Promoting Virtual Mobility in Placements

Progress Report   Public Part

Project information

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Project coordinator:	Mariet Vriens
Project coordinator organisation:	KU Leuven
Project coordinator telephone number:	016 32 82 00 (Teaching and Learning Department)
Project coordinator email address:	mariet.vriens@kuleuven.be

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Executive Summary

The PROVIP project has two main objectives:

1. To further disseminate and exploit the findings of the EU-VIP project (www.euvip.eu), mainly aimed at the business stakeholder group. This project formulated guidelines and advice on how to integrate virtual mobility in international placements.

2. To realize structural collaboration between study programmes and companies focusing on virtually supported international work placements. To this end the project aims to realize a pilot network that will be supported by an online platform which puts the EU-VIP findings into practice.

The dissemination activities that have been carried out so far were mainly (but not solely) aimed at creating awareness and interest. During the second project year this focus will shift to creating desire and encouraging action. Dissemination will therefore be developed around the most important concrete outcome of PROVIP so far: the online platform, which has been baptized "Pathway". This platform will also form the basis of the specific strategy to address businesses which is currently being developed and will be finalized in November 2013.

To start up the creation of a pilot network of study programmes and companies, a small research was being carried out to identify the different disciplines and sectors within the partnership suitable for the pilot network, based on the EU-VIP findings. The decision was made to focus on IT and marketing.

Before the development of the "Pathway" platform we made an inventory of existing platforms supporting (international) internships in the before, during and/or after phase and involving the different stakeholder groups in order to find out which platforms are already out there and what their strenghts and weaknesses are. We concluded that, although there are valuable platforms out there, what we were looking for in our project did not exist yet. Mainly the support of the different stakeholders during and after the internship seemed to be something totally new on the market. The decision was therefore made to start the development of a separate, new platform.

Currently this "Pathway" platform and the pilot network are being launched in the different countries involved in the project (Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Italy and Poland).

The "Pathway" platform will be evaluated by the first user group via an online survey. Based on this user feedback the platform will be updated before the end of the project.

For the set-up of a network between study programmes and companies as well as for the platform a "transferable model" will be created and offered freely:

- The first model will be a description of how to set up a network, inspired by our own experiences about the process and general conclusions.

- The second model will consist of the platform's source code for distribution to other networks. The platform can be downloaded, installed and adapted to fit in the specific user context.

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1. Project Objectives

The PROVIP project has two main objectives. On the one hand it wants to ensure a wide and structural uptake of the EU-VIP project results in the field of virtually supported work placements. The main aims of EU-VIP (Enterprise - University Virtual Placements) were to enhance the quality of international work placement and to increase the number of students undertaking an international work placement, through the use of (new) e-tools. The project resulted in concrete guidelines (printed and online) and training material regarding the integration of virtual mobility in international work placements (see the website: http://www.euvip.eu). These guidelines have been developed in close connection to the concrete needs of all stakeholders involved: higher education institutions, businesses and students. During the EU-VIP project the business stakeholder group turned out to be the most difficult to reach. Therefore PROVIP wants to further disseminate and exploit the EU-VIP results with a clear focus on companies.

On the other hand this project wants to realize structural cooperation and collaboration between European higher education institutions and businesses focusing on virtually supported international work placements. The creation of this network is facilitated through an online platform that implements EU-VIP findings. The main aim of this platform is to incorporate as much as possible the identified success conditions before, during and after a virtual work placement. The online platform will be developed in such a way that it can be offered as a standalone version for installment, use and adaptation to future networks.The set-up of the pilot network between businesses and study programmes is also an important point of attention for the PROVIP project. All findings, experience and advice regarding the formation of such a network will be collected and made publicly available.

2. Project Approach

The PROVIP approach is based on two pillars:

Further dissemination of the EU-VIP findings (mainly towards companies)

The dissemination activities are undertaken following a dissemination plan which was developed at the beginning of the project. Dissemination materials produced during the first year include: a project logo, a brochure, and a website. EU-VIP material has been reprinted and further translated. Outside of the partnership the project has been presented during different international conferences (e.g. EDULearn 2013, CareerCon 2013, Space Conference 2013) and a number of publications have already appeared (e.g. in EAIE Forum). The dissemination activities that have been carried out so far were mainly (but not solely) aimed at creating awareness and interest. During the second project year this focus will shift to creating desire and encouraging action. Dissemination will therefore be developed around the most important concrete outcome of PROVIP so far: the online platform, which has been baptized "Pathway".

