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European University Alliance

Job market transition for inclusive universities (TF 2.12)

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Introduction
Guidelines - Methodology
Shared counseling service
Experts' recommendations
Concluding remarks
Bibliography

1. INTRODUCTION

The ARQUS alliance between the universities of Bergen, Granada, Graz, Leipzig, Lyon (University Jean Monnet, University Lyon 1 and University Lyon 3), Padua and Vilnius is an initiative designed to share the best practices of the seven institutions in their teaching, research, outreach and civic engagement missions. Among these practices, **this report will focus on the transition phase from university to the job market**, a complex experience process for all graduates, and even more so for the ones with vulnerabilities.

One of the main goals of the project is to **map best practices from different perspectives** (students, alumni, employers...), to provide better career guidance programs for groups with and without vulnerabilities and support platforms to monitor services involved in the employment of graduates at risk of exclusion. The Task Force will also encourage actions to raise awareness about the need for inclusion, inform companies about employment and practices for people with disabilities or promote policies throughout public and private entities at the regional level.

In order to make some progress, members of the TFs have decided to work on a working **concept of students with vulnerabilities**. The adopted concept is an adaptation of Schmidt and Napier (2020). As a result, Task Force's members are going to focus on 3 categories:

- **Students with special needs:** students with particular requirements resulting from learning difficulties, physical disability or emotional and behavioral difficulties.
- **Students with socio-vulnerabilities:** social-awareness vulnerabilities, minorities (gender, sexual orientation, foreign students), first-generation university students (students whose parents did not undertake university studies), and refugees.
- **Students with financial vulnerabilities:** often linked with social vulnerabilities.

Expected outputs

TF 2.12 JOB MARKET TRANSITION FOR INCLUSIVE UNIVERSITIES

- Annual **joint staff training events** for careers guidance officers (3 days, 3 participants per university).
- Design of **shared counseling services** for graduates wishing to relocate to a partner region.

2. GUIDELINES - METHODOLOGY

AN ORGANIZATION THROUGH “CONTACTS GROUPS”

The methodology adopted for the guidelines is a detailed description of an idealistic Career Center tackling all the challenges raised during the Task Force’s meetings. To have a document clear enough, the task force decided on an **organization “by contacts”**, listing the purpose and relation Career Centers have to build with each type of contact to provide the best service possible to students. This approach was undertaken as it makes it easy to understand the opportunities (and challenges) each user (or stakeholder) has when interacting with such a Career Center, but also what the Career Center can get from interacting with such targets (especially advocacy groups).

To cover all relevant contacts of a hypothetical Career Center, **5 main aspects** were underlined throughout the Task Force’s meetings.

As they are the **2 main current contacts** of most Career Centers, **students** and **employers** are 2 important groups targeted in the document. Indeed, as students and employers represent the “supply-side” and the “demand-side” of a labor market, they are the two basic categories on which a Career Center must focus (to ensure that offer and demand can meet). As already mentioned, those targets are usually already the focus of existing Career Centers.

Although, some more specific actions were identified during the task force’s meetings, with **2 student sub-groups** highlighted (vulnerables students and internationally-oriented students) and a **new direction for Career Centers** (to act as a real advocacy group). Indeed, as students with vulnerabilities or with international aims present specific issues or challenges, a focus on such procedures seems appropriate. **Students with vulnerabilities** face specific constraints (depending on their specific vulnerability) but sometimes, also have specific opportunities that a Career Center must take into account when offering support and guidance. In the same way, **internationally-oriented students** (whether inbound, or outbound) face institutional, informational and language barriers that a Career Center can help mitigate. Furthermore, to ensure applicability and efficiency of the regulations decided by governments, Career Centers should work as **advocacy groups**, and actively promote their ideas/promote information about their field to political authorities. This partnership could provide governments with information from the ground, helping them design better and simpler rules.

INSIDE EACH “CONTACT” SECTION

For each contact, we decided to emphasize **5 main points** that enable us to grasp some of the complexity of their needs, but also of their prospects.

As a matter of fact, each of the highlighted contacts are in relation with the Career Center for some specific reasons and purposes. First and foremost, the relation’s **objectives** must be identified to be taken into account, as they can differ from one relation to another. The current **challenges** Career Centers face in practice to meet those objectives need also to be identified to be addressed. Next, and to overcome those challenges, a list of **activities**, specific to each objective (and thus, to each contact group) and answering all those objectives must be set. Such activities require precise and defined **tools or resources** (whether material resources or knowledge) the Career Centers should have access to. Though, to obtain those tools and resources, the Career Center must be in contact with **stakeholders** (external or internal to the university), providing them with what they need to successfully accomplish their mission.

