



SIMPLE

GOOD PRACTICES OF ALUMNI CENTRES

Project SIMPLE study



Co-found by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

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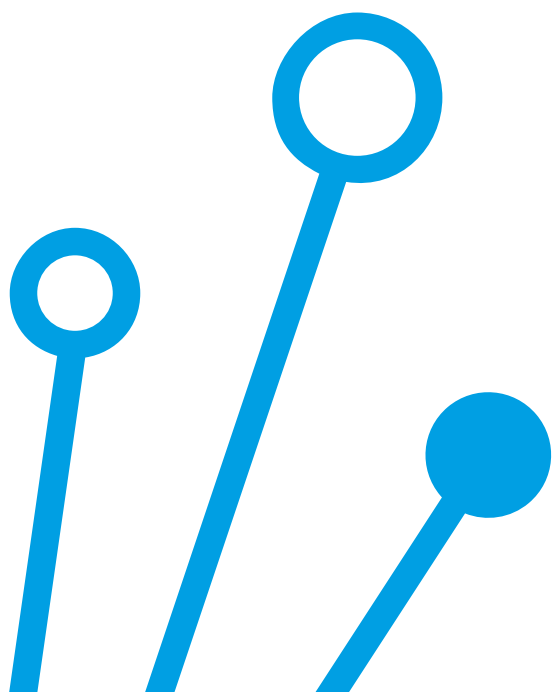
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Abbreviations & Acronyms

A	Alumni
ACs	Alumni Centres
BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria
CASE	The Council for Advancement and Support of Education
CCs	Career Centres
CS	Career Services
CULS	The Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ETH	The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology
EU	The European Union
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GAU	The Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (The University of Göttingen), Germany
GRIPS	The National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies
HAA	The Harvard Alumni Association
HEIs	Higher Educational Institutions
HTE	Half Time Equivalent
HU Berlin	The Humboldt University Berlin, Germany
IAAS	The International Association of Agricultural Students
ICARS	The International CASE Alumni Relations Surveys
INSEAD	The European Institute of Business Administration
IPB	Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia
ISSS	The International Student and Scholar Service
KU	Kasetsart University, Thailand
KULeuven	The University of Leuven, Belgium
LU	The University of Leicester, United Kingdom
NAPA	The High School in the city of Napa, California

N°	Number
PCUAD	The Association of Private College and University Alumni Directors
PSU	The Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
ROI	Return of Investment
RUA	The Royal University of Agriculture, Cambodia
SIMPLE	Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education
SLU	The Swedish University of Life Sciences, Sweden
UBB	The University of Battambang, Cambodia
UBir	The University of Birmingham, United Kingdom
UG	The University of Groningen, The Netherlands
UGent	The Ghent University, Belgium
UK	The United Kingdom
ULG	The University of Liège, Belgium
UNAV	The University of Navarra, Spain
UNTAD	Tadulako University, Indonesia
U.Porto	The University of Porto, Portugal
UoC	The University of Copenhagen, Denmark
UOS	The University of Sheffield, The United Kingdom
USA	The United States of America
UU	The University of Uppsala, Sweden
WULS	The Warsaw University of Life Sciences, Poland
WUR	Wageningen University and Research, the Netherlands

Abstract

The ultimate goal of the project “Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education” (SIMPLE), financed by EACEA (2016-2019) is to encourage cooperation of the academic sector (HEIs) with the professional sector in the area of agriculture and life sciences in the universities of three selected Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand), leading to the enhanced employability of these universities’ alumni.

In the first phase, a study was undertaken to come up with a document highlighting actual specific best practices with respect to the European University Alumni Centres in order to be more successful in connecting, informing, inspiring and serving alumni, getting them engaged longterm with their Alumni Centre (ACs) and Alma Mater.

A group of selected European universities (20), mainly active in the domain of agriculture and life sciences, has been involved in the assessment of the organisation, activities and services rendered by their respective Alumni Centres in order to identify the best Alumni Centres’ practice recommendations. Consequently, the following steps have been taken: a study was made of the AC Alumni websites and a survey carried out of the AC personnel re their perceived strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats (in a so-called SWOT analysis). Based on the results of this work and the lessons learnt thereby, a set of specific best practices was identified specifying goals and how to realize them, supported by good examples.

Most ACs in Europe have recently started gathering data sufficient to allow us rate their success. It is thus possible to identify best practice, based on the personal (qualitative) perceptions of the AC officers and the SIMPLE Project team members, supported by recommendations found in the literature. The ACs engage in generally the same type of activities and services but their approaches differ a lot (in terms of numbers, content, frequency, etc.) depending on the number of officers and volunteers involved, the available budget and logistic facilities, the life span of the Centre, the priorities set and/or cultural aspects.

According to our assessment undertaken within European universities, ACs now give special attention to the following operational practices: stability in staff working at the ACs, the involvement of volunteers in academic and networking matters, the management of the alumni database and AC websites, the benchmarking of AC activities, the efficient use of social media for communication, welloutlined and sustainable support to alumni chapters and attracting new students, graduates and young alumni into permanent membership.

1 INTRODUCTION

We often hear about the global financial situation, sluggish economic growth, and rising unemployment. Unfortunately, this is the situation which new graduates find themselves facing when looking for a job. The best career advice is to have good networks. The real challenge is continuing the perseverance and confidence of these networks and the key for universities and their graduates is to provide and seek work experience. This advice seems like common sense. However, gaining work experience can influence alumni careers and help gain vital experience in competitive industries. When the time comes to apply for full time work, this work experience can make the difference, setting alumni apart from their competitors.

For decades, Career Services and Alumni Relations have operated as solitary entities in order to increase placement, career readiness, alumni engagement and donations. However, in the past five years, colleges and universities have been leveraging the mutual interest between students and alumni to connect these centres and drive higher engagement and outcomes (CampusTap, 2017).

Therefore, the ultimate goal of the SIMPLE (“Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education”) project is to identify how to put cooperation between the academic sector (HEIs) and the professional sector in the area of agriculture and life sciences into practice in the universities¹ of three selected Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand), leading to enhanced employability of those universities’ alumni (Appendix 1). The proposed channels to achieve this are, a priori:

- **Supporting networking** and providing the link among graduates (alumni) and employers by establishing/re-organizing the central **Alumni and Career Centres** and **Platforms for Cooperation with Professional Sector**;
- Improvement of curriculum of study programmes at Higher Education Institute (HEIs) in selected Asian universities by introducing compulsory **internships** leading to more practical knowledge and better skills of the alumni;
- **Enhancing soft skills** of the Asian students.

Intensified contact between the academic sector and non-academic bodies (enterprises) will lead to more innovative and relevant curricula. Thanks to such contacts, enterprises will be able to indicate more clearly the knowledge and skills they expect from alumni.

This report on examples of good practices in Alumni Centres first presents for each of the Alumni Centres a consecutive summary of the internet reports’ studies including main findings and recommendations, and the results of the assessment of available studies. The next four chapters describe the objectives and methodology used, the survey results and the main lessons learnt. In the overall conclusion, one will find the proposed list of specific best practices for Alumni Centres followed by some recommendations for further study.

¹ Cambodia - Royal University of Agriculture (RUA) and University of Battambang (UBB)

Indonesia - Bogor Agricultural University (IPB) and Tadulako University (UNTAD)

Thailand - Kasetsart University (KU) and Prince of Songkla University (PSU)



1.1 Brief Overview of Alumni Centre Reports

There are many reports edited by universities and organisations dealing, among other things, with alumni matters. After going through all these documents, the SIMPLE Project team decided to make a choice of documents covering common advice for best practices given by either different ACs of universities (based in the US and Europe) or by the professional organisations dealing with alumni matters (CASE and NAPA) and of which many European universities are members. Some reports discuss the best practices for certain specific activities/services delivered, others are focus on global approaches to the organisation of Alumni Centres, and some cover more specifically the quality requirements for personnel, Alumni Chapters and volunteers.

1.1.1 General Introduction

The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE)² recommends continuously updating alumni databases, pairing its users with their Alma Mater, maintaining a list of hand-selected alumni who can be involved in high-profile events, to expand the volunteer-pool continuously, offering written guidelines and job descriptions (student recruitment, mentoring, student employability, etc.) (Yashraj, 2016), also create a broad range of different volunteer opportunities, to organise fewer but more successful and low cost events per year (CASE, 2011).

There is currently limited evidence concerning the most effective models of alumni volunteer engagement, and the scale of impact that graduates achieve for institutions. Simply attending events, however, does not appear to foster a path towards other philanthropic activities (Yashraj, 2016).

Alumni professionals should collaborate with their colleagues in development, communications and advancement services to maximize resource decisions regarding alumni engagement, performing roles serving their institutions and other alumni, including championing the institution's mission, encouraging and fostering alumni involvement with their institutions, building longterm relationships with alumni and other constituencies and collaborating critically in partnerships with admissions, career services and student affairs (CASE, 2005).

To become successful one should use more and varied channels and post or share more frequently, knowing that Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram remain the most widely used social channels in which more and more images and videos are showing up (Mack & Stoner, 2016).

CASE recommend to consider the following measures for benchmarking: number of members, event attendees, and new events offered, number overseas events versus domestic events, amount of letters, e-mails and phone calls received (in-ward bound), measures of responsiveness (time needed to reply), current/collapsed email addresses, student participation in campus (indoor) events and recruitment number of prospective alumni.

To increase the success of AC, it is possible to organize social events for young alumni, career-focused events, monthly podcasts showing examples of academic talent and affinity chapters, international career books and dinners to

² The Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) is the professional organization for advancement professionals at all levels who work in alumni relations, communications and marketing, development and advancement services. CASE's membership includes more than 3,600 colleges, universities, independent institutes and secondary schools in more than 80 countries. Their International CASE Alumni Relations Surveys (ICARS), provides continuously updated measurement standards for those interested in alumni relations.



bridge the gap between students and alumni (Yashraj, 2016).

The Napa Group³ recommends that the ACs, in order to become more successful, should give more attention to information, data management and analytics (benchmarking), should focus their efforts on market-related activities that have the greatest impact guaranteeing lifetime relationships, should position themselves as “portals” between alumni and the Alma Mater via programming of events and communications and should broaden alumni engagement, even if resources are in decline.

In another document, the Napa Group (2017a) highlighted that strategic communication approaches and plans are central to reaching the multiple audiences of an alumni association for any activities, and to building and fostering alumni relationships with the university, the association itself and each other. Therefore, they advise ACs to ensure they get the right message to the right people at the right time.

In this second document, the Napa Group also advised ACs fostering alumni connectivity by offering information with university news, events and issues, along with association activities and programmes on their websites and through social media. They also noticed that despite the high-tech rage powering alumni networks, alumni magazines have value at many institutions and are becoming more strategically focused to boost loyalty, participation and further contributions.

1.1.2 Alumni Chapters Introduction

Alumni Chapters are non-centralised groups of graduates, usually with a low number of members with similar interests, cultural background and/or the same geographical region. Cooperation between Alumni Chapters and Alumni Centres is highly recommended.

In the Guidelines for setting-up an Alumni Chapter the following recommendations have been given (GRIPS, 2017). To be successful, an Alumni Chapter should base their programme on a mixture of activities, creating the opportunity for as many people as possible to contribute.

Key activities of an Alumni Chapter should include the organisation of a minimum of one or two events per year to which all alumni in the region are invited, acting as a contact point for the university in their country or region providing a university link for recent graduates returning home, offering informal advice to alumni moving into their area, providing information to prospective students, answering alumni queries about the university, the admission process, financial aid opportunities and curricula, contributing to the university’s Alumni Newsletter at least once a year, occasionally doing some promotional activities for the university, acting as a local contact point for the university, offering advice and assisting the university with new student recruitment and keeping their university’s Alumni Centre informed about the latest developments and activities organised by them.

The Alumni Centre website should provide a forum for telling alumni in other parts of the world about the Alumni Chapters’ activities and should include a short feature on the Alumni Chapters’ events on their website together with some good photos.

³ The NAPA Group has its headquarters in Canada, Novato – works together with CASE (The Napa Group, 2017b).



The Harvard Alumni Association⁴ Best Practices Handbook (HAA, 2017c) describes the following recommendations for volunteer work and finding new volunteers:

- To identify committed volunteers one should create a check-off box on all mailings for people who want to volunteer and distribute handouts at all events with a concise description of what the volunteer for an Alumni Chapter can expect from the job and including a list of existing Club/Alumni Chapters specifying their tasks and time involvement.
- To keep the volunteers involved, the ACs should keep track of volunteers enabling them to identify who is suffering from “burn-out,” and who feels “wasted” in their volunteer position and give recognition or reward to the volunteers.
- HAA’s recommendations concerning the organisation of Alumni Chapters’ events are to create targeted events and communications to attract alumni groups who they are not otherwise reaching. Good communication is the single most important element of a Chapter’s effort to attract and sustain membership.
- The website is the most valuable tool for communicating efficiently with members and with non-members. Newsletters should be published on a regular schedule. The first newsletter of the year could be sent to all alumni, and subsequent issues only to Alumni Chapter members. Newsletters should be as “readable,” interesting, and informative as possible about the Chapter’s purposes and activities. It is helpful if Chapter members with experience in journalism, advertising, or public relations are willing to take responsibility for putting the newsletter together.

