

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# **Self-assessment Framework to enhance universities' performance regarding graduates employment and employability**



**Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación  
(ANECA)**



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## 1. UNIVERSITIES' COMMITMENT TO ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT

One of the main lines of work conducted by the *Spanish University System Quality Observatory* of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation of Spain (ANECA) seeks, through the identification of a key set of elements to be addressed by universities, to gradually facilitate steps for the start-up and comprehensive review of mechanisms at said universities that will contribute to improve compliance with the various **higher education objectives** agreed in the principal international forums of reference, and encourage converging perspectives among universities and the remainder of social agents involved. All this, from a quality assurance viewpoint promoting universities' autonomy and excellence in diversity.

Therefore, complementarily to other actions by ANECA focusing on the external assessment of programs or university institutions, in this case the emphasis is placed on progress more explicitly related to the specific purposes of Higher Education.

The fundamental principles of the *Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area –ESG–* highlight the idea that **quality assurance takes into account the needs and expectations of students, all other stakeholders and society**. Hence, this line of work by the Agency is currently focusing on improving the actions taken by universities with the aim of making progress in three key areas: inclusion; citizenship and sustainable development; and employability and the placement of graduates in the labour market.

This report deals, precisely, with the last of these three spheres. Not without reason, university graduate employability and job placement are a central concern in today's social and economic scenarios, as highlighted in the communiqués and reports issued by UNESCO, OECD, European Union and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), among others.

Thus, having substantiated this initiative in the ***Project for the creation of a, Self-assessment Framework to enhance university performance regarding graduates employment and employability***, ANECA and 64 Spanish universities have determined to combine efforts to ensure their experience crystallizes in a document that serves as a main guide to enhancing universities' actions striving, as mentioned, for better employability and employment.

The shared authorship report presented herein provides details of the results obtained in the initial phase of this ongoing project.

In brief, this report opens with the fundamentals, conceptual framework and aims of the project, as well as the rationale behind universities' commitment and effort toward enhancing graduate employability and employment.

In line with the above, and with the definition of the specific objectives set by universities for enhancing employability and job placement, the report pinpoints a number of key actions to be addressed by universities in order to make progress in fulfilling said objectives.

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Having identified these actions, a proposal is made for the main guidelines (by means of a university self-assessment tool) in order to implement these institutions' actions in this particular field.

The second phase in the project will focus mainly on universities' effective self-assessment task, based on the results of the first phase. The aim here, as in the identification stage for key types of action to be addressed by universities, is to ensure that the self-assessment process facilitated by this tool is the **result of a joint reflection by the various areas within each university called on to take decisive measures** in the mentioned drive for improvement.

For all the above, this report does not dwell on establishing a map of the current state of affairs at each university, but rather charts a **navigation path providing universities**, should they be willing, **with clear guidance** as to the course they should set **to fulfil to the greatest advantage the overriding aim of achieving progress in employability and students' and graduates' access to the labour market.**

Lastly, at the conclusion of the project, the results obtained will form a solid basis for drawing up the master plan for a future ANECA quality label with which to acknowledge the actions set in motion by universities endeavouring to improve employability and job placement.

Returning to the content of this report, it opens with a definition of the role and working context of universities regarding the matter in hand, having debated from an academic and conceptual angle the terms underlying the actions taken by universities in the field of employability and incorporation to the labour market.

In addition to the latter, the report puts forward six important **specific objectives**, of a more operational nature than the initial general objective, agreed among participant universities for taking better-defined steps toward enhancing employability and employment. These objectives are as follows:

- that university graduates' skills profile should match labour market demands, contributing to their acquisition and perfection;
- that recent graduates should hold specific skills for actively searching for employment, and, as appropriate, for deploying their entrepreneurial initiative;
- that students and new graduates should be capable of planning their professional career based on their self-knowledge, job searching tools and the opportunities within their reach;
- that current and future university students and recent graduates should avail of the appropriate information on employability and job placement for each of the various university degrees offered, as well as the effects of measures applied by the university with a view to enhancing graduates' employability;
- that employers should avail of the appropriate information on employability and job placement for each of the various university degrees offered, as well as the effects of measures applied by the university with a view to enhancing its graduates' employability;

- that students and new graduates should avail of sustained opportunities to meet employers, and vice-versa.