As the need to develop those 5 highlighted points (objectives, challenges, activities, tools and resources, stakeholders) results from the previous ones (as illustrated below), we fixed our methodology on developing each of those points one by one, to get a full overview of what the "ideal" Career Center would need from (or provide to) each contact group.

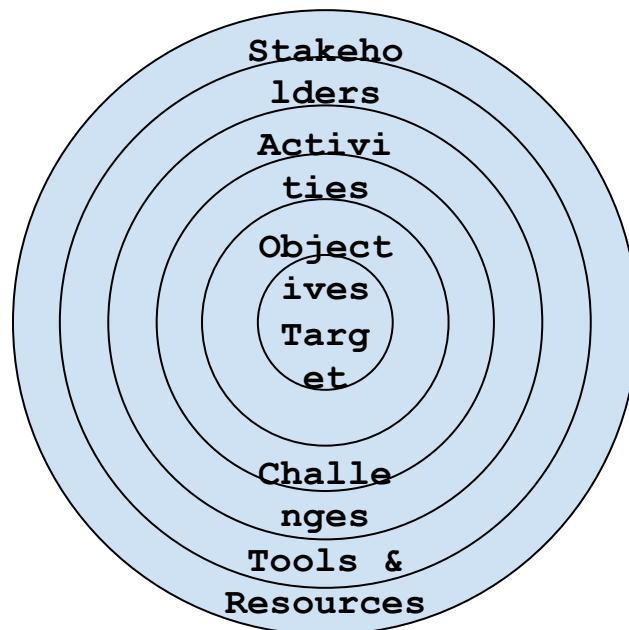


Image 1. Concentric illustration of each aspect's causal link

3. SHARED COUNSELING SERVICE - AN IDEAL CAREER CENTER

A CENTER FOR STUDENTS

As far as students are concerned, the perfect Career Center should accompany them (and graduates) in their overall process of defining and finding employment and thus, should fulfill specific actions aiming at reaching such goals. Here is a detailed report of those actions.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Be open and accessible to all, from newly admitted students, to graduates of the university.

Aim at supporting them in any career path, whether that career is in a preexisting private/public organization, entrepreneurial or in self-employment.

First, the Career Center should **help the student define a career path** (a strategy, a direction) when needed and **provide assistance in achieving the chosen career** for each path. In the case of entrepreneur or self-employment wishes, the center should encourage such spirit and provide information on institutional support existing or previous successful experiences, especially in relation

with relevant offices of the university (Patent office, incubators ...). In the case of employment at a pre-existing institution, the Career Center should be able to identify opportunities at the national and international level. It can also identify potential employers with whom to develop specific partnerships to facilitate the recruiting process for students of the university.

CHALLENGES

The challenges currently faced by Career Centers can be specific to a type of students like women, for whom some positions can be “silently” closed, students in a field less in accordance with companies needs or international students who can face language, visa issues, or even a lack of knowledge/information about the local job/internship market. Though, some challenges are shared equally by all students, like insights about the labor market (meaning that one could not know what kind of job his/her degree leads to) or even passivity. Indeed, students can sometimes not be proactive enough to find an internship (especially for internships mandatory in the curriculum), despite their wish to do one.

ACTIVITIES & TOOLS

Offer multiple activities to students, with a special emphasis on students with vulnerabilities (through specific actions, or tools compensating for those vulnerabilities).

The entry point could be an assistance desk open to students, helping them to find a suitable career depending on their field of studies and then, internships or job opportunities. The Career Center could also develop specific activities like training sessions for students (how/where to look for a job or an internship; how to write a resume or a cover letter; how to pass an interview ...). Overall, the Career Center could provide a “mentorship” system with specific employers or working people to follow students in their application process, but also more broadly to understand the opportunities in their field.

The center should also have a broad range of tools at its disposal to facilitate the process of job/internship hunting as well as the process of welcoming all students in need. This includes defined profiles to help and inform students about different possibilities of their degree, and job/internship seeking tools (online platforms, contact list of possible employers, or tools and awareness to do such a list ...).

