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Virtual mobility to promote placements abroad

One of the main aims of the Career Service of the University of Padova is to foster mobility abroad and internationalization.

Being aware that Virtual Mobility can give students and graduates the chance to increase their possibilities of having international experiences and developing their intercultural awareness, our University is involved in several projects related to virtual placements and courses.

One of these is the PROVIP project - Promoting Virtual Mobility in Placements - coordinated by KU Leuven, whose aim is the implementation of a platform for the management of the three phases of an internship: before (application management, tasks definition, administrative issues), during (communication between stakeholders, feedback, tasks completion) and after phase (evaluation and assessment).

The project includes as partners also businesses and companies networks interested in hosting foreign students for virtual internships (both fully virtual and/or blended).

The PROVIP project is the follow up project of EUVIP, Enterprise-Universities Virtual Placements, funded by the European Commission within the Lifelong Learning Programme. It ran from October 2009 until September 2011 and brought together 16 partners from 8 different countries (including the University of Padova and coordinated by Leuven).

The main aim of the project was to organize 18 pilot projects 9 of which fully virtual and 9 blended. A local training was provided for pilot participants and after the pilot the university mentor, the mentor in the company and the student gave feedback and evaluation on the internship.

The pilots evaluation was used to develop a guide that contains an analysis of the needs, the benefits for the stakeholders but also the possible pitfalls and suggestions. The guide can be downloaded at <http://www.euvip.eu/How/How/manual.html>

PROVIP project partnership, taking into account the findings of EUVIP, implemented a new platform "Pathway" where all the stakeholders involved (HEIs, students, companies) are able to interact and participate in all the phases of the internship. The platform is accessible through the link <http://pathway.sekoialearn.com/>

The platform provides:

- Help to students and companies in finding/offering virtual internships,
- A support function for the creation of an extensive internship charter
- The follow up of the internship from a distance
- Online communication and collaboration possibilities
- Guidelines and advices on the management of virtual internships.

The first group of users will evaluate the platform and their feedback will be used to adjust it before the end of the project.

The creation of a pilot network is the other main aim of the project. The network will have the responsibility to realize structural cooperation between HEIs and companies in the issues related to virtual internships.

The idea is to extend the network and to share the platform also after the project end and to help and advice other networks to be created and grow developing and enhancing the work done so far on virtual internships.

More information on the PROVIP project can be found at <http://provip.eu/>

The other project currently running in which the Career Service is partner is VMCOLAB, “European Co-Laboratory for the Integration of Virtual Mobility in Higher Education Innovation and Modernisation Strategies” with the aim of developing a Quality Assurance approach for VM, developing institutional awareness of VM potential, developing students’ awareness on opportunities to use ICT for intercultural study (in which the career service was particularly involved), developing and testing mutual support service for HEIs willing to pilot VM programmes and integrating VM in institutional academic contexts.

The main outputs realized so far in the project are:

- The Integration Kit for VM, a collection of good practice and projects related with different topics (up to 7) of VM that can support awareness at an institutional level
- The quality assurance book for VM, to facilitate HEIs in VM planning and implementation The handbook is based on several project experiences and scenarios identified by VMCOLAB consortium. The projects are referred to in the text of the handbook, as well as VM models. It sets out a set of a set of quality criteria for the administration of a VM experience
- The students guide to VM, addressed to students interested in learning more about Virtual Mobility (VM). The guide informs about what Virtual Mobility is, how students can benefit from it, how it can be integrated the study programmes or courses and how to find Virtual Mobility opportunities
- The “Virtual for me” website <http://virtual4me.vocolab.eu/>, addressed to students and collecting (video)interviews of VM alumni providing and describing their experience. The website also hosts a FAQ section and a discussion board for the participants in pilot projects.

The pilot courses that are being realized during the project period are a course on Open Educational Resources, managed by Vytautas Magnus University, published at <http://openeducationeuropa.eu/en/course/course-open-educational-resources>, a course on Water Management Engineering (to be developed), managed by KU Leuven and a course on the management of the crisis in Europe (beginning in April 2014), managed by University of Padova.

The pilot course managed by University of Padova is a career staff training course on the following issues: linguistic skills, intercultural awareness, understanding of the ‘crisis’ in Europe. It will involve several European Universities and will focus on how career services can face the challenges of a global market especially in this period when the debt crisis and the political and economic situation are making the access of young graduates to the labour market very hard. The exchange of information and of best practices at an international level is very important to develop common strategies and to

cooperate for the internationalization of internship and work placement opportunities.

The findings of these pilot courses will be used to develop a set of mutual support services for HEIs willing to integrate VM in institutional academic context.

All the project deliverables are downloadable from the project website <http://vmcolab.eu/>

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