



Quality of Career Services

Toward a European Reference Framework

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the report

This document summarises the result of QAREER Intellectual Output 1. The overall aim of intellectual output 1 is to identify perceptions, values and present practices regarding quality of career services by stakeholders and players in the field, and using them to develop the Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Career Services in higher education (Intellectual Output 2).

Methodology

The methodology adopted combines desk and field methods of data collection and analysis, including literature review and practices collection; a set of interviews to key informants, representing the main targets addressed by the project; a survey addressed to students.

Key conclusions

The research work in QAREER pointed out the following key results:

- National situations are very diverse and even in the same country the role and the activities of career services at the university are different;
- Some good example of standards for career services already exist, related to overall services or to one or more areas of the service (e.g. work placement, staff development, etc.);
- However, a reference framework recognised (or known) by universities is not available yet, and quality of career services is mostly included in quality of support services within the ESG guidelines;
- There is no common understanding among stakeholders on the meaning of quality and above on the role of the career services;
- Given the particular features of career services at the university, a broader range of stakeholders need to be taken into account, as career services represent the link between the academic and the labour world, and not an employment service for all;
- Professionalization and development of staff must to be taken into account while dealing with quality issues: this is confirmed both by key respondents, practices and literature review;
- Students' needs are focused on results more than on processes, and the service provided in terms of career by universities is not understood in full, sometimes it is not even known.

Recommendations for design

According to the exploratory work carried out for the purpose key recommendation are:

- To keep it flexible as possible, to favour its adoption in different countries, institutions, and organisations in higher and tertiary education;
- To provide a tool based as possible on self-assessment, in order to make it usable for improvement purposes also by the service itself, where the academic structure or national laws and regulations can hinder its full adoption;
- To design the framework and its standards as a “learning journey” of the service, then avoiding checklists of minimum standards which would turn out to be too easy or too strict to be used: ideally, the framework could be design in three levels of quality, from minimum standard to quality excellence;
- To take into account the particular features of career services at the university, by designing reference standards about the relations with stakeholders, internal (such as i.e. teachers, academic bodies) and external (e.g. enterprises, employment offices, civil society representatives);
- To provide specific standards for staff career development, while recruiting seems to be too dependent from national contexts and regulations;
- To provide standards related to organisational issues, taking therefore into account internal management of the service;
- To design specific standards related to information and communication, on the existence of the service that sometimes seems still missing in the student population, but above all on the role and the mission of it, as career services are not specifically meant to find a job to students, but to make students able to find a job and manage transitions;
- To embed ICTs use across activities of the service;
- To plan the existence of a support service for mobility abroad (related to transition from education to work, not for study);
- To avoid too detailed standards, such as i.e. “how to organise a workshop”, instead providing general references applicable to all activities;
- To build upon existent sources, taking into account previous experiences;
- To co-design as possible with key players, both internal and externals, in order to ensure that all needs are taken into account;
- To specify both monitoring and evaluation processes and sources of verification and information;
- To ask for feedback not only to co-designers (as already planned in the project plan), but also to experts at European level, who deal with quality issues at university with a transnational dimension.



INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings of the introductory research work carried out in the frame of the QAREER project.

The QAREER project is aimed at providing quality assurance references for career services in higher education and guidelines for the implementation of them into higher education institutions across Europe.

The introductory research phase aims is to identify perceptions, values and present practices regarding quality of career services by stakeholders and players in the field.

Research questions to this aim are:

- (a) How do higher education institutions provide quality services in the field of career guidance and placement, why they provide such services and how effective these really are?
- (b) How do main players involve (guidance workforce, students, QA managers, enterprises) perceive quality of career services and which their expectations?

Following this introduction, the document is set out as follows:

1. Section 1 provides a short background on career guidance in higher education, and the debate on quality;
2. Section 2 presents the methodology adopted for the work;
3. Section 3 presents the main findings from desk research – practices collection;
4. Section 4 presents the main findings from the interviews to key informants;
5. Section 5 presents the results from the student survey;
6. Section 6 summarises key conclusions and lists a set of recommendation to design the reference framework for Quality Assurance in Career Services in higher education.

1. THE DEBATE ON QUALITY OF CAREER SERVICES

1.1. Background

The crucial role of career guidance in higher education has started gaining in recent times. Alongside with structural changes of universities, started with the Bologna Declaration (1999), the massification of education began in the Seventies has profoundly changed the student population, and the globalization phenomenon led to deep changes in the labour market, including recruiting processes, different access (Raffle 2011), and increased transitions during the lifetime. The increased instability due to recent crisis and the high unemployment rates, particularly of young people, have contributed to uncertain and varied career paths, where career development skills of the individual play a major role (Bimrose et al 2011).

In addition, with the increased competitiveness among higher education institutions, an emphasis on student life within universities has risen (Haley 2001). Student services come to play a major role in the university environment: students should be supported to achieve full integration in the academic community, to pursue educational attainment and to acquire employability¹ skills. Among students services, career service intervene particularly on students employability, by promoting acquisition of career skills in students providing them with specific support (e.g. extra-curricular work, workshops, work experiences) and by establishing virtuous links between academics, practitioners, and the labour market players (Do Céu et al 2014).

However, if almost all European universities provide students services, including career services, the assessment of them is less harmonised Europe (Kelo et al. 2010), and which are the features of a quality career service in higher education, is still unclear.

1.2. Quality and career guidance

In 2000, the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning of the European Commission acknowledge that alongside the concept of lifelong learning, also guidance and counselling should be revised. The Key Message 5 of the document , “Rethinking guidance and counselling” points out the need of guidance as a “continuously accessible service for all”. The OECD, in the report *From Initial Education to Working Life - Making Transitions Work* (OECD, 2000), included information and career guidance among key factors in creating smooth transitions from education to work, and provided in 2001 some reflections on quality in career guidance (OECD 2001).

¹ We mention here the definition of employability as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” by Professor Mantz Yorke (2004) “Employability in Higher Education: what it is - what it is not”, Higher Education Academy/ ESECT.



In 2008, the concept of lifelong guidance was formalised and defined by the European Commission as

a continuous process that enables citizens at any age and at any point in their lives to identify their capacities, competences and interests, to make educational, training and occupational decisions and to manage their individual life paths in learning, work and other settings in which those capacities and competences are learned and/or used. Guidance covers a range of individual and collective activities relating to information-giving, counselling, competence assessment, support, and the teaching of decision-making and career management skills (Council Resolution, 2008)

The resolution acknowledges the centrality of guidance for education and training policies and invite the member states to support lifelong guidance with different measures, recognising as priority areas

1. Encourage the lifelong acquisition of career management skills;
2. Facilitate access by all citizens to guidance services;
3. Develop the quality assurance of guidance provision;
4. Encourage coordination and cooperation among the various national, regional and local stakeholders.

Lifelong guidance is managed in particular through the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP). Cedefop cooperates with the European Commission and the Member States via the European lifelong guidance policy network (ELGPN).

In past decades, the CEDEFOP and the ELGPN have provided several reference frameworks and guidelines to support high quality lifelong guidance. As regards higher education, the ELGPN's Guidelines for Lifelong Guidance Policies and Systems for the Education and Training Sector (2015) Higher Education Students with Guideline 12, defining guidance in higher education as follows:

Guidance in higher education refers to a range of activities and products that help students to students to select appropriate study programmes and to cope with the transition to higher education. It supports students to enhance the potential of their academic experience and to link it to their personal and career development. It fosters their ability to explore and learn about labour market, further learning (e.g. postgraduate) and entrepreneurship opportunities, and to make successful transitions to those opportunities. It encourages students' ability to effectively transfer their academic knowledge to professional context.

Among good practices for higher education institutions, furthermore, the Guidelines state:

Link the provision of lifelong guidance in tertiary education institutions to quality-assurance arrangements, strategic planning, and performance target.

1.2.1 The Quality Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework

An additional tool for quality assurance in lifelong guidance, again provided by the ELPGN, is the Quality Assurance and Evidence-Base (QAE) Framework. The QAE is designed "in the form of a common set of quality elements, criteria,

indicators and possible sources of data that can be utilised and further developed by policy-makers and other interested parties to jointly assess progress being made in relation to these six broad areas of lifelong guidance policy development” (QAE 2016). Among the six areas of lifelong guidance also higher education is included. The QAE lists 6 areas of quality, namely

1. Practitioner competence
2. Citizen/user involvement
3. Service provision and improvement
4. Cost-benefits to governments
5. Cost-benefits to individuals

For each area, Criteria, Indicators, and Examples for possible source of data are provided. Although addressed to policy makers, the framework is a useful reference also for higher education institutions.

1.2.2 Quality in European Higher Education

Higher education has been in the focus of the European Union since the Lisbon strategy (2000), now followed by the Europe 2020 strategy, as a key to make the Europe the world’s most competitive knowledge economy.

In 2011, the European Commission published the concepts of the strategy for higher education in form of agenda (An agenda for the modernisation of Europe’s higher education systems, 2011), which stresses the need of the third mission of the university – linking with the labour market and encompassing social dimension:

The strength of European higher education institutions lies in their diversity, in the provision of high quality, sustainable, relevant education and research, and in the link between institutional autonomy, accountability to all stakeholders, and an ability to adapt to changing circumstances. In addition to their two traditional missions of teaching and research, a third mission linking institutions and the business sector, including at regional level, and encompassing social responsibility is of growing importance

In several points, the Agenda stresses the need of improving the quality and relevance of higher education and to act to foster employability (e.g. point 2.2. Improving the quality and relevance of higher education; point 3.3 “Putting Higher Education at the centre of Innovation, job creation and employability”). The document however refers to career services (and support services) within a broader concept of “learning environment”, mentioning career guidance among “Key policy issues for Member States and higher education institutions”:

Enhance the capacity of labour market institutions (including public employment services) and regulations to match skills and jobs, and develop active labour market policies to promote graduate employment and enhance career guidance.

