

FOLLOW Project Executive Summary

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1 Introduction

The FOLLOW project is the joint effort of 4 cluster universities with the purpose of identifying and disseminating the best and most effective practices as regards the monitoring and promotion of Graduate employability, and channelling them to tangible and effective improvements on the local and European context. Putting together the input of all partners of this embryonic idea, the consortium managed to carry out a structured and objective team-oriented work, which was not intended to replicate statistics, but to create something that could benefit all stakeholders involved, directly or indirectly, in Graduate employability. The project also aims to accurately observe and assess the employability mechanisms in all partners' structures, drawing upon the good practices from collected data. This will allow for updating knowledge in order to benefit partners and stakeholders across Europe, because an unprecedented comparison of the existing employability mechanisms, in terms of location, features and performance may be made. By mapping the available employability mechanisms, other HEIs will be benefited and a well-informed basis provided in order to devise future Higher Education Policies. The first output of FOLLOW will also be useful to graduates searching for support from the recruiting companies and other employability interface institutions, which are vitally interested in this information on the precise employability network points, easing communication, promoting proper contacts and the sense of interaction. Finally, a Conference was held, entirely dedicated to Graduate employability. The main objectives associated to this initiative were to foster a

debate between different stakeholders and to conclude a number of main areas of intervention that can guide future discussions, actions, research and strategic planning initiatives. The conference revolved around 3 main topics:

- Managing employability at HE Institutions – An approach to employability from the viewpoint of the HE Institutions;
- Through the employers' eyes– The perspective from those who have the need and the capacity to take up the skilled workforce that comes out from the HEIs;
- The role of the publicly-owned and non-corporate institutions – What is the role of the State and professional orders in the development and improvement of Graduate employability.

There was also concern with the dissemination of the project results and events, hence the creation of a Work Package dedicated exclusively to the dissemination of deliverables, both physically (leaflets, brochures, reports, etc.) and electronically (virtual seminars, social network activity, etc.). Being a one-year project, there was recognition from the inception that the sphere of action was limited in terms of how far the consortium could go. Therefore, the idea of a FOLLOW 2 Project soon gained shape and the consortium agreed to guide the works in that direction. The FOLLOW 2 project is currently waiting EU approval, in which case it will run for 3 years. While incorporating the FOLLOW 1 conclusions, phase 2 will be less descriptive and more interventional and the consortium will be wider and, therefore, cover a larger reality. The project aims at chiefly benefiting higher education institutions, employability analysis networks, national working groups and professional associations/orders. However, as regards its final results, the expectation is to know what impacts, direct and indirect, on the national employment policies in Europe and, particularly, in each member country, they may have. The final results of FOLLOW will add to the EM (Employability Mechanisms) mapping and key performance indicators, in terms of a thorough assessment of the history, changes and orientations followed in each case, accordingly to the EU general policies and their adaptation at the level of each partner organization. These final results will entail contributions from all stakeholders (graduate students, company managers and EM coordinators), outlining the best results, the good practices and an innovative classification and analysis framework.

1.1 How is Follow organized?

The FOLLOW project is organized in 4 main Work Packages:

- WP1 (KUL Coordination): Employability mechanisms information collection and analysis.
- WP2 (IST Coordination): Lisbon International Conference.
- WP3 (UPC Coordination): Dissemination and Promotion.
- WP4 (IST Coordination): Administrative and organizing issues.

2 Main Results

2.1 WP1 – Information Collection about Employability Mechanisms

Most internal agents of the FOLLOW partners engaged in multiple areas of intervention, whereas most external agents focused on one particular area – however, sometimes these areas overlapped with those of the internal agents. The Tables below give an overview of the most common areas of intervention per type of practice (promotion or monitoring) and higher education institution. The type of practices most frequently employed are concerned with promotion rather than monitoring. The most common areas in the field of promotion are:

1. Recruitment opportunities: job search by students and/or dissemination of job offers;
2. Professional and career guidance activities including skills and education match;
3. Specific company collaborations.

