



Feasibility Study of Alumni and Career Centres Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector

SIMPLE Project Study
(Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education)

2019



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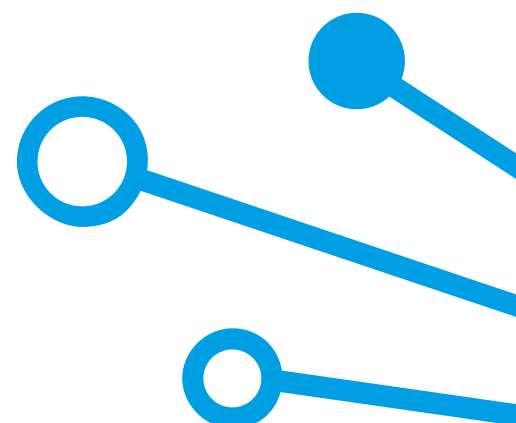
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Abbreviations & Acronyms

A	Alumni
AC	Alumni Centre
BEM	Student organization at faculty level, UNTAD
BEMUT	Student organization at university level, UNTAD
BOKU	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria
CASE	The Council for Advancement and Support of Education
CC	Career Centre
CCDC	Creativity and Career Development Centre
CD	Career Day
CULS	The Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic
CV	Curriculum Vitae
EACEA	Education, Audio visual and Culture Executive Agency
EMA	Erasmus Mundus Association
ESAA	Erasmus+ Student and Alumni Alliance
EU	The European Union
FFKU	Faculty of Fisheries, Kasetsart University, Thailand
FNR	Faculty of Natural Resources, PSU
FORS	Czech Forum for Development Cooperation
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IPB	Bogor Agricultural University, Indonesia
KU	Kasetsart University, Thailand
LKMM	Leadership training for UNTAD students
MNC	Multi National Corporation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
PS	Professional Sector
PC-PS	Platform for Cooperation with Professional Sector
PSU	The Prince of Songkla University, Thailand
RUA	The Royal University of Agriculture, Cambodia
SEA	Southeast Asia
SEARCA	Southeast Asian Regional Centre for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture
SIMPLE	Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education
SWOT	Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat
UBB	The University of Battambang, Cambodia
UGent	Ghent University, Belgium
UNTAD	Tadulako University, Indonesia
WB	World Bank
YPARD	Young Professionals for Agricultural Development

Abstract

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

Due to establishment of the Alumni Centres and the Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector and organization of the Career Days at Universities following benefits have accrued to students and staff as well as other stakeholders attending these events: networking/contacts, learning more about careers and opportunities as well as job market needs, internship opportunities, meetings with potential employers, job search skills and the practice of good communication skills.

The main goal of this feasibility study is to present a set of examples of good practices with respect to university Alumni & Career Centres, how to successfully implement internships to the study programmes, to support the development of soft skills of students and organize Career Days and the guest lectures in order to encourage the cooperation of the academic sector with professional sectors. The lessons learnt based on practical experiences at six project partners’ universities oriented to agriculture and life sciences in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand.

The results showed the importance of the recognition of Alumni and Career Centres (AC/CC) at the highest level of management at universities and close cooperation between these Centres. Thanks to the project SIMPLE, ACs/CCs have been established or improved at the project partner universities. The Platform for cooperation was established with the cooperation of all project’ partners to ensure sustainable networking between universities and professional sector (involving industry, governmental organisations, chambers of commerce, embassies, NGOs etc.), at the regional and international level. Sixteen Career Days were organized at six partner universities and were evaluated by the EU project partners to improve management aspects of future additional activities such as soft skills, and CV checks. Information about internship opportunities was provided during the Career Days. The organization of internships at project partner universities was improved thanks to the extension of choices, promotion, quality improvement and evaluation.

Experience gained during implementation of the project was shared by providing five publications which are available at the project website and which were shared during more than 50 meetings among academic and professional sector. Last not least, soft skills training was both directly and indirectly included during project activities.

Project SIMPLE provided closer connections between the private market and the academic sectors both at the national and international levels. The integration of the above mentioned activities also aided in the provision of professional alumni. Finally, we believe that the strengthened link between Asian HEI’s and private market leads to intensified joint public - private research, improving the overall quality of HEIs and national research.



1 INTRODUCTION

The Project SIMPLE (Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education) is a three-year project within the Erasmus + Capacity Building in the Field of Higher Education programme running from October 2016 to October 2019. The main aim of the project is to encourage cooperation between the academic sector (HEIs) and the professional sector in the area of agriculture and life sciences in selected Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand), leading to enhanced employability of the alumni of those universities.

This study firstly describes the results of the SIMPLE project as well as the methodology on how the project's activities were implemented, followed by the practical results of the Career and/or Alumni centres, establishment or improvements done at the partners' universities in three selected countries (Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand). The lessons learnt are provided as recommendations for improvements and benefits for European and Asian universities.

The increasing of cooperation between the academic and professional sectors is related to the priorities at the national levels (Ministries of Education), as well as to those of the top management of involved universities in both Asia and the EU. This is based on the rationale below.

The agricultural sector in Cambodia continues to play an important role in supporting national economic growth (23.5% of GDP) and food security. The majority of the labour force works in agriculture. The Royal Government of Cambodia, together with a range of local and international non-profit organisations and private businesses, works in interrelated areas of development, particularly in the agriculturally more productive provinces. There is a high demand for human resources in specific fields of agriculture and rural development, provided for only a small amount of highly skilled competitive labour.

In Indonesia, the agricultural sector now counts for only 12.8 % of GDP, but it employs 30.3 % of the total labour force (WB, 2019). According to a case study on investment in agriculture in Indonesia, the government is currently trying to undertake strategic plans to achieve food security, for the reduction of poverty, the provision of employment and the sustainable utilization of natural resources, so the agricultural sector of the country can be more effective and consequently grow.

The agricultural sector in Thailand creates 8.1 % of GDP employing 30.4 % of the labour force (WB, 2019). Thailand is a prime example of successful agriculture development in an industrialising country. The World Bank East Asia and Pacific Report (2011) suggests three priority areas for improvement of the educational system (i) effectiveness and efficiency in financing, (ii) better management of public institutions and (iii) better stewardship of the higher education system: e.g. ensuring stronger links between industry and universities.

Moreover, the previous study done within the Erasmus Mundus project "ASK Asia" (Agriculture, Skills, Knowledge in Asia: Competences and Employability of Erasmus Mundus Graduates in Agriculture on the Asian Professional Market) analysed how the Erasmus Mundus graduates in Agriculture and related Life Sciences perform on the professional job market in Asia, and identified specific competences and skills that provide these graduates with a comparative advantage in meeting the expectations of their employers following the education/training period. The research implemented in six countries (Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Mongolia, Thailand and Vietnam) demonstrated that a major drive for Asian students to seek a mobility experience in Europe, is the fact that they want to obtain practical training and learn more soft skills. The practical training (internships) and professional soft skills (e.g. presenting) are not properly included in curricula of the study programme at their home institution.

Therefore, the consortium of the SIMPLE project decided to provide a network and platform for alumni, and to integrate soft skills into study programme curricula. The Platforms for Cooperation with Professional Sectors were created to ensure better communication among academic and professional sectors. These connections are important also for the improvement of the curriculum of study programmes at the universities, which should support improved preparation for job market of their students.



2 OBJECTIVES

Increasing cooperation between the Asian academic and private markets, enhancing student and alumni soft and practical skills, and the creation of alumni networks in the field of agriculture are among to the main priorities of the SIMPLE project.

The specific objectives of the project were to:

- i. support networking and create a sustainable link between young graduates (alumni) and employers by establishing Alumni Centres and Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector,
- ii. improve the study programme curricula at HEIs in the selected Asian universities by introducing (compulsory) internships, leading to more practical knowledge and better professional skills of the alumni,
- iii. enhance soft skills of the students, and
- iv. introduce the use of guest lectures, from the professional sector, into study curricula, as they are an effective way to connect the private world with the academic (or to start up connections).

The main goal of this feasibility study is to present a set of examples of good practices with respect to university Alumni & Career Centres: how to successfully implement internships to the study programmes, support the development of soft skills of students and organize Career Days and the guest lectures in order to encourage the cooperation of the academic sector with the professional sector. The lessons learnt are provided based on the practical experiences at six project partners' universities oriented to agriculture and life sciences in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand leading to an enhanced employability of those universities' alumni. This study can be used for multiplication effects in these countries, and especially Alumni & Career Centres and Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector, can be implemented at other universities in the country or the region of SEA.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Project team and strategy

The project involves three EU universities (the Czech Republic, Austria and Belgium) and six Asian universities which are high quality HEI oriented on agriculture and life sciences and have a long term experience in EU project management and participation. The selected universities are situated in different geographical parts of each country, based on the fact that we would like to cover the impact for the whole country. Usually one of the universities is located in the capital city (or close to it) with the advantage that the university can link with important chambers of commerce and companies which have their headquarters in the capital. The other universities being located in the South or North part of the country, which are areas where agriculture plays an extremely important role in both economic and social aspects.

Project Partners:

Czech Republic	Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CULS)
Austria	University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)
Belgium	Ghent University (UGent)
Cambodia	Royal University of Agriculture (RUA)
Cambodia	University of Battambang (UBB)
Indonesia	Bogor Agricultural University (IPB)
Indonesia	Tadulako University (UNTAD)
Thailand	Kasetsart University (KU)
Thailand	Prince of Songkla University (PSU)

The project also involves six associates' organizations (Agrinatura, EMA, ESAA, FORS, SEARCA, YPARD) which are active in cooperation with the Alumni and Professional sector and were helpful in providing experiences, know-how and disseminating.

The project SIMPLE strategy (Fig. 1) is focused on enhancing cooperation between the academic and professional sector. As we concluded in the study "Good Practices of Alumni Centres", the life cycle of students should be in line with involvement of students in Alumni and Career Centre activities from the beginning of their studies. Students should be included during the whole student life cycle, with special focus on selecting career services according their level.

- "New students" who are settling into university should be informed about AC/CC activities, be involved in Career Centres and get the opportunity for volunteering activities, so they can serve the university and get their own experiences and ideas about the importance of career involvement at the beginning of their studies.
- The main focus for "Recent students" should be to enable them to meet the opportunities during a wide range of Career Centre activities. Highly valuable are: Soft skills training, Career Days, Guest lectures and field visits. At this stage, students should be aware of the international possibilities and joint presentations with experienced

students with internships abroad.

- Based on previous experiences with the professional sector “Mid-term students” should have a better idea about their future career possibilities and be ready to meet the real requirements of the job the market during internships and Career Days. Critical aspects of the successful implementation are strong focus on improvements in the field of extended opportunities for students, internationalisation and evaluation.
- “Graduates” creating friendly environment and involving students in the activities leading to graduate willingness to cooperate and create new opportunities for new students.