The most important reference for quality in higher education is represented by the Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher



Education Area (ESG). The ESG were adopted by the Ministers responsible for higher education in 2005 following a proposal prepared by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) in co-operation with the European Students' Union (ESU), the European Association of Institutions in Higher Education (EURASHE) and the European University Association (EUA). As stated in the ESG text,

The focus of the ESG is on quality assurance related to learning and teaching in higher education, including the learning environment and relevant links to research and innovation. In addition institutions have policies and processes to ensure and improve the quality of their other activities, such as research and governance.

The ESG don't provide standards of quality as such, therefore they don't prescribe how quality assurance should be implemented, but instead give a set of standards and quality as guidance for a successful quality provision and learning environments in higher education.

In the ESG, the following is stated as regards services

Standard:

Institutions should have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities and ensure that adequate and readily accessible learning resources and **student support** are provided.

Guidelines:

For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to assist student learning. These vary from physical resources such as libraries, study facilities and IT infrastructure to human support in the form of **tutors, counsellors and other advisers**. The role of support services is of particular importance in facilitating the mobility of students within and across higher education systems.

As regards career, the ESG states:

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes; including **preparing students** for active citizenship, **for their future careers** (e.g. contributing to their employability), supporting their personal development, creating a broad advanced knowledge base and stimulating research and innovation. Therefore, stakeholders, who may prioritise different purposes, can view quality in higher education differently and quality assurance needs to take into account these different perspectives. **Quality**, whilst not easy to define, **is mainly a result of the interaction between teachers, students and the institutional learning environment**. Quality assurance should ensure a learning environment in which the content of programmes, learning opportunities and facilities are fit for purpose.

Most European Universities are subject to regular external review by a quality assurance agency (usually national), which ensure compliance with the ESG. The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education (EQAR) is a register of such agencies, listing those that substantially comply with a common set of principles for quality assurance in Europe.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Overall approach

The introductory research work carried out within Intellectual Output 1 was aimed at providing an updated state of the art of perception of quality aspects for QA in career services. Data and figures from desk research have been merged with data collected by means of field research, namely interviews with guidance and coaching practitioners, QA managers, enterprises/employers, and final beneficiaries (students in higher education). The collection of data took place from February to June 2016.

2.2 Literature review and practices collection

In order to understand how higher education institutions ensure quality services, particularly on career guidance, a practices review has been carried out, by adopting a case study approach according to the following process



Figure 1. Simplified process of a case study research

A common template has been provided, and guidelines for collection has been delivered.

Data collected have been shared amongst partners through a common online working space (Google Drive).

2.3 Key informants interview

The interviews were intended to collect points of view and perceptions from four groups of players dealing with career services in higher education, in order

- To verify the scope of the project and its key objectives;
- To identify key issues relevant for the topic;
- To identify a) meaning of quality; b) quality systems in place; c) perceived needs of the primary target groups.

The addressed profiles were:

- Career counsellors and practitioners;
- Higher education students;
- Enterprises, through human resources managers and specialists;



- Quality Assurance managers and experts in higher education.

According to the objectives, the following themes were addressed:

THEME 1. Meaning of quality according to the interviewed (quality of outputs, quality of processes, etc.);

THEME 2. Quality system in place, according to the knowledge of the interviewed;

THEME 3. Perceived needs with regard to quality of students services (both in outputs and processes).

Guidelines for a semi-structured interview have been delivered, completed with main and supplementary questions. The outcome of interviews have been delivered in a common report template, shared in the online working space of the consortium.

2.4 Student survey

The student survey was intended to capture the meaning given by students to career services within their study experience, to understand expectations of the core beneficiaries of services and to extract from the data the expected quality elements.

The survey was delivered online through the Google Forms tool using a self-administered questionnaire, and made available in the languages of the consortium (Italian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish) and English.

3. PRACTICES ANALYSIS

3.1. Sample description

In total, 51 practices were collected, described and analysed, with the following geographical distribution:

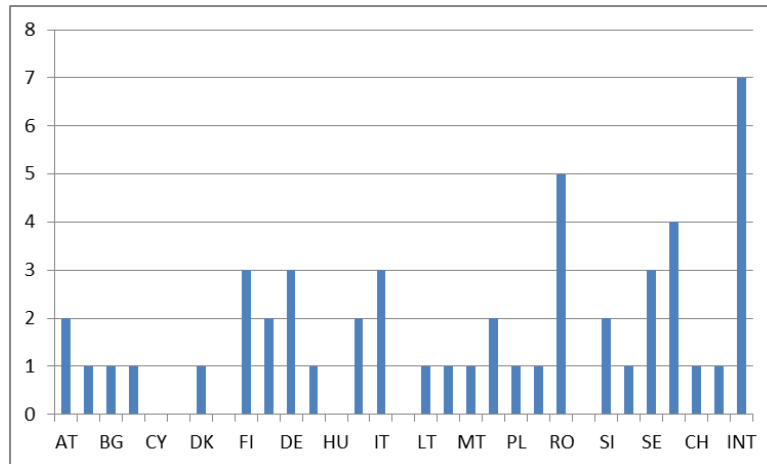


Figure 2. Practices' geographical distribution

The 80% (41) describes practices at university level; 14% (7) describe national initiatives, led by a public body or a private body with official mandate; 4% (2) illustrates practices led by national associations and networks; 2% (1) describes practices carried out by a private, independent body (a foundation).

3.2. Identified themes

Analysis of collected practices has been carried out, starting with coding (Rossman and Rallis 1998), generating description of categories of themes from analysis, interpreting or meaning of the data toward the final study delivery.

Practices are very diverse with respect to quality aspects: they could relate to a system in place, or a single activity. They have been classified according to the level and the detail as follows:

- Quality systems in place in the **career service** (quality arrangements specifically designed/implemented at service level);
- Quality system in place including career service in the **overall quality**

system of the university (teaching, learning, admin);

- Quality elements in **single activities** (e.g. workshops);
- Quality frameworks/initiatives at **national level** (e.g. standards of reference for staff, national surveys, etc.).

The rough distribution across identified themes, with some overlapping, results as follows:

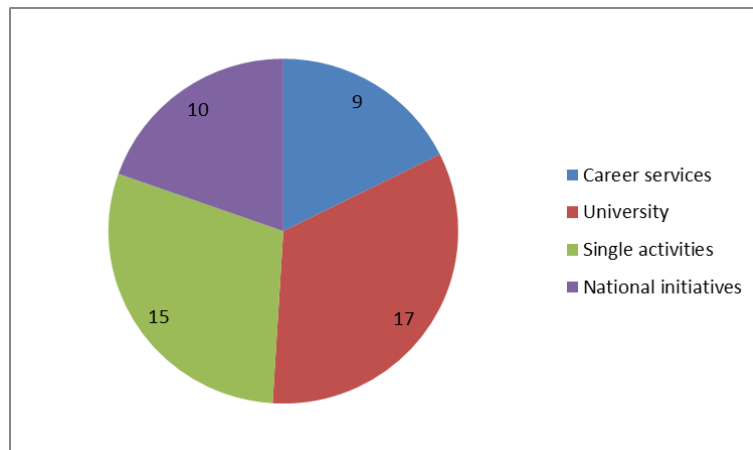


Figure 3. Practices classification

3.2.1 Career services

Some retrievable practices refer to processes and systems of quality applied to career services. The most representative among these is the Matrix Standard.

The Matrix Standard

<http://matrixstandard.com/>

The matrix Standard is the unique quality framework for organisations to assess and measure their information, advice and/or guidance (IAG) services, which ultimately supports individuals in their choice of career, learning, work and life goals. The Standard consists of four elements that fit around your organisation's business themes. These four elements are:

- 1 - Leadership and Management
- 2 - Resource
- 3 - Service Delivery
- 4 - Continuous Quality Improvement

Each element contains assessment criteria, all of which must be met to achieve accreditation. The matrix Standard is an outcome-based standard. This means that an Assessor will look not only at processes used to support IAG delivery but also at results achieved.

The matrix is used also for Higher Education Career Services, and it is managed by Assessment Services Ltd, which acts as accreditation body.

Several universities in the UK are accredited by the Matrix Standard (e.g.



University of East London, University of Hertfordshire - Careers & Placements Service, University of Leicester - Career Development Service, etc.).

This is an example of complete process which lead to an accreditation, managed by an external body, and it represents a good example at international level in which a comprehensive set of standards is provided for career services at the university, within a general framework for advice and/or guidance services.

Another interesting example, based on self-assessment, comes from the United States of America, with the CAS SAG:

CAS Self-Assessment Guide (SAG)

<http://www.cas.edu/>

The CAS Self-Assessment Guide (SAG) is based on the Career Services Standards. This downloadable assessment workbook includes the standards and guidelines along with a series of criterion measure statements used to judge the level of program compliance with the standard. This is a self-assessment process which can be described as follows: "Understanding the Standards is Step 1. Step 2 is assessing where a particular advising program is in relationship to meeting the Standards. Step 3 is developing an Action Plan to attempt to move the particular status of a Standard closer to full compliance. Step 4 is returning to assess the effectiveness of the Action Plan (once implemented) in terms of achieving the stated goals. With this continual round of assessment and action, the goals of quality assurance are met, thus guaranteeing that the academic advising needs of students are fully addressed by an institution, a department, or an advising unit"

Source: <http://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Using-CAS-Standards-for-self-assessment.aspx#sthash.pMQbj9sJ.dpuf>

The CAS is particularly interesting for QAREER purposes, as based on self-assessment and continuous learning. For the European context, where arrangements for support service can be very diverse among countries, this might be the most suitable approach to the quality framework development.

3.2.2 Quality of career services as quality of support services

According to the ESG, support services are part of the overall quality assessment of European universities, then all universities provide data about career services at different level of completeness and detail, and according to different arrangements within the organisation (e.g. different units, delegates, etc.). This not always includes a complete and specific set of standards, or indicators, for career services. As example of processes within the overall university's quality framework, the following two, from Romania and Portugal, are mentioned.

