



TOWARDS EXCELLENCE: Quality support system for study practices



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Summary of the Project

The project will ensure inclusiveness of study practice services by building capacities of career counsellors and developing new services. We aim to improve the quality of study practices by building the competences and skills of coordinators and mentors. By implementing MILEAGE study practices, we will stimulate innovative pedagogies in HEIs and form a supportive environment for student practices. Lastly, we will advocate for civic engagement through the recognition of community work in students' academic results.

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List of abbreviations

Acronym	Description
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
HEI	Higher Education Institution
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisations
NWG	National Working Group



Introduction

Across Europe, Higher Education Institutions are increasingly expected to provide students with learning experiences that combine academic knowledge with practical engagement in real-life contexts. The **MILEAGE project – Mentorship development for quality practices in higher education** – was designed to respond to this challenge by enhancing the quality, inclusiveness, and impact of study practices (commonly referred to as internships or traineeships) through improved collaboration between universities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and university career services.

MILEAGE brings together partners from Slovenia, Italy, and Finland in a collective effort to reimagine how study placements are designed, managed, and supported. Through a combination of comparative research, co-creation, and capacity-building, the project has developed the **MILEAGE Study Practice Model**, a comprehensive framework that integrates pedagogical, organisational, and mentoring perspectives to ensure meaningful and equitable learning experiences for all students.

This publication *TOWARDS EXCELLENCE: Quality support system for study practices* presents the outcomes of this collaborative process. It synthesises the partners' work in analysing national systems, defining the six-stage MILEAGE Study Practice Model, developing three professional toolkits for key actors (career counsellors, HEI coordinators, and NGO mentors), and producing a Quality Checklist to guide Higher Education Institutions in implementing the model effectively.

Before piloting the model, the project partners organised a series of targeted training sessions and capacity-building activities involving:

- 36 career counsellors, who acquired new knowledge on how to guide and support students during study practices;
- 45 HEI study placement coordinators, who enhanced their competence in designing and monitoring study practices; and
- 45 NGO mentors, who strengthened their mentoring and supervisory skills within the learning placement environment.

Following these preparatory activities, the MILEAGE model was piloted in three partner universities – the University of Ljubljana (Slovenia), the University of Palermo (Italy), and the University of Oulu (Finland) – with the participation of 60 students (including 45 with fewer opportunities), 45 HEI coordinators, 18 career counsellors, and 45 NGO representatives from 36 NGOs offering study placements.

Through these actions, MILEAGE has contributed to a raised understanding of the relevance of mentoring in Higher Education and to the creation of new, inclusive opportunities for experiential learning. The project has strengthened partnerships between universities and NGOs, promoted civic engagement through study practices, and introduced innovative models that make study practices more reflective, supportive, and socially meaningful.

Ultimately, this publication serves as both a documentation of the process and a guide for replication. It illustrates how a European partnership can jointly design and test an innovative learning model that transforms study placements into structured, mentored, and impactful educational experiences.

Introduction in Finnish¹

Ympäri Euroopan korkeakoulujen odotetaan yhä useammin tarjoavan opiskelijoille oppimiskokemuksia, joissa akateeminen osaaminen yhdistyy käytännön tekemiseen aidoissa toimintaympäristöissä. **MILEAGE-hanke** (*Mentorship development for quality practices in higher education*) on suunniteltu vastaamaan tähän haasteeseen. Hankkeen tavoitteena on ollut kehittää työharjoitteluiden ja muiden työelämäjaksojen laatua, saavutettavuutta ja vaikuttavuutta tiivistämällä yhteistyötä yliopistojen, kansalaisjärjestöjen sekä korkeakoulujen ura- ja ohjauspalveluiden välillä.

MILEAGE-hanke toi yhteen kumppaneita Sloveniasta, Italiasta ja Suomesta yhteisen tavoitteen äärelle: kehittämään työharjoittelujen suunnittelua, hallintaa ja tukea. Vertailututkimuksen, yhteiskehittämisen ja osaamisen vahvistamisen avulla hankkeessa kehitettiin **MILEAGE-malli** ja -viitekehys, joka yhdistää pedagogisen, organisatorisen ja mentorointiin liittyvät näkökulmat. Mallin avulla varmistetaan, että kaikki opiskelijat saavat merkityksellisiä ja yhdenvertaisia oppimiskokemuksia.

Tämä julkaisu, *TOWARDS EXCELLENCE: Quality support system for study practices*, esittelee hankkeen keskeiset tulokset. Se kokoaa yhteen kumppaneidentyön kansallisten järjestelmien analysoinnissa jakuusivaiheisen MILEAGE-mallin määrittelyssä. Lisäksi se esittelee kolme keskeisille toimijoille (uraohjaajille, korkeakoulujen harjoittelukoordinaattoreille ja kansalaisjärjestöjen mentoreille ja harjoitteluohjaajille) suunnattua ammatillista työkalupakkia sekä MILEAGE-mallin laadukasta käyttöönottoa tukevan tarkistuslistan.