At least one internal agent of each participating higher education institution has developed activities in these areas of intervention. The practices of these agents in these areas are also very similar. For instance, the IST career sessions are comparable to the job training services provided by the KU Leuven Study Advice Service, the career counselling offered by Politecnico di Torino and the guidance programmes and seminars offered by UPC Alumni. The table below shows that all partner universities have internal agents that develop activities in the field of internship promotion. Also, it clearly indicates that IST and Politecnico di Torino are the only institutions in which an internal agent is engaged in promoting entrepreneurship. UPC seems to be the only institution maintaining a strong link to the alumni through an internal agent. Other areas of intervention, such as public policies, university as employer and other practices were less or not represented and, therefore, are not contained in the Table. In comparison, the most

common areas in monitoring are graduate employability observatories and internship follow-up. Every institution has an internal or external agent implementing graduate employability observatories. The graduates' survey and the national unemployment analysis are the most important practices conducted by OEIST. This is driven by a legal demand in Portugal to report figures concerning graduate employability at an institutional, programme or course level. Likewise, the alumni career research service of the Study Advice Office of KU Leuven allows for gathering knowledge on graduate employability. In Spain and Italy, the external agents, AQU Catalunya and AlmaLaurea, are responsible for conducting graduate employability observatories. It seems that other monitoring activities are fragmented and appear to be exclusive for each partner or agent and dependent on the different realities and legislation applicable in each country. The Stage & job unit of Politecnico di Torino, for instance, is responsible for organizing events in order to support students in finding internships and monitors internships effectiveness. Lastly, there were no practices classified in job search follow-up, job vacancy follow-up, employability within companies and internal and external indicators. To conclude, the table lists all practices for each area of intervention per type and higher education institution.

2.2 WP2 – 1st International Conference on Graduate Employability

The main goal of WP2 was achieved even before the main deliverable was implemented. The 1st International Conference on Graduate Employability managed to gather together all kinds of knowledge and experience in 2 days of intense debate, conversation and presentation of tangible practices. The mere fact that all relevant stakeholders were represented by people who, due to their position or their job, have extremely relevant insight about employability, from Faculty Deans to some CEOs, and research specialists, members of the Portuguese Government and former ministers. The main output was to identify the key type of discussion and concern within these stakeholders and how they address them. The most interesting aspect is that there is not much variety of concerns and most stakeholders share the same views, even if they find themselves on opposite sides of the argument, such as the graduate role in terms of responsibility being employed. While most employers point out that the graduate needs to develop such intrinsic traits in order to be employable, University professors and Deans argue that the economic activity must grow through investment and innovation in order to give rise to more jobs. The former sets the employability responsibility on the graduate whereas the latter places it on the market. The main topics/issues identified and raised at the conference

were:

- Soft skills vs. Hard skills: How to ensure that the courses provide the skills employers most want. Who has the responsibility for training extracurricular activities? Are the so called “Soft skills” able to be learnt in an exclusive university context or do they thrive in labour context?
- Influence of the current macroeconomic climate: The role of innovation and technology in reshaping the labour market and how it relates to the internationalization of the labour market and consequently influences the choices and opportunities of HE graduates. How to increase competitiveness and to manage production and design strategies. How to rethink the structure of the necessary human resources in terms of who develops and who actually executes.
- Structural situation: How do demographic and economic changes can restructure labour market and make areas such as social services gain more significance. Will the current crisis have structural impact on the graduate employability?
- Social Value of Higher Education: What is the difference between graduate and non-graduate employment? What is the gap? And, is a 3, 4, 5 College programme still worth it, and will it add force to graduates’ arguments to address the labour market? Did the Bologna process accelerate the graduate labour market entry?
- Pedagogic and Scientific autonomy: How far can the external influence go over the internal strategies and policies concerning the HEI’s own management in terms of employability? How to manage the need to create, maintain and highlight knowledge in all scientific areas in an extremely unbalanced labour market? Should knowledge be restrained by the market laws or should it be the other way around?
- Employability Promotion: Who has the main responsibility in developing structures that can promote employability? How can companies and universities act in order to bring their interests and needs together in a balanced way?
- Employability – Concepts & Monitoring: The concept itself might cause some confusion due to its multiple usages. In this sort of debate there is the need to clarify what the concepts are addressing to. Also, in terms of statistics and information, how can one produce and make methodologies uniform and therefore create comparative data.

It is important to perceive the FOLLOW Project as a dynamic structure oriented towards the implementation of active and tangible actions. This is one of the main distinguishing features of this project; it is descriptive and plays a proactive role. Through the organization of a conference, one of the main deliverables, the project managed to contribute to the highlight of a particular debate, which is usually dissolved in the overall employability debates. One cannot address Graduate employability with the same strategies and policies that are used in non-qualified human resources, because the social and economic impact is quite different. In addition, the FOLLOW 2 Project was already submitted for EU approval, which was only possible due to the experience achieved with FOLLOW 1 and to the dynamic cooperative network set up by the 4 partners which allows for a constant flow of information and exchange of experience. This first stage of the project was to set up this structure and develop a cooperative methodology to support it, which will be used and enhanced in FOLLOW 2. Finally, the project and its contact network (both within and outside the consortium) allowed for the development of the “Journal of Graduate Employability”. Edition zero will be published in June and is intended to bring about relevant contributions to the future debate.

