



# Report on the Role of Career Centres in Study Practice Excellence

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## Summary of the Project

The project will ensure inclusiveness of study practice services by building capacities of career counsellors and developing new services. We aim to improve the quality of study practices by building the competences and skills of coordinators and mentors. By implementing MILEAGE study practices, we will stimulate innovative pedagogies in HEIs and form a supportive environment for student practices. Lastly, we will advocate for civic engagement through the recognition of community work in students' academic results.

## Objective of the Report

To analyse how university Career Centres support students in:

- *choosing internships,*
- *evaluating the experience, and*
- *enhancing the results for academic and professional purposes.*

The report highlights the potential contribution of Career Centres to improving the quality of internships through closer collaboration with host organisations, showcasing good practices and operational recommendations.

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# Report on role of career-centres in study practice excellence

## Introduction: Young People and the Transition Process into the Labour Market

The transition from the academic world to the professional world represents a crucial moment for university students, who often appear disoriented and insufficiently informed about their future employment opportunities (Boffo & Gioli, 2017). Entry into the labour market constitutes a critical and delicate phase of young people's socialisation into work, during which both social forms of mediation—such as family or peer groups—and institutional ones—such as universities and companies—play a role (Presti, Törnroos & Pluviano, 2018).

Within this framework, universities, as institutions responsible for planning and delivering higher education pathways, have increasingly oriented themselves towards Third Mission activities, with the aim of building relationships with society and the local territory. This perspective goes beyond job placement as mere support for employability and involves the university organisation as a whole. In this sense, according to leading international approaches, Career Centres are configured as spaces for building relationships and communities through interaction among students, families, academic staff, companies, and institutions.

Within Career Centres, connections are created and ideas and projects are developed that innovate the economic fabric while simultaneously

suggesting new areas of action for academia. The Career Centre and the university of the future position themselves as hubs of exchange among multiple actors, with the aim of facilitating opportunities for growth and collaboration.

Internships represent an increasingly relevant component of university education pathways, fostering experiential learning that contributes to the development of professional, transversal, and relational skills essential for entering the labour market. Within this context, university Career Centres play a strategic role in supporting students from the initial orientation phase, facilitating matching between students and organisations, ensuring quality, monitoring, and educational coherence, and finally enhancing the outcomes achieved during the experience (Boffo & Terzaroli, 2017).

## The Strategic Role of Career Centres

In Italy the labour market reform introduced by the Biagi Law in 2003 assigned universities the important role of intermediary between the world of work and young adults, a function entrusted to offices such as Career Centres. The Jobs Act reform further reinforced the role of these university services within the broader network of employment services (ANPAL Servizi, 2017).

Before the 2000s, universities performed a role similar to employment offices, commonly recommending their most deserving students or graduates. Legislators therefore deemed it appropriate to formalise this practice, both to regulate the phenomenon and to enhance labour market transparency (Bellezza et al., 2011).

ANVUR defines the Third Mission as “the propensity of academic institutions to open themselves to the socio-economic context through the enhancement and transfer of knowledge” (ANPAL, 2017). Its distinguishing feature is direct interaction with society, unlike teaching (First Mission) and research (Second Mission) (ANVUR, 2013). The Third Mission includes knowledge dissemination, intellectual property management, academic entrepreneurship, and intermediary structures such as incubators, Job Placement offices, and Career Centres (ANVUR, 2015).

The main role of university Career Centres is to bridge the gap between education and the labour market by enhancing human resources and supporting students in career management and employability development (Montefalcone, 2016). Through their intermediary function, Career Centres facilitate young adults' transition into employment and serve as key instruments for building employability.

Career Centre services encompass a wide range of activities, including recruitment, employability training, psychological counselling to support career planning, and the development of initiative and entrepreneurship (Boffo & Terzaroli, 2017; Candia & Cumbo, 2015; Montefalcone, 2016).

According to Montefalcone (2016), the traditional model of Career Centres as mere orientation or placement offices is now outdated. A new service model is emerging that involves not only Career Centre staff but the entire university ecosystem: students, alumni, academic staff, school operators, departments, other academic offices, employers, students' families, and surrounding communities.