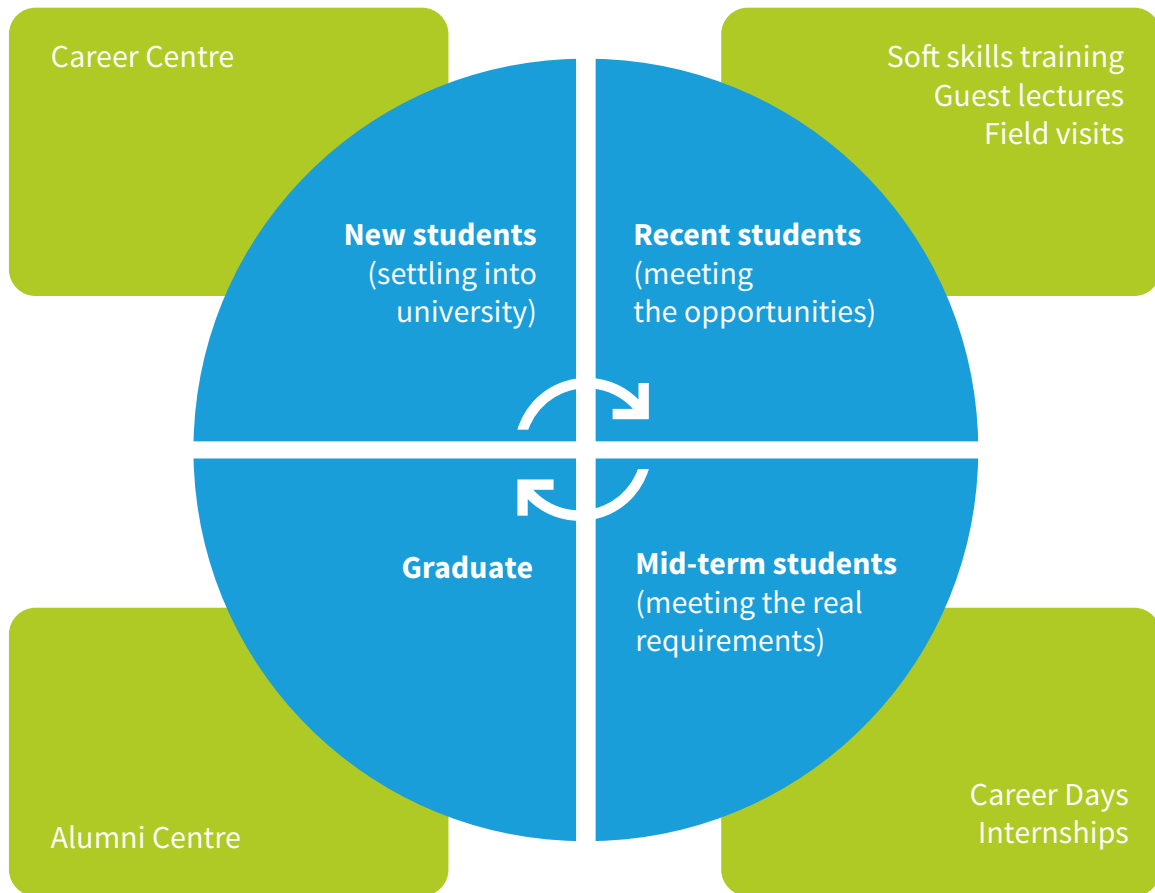


Figure 1. Project strategy respecting student life cycle – main focus for activities according to the stage of the student's life cycle.

3.2 Research approach

The Feasibility Study of Alumni and Career Centres & Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector provides the lessons learnt and achieved outputs during the implementation of the SIMPLE project. The activities included the following actions. Firstly, in-depth analysis of experiences with Alumni Centres was prepared and discussed during the interactive workshop of “Best Practices of Alumni and Career Centres” which was held at the Ghent University in Belgium in June 2017. Over intensive three days the project team focused on deep study of the best practices of Alumni and Career Centres together with a number of outstanding international experts (e.g. INVE



aquaculture, the University of Groningen, CASE and the University of Navarra provided detailed insights into their activities related to alumni).

The training course for the staff of Asian Alumni Centres was held at BOKU, Vienna University, Austria in October 2017. Twenty four participants were trained over five intensive days in fields of service such as advertising, administration and internships by BOKU experts and developed a deep insight into events like Mentoring projects, Internship Days, How to Apply, Career Calling and Job Week which are traditionally held at BOKU, Vienna.

Thanks to the support of the project there were established/improved Alumni Centres and/or Career Centres at the project partners' universities. The centres use the most suitable methods for cooperation and the involvement of future employers in academic activities through contacts with graduates, platforms for cooperation with the professional sector, events and by supporting internships, lectures from practitioners and the improvement of students' soft skills. Particularly, new Alumni centres were established at RUA and UBB in Cambodia, then Career Centre was implemented at KU in Thailand. The Alumni and Career Centre is newly located at the Faculty of Natural Resources of PSU in Thailand. Internationalised Alumni and Career Centres are supported at IPB and UNTAD in Indonesia.

The Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector are complex platforms connecting project partners, academic staff, and administrative staff at the universities, students and the professional sector. A list of companies (enterprises), NGO's and governmental organizations which are potential employers of alumni in the sector of agriculture and life sciences was created, also including international companies oriented towards development or business in the Asian countries involved. The main centres for this platform are the Alumni and/or Career Centres run at the Asian partner universities.

The Career Days were held at six universities: the Prince of Songkla University, Kasetsart University (Thailand), the Royal University of Agriculture, University of Battambang (Cambodia), Bogor University and Tadulako University (Indonesia) between the years 2017 and 2019. More than 400 major domestic and international companies doing business in the field of life sciences took part in these Career Days and over 20,000 students were thus able to take this unique opportunity to establish contacts with potential employers and providers of professional internships. The representatives of the companies, institutions, and organizations involved in the Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector were invited. Alumni and/or Career Centres promoted their activities during the organised the Career Days.

Table 1: Dates and place of organized Career Days

Dates	University/activity	Country	Number of companies/organisations	Number of participants
2017 October 21-22	IPB Job Fair (Career and Entrepreneurship Expo)	Indonesia	44	3,898
2017 December 1	RUA Career Days	Cambodia	21	892
2018 March 27	KU Career Day	Thailand	20	340
2018 April 2	PSU Career Day	Thailand	17/30 (with offers)	729

2018 April 6	UBB Career Day	Cambodia	31	568
2018 April 28-29	IPB Job Fair (Career and Scholarship day)	Indonesia	52	2,490
2018 August 24-25	UNTAD Career Fair and Grand Alumni Meeting	Indonesia	29	603
2018 September 21-22	IPB Job Fair (Career and Entrepreneurship Expo)	Indonesia	41	3,213
2018 November 15	PSU Career Day	Thailand	16	327
2018 December 6	RUA Career Days	Cambodia	17	1,500
2019 March 26	UBB Career Day	Cambodia	33	700
2019 April 2	PSU Career Day	Thailand	10	155
2019 April 2	KU Career Day	Thailand	21	321
2019 April 27-28	IPB Career & Entrepreneur Fair	Indonesia	50	2,316
2019 August 3-4	UBB Career Fair	Cambodia	34	1,000
2019 28-29 September	IPB Career & Entrepreneur Fair	Indonesia	37	3,544
Total			496	22,596

The Guest lectures from more than 70 representatives of the professional sector relevant to various fields of study were provided at the project partners' universities in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand. The project SIMPLE also supported international guest lectures. Guest lectures provided by experts from the professional sector ensure the innovative aspects from the business sector enter into the academic one and have a positive impact on the development of students and staff of Asian Universities.

The improvement of soft skills for students and staff are ensured by training and active participation in project activities (Career Days, Training, Workshops, Guest lectures). Students enhanced their language, communication, and presentation skills. CV checks were also provided for students. During Career Days students were actively involved in the preparation of the event, thereby improving their management and organizational skills.

Practical training (internships) was officially included in the curricula of the selected study programmes at Asian universities. The training of students is organized with connection to representatives of business companies, NGO's and governmental organizations which are involved in the Platforms for Cooperation with Professional Sector. Organized internships are regularly evaluated and summarized in the Evaluation report. Internship instruction were summarized and model documents set up with the organization of internships as a running activity by way of a follow-up, based on the contacts made during the Career Days.

The project consortium prepared the following practical guidelines, which are broadly shared within the project team, and, also other stakeholders, as a multiplication aspect of the project activities:

- i. In-depth analysis of experiences with Alumni Centres in Europe was prepared and published as the study “Good Practices of Alumni Centres”,
- ii. Action Plan for Cooperation with the Non-academic sector,
- iii. Guidelines of Best Practice Examples of Alumni Centres,
- iv. Models of Internship Forms and Evaluation sheets for implementation of internships.

Finally, the Feasibility Study of Alumni and Career Centres & Platforms for Cooperation with the Professional Sector is provided and includes lessons learnt and recommendations achieved during the above mentioned activities. The final results and recommendations were discussed during the SIMPLE project final conference “Bridge the gap between academic and the professional sector”, held at the Kasetsart University, Thailand on 27th August 2019. The main objectives of the conference were to (i) share lessons learnt and recommendations from the SIMPLE project activities done in Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand, (ii) promote best practices for cooperation between universities and the professional sector including experiences with cooperation with the professional sector and (iii) provide feedback from organised internships, Career Days, soft skills training, guest lectures. The project partners’ representatives (32 people in total) together with invited guests (20) participated in this workshop and lessons learnt were discussed.

3.3 Data collection

To reach the above objectives, several research data collection approaches were chosen, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods.

● Monitoring of implemented Career Days

The above-mentioned Career Days organized at the Asian project partners’ universities in 2017-2019 were monitored and evaluated by the EU project partners’ representatives who participated in the events and collected the data through observations and personal interviews with the organising teams. In total, 11 evaluation reports (per each partners’ university in Asia) were provided and included SWOT analysis describing the positive aspects as well as the challenges regarding organisation of the Career Days at the local universities. The recommendations for future improvements are also provided in the evaluation reports.

Internships evaluation

The internships were promoted and managed regularly at the Asian project partners’ universities. The quality of these internships was evaluated at four levels: (i) at the home university using the internship report by each individual student who participated in the internship, (ii) through the evaluation reports provided by the EU project partners’ representatives who personally interviewed the students, (iii) joint evaluation report prepared by the team from PSU university which summarized all the evaluation reports done by EU experts and (iv) through the International Internship Buddy system.

The evaluation via International Internship Buddy system was based on interviews run by the Master students from the Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (CULS, the Czech Republic) with Asian students from Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand, who have participated in internships supported by the SIMPLE project. There were 34

participating Asian students studying at six different universities selected (two universities from each country), who have done their internship in different fields or areas, mainly focusing on agriculture and life sciences. The summary report of these interviews describing the personal experiences with internships, main outputs, improved skills and positive aspects as well as challenges during the internship period was prepared and promoted.