Ennen mallin pilotointia hankekumppanit järjestivät kohdennettuja koulutuksia ja mahdollisuuksia oman osaamisen kehittämiseen. Koulutuksiin osallistui:

- 36 uraohjaajaa, jotka saivat uutta tietoa opiskelijoiden ohjaamisesta ja tukemisesta työharjoittelujen aikana.
- 45 korkeakoulujen harjoittelukoordinaattoria, jotka vahvistivat osaamistaan työharjoittelujen suunnittelussa ja seurannassa.
- 45 kansalaisjärjestöjen mentoria ja harjoitteluohjaajaa, jotka kehittivät mentorointi- ja ohjaustaitojaan.

Valmistavia toimia seurasi MILEAGE-mallin pilotointi kolmessa

¹ The text is machine translated and then reviewed and revised by RKI.

kumppaniyliopistossa: Ljubljanan yliopistossa (Slovenia), Palermon yliopistossa (Italia) ja Oulun yliopistossa (Suomi). Pilottiin osallistui 60 opiskelijaa (joista 45 muita heikommassa asemassa olevaa), 45 korkeakoulujen koordinaattoria, 18 uraohjaajaa sekä 45 kansalaisjärjestöjen edustajaa yhteensä 36 työharjoittelupaikkaa tarjoavasta järjestöstä.

MILEAGE-hanke on lisännyt ymmärrystä mentoroinnin merkityksestä korkeakoulutuksessa ja luonut uusia, inklusiivisia mahdollisuuksia kokemukselliseen oppimiseen. Hanke on vahvistanut yliopistojen ja kansalaisjärjestöjen yhteistyötä, edistänyt opiskelijoiden yhteiskunnallista toimijuutta työharjoittelujen kautta sekä tuonut käyttöön uusia toimintamalleja, jotka tekevät työharjoitteluista aiempaa tuetumpia ja opiskelijoiden kannalta merkityksellisempiä.

Tämä julkaisu toimii sekä prosessin dokumentaationa että oppaana mallin laajempaan käyttöönottoon ja hyödyntämiseen. Julkaisu havainnollistaa, kuinka eurooppalaisessa yhteistyössä voidaan suunnitella ja kokeilla innovatiivisia toimintamalleja, tehdentyöharjoitteluista selkeästi jäsenneiltyjä, mentorointia sisältäviä ja aidosti vaikuttavia oppimiskokemuksia.

Introduction in Italian²

In Europa, sempre più spesso gli istituti di istruzione superiore sono chiamati a fornire alle e agli studenti esperienze formative combinanti conoscenze accademiche e partecipazione pratica all'interno di contesti reali. Il **progetto MILEAGE – *Mentorship development for quality practices in higher education*** – è stato elaborato allo scopo di rispondere a tale sfida attraverso la promozione della qualità, dell'inclusività e dell'impatto dei tirocini curricolari, grazie anche a una migliore collaborazione tra le università, le organizzazioni non governative e i servizi universitari di orientamento professionale.

MILEAGE riunisce partner da Slovenia, Italia e Finlandia in uno sforzo collettivo, volto a reinventare il modo di progettare, gestire e supportare i tirocini. Attraverso una combinazione di ricerche comparative, creazione collaborativa e attività di costruzione delle capacità, il progetto ha portato allo sviluppo del **modello di tirocinio MILEAGE**, un quadro completo che integra prospettive relative alla pedagogia, all'organizzazione e al *mentoring* al fine di garantire esperienze di apprendimento eque e significative per tutte le e tutti gli studenti.

Il presente documento illustra i risultati di tale processo collaborativo, il quale riassume il lavoro delle e dei partner in materia di analisi dei meccanismi nazionali, definizione del modello di tirocinio MILEAGE in sei fasi, sviluppo di tre *toolkit* professionali destinato ai soggetti chiave (consulenti di orientamento professionale, coordinatrici e coordinatori degli HEI e *mentor* delle ONG), nonché produzione di una Lista di controllo della qualità per guidare gli istituti di istruzione superiore nell'implementazione efficace del modello.

Prima di testare il modello pilota, le organizzazioni partner del progetto hanno organizzato una serie di sessioni di formazione mirate e di attività per la costruzione delle capacità che hanno coinvolto:

- 36 consulenti di orientamento professionale, che hanno acquisito nuove competenze su come guidare e supportare le e gli studenti durante il percorso di tirocinio curricolare;
- 45 coordinatrici e coordinatori di tirocinio, che hanno ampliato le proprie competenze in materia di progettazione e monitoraggio dei tirocini curricolari;

² The text is translated by the Translation Office of CESIE ETS. Il testo è stato tradotto dall'Ufficio Traduzioni di CESIE ETS.

