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# New Approaches in Social and Humanistic Sciences

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## Strengthening the Partnership between the University and Graduates: Realities and Challenges

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## Strengthening the Partnership between the University and Graduates: Realities and Challenges

Viorel DORGAN<sup>1</sup>, Viorica CALUGHER<sup>2\*</sup>, Ecaterina LUNGU<sup>3</sup>

### *Abstract*

*The degree of graduates' employability in the labour market is one of the main criteria, according to which shall be evaluated and assessed a university. It is basically a criterion as important as local or international accreditation agency. Unfortunately, higher education in Moldova has no tradition and practice of development the relations between the graduate and the university after his departure from academic medium, tradition very well developed in other states. It is important to know the career development of graduates through the active involvement of the university in this process. The State University of Physical Education and Sport operates a system of mechanisms that monitor the careers of its graduates. The analysis of the results of this action reflects several important issues for the University, such as: the level of employability of its graduates; the market need for qualified specialists in the fields of training of the University; identify problems in the study programs of the University; satisfaction degree of former university students on the quality of education; teachers who provide quality implementation of the program; utility program for employment and career development etc. The success of this exercise depend on the degree of motivation and conviction of young people to get involved in the life of the graduated University and help to improve its activity. At the same time, the University wants to get the graduates involved, to come up with suggestions, with an objective assessment of the realities where they had studied, without fear of any consequences and propose ideas for continuous improvement of studies. Thus, by maintaining a*

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*working relationship with the University and even after studies, the graduate becomes an active partner in ensuring the quality of education at the University.*

**Keywords:** *partnership, graduate, quality of education, career, employability.*

## **Introduction**

The partnership and the exchange of good practices are processes leading to a knowledge-based economy. Only through broad openness to the other actors of society the university can adapt itself to rapid transformations at national as well as international level. Higher education of physical culture in the Republic of Moldova, as a whole, partially succeeds in meeting the demands of the labor market in the country and abroad: most university study programs are characterized by the breakdown between learning outcomes and knowledge, skills and competences needed in real life at the level of qualifications in higher education. This discrepancy can be mitigated, including by developing an effective partnership between the university and its graduates, who are the internal and external clients of the university.

The relationship between the university and the labour market is a complex field, with multiple interactions, that is currently facing global challenges as well as national ones. Within a globalized society and economy, where knowledge has become the main factor of economic growth, both players in this partnership have to redefine their position in relation to the academic approach. University graduates are the best example of its performance, real speakers of that educational institution. They are the ones who connect the university with the labour market, a bridge between theoretical and practical knowledge. The University, as the main player of knowledge-based society, aims to contribute to the well-being of the individual and the socio-economic environment, generating and transferring knowledge through education, research and innovation [6]. In the context of the new social conditions, the roles of the university in relation to the economic environment are redefined. In view of this fact, most of the research in the specialized literature reflects the necessity to develop a constructive dialogue, the active approach of the interaction context and the sustained promotion of a new quality culture within each university, as well as its relation with the diversity of the representatives of the extra world Universities, where the overwhelming majority of university education and research products find their value [2, 3]. We believe that the university must actively participate in the monitoring of the socio professional insertion on the labour market of its graduates, establish an active dialogue with their

employers, develop and consolidate their own institutional capacity necessary for the regular carrying out of such studies, with a permanent character, in order to continuously improve the quality of the educational process and increase employability.

**The aim of research** is to determine the factors of an effective partnership between the university and the labour market by identifying the degree of communication between the university and the graduates from a complex perspective. At the same time, we propose to formulate solutions for an advantageous relationship between the university and the economic environment in order to successfully integrate the graduates into the labour market.

**Methods of research** are: analysis and generalization of data, methodical and scientific sources, survey (applied for 165 respondents: 43 - employers, 122 - SUPES graduates from the 2015 and 2016 classes), mathematical and statistical method. The size of the sample was established on the basis of the following criteria: 43 enterprises / institutions / organizations were identified in the last 5 years, in which the SUPES graduates were employed and active and included in the research; The representativeness of the graduates in the research was ensured by applying the questionnaire for approximately 15 graduates from each study program within the SUPES (8 study programs).

## Results and discussions

One of the basic roles of the university with the economic environment is the training of competent human resources: through the process of education, the university aims to develop to the graduates the competencies that create a competitive advantage on the labour market, being perceived as added value by the employers and make them capable to contribute to the welfare of society [1].

In this context, by applying the instruments for monitoring the socio-professional course of its graduates and the survey conducted with the two categories of respondents - employers and graduates, the State University of Physical Education and Sport identified several important aspects such as:

- The average level of employability of its graduates, 38% of the graduates of the two classes, is employed according to the obtained qualification. Those who have engaged in other spheres of activity have argued their choice by being paid higher. In this context, another problem arises - the drop in the number of candidates to study in low-paid specialties.

- the high degree of gratification of the former students regarding the quality of the teaching staff that ensures the achievement of the program and the high quality of the educational process - 65% of the surveyed graduates are satisfied with the quality of the educational process offered by the SUPES. At the same time, 35% of the respondents are partially content or dissatisfied with the quality of the university educational process, which should be a reason for meditation and a priority action in the strategic development of the university, namely the professional development of the teaching staff.

- the high degree of necessity of the market regarding the qualified specialists in the fields of university education - 86% of employers said that the labour market in the Republic of Moldova needs qualified staff in the fields of physical education, sports, kinetotherapy and recreation. Thus, employers' answers speak about the usefulness and timeliness of university studies in the field of physical culture. At the same time, the results of the survey highlighted also the aspects that prove the existence of problems in the relation between the university and the labour market, such as:

- the low utility of the study program for employment and career development - 69% of graduates said there was a discrepancy between the theory studied at the faculty and the practical realities in the field of professional activity. This fact reflects the lack of an effective partnership between the academic and the practical environment in terms of the professional training of future specialists.