1.1.3 Good Practises in Career Services

It is important to ensure that the ACs’ definition of employability is understood by all parties involved in its career services (employers, academic staff, career advisory staff, students and parents). In particular, there is a need to ensure this definition is aligned with employer expectations and regularly updated.

Career staff should place more responsibility for employability skills with the students themselves and place them at the centre of the process. The Career Centre’s staff and its Alma Mater are responsible for investigating and tracking student opinion to better appreciate the student perspective on employability skills (BIS, 2011) and consequently setting-up adequate opportunities to optimize students’ employability skills.

As students should have developed their employability throughout their study period (UNICA network, 2017), ACs should provide early on workshops for the students’ needs (Young, 2014) and support sufficient and more adequate training in work-related skills during the study period as a high number of employers cannot find the right mix of skills in the job market (UNICA network, 2017).

To enhance the level of adequate training, more opportunities should be offered for students to gain accreditation for employability activities both within and outside the curriculum. ACs should connect with curricula development authorities at the university requesting to initiate cooperative education for integrating courses in business deve-

4 The Harvard Alumni Association (HAA, 2017b): The Harvard Alumni Association (HAA) maintains and enhances a highly engaged, vibrant community of alumni and friends worldwide. HAA was previously known as the Associated Harvard Alumni. The latter was formed on July 1, 1965, as an amalgamation of the Harvard Alumni Association (est. 1840) and the Associated Harvard Clubs (est. 1897). The HAA is the official association of all alumni of Harvard University. Its regular members include recipients of all degrees granted by the University and Radcliffe College, as well as the members of all University Faculties.



lopment and entrepreneurship, work experience, work placements and internships into degree programmes as core elements, enhancing “soft skills” that increase employability in all curricula of the different study programmes (BIS, 2011).

ACs should review/update their policy in the context of their career services, taking up the following recommendations:

In general:

- Enhance ongoing innovation and practice sharing amongst career advisory staff of the ACs (BIS, 2011).
- Offer training to career staff on the needs of international students. Provide staff training on cross-cultural communication, immigration policy and tips on working with international students - offer overseas trips to career staff.
- Promote collaboration between career services, the International Student and Scholar Service (ISSS), international students, employer relations and alumni associations (Young, 2014).
- Be consistent across subject areas in enhancing employability. Ensure access to and engagement with all students, by incorporating a minimum level of employability skills into all subject areas.
- Further explore different models of funding employability activities to be able to continue the provision of services in a challenging economic environment.

Dealing with employers:

- Further foster and develop relations between employers and career advisory staff.
- Introduce a career advisory staff practice of marketing a package of services to employers to engage them in a stronger relationship with the institution.
- Track employer views on required skills in a separate study to ensure that future policy takes account of their changing expectations and needs.
- Involve alumni in actively assisting students by providing an advice network and enhancing relations with employers (BIS, 2011).

Delivering career services for students (Young, 2014):

- Increase the visibility of career services for international students (a website for international student career services, E-newsletter for international student careers, blogs and social media).
- Enhance networking and create opportunities to connect with international alumni and student-friendly employers.
- Develop more online resources for international student career development.
- Offer workshops on job search skills tailored to the needs of (international) students, make lists of employers who hire (international) students, focus on global career development.
- Develop/offer employer guides, handbooks, workshops, webinars, newsletters, and meetings.



1.1.4 Summary of Alumni Centre Experiences

The main lessons learned from the information found in the literature can be summarised as follows.

- The best general and specific practices in ACs identified by different organisations/institutions are rather uniform but the recommendations made for putting these best practices into practice are not uniform. The differences in approach are probably due to cultural, ethnic, geographical and/or institutional differences.
- ACs should give special attention to the use of social media, the setup of Alumni Chapters and career services. The multiple use of different social media as sources of communication is growing in such a way that alumni personnel are bowed under the burden of excess. Consequently, ACs might succeed in bringing down the workload involved by limiting the number of different social media used, reducing the information posted and by attracting volunteers. Nowadays, as universities are receiving more and more students, coming from different parts of the world or from other areas in the country, situated at a great distance from the Alma Mater, the role of Alumni Chapters becomes more and more important in assuring that graduated students stay connected to their Alma Mater.
- ACs/CCs should prepare their (international) students for the job market during their studies. Delivering a set of career services during the study period, stimulating networking with possible employers (including alumni), integrating an internship and a course in entrepreneurship skills into the study programme and offering training possibilities immediately after graduation, helping students in developing appropriate professional skills and identifying the type of career they wish to develop.
- Finally yet importantly, it has been noticed that few Alumni/Career Centres are evaluating the performance of their activities. Most of the ACs identify their successes based on personal perceptions. Therefore, reports of benchmark studies are rather difficult to find. In a few reports, one could notice that the Alumni Centres are limiting their benchmarking studies by using a small set of variables to measure on average 2 to 3 possible successful outcomes (the number of attendants, number of volunteers, percentage of registered alumni) according to the activities/services they have on offer.

2 OBJECTIVES

The main goal of this assessment study is to present a set of examples of good practices with respect to university Alumni Centres in order to become more successful in connecting, informing, inspiring and serving alumni, getting them engaged long-term with their Alumni Centres and Alma Mater.

The specific objectives are the following:

- To summarise the available literature in the domain of good practices for Alumni Centres (ACs);
- To analyse the ACs' and their Career Services' success versus ineffective operation;
- To identify threats which ACs may face;
- To propose the new opportunities and strategies for ACs;
- To underline specific good practices of ACs.

3 METHODOLOGY

Research approach

To reach the above objectives, a two-dimensional research approach was chosen, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods. Firstly, an in-depth assessment of published reports on the internet was undertaken to come up with an overview of examples of good practices in Alumni Centres. Special attention was given to reports delivering guidelines of good practices in Alumni Centres.

Secondly, an assessment of the Alumni Centres' practices at different universities in Europe was performed through the study of their Alumni Centres' websites and, after phone-contact, by sending two surveys to the responsible officers to complete. Before sending the surveys to the Alumni Officers, the head of the office was personally contacted by phone and/or e-mail, informing them of the project and its objectives, explaining for which type of surveys their voluntary support was needed and requesting their willingness for participating in the two surveys.

Thirdly, a first qualitative SWOT analysis survey was elaborated to identify the personally perceived internal weaknesses, strengths and external threats, which ACs officers noticed, along with any opportunities they see for their Alumni and Centres (Appendix 2). Of all the selected and contacted universities, 20 universities agreed to participate and were included in the website study, out of which 15 universities sent their answers to the questionnaire survey (SWOT analysis).

Fourthly, a second quantitative survey for a benchmarking study was developed in order to statistically substantiate the ACs practices at different universities in Europe by benchmarking their organisation, services rendered and activities organised (Appendix 3). The resulting questionnaire was distributed among 20 universities, but unfortunately, only two universities fully filled out the questionnaire completely.

The results obtained during the survey of European universities were discussed in a focus group composed of 15 SIMPLE Project representatives at the workshop, "Best practices of Alumni Centres," which was held at the Ghent University in Belgium in June 2017. During the workshop the project team focused on deepening the study of the best practices of Alumni Centres together with a number of outstanding international experts and principal importance was given to the partners' experience from Asian universities.

Last, but not least, the final practical recommendations in the form of Tips and Tricks were identified during the Training of Alumni Centre staff of six Asian universities who selected the most practical recommendations during their training.

The course for staff of Asian Alumni Centres in Vienna was organised within the project SIMPLE Erasmus+ KA2 at BOKU, Austria in October 2017. On the course, representatives of project partner universities selected the most practical recommendations for ACs which could support their activities in the effective inclusion of, and further cooperation with, graduates.



Selection criteria

The following criteria were set to select the participating universities: the selected university should be preferentially active in the field of life sciences (min. 60% of the sampled universities) and by preference a European university (min. 90% of the sample). The ACs should deliver Career Services and/or work closely together with the Career Centre, a high number of alumni (min. 80% of the universities with a number higher than 20,000 alumni) and an alumni website, representing clearly what they are doing and how, being available in a language mastered by the desktop study analyst. The Alumni Centre should be by preference a mature Centre (existing >5 years).

The assessment of the AC websites was based on the information gathered through the website for a set of variables (Table 1). In this way, one could identify the differences and similarities in the organisation of the Alumni Centres and the activities and services rendered.

Table 1 Variables used in the assessment study of the Alumni Centres' websites

Type of information	Variables
Facts and figures for the university	Number of Faculties, Departments (only for universities without different faculties), chairs, campuses, Centres/institutes/ schools/ businesses/start-ups, satellite universities, number of students and PhDs , % international students
Organisation of the Alumni Centre	Centralised or not, sub-networks: N°, type (at faculty level, programme, departmental, city, country level, regional, clubs, Alumni chapters and/or inter-university level; presence international Alumni Centre), mission document and policy documents, active since, N° staff at central level (FTE equiv.), N° staff at faculty level, presence of board/council, N° Alumni ambassadors
Alumni in figures	Total N°, N° registered, % international alumni
Website	Languages, page structures, attractiveness, easy-to-scroll, type of information given, etc.
Database	Registration facilities, accessibility (whom for what), fees, success rate, Alumni Card with profits
Fundraising	Non-profit organisation, tax deductible, type of sponsorships, etc.
Events	Types, place, organised by whom, frequency, etc.
Communication	Types (social media, newsletter, e-mail, phone, etc.)
Career Centre	Integrated or cooperating, staff N°, specific website, type of services rendered, accessibility for whom and how, etc.

Most of the preselected European universities are situated in the North, West or South of Europe. The websites of the universities in Eastern Europe did not present their (detailed) information in English or in another language



mastered by the analyst and could therefore not be used in the sample. The pre-selected universities were contacted by email and/or by phone.

A qualitative SWOT analysis survey was elaborated to identify the personally perceived internal weaknesses and strengths and external threats AC officers noticed and opportunities they see for their Alumni Centres (Appendix 2). Of all the selected and contacted universities, 20 universities agreed to participate and have been included in the website study, out of which 15 universities sent their answers to the questionnaire survey (SWOT analysis).

Table 2 List of participating universities to the questionnaire survey

The final list of universities selected for inclusion in the study and accompanying surveys		
	Name of the university	Country
1	The University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences (BOKU), Vienna	Austria
2	Ghent University (UGent)	Belgium
3	The University of Leuven (KULeuven)	Belgium
4	The University of Liege (ULG)	Belgium
5	The Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CULS)	Czech Republic
6	The University of Copenhagen (UoC)	Denmark
7	The Graduate Business School, with three campuses in France, Singapore and Abu Dhabi (INSEAD)	France
8	The Humboldt University of Berlin (HU Berlin)	Germany
9	The University of Göttingen (GAU)	Germany
10	The University of Birmingham (UBir)	Great Britain
11	The University of Leicester (UL)	Great Britain
12	Lincoln University (LU)	Poland
13	The Warsaw University of Life Sciences (WULS-SGGW)	Poland
14	The University of Porto (U.Porto)	Portugal
15	The University of Navarra (UNAV)	Spain
16	The Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU)	Sweden
17	Uppsala University (UU)	Sweden
18	The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Zurich	Switzerland
19	The University of Groningen (UG)	The Netherlands
20	Wageningen University and Research (WUR)	The Netherlands

Terminology Used

During the Kick-off meeting of the SIMPLE Project, held at the Czech University of Life Sciences, Prague (CULS), the Czech Republic in October 2016 and in preparation for the Assessment study on examples of best practices in Alumni Centres, the participating universities decided to agree on specific definitions to be used within the project, as it emerged that different countries and institutes had different understandings of some key concepts. The following terminology was agreed to be adopted within the SIMPLE Project:

- **Alumni:** all graduates of a university (including Bachelor, Master, Master after Master and PhD levels) and former students who spent more than 1 month at the university for an academic activity (e.g. exchange student).
- **Alumni Centre (AC):** a university Centre registering alumni, providing information, inspiration and services for alumni and involving alumni.
- **Alumni member:** a University alumnus/a registered at the institute's Alumni Centre/Association.
- **Career Centre (CC):** a University Centre providing consultations, guidance and support for students and alumni for their professional life (e.g. CV checking, providing job opportunities, contacts in the professional sector).
- **Intern:** position of a student in an organisation, with or without payment, to gain work experience or satisfy requirements for an academic qualification.
- **Internship:** activity or programme for an intern
- **Platform for Cooperation with Professional Sector:** a network between universities and the professional sector aimed at cooperation (e.g. members of advisory boards of study programmes, providing guest lectures, offers of internships and jobs, joint research activities, recruitment of students/graduates).
- **Trainee:** a trainee is commonly known as an individual taking part in a training programme or a graduate programme within a company after having graduated from university or college.