- 45 mentor delle ONG, che hanno consolidato le competenze di mentoring e supervisione nel contesto dell'esperienza professionale formativa.

In seguito a queste attività preparatorie, il modello MILEAGE è stato testato da tre università partner – l'Università di Lubiana (Slovenia), l'Università di Palermo (Italia) e l'Università di Oulu (Finlandia) –, con la partecipazione di 60 studenti (di cui 45 con minori opportunità), 45 coordinatrici e coordinatori di istituti di istruzione superiore, 18 consulenti di orientamento professionale e 45 rappresentanti da 36 ONG ospitanti tirocini curriculari.

In tal modo, MILEAGE ha contribuito a sensibilizzare sull'importanza del *mentoring* nell'istruzione superiore, nonché a generare opportunità nuove e inclusive per l'apprendimento esperienziale. Il progetto ha rafforzato il partenariato tra le università e gli enti del terzo settore, promosso la partecipazione civica mediante i tirocini curriculari e introdotto modelli innovativi che rendono integro, nell'esperienza di tirocinio, riflessione, supporto e rilevanza sociale.

Infine, la presente pubblicazione mira, da un lato, a documentare il processo e, dall'altro, a guidarne la riproduzione, illustrando come i partenariati europei possono progettare e testare in maniera congiunta un modello di apprendimento innovativo che trasformi i tirocini curriculari in esperienze formative strutturate, guidate e di impatto.

Introduction in Slovenian³

Po vsej Evropi se od visokošolskih institucij vse bolj pričakuje, da študentom ponudijo učne izkušnje, ki združujejo akademsko znanje s praktičnim delom v resničnem življenju. Projekt MILEAGE – Razvoj mentorstva za kakovostno praktično usposabljanje v visokem šolstvu – je bil zasnovan kot odgovor na ta izziv, z namenom izboljšanja kakovosti, vključevanja in vpliva praktičnega usposabljanja (pogosto imenovano študijska praksa) z boljšim sodelovanjem med univerzami, nevladnimi organizacijami (NVO) in univerzitetnimi kariernimi centri.

MILEAGE združuje partnerje iz Slovenije, Italije in Finske v skupnem prizadevanju za prenovno načrtovanje, upravljanja in podpore praktičnega usposabljanja. S kombinacijo primerjalnih raziskav, soustvarjanja in krepitev zmogljivosti je projekt razvil model praktičnega usposabljanja MILEAGE, celovit okvir, ki združuje pedagoške, organizacijske in mentorske perspektive ter vsem študentom zagotavlja smiselne in enakopravne učne izkušnje.

Publikacija *TOWARDS EXCELLENCE: Quality support system for study practices* (ZA ODLIČNOST: Sistem podpore kakovosti praktičnega usposabljanja) predstavlja rezultate tega sodelovalnega procesa. Povzema delo partnerjev pri analizi nacionalnih sistemov, opredelitvi šeststopenjskega modela študijske prakse MILEAGE, razvoju treh profesionalnih orodij za ključne akterje (karijerne svetovalce, koordinatorje visokošolskih institucij in mentorje NVO) ter pripravi kontrolnega seznama kakovosti, ki visokošolskim institucijam pomaga pri učinkovitem izvajanju modela.

Pred pilotnim izvajanjem modela so partnerji projekta organizirali vrsto ciljnih usposabljanj in dejavnosti za krepitev zmogljivosti, v katerih so sodelovali:

- 36 kariernih svetovalcev, ki so pridobili novo znanje o vodenju in podpori študentov med praktičnem usposabljanjem;
- 45 koordinatorjev na visokošolskih institucijah, ki so izboljšali svoje kompetence pri oblikovanju in spremljanju praktičnega usposabljanja;
- 45 mentorjev nevladnih organizacij, ki so okrepili svoje mentorske in nadzorne sposobnosti v okolju praktičnega usposabljanja.

Po teh pripravljanih dejavnostih je bil model MILEAGE pilotno izveden na treh partnerskih univerzah – Univerzi v Ljubljani (Slovenija), Univerzi v Palermu (Italija) in Univerzi v Oulu (Finska) – s sodelovanjem 60 študentov

3 The text is machine translated. Besedilo je strojno prevedeno.

(od tega 45 študentov z manj priložnostmi), 45 koordinatorjev visokošolskih institucij, 18 kariernih svetovalcev in 45 predstavnikov nevladnih organizacij iz 36 nevladnih organizacij, ki ponujajo praktično usposabljanje.

