

STRENGTHENING RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYERS AND UNIVERSITIES THROUGH EUROPEAN PROJECTS

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Abstract: The purpose of this article is to emphasize the importance of preserving a good collaboration relationship between employers and universities, and the major role that can be played by the European projects in strengthening this connection.

The case study shows the way in which a university that is small, but very active as regards the accessing of projects and has the aim to provide a high quality educational service can improve the effectiveness of the educational activity.

Key words: European projects, employers, students

Introduction

The "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia is a state institution of higher education and research of a public nature, which is integrated into the national education system, with legal personality, which has autonomy, carries out its activity based on the Romanian Constitution, Law No. 1/2011 on national education, the University Charter and its own organization and operation rules drawn up in accordance with the law. The "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia has been accredited and it has received a *'high confidence'* rating following the evaluation performed by ARACIS (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education).

About the "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia

Given that the intention of the academic staff is to increase the quality of education in this institution, the relationships with the representatives of the public and private sectors are created and maintained by the multiple instruments, such as: the organization of conferences, workshops, round tables, symposia, with the participation of the representatives of employers, as well as accessing European funds, in partnership with public institutions, public or private establishments, potential employers for the future graduates.[1]

The "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia has been established in 1991, with a structure that included 4 faculties and a number of almost 4,000 students at both full-time and distance learning forms of education.[2]

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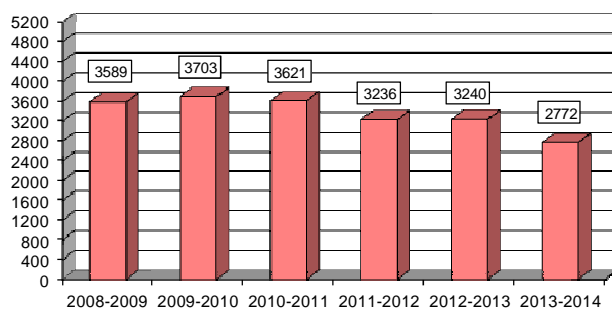


Figure 1. The evolution of the number of students for *the bachelor's degree cycle* in the period from 2008 to 2014 – **Full-time form of study**

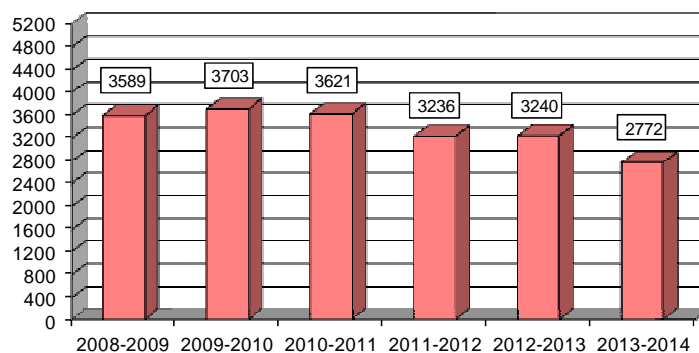


Figure 2. The evolution of the number of students for *the bachelor's degree cycle* in the period from 2008 to 2014 – **Distance learning**

At the *academic level*, the University is an institution of higher education and advanced research and education. The balanced and interdependent development of education and research represents the main manner in which the University carries out the mission that it has assumed, namely to offer highly effective programmes of study for all undergraduate and postgraduate education cycles, to generate research and innovation capacity, to attract the best researchers and students and to meet the needs of society.[3]

At the *social level*, the University's mission consists in providing the institutional framework and the material means for using and developing the potential of skills existing in Alba Iulia and its area, attracting specialists from other areas of the country, creating an academic community which contributes to the local, regional and national development and to the European integration through education, science and culture.

a) The University assumes the mission to create favourable conditions for the scientific progress, to promote the social and professional success of the young people with high potential living in Alba Iulia and in its area and to contribute in this way to reducing the phenomenon of their migration abroad or to other university centres.