## **2. IDENTIFICATION OF KEY ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN BY UNIVERSITIES WITH REGARD TO ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT**

Regarding the identification and the characterization of key university actions, can be found in this report the following groups: international referents; definition and achievement of the graduate profile; student career guidance; university mediation in employment; and systematic analysis, organisation and integration of these actions.

### **Employability and university employment services: international referents**

A great variety of reports, regulations and studies are available on university students' employability, and the activities and aspects through which this employability is achieved and developed. Thus, the tasks undertaken initially are to delimit the notion of 'employability' and to determine what should be understood by 'international referents' in this project.

After dealing with this point, a review is conducted of the reports and regulations issued by public institutions and international bodies, and of significant projects conducted on this subject. All the above are European and international documents of reference in which **it has been possible to identify key elements in configuring the role of Spanish universities** in enhancing the employability and incorporation to the labour market of their graduates. Among the most outstanding aspects we may note the following: curricular design for work-based learning; soft skills; entrepreneurship; university-enterprise cooperation; international mobility; external practicum and internship; graduate job insertion follow-up; and, in addition, several future trends set to impact Higher Education and, hence, employability.

Similarly, addressing the principal conclusions drawn from the above review, a case study was conducted on a large group of universities in different countries for which four specific criteria, in particular, were reviewed: the existence of a centralised career service; environmental relations; the conduct of activities promoting employability; and universities' commitment to employability. This analysis has made it possible to verify that, over and above the different stages reached by each university in this regard, and within a general action framework featuring clear similarities, these universities operate displaying adaptability and creativity toward their respective surroundings, offering specific solutions in each sphere, allowing more or less extension and intensity.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the principal conclusions from this work on the state of play and future trends on the international front have been taken carefully into consideration in the sections that follow dealing with the identification of key action types to be addressed by universities, and in the self-assessment guide presented at the end of this report.

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## Graduate profile design and achievement

This section offers a review of the **graduate profile design and achievement** (European Qualifications Framework and related National Qualifications Framework), **of the relationship between graduate profile achievement and employability, and of the role of university career services in graduate profile achievement. And, finally, there is a description of the pattern of fundamental actions involved in defining and achieving a graduate profile.**

As stated in the section on learning outcomes/skills included in university programmes, the graduate profile is defined as the **capacities, knowledge and skills (competences)** that students should acquire by the end of their course of study.

With regard to **employability and the job placement opportunities available to Spanish graduates** from 2000 to 2019, and according to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics, the employment trend among university graduates is more favourable than for the remainder of job seekers, a tendency that remained on a positive path during the crisis.

In the EHEA framework, the **University Career Services** design and set in motion different lines of action to enhance graduates' employability and subsequent professional placement opportunities through guidance, mediation, entrepreneurship, etc.

Here, we may highlight four **essential actions** addressed by universities in relation to graduate profile achievement and design (according to the results of the survey coordinated by ANECA with the participation of several Spanish universities): **practicums** (curricular, extra-curricular and others); **identification of skills demanded on the labour market and trends in the world of jobs and technology; graduate profile design in higher education based on the analysis of the skills in demand on the labour market and trends in the world of jobs and technology; and actions promoting mobility.**

To ensure that these essential actions achieve their goals and are in line with university strategy, it is important to engage different **agents**, including: the university governing team; the faculty governing team; the university career, entrepreneurship and guidance services; and employers.

It is also deemed significant that actions of this nature should be embedded both in universities' internal processes (such as study programmes, academic innovation schemes, strategy and planning processes, office procedures for external practicums and employability, etc.), and in processes external to the university (staff selection processes, diagnostic processes in the design of active employment policies, etc.).

Finally, it is essential to measure and evaluate the fundamental actions conducted, both with regard to the level of impact of these actions and to the level of student and employer satisfaction, for the purpose of heightening the ongoing achievement of more suitable graduate profiles.

## Student guidance

Career guidance seeks to accompany students and graduates in increasing their employability, with advice regarding decision-making for their professional future, honing their job-seeking skills and supporting them in the process of job placement. This is a

service provided by universities that, among others, affords considerable added value after academic training.

