



COOPERATION BETWEEN COMPANIES AND CAREER CENTERS IN POLAND

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The beginnings

Starting from the time of economic changes in Poland, caused by the significant transition from centrally controlled to free-market economy, a rapid increase of level of unemployment has been recorded. Demanding labour market together with gradual increase in the amount of students in Poland generated the situation when diploma did not guarantee getting a satisfactory job any longer. As a result, the supportive institution was needed - an institution which would assist students and graduates in comfortable entry into an active professional life as well as a satisfactory functioning on more and more competitive labour market.

The structure and the activities of the first Polish Career Center was a copy of the British patterns. It was established in 1993 at The Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun. The whole undertaking was guided by the manager of the Career Center at the University in Hull. As a result, the agreement with local Voivodeship Labour Office was settled, and as a consequence, a unit offering wide field of activities aimed at supporting students in creating their own professional path, has been established.

At the end of the nineties a dynamic development of universities and colleges in Poland has been observed. Thanks to the European Union programme TEMPUS-PHARE as well as initiative of universities in Great Britain, Amsterdam, National Labour Offices and Ministry of National Education, in 1997 another eight adequate posts emerged. At the beginning, the support from the European Union was reduced to organizing trainings carried out by EU experts for employees of Polish Career Centers providing integration meetings and workshops abroad. All the other costs had to be covered by domestic units.

In 1998 Polish Network of Career Centers was established as an informal partnership structure associating more than one hundred Career Centers in Poland. Its main task was to create the pattern of ideal Career Center as well as to elaborate standards of its functioning. Additionally, its activities referred to the promotion of the idea of career orientated institution within academic environment, occupational counseling, both in individual and collective sense, informing students and graduates about vocational possibilities on the labour market and facilitating them contacts with potential employers. Every Career Center has the same goal and functions according to the general set of standards, however each unit generates its individual methods of work.

At present there are 170 academic Career Centers in Poland dealing with professional counseling. The biggest concentration of them can be observed in the main academic centers i.e. Warsaw, Krakow, Wroclaw, Poznan, Lublin, Kielce, Katowice. Recently, bigger number of these institutions as well as their intensified specializations has been noticed. Everything is to emphasize the importance of good preparation of the students for the demands of the business and the labour market.



Essentials of Career Center

Career Center is a kind of a platform between academic environment and the labour market. It has also a very important role in promoting university itself among future students as well as in the business world. Thanks to a long-term experience in cooperation with students as well as annual graduates survey, the service of Career Centers can be easily adjusted to the expectations and demands of the companies and employers.

How to find an appropriate candidate?

Career Centers give possibility for the employers to find an appropriate candidate for the objective position. Employers can place job offers in the Internet Base as well as in Career Office's paper record. Job offers can be also distributed among students of different faculties chosen according to the profile of requested candidate. In order to reach as many as possible potentially interested individuals within the target group, contacts with inner research workers, students councils, representatives of particular faculties and scientific circles, are being used as well. The role of units mentioned above is to promote those jobs possibilities which fit fields of studies they represent the best. It is being done within their own backgrounds, with their own communication channels. What is more, job offers can be also placed on the noticeboards in the dormitories as this is a place where accumulation of students is high and a popular grapevine can be used either.

Employers can also rely on Career Center in reference to internships, voluntary and temporary work offers. They can be distributed among academic environment with the use of the same channels and methods as those for permanent job advertisements.

Within Career Center companies can not only disseminate information about requirements, demands and recruitment plans but also propagate catalogues, brochures, leaflets and posters promoting activities and profiles of the firms. Career Center mediates in the transfers of various information connected with the labour market initiatives by popularizing those materials among students.

Employers can also review profiles of candidates in the Internet Base of Job Offers and CVs. Such base consists of several thousand activated student's accounts, giving the opportunity to select the best candidate in relation to particular skills (e.g. ability to speak specific foreign language, being the graduate / student of particular faculty or specialization). The internet base is beneficial for both sides – student can search for the requested position while employer can seek for the best qualified resource which corresponds with his demands.

