GRADUATE CAREER TRACKING IN HUNGARY
Hungarian Graduate Career Tracking System (GCTS)

Tracking the careers of fresh graduates has proved to be an internationally successful method of promoting communication between higher education and the labour market. Graduate career tracking programmes are empirical studies among university or college graduates aiming to provide information about the professional progress of graduate students, their opportunities on the labour market, as well as their feedback and evaluation of their degree course:

Information on their former students’ job finding experience, their status on the labour market, and the relevance of the skills they acquired provides essential feedback for universities and colleges, based on which these institutions can further improve their training programmes and services.

Graduates’ success in finding employment and the pre-requisites of success represent useful information for future students as for the career path they wish to pursue, and for choosing a degree course.

Governmental organisations as well as institutions of higher education can benefit from the survey as an essential source of information when planning their training programmes.

The findings of career tracking survey can also provide useful information for employers about the trainings at institutions of higher education.

The nationwide, centralised, continuously updated career tracking database was created in 2008 with the support of the European Union (Social Renewal Operative Programme 4.1.3). The programme was managed by Educatio Public Services Non-profit LLC in cooperation with the successfully applying institutions.
According to the Higher Education Act of 2005, every university and college in Hungary is obliged to conduct career tracking research. In recent years, there have been several development projects of this kind; however, these have typically been isolated, unconnected studies adopting different methodologies, requiring different data processing approaches. These organisational and operational shortcomings have been addressed in 2008 by the central priority development programme “Systematic Development of Higher Education Services” funded by the EU, as well as by specific calls for tender for universities and colleges. The objective of the central programme managed by Educatio Public Services Non-profit LLC was to ensure the services and professional assistance that the institutions needed to carry out developments funded by the tenders. The central career tracking programme aimed not only for nationwide, centralised, statistical research, but also for promoting an institution-based, long term educational development scheme.

A questionnaire was created as part of the central development programme with a section covering students’ motivation and graduate career tracking, which was mandatory for the participating institutions to include. This section contains questions regarding students’ social and demographic background, feedback on their training programmes, plans for further studies, integration in the labour market (jobs, job changes, second jobs, salaries, the professional nature of the job, satisfaction with employment). Universities and colleges, of course, have the chance to expand the set of questions with their own specific interests (particularly evaluation of the institution, of the studies, prestige assessment).
The evaluation of the results is carried out by the institutions themselves, however, the central programme provides them with the necessary methodological aids, analysis and communication plans. The raw data gained from the central questionnaire must be submitted to a central database created and maintained by Educatio Non-profit LLC. By processing the data, analyses can be performed on a nationwide, regional, and field of education basis, as part of the central development programme.

The central database of GCTS gathers a wide range of information about graduates, including the data collected annually within the institutional surveys, the integrated database of public agencies with regards to graduate students, and databases of the career tracking programme on a countrywide sample.

The characteristics of the Hungarian graduate tracking system (GCTS):

*EU-funded*

The establishment of the infrastructure of both the central and institution-level career tracking was funded from EU resources.
Mandatory maintenance

After setting up and launching the system, the participants are obliged to maintain it to ensure continuous data collection.

Large coverage

Most of the institutions of higher education have applied successfully to launch the career tracking programme. 31 institutions participate in the programme covering approximately 2/3 of the Hungarian higher education sector.

Centralised methodology

The responsibilities of the GCTS Centre run by Educatio Non-profit LLC include: developing the career tracking system, providing the methodological foundation, preparing the questionnaires, and guaranteeing the necessary professional support to maintain the system.

Customisable to the needs of the institutions

One of the key objectives of GCTS is the integration of career tracking in the institutions’ practices, thereby ensuring continuity and the utilisation of the results. The mandatory and centralised questionnaire and the synchronised methodology can be complemented according to the universities’ and colleges’ specific needs; the institutions can also extend the sample to specific student and graduate groups. The institutions must also conduct a sample survey among their graduate students in every three years.

Cyclic surveys

The graduate career tracking survey takes place every year in spring. The survey covers all the current students of the institutions, as well as graduates from selected years. All graduate students are asked to complete the questionnaire after one, three, and five years from their
graduation, in a cyclic manner. This method allows an analysis of the dynamics of employment changes.

**On-line data collection**

The method of the annual career tracking data collection is an anonymous on-line questionnaire for both graduates and current students. Students are contacted by the universities and colleges based on the email addresses stored in their databases. Personal data is, thus, only handled by the universities and colleges. Response rates were around 20 per cent in the first years of the survey, but the structure of participants differed greatly from that of the base population; therefore, weighting corrections are required at both institution and country level.

