

Student Support and Career Development Centre (CPSRK): Student career development meets employer branding services

Zagreb, Croatia





General Information

Title	Student Support and Career Development Centre (CPSRK)	
Pitch	Student career development meets employer branding services	
Organisation	Faculty of Organisation and Informatics (FOI), University of Zagreb	
Country	Croatia	
Author	Dr. Richard Woolley (Ingenio)	
Nature of interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration in R&D <input type="checkbox"/> Commercialisation of R&D results <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility of staff <input type="checkbox"/> Academic entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Governance	<input type="checkbox"/> Lifelong learning <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Joint curriculum design and delivery <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Mobility of students <input type="checkbox"/> Student entrepreneurship <input type="checkbox"/> Shared resources
Supporting mechanism	<input type="checkbox"/> Strategic <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structural <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Operational <input type="checkbox"/> Policy	
Summary	<p>The Student Support and Career Development Centre (CPSRK) at the Faculty of Organisation and Informatics (FOI) of the University of Zagreb is a key intermediary connecting students and employers in and around the cities of Varaždin and Zagreb. Built around a number of mechanisms that shape students competences and presentation for the labour market, the CPSRK also uses an innovative approach to providing comprehensive employer branding services that make companies highly visible and attractive to suitable talented graduates. CPSRK also acts as a focal point for the modular integration of industry problems and challenges into educational curricula for undergraduates or as topics for master theses.</p>	



Introduction & Overview

1. BACKGROUND

The Student Support and Career Development Centre (CPSRK) of the Faculty of Organisation and Informatics (FOI) at the University of Zagreb (UNIZG) was established in 2012. Student questionnaires on their education experience had been asking for more employer-linked content in degree courses. The CPSRK was designed to address the need for a systematic approach towards the improvement of FOI students' employability, to create better connections with employers, to leverage the experience and connections of FOI alumni, to develop students' generic skills and competencies that enhance their employability. Increased UBC is also viewed as a bridge to expand the educational offer available to FOI students. The initial platform for the initiative was a successful programme of vocational internships, which has been expanded and built around with a range of complementary initiatives.

2. OBJECTIVES AND MOTIVATIONS

The mission of the CPSRK is to provide support to FOI students in order to facilitate their success from enrolment to completion, which includes academic, social and career aspects of support throughout their study processes.

The vision is to become a centre of excellence and reference in students' career planning, including collaboration with alumni and employers' organisations, as well as the dissemination of good case practices in the field of educational expansion for all groups of students.

A general goal is to build an inspiring student culture, triggering the creativity and talent embedded in the student body through a sense of motivation and purpose.

The UBC goal is to break down the barriers between the developing student cohort and the human resource needs of local and regional businesses. Fulfilling this goal is built on a dual strategy to involve and develop the visibility of both students and businesses. Making the UBC link explicitly also demand side driven, which is a hallmark of the CPSRK approach.

3. STAKEHOLDERS

Undergraduate students of the FOI are concentrated in the fields of Business Systems, Information Systems and the Economics of Entrepreneurship. At the graduate level students choose among Information and Software Engineering (IPI), Business Systems Organisation (OPS), Databases and Knowledge Bases (BPBZ) and Informatics in Education (IuO). Support is also offered to students in the vocational Technology in Business Application course. Students principally use the services of CPSRK to develop their competences and presentation in the labour market including career advice, financial support for competitions, student projects and employment efforts, CV building, channelling student association connections to employers and use of the co-working spaces for preparation of (self) employment.

FOI alumni are regarded as valuable building blocks in the culture of openness toward industry that CPSRK seeks to build. An online platform in the form of a website (cpsrk.foi.hr) has been designed for

alumni involvement. Frequent use is made of alumni as guests at career development events to share their experiences, success stories and engage in motivational interactions with current students, as well as to have students employed in the companies of FOI alumni.

Employers have a direct stake in the development of the UBC culture at FOI. The student internships system has been operating for five years, with an online platform in which employers' information and opportunities can be searched being operational for the past two years. Around 480 employers are currently involved as partners in vocational internships that have hosted more than 1,500 unique internships.

CPSRK also cooperates with other stakeholders, including the Croatian Employment Service (HZZ), the Centre for Informing and Career Counseling Varaždin (CISOK Varaždin), the student council and student associations at FOI, and other career centres in Croatia and abroad. Some activities and events are co-organised with other stakeholders.





Implementation

4. INPUTS

The FOI student body are encouraged to enhance their employability and to identify suitable opportunities to deploy their skills through the CPSRK and other supported faculty activities or through students' extracurricular engagement. Competing in competitions, pitching at career days, industry linked coursework projects and internships are all avenues through which students build the UBC culture.