SNSPA - National School of Political and Administrative Studies (NSPAS)

<http://www.snspa.ro/>

The Evaluation and Quality Assurance Commission of SNSPA urged the implementation of quality criteria related to employability and networking for employability. The Counselling and Vocational Guidance Centre (CECOP), in cooperation with the teaching staff and the various departments and services of NSPAS to enable the university to carry out its mission of information, guidance and support for professional integration of students, by

- Providing counselling services (including academic) and career guidance for students;
- Improving employment opportunities for students;
- Increase academic achievement and a better integration in domestic and international academic life;
- Facilitating student access to internships and volunteer programs in the various institutions and partner organizations and stakeholders;
- Informing students about the activities of formal, non-formal and informal learning within their countries and abroad;
- Promote academic and Image offer to the general public and partnership networks.

In a report on the evaluation of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies, the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS), from December 2014, analyse the services provided by CECOP and hopes that the number of students who benefit from counselling to be higher every year.

Pontifical University of Salamanca (UPSA)

<https://www.upsa.es/unidad-tecnica-de-calidad-upsa/sistema-interno-de-garantia-de-calidad/index.php>

The internal quality assurance system of the UPSA follows the recommendations made by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQUA) for quality assurance in higher education institutions in the document "Criteria and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area "published in May 2015. Similarly, it makes reference to the supporting documentation published by the (Spanish) National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) and the Agency for Quality in the University System Castilla y Leon (ACSUCYL) in relation to the various programs that are involved.

UPSA works through quality indicators. <https://www.upsa.es/unidad-tecnica-de-calidad-upsa/indicadores-de-calidad/index.php>). The quality indicators are formed by the set of quantitative and qualitative data collected systematically by the Technical Quality Unit . In this area, main quality indicators are extracted from surveys about: job placement, employers satisfaction and students satisfaction.

There is a technical quality unit which is responsible for analysing the quality

standards.

3.2.3 Quality elements in single activities

Not surprisingly, the most common level for setting up quality standards, and/or provide reference standards for a good service, is the level of the single service. A number of issues favour this level of intervention, such as i.e. the management of the service (the area coordinator/head of a specific activities, as example work placement, is not always and necessarily the head of the service); the type of service provided (e.g. counselling is individual, while career fairs imply a number of stakeholders); the easiness to manage and monitor small units; the fact that sometimes activities are based on kick off initiatives, or addressed to a specific target group; etc.

In addition, often elements of quality can be retrieved where the service is not formally adopting a set of reference standards, like in the case of the YouReCa programme at the KU Leuven in Belgium:

YouReCa - Career Centre for Young Researchers (KU Leuven)

<http://www.kuleuven.be/personeel/careercenter/youreca-career-center/yourecaENG/indexeng>

The goal of YouReCa is to improve and widen the career perspectives of KU Leuven's young researchers. YouReCa activities are organized at three levels: university wide, within the three Doctoral Schools, and initiatives by young researchers.

1. University wide

- cross-discipline initiatives

2. Doctoral Schools

- the coordination and organization of thematic, discipline-related training activities for young researchers
- activities related to the monitoring of doctorates and the quality of the doctoral training
- activities related to the recruitment of foreign PhD students

3. Young Researchers

- (financial) support to the initiatives organized by young researchers for young researchers ("grassroots initiatives"), providing that they fit within the YouReCa framework

In addition, YouReCa names as its stakeholders the following groups:

- labour market (public and private sector)
- the promoters
- Research Coordination Office

Even though the University doesn't make detailed information on quality process publicly available, information provided indicates that a number of mechanisms leading to high quality career services are in place, namely:

- Beneficiaries are stakeholders in the process – there is support (also financial) for the initiatives they suggest themselves
- Attention to different needs of students in different disciplines is paid – delegating certain tasks to doctoral schools allows to design an offer tailored to students of each of the 3 profiles:
 - Science, Engineering, Technology
 - Biomedical Sciences
 - Humanities and Social Sciences
- Efforts to reach out to job market and involve their representatives in shaping the offer of students services are being undertaken – call for corporate partners on the website, representatives of labour market participate in “Career Talks” and “Testimonials”
- The offer of the services available is diversified in terms of covered topics and forms of support (online and off line, collective and individual)
- All the activities are evaluated, there is also follow-up questionnaire 1 year after ending the career guidance.

Also the AU Mentor 100 at the Aarhus University shows quality elements, particularly given the fact that involves mentoring in the process of career development, and then measures the impact of the initiative.

AU Mentor 100 - Aarhus University

<http://www.au.dk/en/knowexch/mentor/>

AU Mentor is a program that focuses on giving and taking. Alumni become mentors for master students whereas the students become mentors for refugees and/or immigrants. It is called double mentoring. The program has two primary purposes:

1. to train a group of AU students to become socially responsible employees and managers for the purpose of integration and multicultural understanding.
2. to prepare the students, Danish and foreign, for business careers through having a personal relationship with an experienced businessperson.

3.2.4 Quality frameworks/initiatives at national level

As noted above, development and quality of career services has been a concern of the national and international bodies in the past decade. Initiatives have been undertaken to tackle the issue from a range of profiles, such as Ministries, national agencies, associations of professionals, etc.

A few examples are here below reported.

Italia Lavoro, the Italian Agency of the Ministry of Labour, has developed a set of quality indicators for work placement in the frame of the FiXo programme, aimed at facilitating transitions between education and work:

Italia Lavoro Spa

www.italialavoro.it

The objectives of the Standard setting: Improve the quality of University career services through discussion and application of quality standards; Validate a national Map of standard of University Career Services; Raising the level of recognizing importance of Career Services by the Universities management; Promoting Third Mission: the relationship of Universities with the production system and the labour market is a key component. The final Map contains 53 quality standards. For each standard, Map offers a definition with several sources (desk review + experimentation), and some operating instructions, either coming from desk review and experience in the 75 Italian Universities. 4 Dimensions of the study research: Local connection, personalization of services, active policies quality, organizational and management quality. And 15 factors linked to the 4 dimensions: communication, knowledge, marketing, network and participation, access, training, information, intermediation between partners, personalized planning, staff requirement and skills, monitoring and assessment, quality assurance, support to entrepreneurship, management of internship and apprenticeship, services for technological dissemination.

More comprehensive standards, looking at the range of activities of a career service, may come from associations, like the network of career services in Germany (Career Service Netzwerk Deutschland e. V.), which have published a declaration on Quality Assurance of Career Services in Germany, or from national bodies, as the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in Scotland, which has developed a code of practice to provide a reference point for career services in higher education:

QAA Code of Practice for the assurance of academic quality and standards in higher education: Career Education, Information and Guidance (CEIG)

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.11120/plan.2001.00020026>

The overall Code and its constituent sections are being prepared by the QAA in response both to the Reports of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education and its Scottish Committee. The completed Code will identify a comprehensive series of system-wide expectations covering matters relating to the management of academic quality and standards in higher education. In so doing, it will provide an authoritative reference point for institutions as they consciously, actively and systematically assure the academic quality and standards of their programmes, awards and qualifications. The Code will assume that, taking into account nationally agreed principles and practices, each institution has its own systems for independent verification both of its quality and standards and of the effectiveness of its quality assurance systems. The Code is divided in sections as follows:
General principles



Institutional context

Students

External relations

Staff

Monitoring, feedback, evaluation and improvement

Each section of the Code is structured into a series of precepts and accompanying outline guidance. The precepts identify those key matters that the QAA expects an institution to be able to demonstrate.

Staff competence and professionalism, which is obviously linked with quality of services, is tackled by several bodies, e.g. the NACE, the National Association of Colleges and Employers, which has published a code of practice for professionals of career services.

One of the most authoritative references for career professionals is the Canadian Blueprint:

Canadian Blueprint

<http://www.lifework.ca/lifework/index.html>

The Blueprint is Canada's national learning outcome framework of the competencies (skills, knowledge and attitudes) citizens of all ages need to improve lifelong to prosper in career and life in the 21st century. The Blueprint is a companion piece to the Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Practitioners for career professionals.

The Canadian Standards and Guidelines for Career Practitioners define the competencies career development practitioners need in order to practice effectively and ethically. They are used extensively in Canada in shaping professional training and development programs, certification and scope of practice.

S&Gs have been heralded as an international model by the OECD and were the basis for the competency framework established by the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance (IAEVG).

4. KEY INFORMANTS INTERVIEWS

4.1. Approach and profile of interviewees

The interviews have been administered using a semi-structured interview schedule. These have been administered face-to-face with the interviewee when possible, by telephone/Skype or by e-mail according to the interviewed availability.

50 professionals and students were interviewed, having the following profiles:

- Career counsellors and practitioners (14 interviews)
- Higher Education students (11 interviews)
- Human Resources managers in small and large companies (13 interviews)
- Quality Assurance managers (12 interviews)

The respondents cover 7 countries in Europe. There are no remarkable differences within the target groups as regards the issues pointed out, even if respondents work in different countries and settings, while differences in points of view can be observed between different profiles.

In general:

- All target groups point out the need of professionalising staff and ensure career development of those working in guidance, counselling and work placement;
- Students tend to focus more on employment (finding a job), while counsellors and others focus on employability;
- Concerns about the sustainability of an additional quality frame to be applied to career service and in general to support services come from quality managers;
- Almost all interviewees stress the need of a closer cooperation with enterprises and in general with the world of work;
- There is no consensus on how the quality implementation should be managed, neither in involved profiles nor in internal/external bodies appointed to the task. This is the most varied response among profiles and within the target groups.

As above said, the questions addressed three main themes, here below detailed.

4.2. Theme 1: Meaning of quality according to the interviewed

The respondents showed a high degree of consensus in terms of quality areas of a career service. These are:

- The need of focussing on employability of students as a first quality outcome, from which all other aspects depend;
- Processes applied to students' services are important as outcomes: in particular, the capability to personalise the service, then customising activities on the need of individuals, is considered as a key quality element;
- Staff competence and staff career development are a key driver of quality;
- Relations with the world of work, therefore with players from the world of work and the civil society are crucial to ensure quality of services;
- A good information and communication system (on services) is part of the process.

