

# arQus

European University Alliance

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Final report

Action Line 2.11 Fast track for gifted students

2022

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The **Arqus European University Alliance** brings together the universities of Bergen, Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon, Padova and Vilnius. The main ambition of the Alliance is to act jointly as a laboratory for institutional learning from which to move forward in the design, testing and implementation of an innovative model for deep inter-university cooperation.

The Arqus Alliance aims to centre its efforts on **enabling people**: enabling a widely diverse student body and enhancing their learning experience; enabling a similarly diverse staff community and promoting their individual and collective professional development; enabling society at large. It also aims to promote widening access for diverse student and staff populations, facilitating inclusive admission and recruitment policies, and attracting talent from less represented groups. Additionally, the Alliance aims to develop **shared policies for inclusion and diversity for all members of the university community**. One of Arqus' core values is the commitment to ensuring and promoting equity and inclusion, and to eliminating barriers of all kinds to access to higher education, and hence to knowledge and to the opportunities it creates.

*(The above information is drawn from the [Arqus Mission Statement](#))*

Although these values and objectives are cross-cutting and engage all members of the Alliance's community, one of the seven Action Lines specifically focuses on inclusion: **Action Line 2, "Widening access, inclusion and diversity"**, chaired by the University of Padova.

Action Line 2 includes 13 activities:

1. Preventive Early Career Education
2. Children's universities
3. Women to STEM
4. Support networks for inclusion
5. Recognition of prior learning
6. Enabling refugees
7. Re-thinking college
8. Seniors' universities
9. Inclusive peer tutoring
10. Staff development for the diverse and inclusive classroom
- 11. Fast tracks for gifted students**
12. Job market transition for inclusive universities
13. Common charters for gender equality, inclusion and SDGs

Altogether, the above-mentioned activities have the objective of creating a more inclusive Alliance and of paving the way for future developments in this direction.

## 2. FAST TRACKS FOR GIFTED STUDENTS 2.11

The aim of the activity 2.11 was to carry out in-depth analysis of current commitments, initiatives, and practices in the field of giftedness/excellence. What do universities offer? How do universities support students in promoting their skills and their talents? How can you detect excellent students? In our first step we analyzed the words giftedness and excellence to find

out what common literature says. The breadth of models and approaches make clear that the topic of gifted students and excellence is vast, with many different approaches both in literature and in practice. We have tried to break down the definitions a bit, particularly to explain the practical approach in connection with the programs of the University of Graz and University of Padova. We brought that definition together with current initiatives of both universities and analyzed in a second step the enablers and success factors of selected programs.

### 3. THE DEFINITION OF GIFTED/EXCELLENCE

Our first step in approaching the topic of talented, gifted and excellent students was to find a good definition. Therefore, literature was analyzed, and generally accepted models identified.

#### **A Definition of Giftedness - By Brynn Hadler**

How does one define giftedness? For many decades and even currently, a high IQ (Intelligence Quotient – from the German *Intelligenzquotient*) test score has been equated with giftedness<sup>1</sup>. Many have opposed this limited view of giftedness and have proposed a multifaceted approach to identifying gifted individuals. While there is no single definition of giftedness within or among nations, it is worth examining some of the standard accepted definitions currently in use. "In general, there are four main groups of definitions of giftedness in the literature (Beranek, 1993; Maker, 2010). The first and the second are oriented to a psychological construction (trait-oriented model and cognitive component model) (Gagné 2002; Feldman, 2003). The third focuses on achievements and accomplishments (Sternberg, 2005) and the fourth group considers the importance of environmental influences on someone's giftedness (Ziegler, 2005; Ziegler, 2014)."<sup>2</sup>

The US has been a leader in the study of giftedness. The US federal definition of giftedness is based on the Marland report (1972) and focuses on "high achievement capability"<sup>3</sup>. The Marland report states: "Gifted and talented children are those identified by professionally qualified persons who by virtue of outstanding abilities, are capable of high performance". These are children who require differential educational programs and/or services beyond those provided by the regular school program in order to realize their contribution to self and society.

Children capable of high performance include those with demonstrated achievement and/or potential ability in any of the following areas, singly or in combination:

1. General intellectual ability.
2. Specific academic aptitude.
3. Creative or productive thinking.
4. Leadership ability.
5. Visual and performing arts.
6. Psychomotor ability."<sup>4</sup>

Although the definition included leadership and arts, it was criticized as being elitist and having too much of a focus on intellectual and academic ability. In 1988, the US passed the Javits Act to encourage the development of talented children. It is the only such federal act devoted to gifted and talented students. Officially named, "The Jacob Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act (Javits)", it was initially passed as a part of the "Elementary and Secondary Education Act" and more recently reauthorized through the "Every Student Succeeds Act"<sup>5</sup>. The current US federal definition of giftedness comes from the Javits Act and is as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Terman, Lewis M. "The uses of intelligence tests." *The measurement of intelligence* (1916): 3-21.

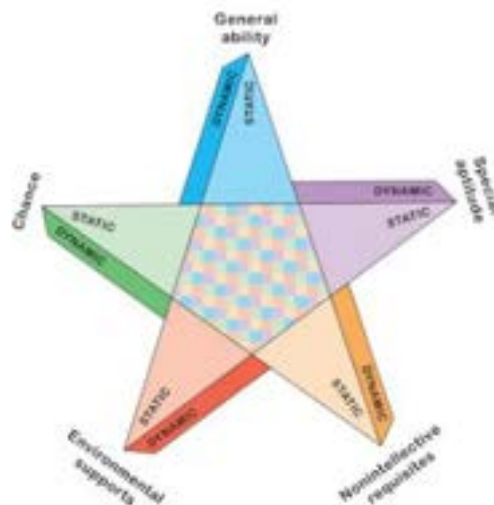
<sup>2</sup> *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)*, volume 81 1st International Conference on Social and Political Development (ICOSOP 2016) Gifted Innovation Education: New Perspective in Identification and Development of Gifted Student in Inclusion Education Setting Eka Sakti Yudha<sup>1</sup>, Sunaryo Kartadinata<sup>2</sup>, Nandang Rusmana<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Jolly, Jennifer L., and Jennifer H. Robins. "After the Marland report: Four decades of progress?." *Journal for the Education of the Gifted* 39.2 (2016): 132-150.

<sup>4</sup> McClellan, Elizabeth. "Defining Giftedness. 1985 Digest." (1985).

<sup>5</sup> <https://usedulaw.com/352-jacob-k-javits-gifted-and-talented-students-education-act.html>





**Figure 1: Tannenbaum's Star Model of Giftedness**

### **Renzulli's Three Ring Conception of Giftedness**

Another leading definition of giftedness was developed by Joseph Renzulli. Renzulli's (1986) Three Ring Conception of Giftedness depicts giftedness as the intersection of three key characteristics – above average ability (although not necessarily superior), task commitment and creativity.<sup>11</sup>



**Figure 2: Renzulli's (1986) Three Ring Conception of Giftedness**

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Renzulli's (1986) Three Ring Conception of Giftedness  
<https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwideenrichment-model/identifygt/>



This definition broadened the notion of giftedness. While sometimes criticized for excluding 'gifted underachievers', Renzulli has countered that his definition includes those "capable of developing this composite set of traits", and points to his intervention study (Baum, Renzulli & Hébert, 1995) showing favorable results for gifted, but underachieving students. He has also argued that whether someone with high potential fulfills that potential or not depends on their environment. This idea is also the basis of his work on organizational models and curricular strategies that promote giftedness.<sup>12</sup>

### Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent

Francoys Gagné's (2003) Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT), makes a distinction between giftedness and talent, and defines each one accordingly.

*"The artist is nothing without the gift,  
but the gift is nothing without work.*

*Emile Zola."*

He sees giftedness as natural abilities, mostly genetically determined. These natural abilities are divided into four categories: intellectual, creative, socioaffective (perceptiveness, communication, empathy, etc.), and sensorimotor.

In contrast, talent is seen as something that is systematically developed – hence the quote above - "the gift is nothing without work". In Gagne's view, talent reveals itself in areas such as academics, arts, business, leisure, social action, sports and technology. According to Gagne, giftedness transforms into talent via intrapersonal catalysts, environmental catalysts, and also chance.<sup>13</sup>

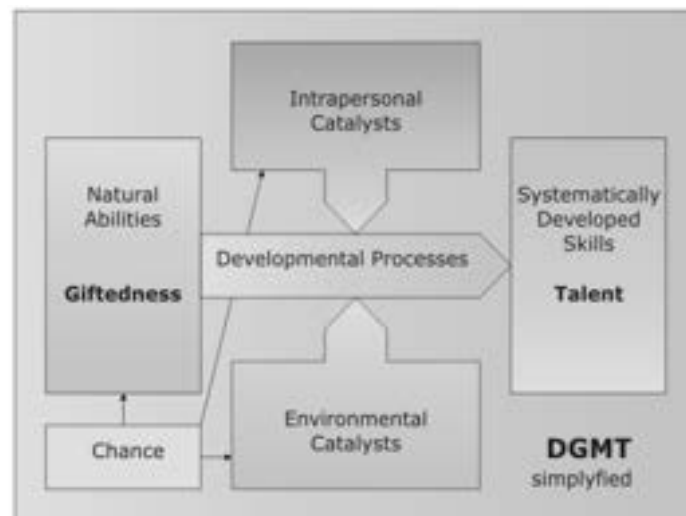


Figure 3: Simplified depiction of Gagne's DMGT<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/what\\_is\\_giftedness/](https://gifted.uconn.edu/schoolwide-enrichment-model/what_is_giftedness/) Renzulli, J. S. (1999). What is this thing called giftedness, and how do we develop it? A twenty-five year perspective. Journal for the Education of the Gifted. 23(1), 3-54

<sup>13</sup> Gagné's Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent (DMGT). Journal for the Education of the Gifted. 1999;22(2):230-234 and Gagne, Francoys. "A Differentiated Model of Giftedness and Talent. Year 2000 Update." (2000).

