment has been destroyed for people at all educational levels (including short university cycles), with the exception of graduates, where there has even been a certain growth. However, in the samples of these studies the set of characteristics which can affect the probability of having a job (gender, age, nationality, level of studies, the branch of these studies and even the region of residence) are controlled. This is why we lack information precisely concerning if these labour benefits can affect non-traditional graduates to the same extent or not.

Recently, the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport (2015) has published statistics about the labour integration of university students which enables us to complete the information coming from the EPA (2015) which was included at the beginning of this section. This study of the MECD works with the rate of registration in the Social Security¹⁵ for the cohort of graduates of the 2009-2010 course, for which information is facilitated from 2011 (one year after the students finished their studies), 2012, 2013 and 2014. Working on Social Security registration we can obtain certain information about the quality of the employment (if it is permanent, temporary, full-time and in keeping with their educational level) of the university students.

The first data which we have is that employment increases with the passing of time. Of the university graduates of the 2009-2010 course, 43.4% (42.9% of the women; 44.3% of the men) are registered in the Social Security one year after finishing their studies,

¹⁵ The Social Security registration is measured with a fixed date of March 23rd. of the calendar years following the conclusion of university studies.



55.6% are registered two years after, 58.6% three years later and 64.4% four years after (64.1% of women; 64.9% of men).

These results vary according to the age section (see Table 6). Those who got their degrees when they were younger (under 30 years old) have registration rates lower in the first year than those who are over 31. This data could however be due to the fact that in the higher age sections it is frequent for students to already be in the labour market before finishing their studies. This is why it is necessary to add that as time passes the graduates who finished their studies when they were between 25 and 40 years old are those who attain higher registration rates, while those who finished them when they were over 40 are delayed, their registration rate hardly varying with respect to those who have recently graduated.

Table 6. Social Security registration rates in the first and fourth year after graduation according to age group (MECD, 2014)

	2011 (first year after graduation)	2014 (fourth year after graduation)
Total	43.4%	64.4%
Less than 25 years old	33.1%	63.8%
25-30 years old	48.6%	64.9%
31-40 years old	63.1%	66.6%
Over 40 years old	61.4%	61.3%

With respect to the indicators which inform us about aspects related to the quality of employment, we firstly refer to the length of the contract. 48,2% of those who are registered as employed in the Social Security one year after graduation have a permanent job, compared to 51.8% who have a temporary job. Four years after graduation, the percentage of registered people with a permanent job reaches 50.7%, That is to say, half of the university graduates registered as employed in the Social Security.

Regarding the type of working day, the first year 67.7% do a full-time job, 18.3% work half the day or more and 14% work less than half the day. Four years after, the percentage of graduates with a full-time contract attains 74.2%.

Considering the contribution group (university, non-medium manual and low manual), it is seen that 48.5% of those registered belong to the lowest group, which does not require specific training. The percentage of university students who are in the highest contribution group grows during the four years after their graduation, reaching 55.5%. It can therefore be stated that somewhat more than half the graduates in four years after their graduation achieve a job in keeping with their educational level.

3. NATIONAL RESEARCH CONCERNING EMPLOYABILITY, NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN HE AND THE RELATION BETWEEN THEM

Traditionally Spanish universities have paid little attention to both employability and transition to the labour market of students and graduates. This situation had started to change in the first years of this century, moment in which the Council of University Coordination launched a programme for analysing the transition to work of graduates as well as other initiatives and studies regarding relationships between universities and the labour market, including career offices, employment services, focus on internships and surveys to graduates and employers (García-Aracil & Mora, 2004). This is the starting point of recent research on employability in higher education, with most of the publications developed from 2008, and a peak of papers published very recently in 2013 and 2014. As we have paid attention in the previous sections to non-traditional students, in this third section we focus more specifically on employability. It is important to know that we have not found papers that relate directly employability and non-traditional students.

To start, it is necessary to stress the importance of two European projects, which developed pioneering research in Spain (and other countries) on higher education and employment. The CHEER (1998-2000) and REFLEX (2002-2004) projects undertook research, particularly from quantitative approaches, on transition from university to the labour market, competences, and professional profiles required by the employers in different working sectors.

There is a scarcity of research on social and educational conditions of non-traditional students in Spain. Nevertheless European projects such as RANLHE (2008-2011) and INSTALL (2011-2014) have contributed to reduce the gap in this area. The contributions of Ariño and collaborators (Ariño, 2008; Ariño & Llopis, 2011; Ariño, 2014) have been important, specially the report *Eurostudent IV*, that offers information about living conditions and everyday life of students, comparing the situation across Europe. All these studies have emphasized students' voices and perspectives. Other papers researched graduates' opinions after five year of having left the university (Carot, Conchado, Mora & Vila, 2011).

Some studies, particularly those developed from sociological approaches, have pointed out issues about social exclusion, poverty, unemployment, inequalities, long-term unemployment and increasing precariousness as a result of the economic crisis and its consequences (Fundación FOESSA, 2014; Arnal, Finkel & Parra, 2013; Langa & Río, 2013; Laparra & Pérez, 2012; Santos, 2004).

