**WHAT DO WE FOCUS ON IN THE EXCELLENCE PROGRAMME?**

***Roundtable for the Grantees of the Youth Impact Research Excellence Programme***

Project Youth Impact
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Grantees:

1. Ondřej Dvouletý (Prague University of Economics and Business)
2. Michal Andera (Prague University of Economics and Business)
3. Přemysl Gubani (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague)
4. Klára Palasová, Tereza Sobotková, Filip Vrzák (Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Point One)
5. Barbora Latečková (Czech Evaluation Society)
6. Adéla Růžičková, David Másilka (Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University Olomouc; PŠL)
7. Nikola Křístek (Restorativní škola, z.s.)
8. Filip Štochl (Institute of Information Studies and Librarianship, Charles University)
9. Veronika Šancová, Kateřina Děkaníková (Prototýpci z.s.)
10. Tereza Semerádová, Michal Dostál (EF Technical University of Liberec) – video presentation

*This article is a summary of a roundtable discussion held online on April 28, 2022, with grantees of the* *Youth Impact Research Excellence Programme.*

**The roundtable aimed to introduce the participants to each other so that they get to know where they work, what their research goals are, what methods they use and what stage their research or evaluation is currently in. A short debate followed each of the individual panellist’s presentations.**

**Below you will find introductions of the individual researchers and brief summaries of the follow-up discussions.**

## **Ondřej Dvouletý (Prague University of Economics and Business)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

Our evaluation focuses on expanding the existing knowledge on the impact of the contribution of starting a business for the unemployed (SÚPM-SVČ), which is provided by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic through individual branches of the Labour Office. The project aims to answer the question of whether the current economic activity allows entrepreneurs to cover the necessary living costs and to determine their level of satisfaction concerning the steps involved in starting a business.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Given the unavailability of variables such as personal income, family income, job satisfaction, or personal well-being, a primary survey of beneficiaries is conducted. The data obtained will be analysed using appropriate statistical methods, in particular multiple regression analysis.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

The activities to date have focused mainly on the creation of a database of beneficiaries and the implementation of a questionnaire survey. From the Active Employment Policy (APZ) database, the researcher obtained information on 7,189 beneficiaries for the period 2015–2021. As part of a paid external collaboration with Bizmachine, the researcher expanded the database to include the year of birth, from which he calculated the age of the beneficiary at the time of signing the contract to receive support (information on 7,799 beneficiaries). The information on age was used to divide the respondents into the groups of “younger” and “older” beneficiaries. Furthermore, he expanded the database with the contact details of the respondents that were necessary for the delivery of the survey. Within the framework of other paid services (direct payments from the researcher’s own funds), available databases at the University of Economics, and searching information on the websites of established business entities, he managed to obtain e-mail addresses for 1,737 entities from several databases. At the same time, a structured questionnaire containing questions about an individual’s income, perceived economic self-sufficiency, job satisfaction and personal well-being, including a number of control variables, was developed. The choice of indicator scales was motivated by scales used in major European surveys such as the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) or the Labour Force Survey (LFS). For the interval income items, median scales reflecting the income of the Czech population were purchased from Trexima after obtaining the consent of the survey’s administrator, the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. Subsequently, a questionnaire was created in Qualtrics, which was repeatedly calibrated based on feedback from doc. Chytková and 10 other colleagues from various universities or their departments as well as from the professional community. The final questionnaire was sent out on 5 April, followed by a reminder to complete it on 12 April. A total of 218 responses have been received up to now. All of them will need to be validated and quality checked. The completion rate is 79%, reflecting the fact that when respondents initiated the survey, they mostly completed it. Some respondents were unwilling to complete the questions on personal income from business and other “too personal questions” and therefore refused to complete or did not complete the survey. However, this has been taken into account as we deal with sensitive data. The researcher also communicated with a number of respondents outside of the questionnaire, if the respondents expressed interest in doing so – he conducted a number of (unrecorded) telephone interviews and email conversations. The dissemination of the questionnaire was carried out transparently, included an immediate opt-out option and the researcher responded to all requests from respondents for information on obtaining contact details and information regarding the granting from the means of public aid. The next phase of the project will be the analysis of the data collected. The researcher does not anticipate implementing an additional follow-up call for questionnaire completion.