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.gigers.com/matthias/gifted/gagne\\_dmgt.html](https://www.gigers.com/matthias/gifted/gagne_dmgt.html)

The image below depicts a more detailed conception of Gagné's model<sup>15</sup>

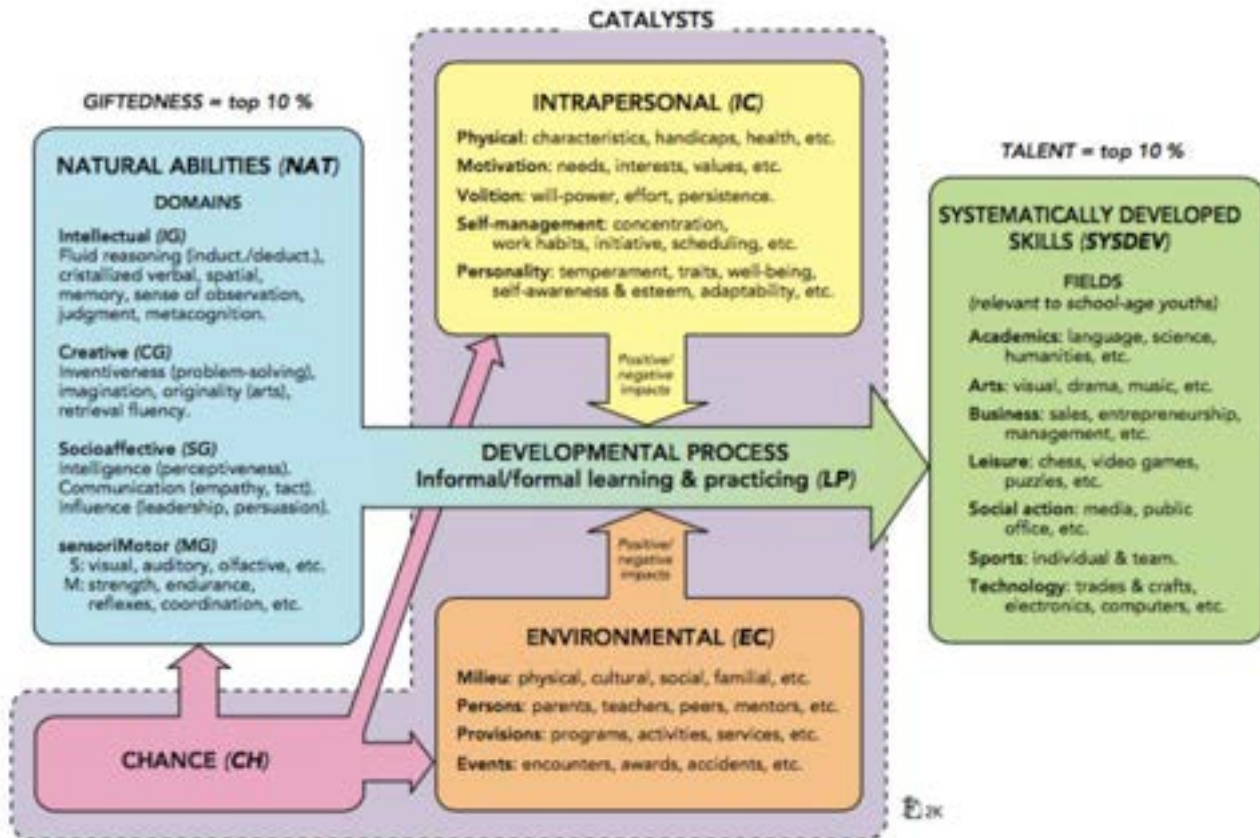


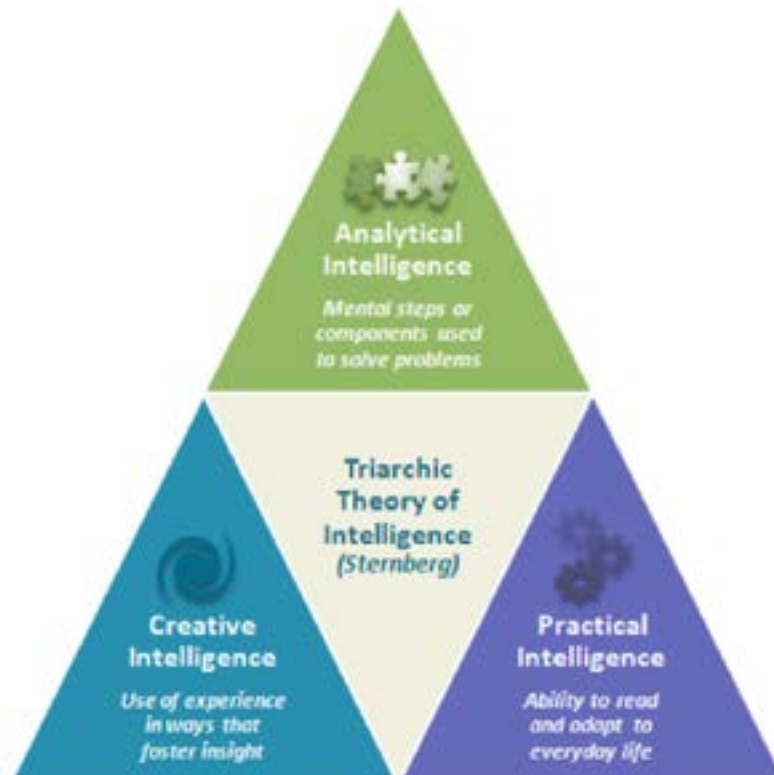
Figure 4: More detailed conception of Gagné's model

### Robert Sternberg's (2003) Triarchic Theory of Intelligence

Noticing that highly intellectual people don't always become successful in society, Robert Sternberg created a Triarchic Theory of Intelligence that focused on three types of intelligence:

<sup>15</sup> Gagne's model - Sydney Technical High School (nsw.gov.au)

analytical, synthetic (creative) and practical. "Analytical giftedness refers to academic knowledge and application typically measured by achievement and aptitude tests. Synthetic giftedness refers to creativity. Practical giftedness represents the ability to apply the analytic or synthetic giftedness to everyday problems. Within Sternberg's three elements, problem solving, and decision making are ongoing."<sup>16</sup>



**Figure 5: Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence**

Whether a person is successful or gifted depends on the balance of these three types of intelligences.

### **Munich model of giftedness**

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<sup>16</sup> Jolly, Jennifer L. "Pioneering definitions and theoretical positions in the field of gifted education." *Gifted Child Today* 28.3 (2005): 38-44.

In the Munich model of giftedness (2005)<sup>17</sup>, giftedness was defined as, "as an individual's cognitive, motivational, and social potential to attain excellence in one or more areas."<sup>18</sup>

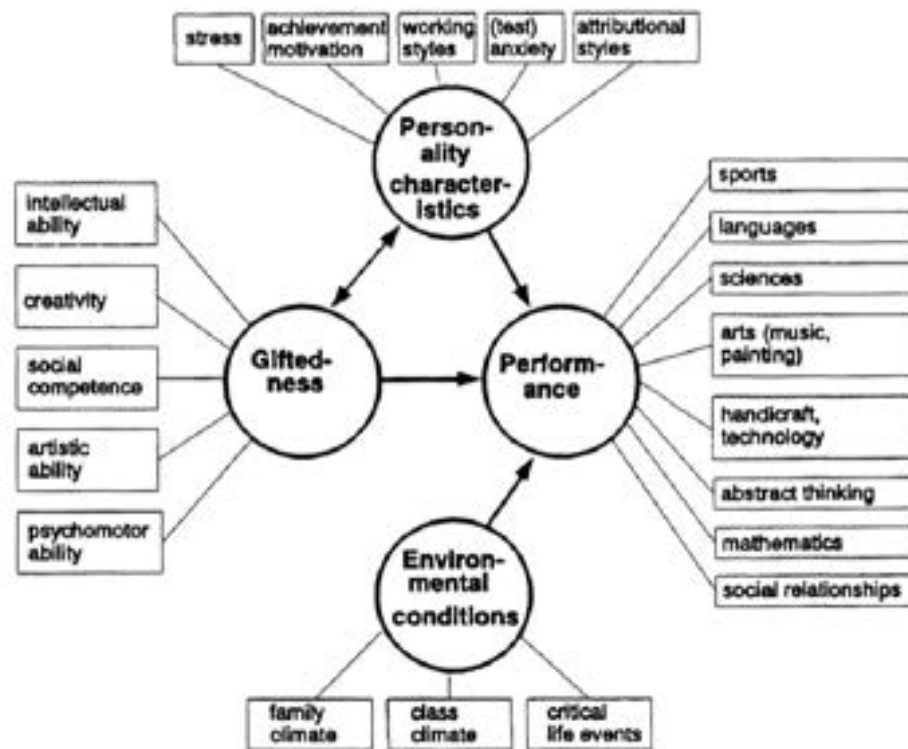


Figure 4.1. Giftedness model of the Munich Longitudinal Study of Giftedness

Figure 6: Giftedness model of the Munich Longitudinal Study of Giftedness

The model includes four dimensions: personality characteristics, giftedness, performance and environmental conditions, each of which are divided into various categories. Personality and environmental factors determine how much innate giftedness is transformed into performance capability.

