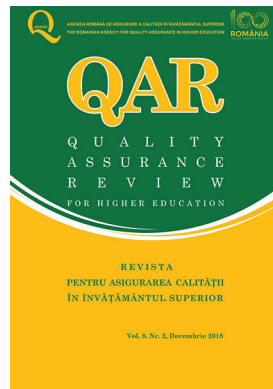




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Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education

Expectations from Career Services in Higher Education Institutions Across Countries

Bogdan Danciu, Mihai Andronic

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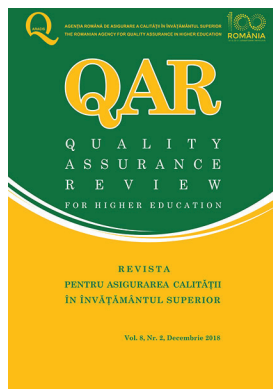
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Așteptări de la serviciile de orientare în carieră din instituțiile de învățământ superior în diferite țări

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Expectations from Career Services in Higher Education Institutions Across Countries

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Rezumat: *Cercetarea de față evidențiază așteptările studenților privitoare la diferite servicii solicitate centrelor de consiliere în carieră ale universităților. Datele au fost colectate din diferite țări în cadrul Proiectului Erasmus+ 2015-1-RO01-KA203-014972 “Quality Assurance of Career Services in Higher Education - QAREER”.*

Așteptările studenților (N=355; bărbați – 31.5%, femei – 67.3%, nedeclarați – 1.1%) în privința serviciilor, precum și referitor la modul de oferire al acestora s-au corelat în mod semnificativ între ele. Ne-am propus să observăm care dintre aceste așteptări au manifestat cele mai puternice corelații cu alte așteptări, stabilind în acest fel anumite pattern-uri de servicii de care au nevoie studenții, dintre care cele mai semnificative sunt: informații despre piața muncii (opt corelații), sesiuni de grup online (cinci corelații).

În baza rezultatelor obținute în cercetare a fost elaborat documentul “Validated Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Career Services in Higher Education”. Acesta conține descrierea standardelor și principiilor pentru serviciile de carieră din unitățile de învățământ superior, propuse de specialiști din România, Spania, Italia, Polonia și Belgia.

Cuvinte cheie: *așteptări, servicii de carieră, consiliere, angajare, piața muncii, webinar*

Abstract: *This research highlights students’ expectations regarding different services needed from career services in universities. Data was collected from universities of different countries in the Project Erasmus+ 2015-1-RO01-KA203-014972 “Quality Assurance of Career Services in Higher Education - QAREER”.*

The expectations of students (N=355; male students– 31.5%, female students – 67.3%, not declared – 1.1%) regarding services and services delivery preferences were significantly correlated to each other. We were interested in observing which expectations manifested the strongest correlations with other ones, establishing

in this way some patterns of services needed by the students, of which the most significant are: Information about the labour market (eight correlations), Online group sessions (five correlations).

Based on the results obtained in the research, the document “Validated Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Career Services in Higher Education” was elaborated. It contains the description of the standards and guidelines for career services in higher education, proposed by specialists from Romania, Spain, Italy, Poland and Belgium.

Keywords: *expectations, career services, counseling, employment, labour market, webinar*

Introduction

Starting from the survey’s data obtained in the international research of the Project Erasmus+ 2015-1-RO01-KA203-014972 “Quality Assurance of Career Services in Higher Education – QAREER”¹, we attempted to verify which of the expectations related to career services in universities, of the entire sample of students, are strongest related to others. The methodology of the project combined 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. Fifty professionals and students were interviewed, having the following profiles: Career counsellors and practitioners, Higher Education students, Human Resources managers in small and large companies, Quality Assurance managers (Intellectual Output 1²).

When students are using (or intend to use) career services in higher education institutions, they have different expectations about what they can achieve for their future career. These expectations are influenced by the information they have about their career centers, gender, personality type, as well as their social and cultural background (Tavakoli, Rocca and Thorngate, 2010; Ægisdóttir and Gerstein, 2004). Expectations have an impact on the satisfaction felt by the beneficiaries of career counseling services, as well as on the effectiveness of their decisions for the future.