The ultimate tool for Career Centers could be an European-wide centralized online platform inventorying all job/internships offered across the European union (and beyond) with a “criteria-based” search system accessible to any student/job seeker. Such a platform would minimize information imperfection on the labor market, one of the main issues students face when looking for employment.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Be in contact with all relevant services from which, the students with vulnerabilities’ office, the international relation’s office (and its network), the admission office, the employment office (if there is one separated from the center), each faculty and pedagogical department. But also entrepreneurs, workinggroups, patent offices and incubators for the more “entrepreneurial path”.

As far as students are concerned, the perfect Career Center should, as for regular students, accompany them in their overall process of defining and finding employment, but with answers to their specific needs and a knowledge of their specific options. Here is a detailed report of those specific concerns.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Be as accessible for students with vulnerabilities (students with special needs, with social or economic difficulties, refugees ...) as for any other type of students.

Aim at identify, reach out to and provide specific support for students with difficulties or vulnerabilities. Next to the internal support provided, the ideal Career Center would also have strong links with external stakeholders or organizations specialized in dealing with vulnerabilities, to provide a more comprehensive support to students.

CHALLENGES

Right now, Career Centers suffer from the lack of a global, comprehensive approach to deal with students with vulnerabilities. Indeed, multiple approaches to support students with vulnerabilities coexist (like positive discrimination, full integration ...) and are not necessarily complementary. This lack of comprehensive approach is visible through a lack of specific training for staff to get knowledge about vulnerabilities, but also through a lack of global data from which to build upon some specific programs.

Thus, there can be a disconnection between Inclusive policy departments and the job market transition one and no difference in the support given to students, with a lack of promotion of special programs addressed to students with vulnerabilities.

ACTIVITIES & TOOLS

To procure the appropriate assistance to students with vulnerabilities, Career Centers would have to be able to identify those vulnerabilities and to direct students to the pertinent department, or program. Although, the work needs to be broader than just supporting students with vulnerabilities. Indeed, Career Centers could become advocates of more inclusiveness in the labor market, by promoting job inclusive policies within the university or within companies.

To do so, a guidance can be established to help staff dealing with students with vulnerabilities. Though again, broader tools, like a range of indicators or information focusing on students with vulnerabilities' integration in the labor market could be designed and collected. Thus the necessity, as a start, to build on a strong relation with university's Inclusion services (when existent).

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Be in contact with the Students with vulnerabilities' Office, the International Relations Office (for refugees) and the students associations, but also social assistants (from and outside of the university).

A CENTER FOR INTERNATIONALLY-ORIENTED STUDENTS

Internationally-oriented students are more concerned with finding a job/internship in accordance with their geographical wishes, requiring specific needs and a knowledge of their specific options. Here is a detailed report of those specific concerns.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Be open to national and international students, but also to national and international companies.

Aim at phasing out any differences between a nationally-oriented and an internationally-oriented career by offering specific services for the latter, to help mitigate the multiple existing gaps.

First, the Career Center should deepen national students' mobility willingness by encouraging them to go abroad. Indeed, a professional experience in another country could improve students' autonomy, adaptational skills and help them master a new language, important things even at the national level. In the case of students already considering an international career (even only partially), a first experience would help build an international network upon which to build such a career. Even in the specific case of an entrepreneurial career at the national level, an international experience could give an openness to new concepts and ideas, but also help benchmark potential new markets and other customs. To do so, Career Centers should praise the benefits of such experience to students.

Thus, to motivate students, Career Centers could advertise some successful international experiences, with some examples of students who went abroad to illustrate the potential benefits of such experiences to next generations.

CHALLENGES

For now, and **regarding international-oriented careers**, Career Centers suffer from a lack of key resources on international practices and opportunities, sometimes joined by linguistic insecurities of staff members. The lack of connections between the Career Center and the International Relations Office of a university is often one of the reasons.

Altogether, those issues can lead to an inefficient promotion of international internships/jobs opportunities to national students (the reverse being also possible).

ACTIVITIES & TOOLS

A broad range of activities can be considered to encourage students going abroad for part (or the whole) of their career.

On the one hand, Career Centers can have a promotional activity, with testimonies of previous experiences, events, like international fairs or career events to present international opportunities and existing funding. It could even go as far as to offer the possibility of short stays abroad, for students to experience what would be life in another country.

On the other hand, Career Centers should offer students help to actually implement their will to go abroad for an internship/job by assisting them in all steps of the procedure (if such help is not already provided by the International Office). Such help should start from the beginning, with individual counseling for students who want to go abroad (as well as the other way around, with international students who want to do an internship in the country). It should continue during the administrative process, with an assistance to obtain scholarships or an assistance to organize their stay abroad (insurance, accommodation, visa ...).