As noted above, the meaning of employability varies among respondents. This is evident particularly between students and career counsellors: for students, employability means to get a job; for career counsellors, employability relates to making the student able to find a job, which not necessarily imply matching and job search provided by the service. In example:

“A good career service supports the student to find a job, an internship or to keep contact with persons who are able to address the student toward the achievement of his/her life project” (MA student from Italy).

“The results that have to be evaluated are not only the career success of the clients but also the attitude and values they acquire (self-confidence, motivation, the feeling of being useful etc.) that are developed one by one during or as a result of the career services provided” (career counsellor from Romania).

In relation with the employability subject, an interesting suggestion comes from a Quality Manager from Italy, who stresses the need of addressing professionalism, not professions, as a key element that lead to quality of services for students. Other respondents, from all groups, point out the need of focussing in soft skills and life skills, leaving on the background academic achievements.

4.3. Theme 2: Quality system(s) in place

The theme is not very known by students, and quite diverse according to point of observation in other addressed groups. In general, quality and evaluation activities are not separated; the quality system of the university is compliant with the European standards (sometimes with national instruments of assessment, but still in the frame of the European references) and career services are evaluated in the frame of general support services (e.g. libraries); the collection of users' feedback is the most common specific tool for career offices.

Asked about who should be involved in standards design, respondents were also uncertain. Almost all interviewees include enterprises or representatives of them in the design working group. The same happens for students and their representatives (also associations, unions, etc.). Many of them mention psychologists, or counsellors. A few mention Ministries and other external bodies of Education.

Some examples of the answers are here below reported:

“Quality design should be based on: career counsellor and other experts working with students and their career development; students’ unions and associations; the voice of alumni; suggestions from the enterprises” (career counsellor, Poland).

“In the quality design of the University Career Service, a part from the university managers, also principal stakeholders like companies managers (especially in the HR area) and student representative should be involved” (HR manager, Italy).

“The stakeholders that should be involved in the process of designing the quality standards are guidance workforce, employers, students, officials from the ministry of education, teaching staff” (Quality Manager, Romania).

A similar degree of uncertainty and lack of consensus, possibly due to the unfamiliar topic, can be retrieved in answers related to the management of a potential quality system, it means who can manage and assess the implementation of the standards. Most of career counsellors believe that the management should be internal to the service and its users (students), but some of them foresees that a devoted body, composed by internal and external players, shall be appointed to the task. HR managers believe that the crucial point is to involve enterprises, whatever the composition of the body/committee in charge of monitoring. QA managers instead point out the need of involving all players, including schools, enterprises, teachers. One of them interestingly points out the need of not creating anything different from the existent committees, but to delegate existent evaluation and quality committees to this additional task, in order to harmonise the monitoring of quality in support services with the rest of the university’s monitoring activities, and to avoid additional burdens in already challenged institutions.

4.4. Theme 3: Perceived needs with regard to quality of students services

Although slightly depending from the profile, the respondents identified similar needs, as follows:

- To professionalise and keep updated guidance/counselling/coaching staff;
- To anticipate intervention, therefore to support students in their transition early on, and not a few months before graduation;
- To strengthen links with the labour market, at all levels (networking with enterprises and other stakeholders, e.g. employment services);



- To pursue cooperation with enterprises, in different ways (learning programmes, common activities, etc.), in particular in anticipation of skills.

The most stressed point relates to relations with enterprises: among these, respondents point out the need of working to anticipate skills needed in the future labour market, considering that today graduates are employed in jobs that didn't even exist only ten years ago.

5. STUDENT SURVEY

5.1. Purpose and approach used

5.1.1 Aims and objectives of the survey

As noted above, the student survey was mainly intended to understand expectations of the core beneficiaries of services and to extract from the data the expected quality elements.

5.1.2 Sample design

The target group addressed by the survey was students in higher education (all levels, BA/MA/postgraduate). The sample design was a quota sample of 160 students.

5.1.3 Survey instrument

The survey was implemented through a self-administered questionnaire: the design and development of the questionnaire was carried out by reviewing the draft among partners (peer review process) and by including suggestions coming from literature review.

Principles guiding the questionnaire drafting were discussed during the kick off meeting, and were agreed among partners in order to provide a tool:

- Easy and quick to fill in, to enhance completion; to this respect, also profiling has been reduced to minimum of items necessary to understand the sample composition;
- Mostly based on closed questions, to avoid the risk of bias in interpreting translations;
- Contain questions in terms of expectation and not in terms of quality, to make easier the collection.

The following elements have been therefore included:

Module	Aim	Content
Student profile	Sample profiling	Age group Gender Name/type of institution Student status (undergrad; masters; post-grad) No. of years studying Current course subject Access to career services (never accessed, accessed, going to

Module	Aim	Content
		access)
Quality of services (perceptions)	Expectations from the service	<p>Range and type of services needed to be provided (e.g. To understand labour market; To find a job; To keep contact with enterprises; To get support for CV building; etc.); To get support for self-understanding and career planning, etc.</p> <p>Availability and access requirements for services (e.g. online, F2F, groups sessions, availability during the study career, integration with other services and/or teaching and learning etc.)</p>

Table 1. Survey's questions

"Quality of services" comprised 11 questions on expectations from the service, and 12 on services delivery preferences: items should be scored on a Likert scale 1-5 (1 = non important at all; 5 = very relevant).

Validation of the questionnaire have been carried out by means of cognitive interviews with 5 higher education students.

5.1.4 Delivery of the survey

The survey was delivered online through the Google Forms tool, and made available in the languages of the consortium (Italian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish) and English. The survey opened on April 11th and closed on May 11th, and promoted online through partners' networks.

5.2. Survey results

A total of 355 higher education students completed the questionnaire.

5.2.1 Respondent profile

Most of respondents are located in the countries of the consortium: Italy (12%), Poland (47%), Romania (17%) and Spain (7%) represent the 83% of the respondents. However, it should be noted that the UNIR in Spain, being an online university, count on its student population also students located elsewhere (e.g. Colombia): if we take into account also these students, students from the four universities of consortium represent the 84,5% of the sample.

In the following figures, geographical distribution, gender and degree level of the sample is given.

By geographical distribution (Europe)

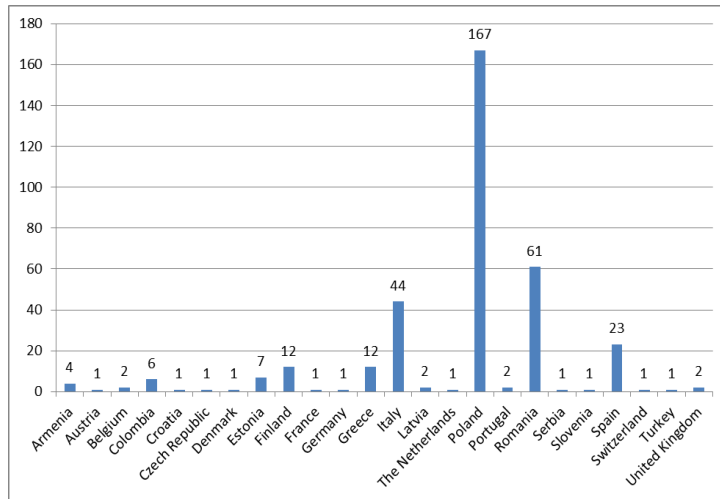


Figure 4. Respondents to the survey

Out of the total number, 343 respondents were European students, 10 of which Erasmus students. Other were studying outside the European Union, or in distance education in the EU but living in a third country (e.g. Colombian students at UNIR).

By gender

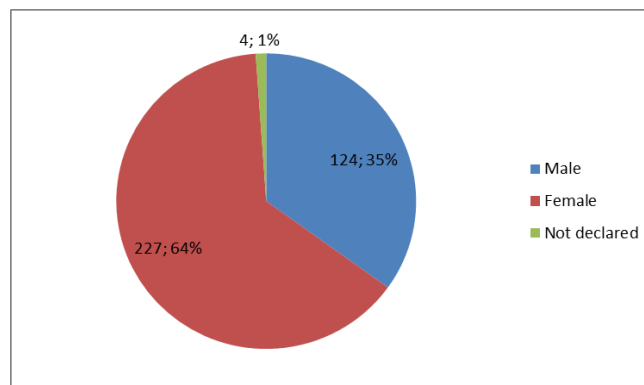


Figure 5. Sample by gender

As illustrated in the figure above, 64% of the sample is composed by female students. Looking at the countries of the consortium, this element is confirmed:

Italy: 59% female, 41% male;

Poland: 69% female, 29% male, 2% not declared;

Romania: 71% female, 27% male, 2% not declared;

Spain: 50% female, 50% male.

By degree level



Figure 6. Sample by degree

The sample presents a homogeneous distribution of BA/MA students (51% and 45% respectively). Students from the universities of the consortium present a similar profile, with the exception of Romania, that has the 82% of BA students.

By field of studies

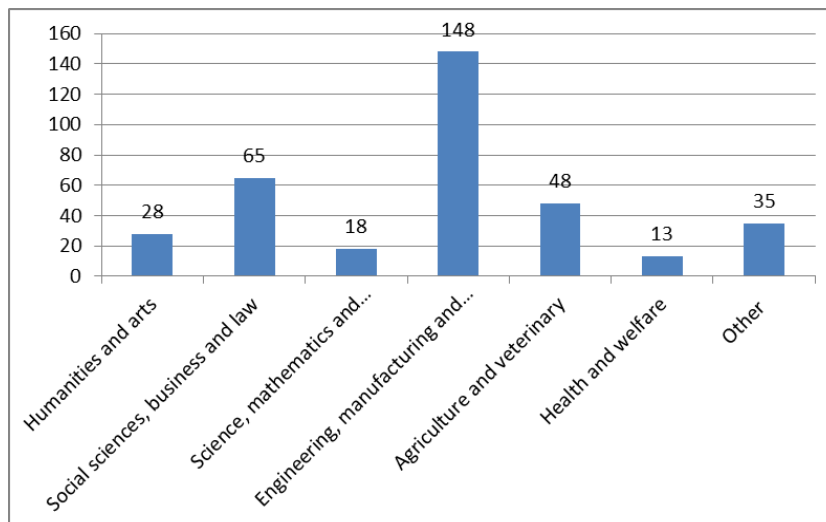


Figure 7. Sample by field of studies

Almost the 42% of the respondents study Engineering, manufacturing and construction. High numbers of this field are present in all four addressed countries. Given the profile of the involved universities, the Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences provides more respondents for agriculture and veterinary; the majority of students from Romania (Spiru Haret University) study Social Sciences; from Italy Engineering and Social Science are the most represented fields of study and from Spain the 64% of students comes from Engineering, manufacturing and construction.