S temi ukrepi je MILEAGE prispeval k boljšemu razumevanju pomena mentorstva v visokem šolstvu in k ustvarjanju novih, vključujočih priložnosti za izkustveno učenje. Projekt je okrepil partnerstva med univerzami in nevladnimi organizacijami, spodbudil državljansko angažiranost prek praktičnega usposabljanja ter uvedel inovativne modele, ki praktično usposabljanje naredijo bolj reflektivne, podporne in družbeno pomembne.

Ta publikacija predstavlja hkrati dokumentacijo procesa in vodnik za praktično usposabljanje. Prikazuje, kako lahko evropsko partnerstvo skupaj oblikuje in preizkusi inovativen model učenja, ki praktično usposabljanje spremeni v strukturirane, mentorirane in vplivne izobraževalne izkušnje.



1. NATIONAL LEVEL SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDY PRACTICES

1.1. Overview by country

1.1.1. Slovenia

Introduction

The Slovenian higher education landscape has gradually evolved in its approach to practical training and work-based learning. Recognising that experiential learning plays a vital role in bridging the gap between academia and the labour market, the MILEAGE Project established a National Working Group (NWG) to map the current state of student practices in Slovenia and to identify directions for future development. The resulting insights highlight both the achievements and the persistent challenges in the Slovenian support system for student practices.

Legal and Structural Framework

In Slovenia, the regulatory foundation for student practice is defined by the Act on Higher Education. The Act distinguishes between several types of study programmes:

1. In professional study programmes, practical training is a mandatory and integral component.
2. In university study programmes, the inclusion of practice is optional, often depending on the discipline.
3. In master's programmes, project tasks are compulsory, though it is not always specified whether these qualify as formal practice.

Quality assurance in this area is further governed by the National Agency for Quality in Higher Education (NAKVIS) through its Criteria for Accreditation and External Evaluation (2017) and Criteria for Credit Evaluation of Study Programmes According to ECTS (2019). These documents ensure that all student activities, including practice, are formally credited with ECTS points.

Additionally, the Act on Health Care and Health Insurance (2013) mandates that students participating in practice must be insured against workplace injuries and occupational diseases. However, there is no legal regulation on remuneration, either for students undertaking practice or for mentors supervising them— a gap that often leads to unequal conditions and variable motivation among both groups.

The University of Ljubljana provides an illustrative example of how practices are structured internally. The university, with its 26 members, recognises three major fields of practice: social sciences and humanities, technology and natural sciences, and regulated professions. It also differentiates between pedagogical mentoring, related to teacher education, and non-pedagogical mentoring, applied to all other fields. Career centre representatives at the university highlight several recurring issues: discrepancies between students' expectations and academic supervision, challenges in coordinating practice with other coursework, and insufficient hours allocated for practice within curricula.

Institutional Practices and Support Mechanisms

To understand institutional approaches, two surveys were conducted under the NWG's coordination. The first involved members of the MILEAGE consortium, and the second, carried out with the Erasmus+ project *Making*

Work-Based Learning Work in an Online Environment (eWBL), gathered feedback from student practice coordinators and career counsellors at Slovenian universities.

Results indicate that coordination roles in practice management are multifaceted but poorly formalised. The most common roles are coordinator of practical training (85%), mentor (62%), and administrative support (62%), while career counsellors account for 39%. In many institutions, these responsibilities are distributed among staff members who perform them alongside other duties, often without official workload recognition. As one respondent noted, coordinators are allotted “only ten minutes per student”.

Digital support systems for managing practices remain fragmented. The most widely used tools are contract templates and online forms, while advanced tools– such as match-making platforms, digital monitoring systems, or evaluation dashboards– are rare. Respondents expressed a strong desire for an integrated digital platform that would combine existing tools, provide real-time availability of mentors and student practices, allow digital assessments, and reduce administrative burdens.

This vision points towards a student-centred digital ecosystem capable of supporting the entire practice cycle – from preparation and matching to monitoring, assessment, and certification.

Perspectives from NGOs and Career Centres

From the viewpoint of NGOs, which are increasingly recognised as valuable learning environments, several challenges persist. NGO mentors often experience a mismatch of expectations between themselves and students. Students may perceive the student practice primarily as an academic obligation, while mentors expect active contribution and engagement. The absence of remuneration and unrecognised mentoring hours further complicate this relationship.

NGO representatives advocate for simple, concise support tools – such as checklists and short guidelines – rather than extensive documentation. They stress the importance of tools that address the early (“before”) and final (“evaluation”) phases of practice, which are often neglected but crucial for quality assurance.

