This article aims to present an overview of the theoretical framework of the career orientation programmes in the higher education in The Netherlands in general, and exemplify it, by presenting the structure and implementation of one of these programmes that is implemented in an Applied Sciences University, in particular.

**Keywords:** SCP (Student Career Planning), PDP (Personal Development Planning).

1. **Introduction**

The Netherlands is one of the countries that introduced a career orientation programme in the higher education, with a personal coach that assists the student towards perusing his/her desired career (Goga, 2015). Higher education in the Netherlands plays an important role in the society, because universities lay the foundation for the so-called ‘educated citizenship’ and fulfills a threefold role: qualification for a certain job; selection for certain job positions; and a social function reflected in norms and values needed for a proper functioning in the society (Onderwijsraad, 2008). According to the definition given by the Dutch Higher education and Research Act, article 3.1 line 4, these institutions of higher education are the place where students are initiated and trained to gain the necessary competences and knowledge in order to later perform the advanced and specialised professions in the society. In their report of 2005, the Dutch Ministry of Economy announced their intention to reach a 50% rate of highly educated individuals amidst the young population.

*Stenden University Leeuwarden*

tatiana.naaijer.ciff@stenden.com; miriam.terpstra@stenden.com

**Abstract**

This article aims to present an overview of the theoretical framework of the career orientation programmes in the higher education in The Netherlands in general, and exemplify it, by presenting the structure and implementation of one of these programmes that is implemented in an Applied Sciences University, in particular.

**Keywords:** SCP (Student Career Planning), PDP (Personal Development Planning).

**Rezumat**

Articolul prezintă o sinteză a cadrului teoretic al programelor de orientare a carierei în învăţământ superior din Olanda, în general, şi il exemplifică, prin prezentarea unei structuri şi prin implementarea uneia dintre aceste programe la nivelul Universităţii de Ştiinţe Aplicate, în particular.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** SCP (Planificarea carierei studenţilor), PDP (Planificarea dezvoltării personale).

**1. Introduction**

The Netherlands is one of the countries that introduced a career orientation programme in the higher education, with a personal coach that assists the student towards perusing his/her desired career (Goga, 2015). Higher education in the Netherlands plays an important role in the society, because universities lay the foundation for the so-called ‘educated citizenship’ and fulfills a threefold role: qualification for a certain job; selection for certain job positions; and a social function reflected in norms and values needed for a proper functioning in the society (Onderwijsraad, 2008). According to the definition given by the Dutch Higher education and Research Act, article 3.1 line 4, these institutions of higher education are the place where students are initiated and trained to gain the necessary competences and knowledge in order to later perform the advanced and specialised professions in the society. In their report of 2005, the Dutch Ministry of Economy announced their intention to reach a 50% rate of highly educated individuals amidst the young population.
In order to achieve this plan, the Ministry Advisory Board for Education (2004a, 2005d, 2006b, 2005c, 2007c, 2007a) advises to focus more on ‘optimising and improving the first period in the higher education’. A key element in this process is the Student Career Planning or the Personal Development Programme, which are to be introduced from the very beginning in the first year, in order to help students adapt and bind with their new learning environment, and help them adjust to the requirements of the programme. Offering support and coaching to the first year student is essential, since it has been shown in many studies (Kausar, 2010, Rabbani et al, 2014) that the first year could be the most difficult and stressful for many students.

Counselling and coaching students in the Netherlands has a tradition of almost 50 years, and it has gone through a transformation from a source of „offering information”, to an effective „communication with the student” approach. Research (Kuijpers, 2003; Kuijpers en Meijers, 2008b, 2009; Mittendorff, Van der Donk & Gellevrij, 2012) has shown that the programme needs improvement and Mittendorff (2014) claims that the student’s study success is correlated with an effective Student Career Coaching, where the main actors are the student and the coach who, on his turn, is assisted by the rest of the team and the supportive organs, like the student counsellor.