4 EXPERIENCES OF ALUMNI CENTRES

4.1 Assessment of Alumni Centre Practices at Different Universities

This chapter gives an overview of all the universities analysed, based on the questionnaire surveys. The results focus on the most important fields of AC strategy, such as the organisation of ACs (position at university and services delivered), registration and database management, best practices via chief communication channels - websites, newsletters, social media and the organisation of events. According to the results of the study some ACs integrated CCs or closely cooperated with them, thus the most effective activities of CCs are also included.

The main activities in common among the different participating ACs in the assessment study can be sub-grouped into four categories: connecting, informing, serving and involving alumni. Registration of the alumni is a priority concern of all universities. To keep them registered (connected) the ACs set up different types of activities to inform and serve. In common, they all deliver career services, communicating daily with their alumni through different channels (websites, social media, blogs, e-mails and the phone) and organise social and academic events in situ. Many of them also organise events in other places than the Alma Mater (in or out of the country), in many cases with the help of their Alumni Chapters. They all publish Newsletters and/or News Flashes on their website and/or News Magazines keeping their alumni informed. The ways they involve their alumni vary considerably. Many universities benefit from external involvement (Alumni Chapters) but internal involvement (e.g. guest-lecturing, offers of internships) should also be supported

During the assessment study the SIMPLE project team identified some specific differences among the ACs.

1) The Organisation of ACs

The organisation of ACs is highly diverse – from Alumni Centres at central level to ACs at faculty level and Alumni Chapters. One of the key factors is cooperation between ACs and Chapters at all levels. Delivering career-linked services are also very essential (Fig. 1).

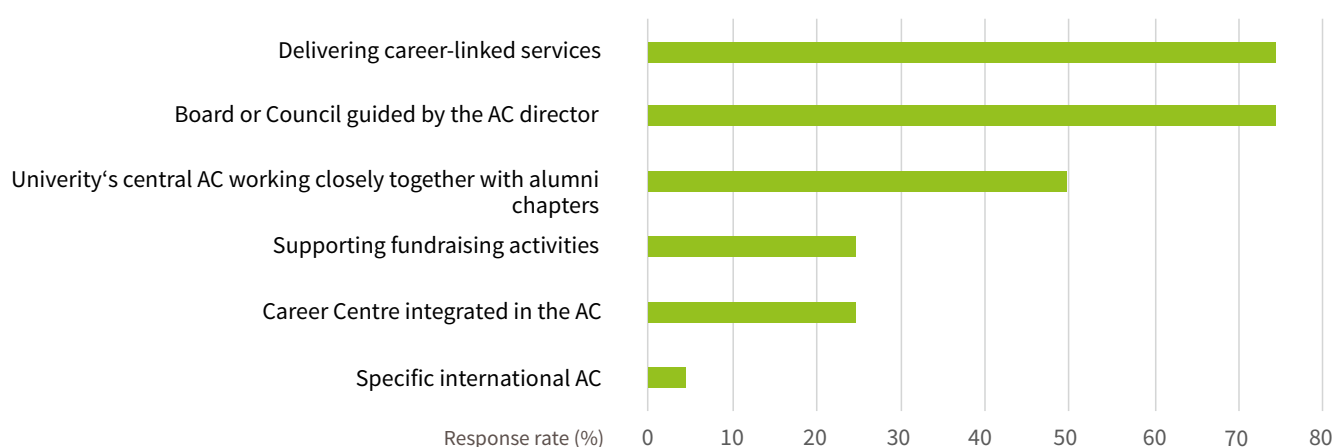


Fig. 1 Organisation of ACs at different universities

The majority of the universities have a board or council and deliver career-like services, and over 25% of the selected universities have integrated their CC with their AC. There is, however, still a big gap between the central ACs and Alumni Chapters, as only 50% are working closely together and cooperation, based on a study of the literature, is one of the key factors in the sustainable growth of ACs.

Personnel Employment at ACs

Personal empowerment depends on overall strategy of each ACs and high variability was found among universities. At central level, the number of personnel varies from three to 21 (on average 6). At lower level within the university on average, one person is contracted per Alumni Centre.

Volunteers

Internal volunteers: On average per academic year 10 graduates and five alumni volunteers were involved, chiefly in events and follow-up on the AC's Facebook page.

As regards the number of external volunteers: This varied a lot between the different universities (on average 8 per 10,000 registered alumni). Universities who involved their alumni in guest lecturing, internship offers and Alumni Chapters had in general a large pool of volunteers though some are not continuously involved.

2) Registration and Databases of Alumni

Registration in an alumni database is one of the most important steps in getting new alumni involved; therefore, ACs must ensure easy access and attractiveness. Important also is the promotion of the benefits for alumni; widely used is the Alumni Card, access to the alumni database and updated information about their Alma Mater (Fig. 2).

Registration of alumni is usually through the AC websites (95%) and surprisingly only 10% of ACs offer registering through LinkedIn even though the importance of social media is growing. Most of the ACs take a specific financial approach with a registration fee (50%), 15% offering a lower fee to young alumni, so they are motivated to join the ACs even if they are only starting their career. In some ACs, a fee is not requested at all or they request payment only for extra services.

ACs also pay attention to the easy use of alumni services, alumni could specify during registration if they want to receive newsletters by email (30%) or put confidentiality note during registration for a more personalised approach.

A high amount of ACs (75%) attract alumni by providing Alumni Cards with benefits. Access to the database is mainly for alumni officers but in 35% of cases this is also granted to registered alumni and to all members who pay a registration fee (25%). A very useful approach is the offering of a life-long e-mail address (30% of selected universities) which enables guaranteed sustainable communication.



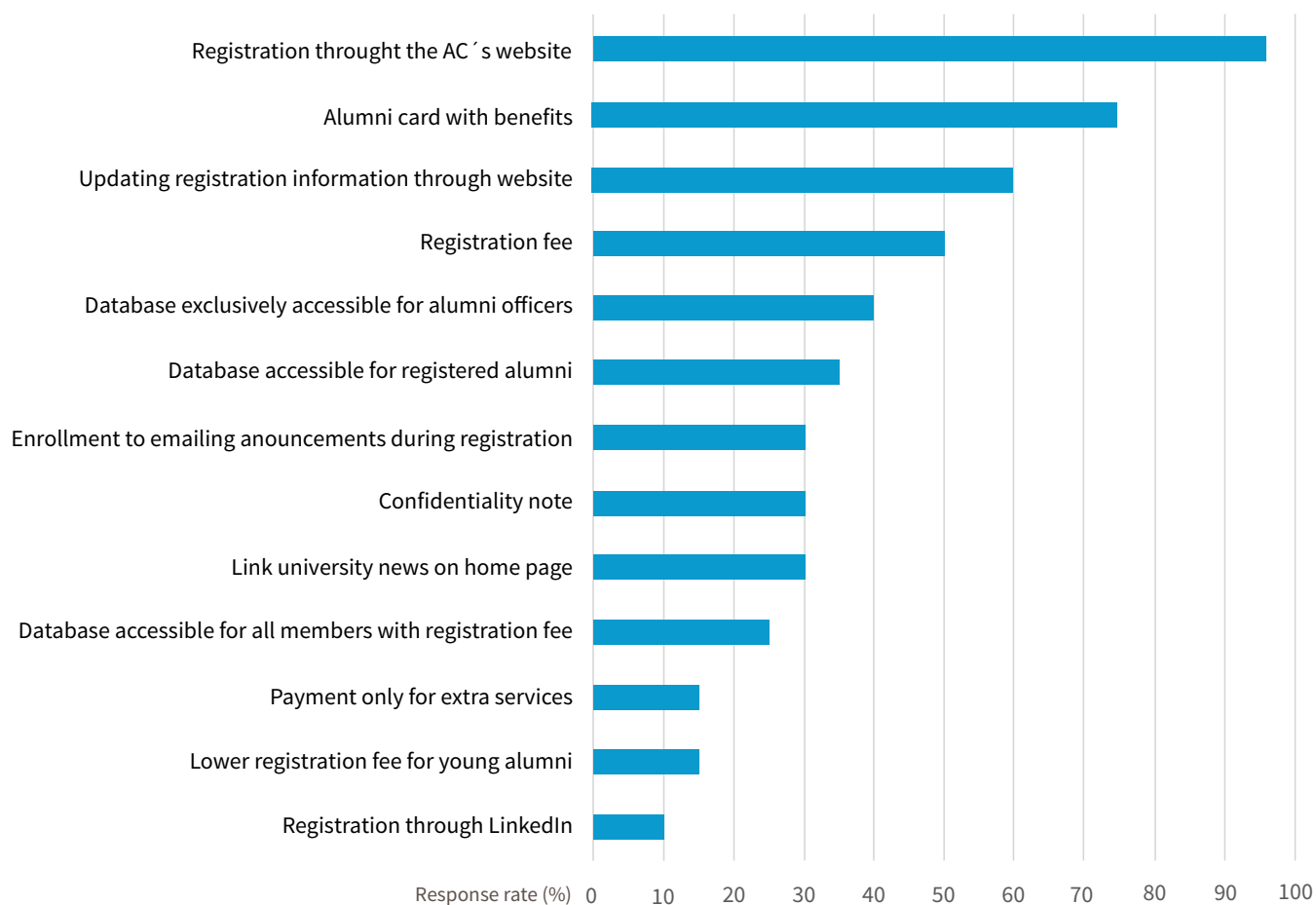


Fig. 2 Registration and databases of alumni: differences in approach to registration and database availability (%)

3) Websites

Promotion and registration through websites is an essential tactic for Alumni Centres. This assumption is supported by the results, as all universities procure easy access to their alumni websites directly from the main page of the university. On the AC website 'the mission and objectives' report is available in the case of 80% of respondents; moreover, all websites are well-organised and more than 70% continuously updated.

The English language is a central requirement for the internationalisation of ACs and getting attention from alumni from other countries; this is highly valuable, especially in these days of intense globalisation and high mobility of students. High attention given to this issue is confirmed by a majority of web pages being provided also in English; 80% provide all pages (main and sub) of their AC website in English, and 15% have at least the home page in English (Fig. 3). Five percent have no information in English, being only published in the language spoken at the university and in the country.

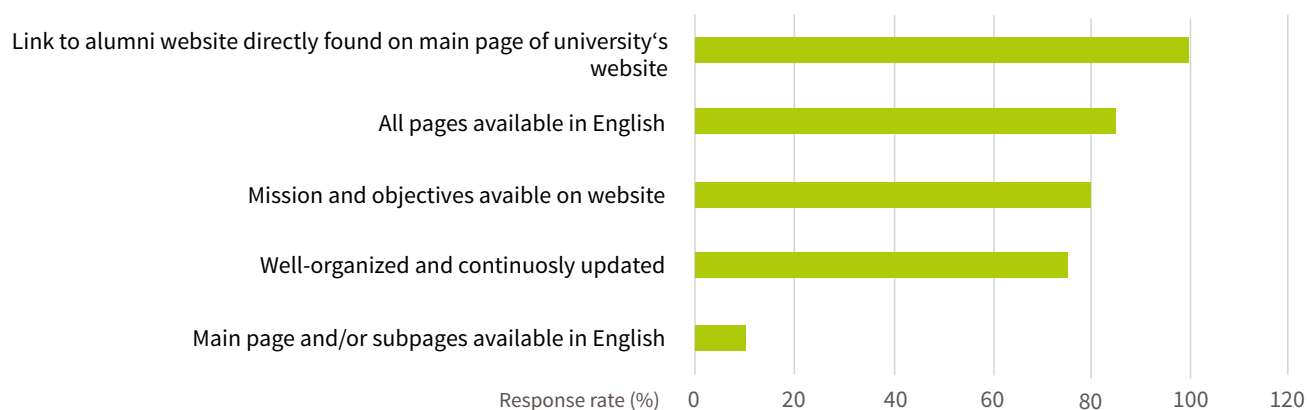


Fig. 3. Website layout: language and structure of the websites (%)

4) Newsletters

The purpose of a newsletter is to engage alumni, keeping them informed, updating information from university and other alumni with easy access to its target group. Newsletters also help with creating a friendly environment and community feeling.