Therefore, it is reasonable to consider that universities should offer **a career guidance scheme** promoted by the institutions' governing body as an integral part of its strategy.

To develop such a scheme, it is essential to identify the critical points influencing graduates' employability, and the career guidance actions performed by the university career services for enhancing said employability. All this should be implemented while measuring the impact of these actions and the level of user satisfaction generated.

The career guidance scheme should feature **actions** aiming to provide a diagnosis and a personalised pathway to enhancing the employability of the student body.

The **actions thus designed** should be geared toward facilitating career management skills to students and graduates, allowing them to define their professional goals and to enhance their personal brand. In addition, students should also be offered, on the one hand, training in the use of job seeking tools, and on the other hand, information on career opportunities and labour market trends. All this, while adapting the design to the study programme in which said actions should be embedded.

Furthermore, these **actions** should be open to systematic **evaluation**, considering both the impact and the level of user satisfaction for each action.

This career guidance process should be fully integrated in the university institution, especially on the managing, teaching and technical levels. Nevertheless, given that employability transcends the scope of universities, it is also advisable to establish links with external career orientation specialists as well as with employers, entrepreneurs and professionals who can provide first-hand information on the status of the job market and possible professional opportunities; without overlooking contributions by alumni conveying their own experience.

## University mediation in employment

The actions taken by universities in relation to mediation in employment are decisive in graduates' access to jobs and are, therefore, a further factor to be taken into consideration in improving their employability. Among these actions (which as in the case of those mentioned in the rest of this report, should be designed and implemented without losing sight of certain individuals' and collectives' special needs) we may mention:

- Activities aiming to **inform potential employers** of the range of degrees, professional profiles, practicums and the availability of university career services. In this line, it is essential **to establish permanent and periodic communication channels between employers and universities** to boost employability, promoting the participation of these entities and professionals in university education, and to hold joint working sessions with university managers and heads of human resources departments at other organisations.
- **External academic practicums and internships, deemed one of the most important actions** among the measures taken by universities for boosting employability and entrepreneurship and for achieving the targeted graduate profile. Universities should be able to offer sufficient quality practicums and

internships. It is equally essential for universities to regularly review their management processes, the effective monitoring and evaluation of their educational programmes and their integration with the university's other academic processes, as well as effective communication and understanding with external collaborating entities.

- Implementation strategies for **programmes promoting and supporting entrepreneurship**, which should stem from a previous identification and evaluation process of the programmes promoted and/or participated in by the university and its faculties. These programmes are found to have a further synergistic effect, positively influencing the detection and development of talents and cross-sectional competences.
- **Communication and cooperation between new graduates (or students) and more veteran graduates** through alumni associations, contributing favourably to their professional development and enhanced employability.
- And **the availability of systems for capturing and disseminating job offers and matching supply and demand**, as well as **job placement plans** for graduates.

### **Systematic analysis, organisation and integration of actions addressed by universities**

This section highlights the vital importance of setting up procedures for collecting and analysing information regarding actions taken to enhance employability and job placement.

On the one hand, these actions should be aligned and, as appropriate, integrated with other processes whether internal or external to the university, and considering the disparity and diversity of agents that, belonging or not to the university community, should be involved. On the other hand, the information gathered in this sphere should be used comprehensively by the university in a systematic, coordinated and effective manner, for the purpose of achieving visible progress in each of the objectives aimed for by the university.

In greater detail, the following significant conclusions should be underscored:

- The key actions identified in this project may be viewed as indispensable in higher education institutions' strategies vis-à-vis employment and employability. Such identification presents an opportunity for **obtaining information** that will facilitate both self-evaluation of said actions and a better knowledge of the dynamics of employment, career guidance and job mediation that universities are keen to visibilise.
- University career and employability services and other areas should meet the requirement of conducting **follow-up and evaluation** of their actions. In the review procedure within the cycle of continuous improvement of each action, it is fundamental to implement a strategy for evaluating effectiveness in relation to the objective pursued, while it is equally important to integrate in the institutional internal quality assurance system the array of processes pertaining to these actions associated with enhancing employment and employability.