In her study, Mittendorff (2014) identified the three main elements of the student career coaching programme. The first one is „coaching for study progress and success”, where the student is proactively coached and assisted to become successful at school, with a focus on: how to learn effectively, how to cope with the study load and requirements of the programme, how to look for solutions when solving problems, how to plan properly, so that he/ she achieves the educational goals proposed. An important aspect here is the motivational one, where the coach may play an important role, but ultimately, it is the student’s responsibility to remain motivated and committed in a responsible way. The second element, is the „coaching for career development”, which implies coaching and guiding the student towards his/her future job. At this stage, the coach plays an important role, for he/ she helps the student discover and develop the necessary skills for his/her future profession. The coach at this stage might choose to make the student think and reflect on his skills and fitness for a certain position, and also think if his skills and talents are suitable for that particular field. The coach remains a motivational tool, that steers the student in exploring, researching, discovering, learning and developing the necessary skills for his/ her future career. And ultimately, the third element is „coaching for the professional development”, where the students are encouraged to reflect and practice specific competences of the
future profession with a special focus on norms, values and ethics.

How Mittendorff (2014) structured the student career coaching programme is, of course, an ideal model but in reality it has limitations. Because of their own nature, the SCP and the PDP have to deal with the personal aspects of the student, who is a person with qualities, flaws and limitations, and so is the coach, too. In some cases, the personal issues of the student are beyond the coach’s expertise, and then, a student counsellor has to be involved, and in some cases a psychologist. Sometimes, the coach him(her)self is not suitable to fulfill the coaching role, and ultimately there are a multitude of SCP programmes that differ from university to university, and even coaches within the same course adopt a different approach (Mittendorf, Den Brok & Beijaard, 2011). In reality, each course develops its own SCP/PDP programme, according to their learning goals, competences and their end product profile they want to instill in the students.

2. A Case study – School of Business, Stenden University of Applied Sciences

International Applied Business Administration (IABA) and International Business and Management Studies (IBMS) are two fulltime study programmes that belong to the School of Business, which is one of the seven schools that represent Stenden University of Applied Sciences. Stenden’s main branches are located in the north and east of The Netherlands (Leeuwarden, Emmen, Groningen, Assen and Meppel) and has campus sites in Thailand, South Africa, Qatar and Bali. IABA and IBMS are completely taught in English, and the duration of the programme is of 4 years. The student population is very diverse, since students from all around the world participate in these programmes, and the students who graduate from the IABA or IBMS programmes receive a bachelor degree in Business Administration (Stenden Hogeschool, 2016). Besides the intensive focus on knowledge and practice, an important focus is laid on the personal development of the students, which is comprised in a separate programme called Student Career Planning and/or Personal Development Programme.

2. 1. Why a student career coaching programme?
The student career coaching programme is an important part of the IABA and IBMS curriculum, and runs parallel to all other modules (each academic year consists of four modules/periods, and one module lasts for 9 weeks). In contrast to many other subjects, the personal development programmes focus on the student himself, and not so much on theoretical knowledge specific to the bachelor programme. This means that students are assisted and coached
in order to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills aiming at self-steered working and learning (reflection on own performance, continuous professional development) skills, development of (study) career management skills for own development of competences, and also for their specialisation profile and future career” (de Leeuw, 2013). Via the student career coaching programme, students get the opportunity to learn more about themselves, their group members, their studies and the labour market, which eventually can help them identify their developmental needs and talents, which will eventually help them make more educated study and career choices. In addition to the above mentioned reasons, career coaching contributes to the early detection of study issues that have a negative impact on the student’s study progress (Ciff, 2016; Terpstra, 2016).

2.2. How is it organised?
The student career coaching programme is designed to focus on three aspects: personal development, study career coaching and orientation towards the future profession. The topics that contribute to these aims are organised and offered to the students under the form of workshops and lectures in a logical order, depending on the different stages that students are in during their studies (Ciff, 2016, Terpstra, 2016).