The Pathway platform will also form the basis of the specific strategy for addressing businesses which is currently being developed and will be finalized in November 2013. Our dissemination keywords here will be a low treshold and a focus on good practices and concrete company benefits. Experience in the EU-VIP project has shown that this strategy is the most effective when it comes to targeting the business world. The dissemination towards companies will also be targeted at the expansion of the pilot network.

The pilot network and the online platform (exploitation)

Before starting to approach specific study programmes and/or companies a small research was being carried out to identify the different disciplines and sectors within the partnership suitable for the pilot network, based on the EU-VIP findings. Eventually a choice was made for the fields of marketing and IT, mainly taking into account the nature of the tasks to be executed during internships in this field. Interested study programmes and companies were asked to complete a survey to identify their current practices and specific issues and needs regarding (international) internships at a distance. The results from this survey were used as input for the platform development and will be an important resource for further dissemination and exploitation strategies. At this point a small scale collaboration between study programmes and companies is being put into action supported by the "Pathway" platform. We strongly believe in the oil spot approach where with the increase of registered users and their generated content the motivation for others to sign up will also rise. As potential users have a concrete outlook on a continually growing university/business network with a clear added value to their organizations and careers, the platform will steadily become 'the place to be' for anyone involved with, interested in or connected to virtually supported international work placements. This will of course continue to be combined with a well-targeted dissemination strategy. While setting up the project's pilot network, we will not only create opportunities for cooperation between higher education institutions and businesses with regards to virtually supported international work placements but also gain insights into how to build a similar network in the future. Our findings will later be translated into a report (i.e. the transferable model part I).

Before the start of the platform development, desktop research was carried out to make an inventory of existing platforms supporting (international) internships in the before, during and/or after phase and involving the different stakeholder groups. The goal was to find out which platforms are already out there and to make an analysis of their strenghts and weaknesses in view of our own goals. The conclusion of this report was that, although there are valuable platforms out there, what we were looking for in our project did not exist yet. Mainly the support of the different stakeholders during and after the internship seemed to be something totally new on the market. The decision was therefore made to start the development of a separate, new platform.

Currently this "Pathway" platform is being launched in the different countries involved in the project (Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Italy and Poland). Pilot users will be asked to give feedback on the platform and their user experiences. Based on their evaluation the platform will be updated in the end phase of the project. After the project's conclusion, we will continue to host the platform as well as offer a standalone downloadable version (i.e. the transferable model part II) for installment, use and adaptation to future networks.

3.   Project Outcomes & Results

The public project outcomes so far are:

Dissemination material

Project website and flyer

The PROVIP website (www.provip.eu) is the most important dissemination channel for the project. It is also the portal through which all other public project outcomes are being presented and distributed. The website provides access to the "Pathway" platform (see further) as well as to the help material accompanying the platform (manual and screencasts). The website also mentions all the latest PROVIP events.

The project flyer presents the project, its partners and its main aims to all interested stakeholders. All partners are responsible for distributing this flyer at relevant events, meetings and conferences and through their existing channels.

Reprint and translation of EU-VIP material

The PROVIP project builds on the outcomes of the EU-VIP project (www.euvip.eu). The conditions of succes for virtual internships which were formulated in this project, are the starting point for the PROVIP approach. Therefore the EU-VIP manual '*Make it work! Integrating virtual mobility in international work placements*' was reprinted as a part of the PROVIP project. This was also the case for the EU-VIP quick guide in English. Next to English this quick guide was already available in a digital form in Danish, Dutch, Finnish, German, Italian and Polish. In the framework of the PROVIP project also a French and a Spanish digital version were produced.