### Albert Ziegler: Actiotope Model of Giftedness

<sup>17</sup> Heller, Kurt A. "The Munich model of giftedness and its impact on identification and programming." Gifted and Talented International 20.1 (2005): 30-36. \*Abstract and references to only – unable to access original article

<sup>18</sup> Subotnik, Rena Faye Ed, and Karen D. Arnold. "Beyond Terman: Contemporary longitudinal studies of giftedness and talent." *This book stems from the 1989 meeting of the American Educational Research Association..* Ablex Publishing, 1994.

Albert Ziegler<sup>19</sup> proposed an Actiotope Model of Giftedness (2005) which basically sees giftedness not as a static attribute, but as a characteristic that is constantly changing and evolving based on interactions with the environment. Here the focus is on the process and environmental influences.<sup>20</sup>

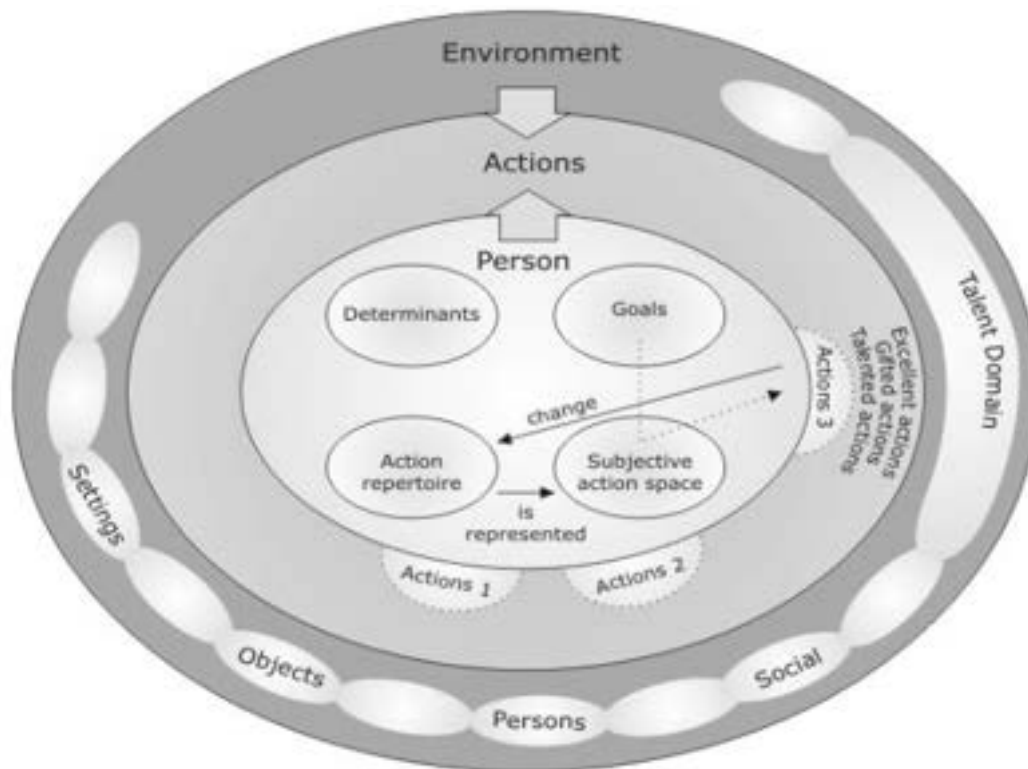


Figure 7: The Actiotope Model of Giftedness<sup>21</sup>

There have been many other concepts of giftedness such as Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, where giftedness is said to include linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic and intra- and interpersonal intelligences and well as naturalistic intelligences. However, it is beyond the scope of this summary to mention all the various theoretical contributors, but rather to give an overview of the most influential models of giftedness.

## Discussion:

<sup>19</sup> Ziegler, Albert. "The actiotope model of giftedness." *Conceptions of giftedness 2* (2005): 411-436.

<sup>20</sup> Yudha, E. et al., "Gifted Innovation Education: New Perspective in Identification and Development of Gifted Students in Inclusion Education Setting," *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research (ASSEHR)*, volume 81, 1st International Conference on Social and Political Development (ICOSOP 2016) Indonesia University of Education, Bandung, Indonesia.

<sup>21</sup> [https://www.gigers.com/matthias/gifted/actiopic\\_model.html](https://www.gigers.com/matthias/gifted/actiopic_model.html)

Overall, Renzulli's definition appears to be the one that fits best into Action Line 2. Academic excellence corresponds to Renzulli's above average ability, a higher degree of motivation is relatable to task commitment, and although a deeper interest in a given field of study does not exactly correspond to creativity, a deeper interest is in a sense a pre-requisite for creativity. How can one express creativity in any area without a deeper interest in that area? If one is careful to emphasize that these definitions include those who are capable of developing the key traits: ability, task commitment, and creativity, the definition is useful and doesn't exclude potentially gifted, but underachieving students. While defining giftedness will never be set in stone, adopting a simpler and less intricate model makes the task of identifying gifted students easier. While many of the theorists display profound conceptual power in their models of giftedness, applying these models to real-life students can be problematic.

Based on that theoretical outcome the University of Graz and the University of Padova have come up with a definition that distinguishes three ways in which students at universities can be seen as gifted. They are related and intertwined but can also stand on their own. Rather than offering resources and guidance to a very limited number of students that fit a narrow description of giftedness, the aim is to provide a greater number of students with broader definition of giftedness the competencies needed to reach their full potential.

### **Academic excellence**

Most conservatively a gifted student is defined by academic success. Universities in the Arqus alliance offer programs and support for students whose grades and study progress exceed their peers. Students in these programs have a high GPA (grade-point average) and can be considered academic elite.

### **Higher degree of motivation**

Students with motivation, drive and curiosity that outshine their peers also fall into the group of gifted students. This refers to students who show interest in areas outside their major field of study and the motivation to obtain certificates useful for their future working life. In comparison to their peers these students put in extra effort to learn more than what is offered in their regular curriculum. They are motivated enough to sacrifice their free time to acquire knowledge useful to them. For these types of students, the universities offer various programs to support and foster their desire for expertise.

### **Deeper interest in their field of study**

Students who show extra interest in specific areas within their field are also considered gifted students, as they pursue that interest with higher intensity than their peers. The universities facilitate various clubs to meet the students' interests and encourage a deeper knowledge of the field in question.

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- <https://www.tc.columbia.edu/articles/2014/july/abraham-tannenbaum-dies-groundbreaking-theorist-in-the-fiel/>
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- [https://www.gigers.com/matthias/gifted/gagne\\_dmgt.html](https://www.gigers.com/matthias/gifted/gagne_dmgt.html)
- Gagne's model - Sydney Technical High School (nsw.gov.au)
- <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED056243.pdf> (Marland Report scanned document)

#### 4. UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

At the University of Graz there is a wide range of programs and initiatives, all of them with a different focus. The following section lists and briefly describes the programs. Furthermore, there is a detailed examination of these programs in connection with the definitions as well as a closer look at the advantages and disadvantages for gifted students.



**Figure 8: Overview of programs/projects and initiatives from the University of Graz**

## 4.1 Our programs/initiatives

The University of Graz provides various programs that aim to support good grades, as well as fostering motivation and engagement. The aim is to improve employability. Some of these initiatives are student-led, meaning they only have peripheral connection to the University of Graz, but because many of the students involved are from the university, the student-led initiatives will be included. To highlight the main aspects that relate to our topic of giftedness, relevant keywords are emphasized in the following section.

### 4.1.1 ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

#### 4.1.1.1 Scholarships

In general, an application for a merit **scholarship** is possible when **a minimum of 30 ECTS** is completed and a **GPA (grade point average) under 2.0** is achieved. Besides these requirements, each faculty defines their own rules for these applications.



**SOWI:** To request a merit scholarship at the School of Business, Economics and Social Sciences, you must complete 40 ECTS within the observation period. It's important to take into account that electives are not considered.

**NAWI:** To request a merit scholarship at the Faculty of Natural Sciences (NAWI), you must complete 55 ECTS. What NAWI students have to consider is that they can only apply for a merit scholarship at their home university. This is important, because NAWI students are often enrolled in two universities.

**URBI:** At the Faculty of Environmental and Regional Sciences and Education, a merit scholarship can be requested when there is a proof of at least 55 ECTS credits within the observation period. At least 45 ECTS must have been positively graded and 10 ECTS can be graded with "successfully participated". For the GPA calculation, the best 45 positively completed and graded ECTS points will be considered.

**GEWI:** At the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, a merit scholarship can be requested when there is a proof of at least 55 ECTS credits within the observation period. At least 45 ECTS must have been positively graded and 10 ECTS can be graded with "successfully participated". For the GPA calculation, the best 45 positively completed and graded ECTS points will be considered.

**REWI:** To request a merit scholarship at the Faculty of Law, you must complete 50 ECTS within the observation period. It's important to take into account that electives and assessments with "successfully participated" are not considered.