In the first year, the focus lies on getting to know the university, its facilities and the way of learning and teaching, getting to know the group members and the personal coach, planning and organising, working in groups, and more specifically, creating awareness and understanding of the cultural diversity in the group, programme and in the world in general. Besides these, students are encouraged to discover their talents and developmental needs, by reflecting on their own performance and by using feedback from their group members and the coach. For the introduction and accommodation of the first year students, a key role is played by the second year students, who are actively involved in the Study Start Week activities, when they organise activities for the new students, give introductions, share tips and experiences with them. In many cases, senior students are also invited to coach first year students, too. From our experience, based on the observations we have made, and from the regular individual coaching interviews with the students, we have noticed that, ensuring a good start in the beginning, and offering timely and consistent support during the first year of study, help students perform better, and reduces the stress they experience. Usually, the accommodation process, till the student feels familiar with the environment and the course requirements, takes one semester.
In their second year, more attention is given to the choices that students can make during their studies, such as a minor or specialisation, study abroad and internship. Since the last year of studies and the preparation for the internship and thesis play an important role, the student career coaching programme helps students to prepare for this. Special informative workshops and lectures are organised, during which students are thoroughly informed about the options they have, and the steps they have to follow; they are given the opportunity to interview other senior and already graduated students, who share their experiences with them and give them pieces of advice; guest lectures with experts in the field are organised; the site is updated and actively used; Facebook platforms, established especially for the course members, students and staff, facilitate an easier way to help students connect to each other and share experiences and help.

When students arrive at the final stage of their studies (third/ fourth year) they are doing their internship and writing their thesis. This means, that a different form of coaching is offered, in the sense, that the guidance of the student is done more individually, by an internship/ thesis coach, and related to the content of the internship and/ or thesis.

For each semester a so called module book is written, by the coordinator of the student career coaching programme. This module book contains necessary information for students (and coaches), such as the weekly programme, the form of assessment and deadlines, the workload, learning goals, etc. The module books are available and distributed to the students via an electronic learning environment. In the paragraphs below, a detailed description of the approach we use is offered, with a special focus on groups, workshops, interviews and assessment.

2.3. The Groups
Beginning with their first year of study, students are clustered into student career coaching groups of 12-16 members. When forming the groups, nationality and gender of the students are taken into account, for diversity purposes. Each group has its own coach, who is, in most of the cases, also one of the teachers of the study programme. The composition of the groups, as well as the coach of the group, remain the same for the complete academic year, and, if possible, also for the years after. As a result, the students and the coach have the best opportunity to get to know each other, and consequently, coaches are better able to guide students in their personal development because, most of the times, a personal and confidential student – coach relationship is established.
2.4. The Workshops
First of all, a series of three workshops are organised per period (8 weeks). A characteristic of the workshops is the interaction and exchange of information amongst the students, guided by the coach, based on before-chosen topics, that are to be found in the module book, and also on additional literature, that is made available to all participants via the electronic blackboard in the beginning of the period. In certain cases, depending on the topic, the students are given the task to organise the workshop themselves, which results in hands-on activities organised by students for students.

2.5. The Interviews
The student-coach interviews take place at least once a period. The aim of the individual coaching interviews is to reflect on, discuss and stimulate personal and professional development, also to provide study career coaching, and in certain cases personal assistance. This does not only involve keeping track of academic achievements and results, but also charting personal qualities and skills, and seeing how these may be improved further. During these meetings of personal character, possible obstacles that a student is facing may be detected, and in case of more complex problems, such as financial, health issues or other circumstances, that have a negative effect on the student’s studies, the coach refers the student to a student counselor.

The student counsellor is a specialist whose role and position is well defined in the organisation. He/ she is specialised in helping students deal with study difficulties and also personal problems that might influence their academic achievements, and they are highly cultural sensitive. He/ she can advise the student on academic problems, study choice problems, personal, health and financial matters and they are very knowledgeable on educational laws and regulations (Stenden Hogeschool, 2016). Besides that, the student counsellor can refer students to other professionals, if necessary.

2.6. The Assessment
The way we observe the personal development and needs of the student is via the group and individual meetings with the student, and also, from the reflective Portfolio the student has to produce, based on the topics tackled during the workshops, meetings, experiences he/ she had in the programme, and sometimes of experiences of a very personal character. At the end of each semester, according to the deadline, the student submits his/ her portfolio, and after that, it is checked by the study coach. It is marked, according to the assessment criteria, with a sufficient and/or insufficient, and when found sufficient, the student obtains European Credits (3 per semester in year 1, and 2 per semester in year 2 and further).
Coaching for study success and for a good start in the career has been seen as very important in the higher educational system, and recent research (Lumley & Wilkinson, 2014) has shown that the skills most managers search for in freshly graduates are primarily the communication skills, planning and organising and interpersonal skills. The SCP/PDP programme enhances the acquisition of such skills like confidence, persistence, organization, cooperation and emotional resilience, offering the student the needed ingredients to achieve in school and prepare for his future career properly (Cliff, 2016).

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