Such an extensive range of activities **would require beforehand** to have collected and centralized all the information (contacts, information about the countries) about opportunities in foreign countries, and a broad network of partner universities (through agreement and contacts) to obtain those information.

To do so, centers should have at their disposal an internationally comprehensive Job seeking platform and a good working relationship with their university's International Relations Office and with international contacts to get information about administrative requirements in foreign countries. This could be completed with some funding for specific grants to international-oriented students (whether inbound or outbound) and language courses available to the Career Center.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Be in close cooperation with services having an international outreach such as university's International Relation Office, foreign national and international companies, but also public institutions like local, regional and national government offices.

A CENTER LINKED TO EMPLOYERS

Employers, as the ones procuring the demand for labor (i.e. jobs/internship offers), are a key partner of a Career Center. The two should have close ties for the Career Center to procure employment possibilities to its university's students, but also to offer some services to companies. Here is a detailed report of the possibilities of such a relationship.

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

Be in constant relation with a broad range of potential employers.

Develop numerous ties between the university world and the company world (not only companies, but also Chambers of commerce) through a constant networking with external stakeholders (during events, forums ...). For students, the Career Center should enhance their connections with companies, have a mentorship program, facilitate the transition to the professional world through promotion of more inclusive profiling during the recruitment or even just better working conditions.

The Career Center could act as a proponent of informal links between professors and employers to improve the knowledge of companies about the academic offer and expand professional offers to disciplines less “employment-oriented”. The other way around, such a connection would incentive professors to adapt their curricula to the job market needs. Overall, a more common approach could be envisioned, with traditional degrees turning toward more professional ones (with the democratization of alternance models¹).

CHALLENGES

As of today, Career Centers face issues with companies, like gender/cultural bias during the selection process or simply a lack of opportunities for internationally-oriented students (whether inbound or outbound). This trend is deepened by the lack of time centers’ staff have to create new relationships with companies. On the company side, they can struggle to compromise between choosing a very-specialized candidate or more inclusive profiles. They also sometimes ask too much of interns, creating a difference between expectations and reality of the work.

The other way around, trying to make diplomas more in phase with the labor market, on top of legal and administrative constraints, Career Centers can indirectly face reluctance from professors, unwilling to adapt their courses.

ACTIVITIES & TOOLS

Offer multiple activities in relations with companies, like mentor/trainee programs, events where company workers present in depth their sector or any other type of connections (Job dating events, Job Fairs, company presentations, company visits ...). An “Employer of the year” prize could also be awarded to the company which hires the most students from the university. The development of a strong alumni network can also promote more informal relations between the university world and the professional world.

The other way around, a regular assessment of the job market to make recommendations on how to adapt degrees to the labor market should be considered.

To do so, Career Centers require a large formal and informal network of companies and databases to compile all the information. A platform to directly link students and employers and an assistance profiling students would help find an internship. An evaluation system for students to get some feedback on their internship, as well as one for companies could also be put in place.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Be in relation with the Community department.

A CENTER WITH AN ADVOCACY ROLE

AIMS & OBJECTIVES

¹ Alternance models are done together with a company and alternate between study periods and working periods to mix educational and practical experiences during the degree.

Be in constant relation with political authorities, whether governmental ones (national/regional/local) or the ones of the university (president/council).

Aim at promoting substantial changes at the university or governmental level to facilitate the internship/job recruiting process. At the university level, this includes changes in the curriculum to embed job placement activities in classes or new rules to better integrate new students. At the governmental level, it includes new inclusion policies, changes to the labor market rules and help making information about grants and procedures more accessible to the public.

CHALLENGES

For now, difficulties can rise from a lack of preparation of staff members to that type of role and their lack of knowledge of external stakeholders. The continuous stream of new laws and reforms would also require Career centers to have regular monitoring.

ACTIVITIES & TOOLS

Undertake multiple actions advocating for new legislation/rules on issues of interest for the Career Center (from inclusive policy, to international housing capacities or employment charters ...). First, acting as an advocate, the center could be collecting data and needs from student organizations to pass them on to authorities at the same time as their own. Then, a strong advocacy network can be built, through close work in connection with NGOs (to organize events to raise awareness for example) or in connection with other national Career centers to harmonize demands when advocating at the governmental level. That could lead to large working groups (including NGOs and Career centers) to emulate from.