**IT background**

The technological support is part of the Hungarian GCTS. The programme included the acquisition of a central database management system (Evasys), which enables every participating institution to collect and manage their data. Support and trainings are provided by the central team to assist the users of the IT system.

**Sample survey component**

The institutions participating in the programme conduct a sample survey every three years, which involves contacting graduates personally. The data collections are typically done via direct phone calls. The role of this component of GCTS is to provide more specific and statistically more reliable information for the universities about their former students (competences, lifestyle, using the acquired skills, etc.).

**Countrywide research**

Before the institution-based surveys, GCTS started with two large-scale, countrywide, long-due studies as a foundation to the career tracking programme. One of these
was a representative survey on a countrywide sample of current students, the other of graduates of 2007. The results of these surveys provided the professional basis, and scholarly legitimacy of GCTS. Data processing and analysis was carried out with the extensive involvement of researchers of higher education.

**Public agency databases**

Apart from the survey component, the Hungarian career tracking system was the first to include integration with official databases of public agencies (higher education register: Education Office (FIR), tax office: National Tax and Customs Office (NAV), health insurance: National Health Insurance Fund (OEP), employment register: Employment Office (FH)). Consequently, there is a wide range of official data available about the graduates of 2009, such as further studies, employment sectors, job positions, salaries, unemployment.

**Support and monitoring**

The Hungarian Graduate Tracking System is not merely a comprehensive data collection and research programme. Promoting the utilisation and incorporation of the results by the institutions has always been a key objective of GCTS, as it’s the key to improvement and continuity. Besides encouraging institutional co-operations, the GCTS Centre has supported the goals of career tracking by trainings, workshops, publications, and personal counselling. Annual monitoring of the institutions has been put in place to measure the progress, and to reveal possible shortcomings.

**Openness, publicity of data**

It has been a principle of the programme from its beginning that the obtained data should be visible and open to the general public. On an institutional level, this means that the results are public; and on the nationwide level, publicity means establishing a central database that pub-
lishes the participating institutions’ results along the same parameters. When displaying the results, however, it has been a guideline to avoid direct ranking of universities and colleges.

**GCTS database**

The countrywide GCTS database comprises of three components: the data based on institutional surveys, the results of the countrywide sample surveys about graduates and current students, and the integrated database of public agencies. Each source of data has its merits and limitations, but in this integrated form - with ongoing updates and development -, it proves to be a uniquely complex basis for research about graduates.

**Alumni development**

Recognising that the key to continuity with the surveys lies with the institutions of higher education, the creation and the strengthening of alumni services at universities and colleges represent an independent part of the programme. The alumni, strengthening the bond with the alma mater, promote response willingness and keeping contact; and on the other hand, are the basis of the creation and maintenance of the special database required for career tracking.

**Scientific findings**

Beside background support, maintaining an analyst and research team is an integral part of the GCTS Centre as well. On the one hand, it means publishing research papers, collections of papers, and new research findings, and, on the other hand, it involves the creation of a nationwide co-operation of researchers that will attract renowned academics working in the field of education and labour market, as well as younger scholars. This intention is manifest in the principle of openness and publicity of research databases.
### GCTS components – elements of the system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Interviews with researchers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Methodological manual</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Publications</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Collections of research papers</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>Visits to institutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Trainings, workshops, forums, conferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Studies abroad</td>
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<tr>
<th>4</th>
<th>Road map</th>
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<td>5</td>
<td>On-line newsletter</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Website</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Fresh graduates in Hungary 2010**

### Advantages expected from graduating Frequency of answers
7837 participants

- Avoid unemployment: 44.41%
- High salary: 43.17%
- Social prestige: 38.30%
- Management position: 27.03%
- Flexible, more relaxed lifestyle: 32.14%
- Find employment abroad: 21.54%

### Entering the labour market one year after graduation
2009 graduates

9464 participants

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<th>Total</th>
<th>0%</th>
<th>20%</th>
<th>40%</th>
<th>60%</th>
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<th>100%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
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<td>Unified and undivided programme</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15.4%</td>
<td>10.6%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
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<td>College - traditional programme</td>
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<td>8.3%</td>
<td>57.3%</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
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<td>BSc</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
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### Connection between the specialisation of degree and type of job
2009 graduates

6421 participants

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<th>To a slight extent</th>
<th>To a great extent</th>
<th>Completely</th>
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<td>3.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>College - traditional programme</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>BSc</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
<td>32.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
The period of time before finding employment as per course type
Among students after passing their final exams, months 2371 participants

Overall satisfaction with current job
Average of marks (1-5)

Objective working conditions
Personal working conditions
Income, benefits
Professional prestige
Professional progress, career building
Professional aspect of work

Graduate survey 2010
Educatio Public Service Non-profit LLC, Higher Education Department