**What are your main findings so far?**

Given the current distribution of the survey, it is too early to anticipate the findings. However, some respondents very openly shared their positive experience with business support for the unemployed and their life story, describing their first steps in starting a business and how it enabled them to leave the Labour Office.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes, covering the cost of obtaining data from commercial databases and other external providers.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

More funding.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *Were interviews/emails with research respondents also used as a basis for drawing any conclusions?*

Answer: No, it was sensitive data, it served more to add context for the researcher.

* *Have you considered whether the return rate of the questionnaires had any effect on the results? (E.g., those who chose to respond may have been the very ones who evaluated the program positively?)*

Answer: This may have played a certain role, which is why the results from the other secondary data analyses were also used and the result is, therefore, a combination of the two.

* *Based on your research, have you traced certain typical trajectories on the path between employment and entrepreneurship?*

Answer: There are examples worth mentioning. For example, it could not be overlooked that the approach of officials varies a lot from branch to branch – some are more likely to recommend retraining than to lead the person to the possibility of entrepreneurship.

## **Michal Andera (Prague University of Economics and Business)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

The impact of entrepreneurship education on university students.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Questionnaire.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

Data collection is ongoing.

**What are your main findings so far?**

It is difficult to measure impacts over a longer time horizon.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. We probably would not start this activity at all this year.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

Experience with similar type of research from other (and foreign) universities. Further networking, sharing of knowledge and experience – creative-academic dialogue.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *What exactly are you measuring? Is it entrepreneurship, openness to conducting a business, etc., or even some business skills and knowledge?*

Answer: All of them, in the form of self-assessment: relationship to entrepreneurship, entrepreneur intentions, self-efficacy and real start-up.

* *Do you follow only business in general or also the business sector?*

Answer: Not yet, but it’s a very thought-provoking question – we’ll probably include it in the future. The same applies to the question of the usefulness of study as such for business.

* *What exactly do you call entrepreneurship? Do you also include here, for example, innovations arising within the public sector, in non-profits, projects in government offices, etc., even if they do not have the legal status of a business?*

Answer: Again, this is a valuable suggestion – so far, we are only looking at traditional methods of doing business, but it would be worth pursuing this area as well.

## **Přemysl Gubani (Career Centre of the Czech University of Life Sciences (CZU) in Prague)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

The course includes 2 flagship courses for students*, Career Exploration* and *How to Find a Job in the 21st Century*. The aim of the evaluation is to check whether the course leads to the intended consequences or not.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Questionnaire survey before and after the course.

Questionnaire 6 months to one year after the course (the questionnaire is based on individual interviews with students 4–6 months after the course).

Focus group with graduates 2–6 years after graduation who previously attended an activity of the Career Centre of the CZU during their studies.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

Evaluation of the data from the first run and proposal for adjustments to the evaluation for the next period.

Finalizing the preparation of the questionnaire for students with a longer time gap since graduation.

**What are your main findings so far?**

The evaluation has confirmed that the biggest benefit of our courses is the confrontation of students’ expectations with the reality of the demands of the labour market, when it turns out that students are unnecessarily worried. Thus, the course functions primarily as reassurance of their own competences and guidance on what else they could do to improve their position in the labour market.

At the same time, it turns out that our oldest course: *How to find a job in the 21st* century works exactly as intended. The newer course, *Career Exploring,* has its flaws, and despite positive ratings on average, shows more significant outliers at the highest and lowest ranks.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. Allocate time and capital to pursue the topic in depth with the opportunity to consult with experts. As a result, we set new rules for our courses, which we have been able to follow to the point where it has become a routine process.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

Presentation of the obtained data. A list of available novel tools for presenting results and a tutorial on how to use them well.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *What is the ideal situation from the point of view of the career centre?*

Answer: Ideally, students coming out of university see themselves as good candidates for the job market (in terms of self-assessment), feel prepared and self-confident.