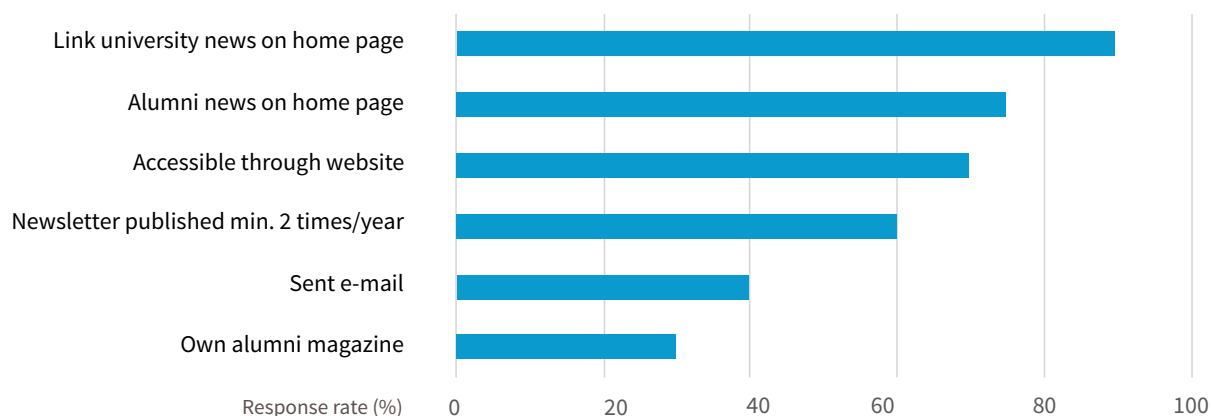


Fig. 4 Newsletters, Alumni Magazine, Alumni News: frequency and main channels (%)

Regular Newsletters are published at most of the universities with a typical frequency of two editions per year minimum). Seventy percent of Newsletters are published online on AC websites and 90% of the AC websites are linked to the Alma Mater News. Less effective is sending Newsletters directly to the alumni by email, and only 40% of ACs use this method of promotion (Fig. 4). An alumni magazine of their own is produced by 30% of ACs.

5) Social media

All the main social media are used for promotion and keeping alumni informed about their Alma Mater (Fig. 5).

According to the questionnaires, social media are a key strategy as all Alumni Centres maintain these channels of

communication. The absolute leader in social media for ACs in Europe is Facebook as it is used by 100% of ACs, followed by LinkedIn (85%) and Twitter (70%). Even though WhatsApp has been growing fast in recent times, the results of the study showed that only half of the respondents now use WhatsApp. An on-line platform was used by 35% of respondents. For promotion and reminding people of past events YouTube is also widely used (65%).

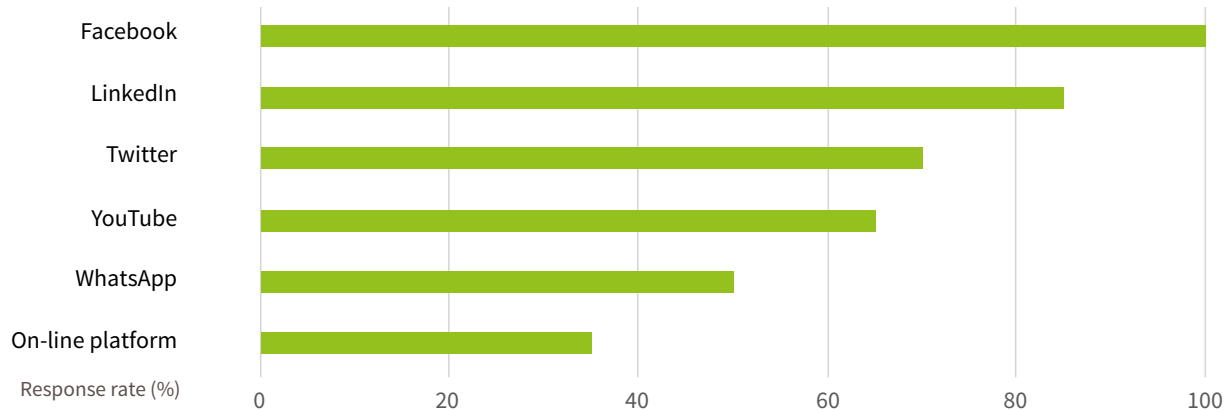


Fig. 5 Social media and other modern communication strategies used for promotion and updating information by ACs

6) Events

Highly valuable activities on the part of the ACs are events for alumni which support a sense of community, the engagement of alumni, new connections in the same fields of interest and the connections of the university to the professional sector, enabling further cooperation based on personal affiliation.

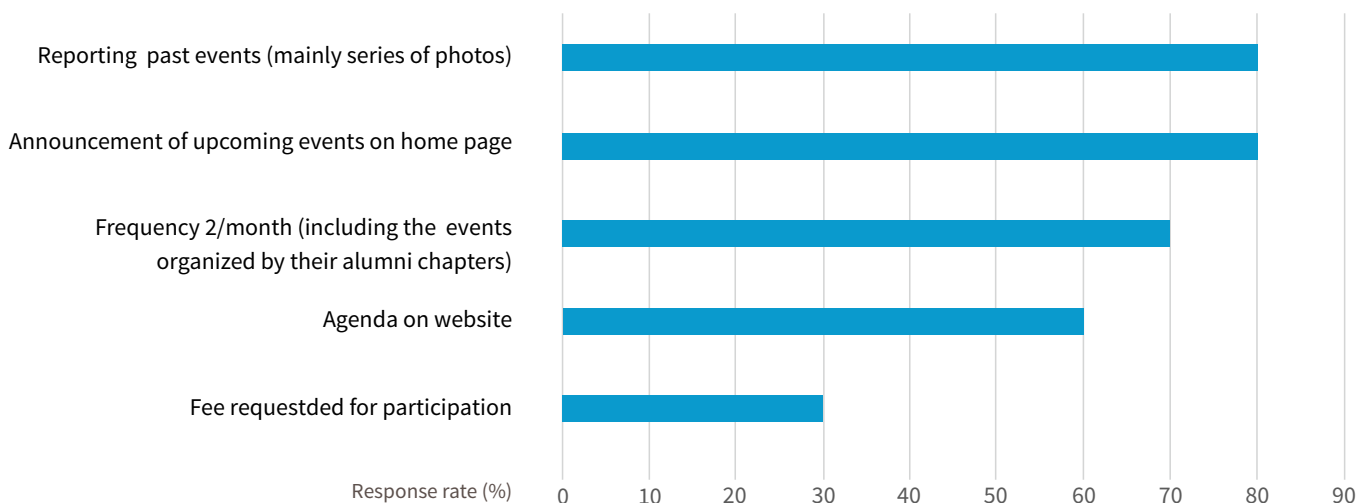


Fig. 6 Events of ACs: promotion, frequency and other requirements (%)

In general, to ensure the high attendance of alumni the main focus must be to promote not only upcoming events on the web pages but also to engage the alumni with photoseries from past events to add attractiveness and remind alumni of good times – both of these methods were used by 80% of the sample universities. Seventy percent of the ACs, including Alumni Chapters, prepare events with a frequency of at least two activities per month. In

most cases, events are free as only 30% of ACs request a fee for participation at such events (Fig. 6).

7) Career Services

A lot of ACs at European universities involved in this assessment deliver career services and/or are closely cooperating with CCs at a central level but, unfortunately, these mainly address the needs of national students and national graduates. Integrated CCs in the ACs have on average less staff at their disposal and consequently they are less available to answer customised individual requests. On the other hand, independent CCs typically have a team of several Career Officers, each member specialised in a certain domain. Fifty percent of sample universities have a specific career website, whereas the other universities use a specific subpage of the alumni website or a website of a non-profit organisation (10%). Besides the main career services given at a central level (Fig. 7), some Faculties or Schools belonging to the universities deliver extra career services, such as Faculty-specific job fairs and a list of internship and job offers. Some ACs collect data on the number of future graduates, others just publish how many industries and other employers' organisations they can attract to a job fair.

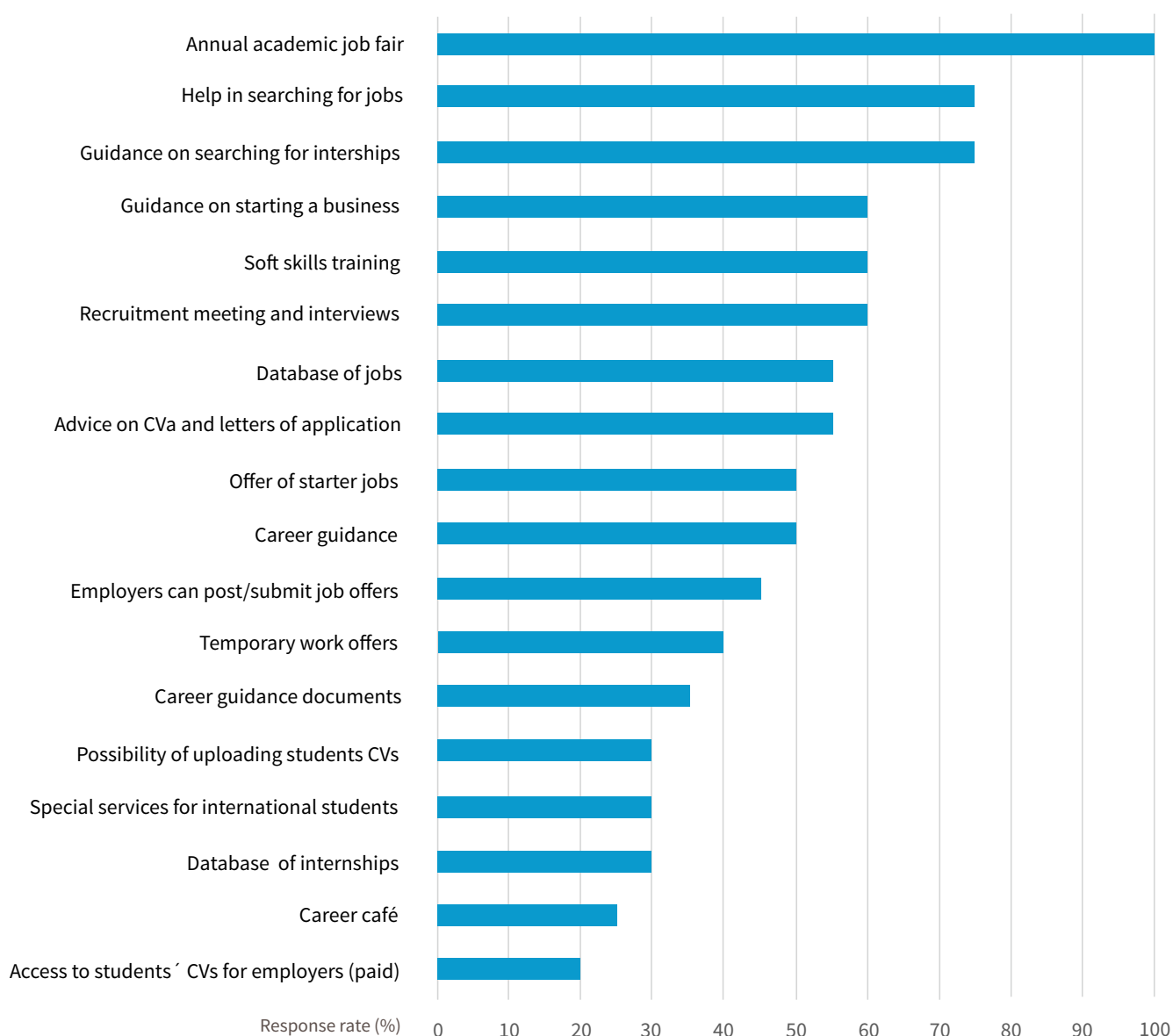


Fig. 7 Main types of career services delivered by the CCs and ACs at the assessed universities (%)

The main service delivered to (future) alumni which was offered in all of the assessed universities were job fairs, which are organised in 100% of the cases at least once a year. More than 60% of CCs offer guidance for internships and in job search, recruitment meetings and interviews together with soft skills training. Significant services also include guidance in setting-up of alumni businesses, offering starter jobs and access to job and internship databases. Another service is uploading CVs to databases after review. A minority of universities also help their graduates in contract negotiation and organise career development trips.

The main services delivered to employers consists of providing invitations to job fairs and career days, facilitating posting on websites: allowing job offers, internship offers, temporary work offers, starter jobs offer open access to databanks with CVs (after registration and payment of fees), inviting guest speakers to alumni events, and facilitating recruitment on campus.

4.1.1 Positive Experiences and Challenges of Alumni Centres

The following results are based on a survey provided by alumni officers who identified the main strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, which they personally perceived for their AC (including any career services delivered). The analysis considers both internal and external factors and defines the main strategic directions for ACs (Fig. 8).

Internal factors

The most valuable strengths which were identified by 60% of AC officers were personnel with a hardworking team of alumni officers, staff with academic and business experiences and a highly motivated team of ACs. The regular publishing of newsletters was also highly valued. A good central alumni database with high alumni numbers, maintaining a continuously growing number of alumni and raising the interest of older alumni (with restricted access available for third parties) are further important strengths. ACs succeeded in the use of career services by graduating students and young alumni, including use of the on-line job-market, mentoring programmes and good network of companies.

ACs' weaknesses with the highest percentages of responses were: the lack of any central database of professional sectors (more than 67% of the universities studied), along with weak profiling at the university level (a lack of collaboration with numerous faculty and alumni associations). Other factors were that the alumni database was not linked with the other databases at the faculty level nor with any existing social alumni networks, and that web pages were without (or only partly) in English, limiting communication with future students and international alumni. A poor marketing strategy such as using limited channels of communication, and not having enough merchandising products were also important factors in the weaknesses analysis. ACs being thought of as an additional programme of the university was also seen as one of the most important weakness factors. Education and research were seen as the main activities and any alumni services were viewed as an ancillary programme only. A repositioning of university thinking in this regard is clearly necessary.