● Project's activities evaluation

The online survey was targeted to the professional sector representatives and students from Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand who participated in the SIMPLE project activities during the years 2016–2019. The questionnaire was open via link at the project website (www.projectsimple.cz) during the period June–August 2019 via Lime Survey online software. Lime Survey is an open online platform enabling the creation of mailing lists, the distribution of questionnaires and the collection of data without manual intervention. Errors due to manual data transfer are thus eliminated.

There were five parts in the survey for the professional sector representatives evaluating their satisfaction and importance of the activities such as Career Days, Internships, Guest lectures, Soft skills training, experiences with interns and alumni and interest for future cooperation. The respondents used the Likert scale evaluation from 1 to 5 (1 – not at all satisfied, 5 – very satisfied). The total number of the respondents was 36.

The questionnaire for the students/alumni was composed of three parts: firstly, general demographic data about the respondents were collected; secondly, they evaluated their satisfaction with Alumni and Career Centres, Career Days/Fair hosted at their university, Soft skills training, their Internship, Guest lectures, and thirdly, the information regarding current job position was asked for (only for alumni). The total number of the students who responded to the online survey was 107.

Table 2: Variables used in the Feasibility Study of implemented components

Type of Information	Variables
ALUMNI AND/OR CAREER CENTRE	Total N° of students, companies (governmental, private, NGO), alumni, platform for cooperation, attractiveness for companies for cooperation with university Overall evaluation, quality, and quantity of offered activities, access to the information at university, web sites, social media and means of communication with companies
CAREER DAYS	Overall evaluation, quality, and quantity of offered activities, new contact/new opportunity for future career, internship, improvement of soft skills
INTERNSHIPS	Length of internship, type of work Overall evaluation, quality and quantity of work, importance for future career, information about internship from university, knowledge on how to turn theory into practice, value for degree studies/personal development, financial resources, duration, outputs, supervising, work content related to field of study, improvement of soft skills Company evaluation of students: education and training, practical experiences, language, soft skills, experiences abroad

Type of Information	Variables
ALUMNI AND/OR CAREER CENTRE	Total N° of students, companies (governmental, private, NGO), alumni, platform for cooperation, attractiveness for companies for cooperation with university Overall evaluation, quality, and quantity of offered activities, access to the information at university, web sites, social media and means of communication with companies
SOFT SKILLS TRAINING	Overall evaluation, quality and quantity of offered activities, Improvement of decision-making, capacity to learn, capacity to adapt new situations, capacity for generating new ideas, capacity for applying knowledge into practice, capacity for analysis and synthesis, capacity for critical thinking, Interaction with other people and cultures, responsibility, self-confidence, independence, ability in problem solving, research skills, language skills, time management, capacity to work in team, oral and written communication
GUEST LECTURES / FIELD VISITS	Overall evaluation, quality, and quantity of offered activities, importance for future career

3.4 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, 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 person 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 RESULTS

4.1 Alumni & Career Centres - Practices from Different Universities

Alumni & Career Centres have a key role at the universities for creating high quality platform for cooperation with professional sector. This chapter gives an overview of all the universities analysed, based on the surveys of students, companies and internal evaluation of Alumni and Career Centres (via questionnaire survey, personal interviews, international evaluation). The results focus on the overall evaluation of management, quantity and quality of offered activities and access to information as a main tool for reaching a high quality platform for cooperation.

Within the project SIMPLE four Alumni & Career Centres were newly established in Cambodia and Thailand and two were improved in Indonesia. Two newly established Alumni and/or Career Centres were established at faculty level with strong cooperation with Alumni & Career Centres at university level. Based on the recommendations of SIMPLE project study (De Winter et al., 2017) five Alumni and Career Centres were established as one office place or with close cooperation with jointly cooperating two offices. The advantage of involving alumni in further development for the Career Centres was reported in SIMPLE study as a best source for the professional sector in certain fields with high level of willingness to cooperate due to personal connection and own experience with respective study programmes. Therefore, creating friendly environment and involvement of students in the activities has a strong impact also on further cooperation and involvement of alumni.

The main strategy of the universities was to create active Alumni and Career Centres and the following conditions play the most important role:

- 1) Recognition at university/faculty level – promotion at university level and internal meetings, involving people with high university status in activities (e.g. as honourable speakers during events).
- 2) Financial resources support by university with focus on sustainability and active cooperation with donors and determining the universities' return on investment (not only financial but also indirectly as an example of university reputation, attracting new students).
- 3) Highly motivated, enthusiastic and trained staff of AC/CC – the training for 24 international staff of the AC/CC was provided at the BOKU Vienna (Austria) via exchange of know-how of project partners and the professional sector involved during training. The most important fields of training of the staff were set out in the following:
 - AC/CC (foundation, milestones, future development)
 - Services for members and administration of the members
 - Mentoring services
 - Advertising
 - Practical social media training
 - Internships and study-related co-operation with companies
 - Alumni-Magazine

- Services for companies
- Events “how to apply” & “internship day”
- Practical exercise to prepare real plan

Based on the Action Plan for Co-operation between Alumni Centres and the Non-academic Sector (Fuhrmann K. et al., 2018) short-term, mid-term and long-term strategy was involved at project partner universities (Fig. 2).



Figure 2. The list of main activities of newly founded / or improved AC/CCs

Short Term

Each AC/CC firstly selected responsible people with leadership features with clear division of duties. During regular monthly meetings a plan of activities was created including budget, list of contacts with alumni and the professional sector and creating promotion tools such as web sites, leaflets, banners, social media. For each activity, benefits for stakeholders were discussed and promoted as the main point for success.

Mid-Term

Organizing of events with high importance according to the results of evaluation by students. Most important was evaluated Career Days and Internships (85% of respondents at highest ratings), followed by Soft skills training and Guest lectures. In the mid-term strategy the focus was to involve international stakeholders to offer wide opportunities, give high credibility and attract more students and stakeholders from the professional sector. To attract students and the professional sector new career activities were involved, such as, round tables, international discussions, and personal meetings. An innovative approach was included for internships in the field of internationalisation.

Long-Term

Within last stage ACs/CCs improved their strategy according to the evaluation of their activities, strengthened platform and extended their services (i.e. amount, quality, impact of events). For further sustainability fundraising and support of each AC/CC was determined based on previous success and contacts at universities, e.g. companies and other sources which are willing to support Alumni and Career Centres and their activities.

Fig. 3-5 are based on evaluation of the questionnaire survey of six Alumni and/or Career Centres and, according ratings, more than 85 % of respondents evaluated the satisfaction level at high and very high level with regard to offering high-quality activities for students. According to the results there is still a case for increasing the number of activities offered. Higher number of activities was involved in long-term strategy within annually prepared year plan for Alumni and Career Centres activities.

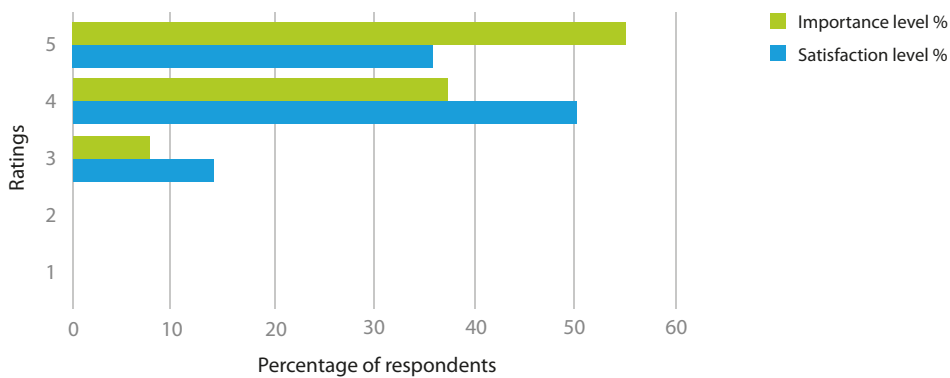


Figure 3. Overall evaluation of Alumni and Career Centre by students (2019) Note: rate between 1–5 (Satisfaction / Importance ratings: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – medium; 4 – high; 5 – very high)

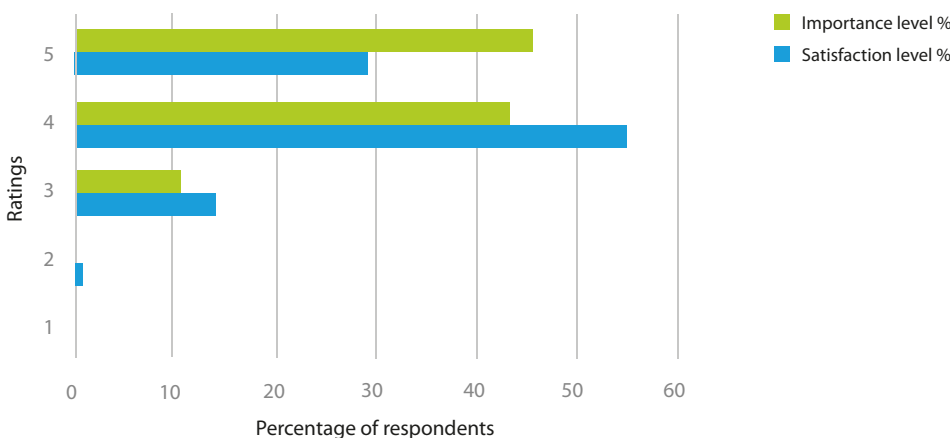


Figure 4. Overall evaluation of quality of offered activities by Alumni and Career Centre evaluated by students (2019) Note: rate between 1–5 (Satisfaction / Importance ratings: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – medium; 4 –high 5 – very high)

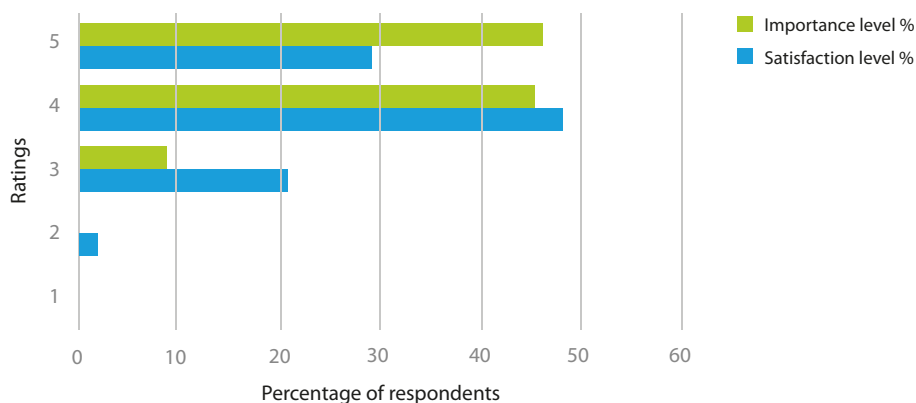


Figure 5. Overall evaluation of quantity of offered activities by Alumni and Career Centre evaluated by students (2019) Note: rate between 1-5 (Satisfaction / Importance at the rating: 1 - very low; 2 - low; 3 - medium; 4 - high 5 - very high)

1) Alumni & Career Centres in Cambodia

In Cambodia, there were newly established Alumni and Career Centres in 2017 at the Royal University of Agriculture and in 2018 at the University of Battambang based on experiences and training of staff members towards capacity building at their home universities. Strong cooperation between universities was enhanced by personal meetings and help during Career Days and supporting activities. At Alumni and Career Centres, there are, currently working, 4-5 staff.