Research report

To prepare the formation of the pilot network and the development of the platform a research report was written with a double focus:

Part 1: Defining the pilot network

A survey was distributed among the project partners in order to define the disciplines to focus on for our pilot network. Based on the information provided by HEIs and business network partners, the decision was made to focus on involving study programmes and companies in the fields of **marketing** and **ICT**. The two main reasons for this choice are firstly the existing and possible links between partners and study programmes and secondly the possibility for fully virtual internships in these fields.

Part 2: Analysis of strenghts and weaknesses of existing platforms providing collaboration between different stakeholders regarding (virtual international) internships

Based on desktop research and a survey among project partners a number of platforms were identified as useful for further analysis. Strengths and weaknesses of

these platforms were formulated based on the criteria for a succesful virtual internship platform as could be taken from the EU-VIP project:

- Supporting international internships
- Addressing virtual(ly) support of internships
- Addressing internships which are part of a curriculum
- Involvement of the three stakeholders: HEIs, students and businesses
- Addressing and supporting the three phases of an internship: before, during and after
- Accessible and user-friendly

Based on the fact that none of the platforms above possessed all necessary requirements, the PROVIP project needed to look at the development of a separate platform.

The "Pathway" platform

One of the main aims of PROVIP was to translate the outcomes of EU-VIP into an online platform to support and facilitate international internships at-a-distance. This resulted in the development of the "Pathway" platform. This platform is accessible via the PROVIP website which also provides tutorials for the different stakeholder groups: study programmes, students and companies. The platform screencasts can also be used as a demo for interested users.

The platform has been developed based on an "umbrella" concept for the organization and execution of virtual internships. The goal is not to offer alternatives for already existing and very well functioning communication tools (e.g. Skype) but to add something new: a framework for the organization and execution of virtual internships.

The Pathway platform:
- helps students and companies to find international interns and internships;
- provides an automated support function for the creation of an extensive internship "charter",
- enables internship mentors to follow up interns from a distance;
- supports online communication and collaboration;
- provides guidelines and advice on how to succesfully organizes virtual internships.

"Pathway" is currently in its launch phase and will be tested by a pilot network of study programmes and companies in the field of IT and marketing. To make sure we do not end up with a discrepancy between the number of offered internships and candidates for internships, we have chosen for a semi-controlled access to the platform. Companies and organizations looking for international interns in the field of IT and/or marketing can register directly and freely on the platform and start creating and offering internship positions right away. Interested study programmes (if not part of one of the HEIs in the project) can send a message to the platform administrator applying for access. If their application is approved, they will be able to register on the platform. Students can only register if they participate in one of the registered study programmes. During the registration process students will be asked to indicate

which programme they belong to. Staff associated with the indicated programme will need to approve the student's registration.

Start up pilot network and pilot project

During the project the "Pathway" platform will be tested by a pilot network of study programmes and companies in the fields of IT and marketing. Initially our idea was to have a fully defined pilot network by the start of the second project year. This assumption turned out not to be very realistic. In order to get people engaged, it is preferable to have already something concrete to show them. This was not the case in the first project year when the platform was still under construction. Now we have a concrete and fully functioning tool to offer instead of a conceptual promise of a valuable network and this is already proving to be a much more realistic and sustainable strategy for creating a pilot network. Besides this, we also found that the formation of a network seems to be an "organic" process that needs to be attributed the necessary time.

In spite of these findings though, we already have a number of study programmes and companies who are currently starting to put the network into practice by registering on the Pathway platform. We are currently starting up the pilot project (use of the platform by a pilot network) with the following interested stakeholders:

Study programmes:

KHLeuven (BE):
- Bachelor in Business Management – Marketing
- Bachelor in Applied Informatics

KU Leuven (BE):
- Master in Commercial Engineering, Policy Informatics

University of Pavia (IT):
- Laurea Magistralis in Computer Engineering
- Laurea Magistralis in International Business and Economics
- Master in Civil Engineering and environment

Laurea University (FI)
- Programme in Business Information Technology
- Programme in Business Management

EAL (DK)
- Programme in Marketing Management
- Bachelor of science in Multimedia Design, E-concept and Web development

University of Padua
- Programme in Communication Sciences

WPBS
- Programmes of the Faculty of Economics and Computer Science

Companies:

From Belgium:
- Colruyt
- Barry Callebaut
- Mc Cann Lowe
- IBM

- Boondoggle
- Materialise
- Ivox
- BBDO

From Denmark:

- redWEB ApS
- Team Online
- KMD TV2 / Digital

From Lithuania:

- Saretas

From Italy:

- La Meccaniva SRLDi Reffo
- Infonet Solution SRL
- MB Scambi Culturali SRL
- Gambato Silvano & C SNC
- Action SRL
- Bonetto Daniele SRL

After starting up the pilot project with these initial participants, the pilot network will be stimulated to grow further and expand, by using a well-targeted dissemination strategy focusing on the concrete platform and the real-life experiences of its users.

BEST Student symposium

From 14 to 20 July 2013 the BEST students organized the first of three PROVIP events aimed at the student stakeholder group. Students were introduced to the concept of virtual internships and got a sneak preview of the Pathway platform. They were asked to identify weaknesses and strengths in highly interactive workshops. An elaborate report of the symposium is available.

Launch meetings

In Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy and Poland local launch meetings are currently being organised. The main goal of these networking events is to bring possible pilot partners together and to create or confirm enthusiasm in the platform and the pilot project. Already confirmed events are:

10 October, 2013: Launch meeting for companies in Denmark, organized by EAL
24 October, 2013: Launch meeting in Belgium, organized by KHLeuven
30 October, 2013: Launch meeting in Italy, organized by the University of Pavia
12 November, 2013: Launch meeting in Finland, organized by Laurea
29 November, 2013: Launch meeting in Poland, organized by WPBS

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4. Partnerships

The PROVIP project brings together 14 partners from 6 different European countries. The added value of the European character of the partnership is directly related to the theme of the project, namely international virtual work placements. It goes without saying that issues of globalization, interculturality and multilinguality that are important in this project can be better addressed in an international partnership.

The PROVIP partnership builds on the succesful partnership of the previous EU-VIP project (www.euvip.eu). Because of the explicit focus of PROVIP on the business stakeholder group, a reorientation of the EU-VIP partnership was required though. Next to representatives of higher education institutions and student stakeholder groups, a number of business networks were included. The PROVIP partnership consists of:

KU Leuven (BE)
KH Leuven (BE)
Laurea University (FI)
University of Padua (IT)
Western Pomeranian Business School (PL)
Erhvervsakademiet Lillebælt (DK)
EFMD (BE)
Northern Chamber of Commerce (PL)
University of Pavia (IT)
University of Edinburgh (UK)
BEST (FR)
Confindustria Padova (IT)
IT-Forum Fyn (DK)
AIESEC (BE)

Most partners have already worked with each other before, ensuring continuity of previous initiatives, mutual trust and easing communication and collaboration. Among these partners there is a lot of experience in conducting European projects.

Six network partners have been purposely involved in the partnership to ensure a wide dissemination among and a direct contact with all the stakeholder groups. The institutions involved in the project are in their turn also part of larger networks (e.g. the Coimbra group and the SPACE network) which can be used for distributing project results.

5. Plans for the Future

Currently the PROVIP partnership is focusing on the launch of the "Pathway" platform and, in close connection to this, the start of the pilot network. The continuous elaboration and reinforcement of this network between study programmes and companies will remain an important attention point for the rest of the project's lifetime.

Further dissemination activities will also (but not solely) have the expansion of the pilot network as a goal. The dissemination activities that have been carried out so far were mainly aimed at creating awareness and interest. During the second project year this focus will shift to creating desire and encouraging action. The Pathway platform will also form the basis of the specific strategy for adressing businesses which is currently being developed and will be finalized in November 2013. The partnership is hereby thinking of creating a flyer (or other dissemination material) specificly for this target group.

To continue our dialogue with the student stakeholder group two more student events will be organized: one by the BEST students and the second one by the AIESEC students. After January 2014 we are also planning to organize two online seminars, aiming to reach stakeholder representatives all over Europe. During these seminars the first experiences of real platform users will be the starting point to stimulate discussion and receive feedback from a wide international audience.

The "Pathway" platform will be evaluated by the first user group via an online survey. Based on this user feedback the platform will be updated before the end of the project.