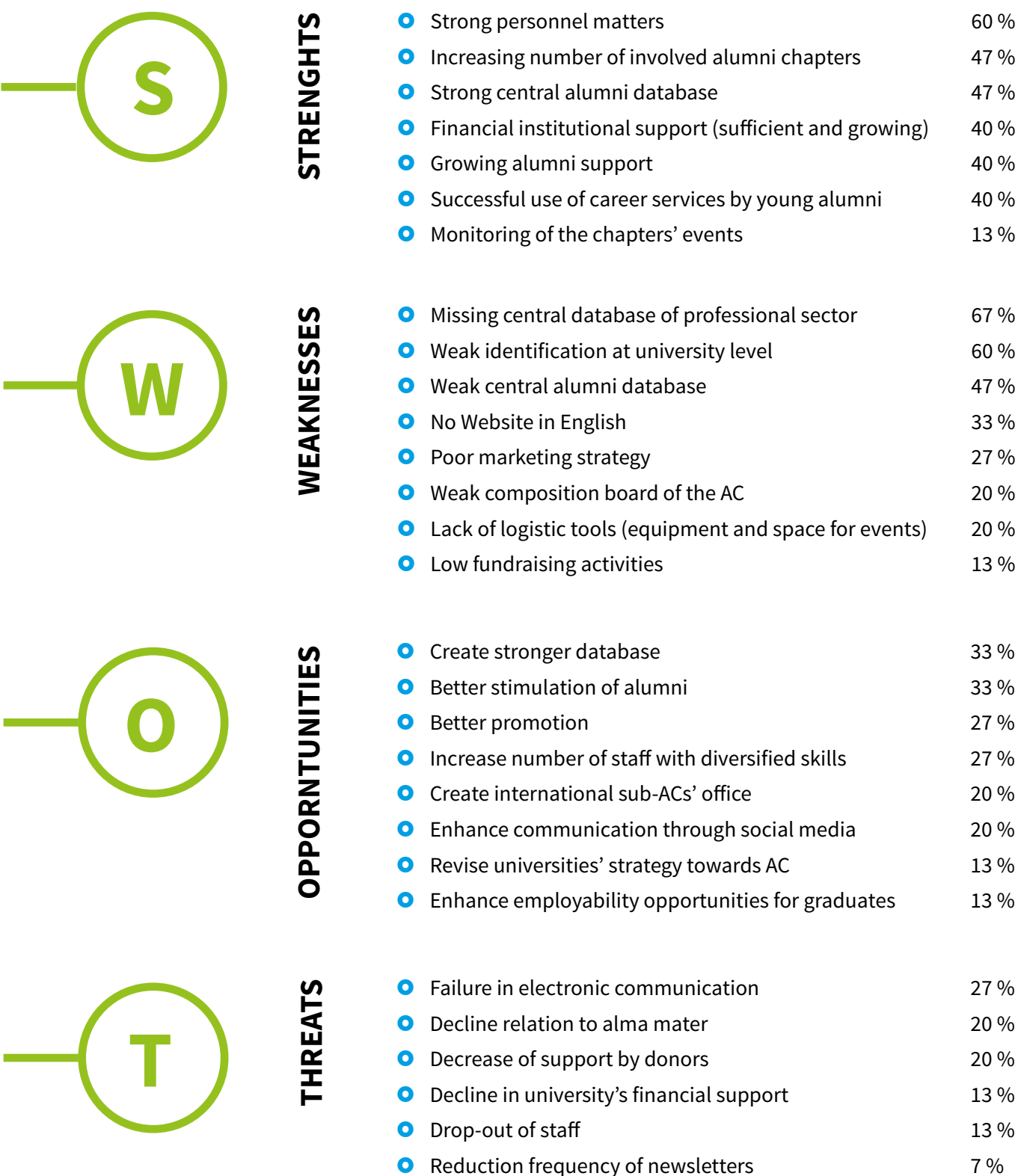


Fig. 8 Analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) identified by ACs participating in this study (N=15).

External factors

The external factors of the SWOT analysis (Fig. 8) reflect opportunities for the improvement of ACs mainly via the creation of stronger databases - updating alumni registration files, finding lost alumni and the preparation of means of access for third parties (Alumni Chapters, employers). Furthermore, focus should be put on better promotion and the stimulation of alumni to get more involved in the ACs' activities and services delivered, and in joint research and projects. Opportunities valued by 27% of respondents were raising the number of motivated staff with diversified skills and by 20% creating an international sub-AC office. In recent times, there is huge potential for enhancing communication through social media and stimulating efficient networking with other alumni and the professional sector thus enhancing further employability. In addition, overall university strategy concerning the functioning of the ACs should be revised and further training in soft skills at university level (sessions, internships, student jobs, etc.) should be delivered.

The main threats which could endanger ACs is the loss of contact with alumni due to failures in electronic communication (SPAM messages, failing email addresses, overloading messages via social media) and erosion of the relationship to the Alma Mater which tends more and more to have a business-like character ("What is in it for me?"). Financial problems, with a decrease in support by donors, and declines in university' financial support and the disappearance of staff were also one of main threats. AC officers were also aware of the importance of newsletters, as they were afraid that infrequent newsletters sent by regular mail and/or email could be one of the factors which could threaten their AC.

4.2 Lessons Learnt

Within Europe, ACs are very popular, with a long tradition. This study, based on 20 selected universities, showed the differences in approach and the need for specific strategies in each country based on general experiences. Specific strategies should consider different stages in the alumni life cycle (Fig. 9), cultural habits, actual requirements of alumni based on surveys and expectations and creating a friendly community atmosphere with a strong relationship with the Alma Mater. Alumni should be aware of the benefits of being engaged in their Alumni Centre (Appendix 4). A key strategic question is: "What kind of benefit can they get from this ongoing relationship with their institution?"

Therefore, it is necessary to understand alumni expectations, needs, and preferences. Important is an active approach towards changing conditions, and being ready to attract alumni, especially via modern communication technology. Universities have to be aware of the benefits of ACs and strongly support cooperation with alumni (Appendix 5).

In the following subchapters are selected the top five specific lessons learnt for setting up or upgrading an Alumni Centre, which are put into groups as follows: (i) Organisation of ACs including personal empowerment, (ii) Alumni database management, (iii) Effective communication, (iv) Benchmarking of the Alumni Centre, (v) Versatile Career Services.

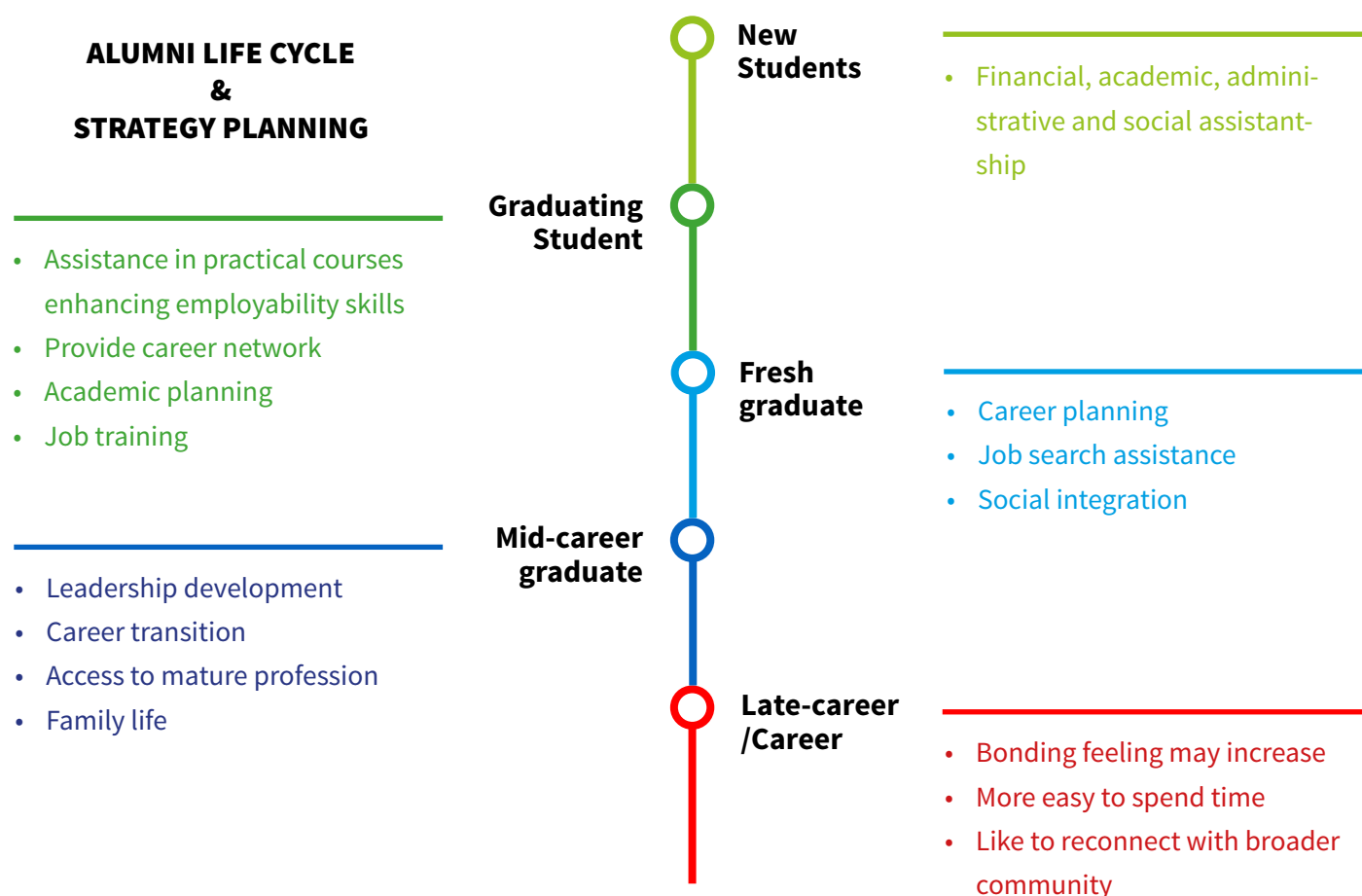


Fig. 9 Alumni life cycle at university and strategic planning

4.2.1 Organisation of ACs and Personal Empowerment

Based on the SWOT analysis, special attention for strategic planning of ACs should focus on a balanced number of experienced and motivated staff members, stability in AC board members, sufficient logistic and financial resources, strong central alumni and professional databases, enhanced services offered with special attention given to the career development of the graduates and fundraising support.

Investment in Alumni Chapters, involving the alumni more frequently in academic and social matters, working closely with the universities' decentralised AC offices and external alumni organisations and the professional sector, communicating continuously with all your alumni and sharing information with future students and international alumni in English are perceived as adding, qualitatively speaking, value to the successful operation of the ACs.

Stability in Manpower

Goal: To optimize the organisation of an AC and its subdivisions, increasing stability in manpower (minimizing churn) at the central Alumni Centre and their partner organisations (Alumni Chapters, alumni clubs) so as to enhance the sustainability of the services delivered, and the activities undertaken while the quality is maintained or improved.

Key actions to carry out:

Beyond the day-to-day interactions, the alumni organisation and staff need to be empowered to meet alumni expectations. This can be achieved by taking the following actions:

- Setting clear yearly targets;
- Providing clear job descriptions for the Alumni Officers, and Alumni Chapters (who is responsible for what, where and when);
- Guiding the Alumni Officers in career planning;
- Well thought-out planning (quality vs. quantity – flexibility in work schedules/budget);
- Giving incentives for personnel (training programmes, free participation in activities abroad);
- Respecting the work delivered: words of thanks, best Alumni Officers of the year, etc.;
- Ensuring the budget is sufficient for payment of staff and activities.

A Good Example:

Having the opportunity at the start of working as an Alumni Officer, to follow a programme of training explaining what is expected from an Alumni Officer and their Alumni Centre and showing how to deliver this is greatly appreciated by young Alumni Officers. This training helps them increase their performance and make the job more enjoyable and sustainable.

Tips & tricks

- Organize activities from central level and “keep an eye“ on what’s going at faculty/department level – regular meetings at all levels and updating about organized activities.
- Organize team-building activities in the office, regular meetings, who does what and support the team spirit (formal and informal).
- To ensure the sustainability of Alumni office – implementation should be in line with the approach to policy of the top level management at the university.
- Clear organizational structure and division of responsibilities plays a key role (the management committee must divide the tasks among the staff).



Bonding New Students, Future Graduates and Young Alumni to Your Institute

Goal: Increasing interest in becoming a student at the Alma Mater, becoming a registered alumnus of the Alma Mater and, for young alumni, in staying members and being engaged.

