Facilitating the education-to-work transition

Please check the document version of this publication:

• A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
• The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
• The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

Link to publication

Impact paragraph

7.1 Societal relevance

Being responsible for the onboarding and on-the-job training of new employees at a Dutch telecom company, I noticed many new employees who had just graduated struggling with adjusting to their role as an employee, with all its responsibilities. Challenges they encountered, besides learning how to perform their job, included adapting to the organizational culture, meeting job-related expectations, building a professional network, and knowing whom to go to when having specific questions. These were all challenges I had recognized when, I made the transition from university to the workplace myself.

Being an "onboarding officer" made me realize that preparing students for their transition to the workplace can be as equally essential as equipping them with content knowledge of a specific field. Higher education and the workplace can be considered as two points along the same continuum. This raises the question of whether supporting students in their transition to the workplace is the responsibility of employers or higher education. On the one hand, employers have the responsibility to provide incoming employees with onboarding and coaching to assimilate them into the organization. On the other hand, higher education has the responsibility to prepare students for their transition into the workplace and continuous learning at the workplace by making them employable and competent. The present dissertation builds further on my personal observations as an onboarding officer and experiences as a young graduate by conducting a series of studies on how higher education can improve student's employability.

Moreover, this dissertation connects with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) set by the United Nations in 2015. This dissertation addresses SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. More specifically, this dissertation connects with target 4.4.: Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship. In addition, this dissertation connects to SDG 8: Promote stained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. More specifically, this dissertation connects with target 8.6.: Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education, or training (NEET).

The results of the studies included in this dissertation show that higher education institutions can provide learning experiences allowing students to increase their employability and, in turn, facilitating their education-to-work transition. As higher

educational institutions bear the responsibility for preparing students for their future careers, they can use insights from the present dissertation to improve student employability. The present dissertation defines student employability as students' ability to obtain and maintain a job after graduation. It has been high on the agenda of higher educational institutions for many years (e.g., Yorke, 2006). Although higher education has implemented various pedagogical interventions aimed at increasing students' employability, a recent OECD report argued that higher education needs to increase its efforts to prepare students for the workplace further (OECD, 2022). According to this report, it is more important than ever that students develop their employability in order to navigate the world of work; a world that is characterized by uncertainties and frequent changes due to globalization and technological innovations, such as artificial intelligence (AI). Not only does employability allow students to find a job after graduation, but it also allows them to learn and develop further on the job (Römgens et al., 2020). One of the lessons learned in recent research is that employability indeed contributes to the early career success of recent graduates (Tuononen & Hyytinen, 2022). It is thus paramount that 1) higher educational institutions support students in the development of their employability, and 2) higher educational institutions develop effective pedagogical interventions for students to do so.

This dissertation provides compelling evidence for coaching as an effective pedagogical intervention to facilitate students' education-to-work transition. The results of this dissertation can be used to improve existing teaching and learning practices focusing on employability.

Coaching and employability in higher education

Employability has been high on the agenda of higher education for several years for two main reasons. First, employability allows students to make a smooth transition to the workplace after graduation. Second, employability allows graduates to continuously learn at the workplace, resulting in more sustainable career development. In preparing students for their education-to-work transition and sustainable career development it is thus pivotal that higher education supports students in developing their employability. For example, Maastricht University is committed to developing highly skilled and employable graduates by equipping them with academic knowledge and the necessary competences to make a successful transition to employment[1]. Initiatives such as the Implicit-Explicit toolkit[2] and an online learning platform (Heymann et al., 2022) have been implemented already. Initiatives to include coaching practices are in progress.

---

[1] https://www.maastrichtuniversity.nl/about-um/employability
[2] https://edlab.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/EDview_Dos-Donts-and-Dont-Knows.pdf

Coaching at Maastricht University

Coaching has already been implemented as a pedagogical intervention within Maastricht University to support students in the development of their employability competences. For example, within the master's program for Learning and Development in Organizations, students follow a year-long coaching trajectory as part of their education.

> Through the "Competence-Based Coaching" course students are supported in developing their employability. The activities in the Competence-Based Coaching trajectory follow a repeated cycle of goal setting, planning of activities, and reflection on those learning activities.