b) The University assumes the mission to contribute to the education and training of human resources in order to ensure the high qualification required for the socio-economic and technological development at the levels imposed by the European integration;

c) The University assumes the mission to contribute to the effective equality of opportunities as regards the access to higher education for the young people from areas that are economically and socially less favourable, in particular for those from the area of the Apuseni Mountains, who cannot cover the high costs of attending an institution of the university centres located at a large distance from their home.[4]

Since 2007, when in Romania appeared the opportunity of implementing European projects for the development of human resources, the "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia has presented, obtained and implemented as beneficiary or partner a series of projects concerning exclusively the students' internship at the economic operators, projects that have supported students by facilitating their access and transition to the labour market.

The "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia has a significant experience in the coordination of grant-type projects, closing over 60 framework agreements for carrying out exchanges/internships, offering advice regarding the professional career, monitoring the graduates' insertion on the labour market.

As regards career planning, the UAB has a Centre for career information, guidance and counselling, it is a founding member of the National Association for University Services for Career, which functions within the institution and which has the mission to assist students and graduates in the development of successful careers and to facilitate their access and insertion in the labour market.

The main relevant projects carried out so far by UAB are: POSDRU/90/2.1./S/63960 `The convergence of the university studies with the active life in the economic field` Period: August 2011- July 2013, a project which intended to correlate the theoretical knowledge gained during the university studies with the requirements of the labour market, through internships for students. By this project a model of education and practical training was proposed, the purpose of which was to enable higher education graduates to meet the specific requirements of the economic operators as regards the labour force that they need. The target group was formed of 450 students, 150 of them being students of the UAB.[5]

POSDRU/ 60/ 2.1/S/41750, Graduates and the labour market. The project was carried out by partnership between the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports and the International Centre for Higher Education Research (INCHER), the University of Kassel, Germany, the "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia a being an active collaborator based on a partnership agreement that was signed after contracting the project. Graduates and the Labour Market is the first national project that monitors the connection between the studies completed by young people and their professional activity, its role being to

increase the institutional capacity of universities to conduct monitoring studies permanently.

The project has made available to the higher education institutions the tools for monitoring the career of higher education graduates of bachelor's degree level, which would allow the correlation of the studies offered by them with the employers' requirements. The instruments that were created and the experience that was thus gained can be the foundation for a long-term approach, so that this type of research is carried out at the national level each year. The results that were obtained can represent an essential support for the coherent reform of the Romanian education system, both as a whole and at the level of each university, as no one can assess better the quality and the usefulness of a study programme than the person for whom it is conceived: the graduate.[6]

The simulated virtual company - an interactive learning system for increasing the level of employment and adaptation of students on the labour market

The general objective of this project was to facilitate the insertion of higher education graduates who are holding a Bachelor's degree or a Master's degree on the labour market, and thus to contribute to increasing the employment level and reducing unemployment. This objective was implemented by the creation of simulated companies and by career counselling and guidance services offered to students. The insertion degree was monitored by this project in the framework of some specific activities.

The specific objectives of the project were: improving the services of career guidance and counselling; providing the tools required to prepare a realistic and feasible business plan; stimulating teamwork based on objectives; experiencing at a virtual level of the operations required for the start-up and the management of a company; increasing the decision-making capability; monitoring graduates' insertion on the labour market.

Internships at the economic operators - a gateway to the labor market`

The general objective of this project was to improve the convergence between the university education and the working life, by offering students an integrated programme of counselling and internship at economic operators, in order to develop their working skills in conditions of advanced technology and to increase the level of integration and resistance on the labour market.

By this project, career counselling was offered to, and the practical skills adapted to the employers' requirements were acquired by 300 students, 70 of which have carried out their internships abroad.