Career centres at universities, on the other hand, largely operate as informational and advisory hubs. Their primary role is to assess students’ competencies and guide career choices rather than directly connect students

with employers. This structure results in limited direct facilitation of student practice, and students often underuse the counselling services available to them.

Career counsellors highlight the need for:

1. stronger partnerships between faculties and employers (especially NGOs),
2. comprehensive databases of available student practice placements, and
3. up-to-date guidance on legal issues for foreign students.

One recurring observation is the fragmentation of responsibilities: coordinators, mentors, and counsellors often operate independently, with little formal collaboration or shared data systems.

Generational and Labour Market Context

An expert discussion on youth employment highlighted the evolving characteristics of the current generation entering the labour market – Generation Z. This cohort values purpose-driven work, learning opportunities, supportive environments, and work-life balance more than previous generations. They expect rapid feedback, clarity, and digital accessibility at all stages of professional development.

At the same time, the Slovenian labour market is experiencing demographic shifts and skill shortages, presenting both challenges and opportunities for integrating student practice more strategically. Practice is increasingly seen not merely as a curricular formality but as a pathway to meaningful employment and professional identity formation.

Student Feedback and Experience

The University of Ljubljana systematically evaluates student experiences with practice. Results from the 2022/23 survey at the Faculty of Social Sciences indicate generally high satisfaction. On a 1–5 scale, students rated key aspects such as mentoring quality, competence acquisition, and organisation above 4 on average, resulting in an overall score of 4.1. Students particularly valued professional mentorship and the learning outcomes achieved, although satisfaction varied across study programmes.

These findings reinforce the view that, when properly designed and supported, student practice provides clear added value for academic learning and career development.

Good Practice Example: PiNA – Social Innovators

The Social Innovators programme was designed to enhance youth employability and support the non-profit sector through work-based learning. It invited organisations such as NGOs, social enterprises, and youth centres to participate in a structured, mentored learning process that connected young people with real-world experience in socially innovative environments.

The programme comprised four stages: introduction to the non-profit sector, observation with participation, testing individual competencies, and an independent “do it yourself” work phase. Each student practice lasted around 80 hours and offered young participants hands-on learning opportunities.

Participating organisations received financial support for mentoring – €250 per participant, or €400 when mentoring young people from vulnerable groups. Each organisation could host several participants and mentors.

Through this initiative, the Social Innovators programme successfully promoted collaboration between education and the labour market, empowered youth with practical skills, and strengthened the role of the non-profit sector in social innovation and community development.

Current Challenges and Development Needs

Despite a well-established legal and institutional foundation, several structural and procedural challenges remain:

1. Before (Planning): Establish and maintain networks with employers, develop and promote career centres and counsellors, train HEI and employer staff and students, match students with employers, assign mentors, prepare and sign contracts, and provide digital support tools.
2. During (Implementation): Conduct student introductions, monitor progress, collect journals/reports from students and mentors, and assess student work.
3. After (Evaluation & Follow-up): Conduct evaluations and surveys, issue certifications (ECTS credits), and carry out follow-up activities.

Additional support tools— such as digital toolboxes, reading lists, and training opportunities— are also provided for coordinators, counsellors, and mentors.

Recommendations for Advancement

Recommendations for improving student practice services emphasise strengthening the “before” phase through clear expectations, detailed plans, and accessible monitoring protocols. Faculties should build stronger, long-term partnerships with employers and NGOs and provide more guidance in finding student practice placements.

Better communication and coordination between faculty and employer mentors are needed to ensure consistent guidance. The roles of coordinators, career counsellors, and mentors at HEIs should be clearly defined, with adequate time and compensation for mentoring. Both academic and employer mentors should receive proper training.

Online or hybrid practices are encouraged, with at least one in-person meeting when possible. Technically, an easy-to-use, comprehensive digital application should support all phases and stakeholders of the practice process.

Overall, improvements should focus on two areas:

1. System level: strengthening networks between faculties and employers, and enhancing digital support.
2. Practice level: improving stakeholder communication, integrating practices into study programmes, and fostering a culture that values student practice for both student career growth and employers' HR development.

Conclusion

The Slovenian system for student practices in higher education is characterised by a robust legal foundation and growing awareness of the importance of experiential learning. However, implementation remains fragmented, and digital and institutional support structures require significant improvement.

NGOs play an increasing role in providing meaningful, flexible, and socially engaged learning environments, while universities are called upon to better coordinate, professionalise mentorship, and align their practices with the evolving expectations of Generation Z.

The direction for future development lies in integration– of stakeholders, tools, and values. By building an inclusive, digitalised, and student-centred support system, Slovenia can transform its practice framework from an administrative requirement into a dynamic bridge between academic learning and societal engagement.