Teachers and other academic staff provide coaching during this course. I also coach students within this trajectory and I try to translate the empirical results of my studies to my own coaching practice. For example, I try to incorporate the best practices found in my second study into my own coaching practice, such as providing students with autonomy, competence, and relatedness support (see Chapter 3). In addition, I was invited to present the results of my second study, that is, the concrete guidelines for coaching, at a workshop for novice coaches in this coaching trajectory. To support students in their competence development, it is necessary for the coach to create three support conditions based on the three basic psychological needs of every individual; autonomy support, relatedness support, and competence support (Spence & Oades, 2011; van der Baan et al., 2022). To create an autonomy-supportive condition, it is necessary that the coach stimulates students' ownership over their own development. Relatedness support refers to the creation of a safe coaching environment in which the student feels safe to share their challenges and worries. Lastly, by creating a condition of competence support, the coach is able to stimulate students' reflection.

Coaching at Odisee

To increase students' employability Odisee, a University of Applied Sciences in Flanders, Belgium, launched a digital portfolio in 2019. However, a digital portfolio in itself is not sufficient to enable students to develop their employability. Without a structured coaching practice that supports the use of a portfolio, students' learning experiences are left behind.

The findings of this dissertation gave shape to the current coaching practice complementing the digital portfolio implemented at Odisee. On numerous occasions, I shared the (preliminary) findings of my studies with the steering committee for the project. These findings were used to finetune the coaching practice within

this project. For example, in my second study, I proposed concrete behaviors for coaches to create the necessary support conditions that students need to develop their employability competences. Practical guidelines for coaches were developed based on these behaviours. In addition, I participated in a symposium presented at a professional conference for teacher educators in Bruges, Belgium (Vereniging voor Lerarenopleiders Nederland/ Vlaanderen; VELON/VELOV) where I presented my findings in relation to this project. During this symposium, we discussed coaching as an amplifier of reflection and professional growth.

The examples of Maastricht University and Odisee show that coaching for transition can be used both as a stand-alone intervention to help students develop their employability, and in combination with other pedagogical interventions, such as a (digital) portfolio.

Coaching and employability at the workplace
Employability allows employees to cope with frequent changes at the workplace (e.g., van der Heijde et al., 2006). Employability is also associated with continuous learning and sustainable career development (e.g, De Vos, 2020). In addition, findings of this dissertation reveal that employability helps graduates adjust to the workplace. It is thus pivotal that employers also provide opportunities for their employees to develop their employability. For example, coaching at the workplace could help graduate employees adjust to their new context (Bell & van der Baan, 2023). Therefore, in this dissertation, I argue that coaching for employability should continue at the workplace in a similar vein.

In the last year of my PhD, I was involved in the *Voorspongfonds (VSF)* project *Boost for Starters*, in which coaching trajectories were offered to graduate employees to help them adjust to the workplace (Geuijen & van der Baan, 2023). The results of this project suggested that these coaching trajectories supported graduate employees in adjusting to the workplace. Future valorisation activities should therefore focus on implementing coaching practices for newly hired employees.

7.2 Dissemination activities: spreading the word

In order to valorise the research findings of this dissertation and to ensure widespread implementation of coaching practices in higher education and at the workplace, it is pivotal to disseminate the findings of this dissertation. Coaching is frequently used in both higher education and at the workplace for different purposes (e.g., Nuis et al., 2022).

Findings of this dissertation suggest that increasing students' employability can be added to the purpose of coaching. Since coaching is already used in both context, a different focus to coaching can be applied to increase students' and graduates employability. To support students and graduates in increasing their employability, coaches should stimulate their (self-)reflection. Reflecting on their own abilities allows students and graduates to identify their talents and specific competences that they need to develop further.

Sharing best practices with the international research community and universities in Finland and Sweden

During my PhD work, I presented my studies at various national and international academic conferences as a roundtable (van der Baan et al., 2023), a poster (Nuis and Van der Baan, 2022), paper presentations (van der Baan et al., 2021a; 2021b; 2022; 2023), and presentations as part of symposia (van der Baan et al., 2021; 2022; 2023). During my research visits at the Finnish Institute of Educational Research, the University of Helsinki and the University of Karlstad, I presented my research during seminars and discussed the findings of my studies with fellow researchers and other academic staff members, such as teachers. Considering the findings and discussion sections of my second, third and fourth studies, I have argued that teachers should coach students to prepare them for their transition to the workplace and how they should do that. A question I often get relates to the practicality of my suggestion. It is often pointed out to me that teachers already experience a high workload and that my recommendation that teachers should also coach students is not feasible. However, I do not argue that teachers should take on the extra role of coaches, but that they should incorporate coaching behaviors while teaching. Since the emergence of competence-based education, the role of the teacher has shifted from being a transmitter of knowledge to guiding students in their learning process (Koenen et al., 2015). Moreover, a recent literature review identified coaching as one of the core tasks of university teachers (van Dijk et al., 2020). The second study included in this dissertation provides practical guidelines for coaching behaviours for teachers, among others. The practical guidelines include concrete coaching behaviors to create the necessary support conditions for students' competence development.

