

Evaluation report

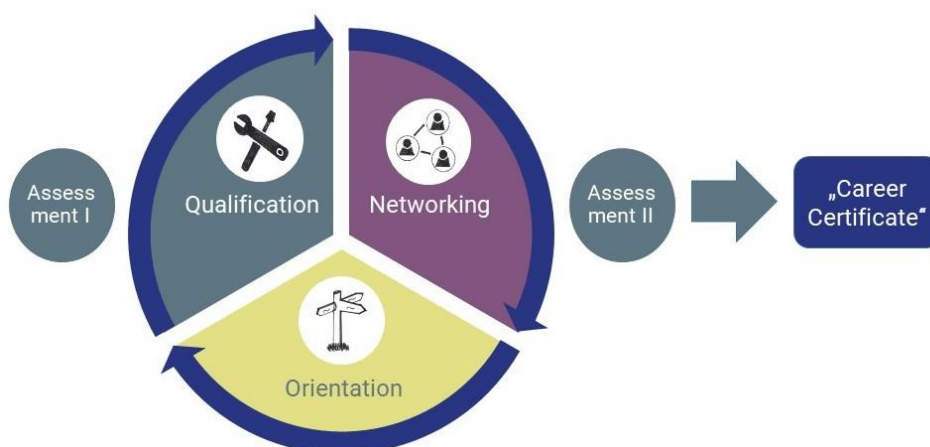
“International Talent Journey” (ITJ)

The International Talent Journey (ITJ) is an Intellectual Output (IO) developed within the ERASMUS+ - Strategic Partnership (KA 2) “*INTERLOCALITY – Increased local employability of international students*” (March 2022 – Feb 2025).

At the beginning of the INTERLOCALITY-project, it was evident that all institutions already offered many employability activities for all students but also especially for international students. These were offered by different internal actors, making them difficult to access and often not tailored (enough) to the needs of international students. To optimize this situation, the International Talent Journey (ITJ) was developed:

The “International Talent Journey (ITJ)” as a career qualification process for international students was tested among more than 100 international students within the consortium of four Universities of Applied Sciences from Denmark, Germany, Finland and the Netherlands as well as one Educational Agency from Italy. The ITJ is based on identified needs of international students and intends to overcome the lack of skills and opportunities. It offers a structured process combining individual career guidance with the attendance to different activities in order to develop various competences, increase relevant knowledge and build up career-related contacts. These are developed and mapped in the categories Orientation, Qualification and Networking.

A focus is given on the assessment parts in each process, which are mandatory for each student to attend. The assessment is done by a Journey Guide, e.g., staff of Career Centre, Counselling staff or teachers. The full attendance in both assessments and a certain number of various activities leads to the “Career Certificate”.



This evaluation report is based on interview findings from the Intellectual Output 1 and experiences during the piloting.

All in all, the evaluation showed students' thankfulness for a tailored and labelled approach to career guidance for international students to overcome obstacles such as language barrier, cultural integration or better understanding of local job markets.

The detailed findings and experiences from this project offer a valuable framework for universities to develop more effective support systems, ensuring that international students are better equipped to succeed in the local job market and contribute to the global workforce.

This evaluation report brings together empirical values from the implementation of the ITJ. The following content is based on two different approaches and implementations:

ARCADA (Finland):

ARCADA organised the ITJ as mandatory and curricular part for 1st year students from Business and Engineering Bachelor programmes.

Journey guides were degree program lecturers and career counsellors.

All activities were offered to all students.

The assessments were group-assessments.

FH Münster (Germany):

FH Münster offered the ITJ as a voluntary and extra-curricular programme for all of students.

Journey guides were from Career Service and International Office.

Students got recommendations for activities depending on their needs, but had to choose and register on their own.

The assessments were offered 1:1.

Similarities:

- Most ITJ participants came from non-EU-countries.
- Most of them studied in English-taught programmes.