How to arise as a solid employer in the student's awareness?

The companies can present their profiles at the chosen faculty of the university which provides access to a wider range of students of requested education and gives opportunity to participate in individual meetings with people truly interested in being employed. It also increases the chances to "catch real talents". The presentation can be enriched with short workshop displaying, for example, the typical day of one of the department in the company. An exhibition may



receive the form of typical stand located in the hall of a particular faculty (which gives wider access to the student community) or standard multimedia display being held in an assembly hall. Case studies during the standard presentation usually increase the attractiveness of the meeting.

Representatives of the companies can also organize information meeting enriched with enrollment process at the chosen faculty of the university. This kind of a meeting is proposed as preliminary recruitment process to offered position. Career Center provides employers with organizational support.

During the meeting representatives of the companies:

- present shortened history of the enterprise and its achievements,
- characterize organizational structure of the company,
- discuss profile of the firm and the character of each department,
- inform students about working conditions (e.g. social benefits),
- present plans and main principles of the enrollment process,
- introduce promotion paths and possibilities of professional development (trainings, transfers within institutions),
- demonstrate requirements of the possible post to potential employees (criteria and methods of selection of candidates to work),
- inform about internship offers and possibility to write a Master's / Bachelor's thesis within the company.

Conducting trainings for students at the chosen area can be also treated as a successful element of employer branding strategy. Within this field employers can carry out, not only social and psychological skills training aimed at developing specific competences such as: self-presentation, successful communication, ability to work in a group, cope with stress, management skills, but also specialized seminars i.e. typical for the field of the business of the company, like sales techniques, specialized computer programmes support. What is more, they can instruct the students what kind of skills are necessary to find a job.

Employers can also participate in meetings with students acting as a role model. These conferences allow businessmen to introduce themselves as experts in specific sector of economy and to present their individual occupational path that had led them to their current successful positions. The idea of this undertaking is to encourage academic environments to establish their own businesses as well as to help them in creating conscious guidance of individual, both professional and personal, development. It is also a great opportunity for both sides to exchange opinions, ask questions, do networking.

Another way to intensify employer branding idea is to organize study visits within the company. The aim of this kind of event is to enable students to achieve experience based on observation of the way the company functions in reference to the place of work and daily duties of the employees. It is sometimes combined with short workshops or case studies which relate to the most important fields of company's activities.



Graduates of a particular specialization can learn about the specific character of the job in a particular line of business by taking part in substantial assembly. Representatives of particular professions share their experience and define precisely which qualifications are demanded in order to be employed in specific occupation, explaining how to increase their chances on the labour market.

The excellent opportunity to meet students face to face is to participate in Job Fairs which are frequently devoted to different fields of economy like Engineering, IT, the Humanities. Job Fairs perfectly link the demands of top companies on the Polish market with the needs of students or graduates by giving the companies unique opportunity to make the best candidates being interested with their job and internship offers. This kind of the event is usually published in local as well as in nationwide media which gives it higher rank and additionally means extra promotion of the enterprise.

Job Fairs facilitate direct contact with the recruiters, which allows participants to receive up-to-date information about current job offers or possibilities to undergo practice within particular establishment. This kind of confrontation allows both sides to get necessary information, on one hand - about the company and the requirements towards potential employees, on the other - about the expectations of fresh graduates towards future employers.

Parallel with Job Fairs workshops, trainings and various seminars are being run. They usually refer to the topics strictly connected with effective searching for the job, professional development as well as to the issue of solving interesting business problems. Participation in these trainings gives employers possibility to create image of the company being concerned about development of the employees, which may encourage bigger amount of students to apply for the internship within this particular firm.

What are the other ways to build Employer Branding idea among students?

At some universities there is also possibility for the graduates who run their own businesses to contact Career Center in order to ask for some business connections which might help them to enhance the quality of the service of the company they manage.

