



# 068

## Virtual Internships

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In a globally connected world, mobility of students is of great value of today's society. Access to information and education plays a key role in students' development opportunities all across the world. The global access to the internet stimulates more and more virtual mobility, creating even more opportunities for students today. BEST (Board of European Students of Technology) in cooperation with EuroPACE, through the Thematic Network of EU-VIP (Enterprise University Virtual Placement) strived to improve and empower virtual mobility especially. The purpose of this cooperation was to make the students' perspectives wider, improve existing virtual programs and develop a set of guidelines for the future.

BEST organised two symposiums on education (2010 in Ljubljana and 2011 in Riga) in order to assess students' expectations on virtual internships and to evaluate pilot projects from student perspective. Pilot projects were carried out by other partners of EU-VIP in order to create a connection between students, companies and higher education institutions (HEIs). The purpose was to identify the benefits that could be developed through the virtual internship and possible pitfalls that may be faced. Within these pilot projects differences were defined in the virtual level of the internship: from blended to fully virtual. During each symposium, 22 international-minded participants discussed virtual mobility and its future. The role of BEST is to endeavor the sharing of students and get their perception on such online programs; these being also the conclusions of the symposium. The main aim was to define from the stu-

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dents' perspective the needs within a virtual internship and to analyse whether students can reach same benefits as in a regular working place, when being physically at the office. In order to stimulate participants' ideas and have as many useful outcomes as possible, several methods were used for the pilot projects' evaluation; from the regular discussion groups to the SWOT analysis or the more innovative exhibition walk. As a result of the 2 symposiums, the most suitable structure of virtual internship is a setting which contains students from different countries working together in small groups. Tasks should be clearly defined and multiple online communication tools should be used to communicate during the working process. For example: A company can organise a virtual office for the interns, thereby they are socially connected, working in their virtual department, using a forum as a communication tool. Preferably, the people involved in such an internship should be students from different countries, supported by an academic mentor from their home university and by a contact person from the company or organisation offering the virtual internship. To understand national differences between countries, there are "Hofstede dimensions" taken into the consideration. Related to trends in today's business world, there is a need for international involved people able to do more complex work than ever before. Participants of both symposiums realised that, in the future there will be more opportunities and possibilities for online work, which have an added value. It provides experiences similar to real work, which is required by companies and at the same time it is beneficial for students as a working experience. ■

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