5.2.2 The student experience (with career services)

The 74% of respondents were aware that career services were available in their university. The 28% (100) of the respondents declared that they have used at least once the career services for the following reasons:

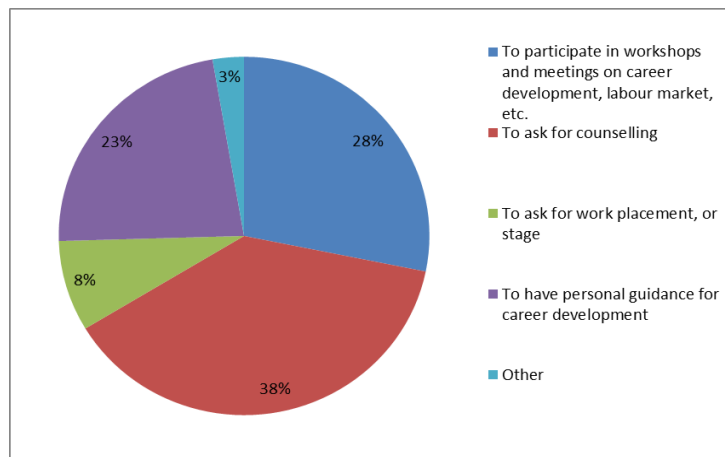


Figure 8. Sample by experience with career services

More than the 65% stated that s/he was happy with the received service. Most of those who declared that they were not happy with the service, didn't give any explanation. Most of them who provided explanation about negative experience, refers about poor support to find work placement/intership opportunities.

5.2.3 The student needs and preferences

The results of the survey allows to identify some key element useful for the design of the QAREER quality framework, which can be summarised as in the following paragraphs.

In general, we can summarise the preferences and expectations from students as follows:

- The most relevant service the student expect from a career service is placement, not only as a part of the study pathway, but also as job placement after graduation (as job posts and matching, contacts with enterprises, etc.);
- Support for developing tools, such as the CV, or information about the labour market and recruiting channels are considered relevant as well;
- Students' preferences are individual services, group services are considered less important; this is confirmed both with relation to online and face to face meetings;
- Face to face meetings are considered more important than online meetings in general, where the online university data highlight obviously a different result;
- Training, both face to face or online, as a part of the regular study or carried out for the purpose, is considered relevant, but not fundamental;
- Premises of guidance sessions, or training, are not significant;
- Support for mobility is important both for Bachelor and Master students.

Please note that in the following figures, the applied scoring scale refers to:

- 1 = Not relevant at all
- 2 = Neither relevant nor irrelevant
- 3 = Partially relevant
- 4 = Relevant
- 5 = Very relevant

It is very relevant to get support for finding a work placement, or a job

All items related to job matching and/or information on how to find a job show the relevance of these activities according to students, confirming the interviews' results. The following figures highlight this outcome:

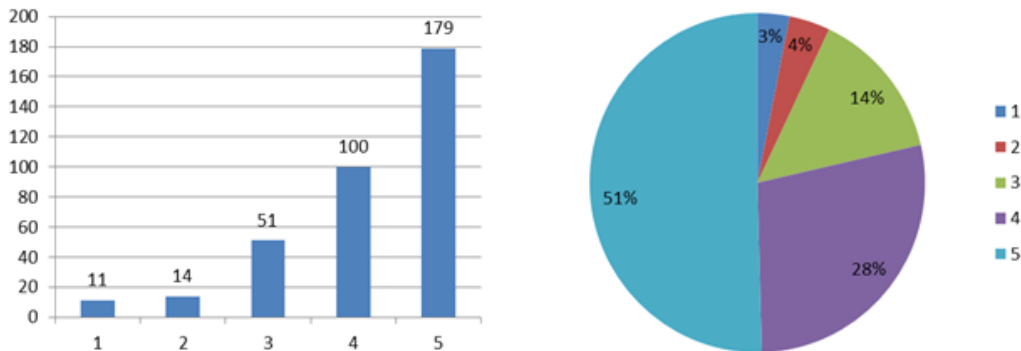


Figure 9. Survey item “Support to get a job”

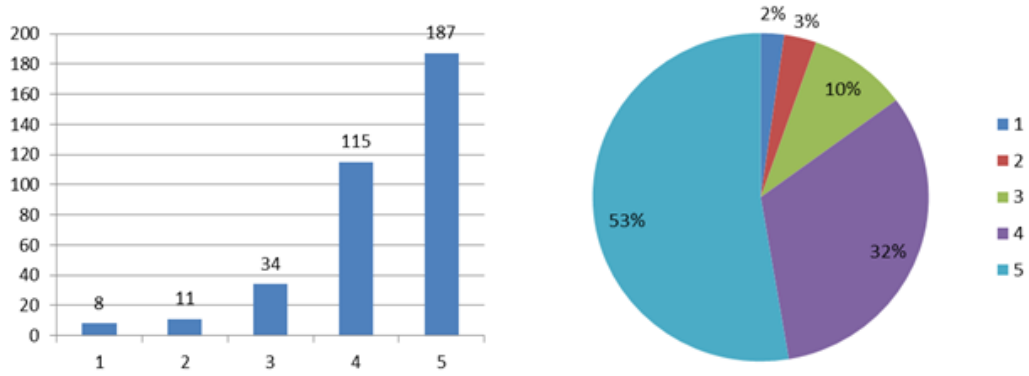


Figure 10. Survey item “Support to find work placement opportunities”

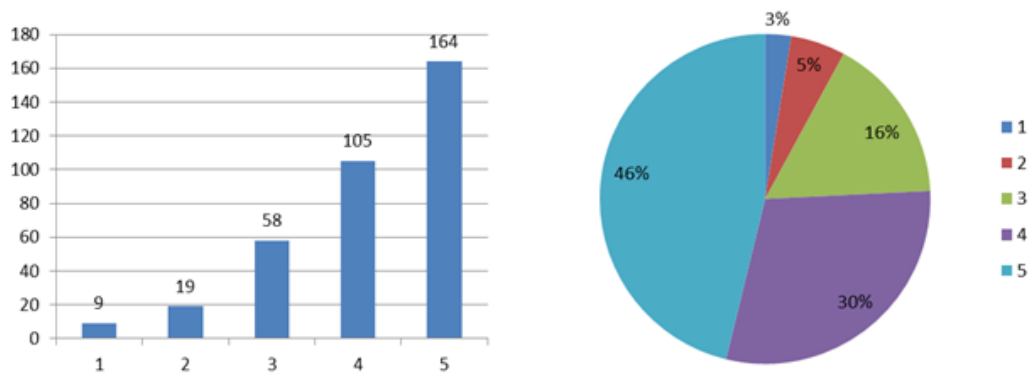


Figure 11. Survey item “Job boards management”

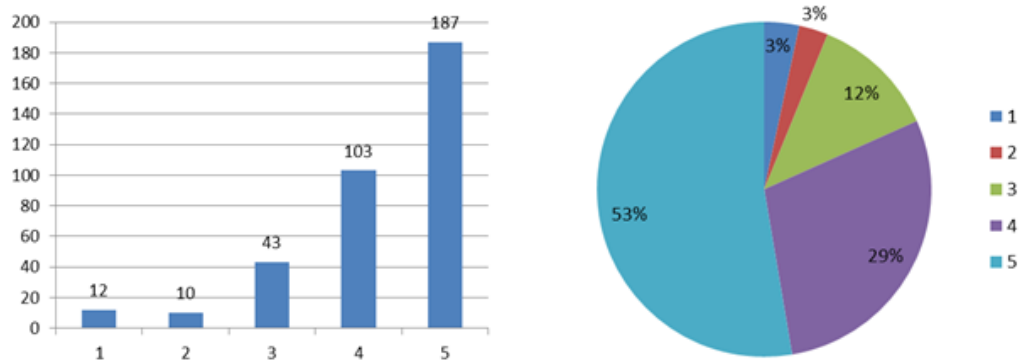


Figure 12. Survey item “Contacts with enterprises”

Tools for the labour market are needed

The preparation for the labour market, including CV drafting, and information on channels for recruiting, is also considered relevant, even if slightly less than support from the career office to find a placement or a job, as highlighted in the following figures:

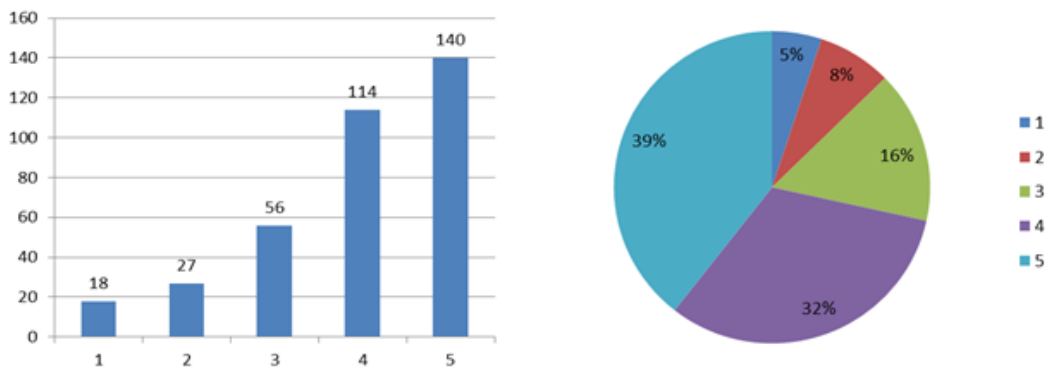


Figure 13. Survey item "Support for CV drafting"