Alumni contribute the vital ingredient of providing role-models and success stories which can both inspire students and shape their development in concrete directions. Both students and alumni are called on to share their passion and energy through their success stories that is vital to the CPSRK and FOI vision of an open UBC culture.

Companies provide invited lectures, workshops, sponsorships, mentorships, project challenges, travel support and internship opportunities.

Under the FOI career and curriculum development strategy, FOI academics are expected to cooperate with CPSRK. To date, CPSRK has initiated activities with around 70% of FOI academics to develop high quality content that is UBC focussed. CPSRK is the intermediary between collaborating academics and companies who have projects that can be suitable for inclusion as assessable course tasks. Employers bring such projects to CPSRK who contact relevant academic staff. A list of course criteria are jointly considered and must be satisfied for the project to be included as course content.

Financial resources are drawn from FOI, the Ministry of Education of Croatia and a range of Croatian and European grants. These sources fund the four current staff positions at CPSRK. Firms contribute sponsorships to help cover some costs of CPSRK events, such as career days, student competitions and projects.

CPSRK has its own office space in the main FOI building and can use FOI lecture theatres, laboratories and other infrastructure. Other relevant infrastructure includes the Technology Park Varaždin, which includes incubator facilities and currently hosts 40 primarily technology-based companies and start-ups with over 300 employees. A co-working space is used to empower students' entrepreneurial initiative and to provide them with a private space outside of the faculty where they can connect with other employers, students and researchers. The park is co-owned by the City of Varaždin, FOI and University North.

5. ACTIVITIES

The UBC activities organised by CPSRK involve mechanisms for formal and informal interpersonal interactions among students, companies and alumni, a portal for connecting stakeholders with educational and employment opportunities, and a strategy of improving the visibility and awareness of between students and firms. Communication tools including a regular newsletter relevant to all stakeholders and promotion of all student opportunities through a website and Facebook, which are also important ingredients.

In terms of interpersonal interactions, CPSRK promotes a range of activities including:

- ▶ Company visits, where students go onsite for familiarisation or to work for longer periods on specific tasks 3-5 times per year. These onsite visits are innovative in that they are often connected to joint curriculum development processes.
- ▶ Financial and other support for the incubation of student start-ups (startup@foiprogramme) through the provision of professional services, including external accounting and legal consulting, of up to 3,000 euros per year per student team.
- ▶ Employment Career Week (that grew from the initial career day), which includes a daily programme of 5-7 lectures of the 45 minute by various experts that link to their curricula, the participation of 100 employer representatives from more than 30 firms, the contributions of around 100 alumni, the active participation of around 1000 students (almost 50% coverage of students in faculty).
- ▶ Interactive events including public talks from high profile business figures and alumni workshops where actual jobs and their requirements are crystallised.
- ▶ Employer pitch events where each employer is given four minutes to present themselves to the students. This event encourages many creative approaches – and students decide on a best company pitch award.
- ▶ A networking event is held regularly in the main coffee shop – usually this is focused on a provocative topic and garners significant student participation and questioning.
- ▶ Production of a newsletter covering activities within previous months, which is circulated to companies and has increasing company participation on content.
- ▶ Career workshops are organised up to 6 times per academic year, in cooperation with employers and external stakeholders (HZZ, CISOK) where career experts hold sessions on various developmental topics (CV writing, mock job interviews, job scouting, etc.)
- ▶ Presentations of students' projects in front of their potential employers, who are brought to FOI from different parts of Croatia. This activity is held within an academic course and students are given a grade, in addition real-world business feedback on their ideas.

CPSRK is also the key intermediary between students, academic faculty and companies in relation to the core internship programme. Internships are programmed during year 3 of vocational undergraduate courses or year 2 of Masters degrees. Every academic year, approximately 300 students ranging from graduate studies (Informatics & Economics of Entrepreneurship) and vocational undergraduate study (Information Technology in Business Application) undertake an obligatory internship. CPSRK is the main hub for those activities, where students can communicate with employers on a regular basis in order to obtain information about internship vacancies.

At the beginning of the academic year, CPSRK contact all the 480 companies in order to open new vacancies for FOI students. Throughout the academic year, students communicate with CPSRK through online internship platform, where they are presented with a range of supporting documents that are necessary for successful completion of the internship (journal of vocational internship, institutional referrals, guidelines, frequently asked questions, etc.). CPSRK monitors the required tasks and documents and approves the internship completion.

Moving beyond the internship programme, CPSRK cooperates directly with companies with regard to recruitment of students, importantly by making all company employment offers available online

and promoting these to students using social media. Some competitive job interview processes in which companies are seeking to recruit directly from the student body are hosted at FOI.