The main means of communication are conducted by regular internal meetings (once per 1 month - 4 months), weekly phone calls, face to face meetings, workshops and trainings, email. The main social media used for communication are Facebook, Telegram and Line.

The main activities involve communication with private sectors and announcing jobs, finding appropriate employees by communicating on Facebook and email of AC/CC and personal visits.

Private sectors can announce jobs and find employees easier by communicating on Facebook and email of AC/CC and personal visits at university. Students and graduates are usually connected with AC/CC to find job or internship programmes, AC/CC is actively working with students and offer wide range of training, guiding, creating networks and giving them the opportunities. Activities are regularly monitored by evaluation of impact, reporting, and discussions during meetings and evaluation of questionnaires distributed among students and companies involved.

The main mission is cooperation between universities and networking, improving the quality of education, teaching, learning, and capacity building to develop career and education also for next generations.

2) Alumni & Career Centres in Indonesia

In Indonesia Alumni and Career Centres were restructured between 2016 and 2018 at Bogor Agricultural University and Tadulako University. As main components for improvement were high quality trainings of staff and support for equipment for Centre and involvement in the Platform for cooperation with the professional sector. Strong



cooperation between universities was enhanced by personal meetings and Career Days observations. There are currently 15 staff working at Alumni and Career Centres. The main focus for Alumni and Career Centres is internationalisation, therefore on-line communication and publicity, used (web pages, Instagram, Line, Facebook, and Twitter) at IPB and on the international platform, is crucial.

The main means of communication at all university levels is focused on IPB to handle graduate careers, tracer studies and to display successful alumni as motivation. Also there is a strong effort to facilitate student and fresh graduates for soft skill development and to get a job. As a good example of students event at UNTAD - Annual LKMM (Leadership training for UNTAD students. Alumni are involved actively in guiding and training students who can later take part in the campus leadership organizations; Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa (BEM/student organization at faculty level) of Tadulako University and Badan Eksekutif Mahasiswa of Tadulako University (BEMUT/student organization at university level).

The main activities are Job Fair, in campus recruitment, job vacancy publication, soft skill training, “studium generale” for graduates, alumni gathering, making gardens by alumni, leadership training, alumni mentoring, fundraising, social events, Career Fair and Alumni Grand Meeting.

Activities have been regularly monitored since the beginning of 2018 and there has been a structural change at IPB. Career Centre and Alumni centre are divided into two different units, but in their implementation, they still work together and collaborate well. At UNTAD Quarter meetings initiated by the Vice-rector and Vice-dean of student affairs, are conducted to discuss and access programmes of the Career centre and Alumni centre. In detail, the meeting is intended to provide an assessment of the student’s organization as well as the Creativity and Career Development Centre (CCDC). The assessment determines the programme of each unit, the outcome of the programme for the students and alumni, and the allocation of funds within the framework of organizational development programmes.

The main sustainability factors for funding of AC/CC are governmental support, Alumni member fundraising and university and companies donations.

3) *Alumni and Career Centres in Thailand*

At Kasetsart University, it was newly established Career centre at the Faculty of Fisheries in 2018, while an Alumni Centre at university level has existed since 2006. At Prince of Songkla University AC/CC of the Faculty of Natural Resources was established in 2017. At the AC/CC two people are currently working at both universities.

The Career Centre (CC) and Alumni Centre (AC) have been sharing an office together. These two Centres are working closely with each other. The AC has a monthly meeting in which the members of the CC are always participated. The AC has been a great resource for the CC in terms of connecting the CC with both private and governmental organizations (internship, guest lecture, and fund raising). The plan is to increase this cooperation even more in the future. Regular meetings are especially for preparation of the Career Day and an outstanding alumni award at PSU.

Career Centres are organise Career Days, Soft skill training (mock interview etc.), Guest lectures and the improvement of internship experiences. The Alumni Centre mainly focuses on fund raising by biking at Kampangsean, charity activities and providing scholarships (two 20,000 baht scholarships per year), registering of alumni members, NR Market, NR reunion - Annual event of Alumni who graduate from the Faculty of Natural Resources, PSU in Hat Yai, Songkhla, NR Chapters in the North, Northeastern and Southern Thailand depending on the key Alumni in each region, NR reunion in Bangkok - the event of Alumni who graduate from the Faculty of Natural Resources, PSU in Bangkok, FNR (Faculty of Natural Resources).

In each activity, evaluation is crucial. Post activity meetings and evaluation forms are the most common tools. The inputs are taken very seriously and used for future activity improvement. At PSU activities are reviewed by a working team of the FNR's Student Development Unit.

ACs/CCs were able to increase their activities and organizational skills due to the funding/know-how from the project and support by equipment. The experiences shared between partner universities were very valuable and the AC is further supported by donation and fundraising activities. The CC is supported at faculty and university level. The initiative of having Career Day is due to the SIMPLE project and closer contacts and relationship with the companies and related government offices is crucial.

4.2 Platform for Cooperation with Professional Sector – the Best Methods

The project SIMPLE Platform for Cooperation with the Professional Sector (PC-PS) is a complex platform connecting project partners, academic staff, and administrative staff from universities, students and the professional sector (Fig. 6). The main centres of this platform are Alumni and/or Career Centres at Asian partner universities. The function of the platform works at different levels: sharing experiences between universities, companies, sharing contacts within the same country and project partners, sharing contact within EU – Asian partners.

The internal online database for each project country contains 410 contacts for Indonesia, 130 contacts for Thailand and 261 contacts for Cambodia and it is continuously updated by each Career Centre.

The analysis of PC-PS considers both internal and external factors for the strategic directions for successful functioning and sustainable cooperation. The main internal factors for successful platform for cooperation is the university support, active team, promotional activities, attracting new contacts, cooperation with alumni, updated database, regular communication with companies about their satisfaction. A challenge which faced some universities was to prevent their email communication being recognised as spam. The main external factor was evaluated willingness of companies to cooperate (facing the challenges to losing their know-how when involving students to their activities, short-time period for internships, strong effort to invest into students for short time).

Following approaches were used within the SIMPLE project to reach the professional sector:

- 1) SIMPLE web pages with possibility for companies of direct enrolment, or via email, social media
- 2) Contacting University directly through established Alumni & Career Centres
- 3) University active contacting of professional sector
- 4) Personal (at office of each project partner, events)
- 5) Support of EU partners and promotion

Promotional activities of PC-PS are one of the key elements of success. The heads of Alumni and Career Centres actively communicate and promote platform on-line, during personal meetings, events, through Embassies, Chambers of Commerce, internationally within other projects and international events.

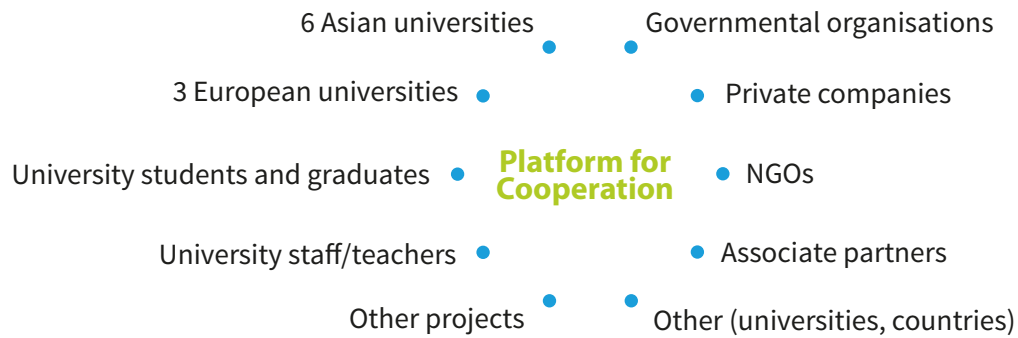


Figure 6. Platform for cooperation within SIMPLE project

Components for facilitating communication within the project SIMPLE platform:

- ▶ SIMPLE project web pages, Facebook, LinkedIn
- ▶ 6 Asian university web pages, Alumni and/or Career Centres webpages and social media
- ▶ Face to face meetings
- ▶ Events (Career Days, trainings, guest lectures)
- ▶ Skype meetings
- ▶ Internships
- ▶ Phones
- ▶ Email
- ▶ Line, WhatsApp, Telegram

Based on our survey, more than 50 % of companies prefer traditional means of communication by email or phone. Surprisingly less than 14 % of company respondents are interested in communication through social media or by personal communication (Fig. 7).

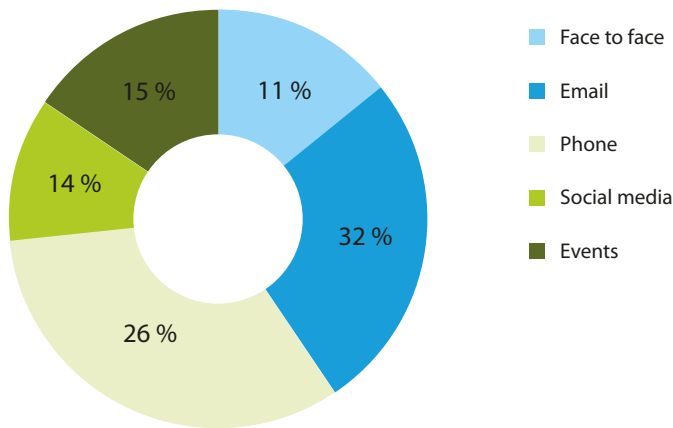


Figure 7. Means of communication preferred by companies

To receive regular feedback from Platforms for cooperation it is recommended to involve (according to possibilities of company representatives):

- ▶ Questionnaires surveys
- ▶ Personal interviews
- ▶ Round tables
- ▶ Panel discussions

4.3 Career Days – Pros and Cons

Career Days were held at least once per year at all six Asian project partners. In total there were 16 Career Days organized with the support of the project SIMPLE. For PSU and UBB universities the organising of a Career Day was very strong input and thanks to great success they manage to organise it within a half year with their own support. Sustainability of this activity was proven even within the project lifetime.

Moreover, Career Days were perceived as a one of the most important activities of AC/CC due to the possibility of face to face meeting of all stakeholders.