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1.1.2. Italy – University of Palermo

Introduction

In Italy, study practices (*tirocini curricolari*) are an integral part of most higher education programmes, especially within public universities such as the University of Palermo (UNIPA). Founded in 1806 and among the largest universities in Southern Italy, the University of Palermo offers a wide range of programmes across humanities, sciences, engineering and the professional disciplines, within which study practices are formally embedded as part of students' academic paths through credit-bearing activities. Thus, they are mandatory for graduation. This ensures that all students must complete a study practice as part of their academic progression. While this structure promotes accessibility and formal recognition, challenges remain in ensuring educational value, aligning with broader objectives of employability, quality assurance, and equal access to support services.

This section offers an overview of the current framework at UNIPA for managing and supporting study practices. It outlines the procedures, resources, and actors involved, as well as identifies major gaps in quality, guidance, and inclusivity. The findings are drawn from an institutional analysis conducted in 2023–2025 under the MILEAGE project.

Current Structure

At UNIPA, study practices are compulsory and credit-bearing, with academic prerequisites clearly defined based on the degree level. The university relies on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA digital platform to manage the full cycle – from hosting organisation accreditation to agreement registration, training project creation and approval and formal validation. UNIPA currently maintains more than 4,900 active internship agreements with public and private organisations across multiple sectors, reflecting a broad institutional commitment to external partnerships. Students may choose to apply for study practice offers published on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform, contact an already accredited organisation to propose a new study practice, or reach out to an organisation that is not yet accredited, which must first complete the formal agreement process with the university through the platform before the study practice can be activated.

Once a study practice is identified, students must select a university tutor, usually based on informal networks. A training project is required, outlining objectives and tasks, and is generally developed by the student and the

hosting organisation and is approved by the university tutor, although the tutor's involvement is often limited to formal validation. Some support is available to guide students before and during the study practice. Supervision during the study practice largely depends on the mentor of the hosting organisation, with academic staff being involved at varying levels and with different degrees of commitment.

As for mentoring within hosting organisations, practices vary significantly from one organisation to another. UNIPA does not provide standardised guidelines or structured training for mentors, nor does it monitor the quality of mentoring practices across placements. The only formal requirements for mentors are related to their presence and their professional qualifications, such as holding an appropriate role to supervise the intern.

Study practices are recognised through CFU (*Crediti Formativi Universitari*), equivalent to the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits and calculated based on workload. Typically, internships can range from 3 to 6 CFU (*Crediti Formativi Universitari*), with 1 CFU corresponding to 25 hours of student engagement. For instance, a 3-credit internship requires approximately 75 hours of activity, while a 6-credit one requires at least 150 hours.

The process formally involves several actors:

1. the degree programme coordinator,
2. the academic tutor (responsible for pedagogical alignment): usually a faculty member responsible for ensuring the internship aligns with the educational goals of the degree program.
3. and the professional supervisor within the hosting organisation (mentor): provides guidance on day-to-day activities and evaluates the student's performance in coordination with the university.

This dual mentorship system is meant to ensure that the internship is both pedagogically valid and practically meaningful.

While all study practices require documentation such as an attendance register, a final report and evaluation forms, the university's quality control mechanisms remain weak. Final evaluation by students and mentors is mandatory through online questionnaires, but no structured career reflection services is carried out after the study practice. Career counselling services are largely disconnected from the study practice process, and support follow-up support after the experience remains limited.

Administrative oversight and coordination are provided by the C.O.T. (*Centro di Orientamento e Tutorato*, transl. Centre for Guidance and Tutoring) which supports students in formalizing agreements with host organizations, managing documentation throughout the internship and eventually identifying internship opportunities, but it does not regularly provide specialised guidance for study practices. Occasionally, career-related workshops and counselling are offered, but these are not systematic and are not integrated with the study practice experience.

Students are required to complete a pre-training course on health and safety and are covered by insurance provided by the University.

Challenges

Despite a standardised administrative system, several challenges limit the effectiveness and inclusiveness of study practices. These include:

1. Lack of guidance and mentorship: students are often left without meaningful academic or professional support. University tutors rarely engage beyond administrative tasks, and the quality of mentoring within hosting organisations varies widely.
2. Limited quality assurance: the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform facilitates administrative control but not pedagogical supervision. There is no standardised assessment of the learning environment, task relevance, or mentor preparedness.
3. Accessibility and inclusion: while students with disabilities may access general university services, there is no systematic approach to ensuring inclusivity within study practices. Hosting organisations are not required to implement accessible environments or receive training on diversity.
4. Weak connection to employability: no structured follow-up exists to assess whether study practices support students' career paths. Data on post-study practice employment outcomes are sparse or unavailable.⁴
5. Administrative complexity: fragmented information across university webpages creates confusion. Students often rely on informal networks or student associations to navigate the process.

