

EMPLOYERS AND THE GUIDANCE PROCESS



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TECHNICAL FILE

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Employers and the Guidance Process

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The terms although used in the masculine refer, indistinctly, to the feminine and masculine



Introduction

UNESCO has set a sustainable increase in the number of young people and adults with relevant qualifications, including technical and vocational skills for employment, adequate work and entrepreneurship as one of the 2030 Education Goals¹.

Technological progress creates the need for a skilled workforce capable of adapting rapidly in a lifelong learning cycle², giving a challenge to the school that must accompany this development, promoting the development of skills required for independent living in the 21st century.

Career interventions in an educational context are a powerful and effective method to help bring school and the labour market³ closer together, preparing young people with the skills to face the challenges of the future. It also contributes to reinforcing pupils' engagement in their educational process⁴ and motivating them to lifelong learning.

This process implies that the school to keep contacts and a deeper knowledge of the labour market and of potential employers, to improve the way it communicates its educational work and the results achieved, to support the students in activities of exploration and approach to the labour context and support in the student's transition.

An employer knows that skilled and knowledgeable employees are central to the success of any activity, and for this reason, the employer is also a relevant partner in promoting career education for students. This role may include collaborating in activities that create opportunities for:

- **Information on existing occupations**, the necessary requirements, working conditions, and prospects for evolution;
- **Activities that explore careers**, such as the Job shadowing technique, or 'Community Clubs'ⁱ, which provide valuable hands-on experience with the community and the realities of the labour market;
- **Academic internships** for students, often important for decision-making;
- **Participate in the design of curricula**, especially in the more qualifying means from a professional point of view, contributing to the adequacy of training plans and work in organisations, current and future needs for training and recruitment of the labour market.

In view of the influential role of employers in promoting young people's career development in an educational context, this brochure aims to reflect on the synergies between the academic and the professional settings, helping to deepen this connection.

ⁱ Community Clubs': Clubs of interest frequented at school by students and teachers who volunteer, coordinated by a psychologist, who identify a real problem in their community. Students develop a process of solving this problem with the help of institutions and members of the professional society, who they meanwhile come to know, practicing, evaluating and then communicating their solution in the school and community.



Trends in the Labour Market

Globalisation, the digital revolution, demography and an economy where services predominate are examples of mega trends that are changing the requirements needed to access the labour market, creating new challenges for systems of education⁵ and for students who are often unaware which skills are most valued by employers⁶.

Technological advances occur so fast, for example at the level of information technology, that we all need to learn on an ongoing basis, to stay updated and integrated, which makes predicting or anticipating with exactitude which skills will be more relevant in the future very complex⁷.

These factors may deepen the gap or disconnection between existing skills and those required by the labour market, a phenomenon that has been studied since the 1970s in the United States and continues to contribute to unemployment and low productivity. Skills mismatch can be either vertical (on qualification) or horizontal (qualification in a different area than required) and both tend to be minimised by reinforcing partnerships between education and training systems with the labour market and vice versa⁸.

Today, workers benefit if they are equipped for the knowledge economy, where complex tasks which require learning and coordination are increasing.

The European Commission study on the impact of the Erasmus Programme in 2014 showed that 92% of European employers give great importance to the soft skills of their future collaborators. They look for communicative, goal-oriented people who are easily adaptable to new situations and who like to accept challenges⁹.

At the same time, these are also objectives of the educational system that intends to prepare active citizens, with career management skills and of effective and ethical contribution to the society or societies to which they belong to¹⁰. However, employers point out that many job seekers lack the skills to work as a team and solve problems as well as little business awareness and attitude¹¹. That is, interest and understanding of one's surroundings, including attention to cost control, customer/user orientation and knowledge of partners and competitors.

In order to promote in all students, the skills necessary to prepare them for life and the professional world, it is vital that there is a greater mutual understanding between school and the world of work. It is also important to highlight the role of apprenticeships in the working environment, in promoting and developing soft skills, which facilitate the transition to employment¹².

In this context, pupils in need of measures to support learning and inclusion, especially those with an Individual Transition Plan (PIT), should be prioritised in this cooperation between the school and employers to promote social inclusion and development of the students' career.

Indeed, in the European Union, the proportion of young people between the ages of 15 and 34 with disabilities who are not studying, working or training is double the percentage of the remaining population¹³, and, as members of the society, we must all work to promote equal opportunities by more effectively fostering the transition to the labour market of this group of the student population.