**Theology:** The Faculty of Catholic Theology does not have separate requirements apart from the general requirements for merit scholarships.

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#### 4.1.1.2 Awards and Grants

##### Awards

**Excellence award:** The Institutes of English and American Studies award prizes to the best graduates of the Diploma Program in Teaching English and the Master Program in English/American Studies.

**KUGEL:** The Institute of Art History at the University of Graz, together with the Universalmuseum Joanneum and the Province of Styria (Land Steiermark), has been awarding outstanding work by young researchers with the Art History Achievement Prize KUGEL.

**Best of REWI:** The Faculty of Law awards the **15 best graduates** of the diploma program in law, and the best dissertation.

- Diploma program: The 15 best graduates of the past academic year **in terms of grade point average** and **length of study** are honored at the Best of REWI ceremony, where they receive certificates and awards and are included in the "Faculty Honor Book". In addition, the top student of the year receives the REWI Award and the names

of the top three are engraved on the plaque of the year's best in the RESOWI building in Component CE.

- Doctorate study: The authors of the best dissertations are honored during the ceremony, where they receive certificates and prizes and will be included in the "Honorary Book of the Faculty".

**SOWI-Ranking:** The School of Business, Economics and Social Sciences honors the **15 best students of the year** taking into account grades and time spent studying. As with the Best of REWI this award is supported by the Grazer Wechselseitige.

[Excellence award of the Federation of Austrian Industries](#)

## Grants

**SOWI offers grants** aimed to **support students** with unfinished masters theses or dissertations that require **financial assistance** to be completed (e.g., going abroad, special literature, etc.).

**Master's grant for master students at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities:** The Faculty of Arts and Humanities bundles measures and activities that aim to promote master students and master studies in different areas. The focus of the master's grant is on the following areas:

- Promotion of young academics through **reimbursement of travel expenses** for master students (in case of active participation in scientific events) and the possibility to win one of three GEWI awards for the best master/diploma theses (as well as dissertations)
- Public relations
- Background studies

**Doctoral Promotion at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities:** Doctoral students are supported in the following areas:

- Promotion of young academics through the GEWI awards for the best dissertations (as well as master/diploma thesis) with the opportunity to **publish their thesis**
- **Employment** as project assistants without a doctorate to encourage PhDs to complete their dissertations
- Opportunity to provide **professional/technical support** to their fellow (master) students as a **mentor**

**Special grants for doctorate students.** In addition to internal grants, the University of Graz maintains a list of international and national grants that are open for applications. This gives students the opportunity to apply to as many grants as possible.

**Doctoral programs and schools:** Doctoral programs and schools are supported by a variety of activities aimed at developing and promoting education. Cross-disciplinary programs have been established to support doctoral students with the dual aims of improving the quality of doctoral projects and ensuring adequate supervision of doctoral students within the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

- Doctoral programs provide opportunities for doctoral students to complete their dissertation in a special field.

- The doctoral school for Teaching Methodology allows education students to write their dissertation in a university- and cross-faculty service area.

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#### 4.1.1.3 Circle of Excellence

**Circle of Excellence:** One-year program for students with **outstanding academic success**. The Circle of Excellence is a cooperation between the Uni Graz and the technical University of Graz where high potential students receive **coaching** but are also given access to **valuable contacts at companies** and a **professional network** of alumni.

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### 4.1.2 DEEPER INTEREST

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#### 4.1.2.1 Icons

**Icons – Consulting by students:** An organisation of students from various fields who do business consulting for different companies with a **network of professionals**. These talented students take on company projects and **solve real client issues**.

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#### 4.1.2.2 Finance club

**Finance Club:** A student **networking** organisation with a deeper interest in finance, they also host **events** with talks from finance **professionals**.

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#### 4.1.2.3 OIKOS

**Oikos:** An international student-led organisation with the aim of integrating sustainability in management and economics. Special emphasis is put on including sustainability in university and high school education.

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#### 4.1.2.4 Moot Courts

**Moot Courts:** An opportunity for law students to apply their knowledge to **practical cases**, where a **real court** is set up. These moot courts are offered in various disciplines of law.

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### 4.1.3 MOTIVATION

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#### 4.1.3.1 KLUG

**KLUG:** A platform that offers courses to **increase soft skills and competences** of students in eight different modules ranging from leadership to diversity and tolerance. The aim is to increase the job readiness of students willing to broaden their horizons and acquire new competences. Upon completion of a set of courses students can acquire a **certificate**.

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#### 4.1.3.2 TIMEGATE

**TIMEGATE:** Students from any field are given the opportunity to acquire a **basic knowledge of business administration** in order to be well equipped when entering the job market. Taught by professionals within each field, the courses cover three main areas: basic knowledge; personality and perspective; and transfer of practical knowledge. Upon completion of a set of courses students can acquire a **certificate**.

#### 4.1.3.3 Supplementary program: Leadership – Act Responsibly in Society and Business

**Supplementary program leadership:** A one-year program to teach students the basics of leadership. The aim is to provide students with **real life leadership competencies** needed in the job market. Rather than transferring academic knowledge, the emphasis lies on developing **hands-on** personal competencies in settings that allow students to thrive, away from the classic lecture style of universities and instead through **coaching and workshops**.

#### 4.1.3.4 Route 63

**Route 63:** A collaboration with the TU Graz. This program enables students from business studies to take suitable courses from the technical university in order to gain a deeper understanding of scientific and technical fields.

#### 4.1.3.5 FAME

**FAME:** In this program female academics meet executives. Female students are given the opportunity to be **coached by professional women** with the goal of enabling women in many fields. FAME is aimed at students from any public university and field of study who have already completed their bachelor's degree or are nearing the end of their studies.

#### 4.1.3.6 Entrepreneurship programs

A set of programs where students who already have the desire to become an entrepreneur receive coaching in legalities, networking and finance. The main focus is on the student's business idea and how this idea can be elevated and be put into action. See Action Line 5.

#### 4.1.3.7 Center for Social Competence

**Center for Social Competence:** A platform that offers courses with the aim of **increasing the social competences** of students. Ranging from project management and team coordination to improvisation and body language, the 40 courses equip students from any field of study with a set of soft skills. Upon completion of a set of courses students can acquire a **certificate**.

#### 4.1.3.8 Mentoring programs

##### REWI Mentoring

- This program has been initiated by the REWI deanship and is currently lead by dean Prof. Dr. Christoph Bezemek.
- There are three different modules that this program uses to support students in building and enhancing their competencies:
  - International Track. Focus: Language skills, going abroad, intercultural competencies
  - Interdisciplinary Track. Focus: Interdisciplinary learning and working, topics covered are Smart Regulation, Law & Economics, Climate Change, etc.

- Business Law Track. Focus: Economic law competencies, entrepreneurship mindset, acquiring hands-on experience
- In general: meant **to accompany** students while studying, track-specific courses (so that they can deepen their knowledge in their specific field of interest), **soft skills, networking, etc.**

How does it work?

- Both parties (mentors and mentees) sign up, matching occurs during the Kick-off event, personal exchanges take place during the semester with the possibility to prolong the mentoring relationship, and an evaluation of the program and process is made at the end of the semester.
- This program includes an initial workshop, mentor-mentee meetings, and group get-togethers. Students earn credits, and mentors are given a certificate.
- Goal: mentoring and orientation in order to obtain guidance from experienced professionals.

Criteria to get accepted

- Application, including a letter of motivation
- Selection based on length of study/letter of motivation (as the mentees are usually in the early stages of their studies, grades are not considered as much)
- No specific definition of excellence is used, but a focus on what a future employer would want from students – employability.

#### Uni Graz Career Mentoring

With career mentoring the University of Graz gives students or new graduates the opportunity **to profit from the insights of a mentor**. The mentoring focuses on the topics "career entry and job orientation", "international/working abroad" and "self-employment".

They offer guidance on how to set up a proper mentoring contract between mentor and mentee and also help with finding a mentor. The aim is to support students to find the right path for the future and to build networks.

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#### 4.1.3.9 Masterstudium Plus

**Masterstudium Plus:** An initiative to make master's studies more **flexible and interdisciplinary**. This offers the possibility for students to deepen their knowledge in a different field for a whole semester as part of their regular master's studies. The students can choose between intra- and entrepreneurship<sup>22</sup>, communication – intervention – cooperation, and climate change and sustainable transformation.

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#### 4.1.3.10 Gusegg

**Gusegg:** A summer school initiated by the University of Graz in cooperation with the Commission of the Bishops' conference of the European Community (COMECE) and the Diocese Graz Seckau. The aim is **to enhance interdisciplinary** co-operation between students and

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<sup>22</sup> Entrepreneurship: to set up one's own business using a new idea or concept, Intrapreneurship: developing new ideas and concepts as an employee within an organization

teachers on **current social and political topics** and help educate the young leaders of tomorrow.

## 4.2 Deeper analysis of selected programs

As can be seen from the previous lists, there are a number of programs at the University of Graz that aim to support gifted students. The following section will first review the central core elements from the previous list (marked in bold). What are the core elements of the programs and initiatives? What do the programs have in common, what distinguishes them?

Subsequently, selected programs will be examined more closely in order to to summarise the advantages and disadvantages of such programs and what implications these have for the recommendations for action (see chapter 6).

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### 4.2.1 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

First, the three areas of deeper interest, motivation, and academic excellence will be considered independently of each other. Later we will look potential commonalities between them.