⁴ Recent national evaluations, such as the CENSIS 2023/2024 report, place UNIPA among the lower-performing 'mega-universities' in terms of graduate employability, suggesting that internships do not yet fully translate into improved labour-market outcomes. Similar concerns have been reported in other major Italian universities such as Sapienza University of Rome, where misalignments between internship content and labour-market needs persist despite extensive institutional frameworks.

6. Support gaps for vulnerable groups: there are no tailored services for first-generation students, international students, or those with limited resources. Study practices are generally unpaid, exacerbating inequalities for students who cannot afford unpaid work.
7. Monitoring and feedback limitations: the only consistent monitoring tools are administrative documents and evaluation forms. Hosting organisations are not subject to ongoing quality control, and students' feedback is not systematically integrated into institutional improvements.

Conclusion

UNIPA's system of study practices exemplifies many strengths of the Italian academic framework, including formal curricular integration, digitalised procedures, and standardised documentation. Despite these positives, the system is hindered by a lack of educational oversight, insufficient inclusion strategies, and an underdeveloped approach to leveraging study practices for professional growth. Furthermore, the system does not fully capitalize on the valuable feedback and evaluations collected from students and hosting organizations, thus missing opportunities to inform institutional learning and enhance the quality and impact of future study practices.

Importantly, this system also impacts student motivation in choosing and engaging with study practices. Many students perceive the procedural and bureaucratic aspects as impediments rather than as gateways to meaningful professional development. This perception risks discouraging students from fully embracing study practices as valuable opportunities for growth and career exploration. By reforming and improving the quality of support services, UNIPA can transform study practices into attractive and motivating experiences. When the university visibly invests in improving the entire process – providing clear guidance, support, and demonstrating genuine interest in student outcomes – it fosters a culture where study practices are seen as integral and rewarding steps toward future careers.

To enhance the value of study practices, UNIPA should move beyond procedural formalism and prioritise student support, inclusion, and the pedagogical quality of study practices. Career services need to be strengthened and integrated into the study practice cycle at school/faculty/department level, with dedicated counsellors offering guidance before, during, and after the experience. Accessibility standards, monitoring mechanisms, and stakeholder engagement must be embedded in institutional practice.

Sustainable reform will require coordinated efforts across departments, improved data collection, and a commitment to treating study practices not just as academic requirements, but as transformative opportunities for personal and professional development. In this regard, the MILEAGE project offers promising paths to enhance internship quality through structured mentorship models, feedback mechanisms, and clearer quality standards, supporting a more meaningful alignment between academic learning and labour-market expectations.

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1.1.3. Finland

Introduction

Finland's study practices, commonly referred to as internships or traineeships, are of vital importance for the development of the students' careers. Study practices often bridge the gap between theoretically oriented studies and practical work experience. Well-planned study practices benefit not only students but also universities and employers (Pajarre et al, 2016). With the increasing emphasis on graduate employability and the aim to shorten study durations, national policies have elevated the significance of study placements within higher education. This policy shift is particularly relevant in light of recent labour market trends, which show a rise in youth unemployment, underscoring the need for stronger links between education and working life. (European Commission, 2025)

Regardless of their recognition, the implementation of study practices in Finland is unsteady and differs across institutions and degree programmes. Each institution integrates and creates their own structure for the practices, which may lead to unequal access, differences in quality and outcomes that are increased depending on the study field and background of the student.

This section provides an overview of how study practices are structured and supported at the national level in Finland. It gives particular attention to the support mechanisms, challenges and areas to further develop.

Current Structure

The structure of study practices in HEIs differ significantly across fields of study and institutions. For instance, in professional fields like Teacher Training, study practices are mandatory, well established and integrated into the curriculum of the degree. In many other fields, study practices are optional, and students are responsible for finding, arranging and completing the study practice process independently.

In Finland, all individuals are entitled to receive guidance and counselling services, regardless of their status – whether studying, employed, unemployed, or outside the labour market. Educational and training institutions, such as HEIs, hold primary responsibility for providing guidance and counselling to pupils and students. Within HEIs, Career Centres serve as key service hubs, offering students support in areas such as career planning, job search strategies, and study practice placement. In an ideal situation, these centres play a vital role in facilitating smoother transitions from education to working life (European Commission, 2025).

JobTeaser is an online career platform used by over 800 institutions across Europe where students can find study practices and job opportunities tailored to their fields of study. In Finland Aalto JobTeaser now lists more than 4,500 jobs and study practice ads to around 10,000 students and with 150,000 visits per year, which makes it a great tool for students and organizations alike. It is currently being used by nine universities, like Oulu, Helsinki and Jyväskylä.