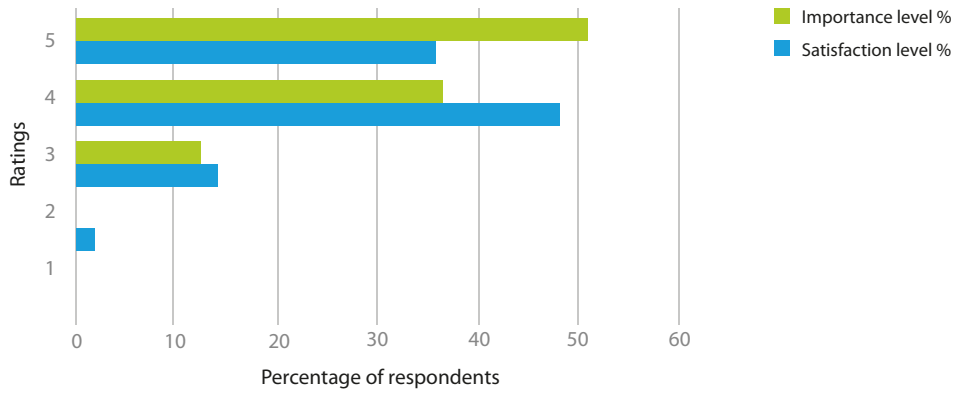


Figure 8. Overall evaluation of Career Days by students Note: rate between 1-5 (Satisfaction / Importance at the rating: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – medium; 4 – high 5 – very high)

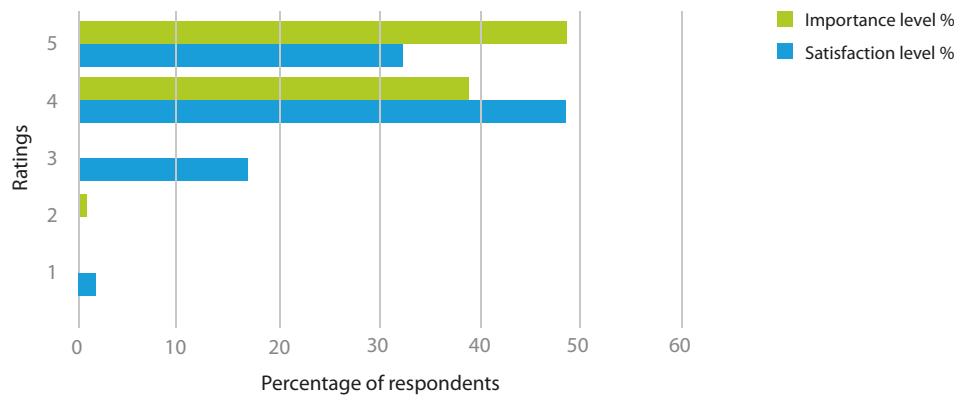


Figure 9. Evaluation of possibility to find new opportunity for future internship or career by students Note: rate between 1–5 (Satisfaction / Importance at the rating: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – medium; 4 –high 5 – very high)

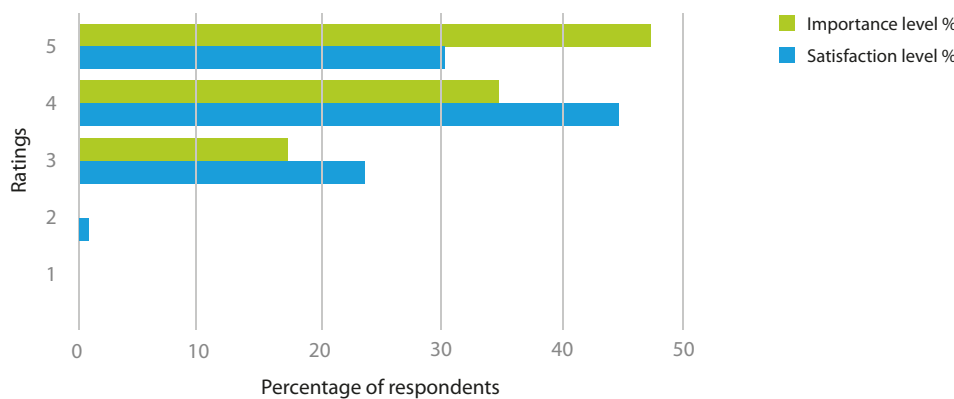


Figure 10. Self-evaluation of students for soft skills improvements thanks to Career Days Note: rate between 1–5 (Satisfaction / Importance at the rating: 1 – very low; 2 – low; 3 – medium; 4 – high 5 – very high)



Career Days were evaluated by students' questionnaire survey. According to (Fig. 8-10), Career Days were selected as the most important event provided by the Alumni and Career Centre for their future career. High expectations by students meet the satisfaction at the scale 4 – 5 (from satisfied to highly satisfied). Students were satisfied with the possibility of finding a new opportunity for their future career or internship (81 %) and the improvement of their soft skills during Career Days (74 %).

Table 3: Main benefits for students and companies offered during Career Days

Benefits for students	Benefits for companies
1 Job opportunities	New contacts
2 Internship opportunities	High-quality students for internships
3 New contacts	High-quality graduates for job
4 Gaining information	Gaining information
5 Sharing information with other students	News in agriculture sectors
6 Community building	International opportunities
7 News in agriculture sectors	Group discussions
8 Improvement of soft skills	Private discussion with PS representatives
9 International opportunities	Possibility for further cooperation with university
10 CV checks	Increase company visibility
11 Group discussions	Became honourable partner of the university
12 Private discussion with PS	Build long-term cooperation with university

The main suggestions by students for improvement of Career Days were to involve more companies, involve Career Day yearly, involvement of all faculties, other universities should be invited, and agricultural equipment should be displayed more.

4.3.1 Cambodia - Career Days evaluation

University of Battambang

Events organised by the UBB provided a suitable space and beneficial services for students and graduates to meet potential employers, mix and mingle among the private companies, gather information on internships and experience. As a strong asset, we would like to highlight the abilities of the organisational team and the high number of volunteers involved. Despite the overall positive evaluation, there are several suggestions and recommendation

which should be taken into account when organising the next event in the UBB (Table 4).

Royal University of Agriculture

Career Days at RUA provided many opportunities for students networking with companies with the possibility to share their mutual experiences and opportunities especially, job opportunities, internship information and strengthen their communication skill. Moreover, students can get some advice from the companies to build up their capacities for a future career.

Table 4: Evaluation of Career Days in Cambodia (main SWOT components based on EU and local project SIMPLE representatives monitoring of two Career Days held between years 2017 and 2019)

SWOT Analysis of Career Days in Cambodia	Royal University of Agriculture	University of Battambang
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High number of volunteers were involved • High number of visitors joined the event • High number of job and internship opportunities for students • Attractive for visitors • Strong cooperation with Lotus radio to promote and disseminate the event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strong management and organizational team • A large number of volunteer involved • Highly motivated team and students • Intensive dissemination and promotion of the event through various channels • Involvement of strong agricultural companies
W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last moment changes in programme • Some companies missed their presentation because of an electric shutdown • Many participants from non-agricultural sectors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date of the first event (close to holiday) • Some of the presentations could be modified into workshops and practical training for students and young graduates (in private groups). • Low involvement of graduates
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase numbers of job opportunities and internship programs are available for students • Improve students communication skills and improve their writing (e.g. CV and Cover letter) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing break-out rooms for students and companies. • Encouraging the maximum number of attendees to fill in the contact form at the companies' booths as well as encouraging these companies to provide such contact forms.
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A low number of students to join in the afternoon session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low interest of students • Insufficient number of private companies

Career Days provided many opportunities for students networking with companies and they could share their mutual experiences and opportunities, especially, job opportunities, internship information and strengthen their



communication skill. Moreover, students could get some advice from the companies to build up their capacities for a future career.

It might be challenging to attract the same number of students and graduates for the next Career Days. Thus, the organisation team should stay innovative and offer several new services for the beneficiaries, practical training or workshops desirably (Fig. 4).

Company representatives felt very proud as many students visited their booths during that event. As a result, not only students but also company booth displayers as well as lecture presenters strongly request AC/CC to provide such an event every year and they are willing to share with students their experiences and new knowledge, and to recruit CVs at the scene as well.

4.3.2 Indonesia – Career Days evaluation

Bogor Agricultural University

The Job Fair at IPB was well appreciated by the exhibitors and visitors. Success rate was at a very good level. On average, of the ones who are applying for a specific job, 50% have studied at IPB so the University graduate applicants have a good chance of finding a job through the IPB fair.

Tadulako University

The Career Fair had a lot of interest of the students. The activities during the fair were well prepared and organised. It was recommended was to rename Career Fair to Career Day due to innovative extent at the Faculty level. The University also organises a Career Fair every year where all faculties are involved. The concept of inviting yearly a specific subgroup of employers (thematic approach) at Faculty level versus all subgroups at University level was highly appreciated. Combining the Career Days with the Grand Alumni Meeting has several positive outcomes: students meet alumni from the professional world and have the opportunity to speak to them personally and organisation costs were proportionally decreasing. Students enjoyed the different presentations and it was admired by EU evaluator how the university facilitates in helping their students in finding a job.

Table 5: Evaluation of Career Days in Indonesia (main SWOT components based on EU and local project SIMPLE representatives monitoring of two Career Days held between years 2017 and 2019)

SWOT Analysis of AC/CC in Indonesia	Bogor Agricultural University	Tadulako University
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent preparation of the fair • Good team of voluntary staff • Confirmed added value for the exhibitors motivated students and alumni with the requested profile(s) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very strong synergy between Alumni and Career Centre • Short period students of Agriculture obtain their first job (between 3 to 6 months) • Good database with overview of the career of the students • Very effective by using social media
W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During certain moments of the fair it was really overcrowded, therefore to talk with companies it was very difficult to understand each other • English knowledge of some visitors was limiting their possibilities for applying for an international job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation problem due to geographical factor
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To join efforts between the biggest universities around Jakarta • Grouping the booths per domain • Facilitating the intensive training of the Bachelor Students (optional courses) for becoming proficient in English. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing amount of companies • University must continuously make efforts to increase direct cooperation with companies
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to respond continuously to the changing needs of the professional world • More and more facilities for applying for a job electronically 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Natural disaster • Growing number of competition with other universities

The main recommendation to Career Days at IPB is for the companies to foresee having enough qualified people at their info corner for the whole exhibition period. The introduction sessions of the expo on the first morning should be open for all visitors and with a more dynamic, creative approach (more information on the objectives of the fair, brief overview on how the fair was organised and what people can expect). There was confirmed added value for the exhibitors, in order to find the appropriate and motivated students and/or young alumni (researchers and job seekers) with the requested profile(s). The main strength was an excellent preparation of the fair: sending on time or contacting the possible exhibitors by the invitations (including a list of newcomers - in total around 400 companies) (Fig. 5).

The main recommendations to Career Days at UNTAD by external EU evaluators are having more different workshops and sharing presentations and speeches at the university level (with students, teachers), providing programme flyers at the entrance and having a green ecologically friendly approach to the Career Fair.