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#### 4.2.1.1 Academic excellence

The programs and initiatives in the area of academic excellence are primarily aimed at student achievement. Good performance is encouraged. This can be done monetarily (for example via scholarships or the SOWI support grant) or through personal awards (honours) in different areas. Academic performance is measured by grade point average and the average duration of study. In addition to financial support, however, support is also provided in the area of research performance. The Doctoral Promotion at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities for example, supports young academics by providing the opportunity to publish their thesis. Mentoring programs, networking support, and employment at the University help students to advance their academic career and succeed.

**Keywords:** *financial support, mentoring, support for publication, employments, networking*

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#### 4.2.1.2 Deeper interest

Most of the initiatives and programs in the area of deeper interest aim to support student networking with professionals from various fields by creating events or organizing talks with professionals from outside of the university. The second major aspect is, that all programs try to help students to improve their professional skills by offering them project work on genuine issues from real clients. By working on practical cases, students have the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge to real-life cases.

**Keywords:** *networking, real cases, practical cases*

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#### 4.2.1.3 Motivation

The third area of our collection of programs and initiatives focuses on the motivation of students. Here the goal is to promote different areas of competences, whereby the emphasis is to promote social-, personal- and methodological competences which are usually neglected in a normal course of study. Besides the intrinsic motivation of students to develop themselves further, offering certificates of achievement encourages students to choose these programs. The formal confirmation seems to be of great importance, and certificates are awarded in almost all initiatives. Just as in the other two areas, networking plays a particularly important role. Through mentoring, coaching, and hands-on activities, competences are developed and interdisciplinary knowledge is increased.

**Keywords:** *increase skills, certificates, networking, hands-on, mentoring and coaching*

In summary, it can be said that all the areas have their own characteristics and above all, focal points. What connects the areas, however, is that the **topic of networking** enjoys a special status and is present as an objective in most programs.

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### 4.2.2 INTERVIEWS

To understand the deeper impact of the projects, especially in terms of promoting excellence and giftedness, we interviewed some project leaders and asked three main questions:

- Why was the initiative/project launched?
- What were the three most important enablers/success factors?
- In what way does your program benefit gifted students?

Some facts about the programs and the answers to the questions are presented below. In addition, the results of two student surveys concerning satisfaction with the programs were included.

#### 4.2.2.1 TIMEGATE – Transfer Initiative for Management- and Entrepreneurship-Basics, Awareness, Training and Employability

##### **Program info:**

- Free elective program
- HRSM cooperation project funded by the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research from 2013 to 2019 (cooperation partners: Graz University of Technology, Medical University of Graz, Marketing Club Graz, Science Park Club Graz, FH Upper Austria)
- Since 2019 self-financed through the university budget (Costs: about €160,000 per year)
- ~30 lectures per semester
- Over 1,700 registrations per semester (more than 400 students)
- 15 basic and advanced certificates (more than 600 certificates awarded since the start of the program)
- Open to all disciplines, as well as bachelor, master, diploma, and PHD students

##### **Interview with Nina Nentwig, MA (project coordinator)**

*Why was it launched?*

The requirements of the job market for university graduates are increasing. Today basic skills in Business Administration are prerequisites in many fields but most study curricula provide only limited opportunities to acquire these skills. Further, support in the field of entrepreneurship is often only offered by non-academic institutions. TIMEGATE offers new forms of electives that focus on application- and practice-oriented modules from Business Administration. It is a cooperation between the Medical University Graz, the Technical University Graz, Science Park Graz and other partners. The program is open to all students of all different fields of study program and universities. Additionally, the program offers certificates for successfully completed classes which can formally validate the business skills acquired.

*What were the three most important enablers/success factors?*

- The interdisciplinary nature of the program and the heterogeneity of the students within the courses.
- The practical and interactive teaching and the hands-on approach. Theoretical knowledge is not enough, students need to learn how to apply this knowledge in a practical context.
- The teachers/lecturers are all from private and public companies outside the university. They teach about fields that they currently work in.

*In what way does your program benefit gifted students?*

TIMEGATE, a free elective program, helps students to learn about a topic that they don't have access to within their regular study programs. They are not obligated to take the courses. So,

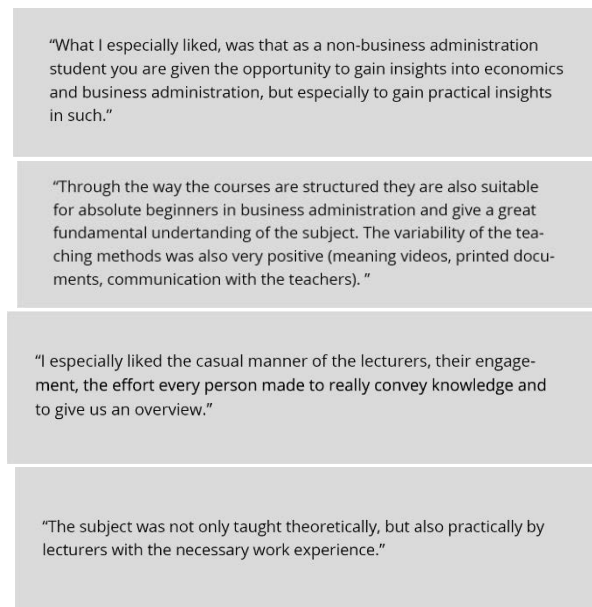


when they choose to take them, they are motivated to learn something extra and to develop their skills in new areas. TIMEGATE helps to provide a basic understanding of business processes and economic interrelationships and thus expands a student's interdisciplinary experience. Students who choose courses from this program stand out from the crowd and can score points with future employers with this by having this hands-on business experience/practical understanding of business.

### That's what students think about the program TIMEGATE.



**Figure 9: Survey results from 2020 (n=170).**



**Figure 10: Quotes from students  
(Source: 2020 Student Survey)**

#### 4.2.2.2 Gusegg

#### Interview with Mag. Martina Braunegger, BA

*Why was the initiative/program launched?*

The Graz International Summer School Seggau (GUSEGG) was launched to bring highly motivated students and professors from various countries and fields of studies together to discuss current European and international events. In the foreground is the exchange between professors and talented students as well as the communication between students from different parts of the world. Supporting students in their research and creating a network they can benefit from are key aspects of the Graz International Summer School Seggau.

*What would you say have been the three most important enablers or success factors and why?*

GUSEGG would not be possible without the support and financial help of our partners. GUSEGG is organized by the University of Graz, the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE), and the Diocese Graz-Seckau. Moreover, the students and professors participating in the summer school and that are putting so much hard work into it, are responsible for the program's success.

*In what way does your program benefit gifted students?*

The Graz International Summer School Seggau is designed for internationally oriented students from all disciplines, who wish to deepen their understanding of current European and international affairs by studying and discussing global developments and challenges in the context of transformation processes and demographic change reflecting aspects of individual, social, political, religious, cultural, literary, regional, economic, cohort and national identities. The program brings hard-working and ambitious students from all over the world together, enables them to build a network, and make connections that last a lifetime. The students participate in seminars, lectures, workshops, and open discussions and are encouraged to challenge themselves. After the summer school, they have the opportunity to get their articles published in the GUSEGG publication series Off Campus: Seggau School of Thoughts.

#### 4.2.2.3 KLUG – Kompetenzen lernen Uni Graz

##### **Program Info:**

- Free elective program
- Self-financed through the university budget. Costs: about €100,000 per year
- Open to all study programs, as well as to bachelor, master, diploma, and PHD students
- ~20 courses per semester
- Over 400 registrations per semester (more than 150 students)
- A competence pass can be earned. There are two passes to choose from:
  - Focus A: People, communication, and creativity
  - Focus B: Self-employment, leadership and networking

##### **Interview with Nina Nentwig, MA: project coordinator**

*Why was it launched?*

It was built as a platform to connect the economy, society and universities, and in particular to build a space where relevant work skills are taught and interaction with a broad range of experts is possible. At our university we have well-educated students. They all know a lot about their field, about their techniques let's say, and when they are finished, they are nearly experts. What is missing is the fact that they often don't know how to apply their knowledge within companies. Let me give you two examples: our law students know a lot of information

about their topic. They learn every single law. They can go deep into their topic. What they do not learn for example, is to negotiate. But what will be important in the future? Pharmacy students are well-educated to analyze every single sample. What they do not learn is to lead a project on their own. They don't know how to organize a project, how to work together with other people. But what will be important in the future?

The project tries to fill that gap. KLUG doesn't want students to learn expert knowledge. KLUG wants to help them improve their soft skills such as communication, conflict management, teamwork, and intercultural competence. And KLUG wants them to apply their knowledge in a business context. To close the training gap at universities by teaching social, personal and methodological skills that are otherwise not covered in the curricula.

KLUG also helps students connect with all kinds of organizations (that's why a lot of events are offered to help them network).

*What were the three most important enablers/success factors?*

- The huge network of practitioners involved in the program. They work as lecturers, as mentors in different mentoring programs within the project, or give speeches at events.
- Students work on real projects together with companies, to develop necessary skills for a successful work life. Therefore, students are "thrown into reality".
- The interdisciplinary nature of the platform and the formation of networks in different disciplines and areas.

*In what way does your program benefit gifted students?*

Students who choose the KLUG program and its courses are motivated to develop themselves and their personalities as well as competences on different levels. They complement their basic studies with social, personal and methodological competencies, thus contributing to their personal development as well as their employability.

