

How can ePortfolios promote employment?

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In the Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal (IPS), in Portugal, we have a long history of using portfolios in student-centred and competence-based education. Participation in Empowering ePortfolio Process (EEP) project, has enabled us to explore and develop digital portfolios. EPortfolios can improve practices in higher education, act as mediation spaces for students promoting self-consciousness and self-determination, as well as develop competences and attitudes for life (Pires, Rodrigues & Pessoa 2018). According to our common analysis of students' perspectives on ePortfolios, we can say that students recognize the added value of them, but also consider using them to be a challenge (Kunnari, Laurikainen, Pires & Rodrigues 2017). Providing other perspectives to the discussion is essential. This article aims to shed light to employers' point of view – how can ePortfolios promote employment?

Context

The Polytechnic Institute of Setúbal (IPS) is a public institution of higher education, which employs approximately 650 persons and has around 6 500 students. At present the IPS comprises five Higher Education Schools: Setúbal School of Technology, School of Education, School of Business and Administration, School of Health and Barreiro School of Technology. Besides short cycle technical degrees and postgraduate diplomas, IPS offers a wide range of first and second cycle Bologna degrees. IPS also integrates a Students' Welfare Unit and several functional units and central services, namely the Employment Promotion Service (SPE-IPS).

The main objective of the Employment Promotion Service (SPE-IPS) is to promote policies and actions that foster the professional integration of its graduates into the labour market, preparing them for the various challenges in the search for jobs for others. The SPE-IPS also develops studies that allow the production of statistical information in terms of employability, to better understand the dynamics of the graduates' transitions. It includes an insertion in the active life dimension of IPS graduates, in close coordination with the service studies and planning of IPS (NEP-IPS). It also provides guidance and career development support services for IPS finalist students. With the objective of supporting the insertion in the active life of the IPS graduates, seminars and workshops are carried out on the different phases of a selection process (from the construction of the Curriculum Vitae to the simulation of interviews), aiming to provide finalist students and graduates with skills to facilitate their entry into the labour market.

The following insights are based on the interview with the technical staff of the Employment Promotion Service (SPE-IPS), Célia Costa and Beatriz Marques, who shared their perspectives about employers' interests, and shed light on the job recruitment settings and on the ePortfolio contributions for the working life.

Job recruitment setting – interests of the employer

According to Costa and Marques (2017), graduates should try to differentiate and distinguish themselves from other graduate applicants in the labour market by presenting transversal competencies that could be applied to acquired positions in addition to possessing the required technical skills. Focus should also be placed on the way graduates present themselves in the labour market. It is not enough for employers to receive a Curriculum Vitae (CV) with the

personality and characteristics that differentiate themselves from other applicants. Further, it is important for employers to understand how graduates have become involved in activities and projects developed during the academic course (in or out of school). Evidence should also be given on their participation in socially responsible activities, skills acquired and how their personal experiences have influenced them. (Costa & Marques 2017.)

In the recruitment process, the evaluation of a candidate through the analysis of his digital portfolio contributes to a more dynamic perspective on the profile of the candidate, not focusing only on the descriptive reading of a CV. For most employers / responsible for the recruitment areas, LinkedIn functions as a platform where it is possible to perceive the course and profile of the candidates. Some employers request the use of digital tools in their recruitment processes such as submitting video information, namely pitch presentation, where the candidates make a brief presentation of themselves and the skills they possess.

Other employers already use platforms with their own templates, where candidates can fill in all the information and submit documents or files that prove the veracity of their CV. This type of platform allows employers to reduce the time in the selection of candidates as well as have access only to the information they need. (Costa & Marques 2017.)

Final reflections

Trying to answer to our research question — how can ePortfolios promote employment — we found that ePortfolios can help both the applicants and employers to find a match between personal characteristics and competences, and the requirements of the job. According to the perspectives of the staff of the IPS Employment Services, the ePortfolio can also be an interesting tool to evidence graduates' competences, personality and characteristics that differentiate them from each other (Costa & Marques 2017). It gives a more dynamic perspective on the profile of the candidate, improving the graduates' relationship with the world of work. These perspectives are important to share with students to motivate them to be creative and innovative in building their ePortfolios.

References

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