* *This is more of a challenge than a question – in trying to get data on students and their success rates, there is no such thing as a student card (common in the West) – we need to apply to the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic (NPI CR) to prepare such policy in our coutnry (the creation is certainly necessary, but the process of creation takes too long).*

Answer: Thank you for this interesting suggestion, it is certainly worth trying.

## **Klára Palasová, Tereza Sobotková (nee. Bartošová), Filip Vrzák (CZU)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

Evaluation of the tools used – support for incubated companies.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Mostly questionnaires.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

Done, evaluated.

**What are your main findings so far?**

Suggestions for changes in feedback and compilation of activities.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. In particular, the implementation of evaluation techniques, advice on how to compose questions, and how to evaluate them correctly so that they give substantial evidence.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

Probably have more capacity to form and collect data for a longer time, at least 1x verify on another sample.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *What exactly have you changed in your programmes after you conducted your research?*

Answer: We started using recordings and follow-up sharing; we did not use to have many guided discussions, which we will be changing based on the feedback.

* *Did participation in the educational part of the programme – workshops, e-learning, etc. influence you anyhow?*

Answer: Absolutely yes – it was a great help, it helped to sort out and complete our previous knowledge. We appreciate the well-crafted materials we keep coming back to.

* *Were any of the findings surprising to you?*

Answer: Not really, perhaps just the low return rate of questionnaires.

## **Barbora Latečková (ČES)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

To investigate the impact of international mobility projects on improving access to the labour market for disadvantaged youth using the QCA method.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Questionnaires, interviews, qualitative comparative analysis.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

Based on the theoretical justification and research and according to the interim report, a questionnaire was developed; the conditions (independent variables) that should explain the outcome (dependent variable) were identified in detail for the QCA method. There must not be too many conditions; this could result in a result that is either too complex or based on too many assumptions. There was a selection of QCAs (mostly fuzzy, i.e., with fuzzy sets on the scale, elsewhere crisp – 0/1, i.e., YES/NO). To refine the questionnaire for the QCA method, in March the researcher contacted 2 experts who help me with the QCA methodology (doc. Květoň from the Faculty of Natural Sciences, and Jiřina Svitáková, an expert in this method in the Czech Republic). Both agree that the preparation of the questionnaire and setting of the QCA parameters is crucial at this stage and the quality of preparation determines the result. The researcher introduced them to the research and had a personal meeting with doc. Květoň in Prague. Dr. Svitáková will help the researcher with the statistical evaluation of the QCA at the end. The researcher will also consult with these two experts every step.

**What are your main findings so far?**

So far, literature search/findings from secondary sources: from a German study of a similar programme: the internships are not so much about gaining professional knowledge (A), but to a lesser extent also, but rather that they gain soft skills, supporting personal development (B): independence, self-confidence, social competence, thanks to the foreign country and the new social environment: improved communicative competence, new coping strategies, increased geographical, mental and emotional adaptability).

Independent variables according to QCA (key conditions explaining the effect):

1. open access to foreign employers and coordinators of organisations (without prejudice towards the target group – TG);
2. willingness of the TG to speak a foreign language even with mistakes;
3. appropriation and development of acquired competences (development with a pedagogical worker or within their social environment) during and after the project, behavioural change.

The German evaluation shows that international mobility has increased the employability of the TG. A German study showed that 2/3 of trainees found a job within 6 months. Work with social insurance in 6 months. The Czech programme also has a good track record (see Mobility follow-up of Call 32 in the Annex to the Interim Report). The questionnaire will be tested to see if a relatively high percentage of the “inactive” members of the TG are students – then, in addition to increased employability, the impact would also be completion/extension of studies and vocational training.