**Here is what students think about the KLUG program:**



**Figure 11: Survey results from 2020 (n=49).**



**Figure 12: Quotes from students**

#### 4.2.2.4 Supplementary program "Leadership – Act responsibly in Society and Business"

##### **Program Info:**

- One year program
- 45 ECTS (part-time)
- Self-financed through the university budget. Costs: €58,500 per year
- 19 courses (two semesters)
- Between 16 and 30 students per year
- Free of charge
- Official final certificate from University of Graz

##### **Interview with Univ.-Prof. Dr. Armin Kreuzthaler (curricula chair)**

###### *Why was it launched?*

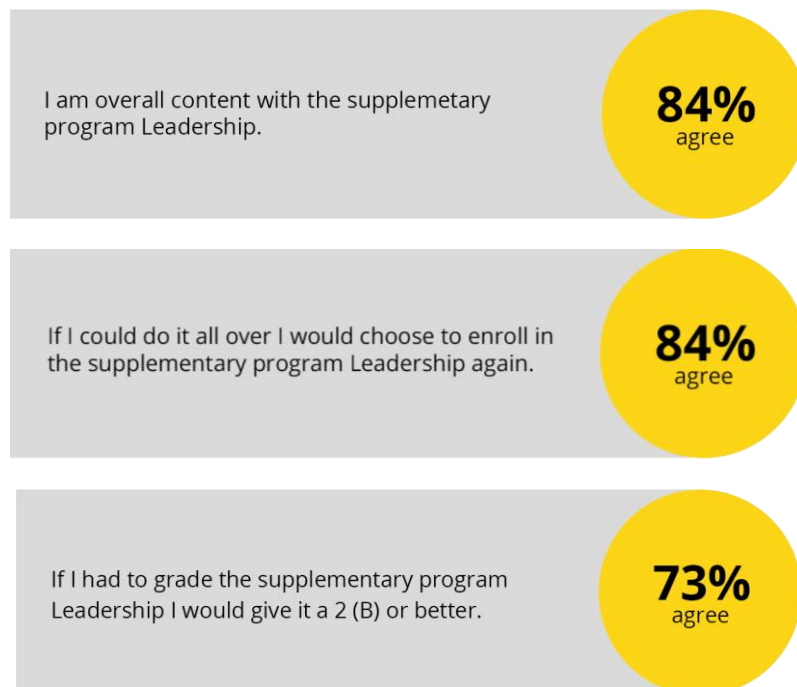
The idea of the project was to build a bridge from the end of study to start of work life. The aim is to provide students with real life competencies needed in the job market, especially in the field of leadership. There is a great gap between what companies expect from public university students and the skills graduates bring after study. Students at public universities are well-educated and well trained in theory but with a lack of knowledge about how to apply their expertise and knowledge in business. The idea was to improve students' employability.

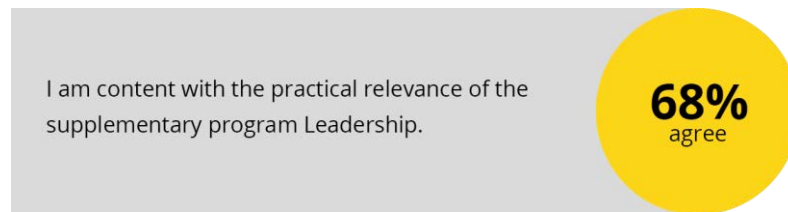
*What were the three most important enablers/success factors?*

- First, the support of the university management for developing a curriculum which defines a new way of studying. A supplementary program of this kind did not exist before in Austria. The management of the university of Graz was very open to this and showed a lot of trust in developing the curriculum.
- We worked together with experts from Human Resources during the development process to find out what companies expect of graduates. This was helpful to find the right direction.
- Students work on real projects together with companies to cultivate many necessary skills especially self-responsibility and teamwork. Therefore, students are “thrown into reality”. They must do everything on their own: ordering, discussions, communication with the company, searching material, forming the team, leading the team, presenting the results. Only supervision dates were set to allow a space for discussing problems with the group or the project.

*In what way does your program benefit gifted students?*

The supplementary program ‘Leadership’ builds the bridge between TIMEGATE and KLUG and aims to provide a basic understanding of economics and combine it with competence development relevant to the labour market with an emphasis on leadership skills. In addition to leadership topics, which are primarily divided into self-leadership, self-management, and working in teams, the study program is also dedicated to current challenges such as digitalization, technology applications and ethics. It is embedded in business basics that are dedicated to corporate management and economic thinking and acting. It appeals to students who have a deeper interest in the topic of leadership and economic action and to students who are motivated to expand their knowledge and their ability to apply knowledge effectively.





**Figure 13: Graduate Survey Results 2021/22**

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#### 4.2.2.5 OIKOS

##### **Interview with Linda Spann, MSc (president OIKOS Graz)**

*Why was the initiative/program launched?*

oikos has its roots in the 80s in Switzerland, to be precise at the University of St. Gallen where they always put a focus on sustainability in management and economics. To this day the main aim of oikos is the integration of sustainability into these two disciplines and there are now chapters in over 40 countries. oikos also strives to equip future leaders with the necessary competencies, qualities, practices, tools and global network to become conscious leaders in the co-creation of thriving and sustainable societies.

*What were the three most important enablers/success factors?*

- The biggest success factor for oikos is definitely the international community. This engages students in a network of like-minded people, where they can thrive, which in turn makes the organization more attractive for new members.
- Secondly, the focus on management and economics makes the topic of sustainability graspable but also applicable for many students. Often activism is seen as the only option to fight the climate crisis, but oikos offers a different approach.
- Lastly, the various initiatives make it so that students with different interests within the sustainability area are attracted to the oikos community. With the leadership program on the one hand but also curriculum change, which is more on the educational side of things or sustainable finance, which is very focused on economics, a broad spectrum of interests can be addressed.

*In what way does your program benefit gifted students?*

oikos gives students a chance to gain some hands-on experience in many fields. There is event management, marketing, but also fundraising expertise that can be gained within the organization. Gifted students can apply their theoretical skills or learn something entirely new and different from their original field of study.

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#### 4.2.2.5 Circle of Excellence

##### **Interview with Mag. iur Antonia Csuk Bakk. Phil. (CEO – Chief executive officer)**

*Why was the initiative/program launched?*

The Circle of Excellence (CoE) was founded in 2001 with the aim to increase the national and international competitiveness of graduates from the five universities in Graz through a High-Potential Program. What got the ball rolling was the founders' surprise that outstanding students lacked connections, and they wanted to change that.

*What were the three most important enablers/success factors?*

- The careful selection of participants: They are characterized by above average success in their studies, experience abroad, or work experience as well as engagement outside of the university and a striking personality.
- The win-win situation for partner companies as well as participants: While the students get exciting insights into the way successful companies are operating and what it is like to work there, partner companies get the chance to introduce their company to high-potential students and possibly recruit new employees.
- Networking and personal development: Through the Circle of Excellence program the participants are supported to better their social skills and to grow on a personal level. They become part of a professional and interdisciplinary network that may become the deciding factor in their career path.

*In what way does your program benefit gifted students?*

Every year around 20 enthusiastic students from the universities in Graz have the possibility of joining the high-potential program Circle of Excellence (CoE). Topics that they need in order to become successful in their future careers constitute the main subject matter taught.

Participants can expect a "Circle-Year" full of experiences, personal growth, coaching, workshops with the partner companies, and networking meetups. The events are on site and hybrid. In addition, every year the participants undertake one charitable project together. On outings and team activities, fun also plays a major role in the program. At the year's end, the participants are part of a network of students, alumni and companies.

## 5. UNIVERSITY OF PADOVA

As a research university, the University of Padova aims to foster academic talent and excellence in all its activities from teaching to research. In accordance with the Italian Constitution and its statute, the University of Padova supports capable and worthy students in their pursuit of education at the highest levels. This principle is put into practice through a broad spectrum of activities from financial assistance for lower income students to specific programs such as the Galilean School. Such breadth ensures that gifted students in general, whether they are formally identified as that or not, are offered the tools they need to reach their full potential.

In line with one of the major goals of the Arqus Alliance, widening access and inclusion, the objective of the activities described below, which are to be considered as a whole, is twofold. On the one hand they aim to reduce barriers (especially financial ones) to higher education and the consequent inequalities in educational attainment. On the other hand, they aim at enriching the experience of higher education students. This is particularly relevant for activity 2.11 considering that, as it has been proven, when not sufficiently intellectually stimulated, gifted students in particular run a serious risk of dropping out of their degree programs.

The initiatives in favor of gifted students promoted by the University of Padova can be grouped on the basis of the target population and the definition of excellence taken into consideration. For example, the Galilean School is specifically targeted to gifted students identified in the most conservative way on the basis of their academic excellence, while the Career Service's Mentor&Me project is open to the general student population but is particularly suited to students with a higher degree of motivation. This categorization is reflected in the following paragraphs, centered on the description of the activities mentioned.

### 5.1. The Galilean School

#### 5.1.1 ORIGINS



In 2004 the University of Padova set up an extensive program for gifted students that falls in the category of the so-called 'Schools of Excellence', or 'Schools of Higher Education'. To give a bit of a historical perspective, the origin of the idea behind the schools of excellence can be traced back to France with the creation of the so-called 'grande école' in the 18th century: the first one, the *École Normale Supérieure* of Paris, was founded in 1794 and after closing the following year it was soon reestablished in 1808 by Napoleon; in 1810 the *Scuola Superiore di Pisa* was founded in Italy, as a branch of the ENS in Paris.