2.3 Management & Strategies: Practices in Promoting & Monitoring Graduate Employability

This panel was dedicated to the FOLLOW partners and divided in two categories. It showed the results of the first work package and discussed the best practices identified in each partner country or school. There is an overall concern about the effective management of the liaison between companies and schools; this comes to light in several forms, some with great involvement of the governmental entities, while others much more direct and tangible. The partners showed a number of practices, which are run in their institutions that revolve around the monitoring and data systematization, professional counselling and training and, finally, labour market and company relation. In the first case, monitoring and systematization of information, IST and KUL disclosed their practices and key indicators. Regarding IST, the analysis of graduate employment goes back to 1998 when the first survey was applied, which has had, since then, a positive evolution. The survey has been applied to recent graduates and graduates with 5 years in labour market. The methodological aspects, which should be looked at, include: i) regarding the target population, sampling framework, representativeness, response rate and sub-population analysis; ii) regarding key indicators, waiting time to get 1st job, type of contract, and ways to get the job, income and internationalization; and

finally iii) regarding information collection, primary/secondary data and the nature of gathering information. The picture below shows the scope of the target population included in the surveys conducted at IST, as well as some notes on the difficulties encountered.

The evolution of the key indicators in the 1998-2012 period, such as internationalization, the number of job offers or a more comprehensive look at the income variable, was notorious and led to the introduction of new key indicators: Waiting time for first job, contract, way to get job, position, non-variable income, variable income, incentives, job offers and internationalization. The surveys are flexible and adaptable to different populations. For example, the Recent Graduate surveys differ from the 5 years professional experience surveys, both in terms of key indicators and how the issue is addressed. The outputs from these surveys are presented in many different ways and used to build all types of materials and reports that help decision-making for candidates to choose their programme and the management of structures of IST, like curricular adjustment or reply, with substantial information and data, to the media and other organizations/individuals. In KUL the alumni career research focuses on some key variables related to employment and working conditions, such as the employment status, the sector of activity, income and working hours. Other variables are also monitored like the start and duration of job search, the main reasons for recruitment and the usefulness of the degree. Some figures on the participation in the Alumni Career Research are shown in the picture below.

The outputs of these surveys are organized by indicator and supplemented by other alternative research, like the IE-net survey, which monitors the employment sector. For the future, the KUL Engineering Faculty will focus on increasing student internship offer, decision-making and leadership aspects, as well as students' entrepreneurial skills and contact and interaction with employers.

According to the second topic, professional counselling and training, UPC, POLITO, KUL and IST came up with some practices. UPC described its UPC Alumni service, which is offered by UPC to its graduates with the main goal of enhancing the students' sense of belonging to UPC and developing professional and personal relationships. These goals can be specified as follows: To facilitate the exchange, knowledge and experience of UPC members; to provide community services related to training, career guidance and employment, entrepreneurship, sports, leisure and culture; to facilitate interaction between members through clubs, chapters, meetings and social networking and to visualize all UPC existing alumni associations. There are three types of UPC alumni members: UPC Alumni (graduates), UPC Alumni Premium (UPC Alumni), who pay a

fee to have access to more specialized activities and services and UPC Alumni Protectors (entities that support activities carried out by the UPC alumni through a fee). UPC Alumni also offers a Career Service, which includes career counselling with individual support on decision-making, skills and competencies development, workshops, conferences and discussions on career opportunities, professional mobility and mobility. This service also organizes visits to companies in order to find and identify new areas, new profiles and new working environments. The Job Vacancies managed are exclusively for junior and seniors. The service assists and supports companies regarding the recruitment of people with technical profiles, information on international mobility programmes and recruitment for national and international companies. The first edition of a Virtual Occupational Fair also took place. Entrepreneurship is also fostered by the Research Valorisation Unit of UPC, with compulsory courses and entrepreneurship. The main purpose of the POLITO Career Counselling Service is to provide “professional guidance of the individual by utilizing psychological methods especially in collecting case history data, using various techniques of the personal interview, and testing interests and aptitudes”. It was created in 2011 and, since then, individual meetings have been carried out by occupational and organization psychologists. This service consists of helping individuals gain greater self-awareness in areas such as interests, values, abilities, and personality style; connecting students to resources so that they can become more knowledgeable about jobs and occupations; engaging students in the decision-making process so that they can choose a career that is well suited to their own interests, values, abilities and personality and assisting individuals to be active managers of their careers as well as becoming lifelong learners in terms of professional development. These counselling meetings define the career path; identify skills, abilities and strengths; identify aspirations, values and professional interests; define and consolidate one or more professional projects; develop the necessary tools for self-presentation (writing a CV and letters of introduction); setting of a structured self-marketing plan; illustration of how to use the different job search tools; planning of these activities and monitoring of the results of the research. The strengths of this service are the individual approach, which allows for a personal contact and a context-sensitive work, and the weaknesses are related to limited resources and limited beneficiaries. This service can be improved by providing a more structured, complete and continuous contribution. In POLITO, the Stage & Job Unit works closely with the Career Counselling Service and liaises between the companies and the University, fostering internships, creating courses that respond to labour market needs and monitoring employment issues. The KUL student association also provides professional and career guidance services, such as