CPSRK is also central to the UBC focused dimension of the FOI curriculum development strategy. The Centre for Application Development at FOI developed a website with course and content links that CPSRK and industry partners use to work on curriculum development, schedule invited lectures and plan other activities. This portal is combined with direct consultation to help companies create projects that can both fulfil their interests and satisfy academic coursework requirements. CPSRK connects suitable professors and firms who work together to design a project that can satisfy course criteria such that students can gain real experience working with companies doing projects that contribute to their academic evaluation.

This model has now developed to include the shaping of MA (and some undergraduate) theses toward the needs of a collaborating company. Topics can be co-designed and the company also has place in evaluation process (although the Professor has overall authority).

CPSRK uses a follow-up methodology with students to explore how successful the co-designed projects have been in relation to their educational outcomes and future employment prospects.

CPSRK has also played a role in the formation of research projects that are conducted in collaboration with companies.

A particularly innovative UBC activity of CPSRK is the provision of comprehensive employer branding services. An illustrated manual on cooperation has been developed by CPSRK and is available to all stakeholders. The manual describes processes through which interested firms can present themselves and market themselves to students of FOI. CPSRK and the firm then collaborate to design a custom visibility and branding solution.

6. OUTPUTS

CPSRK UBC activities have contributed to the production of a range of outputs including:

- ▶ Over 400 employer internship agreements for vocational internships and
- ▶ Over 300 job offers through the website and social media channels.

May 2014 – October 2016 online outputs:

- ▶ 811 total posts;
- ▶ 393 job adverts;
- ▶ 241 competitions and opportunities;
- ▶ 98 workshops and lectures promoted;
- ▶ 82 additional activities (vocational, volunteering opportunities etc.); and
- ▶ 23 alumni stories published.

Internships:

- ▶ Over 400 internships completed annually;
- ▶ Over 480 companies participating; and
- ▶ Over 400 student internship journals completed and processed.

Other outputs to date:

- ▶ Over 130 participations in career competitions or events supported;
- ▶ Over 20 career events hosted;
- ▶ Over 26,000 career web portal views per month;
- ▶ Over 80 career consultation processes conducted in academic year 2014/15;
- ▶ 7 newsletters produced since December 2014;
- ▶ 2 student start-ups incubated within startup@foi programme since October 2015 out of 6 teams that have applied. With teams who are not selected, work continues on developing their ideas into startups, connecting them with mentors, etc.; and
- ▶ 4 career centres supported in their establishment process since January 2015.

7. IMPACTS

CPSRK student survey data show that every third student respondent finds a job during their study, mainly in companies where they did their internships. Many students who did not find a job during their study become employed 3 – 6 months after graduating. The percentage of students who find job after graduation, ranges from generation to generation, however is in the range of 75 – 95%. After two years of operation, CPSRK follow-up with students found that one-third were transitioning to employment relationships with the firm of their internship destination. In the latest survey this figure was 50%. Whilst these results should be viewed with some caution as they do not represent a census of employment outcomes, these data are very encouraging for the CPSRK UBC approach.

Access to a combination of UBC activities, including internships and company visits, has improved the rating students assign to the connection between theory and the practical demands of industry careers.

Employer visibility has been improved in general and the capacity of firms to more clearly communicate their specific needs and challenges has smoothed the matching of potential recruits with these companies.

Since June 2015, CPSRK has collected feedback from more than 120 students that have used CPSRK services or participated in CPSRK activities. In summary, students report that they find CPSRK activities essential for their professional development as well as for making connections with the business world and future employers.



Support & Influencing factors

8. SUPPORTING MECHANISMS

CPSRK focuses on providing a range of interlinked operational mechanisms that create a bi-directional relationship of recognition, connection and information flows between students and local, national and regional companies. CPSRK is a linking intermediary in many of these activities. The innovative focus on presenting companies through customised profiles improves efficiency in translating the demand-driven dimension of UBC.

9. BARRIERS AND DRIVERS

Funding for the permanent employment of professionals to work in the career development roles central to the CPSRK mission is the major potential barrier to CPSRK continuing and enhancing its activities. Reliance on grant programmes to fund key roles and activities reduces strategic planning capacity and contributes to unwanted staff turnover. CPSRK is looking to expand corporate or company sponsorship opportunities and recently raised €6,000 from the private sector for hosting student competitions. Such an approach is starting to reduce financial burden on the university and the faculty.