Within Career Centres, the relationships between study programmes and companies concentrate the future directions of higher education. In the Anglo-Saxon context, Career Centres act as hubs for creating links between the labour market and the various actors connected to universities (Boffo & Terzaroli, 2017)

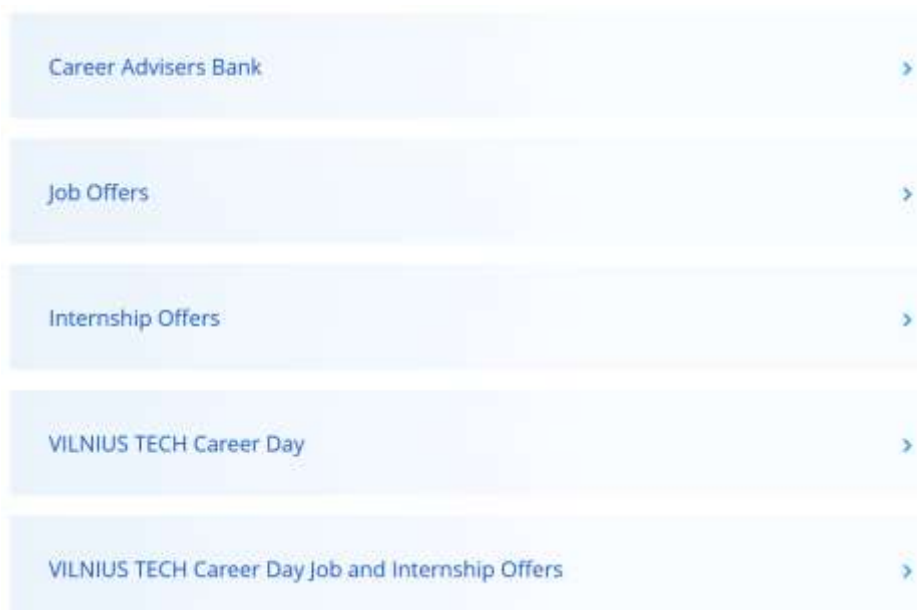
In Italy, Career Centre services began developing only from 2005 onwards, as a strategic response by universities to the Biagi Law (Candia & Cumbo, 2015). Many universities established their Career Centres between 2006 and 2009, while others did so only after 2010, resulting in understandable organisational delays (Boffo & Terzaroli, 2017).

The most common Career Centre model focuses on placement as matching labour supply and demand; however, the most appreciated model is networking, through initiatives that strengthen relational networks around universities and improve communication between placement services and the productive sector. These initiatives allow students to engage in simulated or real recruitment processes while enabling companies to

connect with young academic talent. They also allow universities to gather valuable information about the local entrepreneurial and productive environment (Ingusci et al., 2019a).

In other countries, for example, in Lithuania the role is similar, but with more concentration on organisation of the placements under clear monitoring system (which is based on faculty level). For example: **Vilnius Tech University** provides these Career services:

*“ The goal of our University is to help students find their perfect career path and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary for creating their future in Lithuania and the world. Together with the technological advancements, the focus of the job market is shifting: the qualification and the hard skills of the young specialist are not the only things that matter. Languages, social skills, and abilities to adjust in this ever-changing environment are just as important these days. VILNIUS TECH Career provides consultations directly from the company's representatives and offers the opportunity to receive VILNIUS TECH digital badges for informal activities at the university. It develops an information database of job and internship advertisements and implements projects to help students plan their careers and successfully enter the labour market.”*



Source: <https://vilniustech.lt/studies/career-services/68362>

Career Day, as the annual event, supports a search for career path, puts in contact with companies. Some more inputs: As soon as the placement is found (it can be done individually, through the Career Center, or with the Faculty Placement's coordinator, International Relations Office – for Erasmus placement), a student signs the placement agreement. To mention, that the goals of the placement are defined by the Placement Coordinator with the student, and this Coordinator is in charge for a placement monitoring and recognition of results.

Other good example is **University of Twente** (Netherlands), as it has a Strong practice-oriented model. The University of Twente is known for its “High Tech, Human Touch” approach and close collaboration with industry. Most programmes include mandatory internships or applied projects. The university has a centralised Career Services & Internship Office that:

- *Maintains long-term partnerships with companies*
- *Supports students with placement matching, contracts, and supervision*
- *Clear learning objectives and assessment criteria are defined for each placement.*

In this institution placements are embedded in the curriculum and treated as an academic component, not an add-on.

Source: <https://www.utwente.nl/en/sgw/support-from-professionals/career/>

Meantime, at **KU Leuven** (Belgium) has strong monitoring and evaluation of placements ensures learning quality and relevance. The HEI integrates placements particularly well in engineering, health sciences, education, and social sciences. Each placement includes:

- *A formal agreement between student, host organisation, and university*
- *An academic supervisor and a workplace mentor*
- *Strong quality assurance: students submit reports and receive feedback from both sides.*

Source: <https://www.kuleuven.be/english/study/stuvo/working-volunteering-career>

The **Aalto University (Finland)** the placements are innovation-driven and employer-connected. Aalto has deep links with startups, multinational companies, and public organisations. The university actively encourages:

- *Paid traineeships*
- *Industry thesis projects*
- *Career services provide individual coaching, CV checks, and employer events.*
- *University promotes close integration between placements, innovation ecosystems, and graduate employability.*

