

Students' perspectives on training to enhance employability in Spain

(Abstract proposal)

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This paper is part of the Erasmus+ EMPLOY project which intends to enhance employability for non-traditional students and graduates. In this context, we have undertaken different research and intervention activities. One of them has been the implementation at the University of Seville (Spain) of training aimed at facilitating transition from HE to the graduate labour market. This training consisted of 10 hours distributed in 3 sessions that took place during 3 weeks. As regards participants, 12 non-traditional students (9 undergraduates and 3 graduates) with different profiles took part in them: mature students (7), first generation or low economic capital students (5) and disable students (2). Such training was based on a handbook which has been designed specifically for this purpose through collaborative work among the six European partners involved in the EMPLOY project. The handbook includes different sections that enable reflection on one's own employability taking other students' experiences as starting point. Thus, after an introduction of the project EMPLOY and the contents that can be found inside, the handbook encourages students to reflect on their own educational and professional experiences in the first place. Afterwards, employers and non-traditional students' perspectives on employment and employability are offered to the users of the handbook. In addition to this, real testimonies of non-traditional students are included as well as strategies and support services that students who are meant to join the labour market can benefit from.

Following the aforementioned working sessions with non-traditional students, 12 participants have been asked to evaluate the handbook used during such sessions by means of an open questionnaire. The aim being to know their overall impressions including the aspects that they liked most and least as well as suggestions for improvement.

Results show a good level of acceptance of the handbook by the participants. Two main contributions can be noticed: the development of a positive and entrepreneurial attitude towards the professional world and the process of personal reflection arising from the analysis of other experiences with which participants feel identified. Furthermore, the work on the handbook provides the participants with a group vision and raises awareness about both challenges regarding employability of non-traditional students and strategies to overcome them. In this regard, the necessary adaptation to the labour market perceived by the participants has taken some of them to an inner conflict. Hence, the approach followed goes beyond the superficial treatment of contents.

In participants' words, the working sessions have been crucial in this process -even more relevant than the handbook itself- as they have enable to analyse and reflect on real and diverse experiences in a functional, participative and collaborative manner. Thus, the methodology implemented highly influence results.

Additionally, the design is described as original due to the organisation of content based on case-studies and the structure of activities. Nevertheless, some suggestions for improvement have also been made by the participants, mainly a more work-oriented handbook (e.g. tools or techniques to find a job), participation of employers in the sessions and inclusion of the handbook in mainstream classes.

Key words: Graduate employability, labour market, transitions, non-traditional students, Spanish Higher Education.