Overall, the evaluation should reveal that the project has contributed to reducing barriers at the 2 main transitions where the members of the TG drop out of the system: either not completing their apprenticeship or not getting a job (school – vocational training, vocational training/apprenticeship – job).

Thus, Dependent Variables:

* employment in the labour market (LM) after 3 years there (covid and possibly shorter-term shortages must be taken into account, it would be better to ask after several years);
* further education.

There is also an assumption that the length of the internship is important for the acquisition of sufficient social and professional (to a lesser extent) competences to “transform” the attitudes and behaviour of the TG. Countries, if the TG is willing to speak a foreign language, will probably not be key, but the QCA will show that. The region of residence will definitely be an important factor (mobility is important precisely because it takes them out of their social environment, but here we know that the TG is just from excluded regions and is therefore relevant for all members of the TG). The difference is more pronounced especially for those who have never left their region/country before.

The other items in the questionnaire that the researcher put in the input report are the socio-demographic characteristics of the TG, the evaluation of the trainees’ cooperation with the Czech and foreign organization, and the supportive follow-up.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

The possibility of independent research on a topic that is within my field of interest.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

Thank you for this support.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *How many of you are working on this research? From the description of your activities, you seem to be a bigger team.*

Answer: I am working on it alone with the support of 3 other colleagues.

* *You talked about having to adjust the theory of change – what exactly did you change?*

Answer: We added the willingness to engage target groups to speak English and perhaps openness on the part of employers, and we also looked at “black boxes”, the assumptions of the theory of change. It wasn’t a major change, but rather we clarified what it could mean for the TG and that soft skills mattered the most.

* *Is it that you would still like to do more interviews?*

Answer: Yes, that’s right. With regard to the QCA, we still want to conduct some telephone interviews, mainly to get examples of good practice.

## **Adéla Růžičková, David Másilka (FTK UPOL)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

The main objective is to explore how interventions help in the development of competences needed for the employability of young university students.

The sub-objectives are:

* Determine whether the intervention develops the soft competences[[1]](#footnote-1) needed for the employability of young undergraduates in the field of study in focus and which of these competences are developed.
* Describe the extent to which these interventions develop these competences.
* Define the factors that influence the development of soft skills.
* To make recommendations to the organising institution and the course guarantor (who guarantees also the intervention) on how to adapt the content of the next year’s courses in order to strengthen the development of the desired soft competences needed for the employability of young university students in this field of study.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Focus Groups – 3 focus groups for 7–8 people.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

We are currently finalising the results of the research. The implementation of the focus groups has already taken place, as well as verbatim transcripts and content analysis of the data by members of the research team.

**What are your main findings so far?**

In relation to sub-objective 1, we have constructed an analytical matrix which indicates that 7 of the 15 competences needed for the employability of Leisure Time Educators in the labour market are developed during the Summer Outdoor Course (KPLP) regardless of the specific programme content of the course and the organizational team.

*Respondents perceive the strongest development in these competences:*

* Competence for cooperation/collaboration;
* Competence for effective communication;
* Problem-solving competence;

*Respondents perceive medium development in these competences:*

* Competence to manage the load;
* Competence for flexibility;
* Competence for creativity/entrepreneurship;
* Competence for lifelong learning;
* Competence for a proactive approach.

*An overview of the factors causing the development of soft competences:*

* The overall programme structure of the course supports the development of key competences (KC);
* Appropriate choice and targeting of specific activities for the development of the KC;
* Adequate structure and intensity of the activity for the development of the KC for the specific participant group;
* Repeated inclusion of activities for the development of KC and their dramaturgical interconnection;
* Careful reflection on activities and programme blocks;
* A stimulating, open and supportive social climate;
* A safe and learning-supportive space;
* Methodological follow-up meeting after the course;
* Personality of the instructor(s) and their work in the team.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. The impetus to carry out this research.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

Involvement of colleagues and students to conduct follow-up research. Preparation of the concept of working with soft competences in students.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *Were the results of your research also reflected in the evaluation system of the NGO Prázdninová škola Lipnice (participating in the organisation of the summer course), or were they mainly useful for your university?*

Answer: The research was conducted with the needs of the faculty in mind, so it is unlikely to affect other PŠL courses.

