

Collaborative network for Career-building, training, and E-learning CONNECTE

Report
Questionnaire on University structures
for integration and professionalization
March 2021

This survey is carried out as part of the Collaborative Network for Career-building, Training, and E-learning / CONNECTE project, led by Saint Joseph University and selected in 2019 by the European Commission for funding as part of its Erasmus + call. It is part of the Work package 6 «Universities – Firms Networking » and represents the main activity of the work package 6.1 «Mapping of existing structures in Lebanese Universities ». The objective of the survey is to draft mapping of existing structures in different Lebanese universities in order to develop activities related to the issues addressed by CONNECTE, namely the professionalization of university programs, orientation and professional integration, the design of internship services, support for establishments in educational innovation, particularly through digital technology, etc. This mapping will help to better understand these structures to promote networking among universities and possibly revitalize them.

A first research on universities in Lebanon allows us to identify 19 projects supported by the EU in Lebanon on topics similar to those addressed by CONNECTE. All of these projects included in their sustainability plan the creation of units that would continue to work on the issues addressed by the project at the end of EU support. The number of Lebanese universities involved in each of these projects varies between 1 and 8 university institutions, and 17 universities were approached. Some of them are obviously involved in several projects. This list was completed by centers created on the initiative of the institutions. In the end, around twenty responses from 13 institutions were received.

An electronic message was sent to the head of each of the identified centers inviting him to answer the questionnaire, available in French and English. International relations officials from universities that participated in a large number of projects were also involved in this survey. The compilation of responses took place in a context of multiple crises: pandemic, economic collapse, popular uprising ... which considerably slowed down the performance of this task.

To make the analysis of these results more readable and to facilitate their exploitation, it has been decided to divide the centers into three categories according to their type of activity:

- Career centers
- Incubators / Entrepreneurship
- Distance learning

I – Career Centers

Four Career centers and an employment observatory responded to the questionnaire. All these structures were created within the framework of projects financed by the European Union (OIPULES, DEFI, PACOME). These centers are located at Balamand University, La Sagesse, USEK, Cnam-L and USJ. Two centers are the result of the institution's participation in several European projects. Indeed, after having created the center as part of a first project, Cnam-L and USEK took advantage of their participation in a second project (SEMSEM, RESUME) to expand or revitalize the activities of the center.

These centers have several points in common:

- they are all still active;
- their activities are aimed at the whole university;
- they are all managed by small teams of a maximum of three persons;
- they all declare that they involve students in their activities so far as they are the direct beneficiaries of the services offered. Only one center says it also relies on alumni.

a. Objectives :

All the centers have professional integration, skills development, and training professionalization as main objectives. The Balamand, Cnam-L and USJ centers also aim to strengthen university-firms links and education through the labor market.

b. Activities of the centers :

Half of the centers organize student fairs, 70% put in place the conditions for students to go into business, 30% are soliciting firms for job offers.

c. Impact and results

The measurement of the impact of the centers is limited to the number of internships obtained by the students.

d. Collaborations

As for collaboration with other university services, the situation is highly variable. The centers of the universities of Balamand and La Sagesse say they collaborate with the student service of the university. The USJ and La Sagesse centers declare that they collaborate with all faculties. Three centers (USJ, Cnam-L and USEK) claim to have links with other universities. The center of the University of Balamand is the only one to declare that it has no connection with the professional world, which seems odd for a career center. USEK and Cnam-L operate exclusively online, the other centers combine a physical office with online exchanges.

II - Incubators / Entrepreneurship

Three incubators and a hybrid center (incubator and employment observatory) answered the questionnaire. The UL center was initially created as part of the OIPULES project and reactivated through the RESUME project. The AUB center was created as part of the IDEAL project. Smart ESA and AUST Entrepreneurship and innovation Educational initiative were created through university initiatives and have not received any external funding.

These centers have several points in common:

- they are all still active;
- their activities are aimed at the whole university;
- they are all managed by small teams from three persons and have recourse to volunteer teachers when needed;
- they all collaborate with other incubators and with the professional world in Lebanon and abroad;
- they indicate that the students are their main beneficiaries and are therefore clearly involved.

a. Objectives :

Entrepreneurship is the main objective of all these centers. The relation universities-businesses is also a primary objective for 75% of them.

b. Activities of the centers :

The AUST, ESA and UL centers encourage their students to participate in competitions. They rely on mentors to support their students' business projects. The UL center is at the crossroads between career center and entrepreneurship center. The 4 centers offer training and organize round tables on entrepreneurship.

c. Impact and results

L'ESA et l'AUB prennent pour mesure d'impact le nombre de startup accompagnées. ESA and AUB rely on the number of startups supported to measure their impact.

d. Collaborations

The AUB center collaborate in particular with the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture. The other centers work with all the faculties.

III - Distance learning

Eight centers answered the questionnaire. The center created by the LAU is the result of the university's participation in two European projects, CLIMSAP and E-Taleb. Likewise, the center created by USEK has benefited from the support of the E-Taleb and ADIP projects. Two more centers were established at Beirut Arab University and Jinan University through the E-Taleb project. Four universities (Arab Open University, Balamand, Cnam-L and AUL) have created centers within the framework of the ADIP project. Six centers are still operational following the suspension of activities in the centers created at Balamand University and Cnam-L.

a. Objectives :

Educational innovation, skills development and professional integration are the main objectives of these centers. The professionalization of training is also a priority for half of them.

b. Activities of the centers :

All the centers organize face-to-face training sessions and they rely heavily on mutual support from teachers. For all of them, online training is inseparable from innovation. Two centers organize e-learning training sessions.

c. Collaborations

Most of centers offer their activities to the whole university. Only AUL center is dedicated to a single faculty. Only one center declares to have no relation with other universities. The other centers mainly have relations with the consortia of the projects which created them. Links with the professional world are limited to distance education professionals.

Student participation is indirect, with two centers involving them in research projects and three others to measure the effectiveness of their activities.

d. Means

Human resources are limited to a team of 1 to 3 persons in most cases. All the centers provide their audiences with an LMS « Learning management system» or « Système de gestion de l'apprentissage ». Most centers have a studio or multimedia lab.

Food for thought to be explored in the steering committee:

Career centers and incubators provide expertise and knowledge of the professional field:

- to feed macroeconomic surveys ;
- to disseminate the results of these surveys among students and professionals.

Incubators, through the start-ups they follow, and which are often in the digital field, could:

- investigate the basic digital culture needs necessary to develop an activity.

Career centers could :

- suggest developing a new service relating to the follow-up of students in work-study and / or in a work situation.

Distance learning centers could :

- bring an enlightened look at the practices of students in Lebanon on online courses;
- to assimilate the online training that will be developed as part of the Conecte project, then offer additional training;
- contribute to the development of Conecte's "Scenario on VLE" module, which is intended for teachers.