PRO VIP

Promoting Virtual Mobility in Placements

Lifelong Learning Programme

Final Report   Public Part

Project information

Project acronym:	PROVIP
Project title:	Promoting Virtual Mobility in Placements
Project number:	527951-LLP-1-2012-1-BE-ERASMUS-ECUE
Sub-programme or KA:	Erasmus Multilateral Projects – Co-operation between HEI and Enterprises
Project website:	http://www.provip.eu

Reporting period:	From	01/10/2012
	To	31/09/2014
Report version:		1
Date of preparation:		10/2014

Beneficiary organisation:	Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

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

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

This communication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Executive Summary

The PROVIP project had two main objectives:

1. To further disseminate and exploit the findings of the EU-VIP project (www.euvip.eu), mainly – but not solely - aimed at the business stakeholder group. This project formulated guidelines and advice on how to integrate virtual mobility in international placements.

2. To translate the findings of EU-VIP into an online tool to support virtual internships. This tool was tested by a university-bussines network in a pilot project. One of the goals of the project was also to create "transferable models" for the set-up of a network as well as for the online tool.

During the first project year the focus of the dissemination activities was mainly on raising awareness and interest. During the second project year this focus shifted to stimulating desire and action. A specific dissemination strategy was developed to target the company stakeholder group. This strategy revolved around the promotion of the online tool Pathway (www.pathway-internships.eu). PROVIP developed and tested this tool to support virtual internships. The tool was launched at the beginning of academic year 2013 – 2014. Pathway:

- 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;
- provides guidelines and advice on how to succesfully organizes virtual internships.

To promote Pathway and the supported concept of virtual internships dedicated dissemination material was developed: a demo movie, a flyer targeting companies and recorded testimonies of users. A pilot project was set up with a pilot network between higher education institutions and companies to test Pathway. The feedback from the pilot participants was used to improve the tool. The improved Pathway software is available as open source code under the GNU General Public Licence. This means concretely that the source code can be freely used, changed and shared by anyone.
The creation of the pilot university-business network was intertwined with the dissemination activities promoting the Pathway tool and the concept of virtual mobility. At the beginning of the project a small research was carried out to identify the different disciplines and sectors within the partnership suitable for the pilot network. The decision was made to focus on IT and marketing. All experiences and insights collected by the partnership about the setup of this pilot network are being shared as guidelines and advice via the project's website (www.provip.eu/results).

The Pathway tool and the pilot network were launched via special events in the different countries involved in the project (Belgium, Finland, Denmark, Italy and Poland) in fall 2013. Two BEST events and one AIESEC event were organized to involve the student stakeholder group and additionnally reach the company partners of these student networks. The project concluded with the organization of two webinars presenting the project outcomes. One webinar targeted higher education institutions, the second webinar focused on the business stakeholder group.

Table of Contents

1. Project Objectives

The PROVIP project had 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 wanted to further disseminate and exploit the EU-VIP results with a clear focus on companies.

On the other hand this project wanted to translate the findings of EU-VIP into an online tool to support virtual internships. This tool was tested by a university-bussines network in a pilot project. One of the goals of the project was also to create "transferable models" for the set-up of a network as well as for the online tool. The online platform was therefore developed in such a way that it could be offered as an open source, standalone version which can be installed, used and adapted by other networks or organizations.The set-up of the pilot network between businesses and study programmes was also an important point of attention for the PROVIP project. All findings, experience and advice regarding the formation of such a network have been collected and made publicly available.

2. Project Approach

The PROVIP approach was based on two pillars:

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

The dissemination activities were undertaken following a dissemination plan which was developed at the beginning of the project. Dissemination materials produced include: a project logo, a brochure, a website, a demo movie, recorded witness statements and recorded webinars. 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, INTED 2014, EDEN 2014, PRAXIS Open Discussion Forum 2014 etc.). A number of publications have appeared (e.g. in EAIE Forum and EAIE blog) and there will be more publications after the project (e.g. in EFMD's magazine Global Focus).