Lessons learned depending on the form of implementation

@ ARCADA (Finland):

- Students' proactive behaviour fell short due to the **different reality of local job market conditions** and **late visa decisions**.
- Students wished to have **better pre-arrival counselling** to be both emotional and practical ready.
- **Introduction weeks** were useful in bridging the initial knowledge gap.

@ FH Münster (Germany):

- **Limited time budget** and limited **language skills** hindered to participate in activities.
- Less interest in **Career Certificate** than expected.
- Challenges in **gaining students' interest** and awareness about the ITJ's benefits
- A significant number of registered students did not proceed at the stage of **preparing the PRE-Assessment**
- **High invest of staff capacity** in individual assessments, which turned to be important components

Key lessons learned for both institutions

The process of implementing the ITJ provided important insights that applied to both universities.

- **Importance of interdisciplinary cooperation:** Institutions have recognized the importance of fostering closer collaboration across different disciplines and internal partners throughout the International Talent Journey (ITJ). This integrated approach breaks down traditional silos and promotes a more holistic understanding of international student needs and forms bonds in the interests of the target group
- **Emotional and personal understanding:** A deeper comprehension has emerged regarding the complex emotional journey and the individual perspectives of international students. By recognizing their unique worries, challenges, and personal experiences, institutions can develop more empathetic, complete and targeted support mechanisms.
- **Improved visibility and transparency of advisory structures:** The process has highlighted the need for a better visibility of advisory structures, with transparent communication channels and clear pathways for international student support.
- **Relevance of expectation management:** Institutions have gained valuable insights into challenging existing assumptions about international students, recognizing and addressing potential misconceptions and thus identifying ineffective support strategies
- **Valuing individual potential:** A significant lesson has been appreciating the rich diversity of international students, acknowledging their unique skill sets, their varied life experiences, individual characteristics and potential contributions to the academic community.
- **Enhanced institutional awareness:** Staff across higher education institutions have developed a raised awareness of the specific needs, challenges, and strengths of the international student target group, promoting more inclusive and supportive environments.

Findings on the target group:

Expectation & Challenges:

- **Language barrier** as highest challenge
- Huge spectrum of perceptions and preparedness regarding career prospects
- **Transferring skills to the local job markets** due to clearer career paths in home countries
- More **cultural differences** between job search in home country and country of residence than expected



Influences on the willingness to stay:

- Individual level of local language skills
- Internationalisation and open-mindedness of the region
- Presence of family and friends in the region
- How the invest in building a network pays out
- Well-being and mental health



Benefit of ITJ for students:

- Awareness about dimensions and details of **local employability** (three categories)
- **Networking** events were highly welcomed
- More knowledge about **support structures** and fewer barriers to using them
- Awareness of individual unconscious strengths and needs



Limits of the ITJ:

- The ITJ cannot compensate basic **skills** for studying and career development (communication, study field related, ...)
- The ITJ does not replace **individual preparation** and to-dos
- The ITJ cannot provide preparation for every individual situation



Conclusion & transfer potential:

- Do an early **expectation management**, preferably before arrival: Sensitize continuously for underestimated **cultural differences** and **knowledge deficits**.
- Be honest in the communication about **local language requirements**, also in English-taught programs.
- Provide enough **activities in English** specifically for students on these programs.
- **Cooperation** between guides and teachers (also language teachers) is fundamental.
- Understand **HEI as „bridge“ to local companies and employers** and build it with networking events and hands-on experiences with open-minded employers.
- Students' journeys are highly emotional – take the importance of **mental health** and **well-being** into account.
- Extend the ITJ to **all study phases** with a stronger interlink, as they are mutually dependent.
- At least some activities should be selectable as **a part of the curriculum**.
When planning extracurricular activities, allow a long-enough ITJ.
- **There is no such thing as “THE” international student**, but only individuals with own strengths, weaknesses and needs in different stages of their career.

For more information on the project, see www.interlocality.eu

Co-funded by the European Union.

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