* *Which of the competences did you find to be developed during the course and which were less developed?*

Answer: The course was not meant to develop all competences, it aims rather on personal development (to recognise one’s strengths, etc.), but most of all it developed the following competences: to cooperate, solve problems, communicate effectively; and less the following: to influence others, work with information, work with clients, etc. Therefore, we know that in the given study programme these competences need to be acquired elsewhere.

* *What do you see as the greatest value of this research?*

Answer: Strengthening of the position of the course; regarding the students – clarification of what they need for their employability; regarding the whole programme – a good balance of the development of all competences.

* *Have you come up with a more objective measure of competences – something other than self-assessment?*

Answer: We did not have these ambitions. Reaction (Nikola Křístek): If you want to, we can discuss this topic, I have dealt with it profoundly.

## **Nikola Křístek (Restorative School, z.s.)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

Does the training of school peer mediators also develop key competences for entrepreneurship, initiative and cooperation? How to support it if necessary? The aim is to strengthen the training of peer-mediators by consciously developing these competences.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Questionnaire, evaluation workshop, focus group interviews, in-depth interviews.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

Second part of three. Initial findings from the analysis of the outcomes of the focus groups with students have been shared with the school mediation methodology team, and we are preparing a methodology workshop that will use the outcomes of the final data collection.

**What are your main findings so far?**

Students do not have the conceptual apparatus to monitor their development in key competences. Peer-mediation trainers are eager for its positive externalities (development of key competences), but they do not have the capacity for them yet.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. The topic itself (developing competence for entrepreneurship and initiative) was outside the focus of the school mediation development team, the grant refreshed its methodological approach. Course adjustments in this direction will be made consciously and based on evidence.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

Possibility to work with the target group for a longer period of time.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *Many people in the Czech Republic are not familiar with the restorative approach and do not work with it. How do you pass it on and how do you measure it?*

Answer: Mediation itself is a restorative tool.

* *Do you still plan to design similar methods to the ones you mentioned in your presentation that employ collaborative works of art made by students?*

Answer: Yes, I’m sure we’ll come up with something similar. At the same time, we believe that the results can be analysed objectively, although it is true that it would take a long time to develop a comprehensive methodology in this area.

* *Was there anything that surprised you – other than the fact that the group results were deeper?*

Answer: Yes, for example, that our staff themselves do not have enough mastery of these methods in themselves and we need to train them well in this area. And then there is also the fact that even at a selective grammar school with a good atmosphere, children may completely lack the conceptual apparatus to express their inner feelings and desires.

## **Filip Štochl (Institute of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

Measuring student entrepreneurship in the project Rozjeď projekt (Launch a Project).

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Figma, Excel, PowerPoint.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

Analysis of results.

**What are your main findings so far?**

So far positive, those who have taken the course have improved in almost all categories (indicators) monitored, by an average of 22%.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. Networking with others on courses on impact evaluation, better insight into the topic, and being able to focus on a topic that is of interest for the researcher.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

More networking activities and seminars :)

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *Concerning competences – how do you deal with the fact that participants only realise their competence gaps during the course and therefore may rate themselves worse in a given competence after the course, even though they actually get significantly better?*

Answer: We are aware of this effect, but we do not work with it purposefully – we would be happy for a recipe. Reaction (Nikola Křístek): The way we solve it is that we take the first statement as a kind of indicator and we start proper measuring only after we all know what we are talking about (so there are 3 measurements).

