



## **The Practice of Career Guidance in a Northern Portuguese University**

<sup>1</sup>Natália Pereira, <sup>2</sup>Neves Arza Arza

<sup>1</sup>Lusófona University of Porto, Porto, Portugal

<sup>2</sup>University of A Coruña, A Coruña, Spain

**Abstract:** This study aims to analyze the practice of career guidance in a northern Portuguese University. In the process of selecting of a profession, we are increasingly faced with great difficulty on the part of young people to carry out educational, formative and professional options. Based on the Bologna Process and the purpose of improving the employability of graduates, professional guidance has become a quality factor in higher education. In this quantitative research, we used a Likert Scale questionnaire. Two hundred twelve finalist students configured the representative sample, (50,9% of the student population), distributed by 18 courses in five different university departments. The results show that the career guidance available does not fully satisfy the student's needs. The guidance received by the students is characterized as being basically informative and focused on academic and professional issues. The main guidance agents are the teachers, and the main actions related to career guidance occurred during the last year of the course. The difference between College departments demonstrates that the Management area is the one where its students received more career guidance for the transition into the job market. In relation to the guidance services, there is a difference between the information available and its actual use.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Career guidance, Guidance services

### **1. Introduction**

The first professional guidance services in Higher Education in Portugal started operating in the 1980s. In 1985, Units for Insertion into Active Life (UNIVA) have been created and, at this time are designated as Department for Professional Insertion (GIP), their functions focus on supporting the employment of students and recent graduates. At the beginning of the 90s, Psychological Support Services have been promoted, which, among others, assume functions specific to professional guidance. The most crucial advance in the recognition and extension of vocational guidance comes with the creation of the European Higher Education Area.

In 2007, the Legal Regime for Higher Education Institutions (RJIES) - Law nr. 62/2007, from the 10th of September, which reinforces various support to higher education students, including support to the inclusion of graduates in the working world and provides for all institutions to collect and distribute information about the employment of their graduates and their professional backgrounds. Thus, the role of vocational guidance in its dimension more focused on job insertion in instituted. Decree-Law no. 107/2008, from the 25th of June, stipulated the preparation of a report on the implementation of the reform higher education and provided support for the promotion of school success, as well as encouragement for professional insertion. The measures included curricular and professional internships and guidance for integration into the labour market. Therefore, Higher education takes on the challenge of employing its graduates. The benefits of internships were evidenced in the study by Vieira, Caires and Coimbra (2011), in which they concluded that students with internships had better levels of vocational exploration, self-efficacy and better professional investment objectives

In summary, the reform undertaken with the creation of the European Higher Education Area boosted the implantation of vocational guidance services, that focus their activities on the transition from high school to higher education; in preparation for the transition from higher education to the labour market and employability and adaptation to the work

career (Taveira, 2017, Eurydice, 2019). Between 2015 and 2017, there was a significant increase in Professional Guidance Services at public and private Universities in mainland Portugal and Autonomous Regions (Pereira, 2017).

## 2. Literature Review

The difficulties that university students encounter in their academic journey (entry, attendance and exit) justify the relevance of professional guidance at the university and its action throughout the university course (Rodríguez Moreno, 2003; Romero & Sobrado, 2002; Romero & Figuera, 2016). Transitions delimit the functions of vocational guidance at the university and reflect its summative character. On admission, professional guidance promotes adaptation and integration to university life and professional redirecting. For Romero and Figuera (2016), active participation, integration in the university and the development of social relationships contribute to the acquisition of important skills for the professional sphere.

During the studies, professional guidance enables the delimitation of the academic and professional itinerary (choice of course units, specialization branches, mobility programs, scholarships and the reorientation to other training). The preparation for decision-making about training when finishing studies and to the entering on the labour market are two other essential functions of professional guidance that are related to leaving the University. So, we are going to come across the stated by Santana Vegas (2003, p.112), "guiding means helping the person in the process of realizing a vital project over other possible ones, but it also means guiding for the social-labour transition in a globalized, complex, flexible and precarious market, in an era marked by uncertainty". Professional guidance in this process is mainly preventive, and its main purpose is to contribute, along with professional training, to the development of employability.