During the first project year the focus of the dissemination activities was mainly on raising awareness and interest. During the second project year this focus shifted to stimulating desire and action. A specific dissemination strategy was developed to target the company stakeholder group. This strategy revolved around the promotion of the online tool Pathway (www.pathway-internships.eu). The dissemination keywords here were a low treshold and a focus on good practices and concrete company benefits. In this respect a (digital) flyer, particularly targeting companies was developed. During the second project year the number of dissemination activities targeting companies (92) doubled compared to the first project year (40).

The pilot network, the pilot project and the online platform (exploitation)

Before starting to approach specific study programmes and/or companies a small research was carried out to identify the different disciplines and sectors within the partnership suitable for participation in the pilot network, based on the EU-VIP findings. Eventually the choice was made to focus on the fields of marketing and IT, mainly taking into account the nature of the tasks to be executed during internships in this field.

The setup of a university-business network was very much intertwined with the project's dissemination activities. In the course of the project the partners found out that in order to gain not only interest from potential network members, but also move them to action, the theoretical concept of virtual internships did not suffice as a binding factor. Especially for the company stakeholders the offer of a working online tool and concrete success stories are requiered convincing arguments. Network setup therefore could only start fully after launch of the online tool in late summer 2013. In this respect launch meetings for interested network partners were organized in Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Italy and Poland. The partnership has gained a lot of insights into the do's and don't's while aiming to set up a university-business network. These insights have been shared in a report that was published on the project's website.

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 aiming to develop 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. 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. The tool was launched late summer 2013 and baptized "Pathway". It was tested by members of the pilot network in the course of academic year 2013-2014. Based on the feedback of the pilot users the platform was updated and improved in April 2014. This feedback also allowed the partnership to fine-tune the success conditions for a virtual internship even further.

The project coordinator will continue to host the platform after the end of the project. The source code of the Pathway tool has been made available as open source. This means that the software can be freely used, changed, and shared (in modified or unmodified form) by anyone.

3.   Project Outcomes & Results

Dissemination material

Project website and flyers

The PROVIP website (www.provip.eu) was and 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 project flyer presented the project, its partners and its main aims to all interested stakeholders. All partners were responsible for distributing this flyer at relevant events, meetings and conferences and through their existing channels.

During the second project year a (digital) flyer, specifically targeting companies was produced. This flyer promoted the concept of virtual internships from a company perspective, as well as the Pathway tool.

Audiovisual dissemination material

Extra audiovisual dissemination material was created to disseminate and promote the Pathway tool and the concept of virtual internships to the different stakeholder groups: a demo of the tool, interviews with platform users and recorded webinars presenting the project's outcomes. All this material is available via the project's website.

Reprint and translation of EU-VIP material

The PROVIP project built on the outcomes of the EU-VIP project (www.euvip.eu). 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

The Pathway platform is accessible via the PROVIP website which also provides tutorials for the different stakeholder groups: study programmes, students and companies. A demo movie has been produced to promote and explain the Pathway tool:

https://videolab.avnet.kuleuven.be/video/?id=0dbc3de792195c72674667645daee303&height=388&width=640&autostart=false

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.

Overview of platform development:

- April – May 2013:   Defining requierements
- June 2013:   Design
- July – September 2013:   Development
- October 2013 – March 2014:   Verification: testing through pilot project
- April – May 2014:   Improvements and debugging

Open source code

The source code of the Pathway tool has been made available as open source. This means that the software can be freely used, changed, and shared (in modified or unmodified form) by anyone. The code can be downloaded via https://github.com/kuldoel/provip and is available under the GNU General Public Licence. Pathway is a PHP application built on the Symfony framework.

Pilot network and pilot project

A pilot network was setup in the targeted disciplines and sectors (the fields of marketing and IT). This network brought together study programmes, students and companies around the concept of virtual internships. All the participants have registered on the Pathway platform.