Key actions to carry out:

- Post Graduate Profiles/Alumni Quotes/Alumni portraits and/or some videos with interviews of some alumni.
- Highlight more internship possibilities and soft career skills training sessions.
- Encourage becoming a member of existing alumni groups on social media and your alumni Facebook group.
- Invite students to some of your alumni events (Appendix 6) – send them the alumni newsletter by e-mail (Appendix 7).
- Post Graduate Profiles and/or some videos with interviews of some alumni in which the following is discussed: Why did they come to study at your university, how do they evaluate their study period (academically, socially, professionally), how easy was it to find a job and would it have been possible to find the same job without the diploma and experiences obtained at the Alma Mater.
- Publish Alumni Quotes: What did you enjoy about your course? How did your studies prepare you for your future career? What was your favourite thing about the university?
- Publish pictures of some events (website, posters, e-mail).
- Organize activities helping students to get the most out of their studies (speed reading, time management, students and money, etc.), to be prepared for the labour market (CV writing workshops and individual feedback, lectures on how to find a job, Work Search Cafes, etc.) and to stimulate personal development (Workshops on debating skills, Be the best you can be). Offer such training for free.

Tips & tricks

- Prepare and distribute questionnaire for final year students on their needs; and inform them about the Alumni Centre and its activities.
- Regularly motivate students during their studies to consider their future work.
- Organize seminar “How to apply for job?”.

Good examples:

- ✓ The University of Birmingham: inspire prospective students with a quote about your time at Birmingham (The University of Birmingham’s AC, 2017)
- ✓ The University of Copenhagen: meet alumni and students (The University of Copenhagen’s AC, 2017)
- ✓ The University of Groningen: study and career (The University of Groningen’s AC, 2017b), enhancing vo-



lunteer involvement (The University of Groningen's AC, 2017c), alumnus of the year (The University of Groningen's AC, 2017d), worldwide newsletter (The University of Groningen's AC, 2017e)

✓ The University of Liège: graduates' stories, graduates employment statistics - only accessible if password - otherwise to request by e-mail (The University of Liège's AC, 2017)

✓ The University of Uppsala: alumnus of the year (The University of Uppsala's AC, 2017b), alumni portrait (The University of Uppsala's AC, 2017a)

Enhancing Volunteer Involvement

Goal: Increasing the number of engaged volunteers (supporting the AC as they can play an active role at different levels in Alumni Chapters), career search, internship search and guidance, research and guidance, identification of students with top prospects, setting up events, enhancing communication with the alumni, etc.

Key actions to carry out:

- Keep the actual volunteers motivated by assisting them whenever needed (ex. through logistical support) and not forgetting to thank them personally and publicly for their efforts made.
- Look for key alumni who can become Alumni Chapter volunteers, offering them a leadership training.
- Encourage a new group of alumni to become engaged in guest-lecturing, mentoring students, offering internships and thesis topics and thesis research facilities (for which they could be the coordinator in situ) (Fig. 10).
- Engage alumni in admissions to provide objective evaluations of prospective student's files and selecting fellowship candidates.
- Encourage alumni to post jobs and internships through platforms set up by the Career Centre. Provide a mentorship platform for current students to leverage alumni expertise.

Good examples:

✓ Humboldt-University: stimulating involvement of former students of the university who are able to choose from a variety of initiatives and associations. These are supporting activities like graduations, alumni reunions, and career services. Due to their specific faculty relationships, those associations offer specialised events and contacts. (Humboldt university, 2017)

✓ Birmingham University: A good example of thanking and showing appreciation of your volunteers. Twitter message Birmingham University: "Our Alumni volunteers provide invaluable support to our students. Thank you".



✓ Lancaster University: for a good example of a well-structured volunteer organisation one can read the following: Guidance documents for setting up a volunteer Chapter (how to set up, or join an Alumni Chapter, chapter expectations, about the 'Leicester on Tour' event, online application form) (Lancaster University, 2017).



Fig. 10 Different phases of alumni service to the University during the Alumni Life Cycle

4.2.2 Database Management

Goals: Enhance registration, keeping Alumni database up-to-date, upload detail and useful information. (Restricted) access facilities created for alumni, Alumni Officers of your institute and professional world.

Key actions to carry out:

- Foresee when the alumnus/a register, to sign a consent document giving the Alumni Centre the permission, other alumni and/or employers (searching people to fill open jobs in their business) will have (restricted) access to the alumnus/a's file in the alumni database.
- Create a search engine on the AC's website for alumni by degree, stream, company, location, industry, experience, etc.
- Keep the database continuously up-to-date by creating a facility on the CC's website where alumni can update their personal information given at registration.
- Give a life-long institute-linked e-mail address to the registering alumni avoiding future e-mail address bounces and spam.
- Keep the member enrolment experience simple, even if it requires a complex process behind the scenes.

Good examples:

- ✓ The University of Groningen: on these pages, the alumnus can (un)register at the University of Groningen, subscribe to services and update personal details (The University of Groningen's AC, 2017a).
- ✓ Uppsala University: gives a clear picture on how to formulate the consent part (They also give alumni the chance to sign on to LinkedIn on the same page) (Uppsala University, 2017).
- ✓ The University of Leuven: gives the chance to register for a choice of alumni activities at registration and to renew his/her Alumni Chapter membership on the web page; they explain through the use of pictures how to activate the alumni account (= registration) (KULeuven, 2017).
- ✓ ETH: example of a detailed registration form (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, 2017).
- ✓ Harvard University: Long-life university alumni email address, useful information when registering as an alumnus (HAA, 2017a).



Tips & tricks

- Use social media for searching alumni to avoid email problems.
- Updated database of contacts – search on LinkedIn, Facebook, software of the database.

4.2.3 Effective Communication

- There is great potential for attracting alumni through easy access web pages and by offering special benefits like an alumnus card, access to news of the Alma Mater and the database of the AC.
- Web pages in English are essential for effective internationalisation of ACs.
- An alumni newsletter has to be linked to university news and should be published regularly two times per year (Appendix 7).
- Key social media for ACs are Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
- The success of events has to be supported by good promotion on web pages.
- Special attention has to be paid to the close cooperation of all Alumni Chapters with central AC.
- Consider the age of alumni (Fig. 11) – the older alumni make less use, or no use, of social media, so identify the professional media which your academic, governmental and business alumni are specifically using and post professional messages there.

Efficient Use of Social Media

Goal: Enhancing your alumni are feeling affiliated to their Alma Mater, to increase their engagement, to optimize the spread of social, academic and professional AC news and to save time while increasing your contact moments.

Key actions to carry out:

- Enough time for close follow-up on the social media.
- Limit the number of social media used in the AC and act efficiently: define clearly, who will be responsible for the follow-up and when (e.g. once a week) and for what? Who will be responsible for posting the Alumni Centres' messages? Develop guidelines for use of social media by the Alumni Centre: who can use which media and for what?
- Consider cultural differences as they play an important role in selecting the most appropriate channels.
- Use each medium for its own particular purpose, e.g. LinkedIn can be more effective for discussion among its self-driven community and Facebook can be more effective communicating updates.
- LinkedIn is an effective tool to provide alumni with career resources.
- Twitter is an effective tool to share job leads with alumni.



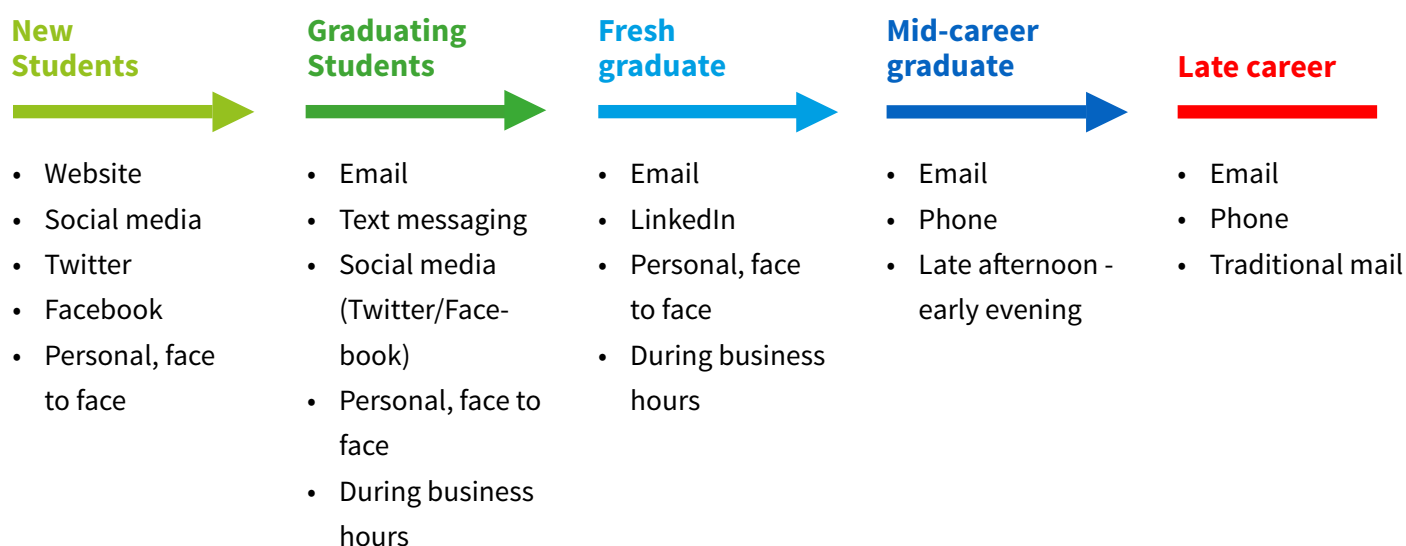


Fig. 11 Communication strategy during different alumni life cycle at university

Good examples:

- ✓ All Alumni Centres of the participating universities in the desktop study are following their alumni through different social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube) and professional media (LinkedIn), posting of blogs or using a platform for communication on their alumni website. They all use e-mail and phone for individual communications.
- ✓ The University of Birmingham: Facebook (The University of Birmingham, 2017c)
- ✓ Wageningen University and Research: LinkedIn (Wageningen University, 2017b)

A Coherent and Informative Alumni Website

Goal: An attractive, informative website, giving good information to young alumni and graduates in order to guarantee that they do not lose their interest in being registered in the Alumni and motivate other graduates to become registered members of the Alumni Centre.

Key actions to carry out:

- Increase the attractiveness, structure, relevance and completeness of all information.
- All information alumni need and search for should be available.
- Regularly up-date information (avoid misinformation, no typing errors).
- Use professional language, attracting future students from abroad.
- Give the opportunity, on your main page, for website feedback by visitors to your website.

- Count hits per week (benchmarking).

Good examples:

- ✓ The University of Birmingham: a well organised (structured) website (The University of Birmingham, 2017c); opportunities for website feedback (The University of Birmingham, 2017b).
- ✓ Wageningen University: attractive, simple, not overloaded (Wageningen University, 2017a).
- ✓ The European Institute of Business Administration AC (INSEAD, 2017a): the most extensive main page of all alumni websites; can be considered an excellent example on how to proceed when updating the AC's website.

Tips & tricks

- Identify carefully your target group and their needs and experiences (use the media which they use).
- Social media, websites (Facebook, LinkedIn – please keep your data updated); use Facebook Life, Count followers on Facebook.
- To increase the interest of students and alumni, you can organize attractive activities such as Lotteries/ photo of the year from Alumni, photocontests.
- Ensure that your websites are suitable for mobile phone access.

4.2.4 Benchmarking of Alumni Centres

Goal: Increasing time available to better support to the real demands of alumni, leading to better programming, by measuring the success rate in attendance, registrations, in attracting volunteers, in supporting Alumni Chapters, etc., and in avoiding services and activities previously delivered which do not meet the set criteria.

Key actions to carry out:

- Make an activity report yearly, describing not only what the AC has done but also how well it turned out. Also, insert in the report any proposal for updated action plans in various operational areas aimed at achieving ultimate goals.
- The chief operational areas are communication (frequency, method), events (costs, number, and success rate), alumni activities, database, fundraising, career assistance and alumni coordination.
- Involve the Alumni Board in the evaluation of the report. If successful, the Alumni Board could raise the AC's total annual budget and/or give their fiat for engaging extra staff members.
- Identify the most successful activities and reorganise or drop activities, which are not valuable.



Good examples:

- ✓ The Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE, 2017a): benchmarking toolkit and template, example how to set up a benchmarking study and what to evaluate. ICARS surveys (CASE, 2017b): some of universities' Alumni Centres involved in the study (Leicester University, Birmingham University, The University of Navarra and the Swedish University of Life Sciences) are also participating in the ICARS surveys.
- ✓ The European Institute of Business Administration (INSEAD, 2017a) : tracking every year their most successful activities.

Tips & tricks

- To increase attendance, invite Alumni via one contact alumnus from that year's groups of alumni, (the leader of the group, chairperson of a class, moderator of a FB group etc.).
- Send "thank you" emails with pictures to speakers and participants.

4.2.5 Versatile Career Services

Goals: Increasing the employability skills of the graduates in finding a job within a shorter application period. Increasing the number of registered alumni by keeping young alumni motivated to stay on as members and motivating older alumni to offer jobs and internships and become guest speakers at certain events (job café, guest speakers at job fairs, etc.)