As of today, the *Scuola Normale Superiore* is one of the four institutions of this kind to be recognized by the Italian Ministry of Education as higher education schools (the other 3 are the *Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna*, *IUSS Pavia* and *SISSA*). They operate as independent institutions, like normal universities; apart from them, many other schools of higher education have been created, usually as part of pre-existing universities.

This is the case of the *Galilean School of Higher Education*: it is part of the University of Padova, and it represents a program of excellence dedicated to the most brilliant students enrolled at the University of Padova; it is named after Galileo Galilei, scientist and famous scholar from the University of Padova. The program at the *Galilean School* is structured over five years, and it is meant to accompany the usual five-year study course at the University of Padova; each student enrolled at the school will attend lessons and take the course exams at the University of Padova (just like every other UniPD student) and at the same time will take courses and exams reserved for *Galilean* students.

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### 5.1.2 STRUCTURE

Students at the *Galilean School* are divided into three groups; prospective students can only apply for admission to one of the classes, and it is advised that they choose a class that is consistent with the scientific area of the course that they have chosen at the University of Padova, but this isn't mandatory: students interested in deepening at the *Galilean School* subjects that are not part of the same scientific area of the course they have chosen at the University of Padova are encouraged to do so, provided that they can pass the selection and then keep up with two distinct courses of study. Only a total of 30 students per year can enter the *Galilean School*: 16 places are available for the scientific class (Natural Sciences), eight for the humanities class (Moral Sciences) and eight for the social sciences class (dedicated to socio/economic disciplines). The selection is based on two written tests and two oral tests for each class; only the top-ranking candidates can be admitted to the school. Applying to take the tests is free and joining the *Galilean School* doesn't require paying any extra fees than those required for the other UniPD students.

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### 5.1.3 BENEFITS AND DUTIES

Once members of the *Galilean School*, students must complete all the exams scheduled for each academic year on time; their grades cannot drop below 24/30, and their average must not be less than 27/30.

*Galilean* students enjoy a wide array of benefits for the duration of their entire academic career at the University of Padova: free room and board, free language courses, reimbursements of expenses to buy books and participate in study trips. At the center of the *Galilean* experience, though, there are the *Galilean* courses: *Galilean* students can attend courses held by experts

on specific aspects of the disciplines that they are studying that aren't usually covered at the university.

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#### 5.1.4 DIDACTICS

The didactic offer is often developed with the support of the students themselves (if there is a particular interest from the students for a course on a specific matter, the Class Coordinator can plan to offer that course in the following academic year) and it is also highly customizable: with the exception of some fixed courses that students need to have a strong common theoretical base on certain subjects, students can choose among the offerings of each class which courses to attend (they can also attend courses held in different classes, if they're interested), and especially in the latter part of their career, they can insert into their study plan research stays at other universities, internships and individually structured research projects of different kinds.

Finally, another crucial aspect of the Galilean experience, perhaps the most crucial, is community. All Galilean students live in the same building and share the same spaces; they can hang out together, share meals and study together; a big part of the appeal of the Galilean School lies in this idea of putting together brilliant young people who share the same love and eagerness for knowledge and let them interact, so that a continuous exchange of notions and stimuli can happen among them, and they can all come out from this experience as much better and well-rounded individuals and scholars.

### 5.2 Financial assistance

The Arqus Alliance aims to widen access to and inclusion into the world of university education through the broad range of activities that form Action Line 2. The specific target groups of this Action Line include people with special educational needs due to physical and intellectual disabilities; migrant and refugee populations; women; LGBT and gifted students. Action Line 2 activities, as recapped at the beginning of this report, clearly indicate that each of these underrepresented groups has their own specific needs that must be taken into account when designing inclusion strategies. This should not distract from the fact that individuals from underrepresented groups may share common challenges when access to and success in higher education are concerned. This is particularly relevant in the case of economic obstacles.

It is worth noting that lower socio-economic conditions, even though not specifically targeted by AL 2 activities, are one of the main barriers that can prevent students from accessing and completing higher education. Therefore, financial assistance is one the main and most effective but also widespread tools to favour the inclusion not only of the general student population but also of underrepresented groups as well.

The University of Padova provides different forms of economic support for its students. The following paragraphs will give a brief description of the two main financial assistance schemes while trying to underline the importance of financial assistance not only for the student population as a whole but for gifted students in particular.

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#### 5.2.1 THE REGIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

The regional scholarship is one the most far-reaching initiatives promoted by the University of Padova in order to financially support capable and worthy students.

The regional scholarship is funded through the Veneto Region budget and supports low-income students (Italian and international) enrolled in Bachelor's, Single-cycle, Master's or PhD degree courses. The amount of the scholarship varies according to the student's income and may include both the exemption of tuition fees and a subsistence allowance, as well as free or discounted student services such as accommodation, meals at university canteens, and so on.

Apart from the income-related criteria, students are required to meet academic performance criteria as well. Recipients need to have acquired a definite number of ECTS, determined on the basis of the year of enrolment, by August 10 of each year in order to maintain the benefit.

Even though the importance of financial assistance to higher education students is self-explanatory, it is worth noting that thanks to this kind of initiative the University of Padova is able to support gifted students that may be excluded by the Galilean School due to the technical constraints (namely limited number and selection) mentioned previously.

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### 5.2.2 THE "MILLE E UNA LODE" GRANT

Through the "Mille e una Lode" grant, the University of Padova assigns 1000 awards each year (of 1000 euros each) to the most excellent students in each course of study. Students do not have to apply as the recipients of the award are selected automatically on the basis of their academic performance. The evaluation is made with reference to the previous academic year.

Selected students have the possibility to receive a reduction on tuition fees or use the grant to carry out one of the following activities: tutoring, mobility for studies, internships (in Italy or abroad).

The "Mille e una lode" grant is different from the regional scholarship, as it does not consider students' income; the only award criterion is academic talent. Furthermore, the "Mille e una Lode" grant is assigned to carry out a specific activity that can be embedded in the study plan (for example, a mandatory internship) or not (for example a voluntary internship abroad). Through this kind of award, excellent students (gifted students identified on the basis of their academic performance) are encouraged to take part in activities that they may have not taken into consideration, thus enhancing the value of their educational path and broadening their horizons.

As in the case of the regional scholarship, the "Mille e una lode" award encourages gifted students to engage in a wide range of activities. At the same time, it expands the pool of beneficiaries compared to the Galilean School.

## 5.3 Career service initiatives

The primary goal of the Career Service of the University of Padova is to connect students and local, national and international companies. Students and recent graduates are offered a wide range of services aimed at a targeted and facilitated entry into the job market. At the same time, companies are supported in recruiting the best talent.

The activities promoted by the Career Service are aimed at the general student population with no particular focus on gifted students. It is worth noting though, that the services offered make use of principles similar to those of the Galilean School in order to reinforce student's employability. A group of services is characterized by the possibility of customization while the other focuses on offering a stimulating interaction with the job market.

Equipping students with the tools to shape their entry in the job market according to their uniqueness and favoring diverse and inspirational encounters with the professional world provide gifted students the opportunity to put their knowledge and skills (both hard and soft) into practice.

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### 5.3.1 FOCUS ON CUSTOMIZATION

The main fully customizable services and programs managed by the Career Service are: individual counselling sessions, internships and the “Mentor&Me” project.

- **Individual counselling:** students and recent graduates can book an individual counselling session to get the support of specialized staff in approaching the job market. The main topics discussed during these sessions include professional goals, occupational areas of interest, effective tools for job searching, how to prepare a CV and a cover letter, and how to prepare for a job interview. <https://www.unipd.it/en/job-guidance-counselling>
- **Internships:** students have the possibility to carry out an internship whether it is mandatory (embedded in the study plan) or voluntary. Especially in this last case, an internship is a fully customizable experience. In fact, students have the possibility to choose the host organization based on their interests. Students can contact host organizations (companies, associations, research institutes, universities, hospitals, public administrations, and so on) through the Unipd Careers platform <https://careers.unipd.it/en/#/pages/login>. Once the selection process is completed, interns will define the training program that suits their individual needs under the guidance of their academic tutor and supervisor at the host organization. <https://www.unipd.it/en/internships>
- **The “Mentor & Me” project:** the objective of the project is to provide students interested in building an outstanding career in the public or private sector the opportunity to interact with successful professionals. The project aims to develop a meaningful relationship between the Mentor and the Mentee who can receive personalized guidance on their educational and professional path. Since the development of such a relationship is the main feature of the program, mentors and the mentees are carefully matched based on the mentee’s individual needs and aspirations. During the six-month duration of the project mentees will have regular meetings with their mentor and group meetings with other mentees, led by the Career Service staff. <https://www.unipd.it/en/mentor-me-project>

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### 5.3.2 INTERACTION WITH THE PROFESSIONAL WORLD

Positive interaction between students/recent graduates and potential employers is the main goal of the Career Service. This is achieved through services designed to prepare students to successfully enter the job market (seminars and workshops), and events organized to promote direct contact between students and local companies.