Study programmes:
Bachelor in Business Management, KH Leuven (Belgium) – Bachelor-post-bachelor in Advanced Business Management, KH Leuven (Belgium) – Laurea Magistralis in Computer Engineering, University of Pavia (Italy) – Laurea Magistralis in International Business and Economics, University of Pavia (Italy) – Bachelor in Communication, University of Padua (Italy) – Bachelor in Marketing Management , Lillebaelt Academy (Denmark) – Bachelor's and Master's degree in International Business, West Pomeranian Business School (Poland) – Bachelor's and Master's degree in Information Systems Engineering, West Pomeranian Business School (Poland) – Degree in Business Information Technology, Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Finland) – Degree in Business Management, Laurea University of Applied Sciences (Finland)

Companies:
Siverra BVBA (Belgium) – Sekoia (Belgium) – Byte-Store Informatics (Italy) – EG A/S (Denmark) – BBDO Belgium – Action srl (Italy) – Neol srl (Italy) – Gambato Silvano & C. Snc. (Italy) – LaMeccinaca srl di Reffo (Italy) – StudioCentroVeneto sas (Italy) – Infonet Solutions srl (Italy) – Yupmedia di Dal Lago Paolo (Italy) – coachByapp (Finland) – InGenium HR (Poland) – Zervant (Finland) – Innofactor Plc (Finland) – WFL Publisher Ltd. (Finland) – Fiskars Oy (Finland) – Barry Callebaut Belgium NV – Protan Oy (Finland) – NSD Oy (Finland) – Confindustria Padova (Italy) – Mooof nv (Belgium) – IPAM Aveiro (Italy) – EBAN (Belgium) – Finnovaregio (Belgium) – Marsh (Belgium) – Prestige Brand (Poland) – LSJ HR Group (Poland) – Kelpo Analytics (Finland))- SKOV Data (Finland) – KIC (Poland) – Kiddex Oy (Finland), Sun Innovations Oy (Finland)

This network was the executor of the pilot project. The aim of this pilot project was to test the Pathway platform.

Quantitative overview of the pilot:
Registered companies: 48
Registered programmes; 22
Registered students: 34
Opportunities created: 27
Internship projects completed: 5

Even though, because of the iterative nature of the project, it was difficult to set concrete goals for the use of the platform during the pilot, the number of completed projects stayed lower than expected. The reasons that can be identified:

- Matchmaking was difficult in this pilot phase. The partnership found out that a large critical mass of students and opportunities is requiered in order to have automated matches. What was learned from other university – business networks revolving around internships during the project, is also that usually a lot of "legwork" is requiered next to an online tool to match students and internship opportunities. This might be even more so in the case of virtual internships where also the concept itself is still relatively new and can be a treshold.
- The project aimed to design and test an online tool, and at the same time form a network between higher educations institutions and companies with the tool as connecting factor. With hindsight, a more slowly paced step-by-step approach and a longer project period would have been better. Ideally we should have been able to conclude the cycle of platform development (including improvement and debugging) before fully focusing on network development and large uptake of the tool. This is an important piece of advice the partnership can give to other similar projects.

Even though the number of pilot users stayed relatively low, the users provided us with valuable feedback regarding the platform. To thoroughly test the usability and the workflow also only a small number of test users is required. The feedback regarding the technical issues was used to improve and update the Pathway tool. All in all the users concluded that the Pathway platform fullfils its function as a tool to support virtual international internships. It offers flexibility to use as many or as few functionalities as needed. Through the pilot project, the partnership also managed to further finetune the more general requierements for a successful virtual internship (see under point 5 of this report).

Insights regarding the setup of a university – business network

In this document the partnership presented the insights gained during the PROVIP project regarding setting up a network between higher education institutions (HEIs) and businesses. The guidelines and advice in this document are a representation of the experiences of the PROVIP partners, of input from all PROVIP partners based on a questionnaire and of interviews with PROVIP partners experienced in the formation and support of university – business networks. This document is available via the PROVIP website.