Students more and more often write Master's / Bachelor's thesis made to order by companies. This solution is beneficial for both parties. Enterprises can, not only find future human resources but are also able to save the time of their own specialists. On the other hand, students can easily test their own knowledge in practice by using data, technology, laboratory and the entire back-up of the company. Specific and significant problems of the companies can be resolved with the fresh spirit of the student.

Companies can perform an important role as experts in numerous competitions, for example, for the best and the most innovative thesis. As a member of the jury employer may receive free promotion of its brand within university community by being indicated as a key partner in all written materials as well as throughout all kinds of presentations. Managers can appear in the consciousness of academic environment as an object supporting pro-innovative activities of the region.



Why social researches are so important for the employers?

Graduates' surveys were implemented in response to an increasing awareness of the enormous importance of their results for improving Academic Curricula and fields of studies. It is hard to believe nowadays that Academic Curricula offered by the universities cannot correspond with social demands, especially labour market requirements.

The results of the survey indicate the importance of practical dimension of education gained at the university. It gives possibility to come to the interesting conclusions and, as a consequence, implement modifications to the Academic Curricula so it can be better adjusted to the needs of interchangeable labour market. This study monitors professional activities and occupational achievements of the alumni. According to the statistics it gives information about tendencies observed on the labour market as well as a demand to form, required profile of education.

The results of the examination are important for the students and candidates for studies too. Thanks to them, young people standing in front of difficult decision connected with choosing preferred discipline, are able to adjust it to individual preferences, interests as well as general standards of particular Academic Curricula and professional perspectives in context of desired education.

Another important research for the business is "Employers' expectations towards graduates survey", the aim of which, is to evaluate the condition of alumni's preparations for the independent functioning on the labour market. It studies the education of the personnel of the company, the company's demand for hiring employees with certain education, company's difficulties connected with contracting graduates, as well as desired skills and personal features necessary for working in a particular company. It constitutes the base for better preparation of graduates for the demands of the labour market.

As we can see, social researches are very important for the workforce as it determines the demands and requirements of the labour market.

Recent Mentoring Programme – how does it work?

One of the latest projects, the idea of which comes from our German colleagues, is Mentoring Programme, being implemented so far within four Career Services in Wroclaw in October 2011. The programme is addressed to students and professionals, while its main goal is to increase student's employability.

How does it work? A student and a Mentor decide about meeting programme - what goals should be achieved and what the desired results are. The relation between student and the Mentor is being built on the mutual willingness to exchange experiences and knowledge.

Students who decide to participate in the programme have great chance to develop their interpersonal skills and verify advantages and disadvantages according to the chosen career path. What is more, mentees can be acquainted with expectation of particular branches and be able to



learn what “vocational maturity” means and how to build this skill during study. Once again, it is a great opportunity for the employer to build its own brand as well as to take part in the process of shaping the future of the young generation.

What else can be done for the academic world?

Other forms of the cooperation with Career Centers are:

- pre-selection of the candidates to work or internship position according to the requirements of the employers,
- on – line promotion. It is possible to place commercial banner on the website of the Career Center. The banner will redirect interested students to the website of the particular company.
- support of Career Center in formal arrangements of the internships within the university.

Most Career Center services are free of charge. However, it can be observed that some special amenities like participation in Job Fairs or location of company’s advertisement on the official website can be contracted. There is no rule. It is being an individual decision of a particular Career Center.

The future

The requirements of the companies in reference to properly qualified employees are bigger and bigger and the universities, at the times of forthcoming demographic low, have to rise their competitiveness by guaranteeing graduates employability after completing studies. This is why educational sector together with companies has to rely on each other and consequently deepen their cooperation.

In other words, collaboration with employers is the key factor of Career Centers activities, this is why those institutions are opened to any new, elaborated by the companies, forms of promotion of job positions.

We have to remember that Career Centers have considerable potential in reference to experience and knowledge as well as logistic and organizational aspects. They enter into relations with a variety of partners whose actions are intended to improve domestic economy by decreasing unemployment among graduates of universities.

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