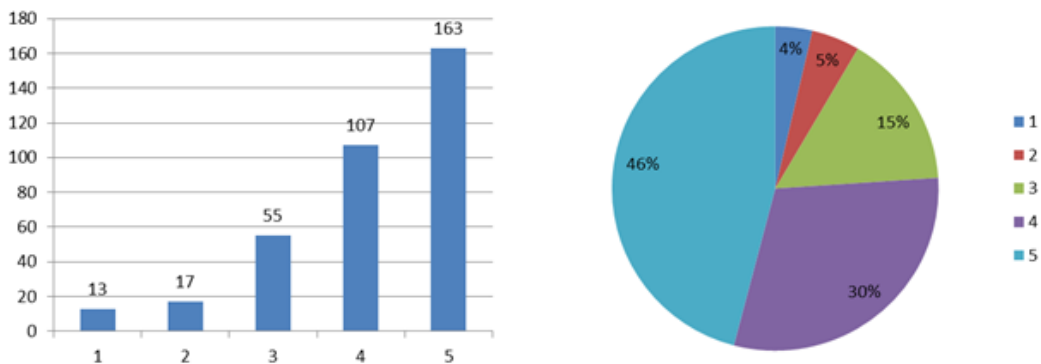


Figure 14. Survey item "Information on recruiting channels"

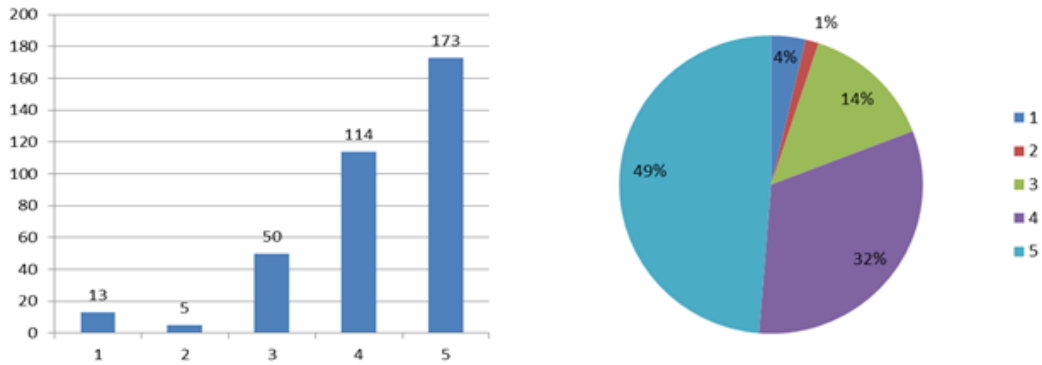


Figure 15. Survey item "Information about the labour market"

Training is relevant, but not fundamental

Training is considered relevant, but not extremely relevant: in any case, much better face to face than online, and possibly carried out by career service for the purpose and not integrated in academic courses.

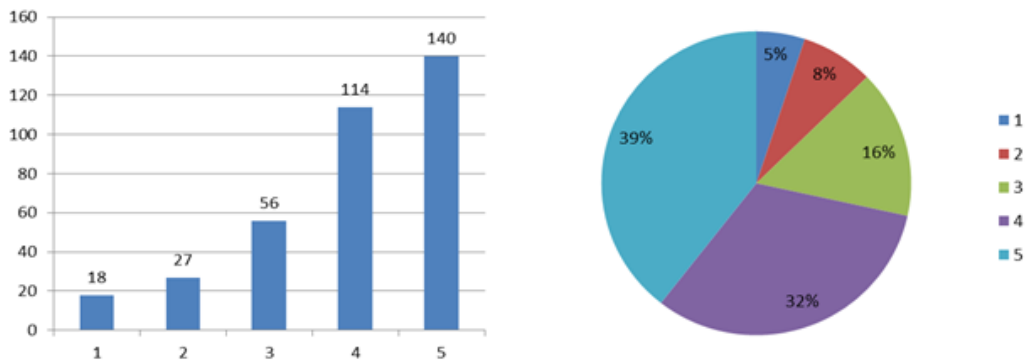


Figure 16. Survey item "Support for soft skills development"

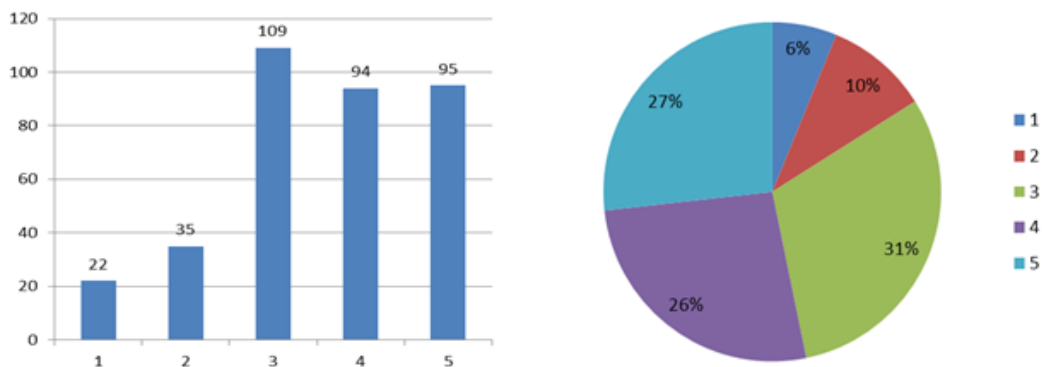


Figure 17. Survey item “ICT-based learning materials”

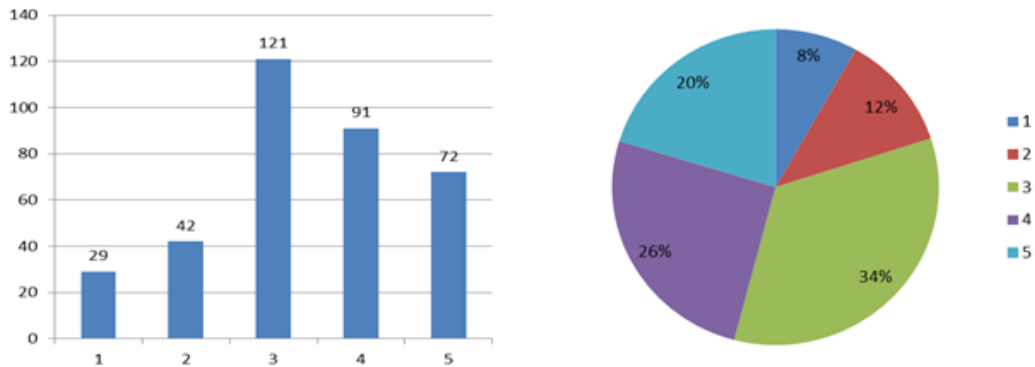


Figure 18. Survey item “Webinars”

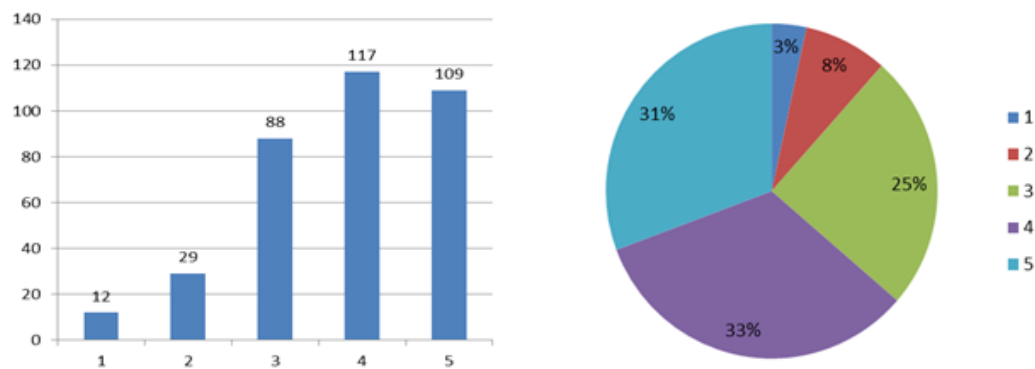


Figure 19. Survey item “By integrating career development topics in the regular study course”

For items “ICT-based materials” (Fig. 18) and “Webinars” (Fig.19), students from UNIR, which is an online university, are more in favour of ICT based courses and webinars (“ICT based-materials” very relevant or relevant for the 64% against the 53% of the total sample; “Webinars” very relevant or relevant for the 61% against the 46% of the total sample).

Information on job offers is important, but should not be necessarily managed by the career service

Again referring to labour market, information about job/placement offers is considered important, as information on recruiting channels above mentioned. Online services are most appreciate than offline services.