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- Universities' **organisation and integration of their key actions framework** is crucial to attaining, on the one hand, maximum impact from each measure addressed by the university to enhance employability, and on the other hand, greater benefits from the effort made by the agents involved and, hence, more efficient operability throughout the university institution. Specifically:
    - 1) Each action type should be integrated with other types of action internal to the university, both within and without its scope, systematically and concurrently with other processes related to institutional governance, planning and organisation, data and information analysis, and the management of institutional quality and support systems;
    - 2) key action types should establish links with other external processes, that are on many occasions also fundamental, despite not being university-led;
    - 3) the planning and management of internal and external relations will require intensive reflection, synthesis and organisation to handle and make use of this network of relations for the benefit of achieving enhanced employability.
  - **The governance of university institutions** is a strategic element to articulate - through leadership, planning and organisation- actions to enhance employability. In more detailed terms, a list of instrumental measures is given below.
    - 1) Planning: incorporating significant employability-enhancing actions in the university strategy plan, and setting up an integrated and coordinated plan for these measures for improving employability, entrepreneurship and job placement.
    - 2) Decision-taking and communication: establishing a procedure for transferring information on the outcomes of actions taken to other services or processes within the university.
    - 3) University professionals: ensuring the presence of sufficient specialised human resources and promoting continuous training for employees.
    - 4) Management of services and of economic and material resources: setting up services or offices specifically dedicated to issues regarding employability, entrepreneurship and job placement for students and graduates, and to avail of specialised material resources and sustained funding that is specific and appropriate to the set of key actions.

In essence, careful reflection should be given to the increasing importance of employability and employment in universities' strategic outlook, and consequently, on the link between said strategy and human and material resources, and internal and external quality assurance processes at institutions and in degree programmes, in which perfecting information management is critical.

### **3. REVIEW OF KEY ACTIONS IN ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY AND EMPLOYMENT: PROPOSAL FOR A SELF-ASSESSMENT GUIDE**

As indicated earlier, having identified a set of key action types for enhancing employability and the incorporation of students and graduates to the labour market has paved the way

for drafting a self-assessment guide whose mission is to advise universities on strategy development geared toward such enhancement.

In drafting this guide, in addition to the task of identifying key action types, both the *ESG* and the content of the principal external evaluation models for programmes and institutions implemented by ANECA have been taken into account.

The self-assessment guide consists of four main sections, namely strategic and institutional aspects; specific employability targets; appraisal of employability measures; summary and overall evaluation of actions taken.

The self-assessment process guided mainly with this tool is intended to boost, at each university, a comprehensive and coordinated reflection on the most salient actions regarding employment and employability that, by virtue of its institutional autonomy, are or may potentially be taken, and to conduct an appraisal of the current status of such actions and any possible future improvement plans.

Finally, further to the foregoing considerations which sum up the principal ideas in this report, we should add four **significant conclusions**.

First of all, according to the demands of students and society, **the array of actions to be taken by universities should progressively broaden its boundaries** in two ways. On the one hand, **to become more inclusive** and allow the participation of a more diverse public with different needs and expectations. And on the other hand, **to provide support more closely synchronised** with individuals' needs at each step in their life path, that may extend from a pre-university stage to after having completed university studies.

Secondly, the effort and commitment by universities and ANECA alone cannot be sufficient to achieve significant advances in the current state of affairs, unless **other important agents, external to these institutions, become increasingly engaged and make resolute joint contributions to generating a favourable climate and the appropriate channels for tapping and sponsoring the talent** emerging from these Higher Education institutions.

Thirdly, the results yielded by this project, over and above contributing to providing guidance to universities, also seek to maintain a **constructive dialogue with the current external quality assessment procedures of programmes and institutions**. On the one hand, keeping in view the elements present in such procedures that contribute to improving universities' measures in favour of employability and graduates' access to the labour market; and, on the other hand, offering issues that warrant serious consideration regarding reviewing said external assessment procedures, with aim of rendering the latter capable of inflicting a greater impact on key items of the work done by universities with repercussions in the improvement of said measures.

To finish, we may conclude that, in view of their indisputable **vocation for service to society**, through this initiative ANECA and participating universities strengthen their commitment to enhancing employability and employment for those currently studying or who have graduated from programmes in the Spanish university system and to progress in society as a whole.