- both graduates and the majority of employers noted the excessive theorization of university studies, which makes it more difficult and prolongs the period of integration of young specialists into professional practice. Thus, the university needs to propose the modification / adjustment of the curricula in order to develop practical skills for the future specialists: increasing the number of practical subjects, increasing the length of practical training sessions, carrying out the didactic activities at the employing enterprises / institutions.

- the majority of respondents in both categories (62% of graduates, 80% of employers) mentioned the insufficient communication of the university with the labour market, this being explained by the existence of traditional models, overcome in the communication between the partners; differences between the views of the parties on the concept of partnership; the economic environment does not have an adequate strategy of using the high-level qualifications of academic environment, which leads to a lack of consistency between the competencies and qualifications of the academic environment and the needs of the labour market. Identifying these obstacles in the communication between the university and the labour market will lead

to the formulation of the strategic objectives of the university and the actions envisaged in order to develop a constructive partnership between the academic and the economic environment.

By maintaining relationships with his former students, the university wants the graduates to get involved, to come up with suggestions, with an objective appreciation of the realities where they did their studies, without fear of possible consequences and propose ideas for continuous improvement of studies and their own career development. It is important to note that the success of this exercise depends on the motivation and faith of young people to get involved in the life of the graduate university and to contribute to the improvement of its activity.

Another aspect addressed in the survey was the formulation by the respondents of suggestions for improving relations between university and graduates. In this context, the following were proposed:

- active involvement of the graduates in the activities of the university: scientific conferences, seminars, round tables, workshops, sporting activities;
- establishment of the Association of University graduates;
- involvement of the economic environment (university graduates) in the elaboration / improvement of curricula, the counselling and career guidance activities of the students, the organization of job fairs and internships, the development of research partnerships;
- organization of trainings / round tables on career development issues of students and university graduates with the participation of employers.

The need to establish and develop effective communication between the university and its graduates is linked to the needs of the civil society in terms of the current labour market, including [5]:

- improving the quality of the didactic process by correlating the educational offer, the skills, competencies and abilities acquired by the graduates from the higher education with the requirements of the labour market;
- the existence of information on professional development at different time intervals after graduation, in conjunction with a series of social and educational descriptors (the feedback necessary to improve the higher education system);
- regular monitoring of the socio-professional insertion of the graduates in order to improve the relevance of the educational offer of higher education to the demand of the labour market and to increase the quality of the students' training;

- developing and strengthening the institutional capacity to carry out these regularly monitoring at relevant time intervals;
- knowing the capacity of the education system offer and its correlation with the estimated labour market requirements;
- setting of the national and institutional decisions on the implementation of national policies in the field of employment;
- empowering the social partners in education-related issues;
- increasing the investment in human resources reflected by the results of the higher education system.

## Conclusions

We mention that the present study is a step in the direction of achievement the future approaches in order to identify the ways to develop an advantageous partnership between the university and the labour market by communicating with their own graduates. We appreciate the importance of the university initiative in this dialogue, which will result in the development of a competitive economy in a knowledge-based society. In this context, the relationship between the university and the economic environment is a strategic element for the future mission of all higher education institutions through a reformulation of advantageous partnership policies [4].

## Recommendations

We will formulate some suggestions for developing an effective partnership between the university and the economic environment:

- increasing the degree of involvement / participation of the business community in the activities and processes of defining the competencies and the programs of university studies;
- adaptation of higher education offers to the needs of the labour market and the knowledge-based society by increasing the level of communication between universities, graduates and employers;
- improving the university management in order to increase the capacity of universities to match their offer with the requirements of those interested (universities-students / graduates-employers);
- developing the ICT tools to manage the communication process between universities-students-graduates-employers;
- the active involvement of graduates in the life of the university through the creation of alumni organizations, the presence of graduates in

the consultative / decisional structures of the university, career support after graduation, etc.

- development of structures and institutionalized forms of consulting and decision-making from strategic to the operational level, of process, as well as forms of stimulating the participation of members of the academic community in the life of socio-economic organizations, through representatives of the graduates and the socio-economic environment in the senate, the teaching councils and coordination structures of university studies programs, partner structures in developing and carrying out specific academic approaches, such as study modules and programs, research / development / innovation projects, etc.);

- training the staff involved in activities to increase the relevance of the educational offer of universities to the labour market demand;

- sustainable and effective transposition of existing procedures and methodologies for the benefit of stakeholders;

- promoting the concept of communication centres among the interested entities - universities, graduates, employers.

This research is a step in the direction of future steps to identify ways to develop an advantageous partnership between the university, employers and graduates for the purpose of their professional insertion. We appreciate the importance of the university initiative in this dialogue, which will result in the development of a competitive economy in a knowledge based society.

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## Acknowledgment

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We declare under our sole responsibility that the subjects involved in the research have been informed of the voluntary nature of participation in the research, the understanding of the information received and the understanding that withdrawing from the research can be done at any time without adverse consequences for the participant. The research complied with the ethical standards of research: university graduates were informed during the last year of research with the objectives of the research, its importance for the graduate university and the voluntary nature of participation in the research. In this context, each year, students give their consent to participate in the research, register their own contact details, and respond within 4-5 months after graduation to the questionnaire on employment. Measures on ethics of research were also undertaken in relation to employers of university graduates. The content of the questionnaires and of the present research was approved in the Department



of Quality Management of the University and discussed within the Ethics Commission of the State University of Physical Education and Sport.

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