Our main objective in the present research was to establish which of the expectation related to career services in universities are *strongest interconnected*. The list of expectations proposed for assessment by the students was built starting from career centers services.

¹ Authors and contributors to the international research: Gigliola Paviotti (Melius s.r.l., Italy), Gilda Rota (University of Padova, Italy), Maria Chiara Vita Finzi (Melius s.r.l., Italy), Mihai Andronie (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Alexandru Lucinescu (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Cristina Păiușan-Nuică (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Aurelian A. Bondrea (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Maria Andronie (Spiru Haret University, Romania), Katarzyna Czyz (The European Students Union, Belgium), Zoltan Denes (University of Padova, Italy), Stefania Aceto (International University of La Rioja, Spain), Eugenio Gil (International University of La Rioja, Spain), Krzysztof Kafarski (Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland), Jadwiga Bolechowska (Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland), Anna Partyka-Gorska (WUELS – Wroclaw University of Environmental and Life Sciences, Poland)

² https://qareer.ro/images/2016/QAREER_O1_O4_Quality_of_career_services_report.pdf

Methodological Approach

The Research Instrument

The student survey was implemented through a self-administered questionnaire (in the period of April – May 2016) regarding: support for soft-skills development (e.g. teamwork, communication, problem solving etc.), such as courses, workshops, seminars; support for CV drafting; individual career guidance; group career guidance sessions; support to find work placement opportunities; support to get a job; job boards management; contacts with enterprises; information about the labour market; information on recruiting channels (how to search for job offers); support for mobility (abroad); individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office; group sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office; individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty; group sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty; online individual sessions; online group sessions; ICT-based learning materials; webinars; by integrating career development topics in the regular study course (i.e. having lessons that focus on career development topics in the frame of all courses); job boards online (website); job boards offline (offices); online information about work placement/job opportunities through social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter). Each item was evaluated using a Likert scale, i.e.: “What do you expect from the career service? Please rate the following services on a scale 1 – 5, where 1 = not relevant at all, 2 = neither relevant nor irrelevant, 3 = partially relevant, 4 = relevant, 5 = very relevant”. The survey was delivered online through the Google Forms tool using a self-administered questionnaire, and made available in five languages: Italian, Polish, Romanian, Spanish and English.

The base for the questionnaire were the career services activities provided for the students by the career services from higher education institutions, that “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” (Intellectual Output 2³).

Student Sample Description

The research was carried out on a number of 355 students enrolled in universities from different European countries, who had different profiles. The distribution by genders, countries in which they are studying, as well as the fields they study are contained in Tables 2, 3 and 5.

The biggest number of students from this sample were studying in Poland (n = 167), Romania (n = 61), Italy (n = 45) and Spain (n = 29). Regarding the field

³ <http://cercetare.spiruharet.ro/qareers/IO2.pdf>

of study, most of the students were enrolled in Engineering (n = 150), Social sciences (n = 66), Mathematics and nature sciences (n = 48) and Humanities (n = 33).

Table 1: Valid and missing data related to Gender and Country of study

Statistics			
Number	Status	Gender	Country of study
N	Valid	351	355
	Missing	4	0

Table 2: Frequency of students according to gender

Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	112	31.5	31.9	31.9
	Female	239	67.3	68.1	100.0
	Total	351	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	4	1.1		
	Total	355	100.0		

Table 3: Frequency of students according to countries

Country of study				
	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Romania	61	17.2	17.2	17.2
Greece	12	3.4	3.4	20.6
Spain	29	8.2	8.2	28.7
Poland	167	47.0	47.0	75.8
Italy	45	12.7	12.7	88.5
Denmark	1	.3	.3	88.7
Portugal	2	.6	.6	89.3
UK	2	.6	.6	89.9
Belgium	1	.3	.3	90.1
Germany	1	.3	.3	90.4
Austria	1	.3	.3	90.7
Turkey	1	.3	.3	91.0