To ensure the efficiency of those actions, outreach is the main point. Outreach to authorities, that can be designed through an official consultant position of the Career Center at Universities' or government governance bodies. Outreach to the public then, that can be achieved through a comprehensive communication campaign (with all the tools required) including a social media strategy and actions with external contacts as NGOs.

This outreach must be supported by a comprehensive and continuous monitoring of administrative and legal changes, for Career Centers to be on date with the latest evolutions of the labor market, the government's procedures and their rules.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

Be in relation with political authorities (inside the university or in the government) and university's academic authorities. Although, other career services of the country, or students associations and NGOs are also relevant.

An overall requirement: an increase in budget and personnel

An important part of the challenges highlighted by the Task Force are consequences of a **lack of funding and resources** destined to the Career Center. If some of the activities and tools designed are simple reallocation of resources (whether human or financial) and thus, do not cost anything, it is not the case for all of them.

Hence, this ideal Career Center would require an increase in funding and personnel to ensure all the activities are undertaken properly. This should be taken into account when (in the future) considering more “realistic” implementations of this “ideal” Career Center.

4. CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EXPERTS’ REVIEW

On June the 30st 2022, the TF work was reviewed by two researchers on “Career counseling” from the University of Padova: Professor Laura Nota and Professor Maria Cristina Ginevra. Their two respective presentations gave the TF an overview of the current state of the research in the field and then, how our work could benefit from it.

First and foremost, it appears important to emphasize the gap between the TF work and the current state of the research that was described. Indeed, it appears that researchers currently focus on the socio-economic structure in which nowadays careers take place, and how those conditions influence young generations in their work conditions or aspirations. For its part, the TF definitively omitted to reflect on these aspects, and by doing so, unconsciously took for granted the current socio-economic conditions we are living in.

As Career centers evolve in a given socio-economic situation, and as bad as that situation can get, their aim to support students onto the labor market does not change, such an assumption is not completely out of order. Although, the fact that the TF, thinking about an “ideal” Career center, did not even think about confronting those conditions illustrate how the TF was unaware and far from researchers' preoccupations. Thus, the TF model of Career center could (and maybe should) have tackled both aspects, with first the given socio-economic conditions as exogenous and then, those conditions as endogenous (especially in the “lobby section”).

The clear lack of this aspect in the TF work underlines the lack of relations between Career center’s staff and researchers on the topic (confirmed by the practice of TF members). This is supported by the second main criticism that was made of the TF work, namely the lack of uses of theoretical models to help being comprehensive and eclectic in the aspects and aims developed.

Overall, those two main results the TF keeps from this training event emphasize the need for some more generalized special training for Career center’s staff and how they could benefit from a more theoretical approach to their work (and especially, the conditions their work takes place in). Indeed, both experts highlighted actions that could be put in place at a Career center level to better tackle socio-economic conditions, or train staff to spread this type of knowledge.

Hence, more than presenting those possible actions, what the TF recommends is to generalize and institutionalize the experience we had, with a deeper connection between Career centers and researchers on the topic, possibly through, as Professor Maria Cristina Ginevra suggests, more

emphasis on training for Career center’s staff. This would enable all staff to reflect on their work and to benefit from all the other suggestions researchers (who we did not have the chance to talk to through this staff event) instead have.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

An efficient and comprehensive career center is key to ensure a smooth transfer of students from the university into the labor market, one of the most important tasks of a university. Hence, ideally this center should have enough resources (material and knowledge) to provide any type of student with the support he/she may need to find an internship or a job. The “ideal” Career Center designed by the 2.12 Task Force and described above gathers feedback from career center’s staff from most Arqus alliance’s universities. From those experiences, the main aspects, activities and goals a career center should have were emphasized for each contact group identified.

Following the 3rd staff training event, and the feedback from the 2 experts from Padova University (Professor Maria Cristina Ginevra and Laura Nota) it appears that the TF unconsciously embedded its work in the current socio-economic conditions without questioning it. This assumption creates a gap with current research on the topic, highlighting the lack of existing and deep connections between Career centers and research departments, despite the clear benefits the former could get from the latter.

In the end, the TF joins the professors in their recommendation to have more training for Career center’s staff, especially on theoretical aspects of their work.

Overall, the theoretical center design could act as a guideline for the universities of the alliance in their future reforms, or transformations of the center: a Career Center to reach for. Although this document should above all remind its readers of how easy it is to admit the current world as given (as the TF did) and that theoretical research is here also to remind people not to do so without questions. To conclude, this document acts as a fair example of why Career center’s staff could benefit from more theoretical training.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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