* *Comment: Thanks from Ondřej Dvouletý and Michal Andera for sharing the assessment scales on entrepreneurial skills – we consider this a great example of collegiality in this area.*

Answer: You’re welcome. :)

* *Did attending Youth Impact workshops and roundtables have any impact on you?*

Answer: Definitely – it was a great validation for me. I’m on my own for the evaluation and it helped me make sure I was going in the right direction.

## **Veronika Šancová, Kateřina Děkaníková (Prototýpci z.s.)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

Evaluation of the impact of individual activities on the development of creativity and entrepreneurship (workshops, webinars, project days, the programme Prototýpci rostou ve škole). Evaluation of the effectiveness of individual training activities.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

Quantitative (internal data – Podio, data for websites and SW tools), qualitative (questionnaires, online questionnaires, directed interview).

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

We include evaluations of individual activities on a daily basis and collect data routinely, adjusting evaluations based on first analyses, newly discovered opportunities and needs – especially project days and the programme Prototýpci rostou ve škole. We try to make the most of the data from internal systems and link it to the findings from the qualitative research. The evaluation of the webinars and face-to-face workshops seems to be set up very well, and the insights gained are very helpful in adapting and developing the topics.

**What are your main findings so far?**

The evaluation of the face-to-face activities and webinars helped us to adjust the formats of the events to make them as efficient as possible in terms of content. We have found that project days are not as beneficial for pupils in the future as we had thought. On the other hand, formats for educators are proving to be very beneficial and, thanks to their multiplier effect, are now a priority in our efforts. The evaluation also identified the most beneficial parts of our programme Prototýpci rostou ve škole and allowed us to adjust the upcoming year’s program accordingly. The findings from the evaluation (both hard data from systems and questionnaire surveys) led to personnel changes in the organisation – the evaluation of trainers.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. Thanks to the Excellence programme, there has been quite a deep dive into the theory of change, which we are still refining. We have had the opportunity to introduce the wider team to evaluation methods and there has been an understanding of its importance by all members of the organisation. Evaluation has become a very natural part of all activities – those aimed at participants, but also the internal ones. After years of lively and intuitive evaluation of activities with occasional feedback, we now evaluate each event in a fairly detailed way and the findings are always shared with the whole team. To make this feasible, we have created a fairly sophisticated internal environment on the Podio platform. Thanks to the comprehensive evaluation approach, we can now create weekly reports that are available to everyone with relative ease – this has also made meetings more efficient.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

In the area of evaluation, what would be most helpful would be more time for analysis, more discussion within the team – in short, we lack capacity, and some team members have revealed certain competence gaps that we are now actively addressing. For further development, we would benefit from sharing with other organisations, possible consultation, the ability to analyse and other team members and take action towards increasing the impact of our learning activities.

**Questions from the discussion**:

* *Rather a comment about another project where the usefulness of project days was also investigated – it turned out that they are demonstrably meaningful and that it also makes sense to record the final reflective “rounds”, because you can learn a lot there. And fingers crossed. :)*

Answer: Thank you. Just one comment on the evaluation of project days – their usefulness varies a lot and it seems to depend very much on the class that comes (and whether the children are already prepared for this type of work) – where they are used to working in a similar way from before, there is the biggest shift. At the same time, those project days that do not go well have a big impact on the lecturers and their motivation: the evaluation therefore concluded that we need to focus more on communication with the school and on the parameters we set ourselves.

##  **Tereza Semerádová, Michal Dostál (EF TUL)**

**What is the subject and goal of your research?**

The aim of the planned research study is to evaluate the impact of a supervised internship in a company on the development of ICT competences in students of IT-oriented disciplines. The study is based on the assumption that the full potential of technical skills can only be developed through their application in real projects in a real environment. Students of Information Management and Systems Engineering and Informatics at the Faculty of Economics of the Technical University of Liberec (EF TUL), who have an internship in a company as a compulsory part of their studies, were selected as the test group. In the case of the Bachelor’s programme in Information Management, the internship is 34 weeks and in the case of the follow-up programme in Systems Engineering and Informatics, the internship is 8 weeks.