Seminars and workshops (<https://www.unipd.it/seminari-workshop-orientamento-lavoro> - link available in Italian only) take place throughout the academic year and are focused on, but not limited to, the following topics:

- Freelancing and entrepreneurship;
- Effective use of LinkedIn for career development;
- Career tools (CV, cover letter, interviews);
- International careers;
- Industry specific skills;

- Soft and transferable skill development and practice (experiential workshops <https://www.unipd.it/laboratori-sviluppo-competenze-trasversali>, link available in Italian only)

Students can have direct contact with local companies thanks to the following activities:

- **Company on-site and virtual tours:** companies offer on-site tours that include the company presentations, a guided tour of the company premises, and individual interviews/assessment. Apart from in-person visits, students are offered the possibility to attend **virtual tours (V-Tours project)** during which managers of different companies present their organization and answer questions from students and recent graduates.
- **Corporate presentations at the university:** companies can offer job opportunities or paid work placements via organized events at the university, making direct contact with prospective candidates. At the end of the presentation, the company can meet interested participants in person, collect their CVs and talk to them briefly.
- **Career days:** Università Aperta, the Career Day organized by the University of Padova, offers companies the chance to showcase their business along with their educational and professional requirements to students and recent graduates. Students and graduates can learn about many companies in one location at the same time, talk to company managers, and provide CVs to companies they are interested in. The Career Day program includes corporate presentations and workshops. Several industry specific Career Days are organized each year. <https://www.universitaperta-unipd.it/> (Link available in Italian only.)

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

As we have seen in the previous chapters there is a wide range of programs that address the topic of giftedness in different ways (motivation, academic excellence, deeper interest). To support other universities in implementing such programs, the following section will describe the challenges and opportunities of selected programs. In doing so, both student and university perspectives will be highlighted, and the pros and cons of implementing programs for gifted students will be examined. The aim is to identify the advantages and disadvantages of each program and the challenges and opportunities that universities may face. From this, individual recommendations for action are to be derived that can be applied according to the needs of the respective universities.

### 6.1 Recommendation 1

The easiest way to implement offers for excellent students at a university are scholarships and grants. These offers can usually be found at all higher education institutions. The problem, however, as can be seen in the example of the University of Graz, is that these scholarships differ greatly in their requirements. Even within the university, there are different requirements for receiving scholarships in the individual faculties. The recommendation for action here could be to standardize the requirements for receiving a scholarship. On the one hand, this would create uniformity within the university and on the other hand, ensure the same quality of all scholarships at European universities. Students who decide to study at a foreign university would face the same conditions as they would at their home university. The problem, however, is that not every faculty and every university can issue the same funding for scholarships. At the University of Graz for example, different budgets are available to the individual faculties. This results from the fact that the size of the faculties differs. Another problem may be that performance is not always viewed equally objectively by all. If presentations must be completed in a course or open questions are asked in an examination, sympathy and antipathy can influence the assessment of individual students. Thus, there is a danger that gifted students who excel and receive good grades will not receive the performance assessment they deserve in courses. Likewise, it can be said that scholarships and grants do not always promote talent. Very good grades basically do not yet directly stand out from the crowd. Nevertheless, the introduction of scholarships and grants can motivate excellent students to complete their studies with the best possible performance and rewards their achievements accordingly in order to be able to motivate them further down the line.

### 6.2 Recommendation 2

Implement a one-year program that aims to develop motivated students in terms of personal development and business understanding. Example: 4.1.3.3 **Supplementary program leadership**. The advantages and disadvantages are mentioned below.

Pro	Con

<p><b>Group feeling</b></p> <p>The feeling of belonging together as a group develops because students attend all courses together for a year (this differs from a regular study program where courses can usually be attended in any order). This also <b>reduces the drop-out rate</b> because the students feel like a cohort and maintain greater cohesion among themselves, even if there are difficult issues.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If someone must drop out due to illness, then the respective semester can only be made up a year later (one joins another group)</li> <li>▪ If there is more than one negative person in the group, this can negatively influence the group dynamics.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Part-time schedule</b></p> <p>The courses are offered during the week in the afternoon/evening to enable students to <b>work and study</b>. This gives students the chance to <b>directly put into practice</b> what they have learned.</p>	<p>If students are already working, then they naturally have a double burden due to the afternoon/evening courses. They are more tired, and it is more difficult to maintain concentration.</p>
<p><b>Official degree certificate</b></p> <p>It is a regular degree program, therefore there is an official degree certificate from the University of Graz upon completion of the program.</p>	<p>It is a new form of study program in Austria and not yet well known among employers. It will take a little time until this type of degree and its benefits are recognized by companies.</p>
<p><b>High quality standards</b></p> <p>The curriculum had to be confirmed by the Senate and several bodies after it was developed in 2018. This ensures the quality of the content and prevents content and objectives from being chosen arbitrarily.</p>	<p>If the curriculum is to be changed, then the application process starts again and can take up to a year. This also applies to simple changes such as changing course names in the curriculum or changing module sequences. It thus limits the flexibility to react to changes and needs in a timely manner. In addition, recommendations for improving the curriculum cannot be incorporated as quickly.</p>

### 6.3 Recommendation 3

Implementation of an interdisciplinary elective program to support motivated students who want to develop in business-related areas during their studies. Example: 4.1.3.2 **TIMEGATE**

<p><b>Pro</b></p>	<p><b>Con</b></p>
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<p><b>Wide range of courses</b></p> <p>The broad range of courses per semester offers students of all fields of study suitable options for their <b>personal aspirations and needs</b>.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ High financial outlay for the university</li> <li>▪ Intensive organizational effort (room booking, coordination of teachers, time resources)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Praxis-oriented</b></p> <p>All <b>lecturers are experts</b> from their field and work full time outside the university. They are therefore <b>practitioners</b> who share experiences from their everyday professional life.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Limited time resources on the part of the lecturers</li> <li>▪ For some lecturers it is easier to convey the practice than for others. As a result, the quality of the individual courses sometimes varies.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Work-friendly hours</b></p> <p>Blocked course times and courses in the afternoon/evening enable working students to participate.</p>	<p>Problem of limited space resources at public universities</p>
<p><b>Interdisciplinary groups</b></p> <p>The interdisciplinary nature of the courses is conducive to <b>insightful discussions</b> within the group. It allows students to examine the topics from <b>different angles</b>.</p>	<p>Due to the admission of students from all fields of study, the program must be widely publicized in order to reach all students. Application to such programs is handled differently by the individual faculties and universities. There are faculties, institutes, and internal professors who make great efforts to promote the program, however others brush it aside.</p>

The benefits of such a program for the students is relatively high because they see it as a supplement to their basic studies, which can help them in their later professional life. However, the organizational effort behind it should not be underestimated. Ideally, there is a superordinate institution at the respective university that is completely dedicated to the creation and supervision of such a program. It would ensure the supervision of the lecturers, who come from practice, as well as the students.

*"This personal attention to students is extremely important when it comes to the perceived quality of the program. Having a central contact person or an institution for*



*any questions or problems is very important so that students don't feel lost in the multitude of courses.” (Nina Nentwig, Project coordinator)*

The coordination of such a program should therefore be done by a central body.

#### 6.4 Recommendation 4

Implementation of a school of higher education dedicated to supporting gifted students in the form of a separate institution integrated in the university's system. Example: **Galilean School – University of Padova.**

Schools of higher education like the Galilean School can have different traits and objectives: most are aimed at undergraduate education, but there are also some that are dedicated to PhD students; they can be autonomous institutions or part of universities; whatever the case may be though, there are a number of common traits that can help to better understand what sets them apart from normal education paths, and upon which universities can expand, by integrating the principles listed below into their activities:

- Limited number and selection: For a number of reasons, schools of higher education can only work with a limited number of students; that makes it essential to be able to identify and select the most brilliant students. Students are usually admitted through tests, and their prior education path and grades usually bear no weight. Admitting only a limited number of students to certain activities must not be seen as a way to exclude the others, but as a means to give each student a sufficient degree of attention and consideration.
- Economic support: Schools of higher education aim to give students the funds to support themselves while studying, and better still, the means to afford materials and experiences that may have been out of their reach. That is why room and board are usually free, and there is support for expenses for items such as books and study trips.
- Stimulating environment: Students can share living spaces and classes with like-minded individuals, thus enriching their experience and giving them the chance to broaden their horizons and share their knowledge. Students can support each other while studying and create communal projects.
- Customization: The didactic path is less rigid than at normal schools or universities: after obtaining a solid base of knowledge in the subjects that they are studying, students are free to explore aspects that interest them the most. At the same time, they are able to choose the best approach to each study subject by having the possibility of undertaking research or study experiences as they see fit given their interests or objectives.

#### 6.5 Recommendation 5

As seen in the previous recommendations there are a lot of different possibilities for actively supporting gifted students. They all entail different advantages and disadvantages. Other possibilities to provide fast tracks for gifted students include programs/initiatives which are organized in cooperation with universities (e.g., OIKOS 4.1.2.3, Circle of Excellence 4.1.2.3, etc.) The biggest challenge for such outside programs is funding. Most of these programs are created as associations and are reliant on external financial promotion. Another problem is that the organization within these associations usually depends on the intrinsic motivation of the people who take part in them. Salaries often cannot be paid, and a lot of people work there

voluntarily. The good thing is that companies, especially private companies, often help to fund activities such as working together with students on real projects, because they see the advantage of working with motivated people. The advantages for the students include working on real-life projects, working together with companies, and learning from practice. The advantages for the companies include free resources, interdisciplinary groups, potential future employees and exposure to the students' different perspectives on life.

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