France	1	.3	.3	91.3
Slovenia	1	.3	.3	91.5
Netherlands	1	.3	.3	91.8
Switzerland	1	.3	.3	92.1
Latvia	2	.6	.6	92.7
Croatia	1	.3	.3	93.0
Estonia	7	2.0	2.0	94.9
Czech Republic	1	.3	.3	95.2
Finland	12	3.4	3.4	98.6
Armenia	4	1.1	1.1	99.7
Serbia	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	355	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Valid and missing data related to Fundamental field of study

Statistics		
Fundamental field of study		
N	Valid	327
	Missing	28

Table 5: Frequency of students according to Fundamental field of study

Fundamental field of study					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Social sciences	66	18.6	20.2	20.2
	Humanities	33	9.3	10.1	30.3
	Engineering	150	42.3	45.9	76.1
	Math and nature sciences	48	13.5	14.7	90.8
	Biological and biomedical sciences	6	1.7	1.8	92.7
	Sport science	24	6.8	7.3	100.0
	Total	327	92.1	100.0	
Missing	System	28	7.9		
	Total	355	100.0		

For the statistical processing we used S.P.S.S. program, version 20.0.

Results and Discussions

To achieve the objective of highlighting the relations between students' expectations we calculated the intercorrelations between expectations and took into account the values of strong significant correlations ($r > .5$). The data is presented in Table 7.

The correlations table highlights that expectations of students are significantly related to each other, but a part of them are stronger related to other expectations. We have taken into account the expectations with at least 4 powerful correlations ($r > .5$). These associations between expectations form some patterns that are in this case constructed from the entire sample of students (from all countries studied):

- *Information about the labour market* – 8 powerful correlations;
- *Online group sessions* – 5 powerful correlations.

Table 6: *The most significant patterns of expectations*

PATTERN 1	
Information about the labour market	Support for CV drafting
	Individual career guidance
	Support to find work placement opportunities
	Support to get a job
	Job boards management
	Contacts with enterprises
	Information on recruiting channels (how to search for job offers)
	Support for mobility (abroad)
PATTERN 2	
Online group sessions Group sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty Online individual sessions ICT-based learning materials Webinars	Group sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office

Table 7: Intercorrelations of the students' expectations^{4, 5}:

		Powerful correlation $r > .5$		Moderate correlation $.3 < r < .5$		Weak correlation $.1 < r < .3$							
		E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	E11	E12
1. Support for soft-skills development (e.g. team-work, communication, problem solving, etc.), such as courses, workshops, seminars (E1)	r												
	p												
2. Support for CV drafting (E2)	r	.458**											
	p	.000											
3. Individual career guidance (E3)	r	.384**	.503**										
	p	.000	.000										
4. Group career guidance sessions (E4)	r	.457**	.373**	.501**									
	p	.000	.000	.000									
5. Support to find work placement opportunities (E5)	r	.297**	.468**	.533**	.356**								
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000								
6. Support to get a job (E6)	r	.298**	.422**	.488**	.308**	.745**							
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000							
7. Job boards management (E7)	r	.189**	.434**	.402**	.322**	.588**	.617**						
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000						
8. Contacts with enterprises (E8)	r	.228**	.433**	.462**	.290**	.645**	.641**	.673**					
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000					

⁴ The r value represents the correlation coefficient. Correlation is a statistical technique which shows if two variables are related to each other and how strong is the relation. The value of r ranges from -1 to 1; the closer the value of r is to 1 or -1, the more closely the two variables are related.

⁵ The p value is used for hypothesis testing, for supporting or rejecting the null hypothesis. The p value is the evidence against the null hypothesis; the value of p is lower, the evidence for rejecting the null hypothesis is stronger. The value of $p < 0.05$ is statistically significant.