One of the challenges of the reform undertaken with the creation of the European Higher Education Area was precisely to increase the employability of graduates. Training provides professional and transversal skills, which will enable graduates to respond to the demands of the labour market and to better position themselves in a flexible, unstable and continuously changing labour market (Martín de el Peso; Rabadan and Hernández; Mora; Sánchez Pozo, cit. in Suárez, 2013). Professional guidance provides skills related to career management (Sánchez García, 2013). The functions of vocational guidance are articulated from the intervention areas, defined as contents and thematic (Álvarez González & Bisquerra Alzina, 2012). In the delimitation of areas or content of professional guidance, we found proposals from different authors (among others, Taveira, 2004; Álvarez González and Bisquerra, 2012; Sánchez García, 2013). In a synthesis mode of the contributions made by different authors, we found four interconnected areas: Self-knowledge; Academic, professional and Labor information; Planning and tools for job searching and professional project. In line with the defence and conception of professional guidance for social justice (Hooley & Sultana, 2016) and for transformation and change (Ulla Kann, 1988), in the four mentioned areas, thematic related to the gender perspective are incorporated. With its inclusion and intension that oriented people build a critical gender thinking, which allows them to become aware of inequality situations and their causes, as well as decision-making that neutralizes the influence of gender barriers in professional development. The indicated areas or thematic and the incorporation of the gender perspective in a transversal way in each one of them are present in the questionnaire prepared for the current investigation, specifically for the characterization of one of the dimensions of the practice of professional guidance referred in the thematic in which they received guidance.

## 3. Methodology

The research is based on a descriptive methodology of quantitative type from the data obtained through a questionnaire elaborated for this investigation. Due to its characteristics, it is an adequate methodological option for our study, since the intention is to describe a phenomenon or reality. Another reason that justifies this choice is that it allows us to quickly collect information from a large sample of the population. In this research, the objective is to analyze the practice of professional guidance in a northern Portuguese university.

### 3.1 Population

The population consists of students who are in the last curricular year of their university course which, with some exceptions, usually are three years long. The areas of law and architecture take four and five years, respectively. The population is composed of 416 students; the majority are women (57%) and, in the distribution by courses, gender differences reproduced in the professional choices (there are more women in the areas of Social and Human Sciences, Communication and Humanity Sciences). The population is spread over five faculties and 18 university courses.

### 3.2 Sample Description

Given the size of the population, it was decided to apply the questionnaire to the entire population that at the time of data collection were in class. Therefore, size and representativeness criteria were not used for their selection. The sample was configured by the 212 finalist students that answered the questionnaire. They represent 50.9% of the population and are distributed among the 18 university courses and integrated master courses of the five faculties. The distribution of the sample by courses does not show strong discrepancies with the population. With regard to gender and the course, it has proportions similar to those of the population, observing the same trend of feminized and masculinized courses. As for the gender variable, the sample consists of 60.4% females and 39.6% males. Regarding the age variable, it is verifiable that 62.2% of the sample is between 20 and 24 years old, with emphasis on the number of people aged over 30 years (18.9%).