career days and workshops. In IST, the Transfer and Technology Office manages to help career development and companies relations as well as the intellectual property. The development of a Career development plan that includes some activities like a Career week, training workshops (curriculum creation, job search strategies, interview methods, negotiation and career management), job shops and summer internships. IST awards students scholarships for 2 career workshop sessions.

The conference showed several good examples in terms of labour market and company relation. The region of Torino presented a service that matches the public and private sectors. This service is based on Employment Centres, which collaborate with the University of Torino and POLITO, which provide pre-selection of candidates and supply high profile job skills or specialized profiles to the labour market and companies in a multimodal methodology of selection and recruitment. Some of the advantages of this service is the flexibility and close cooperation between recruitment teams from both companies and Employment Centres, the customization of the professional integration with corporate methodology and business needs; the definition of a research process and selection of tools analysis for the Company, the construction of a project monitoring system; the continuous control and coordination management of the applicant for all the selection process; the reduction of indirect costs of logistics and secretarial. It is a pre-paid service without any extra charge to the Company and helps strengthen cooperation between public and private sectors. This service is organized in 4 stages:

This service works closely with companies and universities and provides candidates with the ability to have direct access to highly skilled employment opportunities without area constraints; timely access to tools to promote research, ability to auto-nominate using different methods, support in understanding the requirements and evaluation of the requirements requested, guidance talk regarding active research, advice and support in the articulation of an effective curriculum, information on how to search job opportunities and access the "High professional" database.

Companies can access the service in three modalities, Bronze, Silver or Gold, each one with different types of offering and complexity, and adequate to companies needs and budget constraints. In this respect, all partners described a Job placement service, which goes from virtual occupational fairs or tools to offices that have a tangible relation with companies. In KUL, the student association plays a predominant role in career counselling and labour market relationships. The business relationship unit organizes several events in collaboration with and on demand of the companies. Examples of these activities are the BR-launch, the stage fair, job fair, job forum and interview days and panel discussions, among others. It

should be emphasized that the BR-Launch event combines a social activity with the companies and employment relationships. As regards its liaison with the business sector and the labour market, UPC has sought to find new technological solutions, to improve professional development and to facilitate the recruitment of talent to the productive sector. In this case, UPC has put some development strategies in place among students that focus on:

The UPC schools also take actions in the relationship with the labour market through internships designed for bachelor and master students, supplemented by job listing in schools, the participation and exchange with mobility and internship initiatives (BEST, IAESTE, etc.) and several activities carried out by students like business forums. In UPC, the Research Valorisation Unit also fosters the collaboration between companies and universities in research and research-related employment. Other contributions came from other High Education Schools represented in the Conference. The nature of the practices focuses, in general, on the same concerns. The systematic organization of data that allows schools to take decisions, the improvement and development skills and career counselling and labour market relations, also focusing on the preparation of students for the international labour market. By and large, institutions gather company profiles and establish some collaboration routines, contact persons, graduate selection for job interviews, job listings, graduate selection and interviewing. Geared for the students, these are chiefly training and counselling activities, including internships and job fairs/career weeks. In these actions, interview preparation and resume creation are thoroughly looked at. The Paula Frassinetti School also promotes shared experiences between graduates and former graduates and international employment through direct support to students on applications, partnerships with the EURES network and international cooperation projects. In the field of international employment, they also foster Entrepreneurship projects, market research, financing possibilities (microcredit, business angels), and active job search. They are also involved in a cooperation language-based project with Timor Lorosae, i.e., introduction to Portuguese Language; teacher's training; support to Timor students. Besides the general activities stated above, like internship programmes, the ISLA school program Employability 360° integrates a group of best practices:

The activities integrated are diverse and range from specific programs, like the Active job and Senior Programme, which focuses not only on recent graduates but also on students already in the labour market or with professional background, to events that bring companies closer to graduates and the University. The objective is to foster entrepreneurial mind and also put company managers in contact with students. Some courses are integrated

in the academic programmes, like communication skills, professional ethics, creativity and critical thinking, interpersonal relations, management and leadership, image and public relations. In the field of studying the paths and statistical profiles, the Lisbon University has released since 2000 several studies concerning employability and entrepreneurship. These studies rely on survey conduction, in this particular case on recent graduates (12 and 18 months after graduation). UL also develops activities to develop skills on employment and entrepreneurship and features workshops, personalized customer service, internationalization programmes, specific technical training, promotion of internships and practical experiences and support for the creation of companies. The strategy of UL also involves professional associations in the process, adding one more partners to the company – university relationship, gathering professional recognition in the labour market. The professional orders are invited to participate in workshops and sessions.

Finally, it is important to mention a Job Shadowing program, which is promoted by Universidade Católica Portuguesa (UCP). This consists in a programme designed for students to find out what it is like to be in a specific profession. College students or by non-student adults also use job shadowing to experience a particular career opportunity. In either case, the shadower will follow the professional and observe their daily work. While not being an exclusive practice, it demonstrates the concern of UCP with providing their students with current direct exposure to what their future may be. In UCP, this programme is organized in a way that the top students are the only ones to benefit from it. In short, the strategies tend to respond to similar needs but to different contexts. In general the economic context and the labour market demands are the driving force for a closer relationship among the employability stakeholders, fostering a better adjustment of the market needs to the graduates' skills.

3 Final Considerations and Future Debates

The 1st International Conference on Graduate Employability was neither designed to produce the solutions to the overall employability problems, nor was it geared for producing practical results that one can pick up and implement immediately. The purpose of the conference, as the whole FOLLOW project, was to lay the foundations for a more structured debate and to act as a very comprehensive and insightful starting point (or restarting point) for all sorts of work done in the field of employability. Some topics, due to their relevance, are worth a few additional words.

The knowledge-based Society: If the convergence focuses on the ca-

capacity of the universities to respond to the labour market needs, is there room for research with the purpose of producing knowledge “per se”? If the growth of knowledge and the capacity to understand the phenomena that surround us may have its applicability and usefulness in the long term, does this mean that there should not be investment in this kind of research?

Competences being prepared for the labor market: The immediate capacity to perform a job that recent graduates might or might not have was a hot topic raised by universities, public institutions and employers. For future debates, it can be asked whether the convergence between Universities and employers can be supported by a preparation for the performance of jobs through offices and extra-curricular structures but without influencing directly the curricula for current cyclical or structural motives.

The attractiveness of Higher Education: The perception of the potential of HE candidates can influence, in the short term, the shortage of HE students in some courses and consequently might, in the mid and long terms, have a serious impact on the human resources structure of the labour market or even on the extinction of a course, making a Country less developed in terms of scientific knowledge. A potential lack of attractiveness might be present when the labour market conditions do not allow HE graduates to obtain jobs in a fast and satisfactory way, but there might even be problems in more developed labour markets. The European ATTRACT Project deals with the problem of the shortage of technology, engineering and science workforce in countries where the employment market is better balanced than in Southern European Economies. The development of these countries allows the population not to be highly conditioned by employability factors and can achieve good employability levels without higher education degrees. In countries like Belgium or Finland, there is not a significant difference in the employability of the different education levels.

The role of the students: The role they play and the capacity they have to mobilize and develop their own structures to improve and support employability cannot be underestimated. Students are the main target of initiatives such as FOLLOW and the inclusion of their insight and experiences is essential for a wide-ranging observation of the graduate employability phenomena. The resource to quantitative indicators such as employment rates or the number of graduates signed up with job centres allows for a macro vision of the phenomena but to act

solely on this level may lead to investments in measures which are not adequate and whose effectiveness and efficiency may be jeopardised. We can metaphorically think that if a boat is sinking, the mental disposition of the one who's on the boat will always be different from the ones on shore thinking what they can do to help. In the name of the multiplicity of motivations, experiences and mental dispositions it is relevant to bring to the debate and seek solutions to those we are ultimately addressing to: the students and graduates.