

PROPOSED STANDARDS FOR CAREER SERVICES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

MIHAI ANDRONIE ^{*}, BOGDAN DANCIU ^{**}

*Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Faculty of Economic
Sciences, mihai.andronie@gmail.com ^{*}*

*^{**} Spiru Haret University, Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology
and Educational Sciences, sp.danciu.bogdan@spiruharet.ro*

This paper presents several proposed standards for career services in higher education institutions (HEI) based on the research made in several countries (most participants were from Italy, Poland, Romania and Spain). The main study represented the Intellectual Outcome O2 of the Project Erasmus +

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Author of the research: *Spiru Haret* University, Romania

Contributors:

Mihai Andronie (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Alexandru Lucinescu (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Anca Andronic (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Aurelian A. Bondrea (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Maria Andronie (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Bogdan Danciu (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Daniel Burgos (International University of La Rioja, Spain), Stefania Aceto (International University of La Rioja, Spain), Ruben Gonzalez Crespo (International University of La Rioja, Spain), Ester Alonso Velasco (International University of La Rioja, Spain), Gilda Rota (University of Padua, Italy) Jadwiga Bolechowska (Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland), Krzysztof Kafarski (Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland), Anna Partyka-Górska (Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland)

INTRODUCTION

Higher education aims to fulfil multiple purposes, including **preparing students for active citizenship** and their future career (e.g. by contributing to their employability). Therefore, stakeholders in education that can prioritize these different purposes may have different views on the quality of counselling services offered by higher education institutions. Quality assurance must take into account these different perspectives.

The activities of Career Services (CS) at HEIs have been categorized at three levels, from level 1 (minimum) to level 3 (maximum). The activities at level 1 are basic for functioning of CS, while level 3 comprises all the activities and highly qualified staff.

According to specialists, major challenges for a counselling system include:

- identification of affordable ways leading to improved access of counselling to beneficiaries;
 - changes of focus from career services to individuals, helping them to manage their own decisions.
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INTRODUCTION

A quality assurance system that copes with these challenges is characterized by:

- transparency,
- easy access for students,
- ability to meet the needs of different categories of beneficiaries,
- access to comprehensive knowledge on education, employment and the labour market,
- programmes enabling the development of skills necessary for future career management.

Career services standards represent relevant principles for the staff and practices necessary for their functioning. Quality assurance of career services in higher education institutions must be considered and respected by all individuals involved, for all the types of career services in the academic environment.

METHODOLOGY

The career services activities provided for the students at HEIs include:

- counselling related to career plan development;
 - providing the students with information on career guidance and other activities;
 - advice on applying for a job, doctoral scholarship or research;
 - counselling regarding employment opportunities, evaluation of alternatives, career plans;
 - organizing counselling or coaching sessions with students who can share their experience on academic or professional life (academic peer coaching);
 - training workshops and courses on career skills development.
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METHODOLOGY

The framework is supposed to serve as a tool for higher education institutions towards excellence of career services.

It is structured in three main phases (Watt 1998):

- Access;
- Process;
- Output.

And in three main areas:

- Staff management and development;
- Services provision;
- Monitoring and evaluation.

The levels of quality are progressive: level 3 (maximum) also includes items at levels 1 and 2.

METHODOLOGY

The model presented by the three phases (access, process and output) has been structured for the quality assurance methods by Watt (1998) and later described by Clayton et al. (2008) in the following way:

- **Access** (clients/beneficiaries targeted, physical/social/linguistic access etc.);
 - **Process** (objectives, organization, monitoring, time spent with beneficiaries, guidance interviews, information, quality assurance systems etc.);
 - **Output** (number of people taking up job/training/education, cost/benefit, value for money etc.).
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THE SOURCES FOR DESIGN

The starting point for developing the standards and guidelines was the international experience of recognized specialists in the field of counselling, normative documents and guidelines recognized by practitioners in counselling as well as the results of the present project (Intellectual Output O1). The results obtained in this project show that staff professionalization and development are key issues for QA, which has been confirmed both by the respondents and the data in literature.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES – ACCESS – STAFF

<p>A.ST.1 Recruitment</p>	<p>Standard: Recruitment of career services staff will be strictly adhered to the principle of professionalization.</p> <p>Guidelines: CS recruit competent staff with respect to their qualifications and qualities (personal and cultural abilities).</p>
<p>A.ST.2 Update</p>	<p>Standard: The internal criteria for staff update in professionalization are met for achieving career services.</p> <p>Guidelines: HEI will comply with national regulations regarding the professionalization of career services staff whenever update is necessary.</p>
<p>A.ST.3 Management</p>	<p>Standard: Management procedures are fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory.</p> <p>Guidelines: HEI have - as part of their quality management system - procedures for career services staff management that are fair, inclusive and non-discriminatory.</p>