### 3.3 Data Collection

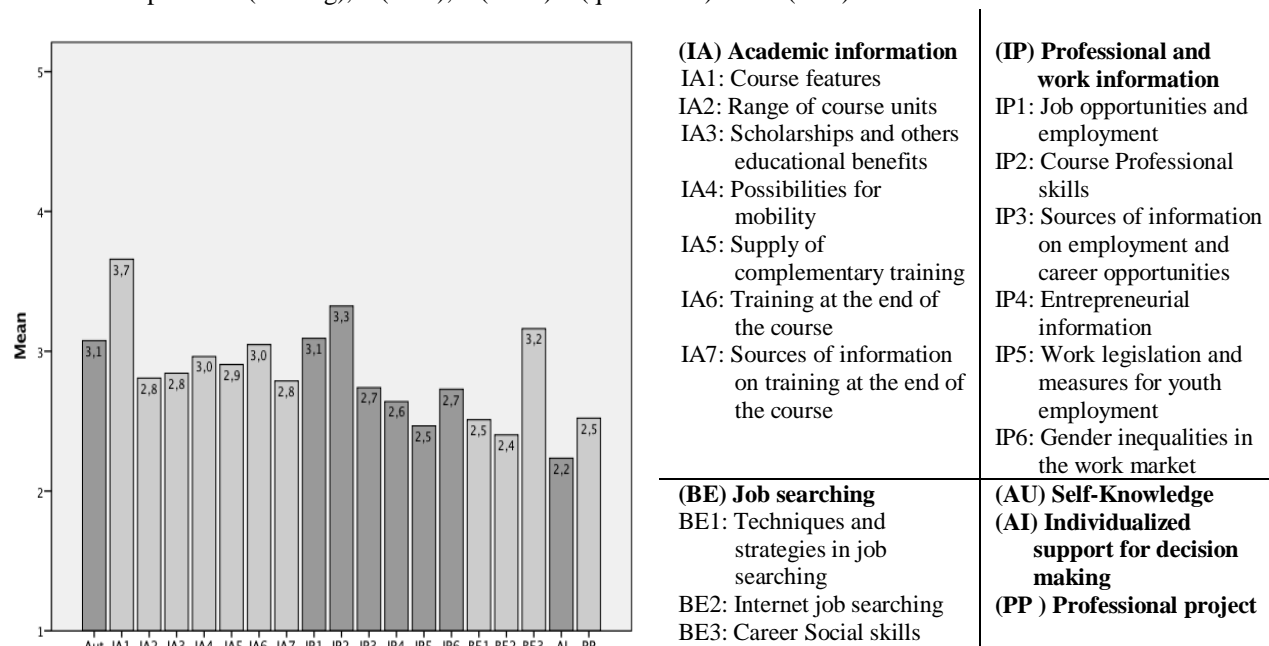
The instrument used was a questionnaire with a Likert scale, in which 35 questions collect information on the areas and themes, on the agents and on the moments when students received professional guidance. These three dimensions make it possible to partially characterize the practice of professional guidance. The first stage was in classrooms, where present students filled questionnaire (obtained 162), in order to increase the number of applicants, the questionnaire was held on online (added 50 more). Descriptive and comparative analysis was carried out. At the descriptive level, central tendency statistics were used, such as the average, the median and the standard deviation, and the distribution of frequencies and percentages of the variables. At the comparative level, the Kruskal-Wallis and Mann-Whitney tests were used to analyze group differences. In order to identify the variables that most influence the global value of professional guidance, a multiple regression analysis was performed.

## 4. Results and Discussion

At this point, we will characterize the professional orientation that the students, through three of the dimensions that define professional guidance as practice: the areas or thematic, the moments in which it occurs and the agents who develop it. Their study makes it possible to value the extent to which professional guidance has been developed.

### 4.1 The Areas or Themes and Individualized Advisory Services

Taking into account the proposals of different authors (Álvarez González and Sánchez García, 2013; Álvarez González & Bisquerra Alzina, 2012; Rodríguez Moreno, 2007; Sánchez García, 2004, 2013) we analyzed the following areas or thematic: self-knowledge, academic, professional and work information, techniques and strategies for job searching and professional project. Graph 1 presents the contents for each of the areas and the corresponding averages. The response scale has five points: 1 (nothing), 2 (little), 3 (some) 4 (quite some) and 5 (a lot).



**Graph 1:** Average of the areas and contents of the professional guidance received  
(Note. Source: Own elaboration.)

From reading Graph 1, we highlight the following information:

- The professional guidance received is uneven, depending on the area or content. The averages range from 3.66 to 2.22.
- The contents in which they would have received more guidance correspond to different areas, mainly that of academic (AI), professional and work (IP) information. Information about the characteristics of the course they are studying in (IA1 = 3.66), information about the professional skills specific to the course that are searched for in the work market (IP2 = 3.32), social skills for a professional career (BE3 = 3.16), information about the course's professional market - job opportunities and job vacancies - (IP3 = 3.09), self-knowledge (AU = 3.08) and training possibilities at the end of the course (IA6 = 3.05).
- The themes in which they have received less guidance are related to job search on the Internet (BE = 2.40), with information on work legislation and political measures for insertion in the work market (IP5 = 2.47) and with the planning of the professional project (PP = 2.52).
- Individualized advisory (AI = 2.23) for decision making has little presence in the guiding practice.
- The professional guidance received does not meet the needs of the student, with the differences indicated for the different themes, the averages do not approach the highest point of the scale.