One field reviewed recently in Spain has been skills, in general and with particular focus on transversal dimensions, employability and entrepreneurship (Carmona & Martínez, 2009; Marina, 2010). The study of Alonso, Fernández, and Nyssen (2009) used focus groups to identify perspectives and discourses of both graduates and employers in different regions across Spain.

The transition from university to the labour market is an area explored in several publications. Calvo and Fernández (2013) studied the programmes of “first young

employment". On the other hand, Alonso (2010) focused on different career patterns, creating several typologies about the ways of navigating from higher education to work. Some studies researched on factors that hinder and enhance good working itineraries (ANECA, 2009; Pastor & Peraita, 2014). The internships play an important role to promote better transitions from university to work, as it is showed in two studies (Bernal, Marhuenda & Navas, 2010; Caballero, García & Piñeiro, 2008).

An interesting area of research is related to stakeholders (Caballero, García & Quintás, 2008; Caballero, Vázquez & Quintás, 2009) and employers (Hernández, Martín & Rabadán, 2013), exploring particularly mismatches between training and employment.

Several contributions have focused on career offices and guidance services. In a meta-analysis (Martínez, Martínez and Pérez, 2014) made from reports produced by university guidance services, there are some interesting data regarding labour insertion of university students and graduates:

- The most frequent ways to find a job, the graduates used to be personal and family contacts, the Internet and self-application, while the less-used are public employment services and labour exchanges.
- These preferential paths differ much according to the training area. Thus, graduates in health sciences tend to find their first job through the labour exchanges, while internships are most used by graduates of technical fields. In the case of humanities, Law and social sciences, the access roads tend to be contact networks and self-applications.
- Although it is evident that graduates have more skills to search for and access to employment, the study of Padilla, Suarez and Sánchez (2014) found - even though this is true when compared to people with low level of education - paradoxically that this graduates present greatest needs in terms of career management competencies than those young with secondary or postsecondary education.

Martínez Clares (2008) points out the importance of knowledge of the techniques of insertion and search for employment in order to enhance the level of employability, together with other personal variables as, for example, the ability of learning. However,

as Rodríguez, Prades, Bernáldez and Sánchez (2010) state, employability does not depend on only personal circumstances, but also of external factors such as the labour market and social contexts.

Political and historical reasons explain the importance of regions in Spain in relation to higher education and employment policies. This is why there are studies with focus on the regional level. Hernández, Martín and Rabadán (2013) explore the situation in the region of Madrid while Cataluña is the focus of the study of Rodríguez, Prades, Bernáldez and Sánchez (2010). There are scarcity of studies regarding specific disciplines and professions. An exception is the paper of Paz, Betanzos and Uribe (2014), centred on Nursery and Psychology.

Some contributions are focused on the current situation, concepts and critical approaches on employability (Lantarón, 2014; Suárez-Lantarón, 2014; Santos, 2014; Brunet & Pastor, 2003).

Three recent doctoral theses show broad literature reviews and important contributions concerning employability and higher education. Ayats (2010) explores these issues with a case study located at the “Universidad Politécnica de Valencia. Rodríguez Martínez (2012) discusses professional counselling through transversal competences to enhance employability. A more general and broad focus has the PhD of Rodríguez Esteban (2013), mapping general trends both in Spain and Europe, developing empirical fieldwork and discussing theories and methodologies to study employability.

Finally we would like to discuss three key questions, almost generally ignored in the publications reviewed, but that are central for employability, at least in the Spanish context. For this reason, we consider these issues deserve more attention and research in the future. These three questions are the following:

- Importance of languages, particularly English, as a factor of employability. In recent years it has significantly increased the knowledge of English by Spanish young people. This has been encouraged by recent university policies, imposed by the need to have at



least the level B1 (European Framework of Reference) to get the university degree. High rates of unemployment of young Spaniards, including university students, are causing the English begin to be not only a common requirement in skilled jobs, but also in many low-skilled and low-paid jobs. A good portion of graduates used to consider that improvement of their English level is one of the main factors to enhance employability.

- Importance of international experience (academic Erasmus mobility across Europe, work experience abroad) as an element that significantly increases employability. It is not surprising that many companies -taking into account the high demand of employment existing at present in Spain and the scarcity of employments available- have mainly privileged employment for international graduates, particularly those who have undertaken Erasmus stays abroad. This is a way of filtering the high demand of employment. There are publications that facilitate this process of recruitment. Such is the case of “Employment Magazine”, that brings together former Erasmus students with global and transnational companies.

- Internet and social networks play a key role in the search for employment as well as opportunities related to complementary training and work placements. In Spain has a great importance the website *Infojobs*, which has grown significantly in recent years. This website also publishes reports on the labour market and its constant changes. Websites like *LinkedIn* are also relevant in relation to employment and employability

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