Key actions to carry out:

- Integration of the CC with the AC (or close cooperation at least) is highly valued.
- ACs should enhance professional networking to raise the job opportunities of their graduates and alumni.
- Develop an employability strategy ensuring students have all the same opportunities and support to develop their career skills throughout their study programme and into the first year of their career.
- Increase the range of services delivered including some of the following activities: Personal career counselling, a Newsletter with job offers, Alumni networks offering job opportunities and job mentors, a yearly Career Day, CV checks, checks of motivation letters, LinkedIn profiles, Talk & Toast Career Events, tailor-made events for employers, information sessions about the steps to take to find a job, a traineeship or an internship, customised offers, an employment portal, employability support after studies, alumni careers presented on the website, a portal for candidates looking for jobs and where they can post their CVs, career advice (self-knowledge, personal branding, entrepreneurship, LinkedIn, CV, letters of application), placements abroad, job fairs, courses leading



to career-related additional qualifications.

- Key career services for alumni include: guidance for internships and job search, recruitment meetings and interviews together with soft skills training
- Key career services for employers include: job fairs and career days, facilitating posting on websites and access to the AC database.
- Considering engagement with employers: relations between employers and career advisory staff should be further fostered and developed.
- Build relations with employers for international students' careers by one-on-one meetings with international student-friendly employers.
- Prepare lists of employers who hired international students; organise Career Events enhancing networking with international alumni and international student-friendly employers.
- Encourage students and alumni to gain experiences and learn what aspects of their experience will sell them better.
- Advise students to network with people in the field of their career interests.
- Career Centre staff should receive training on the needs of international students. Staff training on cross-cultural communication; and tips on how to work with international students; offer overseas trips to career staff. Provide workshops on cultural aspects of working in a country other than the home country.
- Develop/offer employer guides, handbooks, workshops, webinars, newsletters, and meetings with student-friendly employers.

Good examples:

- ✓ Navarra University (Career Services): portal of professional careers (Navarra University, 2017)
- ✓ Wageningen University and Research: entrepreneur information (WUR, 2017)
- ✓ The University of Birmingham: alumni career profiles (The Birmingham Business School's Alumni, 2017); careers network mentoring (The University of Birmingham, 2017a)
- ✓ INSEAD: career development programme (INSEAD, 2017b), career global recruitment portal (INSEAD, 2017c)
- ✓ The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology: career counselling (ETH Zürich, 2017a) – fee, career services price list (ETH Zürich, 2017b)
- ✓ The University of Leicester: application tests (The University of Leicester, 2017)
- ✓ Lund University: CV and cover letter, interviews, job portal, network with alumni, recruitment companies and job websites (Lund University, 2017)
- ✓ The University of Groningen: careers advice; a schematic presentation of the domains in which they give advice (University of Groningen, 2017)



- ✓ CampusTap: role of professional internships (McPeak, 2017)
- ✓ QS Top Universities: a complete guide to perfecting a CV and finding the job (QS, 2017)

Tips & tricks

- Offer mentoring programmes from alumni to current students – 3 meetings for mentor and mentee.
- To increase participation by students, if they would like to apply an intership they have to participate in an event and bring their CV one month before the event for CV checking.
- Check the follow up on job offers - if the company received the CVs from your university, write an email to the company; how many candidates applied and if they were accepted or not (to have feedback and statistics). If a candiate is accepted, you can do an interview with him/her for the Alumni Magazine.
- Evaluate the activity – a critical evaluation of the impact of the activity (for example of an event).
- Be open-minded enough to do something new, be creative!!!

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The list of current good practices in the ACs and CCs in Europe, guaranteeing an increase in the sustainable success of the ACs and CCs, were identified based on the results of a three-dimensional study: a search for relevant recommendations in documents and reports available, a conscious study of the ACs websites of a group of selected universities, and a qualitative survey on the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats experienced by the Alumni Officers of the selected mainly European universities.

The main lessons learnt from all the examples found in the current documentation in print and on the websites of the selected universities, also taking into account the survey results, can be summarised as follows:

Universities are recommended to review their financial, constitutional and logistic support to ACs and CCs. The efficient functioning of their ACs and CCs must become one of their priority ambitions.

The contracting of a stable, multidisciplinary, well trained and experienced team of AC and CC officers, assisted by a Board of engaged members, is necessary to insure the activities undertaken by the ACs and CCs are sustainable.

Alumni Officers should increase their efforts in:

- Setting up a strong, continuously updated alumni database accessible to their members (alumni) and associated members (the professional world, sub-organisations such as the Alumni Chapters and faculty and/or programme Alumni Offices).
- Engaging more volunteers (internal and external) to support their tasks and facilitate communication and physical contact with the alumni.
- Using different social media and platforms in a better organised and selective way decreasing the time spent on communication activities.
- Presenting a coherent, informative, continuously updated website, fully drawn up in at least two languages (of which one language is English).
- Benchmarking activities, starting by collecting data to measure the outputs and outcomes of events organised (at university and chapter level) and of the different communication channels used.
- Strategically supporting and involving their Alumni Chapters and lower level alumni offices at their university.
- Bonding new students, future graduates, young alumni and older ones to the Alma Mater with special attention given to international alumni.
- Identifying and supporting ambassadors for networking; the setting up of opportunities for students to gain accreditation for employability activities both within and outside the curriculum should be increased.
- Delivering versatile career services to students, alumni and employers.

However, we recommend the ACs to go step by step after identifying which recommendations will help them more efficiently fulfil their official mission and objectives, set and approved by their Board, taking into account their limitations.



Career Centres must now be more versatile in order to respond better to the current needs identified by their alumni and graduates.

To bring this versatility about, we recommend CCs intensify their efforts in the following areas: identifying the current needs of employers of the students and of the alumni who wish to make use of the services the CCs deliver and trying to convince (via lobbying) the academic world there is a need to integrate an internship module (practical experience in a job situation) and courses discussing the range of entrepreneurship skills needed (how to search for a job, to apply for it, to manage a team of employees, including some homework to put into practice what they learn) in the official study programmes for their graduates.

In order to raise students' employability, it is also recommended to try to carry out the actions specified below:

- Set up/extend a database of employers, accessible to the graduates and registered alumni and the employers, giving a clear picture of the work environment of the employer.
- Create of a database of job and internship offers.
- Support the contacted referees in drawing up relevant reference letters for alumni and graduates applying for a specific job.
- Supply support to students and alumni in fine-tuning how they wish to build up their personal careers.



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7 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix 1: SIMPLE Project in Brief

Erasmus+ KA2 Project SIMPLE: Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education

Duration: October 2016 – October 2019

Project budget: € 535,600

Wider objective:

Encouragement of the cooperation of academic sector (HEIs) with the professional sector in the area of agriculture and life sciences in selected Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand), leading to enhanced employability of those universities' alumni.

Specific objective:

Specific objectives are (i) to support networking and provide the link between graduates (alumni) and employers by establishing Alumni Centres and Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector, (ii) improvement of the curricula of study programmes at HEIs in selected Asian universities by introducing compulsory internships leading to more practical knowledge and better skills among the alumni and (iii) enhancing the soft skills of the Asian students.

Work packages:

- **WP 1: Preparation:** Assessment studies of Alumni Centres and cooperation with enterprises and Guidelines for best practice examples for Alumni Centres.
- **WP 2: Development:** Establishment and mutual cooperation of Alumni Centres and Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector.
- **WP 3: Quality plan:** Including the practical internships and training of soft skills in the curricula of the study programmes.
- **WP 4: Dissemination and Exploitation:** Organisation of Career Days and Promotion of joint cooperation of Alumni Centres and Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector with respect to innovation in curricula.
- **WP 5: Management:** Joint coordination of project activities.



Project Partners:

	Organisation name	Abbreviation	Country
P1	The Czech University of Life Sciences Prague	CULS	Czech Republic
P2	The University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna	BOKU	Austria
P3	Ghent University	UGent	Belgium
P4	The Royal University of Agriculture	RUA	Cambodia
P5	The University of Battambang	UBB	Cambodia
P6	Bogor Agricultural University	IPB	Indonesia
P7	Tadulako University	UNTAD	Indonesia
P8	Kasetsart University	KU	Thailand
P9	The Prince of Songkla University	PSU	Thailand

Associates:

	Name of organisation	Type of institution	Country	Role in the project
1	ESAA - Erasmus+ Students and Alumni Association	Association of students	Germany	Promotion of the project results, sharing of experiences with Alumni Centres management
2	EMA – Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association	Association of students, Representative in Thailand	Thailand	Promotion of the project results, sharing of experiences with Alumni Centres management
3	YPARD – Young Professional for Agricultural Development	Network	Italy	Promotion of the project results, sharing of experiences and job opportunities
4	AGRINATURA – the European Alliance on Agricultural Knowledge for Development	International organisation	Czech Republic	Promotion of the project results, sharing of experiences and job opportunities, quality control, source for information for assessment studies of Alumni Centres
5	SEARCA – South-east Asian Regional Centre for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture	International Organisation	Philippines	Promotion of the project results, sharing of experiences with Alumni Centres management, and job opportunities
6	FORS - Czech Forum for Development Cooperation	Network of NGOs	Czech Republic	Promotion of the project results, job opportunities for Alumni

7.2 Appendix 2: Alumni Centre Operation (SWOT Analysis)

Could you please complete the following information?

(SWOT analysis in brief of your organisation)

INTERNAL FACTORS

(Human resources, physical resources, financial resources, activities and processes, past experiences)

- **Strengths:** characteristics of your alumni association, including its fundraising and career offices, that give it an advantage over others
- **Weaknesses:** characteristics of your alumni association including its fundraising and career offices that place your alumni association at a disadvantage relative to others

EXTERNAL FACTORS

(Future trends, funding sources, demographics, legislation, local, national or international events etc.)

- **Opportunities:** elements in the environment that your alumni association could exploit to its advantage
- **Threats:** elements in the environment that could cause trouble for your alumni association



7.3 Appendix 3: Benchmarking Survey

Monitoring and evaluation, Benchmark and statistics

(complete table below as far as possible)

Legend: **not to be completed**

1 Ex. 2,000 alumni registered vs. 3,000 alumni contacted for registration: success rate 66%.

2 when: which cut-off for success rate do you use?

Part A General information		Success rate (%) ¹	Corrective actions (when ² and type) taken?
Year of Start of alumni association			
Number of students at your university			
Mission	Add document		
Policy	Add document		
N° of registered alumni today			
N° nationals			
N° internationals			
N° prospective alumni (last year students)			
N° nationals			
N° internationals			
N° prospective alumni registering			
N° nationals			
N° internationals			
Average % of alumni who cancel their inscription yearly			
Membership fees (in euro)			
Active alumni			
In fundraising (donations)			
In participating to the academic selection process of prospective students			
In offering internships			
In offering job opportunities			
In offering PhD opportunities			
In offering Master Dissertation positions			
In setting up alumni events (volunteering)			
Average N° participating in an event		Vs invited alumni	
In guest lecturing			

Part A General information	Success rate (%) ¹	Corrective actions (when ² and type) taken?
In mentoring students		
In participating in other activities: please specify		
• Career fairs		
• Local alumni networks		
• ...		
Other members of your alumni organisation		
Teaching staff		
Business world		
....		
Average number of students involved		
In events		
In fundraising		
In career fairs		

Part B	RESPONSE RATE	RESPONSE RATE
N° of (professional) organisations involved/non-alumni individuals		
In Fundraising (donations)		
In paying money for services rendered (for ex. Search for prospective employees)		
Association dues (euro)- amount + for which activity		
• Posting jobs		
• Participation in job fair		
• In offering jobs		
• In offering internships		
In offering Master dissertation positions		
In guest-lecturing		
In events		
In career fairs		
For content Newsletter		
In other activities, please specify		
...		
EVENTS		
• N° planned per year nationally		
• N° Planned per year internationally		
• N° realised per year nationally		



Part B		RESPONSE RATE	RESPONSE RATE
• N° realised per year internationally			
CAREER OFFICE			
Activities organised for prospective alumni (please specify)	N° of prosp. Alumni participating		
...			
Activities organised for alumni (please specify) 3Activities organised for prospective alumni (please specify)	N° of Alumni participating		
...			
Activities organised for alumni (please specify)	N° of Alumni participating		

Part C Type of events	Average N° alumni invited	Average N° alumni participating	Success rate
National			
...			
International			
...			
Partnering with other organisations			
...			
NEWSLETTERS/MAGAZINES			
Frequency per year			
Electronically sent to N° of members			
If only available on the web, N° of hits			
Content : specify the type of news you give			
STAFF alumni association	Number	Responsible for/Title	Paid by
Full time			
Part time			
Volunteers			
BOARD alumni association			
Responsible for/Title			
Total number			

Thank you for your kind cooperation

- Ir. A.M. Remaut-De Winter
- pp. The SIMPLE Project staff



7.4 Appendix 4: List of Alumni Services

(List contains information of alumni associations in Austria)

- Newsletter
- Alumni Magazine
- Events (reunions, seminars, talks, etc.)
- Application consultation and other career services
- Searching for colleagues
- Library access
- Alumni e-mail-address