The project had the following specific objectives: developing the partnership existing between the university, potential employers, economic operators and other institutions with a view to the collaboration for the completion of internships by students and their subsequent employment by important

companies in their field of specialisation; increasing the relevance of university studies in relation to the requirements of the labour market by internships carried out in the country and abroad and by providing career guidance and counselling in order to support students in their transition from school to working life.

The above mentioned projects are just some of the projects that were implemented by the UAB.

They offer a real opportunity for the present generation of students to develop their professional skills and to shape their career in a way that is effective, organized, and assisted, and they also represent a manner in which the cooperation relationships between universities and employers can materialise, in order to have graduates that are better prepared for the labour market, which benefits all parties

These projects aim to promote the innovative activities of the universities among the interested entities (the academic environment, the business environment); to develop and to provide career orientation, guidance and counselling for students by education activities that are based on the simulation of practices that are specific for the economic field; to improve students` skills and to increase the competitiveness of the future graduates on the labour market by learning activities based on internships.

Practice is, first of all, an important component of the curriculum, it has been credited, it has learning objectives and forms certain skills; it converges toward the achievement of the essential skills for an economist or a graduate of economic studies and, from this point of view, referring to the results of learning, to the acquisition of skills and not only to the accumulation of knowledge, one can say with certainty that the role of internship is even more important than that of a regular disciplines, in the sense that during their practice, students have the chance to use what they have learned, to practise in a real context what they will do after their graduation, and this gives them an idea about what their work as economists will consist in. Internship helps students not only to acquire skills, but also to form a set of expectations with respect to what will be after graduation, to develop their attitude towards the profession, to adopt certain values of morality, professional ethics, but also of teamwork, integration in a group of people, in a company.

For this reason, it can be concluded that the close relationship that currently exists between the UAB and the employers with which it collaborates is also the result of these these types of activities, namely the implementation of joint projects. The database created at the level of the University (internal document), which includes concrete contacts, active in the process of supporting the employment of students constitutes one of the strengths of the University, the proof of the fact that the concern for the professional future of graduates is major. The lasting partnership with employers and its materialisation are defining elements for offering effective educational services.

Summary

As the employers declare, during their internships students acquire experiences that make them stronger, more confident in their skills. They also learn about time management, discipline, effective communication and logical and critical thinking. During the period of internship, students see how the theory applies in the real environment. These internships determine students to work together with their colleagues and to improve their working habits, in order to prove that they are capable to occupy a position in that company.

This internship programme has enabled students to observe in detail all the activities that are performed in an economic unit, as well as complexity of these activities, the degree of risk faced by companies, the collaboration relations between companies, as well as many other aspects related to the proper management of a business.

In addition, such collaborations can contribute to the adaptation of the university curriculum to the requirements of the socio-economic environment, as well as to the development of the skills acquired in the tertiary education by interactive learning in real companies.

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WZMOCNIENIE RELACJI POMIĘDZY PRACODAWCAMI I UCZELNIAMI POPRAZEC PROJEKTY EUROPEJSKIE

Streszczenie: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest podkreślenie znaczenia zachowania dobrych relacji współpracy pomiędzy pracodawcami a uczelniami wyższymi, a także istotnej roli, jaka może być odgrywana przez projekty europejskie we wzmacnianiu tego powiązania. Niniejsze studium przypadku pokazuje, w jaki sposób uczelnia, która jest mała, jednak bardzo aktywna, jeśli chodzi o dostęp do projektów, mająca za cel zapewnienie wysokiej jakości usług edukacyjnych, może poprawić efektywność działalności edukacyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: Projekty europejskie, pracodawcy, studenci.

加强雇主和大学通过欧洲项目之间的关系

摘要： 本文的目的是强调维护雇主与高校中加强这方面的欧洲项目可以发挥重大作用的良好协作关系的重要性。案例研究显示在其中一所大学，很小，但在访问项目非常积极和的目标是提供高质量的教育服务可以提高教育活动的有效性的方法。

关键词： 欧洲项目、雇主、学生