SIMPLE

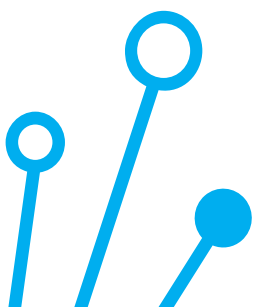# GUIDELINES OF BEST PRACTICE EXAMPLES FOR ALUMNI CENTRES

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

The SIMPLE Project (Support of International Platform Merging Labour and Education) is funded by the European Union Erasmus+ Programme: Capacity-Building projects in the field of Higher Education (E+CBHE) from 2016 to 2019.

The main objective of these Guidelines is to identify the specific best practices for university Alumni Centres in order to become more successful in connecting, informing, inspiring and serving alumni, getting them engaged through Alumni Centres with their Alma Maters and have been created based on the published study Best Practices of Alumni Centres.

Various methods of data collection were used:

○ In-depth assessment of published reports with relevant recommendations,

○ Assessment of the Alumni Centres' practices at different universities in Europe,

○ Qualitative survey on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats experienced by the Alumni Officers of the selected universities,

○ Outputs of a focus group discussion among European and Asian SIMPLE partners organised during workshops held within the SIMPLE project.

Lessons Learnt

1. Organisation of ACs and personal empowerment

Essential is to review university financial, constitutional and logistic support to Alumni Centres (ACs). The efficient functioning of their ACs and CCs must become one of their priority ambitions.

▶ **Stability in manpower**
 The contracting of a stable, multidisciplinary, well-trained and experienced team of AC and CC officers, assisted by a Board of engaged members, is necessary to ensure that the activities undertaken by the ACs and CCs are sustainable.

▶ **Bonding new students, future graduates and young alumni to your institute**
Taking into account the Alumni life cycle at the university is necessary to an understanding of alumni expectations, needs, and preferences. Very important is an active approach towards changing conditions. Be ready to attract alumni especially via modern communication technologies.

▶ **Enhancing volunteer involvement**
Highly valued is an increase in the number of engaged volunteers (supporting the AC) as they can play an active role at different levels (academic, social, alumni chapters), career search, internship search and guidance, Bachelor's, Master's and Ph.D. dissertation research and guidance, identification of top prospect students, setting up events and enhancing communication with the alumni).

▶ **Ambassadors to support networking**
Increase the success rate of networking activities organised and/or supported by the central Alumni Centre without extending the Alumni Officers team (saving budget). Enhance networking (on- and offline) for connecting and communicating with their alumni for mutual benefits.

▶ **Support of Alumni chapters/clubs/groups/networks**
Alumni networks/Alumni Chapters do more than help fund their Alma Mater; they become a professional and

personal community to aid graduates in their advancement throughout the course of their lives. Cooperation and promotion of Alumni Chapters is considered an effective way to increase the success of ACs.

2. Registration and databases of alumni

Registration in an Alumni database is one of the most important steps towards finding new alumni; therefore AC´s have to pay attention to easy access and attractiveness. Important also is the promotion of the benefits for alumni, widely used is the Alumni Card, access to the alumni database and updated information about their Alma Mater. Databases should be continuously updated by creating a facility on the AC website where alumni can update personal information given at registration, and should give a life-long institute linked e-mail address to the registering alumni avoiding future e-mail address bounces and spams.

3. Effective communication

Great potential is shown by attracting alumni through easy access webpages and by offering special benefits, access to news of their Alma Mater and the database of the AC. A webpage in English is essential for effective internationalisation of ACs. An alumni newsletter has to be linked to university news and should be published regularly a minimum of two times per year.

▶ **Efficient use of social media**

Key social media for ACs are Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter, which enhance the alumni feeling of being affiliated to their Alma Mater and increase their engagement. Optimisation of the spread of social, academic and professional AC news saves time while increasing contact moments. Results show that giving responsibility to a particular person for such communication is essential.

▶ **Coherent and informative alumni website**

An attractive, informative website, informing young alumni and graduates in order to guarantee alumni do not lose interest in being registered in the Alumni Centre and consequently cancelling their registration motivates graduates in becoming a registered member of the Alumni Centre. Also the success of various events has to be supported by good promotion on these webpages.

4. Benchmarking of the Alumni Centres

Increase the time devoted to meeting the real demands of alumni leading to a better programme, by measuring the success rate in attendance, registrations, in attracting volunteers, in support for alumni chapters, etc. to drop services and activities delivered which do not meet the set criteria.

5. Versatile Career Services

Integration of CCs with ACs or close cooperation between them is highly valued. Integrated CCs in the ACs have on average less staff at their disposal and consequently they are less available for dealing with customised individual requests. An Employability Strategy should ensure students have opportunities and support to develop their career skills throughout their study programme and in the first year of their career.

Recommendations

1) Universities have to be aware of the benefits of ACs and strongly support cooperation with alumni.
2) The contracting of a stable, multidisciplinary, well trained and experienced team of AC and CC officers, assisted by a Board of engaged members.
3) Setting up of a strong, continuously updated alumni database accessible to members.
4) Engaging more volunteers (internal and external) to support tasks and facilitate contacts with alumni.
5) Presenting a coherent, informative, continuously updated website and using different social media and platforms in a better organised and selective way, decreasing the time spent on communication activities.
6) Benchmarking activities, starting by collecting data to measure the outputs and outcomes of events organised (at university and chapter level) and of the different communication channels used.
7) Supporting and involving alumni chapters.
8) Identifying and supporting ambassadors for networking.
9) Delivering versatile career services to students, alumni and employers.

Conclusions

One of the best methods to increase cooperation between the academic and professional sectors are Alumni Centres, as a long-term proven model for providing a unique platform which leads to mutual benefits. We recommend ACs go step by step after identifying which recommendations will help them more efficiently fulfil their official mission and objectives, set and approved by their Board, taking into account their limitations. Career Centres must be more versatile nowadays in order to respond better to the actual needs identified by their alumni and graduates. Strengthened links between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the private market through ACs will lead in the long run to (more and more intensified) joint public – education, research, business and an improved social environment.

Detailed information about the project, full text of the study **Good Practices of Alumni Centres** and practical advices provided in the **Action Plan for Co-operation between Alumni Centres and the Non-academic Sector** are available at: **www.projectsimple.eu/outcomes/**.