4.3.3 Thailand - Career Days evaluation

Kasetsart University

The idea in developing of a Career Day (CD) was to bring the alumni and students closer to the job market. In addition, the university shall strengthen the network to companies and other job providers as the end user of the alumni. In the event of the CD at the Kasetsart University, we noticed huge interest among the students in attending such event. Students interacted directly with companies, also for young students it was important to get in touch to such event. The CDs has provided a great service for students.

Prince of Songkla University

FNR Career Days were, because of the great success and interest, organised 3 times within 2 years. The European evaluator appreciated well-attended events with a good amount of companies and interested students who could get in contact with the companies and put in their applications. Students should be aware that they should present themselves to companies in a good way and get as much information as possible about them. For students at PSU it is not easy to visit companies as they are spread all over Thailand, so they are strongly motivated to join in this event. Companies liked the event and the number of participating students, too.

Table 6: Evaluation of Career Days in Thailand (main SWOT components based on EU and local project SIMPLE representatives monitoring of two Career Days held between years 2017 and 2019)

SWOT Analysis of AC/CC in Thailand	Kasetsart University	Prince of Songkla University
S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well managed organizer and event preparation. Lesson learnt from the previous career day Expanded opportunities for students to receive job offers by companies. Facilities provided by the university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good distribution of the students throughout the day, was not crowded, signs for every company, good overview and also the desks for companies provide enough space for them Highly interested students Announcement and contacting companies for this event during visit at KU Career Day Good care of the companies
W	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some signs only in Thai 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Registration took a long time Company-signs should be reusable



SWOT Analysis of AC/CC in Thailand		
	Kasetsart University	Prince of Songkla University
O	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of social media could support the CC in distributing the job offers, not only by annual career day. Connecting the CC web to the job providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More activities/benefits for the students More activities also for the companies (like discussions about job opportunities or short reports about their experiences with applicants) More staff/space for the registration
T	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students and alumni lack of motivation to explore job and internship offers Faculty programs will compete with CC events. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New students: attractiveness to students Communication not properly recognized by students Motivation of companies to join Career Days

Recommended to KU: is to invite more variety of companies. Job offer and company recruitments can be implemented not only in the annual CD but also in a certain schedule requested by companies. Companies usually have their own recruitment schedule and may not meet the schedule of a CD, therefore working side by side with the companies, can be of benefit to alumni.

Recommendations to PSU are to offer more activities like a CV-check, provide some examples of good and bad CV's, organize a photo-corner, show them an example of a job interview (the do's and don'ts) on the stage and provide information about the CC/AC.

4.4 Internships

The internships were organized with the support of the project SIMPLE at six partners' universities. Several documents were recommended several documents with the objective of organising high quality internships: template for intern's presentation, soft skill training presentation, SIMPLE publications. Each Asian partner University and Alumni and Career Centre is responsible for internships improvements and reporting to the coordinator.

The most important improvements for internship by university was summarized as follows:

Extension of choice

- ▶ involving new internships opportunities thanks to the platform for cooperation with professional sector
- ▶ collaborating at national level
- ▶ searching for and communicating new offers of internships accessible to students
- ▶ focusing to international organisations, projects, possibilities and growth of platform outside home country

Promotion

- ▶ providing promotion of new internships opportunities accessible for students on web sites, social media, during

lectures, during AC/CC events, notice-boards

- ▶ reports available for new students – both written material as well as presentation
- ▶ sharing of success stories about internship by student (web page, social media)
- ▶ attract companies by promotion of their students (what they manage to improve at other companies, which will be of benefit, possibility to collaborate and find the most appropriate students)

Quality improvement

- ▶ involving uniform documents (template of SIMPLE documents available on project websites)
- ▶ selecting supervisor for each student in cooperation with AC/CC
- ▶ regular monitoring during internships (on field, reporting by students, phone calls, emails - contacting companies for reporting about student activities during internship)
- ▶ sharing results of internships with other students (presentation/special lecture) with recommendation on how to prepare and what to improve
- ▶ volunteer engagement

Evaluation

- ▶ reporting (template of SIMPLE documents available on project websites)
- ▶ evaluation by AC/CC/university/students/companies, Internships as support for BSc/MSc/Ph.D. thesis – evaluation, recognition of credits)
- ▶ template of presentation for intern (so students are aware about of their duties before they go to internships)
- ▶ improving skills of students
- ▶ involving preparation courses for internships, language courses, soft skills training, guest lectures, trainings, field trips
- ▶ soft skill training SIMPLE presentation (available at project websites)

Improving skills of students

- ▶ involving preparation courses for internships, language courses, soft skills training, guest lectures, trainings, field trips
- ▶ soft skill training SIMPLE presentation (available at project websites)



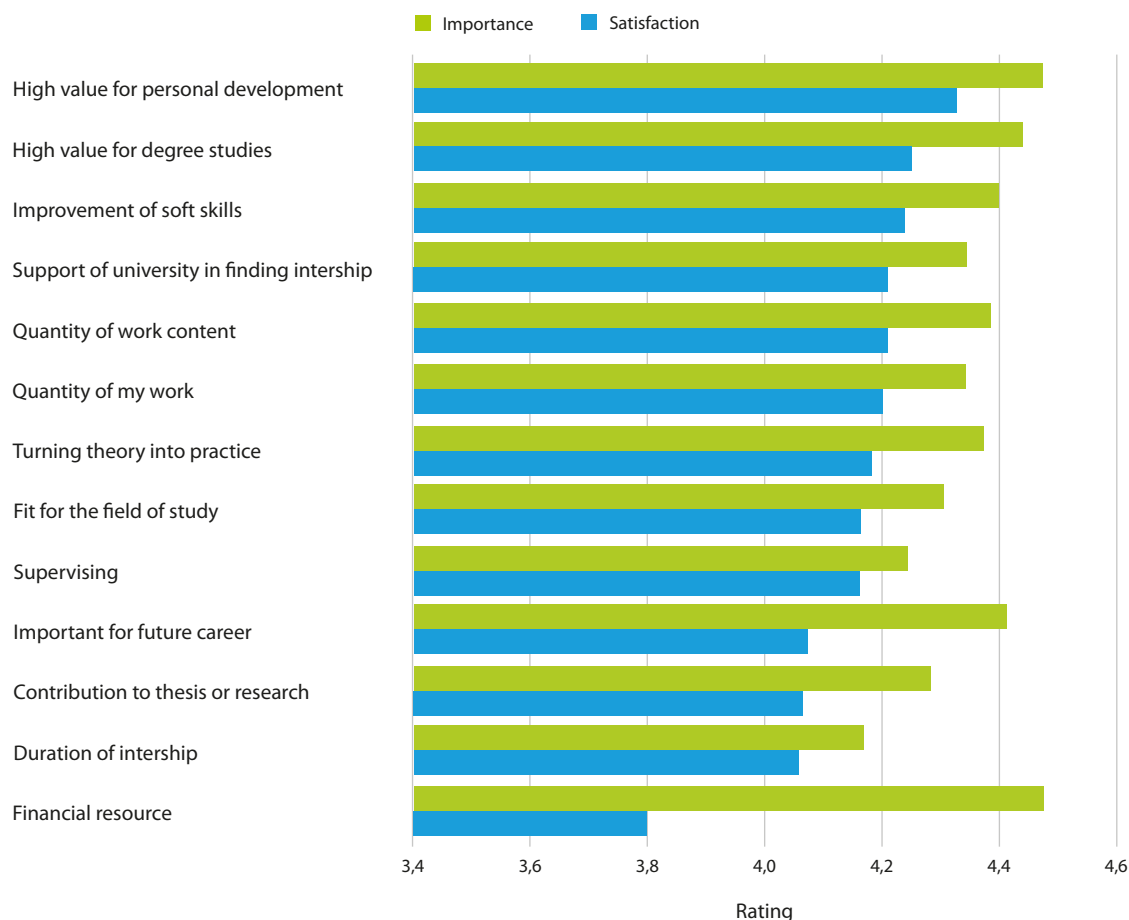


Figure 11. Students' satisfaction and importance of main components of internships (Note: rate between 1-5 (Satisfaction / Importance at the rating: 1 - very low; 2 - low; 3 - medium; 4 - high 5 - very high)

According to questionnaires internships have high value for student's personal development as well as for degree studies. The biggest gap was found in financial support during internships (Fig. 11).

Detailed monitoring by international experts was evaluated by SWOT analysis and details were published in a separate report (Tantikitti et al., 2019) which concluded that internships performed at Asian university partners differ greatly according to the country's national policy, culture and university policy and management factors. In spite of the differences, all stakeholders appreciate the internships, particularly those with a long duration. It is common to find that there is a gap between what students have learned in the classroom and the reality in the field. Internship helps filli this gap and contributes to the students' competitive employability in the future. Overall, the impact of the internship on participating students was positive. They showed high appreciation of skills gained over their internship experience such as practical knowledge, ability to adapt to different working environments, time management and decision-making skills, intercultural communication skills, improved language skills, and interpersonal relationships.



4.4.1 Internship Buddy System

It was generally agreed that all of the students who participated in internships supported by the project SIMPLE finished with a lasting positive impact that they perceived as valuable for their future. Internship experience is regarded as an important factor that contributes to the overall competencies of students as future employees, entrepreneurs, and experts in their respective fields.

Although the fields of internship vary, and some students did their internship overseas and others did theirs on a more local scale, both reported that they have gained broader knowledge, deeper understanding and practical skills that they would not have gained without the internship. Through the internship, students were given a way to implement theories and knowledge that they have learned in classes into practicalities with different sets of challenges that helped them to form a better understanding of their fields and develop technical skills. This and daily interaction during internship with experts and those who have extensive experience in the field gave students a lot of insights and those who did their internship in rural areas have a better understanding of real life challenges that small stakeholders in their field have to face.

The students also appreciated that the internship had exposed them to other relevant areas that they found very interesting, that complemented their practical understanding and helped them to branch out after graduation. It is also noted that the internship has introduced them to different important stakeholders in the field, creating a multidimensional experience that helped students to consider more than one perspective in their respective area of work. Furthermore, soft skills such as time management, communication, the ability to adapt to different culture and work environments, better work ethics, and data-driven decision-making ability are also reported by the students as important skills that they have gained from the internship and could help improve their employability.

However, since the students were all from Asian countries (Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand), those who did their internship overseas and those who did their internship within their countries of origin have had different experiences. Most students who did their internship overseas worked in big institutions or companies and found that the biggest challenge that they had to face was adapting to a fast-paced work life rhythm and being in a different culture from that of their countries of origin. They found that the working life was more demanding than what they were used to as a student and that the different culture and language made it harder to adjust. Meanwhile, students who did their internship locally had to face problems such as lack of government support, lack of infrastructure, and lack of community involvement, which were very important in their case since they mostly worked in the field of agricultural development in rural areas.