Sharing best practices among expert coaches

The second study included in this dissertation can be seen as itself a valorisation activity. In the second study, two focus groups were conducted with experienced coaches in higher education and at the workplace. During the focus groups, participants discussed best practices with each other. Participants mentioned that they received inspiration for their own practices from hearing others' approaches to coaching.

Sharing best practices with teacher(-educators)

To disseminate the results of the studies included in this dissertation further, I (co-)authored several blog posts. The first blog post[3] that I wrote relates to the first study of my dissertation. In this blog post, I wrote about bridging the boundary between school and work by increasing collaboration between the two worlds and making use of boundary objects. I argued that a more personalized approach to learning is needed to help students cross the boundary between school and work. In the second blog post[4], I built further on this notion to suggest reflection as a personalized approach to learning. Encouraging students to reflect on their own competences will pave the way for competence development and professional growth. I came back to this in my third blog post[5] in which I propose coaching as a valuable intervention to support students in the development of their employability competences and facilitate their transition to the workplace. I also provided concrete coaching tips and tricks.

7.3 Co-authoring a book: Coaching at the boundary between education and work: this is how you guide students

I co-authored a book about coaching for practitioners, both in higher education, such as teachers, and at the workplace, such as HR-managers. Coaching has been implemented both in higher education and at the workplace to support students and (newly hired) employees in their professional growth. Higher education and the workplace are two different contexts along the same lifelong learning continuum, which means that both worlds can learn from each other when it comes to coaching. Yet, both worlds remain separate and rarely look to each other's coaching practices. This book aimed to define four types of support of coaching based on scientific research (including this dissertation). Support types include autonomy support, career or competence support, emotional support, and networking support. The book also provides concrete examples of coaching practices in higher education and at the workplace (see Figure 7.1.; De Wilde et al., 2023).

---

[3] https://onderzoekonderwijs.net/2020/11/17/__trashed/

[4] https://www.velov.be/reflectie-in-het-onderwijs-een-vlag-met-meerdere-ladingen/

[5] https://educationalist.substack.com/p/coaching-for-employability-facilitating

Figure 7.1 Book cover. Title in English: Coaching at the boundary between education and work: this is how you guide students.

7.4 Concluding remarks

Employability is pivotal to ensure a smooth education-to-work transition. In addition, employability empowers graduates to continue to learn at the workplace, enabling them to adapt to the changing demands of their chosen occupation, thus fostering sustainable career development. As it is one of the main responsibilities to prepare students for their future, higher education has implemented various pedagogical interventions aimed at supporting students in developing their employability. This dissertation adds coaching to the list of interventions aimed at increasing students' employability and their transition to the workplace. As the transition does not end after graduation, it is pivotal that coaching continues at the workplace, in a similar vein. This continuity ensures that graduates receive the necessary support to navigate upcoming challenges in their early career stages.

References

Bell, Z., & van der Baan, N. (2023). Organisational socialisation of graduates: the role of mentoring within onboarding [Master's thesis].

De Vos, A., van der Heijden, B. I. J. M., & Akkermans, J. (2020). Sustainable careers: Towards a conceptual model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *117*(103196), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.06.011

De Wilde, J., Nuis, W., van der Baan, N., & Beausaert, S. (2023). *Coachen op de grens van opleiding en werk: gefundeerd begeleiden doe je zo* [Coaching at the boundary between education and work: This is how you guide students]. Lanoo Campus.

Geuijen, L. & van der Baan, N. (2023). Lifelong learning of starting employees: A qualitative research study [Master's thesis].