**What tools do you use for your research?**

The present study consists of the following activities. In the first phase, key competences in the field of ICT were defined on the basis of a literature search and analysis of existing standards. On the basis of these areas, questions were then prepared for an electronic questionnaire sent to ICT professionals, representatives from companies that cooperate in the organization of IT internships, and graduates of both fields of study. These quantitative data were further processed using factor analysis and linear regression to determine the evaluation criteria for the final version of the ICT competency form. In order to ensure a suitable selection of internships and to facilitate the continuous monitoring of students’ competence development, the Portal of Informatics Internships has been created and is available on the kin.tul.cz website. This portal is used not only to publish company offers and match students with companies according to their profile and interests, but also to submit interim monthly reports from the internship and qualifying semester and final reports from the internship. The main purpose of these reports is to qualitatively assess the development of their competences by means of a designed questionnaire and also to provide a verbal description of the activities that the students carry out during the internship and the projects they are involved in. The semester and final report from the internship are documents of a larger scope, which are classified both by the coordinator of the internship from the Department of Informatics of EF TUL and by the supervisors of the internship directly from the cooperating companies, who are in charge of individual students. Students’ competences are therefore assessed not only by the students themselves, but also by their guarantors.

**At what stage is your research/evaluation activity currently?**

In order to optimize the management of bachelor’s and further informatics practices and at the same time to ensure the consistency of data collection on the development of students’ competence levels, a web portal was created. This portal is available at kin.tul.cz. The portal allows companies to upload specific internship offers along with their detailed descriptions and to book a lecture date at the faculty for second-year students who have yet to complete their internship. The student section of the portal allows you to search for posted job offers and upload interim, semester and final reports from your internship directly into your personal profile. Input and output competency questionnaires are also located at each user account. At the moment, there is an ongoing, monthly evaluation of the reports from undergraduate and continuing student work experience. The project is therefore already approaching its final phase, which will take place in May after the end of the students’ work experience.

**What are your main findings so far?**

Student placements and related monitoring activities are still ongoing, but it is clear from the data collected so far that the application of knowledge and skills in practice is contributing to their considerable development. As the IT field encompasses a wide range of competences, in our study we work with 40 selected areas that were identified through a survey of firms involved in organizing practices and IT professionals. These competency areas also combine information from a search of the scientific literature on measuring digital readiness in HR and existing competency standards. From the data collected so far, it can be concluded that there are two main groups within the 40 surveyed areas. On the basis of student internships, global competences were identified, common to all students regardless of the focus of the internship, and profile competences, the development of which takes place depending on the type of internship and the projects in which students participate in companies. This information has been obtained from interim reports; however, an important part of the overall evaluation will be the final reports from the internship, which will be commented on by the guarantors from the companies where the students are on internship.

**Is there anything that the Youth Impact Excellence grant has made possible for you (and would have been difficult to achieve otherwise)? If so, what is it?**

Yes. Thanks to the programme, we have gained the space needed to create a system for assessing student competences and to create a web portal that will allow us not only to monitor the development of student competences more effectively, but also to ensure better matching of internship offers with student preferences. We believe that the knowledge gained through this project will enable us to better adapt the teaching of IT subjects so that students acquire the competences necessary for employment in the labour market.

**What would help you in your further development and exploration?**

Our project is now in its final phase, with the interim reports for the last two months to be evaluated, followed by the final reports from the practice. In terms of the study, the research activities are almost over. However, we will continue to monitor the development of students’ competences after the study is completed. Due to the professional focus of the students of Information Management and Systems Engineering and Informatics, theoretical preparation of students for practice and subsequent competence in practice are the basic prerequisite for pursuing a profession in the field of IT. The success of the monitoring activities carried out within Youth Impact confirmed us that it makes sense to continue with the project.

1. These are soft competences defined by the National Pedagogical Institute of the Czech Republic. These competences are used to define individual professions by the National Occupational System administered by the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech Republic. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)