Source: <https://www.aalto.fi/en/services/career-design-lab-career-services>

The **Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya – UPC (Spain)** spurs large-scale, well-managed placements. The model well knows due to an efficient digital systems make placements accessible and scalable:

- *UPC manages **thousands of student placements annually**, especially in engineering and IT.*
- *Has a **central placement platform** that matches students with companies, manages contracts and insurance.*
- *Placements can be curricular or extracurricular, both clearly regulated.*

Source: <https://talenthub.upc.edu/en/jobs>

These examples demonstrate diversity of actions which can be taken by the HEIs for a placement organisation aiming to make them beneficial for all parties engaged in.

## Support in Choosing an Internship

Career Centres act as key intermediaries between universities, students, and host organisations. They ensure structured internship management by providing orientation, counselling, opportunity promotion, quality standards definition, and personalised support throughout all internship phases.

The term “Placement” is now considered reductive; “Career Centres” better reflects the accompanying and support pathway that develops throughout

the entire academic journey and during internship initiation and management (Candia & Cumbo, 2015).

ANPAL Servizi identified a roadmap consisting of ten success factors for university Career Centres:

- i. Governance involvement and commitment, including rectors and delegates, leading to strategic university plans with internal and external stakeholders.*
- ii. Network building through strategic partnerships with companies and labour market actors.*
- iii. Knowledge of labour market demand to enable service planning.*
- iv. Marketing and tailored communication of services.*
- v. Personalised development pathways aligned with students' backgrounds and skills.*
- vi. Attractive and functional services aligned with employer expectations.*
- vii. Promotion of a dual system integrating education and work.*
- viii. Fundraising policies to ensure sustainability.*
- ix. Training and strengthening of guidance service staff.*
- x. Monitoring and evaluation as continuous improvement tools (ANPAL, 2017).*

Internship selection is a crucial moment for students. As so, the Career Centre support includes:

- Personalised counselling and individual guidance interviews*
- Assessment of prior skills*
- Identification of learning objectives*
- Recommendation of coherent opportunities*
- Initial and final skills assessment*
- Identification of key labour-market competencies*
- Career orientation workshops*
- Dedicated thematic workshops*
- Digital platforms for internship matching*

# Evaluation of the Internship Experience

Career Centres contribute significantly to evaluating internship experiences and achievement of learning objectives through:

- *Monitoring tools definition*
- *Follow-up interviews with academic and company tutors*
- *Student feedback collection*
- *Qualitative and quantitative impact reports*
- *Learning outcomes verification*
- *Company satisfaction analysis*
- *Internship evaluation occurs through two main processes: company evaluation and student evaluation, usually via online questionnaires.*

Company evaluation includes:

- *Assessment of commitment, skills, and professionalism*
- *Achievement of learning objectives*
- *Overall feedback and potential employment opportunities*

Student evaluation includes:

- *Overall satisfaction*
- *Coherence between theory and practice*
- *Professional growth and skill acquisition*
- *Support received from tutors*

# Enhancement of Internship Outcomes

Internship outcomes are enhanced through a final report documenting acquired skills, practical knowledge, and professional impact. This documentation may contribute to academic credits or degree grades.

Career Centres support students in:

- *CV and skills portfolio development*
- *Identification of transversal skills*
- *Career pathway integration*

- *Interview preparation*
- *Academic credit recognition*
- *Soft-skills validation*
- *Labour-market positioning strategies*

## Collaboration with Host Organisations

Effective collaboration between Career Centres and host organisations ensures structured internships through:

- *Shared expectation setting*
- *Co-design of internships*
- *Direct activity monitoring*
- *Structured company feedback*
- *Alignment between market needs and training*

## Good Practices

International best practices highlight the importance of integrated platforms, tutor training, and structured learning outcomes. Key practices include:

- *Integration of education and work*
- *Technological platforms for internship management*
- *Clear roadmaps*
- *Labour-market needs analysis*
- *Personalised career coaching*
- *Employability promotion*
- *Strategic long-term partnerships*
- *Networking events and career days*

## Operational Recommendations

According to the project, to improve internship quality, it is recommended to:

- *Strengthen employment outcome data collection*

- ***Promote uniform evaluation systems***
- ***Increase tutor training***
- ***Foster co-creation with companies***
- ***Develop digital monitoring tools***
- ***Consolidate territorial networks***

## Conclusions

Career Centres play a key role in ensuring internship quality and effectiveness by connecting higher education and the labour market. Their intermediary function supports graduate employability while fostering organisational innovation and economic growth. Employability is built throughout academic pathways, internships, and experiential learning, supporting the development of professional identities and sustainable career projects.

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