## 4.2 Guidance Received and Fulfilment of Guidance Needs

The questionnaire included a question asking them to globally evaluate the extent to which the guidance and professional information received at the university met their needs (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Globally evaluate the professional guidance and information received

Almost none		Little		Some		Quite Some		Completely		Total		Average	Standard deviation
n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
13	6,5	43	21,4	88	43,8	51	25,4	6	3,0	201	100	2,97	0,921

**Source:** Own elaboration.

Almost 2/3 of the students valued the guidance received with the two lower points of the scale (little – 21,4% - and some – 43,8%). Those who valued it with the highest scores on the scale represent 28,4%. It can be considered that students are not satisfied with the guidance received. The multiple regression analysis, in which the dependent variable is the global valuation of the guidance received, and the independent variables are the 19 items related to the content of the guidance received from the questionnaire, establishes as priorities five items that justify the variability of the global valuation ( $R$  multiple = 0.705). As demonstrated in Table 2, the variables that most positively influence the valuation of the professional guidance received are social skills for professional life ( $\beta = 0.264$ ) and information about the information sources on postgraduate training ( $\beta = 0.246$ ), followed by information on the professional skills demanded in the work market ( $\beta = 0.186$ ), on the sources and services for information on the professional market ( $\beta = 0.147$ ) and guidance for professional self-knowledge ( $\beta = 0.147$ ). The five variables are related to job and professional information and the possibilities of training after finishing studies. Most of the variables must be related to the advisory role of the teaching staff and, most likely, to the role of the teachers, namely the specialists, for their professional practice and their knowledge of the work market.

**Table 2:** Multiple regression analysis (valuing professional guidance). Significant variables.

Model	Standardised coefficients Beta ( $\beta$ )	T	Sig.
Social skills for a professional career? (Interpersonal and communication skills, teamwork, etc.).	0.264	4.106	0.000
To find out where to obtain this information on the training possibilities at the end of the course.	0.246	3.796	0.000
Professional skills specific to the course that are searched for in the work market.	0.186	2.822	0.005
Information sources and services where you can find information about the professional opportunities and employment of my course (website and information sheets).	0.147	2.239	0.026
Self-knowledge, professional skills, interests, strengths, weaknesses and aspects to improve.	0.147	2.173	0.031

**Source:** Own elaboration

### 4.3 Guidance Agents

The following chart (Table 3) presents information corresponding to the items about the people, services and tools that provided professional guidance to students. There is evidence that the university under study offers Services and Resources to its students, from the first to the last year of the course. The university provides its students with services that have different functions, namely admission, mobility, internships, social work and academic services, prioritizing the information on advisory and highlighting the integration and adaptation of students at the beginning and during their studies. In addition to the services, the university posts academic and professional information on the University guide, on course brochures and at the University website.

**Table 3:** Professional guidance agents

<b>Professional guidance agents:</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
From Course Director	206	2,79	3,00	1,289
From teachers	209	3,60	4,00	0,971
From fellow students	206	3,26	3,00	1,017
From University services	211	2,34	2,00	1,022
From the university and colleges website	210	2,50	3,00	1,008
From other services and people outside the university	206	2,90	3,00	1,231
From family and friends	205	3,23	3,00	1,213

**Source:** Own elaboration

As evidenced by the data in Table 3, teachers are the main guiding agents (3,66). Family and friends and fellow students are in second place. The University services and website play a less relevant role in the professional guidance of students.

### 4.4 Moments when the students received guidance

Professional guidance at the university has a continuous character, which is identified with the three moments of the university course: in the first year, during studies and in the last year.

**Table 4:** Moments when the students received guidance

<b>Moments</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>Average</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Standard deviation</b>
In the first year of the course	199	2,62	3,00	1,156
Through all the years of the course	200	2,93	3,00	1,101
In the last year of the course	198	3,20	3,00	1,107

**Source:** Own elaboration

Table 4 shows that the guidance had a distinct presence in the course of university studies. The most presence occurred in the last year of the course.

## 5. Conclusion

The profile of the guiding practice carried out at the university under study is essentially informative, mostly provided by teachers, present throughout the university course's journey - especially in the last year of studies - and it does not meet the student's needs.

