

# PREPARING STUDENTS FOR LIFE



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One's education and career are not isolated from other life roles. Social situation, health status, relationships, culture, and many other factors need to be considered. Therefore, one of the tasks of higher education is a comprehensive support of its students.

Counseling centers that provide students with support are an integral part of modern and high-quality international and Slovak universities. The University Counseling Center (UNIPOC) has been operating at the Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice (UPJŠ) for almost ten years. Such support plays a crucial role in increasing students' motivation and their psychological well-being, in preventing early drop out, inconsistency between students' interests and the chosen field of study, or mismatch between the demands of the labor market and the content of education, which ultimately makes the education system more efficient. UNIPOC provides psychological, career, social, and legal counseling, counseling in effective learning for every student of UPJŠ in Košice and special study support to students with specific needs. In the last three years, we have witnessed huge changes in our society that have brought a sense of uncertainty into our lives. Supporting students

proved to be a necessity. Studying at a university is often associated with high levels of stress and the ability to cope with it is very individual. Therefore, universities must have mechanisms in place to manage and prevent these problems.



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The future career of university students and graduates is a fundamental topic, but few Slovak universities provide career services to their students. Young people choose the path of higher education with the aim of better applying themselves on the labor market. Whether that means finding a job quickly, a dream profession, or finding a higher paying job. At a time when the world and the labor market are

rapidly changing, it is a great simplification to think that a university degree will secure them that. What students do in addition to the degree, how aware they are of their strengths and weaknesses, how they manage their own development, career, and overall functioning on the labor market and in life is what is going to set them apart. Career guidance plays a major role here and higher education institutions must give it importance.

Globalization, automation, robotization, more flexible employment, changes in values and demographics – those are the terms that are traditionally mentioned in connection with current trends in the labor market. If the last years have taught us anything, it is that we cannot anticipate and prepare for all the changes, but we can react to them. Adaptability and flexibility are thus one of the most important competencies for the labor market and life. Adaptive individuals are interested in their future, have control over it, are curious and self-confident in following their goals regardless of how the world changes. Concepts such as green transition, work-life balance, gender equality are values that are currently present in all sectors of the labor market. How we can apply these values in our (working) life? We can use green skills as an example here. Transition to the

Veronika has a master's degree in Psychology from UPJŠ in Košice and studied at Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas for two semesters. During her PhD. in Social and Work Psychology, she studied transition to adulthood and its difficulties which led her to her current position of director of the University Counseling Center. As of 2019 Veronika has been a

board member of the Slovak Association for Career Guidance and Career Development, where she helps to spread awareness of career guidance and improve access to guidance for all people. In 2022 she was appointed by the Minister of Education to the position of member of the supervisory board of Slovak Education Support Fund (Fond na podporu vzdelávania).

green economy is not only a challenge but also a great opportunity we must be prepared for. Although green skills are a relatively new concept, we can assume that employers will expect their employees to behave ecologically in the workplace and mind environmental protection and sustainability when performing work tasks.

Hence, in the coming years, it will be the task of universities to educate graduates who possess and know how to apply transition-oriented skills and values. Only then can they take advantage of the opportunities in the emerging post-pandemic world and labor market. At the UPJŠ in Košice, we believe the best strategy is to lead by example. We joined the global Race to Zero campaign, created a Green Committee,

implemented Gender Equality Policy, and created a Committee for Gender Equality. This sends a signal to the society, our students, and alumni, that we are taking these values seriously.

If we want to prepare students for life, not just the labor market, we need cooperation and active interest from both, the students and the employers. We need students to be demanding of their alma maters. It is essential they understand the importance of support services, actively use and request them from the universities. Finally, engagement of employers in improving the readiness of students and creating high-quality opportunities to realize their potential is of great importance.