Career interventions in an educational context should therefore take into account that the labour market is changing at an ever- faster pace and that the workforce of the future must be able to adapt to emerging technologies in a continuous learning cycle throughout life.



The Role of Employers

All employers, regardless of size or area of activity, can contribute to the guidance process and prepare students for the world of work, benefiting future employees with more relevant qualifications and valuing their image within the community¹⁴ .

The importance of the partnership with employers is obvious when, in Portugal, almost half of the students complete upper secondary education through training courses¹⁵, but we must not forget that it is also central to all the other remaining students.

With their knowledge and experience, employers can enrich career development and the educational process at all stages, either directly involving young people or indirectly working with teachers, principals, psychologists and parents, who must try to know better the changes and opportunities of the labour market, as well as the skills needed to access and succeed in a given socio-cultural context.

For their part, employers should seek to know the realities of the educational and training system, at all times, and contribute to the development of productive and sustainable societies, respectful of human rights, complying with high standards of justice and equity, incorporating, in their work environments, the value of learning and training, and the latest contributions from school and the academic world.

Some of the contributions suggested by employers are:

- **Validating** the trends and future needs regarding skills for the labour market together with the school;
- **Promoting** classes or lectures given by the guests of the labour market (employers, collaborators and/or alumni) to share their experiences and vision about careers and future opportunities;
- **Balancing** theoretical education with practice by fostering academic internships, study visits or Job shadowing¹⁶ (including the primary and secondary sectors of the economy);
- **Promoting** internships during the summer adapted according to the students' age;
- **Developing** case studies with the aim of placing students in the role of employer or employee and presenting them with real challenges, promoting the debate of ideas about solving concrete problems;
- **Making students aware** of the importance of soft skills, such as a sense of responsibility and satisfaction in carrying out any task, the respect of the rules and objectives defined by the employer; or the importance of dialogue, teamwork and positive attitude at work;

- **Promoting** entrepreneurship through visits to creative hubs and contact with managers of successful start-ups, through the development of a competition of ideas and/or virtual business implementation (e.g. having entrepreneurs as judges);
- **Providing** the necessary practical tools and knowledge when entering the labour market, such as preparing a curriculum vitae and a cover letter, and how to present oneself online with the purpose of looking for a job;
- **Preparing and providing** training to the organisation's employees and managers so they learn how to deal with disability and other inabilities at work;
- **Promoting** links between business and professional associations and renown employment agencies.

These activities can help students to:

- **Identify and understand** characteristics of the professional world and what distinguishes school life from professional life;
- **Understand** the relevance of the work in its forms and contexts and the value of the school and the available educational and professional options;

- **Identify** their strengths and weaknesses and understand how they can develop and overcome them;
- **Understand the job options** available, the required qualifications, ways to access them, the lives of different organisations and professionals, and the benefits of the jobs;
- **Learn to solve** problems and present solutions to the professional world and society;
- **Learn procedures** that are effective at job search and maintenance;
- **Know how to manage** changes and transitions;
- **Develop career adaptability** to take advantage of opportunities as they come about;
- **Overcome behaviours** that are self-destructive gaining self-confidence and learning life skills;
- **Know how to maintain** safety and well-being at work;
- **Understand** what is needed to achieve work-life balance at a family, personal and social level, and as a citizen;
- **Increase** involvement and commitment to the community.

Good Practices

Career development activities in partnership with employers are extremely valuable and are already widespread in our schools.

The majority of educational communities already have a network of partnerships with an interesting number of local employers, which can always be extended through the support of, among others, City Councils, Business Associations and, at international level, National Agencies for the Erasmus+ Programme.

As an example of good practice, adopted at national level, we can refer to the:

Schools that value and involve psychology professionals and teachers in training actions on the issues of career development, that assure good conditions for their education community to be enlightened and are intentional in the support to the guidance and vocational development of their students.

Family-owned businesses are increasing in Portugal. These companies create conditions for their employees to better manage different life roles, with a bearing on their motivation, productivity and well-being, both for themselves and the community.



Employers and companies that support socio-emotional and career skills development projects, favour the education system and schools in the preparation of their students for professional life.



The involvement of school, academic and business leaders in the creation of school and community forums on education, working life and employment for students of compulsory schooling, favours the clarification, acquiring of knowledge and joint action, with gains for guidance development of the students.



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