### a) The Presence of Areas

The guidance received concerning the areas or contents displays an essentially informative profile with a focus on academic and professional themes. Academic information about the characteristics of the course (duration, study plan, curricular units, optional and/or specialities), information about the professional skills specific to the course that are searched for in the job market, along with professional self-knowledge, are the three thematic which more orientation is given on by the institution. The professional guidance thematic on which less orientation is given, are related to a more systematic orientation. Due to the fact that they are less attended to, the informal nature of the practice of guidance and its link with the guiding role of teachers and the curriculum itself is verified. The orientation for the elaboration of the

professional project and the individualized support/advisory for decision-making on training and employment are the thematic that students have received less guidance on. The thematic most linked to insertion in the work market, such as job search techniques and strategies, job search on the Internet, labour law and entrepreneurship are also among those with less presence. Despite the importance, and the legal prescriptions that recognize it, guidance for moving into the job market is scarce. Consequently, this aspect of professional guidance must be promoted. The gender focus is only present in the orientation that the student received. Knowledge of the situation of discrimination towards women in the labour market, its causes and the measures taken to reduce or eliminate this problem, was also among the ones that got the least attention.

#### **b) Agents and Services that Provide Professional Guidance**

Vocational guidance is carried out mainly by teachers. The university's services, the university's website and colleges have had little of a guiding role. Teachers informally perform an important guiding function that is recognized by students. This role would be related, mainly, to the guiding role of internships and to the transmission of knowledge of the professional market that has a part of the teachers who accumulate the function of teaching and employment. The scarce guiding role of the university services can be related to the reduced use of these services by the students. These results were collected by Pereira (2017) in another conducted research, in which students know the services, but do not use them in equal proportion. Services have a small role in guidance. The majority of services more related to vocational guidance have low levels of knowledge and use. Therefore, it can be concluded that students do not take advantage of existing services at the university. Another conclusion of the same study highlights that the services and the guiding figures are presented in a fragmented way at the scopes and function levels, which are fundamentally informative. It is necessary to unify services and figures in charge of the guiding task, through its integration in a guidance plan at the university level.

#### **c) Presence of Professional Guidance in the University Journey**

Professional guidance was present throughout the university course, from the beginning to the end of the studies. The last year of the course is where the orientation has a greater presence, although it does not completely meet the needs of students. This presence can be explained by the guiding role of the internships that take place in the last year and, therefore, explains its greater appreciation in the last moment of the course by the students, because they provide more information and bring them closer to the reality of the work market. The smallest presence of guidance happens in the first year. This fact contrasts with the offer of information that takes place at the time of entry in which various activities are carried out aimed at knowing the characteristics of the university's course and services. This contrast leads us to consider that informative actions are ineffective. However, there are activities in which students participate in the first year, but it can be interpreted that they must be improved. Thus, it is necessary to rethink the activities developed in the first year (modalities, duration and fostering more student involvement), in order to make them more efficient and effective. The lower presence of guidance for job insertion contrasts with the importance that some variables have in the global appreciation of the guidance received. Thus, the following appear highlighted: The social skills for professional life (interpersonal skills and communication, team work, etc.); information about the possibilities of training after the course; the professional skills specific to the course; information about professional opportunities; employment; professional skills they have; interests; and potential. This aspect of professional guidance must, therefore, be developed. In an attempt to improve the orientation for professional insertion, the university under study promoted Workshops on Preparation for Integration into the Labor Market, integrating the modules "job searching: know yourself and know the labour world I and II; Curriculum vitae and application letters; Job interviews ", which were aimed at all students at the university, but as they took place during school periods, during daytime hours, and simultaneously with undergraduate classes, it's expected success might have been negatively influenced by those factors.

## **References**

- Álvarez González, M. & Bisquerra Alzina, R. (2012). Orientación educativa. In Modelos, áreas, estrategias y recursos (pp- 197-237). Madrid: Wolters Kluwer.
- Álvarez González, M. & Sánchez García, M. F. (2013). Concepto, evolución y enfoques teóricos de la orientación profesional. In Sánchez García, M. F. (coord.) e Álvarez González, M. Bases Teórico-prácticas de la orientación profesional. Madrid: UNED.
- Decreto-Lei n. ° 107/ 2008, de 25 de Junho - It determines a measure to stimulate inactive insertion life, namely support in professional internships, if resulting up to 2 years after the end of the degree he attended. From: [http://www.dges.mctes.pt/NR/rdonlyres/AE6762DF-1DBF-40C0-B194-E3FAA9516D79/2366/DL107\\_2008.pdf](http://www.dges.mctes.pt/NR/rdonlyres/AE6762DF-1DBF-40C0-B194-E3FAA9516D79/2366/DL107_2008.pdf)