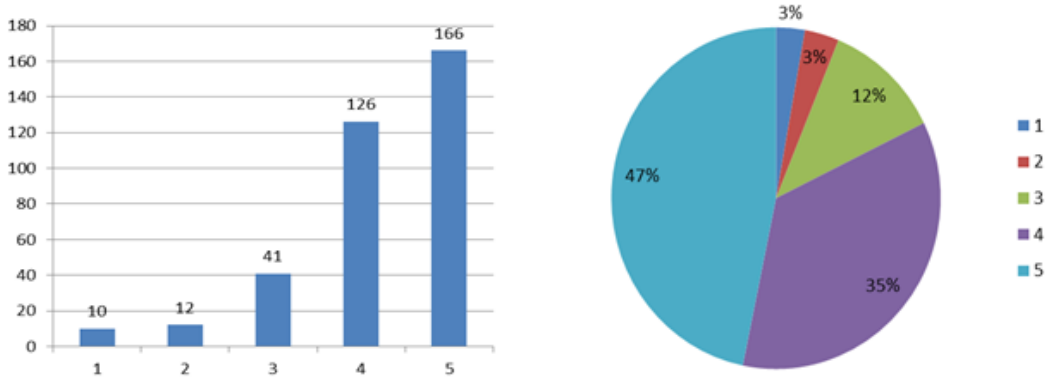


Figure 20. Survey item "Job boards online"

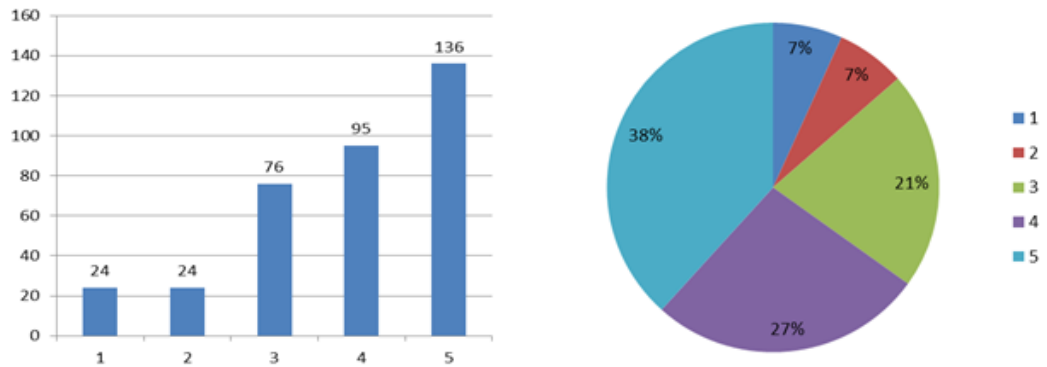


Figure 21. Survey item "Job boards offline"

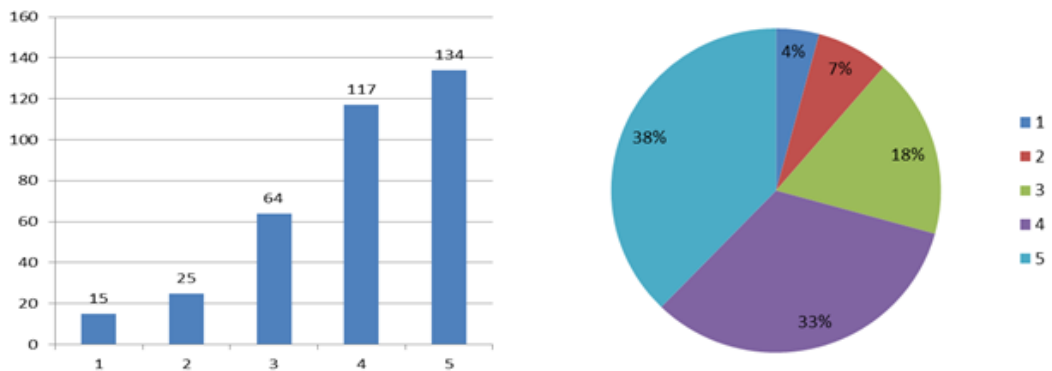


Figure 22. Survey item "Online information about work placement/job opportunities through social networks"

Individual, tailored, face to face service

Support for career guidance it is more relevant, and probably considered more effective, if carried out individually, preferably face to face, and at the career service premises:

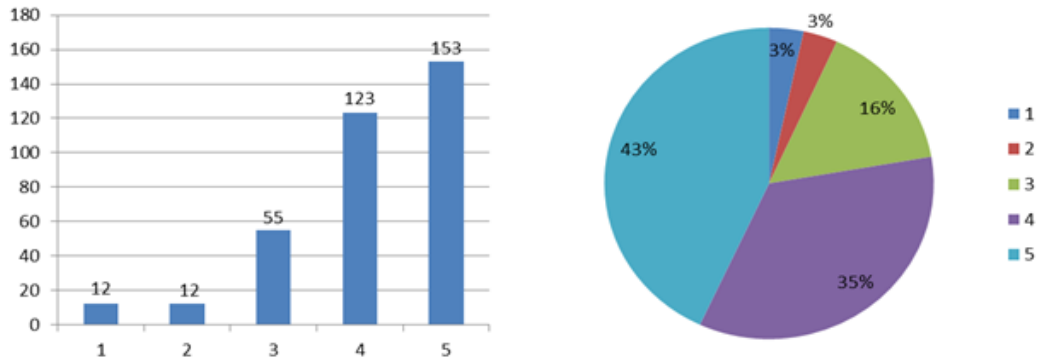


Figure 23. Survey item "Individual career guidance"

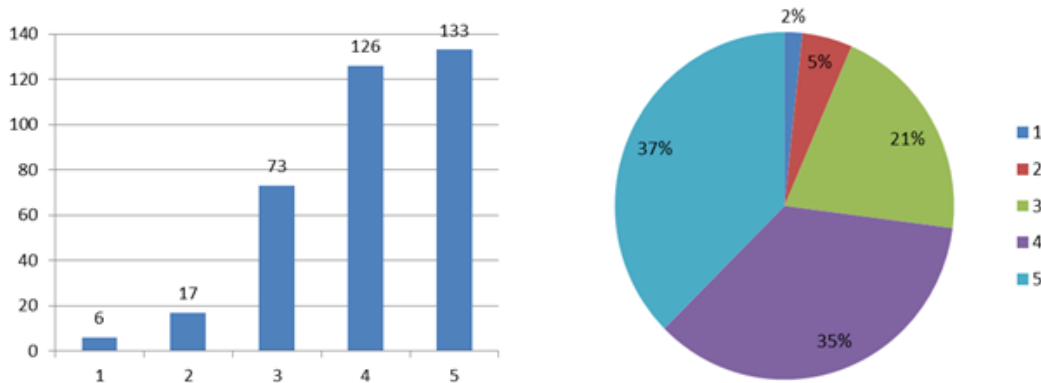


Figure 24. Survey item "Individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office"

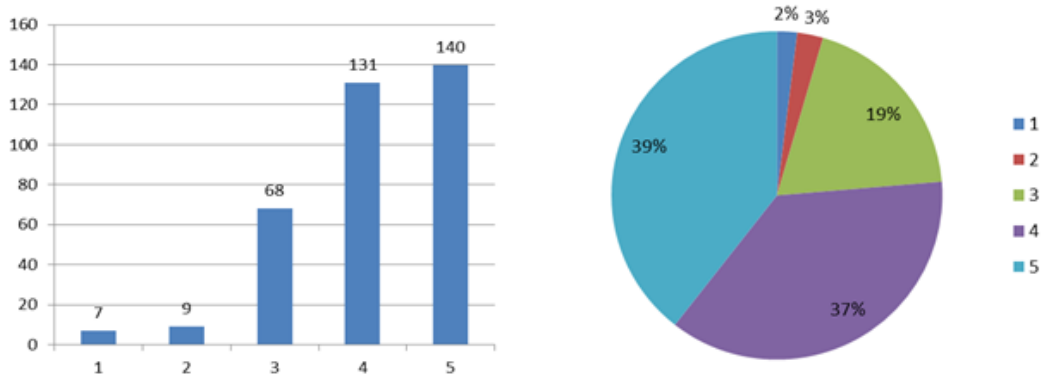


Figure 25. Survey item “Individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty”

Group sessions, which are the most common in career services, are considered less relevant (and probably less effective), wherever they take place (faculty or career services premises).

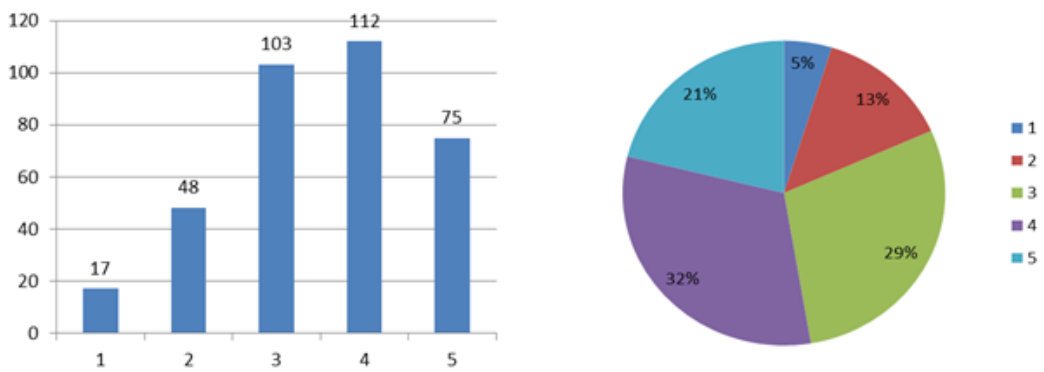


Figure 26. Survey item “Group career guidance sessions”

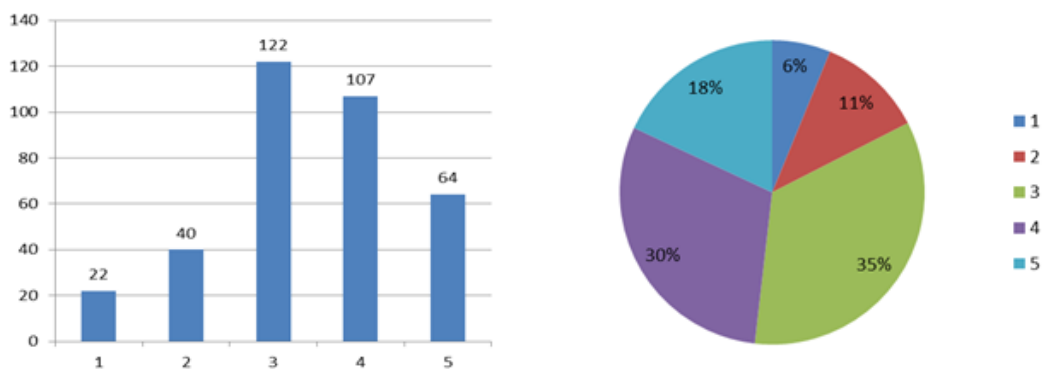


Figure 27. Survey item “Group sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office”