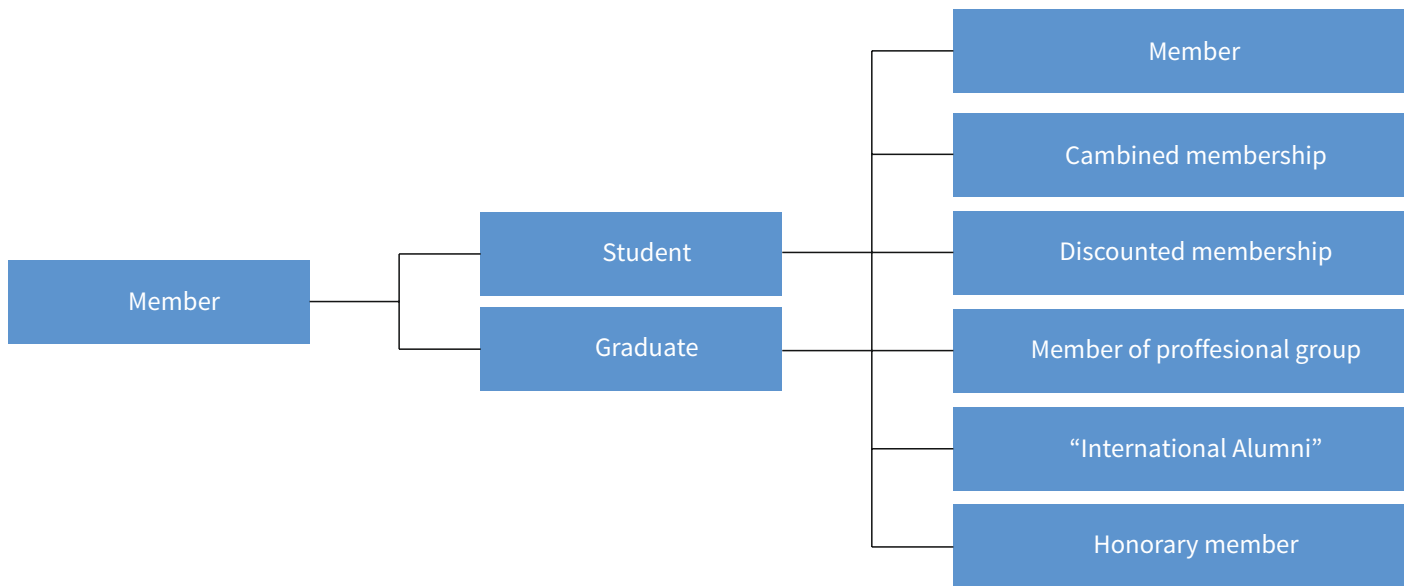
- Networking
 - Lectures
 - Dinners
 - Friendly get-togethers
 - Cultural and athletics events
 - LinkedIn-groups
 - Facebook-groups

- Discounts on
 - Newspaper subscription
 - Different shops (clothing, sport, etc.)
 - University ball (dance night)
 - Fitness centres
 - Museums
 - Theatres
 - Restaurants
 - Further education (university courses)
 - u:books, notebooks or edustore
 - Travel agencies

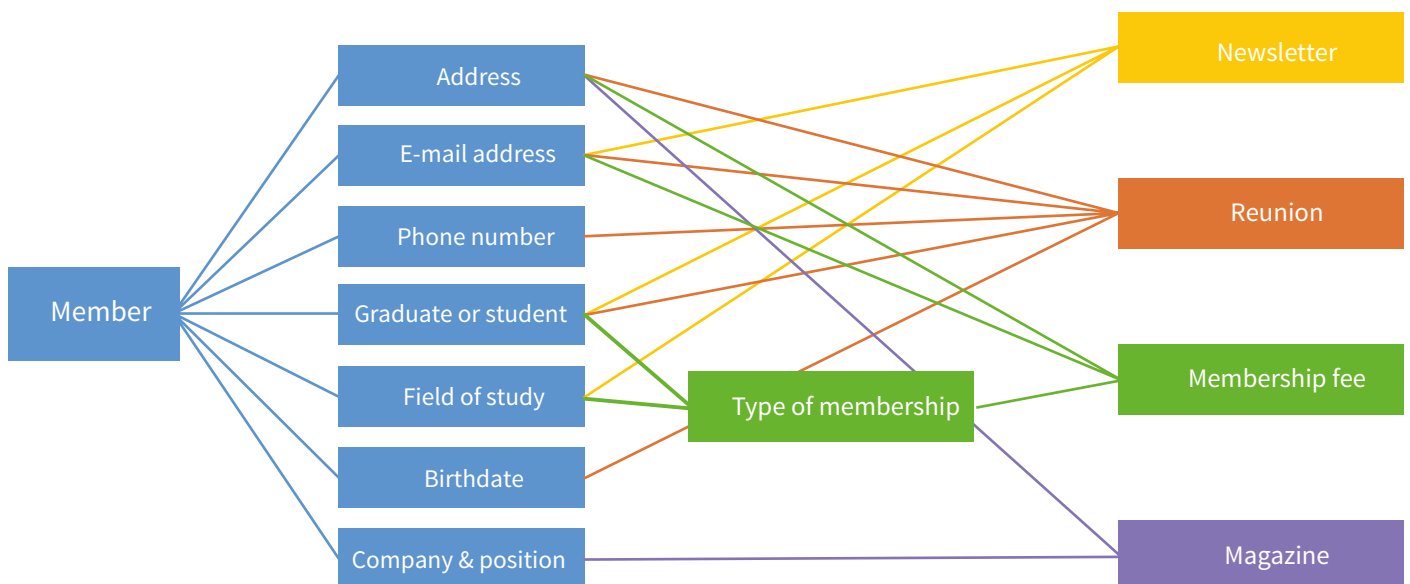


7.5 Appendix 5: Membership

Types of membership:



Example: Mindmap for setup of a database:



7.6 Appendix 6: Event Management

EVENT PLANNING TIMETABLE

Not all items will apply to all events. This is a list to get you thinking about what planning items may be needed.

6 – 8 MONTHS AHEAD OF EVENT *

*start your planning as early as possible.

- Select date and identify venue and time
- Get cost estimates (e.g., room rental, food & beverages, equipment, speaker fees, etc.) and create a budget
- Recruit event committee, event manager or chair and establish sub-committee chairs
- Develop event goals, programme outline and any key communication messages for marketing materials
- Create and launch publicity plan & brand your event (ensure staff and/or volunteers are identified to manage specific tasks – e.g., media relations, VIP coordination, printed material design & printing coordination, online / social media, etc.)
- Identify and confirm speakers/presenters/entertainers
- Identify and contact sponsors/partners
- Identify target group
- Establish planning meeting frequency and times, schedule remaining planning meetings
- Brainstorm gift ideas, identify gift vendors, work on design; and determine costs
- Contact graphic designer for invitation and programme designs, initiate design process, determine deadlines and costs, include accessibility information
- Get approval for the programme

4 – 6 MONTHS AHEAD OF EVENT

- Check and order necessary supplies (e.g. name badge holders, pens, stamps, envelopes, notebooks, wrapping paper, ribbons, etc.)
- Registration fees yes or no?
- Finalize presentation/speech topics
- Confirm speakers and speaking order for ceremony and dinner; confirm topic, length of presentation and other requirements
- Travel & accommodation arrangements
- Collect speaker biographies
- Set up/enable online registration



- Sponsor levels/amounts/logos
- Obtain final approval of invitation design, format and number of printed copies if needed
- Reserve photographer, caterer, IT-technician, staff or volunteers
- Publicity:
- Create draft event script (e.g., speaker introductions, thanks, closing, etc.)
- Develop publicity e.g. newsletter articles and/or ads, print blog posts articles for submission to other publications and/or ads, etc.
- Create event page on your website and create a Facebook event page
- Register your event on a variety of online event calendars
- Develop and produce invitations, programmes, posters, tickets, etc.
- Initiate “Save the Date” mailing

2 – 3 MONTHS AHEAD OF EVENT

- Send reminders to contact list regarding registration/participation
- Confirm travel/accommodation details
- Request copy of speeches and/or presentations
- Mail invitations
- Obtain final approval of programme
- Facility walk through
- Publicity: Post your initial event news release on your website and circulate to all partners, affiliated organizations, etc.

4 – 2 WEEKS BEFORE EVENT

- Have all committee chairs meet and confirm all details– and ensure back-up plans are developed for any situation (e.g. additional volunteers for registration or set-up, etc.)
- Finalize event script
- Brief greeters, volunteers about their event duties and timelines
- Final seating plan, place cards, etc.
- Provide final registration numbers to caterer
- Make print and online copies of any speeches, videos, presentations, etc.
- Final registration check, name badges & registration list
- Determine photo and interview opportunities with any presenters, VIPs etc. and confirm details

ONE DAY BEFORE EVENT

- Ensure all signage is in place
- Ensure registration and media tables are prepared and stocked with necessary items (e.g., blank name badges,



paper, pens, tape, stapler, etc.)

- Ensure all promotional items, gifts, etc. are on-site
- Ensure you have copies of all instructions, directions, phone numbers, keys, parking permits for VIP guests, seating charts and guest lists with you

POST EVENT

- Distribute photographs of the event to VIPs, participants, etc. via e-mail
- Hold event debrief meeting
- Complete comparison of actual versus budgeted costs
- Send thank-you's to the speakers and attach photos and/or link to the website post
- File all materials to assist with planning of future event(s)
- All receipts and invoices
- Event planning notes (timeline included)
- All event related emails and written correspondence
- Event handouts and samples of ALL printed materials
- PR materials/newspaper articles mentioning the event
- Photographs
- Schedule of events and timeline
- Catering order
- Accept/Regret/Participant lists and seating list and chart if applicable

MARKETING TIME TABLE

6 – 4 MONTHS AHEAD OF EVENT

- Save the date – by e-mail
- Event homepage with important dates and a contact person
- Creation of a design, logo, programme, etc.

2 MONTHS AHEAD OF EVENT

- First newsletter to members with general information about the event
- First social media announcement
- Hang posters in popular places at the university

4 WEEKS AHEAD OF EVENT

- Presentation of the programme on social media channels



- Presentation of the updated event on the website
- Presentation of the event in the local newspaper or other newspapers

14 – 10 DAYS AHEAD OF EVENT

- E-mail to all students (if possible)
- Second round to hang posters, this time everywhere there are students
- Highlight the event on the website
- Create article for the BOKU-screens (TV's at the university)
- Social media article with programme

5 – 3 DAYS AHEAD EVENT

- Second newsletter to our members
- Social media article with programme

2 – 1 DAYS AHEAD EVENT

- E-mail to all registered participants with date, time, place etc.
- Social media article with updated programme, the speeches, short video with personal invitation, etc.



7.7 Appendix 7: How to Create a Magazine

STEP-BY-STEP

1) Planning the content of the magazine (contents page)

- How many pages has the magazine?
- Collect ideas
- Choose topics (You should always think about your target group!)
- (recurring topics: e.g. careers, graduation ceremonies, academic events, portraits)
- Bring the topics into an order; think about length of articles, interviews, stories.
- Number of all topics (same numbering for organizing e-mails and documents)

2) Editorial meeting

- You can attend the editorial meeting with your contents page and discuss the topics. You can still delete and add topics. After the meeting stick to the contents page, but be flexible (e.g. if your interview partner changes, an event gets cancelled etc.).

3) Information about deadlines

- Inform stakeholders and everybody who is working on the magazine: associations, graphic designer, proofreader and co-workers (who are working regularly for the magazine) about deadlines.

4) Investigation and creation

- Ask for interviews, reading CVs, thinking about questions, carry out the interview, probably make the transcription (writing down what you have recorded on your dictation machine), shorten the text, choose/take a picture or ask for one.
- Talk to people, making notes on events, read articles, make appointments, ask for photo credits, ...
- Write and receive articles

5) Proofreading, correction, designing, printing, delivering

- Proofreading by a professional proofreader, managing director, rector and editor.
- Design and placement articles and pictures by a graphic designer.
- Print and delivery to members, honorary members and the university by the printer.

6) Special delivery

- Editor sends copies and letters (thanks for contributions, announcement of next deadlines) to all co-workers.
- Editor is also responsible for sending an invoice to companies which ordered advertisements.

7) Homepage

- The electronic version of the magazine should be published on the homepage of the alumni association.

USEFUL HINTS

What length should an article be? Writer and Graphic Designer have to work together to find out the number of characters that are possible in the chosen format of the magazine.

NOC = number of characters inclusive of blank spaces

approximate suggestions:

Editorial	1,000 + big picture, index, imprint
1 page text, 1 small picture	4,300
Half of a page text, 1 big picture (e.g. comment, portrait)	2,000 – 2,500
Small articles (3 articles per page + 2 pictures)	1,000 per article
Small articles (6 articles per page + 6 pictures) (e.g. English summary)	3,500 in total
Small articles (e.g. splitter) + pictures	500 – 700 per article

(König, 2017)