- Eurydice (2019). Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education. From [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/guidance-and-counselling-higher-education-25\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/guidance-and-counselling-higher-education-25_en)
- Hooley, T. & Sultana, R. (2016). Career guidance for social justice. *Journal of the National Institute for Career Education and Counselling*, 36, 2-11. From: <https://derby.openrepository.com/derby/bitstream/10545/611264/1/1-hooley-sultana.pdf> [Crossref](#)
- Kann, Ulla (1988). La orientación vocacional y el mercado del trabajo: ¿orientar para transformar o para domesticar? *Perspectivas: Revista trimestral de educación comparada*, ISSN 0304-3053, N.º. 4, 1988, pp. 509-519. From <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=3115732>
- Lei n.º 62/2007, de 10 de setembro – Regula o Regime Jurídico das Instituições de Ensino Superior – includes support for the integration into the active life of graduates into work market. From [http://www.dges.mctes.pt/NR/rdonlyres/AE6762DF-1DBF-40C0-B194-E3FAA9516D79/1771/Lei62\\_2007.pdf](http://www.dges.mctes.pt/NR/rdonlyres/AE6762DF-1DBF-40C0-B194-E3FAA9516D79/1771/Lei62_2007.pdf)
- Pereira, N. (2017). A prática da orientação profissional na universidade: um estudo numa universidade portuguesa. (Tese de Doutoramento, Universidade da Coruña). From <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/tesis?codigo=133955>
- Rodríguez Moreno, M. L (2003). *Hacia una nueva orientación universitaria. Modelos integrados de acción tutorial, orientación curricular y construcción del proyecto profesional*. Barcelona: Ediciones Universidad de Barcelona.
- Rodríguez Moreno, M. L (2007). Orientación Profesional y formación basada en el trabajo-Conceptos básicos y sugerencias para la intervención. *Rev. Educación*,9,15-33. From: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=2569162>
- Romero Rodríguez, S. and Figuera Gazo, P. (2016). La orientación en la universidad. En En M. Manzanares y C. Sanz, *Orientación profesional. Fundamentos y estrategias* (pp. 163-196). Ciudad Real: Universidad de Castilla-La Mancha, Wolters Kluwer España.
- Romero, S. & Sobrado, L. (2002). Orientación para el desarrollo de la carrera profesional del universitario. In Álvarez Rojo e Lázaro Martínez (Coord). *Calidad de las universidades y orientación universitaria*. Málaga: Ediciones Aljibe.
- Sánchez Carcia, L (2004). *Orientación laboral. Para la diversidad y el cambio*. Madrid: Sanz y Torres.
- Sanchez Garcia, L (2013). Transiciones y empleabilidad en el desarrollo de la carrera. In Sánchez García (Coord.). *Orientación profesional e personal* (pp. 139-183). Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia.
- Santana Vega, L. (2003). *Orientación Educativa e intervención psicopedagógica. Cambian los tiempos. Cambian las responsabilidades profesionales*. Madrid: Pirámide.
- Suárez Lantarón, B. (2013). Servicios de Orientación profesional universitarios: estudio descriptivo. *Revista de Docencia Universitaria. REDU*. Número monográfico dedicado a Tutoría y sistemas de orientación y apoyo a los estudiantes, Vol.11 (2), mayo-agosto, 43-62. From <http://www.red-u.net/> [Crossref](#)
- Taveira, M. C. (2004). Exploração e desenvolvimento vocacional na adolescência: contributos para uma abordagem sistemática e colaborativa. *Psicologia e Educação*, vol. III (1), Dez., 109-120.
- Taveira, M. C. (2017). Career Education and Guidance Services in Portugal: Deeds and Needs. In Ronald G. Sultano (Ed.). *Comparative and international education: diversity of voices. Career Guidance and Livelihood Planning across the Mediterranean. Challenging Transitions in South Europe and the MENA Region*. Sense Publishers and *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies* (pp. 401-418). [Crossref](#)
- Vieira, D. G., Caires, S., and Coimbra, J. L. (2011). Do ensino superior para o trabalho: Contributo dos estágios para inserção profissional. *Revista Brasileira de Orientação Profissional*, jan.-jun., vol. 12(1), 29-36. From [https://jpn.up.pt/pdf/Vieira,%20Caires,%20%26%20Coimbra%20\(2011\).pdf](https://jpn.up.pt/pdf/Vieira,%20Caires,%20%26%20Coimbra%20(2011).pdf)