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES – ACCESS – SERVICES

A.SE.1 Information to prospective students	Standard: Information about career service is available at the career service office and on its website and it is provided in both the national language and in at least one international language. Guidelines: Information is provided by means of promotional materials which should include at least leaflets and booklets in printed and electronic format.
A.SE.2 Information to enrolled students	Standard: Information about the career service is provided at the career service office and on its website in both the national language and at least one international language. Guidelines: Information should be communicated by means of information materials such as banners, leaflets, posters, booklets and by means of face-to-face and online discussions.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES – ACCESS – SERVICES

A.SE.3 Reception	Standard: Career services are provided in a distinct space within the HEI. Guidelines: HEI provides a distinct space for career services, preferably in an area with easy access to most students.
A.SE.4 Outreach	Standard: The career service office is easily accessible with respect to both its location and opening hours. Guidelines: The career service office is located in an area that is intensely frequented by students and its opening hours cover the most part of the day.
A.SE.5 Beneficiaries	Standard: Career services are provided for students enrolled in the last study year. Guidelines: The career services are provided to students from any study cycle on condition that they are enrolled in the last study year.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES – PROCESS – STAFF

P.ST.1. Staff development	Standard: Staff learning/training is optional. Guidelines: Staff is encouraged to further training/learning on individual basis.
P.ST.2. Staff career progression	Standard: Career progression mechanisms are stated in individual contracts. Guidelines: HEIs are including conditions regarding career progression in individual labour contracts.
P.ST.3. Staff peer networking	Standard: Networking within peers is on individual basis. Guidelines: Staff hired for career services may participate in peer networking.

STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES – OUTPUT – SERVICES

O.SE.1 Analysing feedback from internal players	Standard: Information is collected only from registered beneficiaries. Guidelines: Feedback is requested and processed from all recipients of the service.
O.SE.2 Analysing feedback from external players	Standard: A global assessment of how services meet the recipients is done. Guidelines: HEI appreciates the way on which career services operates at the global level through networking with other departments/services.
O.SE.3 Planning for improvement	Standard: Professional development is optional, not compulsory. Guidelines: In HEI, the manner in which professional development is done is decided by each employee.

THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

The standards developed constitute landmarks in practice and theoretical research dedicated to counselling; they represent the minimum requirements for counselling professionals and they are an indicator of performance in offered services.

The standards and guidelines are used in many areas of career services, but also in the regulation and direction of specific activities. They are recommended to be implemented in order to improve professional responsibility of counsellors, diversification of services to beneficiaries, setting professional boundaries, preventing problems related to confidentiality, providing equal opportunities to all counselling beneficiaries, student communication etc.

THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

The following requirements must be met cumulatively for adequate implementation of quality standards of career services:

- Independence must be understood as the lack of any impairment that would affect the objectivity of facts assessment.
 - Objectivity should be understood as an intellectual unbiased attitude, allowing career specialists to carry out their steps in a way that demonstrates their sincere faith in their work and the fact that they don't compromise on quality. Objectivity requires specialists not to subordinate their professional judgment to any interest outside beneficiary interest.
 - Trust in terms of confidentiality and secure environment in which the counsellors realise the process of counselling.
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THE QUALITY FRAMEWORK OF REFERENCE

- Continuous training of counsellors
 - Added value, meaning that the counselling must offer students as many opportunities and improve opportunities for achieving their objectives, resulting in improved decision-making, reduced risk exposure through skill efficiency offered to the beneficiary.
 - Guidance for students' self-knowledge, using instruments validated by scientific research.
 - Supporting the person counselled by a continuous, systematic and methodical assessment of students' needs and potentials.
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CONCLUSIONS

The standards developed for career services in HEIs' are guided by two main principles:

- CS guide the students from the first year of study in order to reduce drop-outs and increase the students' awareness of the labour market needs and different educational paths which may enhance the possibility of employment after graduation.
 - Harmonization of educational and professional aspirations with the social system of values, desirable social behaviours and need for personal success, with the wishes of self-affirmation, action and autonomy of the individual will grow the chances for employability.
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CONCLUSIONS

Career counselling goals are:

- Offering consultancy to identify development opportunities;
 - Identifying the dynamics of personal and professional development needs of students;
 - Creating and developing performing methodologies tailored to the needs of students;
 - Professional consultancy for public and private institutions;
 - Offering support for the students' employability;
 - Facilitating access to student volunteering and training programmes;
 - Creating a culture of continuous learning for strategic development;
 - Maintaining a continuous connection between students and specialists from the labour market;
 - Integration of the counselling and career services in education.
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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!