Launch meetings
In Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Italy and Poland local launch meetings were organised. The main goal of these networking events was to bring possible pilot partners together and to create or confirm enthusiasm in the platform and the pilot project. The following events took place:

- 9 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

Student events

- BEST event: "Bringing education and entrepreneurship under students's scope", 14 to 20 July 2013, Timisoara (RO): http://issuu.com/bestorg/docs/baco_timisoara_-__final_report/0
- BEST event: "Let's introduce the network of knowledge", 28 June to 5 July 2014, Gdansk (PL): http://issuu.com/bestorg/docs/baco_gdansk_-_final_report/0
- AIESEC Gala Night: "The future of internships", 25 May 2014, Brussels (BE)

Webinars

To conclude the project, the partnership organized two webinars as final events to disseminate the project outcomes:

PROVIP Webinar: "The Future of International Internships"
Tuesday the 16th of September, 14:00 to 15:00 CET

This webinar was aimed mainly – but not solely – at company representatives. Participants were stimulated to think about about the added value of international and virtual internships, mainly based on input via witness statements. During the webinar there were 30 attendees. The webinar was afterwards also made avialable via the PROVIP website. This webinar is available via:

https://videolab.avnet.kuleuven.be/video/?id=4a82a07ada11e6f79107c6786e558c1c&height=388&width=640&autostart=false

PROVIP Webinar: "International Internships from a distance: what, why and how"
Thursday the 18th of September, 14:00 to 15:00 CET

This webinar was aimed mainly – but not solely – at higher education staff. Participants were stimulated to think about new ways of internationalizing their internship programmes, mainly based on input via witness statements. During the webinar there were 34 attendees. The webinar was afterwards also made available via the PROVIP website. This webinar is available via:

https://videolab.avnet.kuleuven.be/video/?id=4a82a07ada11e6f79107c6786e558c1c&height=388&width=640&autostart=false

4. Partnerships

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

The PROVIP partnership built 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. Next to representatives of higher education institutions and student stakeholder groups, a number of business networks were included. The PROVIP partnership consisted 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 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 were 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 were in their turn also part of larger networks which were used for distributing project results (e.g. SPACE, Coimbra, EAIE)

5.   Plans for the Future

The pilots carried out via the Pathway tool and the continued interest expressed by the stakeholders in the course of the project, show the validity of the concept of virtual internships. It is clearly seen as an additional option for students to gain international experience although it does not replace traditional, onsite internships. The partnership has noticed a more general shift in the attitude regarding virtual internships. Where virtual internships at the start of the EU-VIP project were still perceived as something « exotic » by the majority of target users, there is nowadays a lot more openess and willingness to implement this new concept in the own practice. The partnership therefore sees a blooming future for virtual internships and the project's outcomes.

The specific conditions for successful virtual internships have cristallized even more in the course of the PROVIP project:
*   The student profile described autonomous, mature students who have in general already completed at least one prior internship. Such students would be most likely enrolled in postgraduate studies and have already developed some knowledge and expertise in the area of internship.
*   The internships themselves clearly needed need to take the form of a project with milestones, rather than routine administrative tasks. This format maximizes the flexibility inherent in the virtual format.
*   Virtual international internships are well received by companies which do not have rigid internship recruitment procedures in place, which are open to recruiting (regular) interns, for which space is at a premium and in which employees are competent with teleworking tools. The virtual internships further offer companies the advantage of a lower requirement for constant task supervision.

The Pathway platform proved to fullfil its function as a tool to support virtual international internships. The online tool will continue to be hosted on the KU Leuven servers. The members of the pilot network will continue to have access to it it after the end the project. At the start of the project, research was done into the existing online tools to support international internships. This research showed that, at that point, there were no platfoms active that provided online support during the three phases of an internship (before, during and after). At the end of the project, the PROVIP partnership still has no knowledge of another platform providing the same extensive internship support. This will continue to be a unique "selling point" for the online platform ans it's open source code.

In all partner institutions and organizations the concept of virtual internships was further adopted because of the project. For the higher education institutions this means that they have accepted virtual internships as part of their regular internship programmes. New internships have also been launched via the platform in the last month. The network partners will continue to promote the concept and the tool as a valid option to their members (e.g. upcoming article in EFMD's Global Focus). The BEST students are currently looking at the source code to see if some of the

Pathway functionalities could be integrated in their own platform. Furthermore, interest in the source code has been expressed by EKONOMIKA, ESN and TU Delft. The project coordinator will follow up on these contacts.

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.