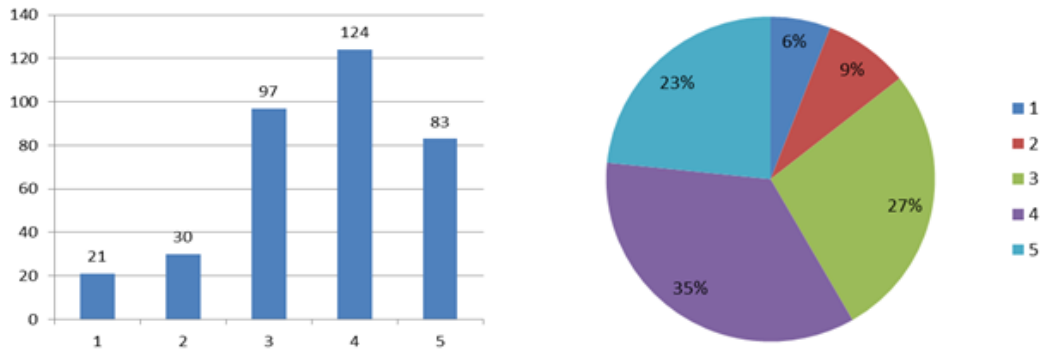


Figure 27. Survey item “Group sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty”

Online sessions, both in group and individually, are not considered the best choice, if we take into account the entire sample:

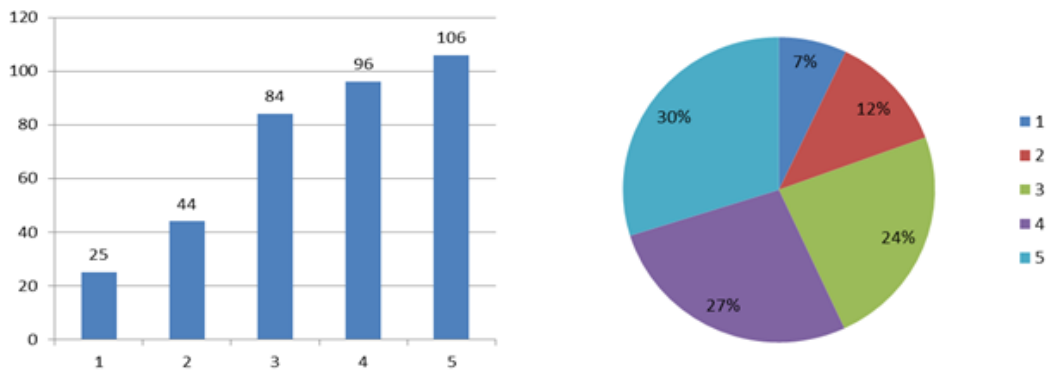


Figure 28. Survey item “Online individual sessions”

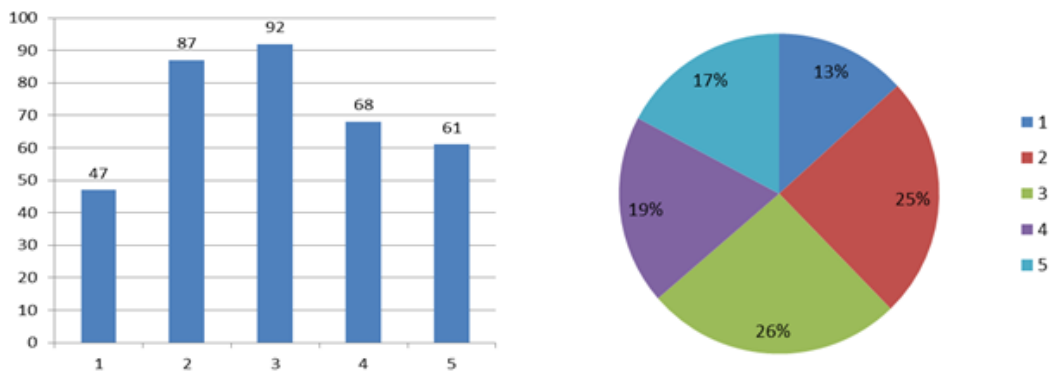


Figure 29. Survey item “Online group sessions”

However, taking into account the online university students, and for obvious reasons, the situation changes remarkably in regards to the online individual sessions (very relevant or relevant for the 75% against the 57% of the total sample), as well as for online groups sessions (58% against 36%). In general, individual support is anyway preferred to group support.

Not absolute interest to get support for moving abroad, but still very important

Respondents shows interest for moving abroad:

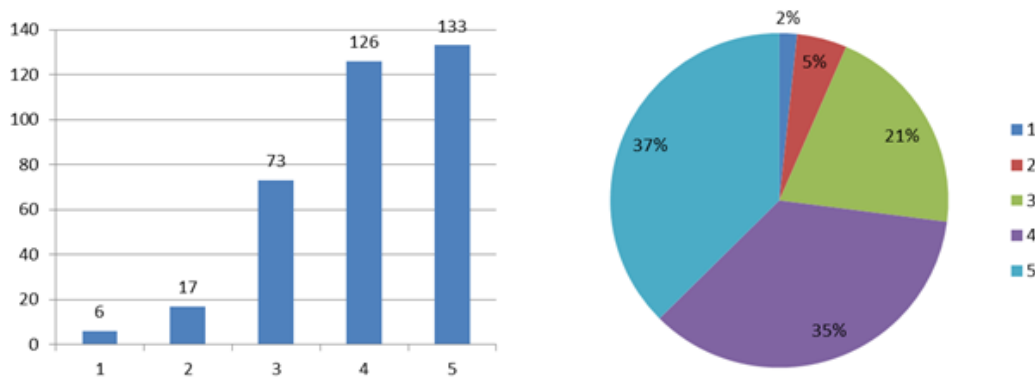


Figure 30. Survey item “Support for mobility abroad”

No significant differences are detectable between Bachelor and Master students (68% against 71% respectively marked very important or important):

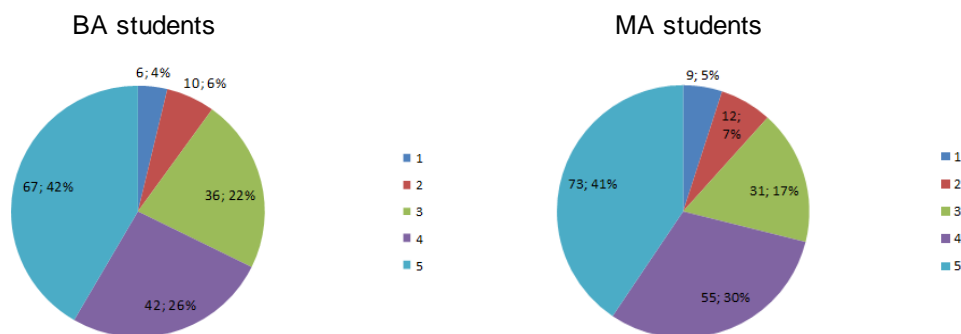


Figure xx. Survey item “Support for mobility abroad”: differences between BA/MA students

Instead, if we take into account the students enrolled in the four universities of the consortium, if Spanish and Romanian data are rather similar to the general result, Polish and Italian students seems to be more interested to move abroad (72% and 89% respectively marked 5 or 4). It should be anyway pointed out that



a real comparison between the groups is not feasible given the different numbers of the national samples.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Conclusions: main findings

The research work in QAREER pointed out the following key results:

- National situations are very diverse and even in the same country the role and the activities of career services at the university are different;
- Some good example of standards for career services already exist, related to overall services or to one or more areas of the service (e.g. work placement, staff development, etc.);
- However, a reference framework recognised (or known) by universities is not available yet, and quality of career services is mostly included in quality of support services within the ESG guidelines;
- There is no common understanding among stakeholders on the meaning of quality and above on the role of the career services;
- Given the particular features of career services at the university, a broader range of stakeholders need to be taken into account, as career services represent the link between the academic world and the labour world, and not a service to external users (such as unemployed) – therefore standards like the ISO, or the ServQual, even if good and widely tested, are not perfectly suitable for higher education services;
- Professionalization and development of staff must to be taken into account while dealing with quality issues: this is confirmed both by key respondents and practices and literature review;
- Students' needs are focused on results more than on processes, and the service provided in terms of career by universities is not understood in full, sometimes it is not even known.

6.2. Recommendations for the design of the QAREER quality framework

According to the exploratory work carried out for the purpose of developing the European Quality Assurance framework for Career Services it is recommended:

- To keep it flexible as possible, to favour its adoption in different countries, institutions, and organisations in higher and tertiary education;
- To provide a tool based as possible on self-assessment, in order to make it usable for improvement purposes also by the service itself, where the academic structure or national laws and regulations can hinder its full adoption;
- To design the framework and its standards as a “learning journey” of the service, then avoiding checklists of minimum standards which would turn out to be too easy or too strict to be used: ideally, the framework could be

design in three levels of quality, from minimum standard to quality excellence;

- To take into account the particular features of career services at the university, by designing reference standards about the relations with stakeholders, internal (such as i.e. teachers, academic bodies) and external (e.g. enterprises, employment offices, civil society representatives);
- To provide specific standards for staff career development, while recruiting seems to be too dependent from national contexts and regulations;
- To provide standards related to organisational issues, taking therefore into account internal management of the service;
- To design specific standards related to information and communication, on the existence of the service that sometimes seems still missing in the student population, but above all on the role and the mission of it, as career services are not specifically meant to find a job to students, but to make students able to find a job and manage transitions;
- To embed ICTs use across activities of the service;
- To plan the existence of a support service for mobility abroad (related to transition from education to work, not for study);
- To avoid too detailed standards, such as i.e. "how to organise a workshop", instead providing general references applicable to all activities;
- To build upon existent sources, taking into account previous experiences;
- To co-design as possible with key players, both internal and externals, in order to ensure that all needs are taken into account;
- To specify both monitoring and evaluation processes and sources of verification and information;
- To ask for feedback not only to co-designers (as already planned in the project plan), but also to experts at European level, who deal with quality issues at university with a transnational dimension.

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