	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	E11	E12
9. Information about the labour market (E9)	.370** .000	.515** .000	.523** .000	.380** .000	.579** .000	.606** .000	.631** .000	.687** .000				
10. Information on recruiting channels (how to search for job offers) (E10)	.321** .000	.481** .000	.499** .000	.324** .000	.523** .000	.520** .000	.602** .000	.611** .000	.802** .000			
11. Support for mobility (abroad) (E11)	.319** .000	.434** .000	.424** .000	.351** .000	.513** .000	.490** .000	.460** .000	.577** .000	.586** .000	.602** .000		
12. Individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office (E12)	.170** .001	.212** .000	.411** .000	.182** .001	.271** .000	.311** .000	.246** .000	.234** .000	.269** .000	.291** .000	.263** .000	
13. Group sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office (E13)	.292** .000	.189** .000	.173** .001	.501** .000	.184** .000	.199** .000	.169** .001	.150** .005	.241** .000	.223** .000	.237** .000	.264** .000
14. Individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty (E14)	.223** .000	.272** .000	.410** .000	.237** .000	.378** .000	.401** .000	.371** .000	.388** .000	.424** .000	.378** .000	.332** .000	.467** .000
15. Group sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty (E15)	.231** .000	.137** .010	.123** .021	.418** .000	.250** .000	.188** .000	.227** .000	.180** .001	.236** .000	.262** .000	.210** .000	.072 .178
16. Online individual sessions (E16)	.235** .000	.212** .000	.262** .000	.218** .000	.202** .000	.205** .000	.235** .000	.206** .000	.231** .000	.240** .000	.210** .000	.301** .000

	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9	E10	E11	E12
17. Online group sessions (E17)	r .290** p .000	r .162** p .002	r .163** p .002	r .358** p .000	r .152** p .004	r .210** p .000	r .218** p .000	r .148** p .005	r .225** p .000	r .213** p .000	r .158** p .003	r .200** p .000
18. ICT-based learning materials (E18)	r .403** p .000	r .252** p .000	r .231** p .000	r .289** p .000	r .142** p .007	r .150** p .005	r .199** p .000	r .153** p .004	r .217** p .000	r .240** p .000	r .245** p .000	r .226** p .000
19. Webinars (E19)	r .415** p .000	r .198** p .000	r .229** p .000	r .323** p .000	r .175** p .001	r .187** p .000	r .264** p .000	r .194** p .000	r .168** p .001	r .231** p .000	r .246** p .000	r .240** p .000
20. By integrating career development topics in the regular study course (i.e. having lessons that focus on career development topics in the frame of all courses) (E20)	r .256** p .000	r .189** p .000	r .222** p .000	r .299** p .000	r .165** p .002	r .172** p .001	r .273** p .000	r .258** p .000	r .276** p .000	r .269** p .000	r .204** p .000	r .292** p .000
21. Job boards online (website) (E21)	r .165** p .002	r .255** p .000	r .268** p .000	r .200** p .000	r .358** p .000	r .346** p .000	r .565** p .000	r .441** p .000	r .368** p .000	r .391** p .000	r .316** p .000	r .299** p .000
22. Job boards offline (offices) (E22)	r .233** p .000	r .188** p .000	r .201** p .000	r .242** p .000	r .248** p .000	r .337** p .000	r .392** p .000	r .266** p .000	r .336** p .000	r .360** p .000	r .294** p .000	r .320** p .000
23. Online information about work placement/job opportunities through social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) (E23)	r .262** p .000	r .264** p .000	r .276** p .000	r .250** p .000	r .388** p .000	r .426** p .000	r .423** p .000	r .332** p .000	r .369** p .000	r .411** p .000	r .324** p .000	r .252** p .000

	E13	E14	E15	E16	E17	E18	E19	E20	E21	E22	E23
14. Individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty (E14)	r	.297**									
	p	.000									
15. Group sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty (E15)	r	.726**	.296**								
	p	.000	.000								
16. Online individual sessions (E16)	r	.255**	.233**	.241**							
	p	.000	.000	.000							
17. Online group sessions (E17)	r	.542**	.187**	.515**	.631**						
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000						
18. ICT-based learning materials (E18)	r	.314**	.252**	.291**	.542**	.513**					
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000					
19. Webinars (E19)	r	.348**	.215**	.326**	.594**	.602**	.730**				
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000				
20. By integrating career development topics in the regular study course (i.e. having lessons that focus on career development topics in the frame of all courses) (E20)	r	.274**	.352**	.294**	.307**	.375**	.447**	.448**			
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000			
21. Job boards online (website) (E21)	r	.234**	.358**	.264**	.376**	.330**	.342**	.367**	.460**		
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		
22. Job boards offline (offices) (E22)	r	.285**	.325**	.270**	.302**	.321**	.312**	.340**	.402**	.575**	
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
23. Online information about work placement/job opportunities through social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) (E23)	r	.279**	.307**	.337**	.371**	.351**	.292**	.375**	.372**	.540**	.439**
	p	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