4.5 Soft skills training

Within the project SIMPLE there were more than 50 soft skills courses with a strong focus on languages, communication skills, the ability to turn theory into practice and working in teams. Two approaches to training were included:

- Direct - training sessions provided by university, the professional sector, international representatives, and project SIMPLE soft skills presentation (available on-line for multiple use)
- Indirect – involvement of students in activities (focused on organisational skills, communication skills, working in teams – leading to high self-confidence of students thanks to the great success of events they were participating in), and recommended sources for soft skills training material available online.

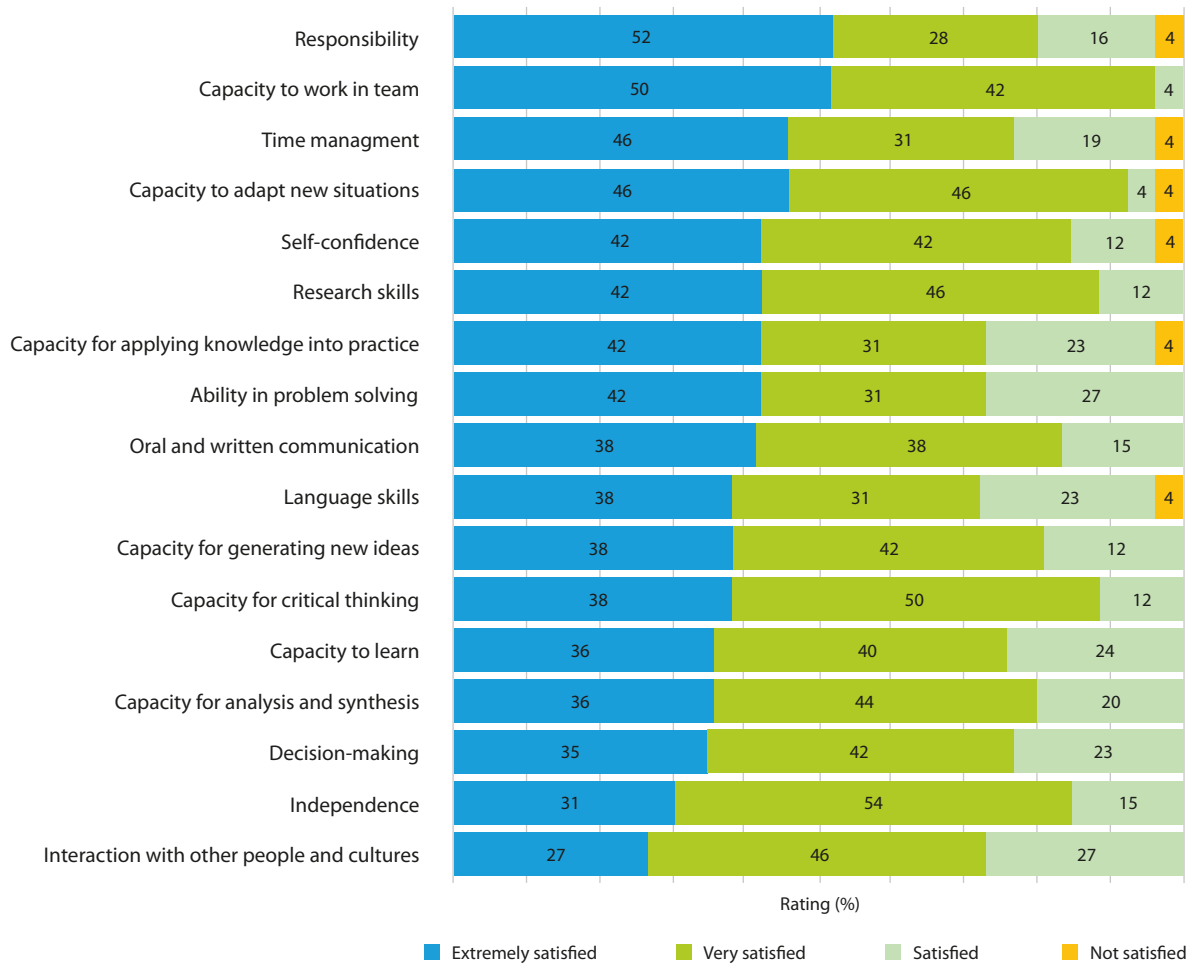


Figure 12. Satisfaction with improvement of soft skills by students in Cambodia

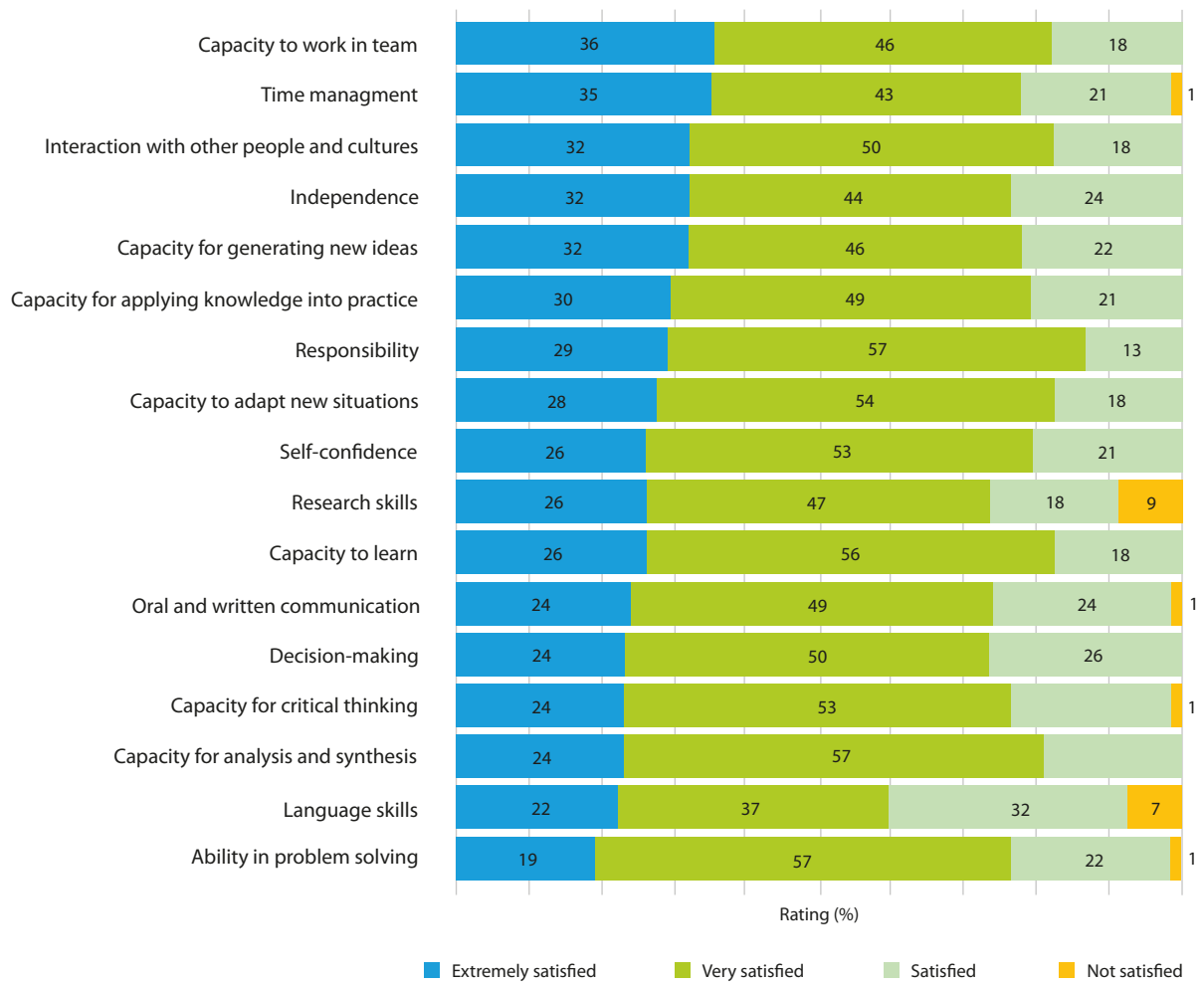


Figure 13. Satisfaction with improvement of soft skills by students in Thailand



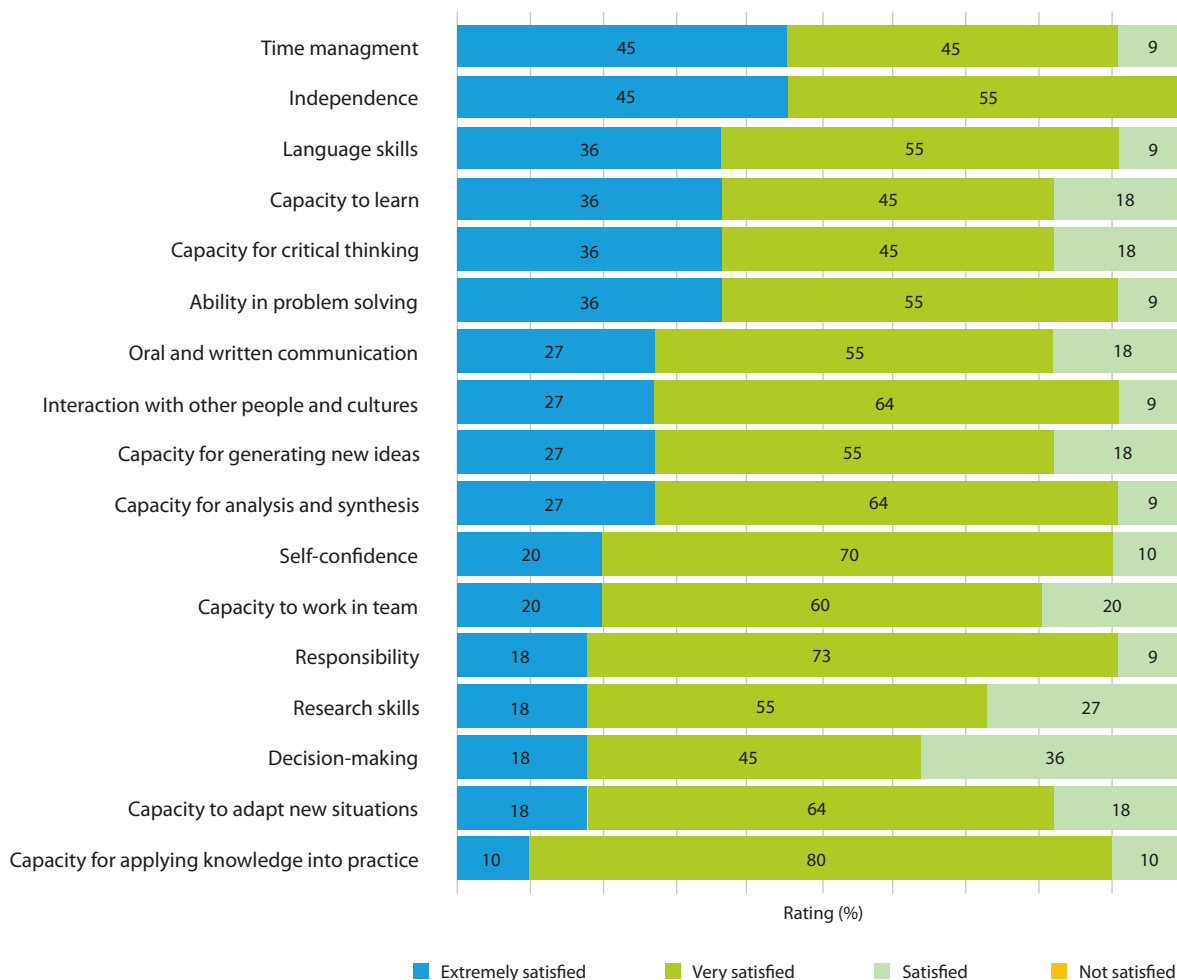


Figure 14. Satisfaction with improvement of soft skills by students in Indonesia

Students from Cambodia highly appreciated soft skills improvement thanks to their Alumni and Career Centres mainly in the field of responsibility, capacity to work in teams, and the capacity to adapt to new situations (Fig. 12). Thai students were very satisfied with improvements in soft skills: the capacity to work in teams, time management and interaction with other cultures (Fig. 13). In Indonesia, students were highly satisfied with implemented activities especially time management, independence and language skills (Fig. 14).