For the set-up of a network between study programmes and companies as well as for the platform a "transferable model" will be created and offered freely:

- The first model will be a description of how to set up a network, inspired by our own experiences about the process and general conclusions.

- The second model will consist of the platform's source code for distribution to other networks. The platform can be downloaded, installed and adapted to fit in the specific user context.

All these activities will of course be monitored by the project management that will continue to ensure that deadlines are met and deliverables produced in accordance with the contract, the timetable, the quality requirements and the budget limitations. Evaluation of project progress and outcomes will continue to take place at a regular basis. The highly participatory project approach and frequent communication with the entire project team via e-mail and flash meetings have proven their worth and will thus stay in effect. Next to this, two more face-to-face partner meetings will be organized. The first one is scheduled for 9 and 10 December 2013 in Helsinki (Finland).
The project will conclude with a Final Event in September 2014, during which all project results will be presented to representatives of all stakeholders.

6. Contribution to EU policies

To help promote creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit

Virtual placements can serve as 'hotbeds' for testing new collaboration methods as part of a larger evolution towards a globally integrated enterprise. Globalisation forces businesses and students to be creative, innovative and competitive. For students, placements can be an excellent introduction in the market, thus increasing their employability. For businesses, placements can serve as recruitment instruments in the 'war for talent', thus enhancing their competitive position in the market.

To support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning

Virtual work placements are for students a perfect way to get familiar with the use of new technologies on the work floor. Supporting students and employers to engage in new ways of working boosts creativity and competitiveness in the work place. Virtual placements will also broaden the e-competences of teachers, tutors and the supervisors of the internships in companies. Within PROVIP a platform will be developed, as online meeting place for all stakeholders involved in virtual placements.

To reinforce the contribution of higher education and advanced vocational education to the process of innovation

Work placements are the perfect opportunity for interaction between the academic and the business community, generating a reciprocal inflow of knowledge, thus enhancing innovation. Organizing international work placements also stimulates knowledge exchange between higher education institutions and the international professional field. The focus on work placements therefore allows for PROVIP to reinforce the contribution of higher education to the process of innovation.

To improve the quality and to increase the volume of co-operation between higher education institutions and enterprises

(Virtual) work placements are an important way to develop better interaction between higher education and the industry. The main focus of PROVIP lies on increasing the number of students that will undertake a (virtual) work placement and enhancing the quality/support of such work placements. The proposed solutions and strategies promote and support exchanges, collaboration and the forming of sustainable networks between higher education institutions and enterprises and/or organizations.

To support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning

PROVIP provides the necessary technical, pedagogical and organizational models, services and platform for blended and virtual work placements. Collaboration between HEIs, enterprises and students is supported using the advantages of both established and the most innovative ICT tools and technologies.

Virtual placements allow students to gain technology and virtual communication skills and will furthermore broaden e-competences of teachers, tutors (HEIs) and supervisors (in the companies).

Co-operation between Universities and Enterprises

Comparable to the structural cooperation that often already exists for local work placements, it will be highly useful to build up more solid bridges and realize concrete collaboration between HEIs and companies all over Europe focusing on (virtually supported) international work placements. Within PROVIP it is aimed to facilitate cooperation via an online platform tested by a pilot business – university network (conceptualized to be easily expandable and transferable to other sectors).

Promoting an awareness of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe, as well as of the need to combat racism, prejudice and xenophobia

International experiences awake cultural awareness and understanding and thus contribute to the fight against racism and xenophobia. During an international work placement students get access to an international community and hence to the wide linguistic and cultural diversity within Europe. Cross-cultural viewpoints are presented and intercultural communication is stimulated which helps to develop the habit of intercultural dialogue for learning and non-learning purposes, so raising tolerance.

Making provision for learners with special needs, and in particular by helping to promote their integration into mainstream education and training

Virtual work placements give every teacher, student or company representative the chance to participate in international programmes regardless of any physical disabilities. Due to their special needs (e.g. particular physical limitations, specific medical requirements,…) some students are simply not able to do a physical international work placement. Fully virtual work placements permit them to also have a first international working experience, without having to travel abroad physically.