The data reveals that some expectations of the students are **more strongly interconnected than others**. For instance, students that need information about the labour market are also interested in support for CV drafting, individual career guidance, support to find work placement opportunities, support to get a job, job boards management, contacts with enterprises, information on recruiting channels (how to search for job offers), support for mobility (abroad) (Pattern 1). Therefore, career services could offer integrated packages of services, so that students benefit from complex guidance, in accordance with the labour market in a certain country or in a specific community.

The expectations that showed the highest number of strong correlations are therefore not necessarily the most preferred by students. In a previous paper we presented, the results obtained on the same sample of students, regarding the hierarchy of preferences and expectations were: the biggest average scores (m) were *support to find work placement opportunities* ($m = 4.301$), *contacts with enterprises* ($m = 4.247$) and *information about the labour market* ($m = 4.208$). The lowest scores were related to *groups sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office* ($m = 3.425$), *webinars* ($m = 3.3807$) and *online group sessions* ($m = 3.025$) (Danciu and Andronie, 2017).

There can be observed a cross-cultural dynamic in respect to expectations. The grouping variable was **Country of study**. The biggest scores were:

- for **Italian** students: *support for mobility (abroad)* ($m = 4.55$), *contacts with enterprises* ($m = 4.48$), *job boards online (website)* ($m = 4.42$);
- for **Spanish** students: *online individual sessions* ($m = 4.03$), *ICT-based learning materials* ($m = 3.89$), *job boards online (website)* ($m = 3.89$);
- for **Polish** students: *support to find work placement opportunities* ($m = 4.56$), *contacts with enterprises* ($m = 4.50$), *support to get a job* ($m = 4.49$);
- for **Romanian** students: *individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the career office* ($m = 4.29$), *individual sessions on career development (all topics) at the faculty* ($m = 4.26$), *individual career guidance* ($m = 4.21$).

Measuring individual preferences of students regarding career services, there are differences between **genders** related to active involvement in constructing realistic career objectives and plans. In the entire sample, female students showed bigger interest for: support for CV drafting ($t = -2.650$, $p = .009$)⁶, individual career guidance ($t = -2.374$, $p = .018$), information on recruiting channels (how to search for job offers) ($t = -2.179$, $p = .030$), online individual sessions ($t = -3.652$, $p = .001$), online group sessions ($t = -2.220$, $p = .027$), job boards offline (offices) ($t = -2.120$, $p = .035$), online information about work placement/job opportunities through social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) ($t = -2.216$, $p = .027$).

⁶ The value of t is the result of the statistical Student's t -test, a measure of how far apart are the means of two groups, which may be related in certain features. Student's t -test is a type of inferential statistic used for determining if there is a significant difference between the two means.

Conclusions

These patterns of expectations need to be constructed in each specific country and culture because they depend on different factors: economy, tradition, information about career centers, number of specialists etc. In this way, the specialists from career centers of higher education institutions can focus their services offers and develop specific trainings for students.

The activities of career centres from universities are a very important indicator for institutional development and, in Romania, one of the consequences of legislation in this area (National Education Ministry Orders no. 650/2014 and 3070/2015) was that the most of the Romanian universities took measures in making them known among students and in enlarging the offer of services.

The need for focused counseling and guidance programs is also highlighted by the serious problems students have, such as drop-outs, emotional issues or unhealthy behaviors (Baban, 2009).

This research represents a starting point for future research with bigger samples of students, for a better external validity, considering also the field of study.

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