Heymann, P., Bastiaens, E., Jansen, A., van Rosmalen, P., & Beausaert, S. (2022). A conceptual model of students' reflective practice for the development of employability competences, supported by an online learning platform. *Education + Training*, *64*(3), 380–397. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-05-2021-0161

Koenen, A.-K., Dochy, F., & Berghmans, I. (2015). A phenomenographic analysis of the implementation of competence-based education in higher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *50*, 1–12. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2015.04.001

OECD. (2022). *Education at a glance 2022*. OECD. https://doi.org/10.1787/3197152b-en

Römgens, I., Scoupe, R., & Beausaert, S. (2020). Unraveling the concept of employability , bringing together research on employability in higher education and the workplace research on employability in higher education and the workplace. *Studies in Higher Education*, *45*(12), 2588–2603. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1623770

Spence, G. B., & Oades, L. G. (2011). Coaching with self-determination in mind: Using theory to advance evidence-based coaching practice. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, *9*, 37–55.

Tuononen, T., & Hyytinen, H. (2022). Towards a successful transition to work - which employability factors contribute to early career success ? *Journal of Education and Work*, *35*(6–7), 599–613. https://doi.org/10.1080/13639080.2022.2126969

van der Baan, N., Beausaert, S., Gijselaers, W. & Gast, I. (2023). How does coaching facilitate students' education-to-work transition? In H. Hyytinen (chair) *Factors supporting successful transition from higher education to working life*. Symposium, presented at the 20th Biennial EARLI conference for learning and instruction, August 22-26, Thessaloniki, Greece.

van der Baan, N., Nuis, W., Beausaert, S., Gijselaers, W. & Gast, I. (2023). *Exploring the relationship between coaching and employability competences: preparing students for workplace learning*. Paper presented at the 17th annual Teacher Education Policy in Europe (TEPE), May 8-10, Karlstad, Sweden.

van der Baan, N., Nuis, W., Beausaert, S., Gijselaers, W. & Gast, I. (2023). *On the relationship between coaching and employability competences: a multiple perspective study*. Roundtable presented at the AERA, April 13-16, Chicago, USA.

van der Baan, N., Beausaert S., Gijselaers, W. & Gast, I. (2022). *Exploring the relationship between coaching and employability competences: A mixed-method study*. Paper presented at the EARLI SIG1+4, June 27-30, Cádiz, Spain.

van der Baan, N., Nuis. W., Beausaert, S., Gijselaers, W. & Gast, I. (2022). *Coaching voor het ontwikkelen van inzetbaarheidscompetenties*. In S. Beausaert and C. Struyve (chair), Coaching, de versterker van reflectie en professionele groei. Symposium presented at VELOV - VELON; Eigentijds professioneel, March 17-18 Bruges, Belgium.

7

van der Baan, N., Gast, I., Gijselaers, W., & Beausaert, S. (2022). Coaching to prepare students for their school-to-work transition: conceptualizing core coaching competences. *Education + Training*, *64*(3), 398–415. https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-11-2020-0341

van der Baan, N., Gast, I., Beausaert, S., Gijselaers, W. & Kyndt, E. (2021a). *Transitioning to the labor market: preparing students for dynamic contexts*. Paper presented at the JURE 2021, August 18-20, online.

van der Baan, N., Gast, I., Beausaert S. & Gijselaers W. (2021b). *Coaching to prepare students for their school-to-work transition: conceptualizing core coaching competences.* Paper presented at the 19th Biennial EARLI conference for learning and instruction, August 23-27, online.

van der Baan, N., Gast, I., Beausaert S. & Gijselaers W. (2021). *Coaching to prepare students for their school-to-work transition: conceptualizing core coaching competences.* In N. van der Baan (chair), *(Study) career guidance in secondary and Higher Education: Definition and Practice*. Symposium conducted at the Onderwijs Research Dagen, July 7-9, online.

van der Heijde, C. M. & van der Heijden, B. I. J. M. (2006). A competence-based and multidimensional operationalization and measurement of employability. *Human Resource Management*, *45*(3), 449–476. https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.20119

van Dijk, E. E., van Tartwijk, J., van der Schaaf, M. F., & Kluijtmans, M. (2020). What makes an expert university teacher? A systematic review and synthesis of frameworks for teacher expertise in higher education. *Educational Research Review*, *31*(October), 100365. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2020.100365

Yorke, M. (2006). *Employability in higher education: what it is - what it is not* (Vol. 1). Higher Education Academy York.