An additional barrier is the capacity of current CPSRK employment levels to cope with growing demand. For example, a majority of companies would like to have their own competitions organised at FOI, have their own custom made career days (opportunities to be presented), but HR limitations restrict the overall potential scope of CPSRK to satisfy these rising demands. At this moment, insufficient (full-time equivalent) staff is available to develop additional activities.

Another barrier to UBC is the level of motivation of those students who are burdened by particularly extensive curriculum demands. These students have few hours per week to participate in additional activities. Nevertheless, student participation is growing every year.

The motivation of teaching staff to implement new activities within their long-running courses can also tend to be a challenge for UBC and a potential barrier of implementing new and agile career development methods within the existing content.

10. FUTURE CHALLENGES

A serious challenge is to ensure the sustainability of CPSRK staffing levels. New projects and collaborations under available European and national programmes are being sought.

Another challenge is to develop greater horizontal activities with other faculties and eventually other career centres, particularly in relation to the goal of inspiring the emergence of more career centres and interdisciplinary start-ups. CPSRK aim to eventually create a network of career centres focused on UBC at a regional and then European level.

11. CONTEXT

FOI specialisations - in business systems, data and knowledge systems and management, information and software engineering, economics of entrepreneurship, and innovation, informatics and audit systems - are well aligned with the needs of the local/regional business sector. The socio-economic context focusing on smart specialisation and technology-based start-up companies as a route out of the economic crises afflicting many European regions means demand for FOI graduates will likely grow. To the extent the CPSRK model reduces the transaction and induction costs associated with acquiring new skilled employees and shapes collaboration on education with commercial relevance, this can lead to a virtuous circle strengthening the context for UBC in the region.

12. KEY SUCCESS FACTORS

Coordinating the supply and demand sides of UBC at the level of individual students and firms, reducing costs and facilitating a culture of openness, connectedness and collaborative creativity.

The CPSRK model relies on buy-in from students, alumni, academics and industry. The UBC community constructed around these groups, with CPSRK as a focal point, is driving improved labour market outcomes. Underpinning this is the enthusiasm and commitment of participating stakeholders.

Demand for skilled labour, which drives employer commitment and participation, is essential. But this must be matched with outcomes and evidence that demonstrate the career development model being utilised (and the level of investment of time and resources it requires) is effective in meeting this demand - otherwise employer interest can be expected to rapidly dwindle.





Further Information

13. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

CPSRK conducts follow-up interviews/surveys with students involved in UBC focused coursework activities to assess the success of the project and its potential replication. It also collects annualised data on all of its activities and utilises these as a management information system for resource planning and strategic decision-making. The alumni questionnaire has been running since academic year 2012/2013 and serves as a basis for monitoring the employment rate of FOI students during their study. An additional survey is being conducted 3-6 months after students graduate, which provides a more precise estimate of students' employability.

Each year CPSRK publishes a comprehensive report which documents all activities conducted within the academic year, which is submitted to the Faculty Management Board and Faculty Council, along with a plan for the upcoming academic year. CPSRK has an 'open doors' policy where any FOI employee or student can propose an improvement of existing activities or the implementation of something new.

14. SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES

CPSRK has a strategic plan and is actively working toward developing a greater financial independence. In particular, programmes to encourage and facilitate small to medium sized firm sponsorships of events is starting to reduce reliance on central faculty budgets and programme grants for specific activities. CPSRK aims to apply for additional EU or nationally funded projects in order to further develop its activities and employ more professionals within the centre.

15. TRANSFERABILITY

The model of CPSRK is highly transferable to other faculties and other universities internationally. The CPSRK is currently mentoring the Faculty of Agriculture within UNIZG, which aims to adopt the same model. Counselling is being provided to four other career centres within and outside UNIZG. In addition, some horizontal collaboration activities with career centres in other universities help to share good practices.

16. AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Recognition of the successes of the CPSRK model can be seen in the fact that CPSRK has signed an agreement to mentor a career development centre (Faculty of Agriculture, UNIZG) and is providing informal counselling to four other career centres in three different universities.

Within the university CPSRK has won awards for best promotional materials, most approachable staff and most interactive promotional space for three consecutive years (<http://smotra.unizg.hr/en/>).

17. LINKS

CPSRK information in English <http://www.foi.unizg.hr/en/about-us/departments/cpsrk>

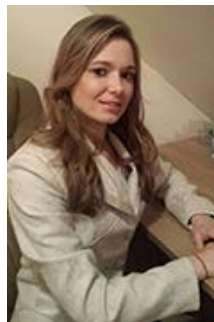
CPSRK website <http://cpsrk.foi.hr/>

FOI newsletter <http://cpsrk.foi.hr/newsletteri>

18. CONTACT PERSONS



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