According to the results the area with the greatest need for improvement in Cambodia and Thailand is language skills. In Indonesia it was indicated that there should be greater focus on decision making, the capacity to work in teams and the ability to apply knowledge to practice.

Main requirements of and recommendations from employers to students according to personal interviews and panel discussion during Final Conference

- ✓ Students should think about their future life & career from the very beginning of their university studies
- ✓ Students should be more active and contact employers and companies as well as speak with them during their guest lectures at the university



- ✓ Students should be in love with their job, so nobody would have to tell them what they should do, and they should be able to do things on their own
- ✓ Students should know what they want to do, what employers want them to do and what they are doing
- ✓ Graduates should start work immediately
- ✓ Soft skills:
 - i. Communication skills – the ability to communicate what they want directly and to express themselves in positive ways The ability to think for oneself, which is rarely found amongst students
 - ii. Leadership skills together with management skills, judgement, reward (companies usually need to send employees for special training)
 - iii. Highly competitive skills
 - iv. Knowledge of general idea of things, e.g. graduates in environment should also know about the broader context (for example export, import, business)
 - v. Self-confidence
 - vi. Ability to work in a group
 - vii. Ability to connect several areas of knowledge (e.g. inorganic chemistry + agrochemistry + organic chemistry + biochemistry, for example in the case of the MISOTA company)
 - viii. Improvement of public performances (students are shy, indecisive, and unable to assert themselves)
 - ix. English and other languages
 - x. Practical skills and knowledge - education and training from university, more comprehensive use of theory acquired at university
 - xi. Experience abroad

Some companies offer soft skills training to students (for example BM Consult, Cambodia which is focusing on training programmes and the development of soft skills through workshops (communication, social media, self and time management).

Satisfaction of students with the improvements in their soft skills at their universities was highly ranked, with an average of 79 % very satisfied to satisfied with their ability in time management, capacity to work in teams, responsibility and independence (Fig. 12, 13, 14).



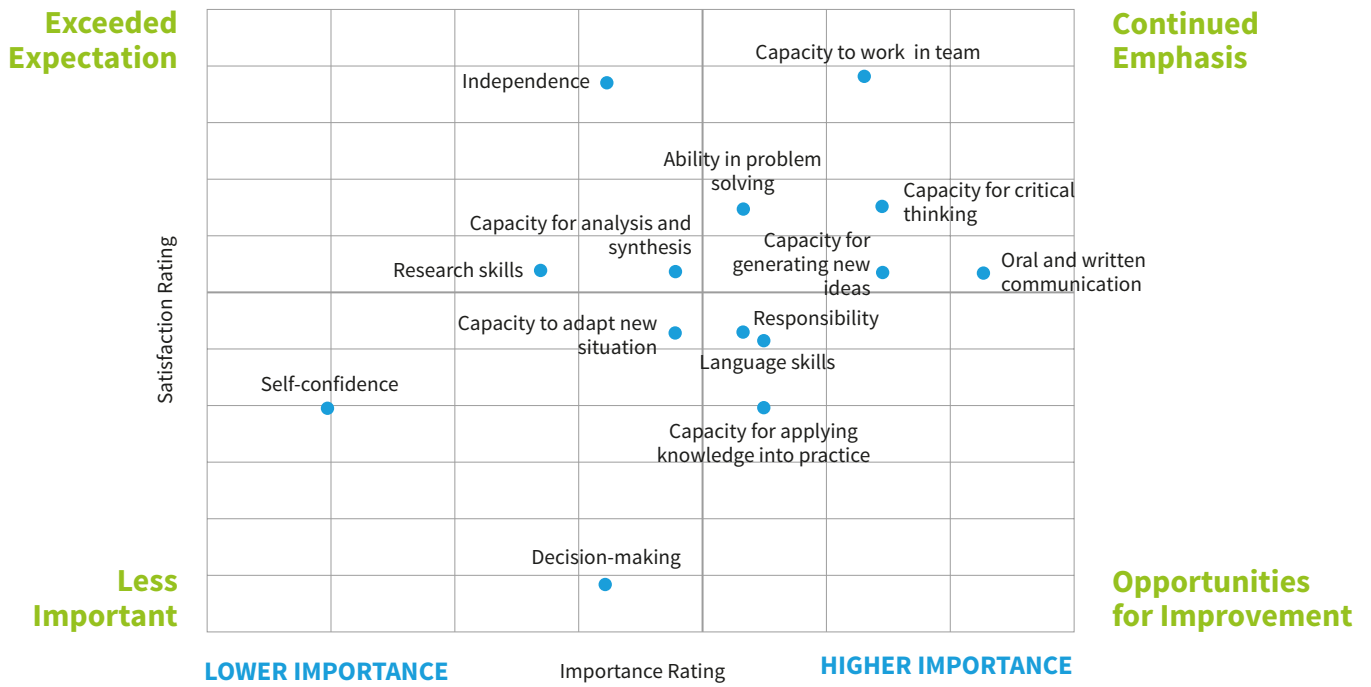


Figure 15. Soft skills model indicating the level of satisfaction/importance of particular skills according to evaluation of students

81 % of our survey respondents indicated that they were very satisfied or extremely satisfied with the overall quality of soft skills provided at their home universities. The survey results help us identify several factors that shape this perception. If we successfully address those factors, it could substantially improve the quality of soft skills.

Survey results visualized in an importance-satisfaction grid (Fig. 15), are divided by the mean for importance ratings and by the mean of satisfaction ratings.

It can be seen that the highest importance was given to oral and written communication, the capacity to work in teams, the capacity for critical thinking, for generating new ideas and problem-solving. On the other hand even though highly satisfied with the soft skills training, from the students’ point of view more opportunities in the area of language skills are recommended, and the capacity to apply knowledge into practice and responsibility.

Within the project SIMPLE these anticipated soft skills for language improvement were supported by language courses, the possibility of being involved in international discussion, visits of the international booth during Career Days, international internships (for example at Bogor Agricultural University, the University of Battambang, and Kasetsart University), guest lectures in English, enabling students to be actively involved and improve their soft skills in English. Within the project international CV checks, (enabling students to have their CV checked in English by international experts) and mock interviews were also provided.

Within the project there were many successful opportunity to apply knowledge to practice (more than 70 guest lectures, 300 internships, 16 Career Days, field visits, mentoring activities) which confirmed a need for these activities, and Career Centres are continuously improving this opportunity based on regular evaluation.

Responsibility was improved mainly by the involvement of students in the preparation of events for project SIMPLE. This field is one of the most difficult to learn as it always depends on the ability of the company/organisation to give responsibility to students.



5 LESSONS LEARNT

Based on the results of project SIMPLE the following aspects were emphasised to support fruitful cooperation between the academic and professional sectors.

Impact on universities:

- ✓ Integration of Alumni Centres – Career Centres – Platforms for the professional sector whose cooperation should be on the agenda of the universities' top management
- ✓ Universities should build a network with the professional sector via active contacts with their alumni (who can also provide guest lectures) and regular networking and communications with the private sector
- ✓ The efficient implementation and promotion of AC and CC activities at university level, faculty is key aspect for long term cooperation with professional sector
- ✓ Personal connections are very important - Career opportunities usually depend on these connections
- ✓ Sharing and practices (knowledge, experiences) from project partners are highly appreciated
- ✓ Providing good training to staff of the Alumni and Career Centre is crucial
- ✓ It is challenging to identify relevant speakers to the training, round-tables and CV checks
- ✓ Organize regular CD, once per year (it is very time and resources consuming to organize it more often)
- ✓ Improvement of networking with industries is not easy due to the fact that higher education institutions are usually slower to respond to change in comparison to industry institutions
- ✓ There is a gap between alumni capacity and the needs of industry

Impact on students:

- ✓ Internships are appreciated by all stakeholders (universities, students, employers) and increase job opportunities for graduates
- ✓ International internship is essential for enable local graduates to reach an international standard
- ✓ Career development is a long-term process and continuing support from university is crucial for success
- ✓ Providing soft-skills trainings to the students is crucial as these skills are highly requested by representatives from the professional sector
- ✓ “Ask students” what they need and what is important benefit for them
- ✓ Getting information about internship programmes, the importance of internship programmes in improving their ability and capacity building in communication and practical skills

Impact on the professional sector:

- ✓ The opportunity for companies to present their activities and job offers during Career days
- ✓ Promotion of the companies concerned and the creation of image among students
- ✓ Connection with potential employees
- ✓ The opportunity to select the most appropriate candidates



6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The positive impact of cooperation between the academic and professional sectors was enhanced at six selected Asian universities in Cambodia, Indonesia and Thailand by the establishment and/or the improvement of Alumni and/or Career Centres. The Platform for cooperation with the professional sector was created to guarantee an increase in the sustainable success of the involvement of future employers in academic activities leading to enhanced employability of the respective universities' alumni and development of the qualified work sector.

Career development is an important part of a university's mission. Therefore, the universities should concentrate on providing greater opportunities to students in terms of employability, and producing qualified graduate students for the labour market. Building professional alumni needs a lot of investment and the adoption of new innovative approaches and a need to build a professional relationship with companies. Alumni and Career Centres should be a place for inspiration among students (inspiration for future development, orientation), should motivate the students and promote "examples of good practice."

The results of the SIMPLE project can be used as an example of good practice for other universities.



7 LIST OF REFERENCES

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8 APPENDIX: 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 – Southeast 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