Investments in the development of study practice related practices, such as career services, the piloting of new structural models, and the recruitment of additional staff to support study practices have been facilitated through externally funded initiatives, such as the Talent Boost programme. Talent Boost was a national programme supported by the Finnish Ministries of Education and Culture and of Economic Affairs and Employment. It was implemented in HEIs from 2021 to 2024. At the University of Oulu, for example, funding from Talent Boost was utilized to enhance career counselling services, organize employment-focused workshops, and foster stronger collaboration with employers. As with many other developmental efforts, this type of funding model is typical for higher education institutions in Finland.

Generally, universities of applied sciences (UAS) are more closely tied to working life than Universities. For example, at Humak UAS, study practices and civic activities are a central part of the curriculum (Holopainen, Lind & Niemelä, 2008, cited in Lindt, 2017). Pajarre et al. (2016) suggest that standardising certain aspects of study practices, like UASs have done, could be beneficial for all; students, HEIs and organisations offering study practices.

In the Finnish labour market, professional networking plays a critical role in securing employment opportunities. Career counsellors consistently emphasize that building a strong professional network is essential for students, as it significantly enhances their prospects when transitioning into the workforce. As Lindt (2017) notes, there are many ways to network, like volunteering. Volunteering is recognized as a great way to network, however, among students it is not seen as a traditional path for career development, and it does not hold a strong role within the student community.

Challenges

Although study practices are highly recognised and important as part of HEIs education in Finland, there are still many challenges students face while searching and completing them.

Differences across fields of study and institutions may lead to inconsistencies in support and access. In many cases, study practices are not included within the programmes and students are responsible for finding placements. According to Lind (2017), students sometimes find it hard to participate in study practices due to the pressure to graduate quickly and strict financial aid rules.

In many cases, students manage the process themselves, including researching the suitable placement, contacting employers, and handling the necessary documentation. Alongside their studies, this process can be very demanding especially for those students unfamiliar with the market or who lack prior experience in professional environments. Students report uncertainty about the process, being confused on how to begin the study practice search or how to navigate the application process.

Moreover, students still face difficulties in finding suitable, field related study practices due to the competitiveness of the market. Paid placements are a rare find, especially in certain fields, and for example international students may also encounter language barriers and lack of network. This emphasizes the fact that not all students have the same opportunities to network, due to personal initiative, time, resources or language barriers, these leading to more unbalanced opportunities. Some universities have responded to these challenges by further developing their support.

One of the key challenges of an external funding model is its reliance on temporary project-based financing, which can lead to discontinuity in services and staffing. Once the external funding period concludes, institutions are often required to reassess and reorganize their internal priorities. This may involve scaling back or discontinuing services that were previously developed or expanded through the project, as well as reallocating or reducing staff positions. As a result, valuable resources – such as tailored support services or employer engagement initiatives – may be diminished or lost entirely, despite having demonstrated their relevance and impact during the funded period. This creates instability and hinders the long-term institutionalization of successful practices.

Furthermore, many times when students apply it is common to receive no response from employers. The lack of feedback can be discouraging and, according to career professionals, it affects negatively the motivation and mental wellbeing of student's which career counsellors state is an increasing concern. In addition, in some field's study practices are difficult to find and the level of competition is high, in many cases study practices application

attracts hundreds of entries within a few hours. In programmes where study practices are not compulsory or offered by the university, there is sometimes more students seeking for placements than open positions, further increasing the issue (European Commission, 2025).

Many students are unaware of the opportunities hidden in NGOs and volunteering. As Marjovu (2014) highlights, volunteering can build transferable skills, but it is often overlooked. Because of that some universities have piloted projects to bring solution to this. For example, at the University of Jyväskylä, NGOs are now cooperating more closely with faculties. The University of Tampere has put into trial a departmental contact model for volunteer work. (Reference) The European Commission emphasizes, that regardless of where the skills are gained, such as volunteering, they should be recognised by the education system (European Commission, 2024).

Conclusion

Study practices play a crucial role in preparing students for working life, yet theory structure and support remains uneven across institutions. While some degree programmes offer well-integrated and mandatory placements, others leave students to do the process independently, often with limited resources and guidance. Temporary funding programmes have helped improve the progress, but many services get discontinued when funding ends.

Students still face many challenges, from unclear application processes to limited access to opportunities. NGO placements remain underutilized, and international students often encounter additional barriers. There are promising initiatives, but without long-term coordination and a shared national framework, these efforts remain fragmented.

All in all, we can see, that there is a need to improve the visibility and consistency of support services, encouraging wider recognition of volunteering and NGO placements, and increasing the sustainability of support services by strengthening the role of study practices beyond short-term projects.

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1.2. Key observations

Across the three national contexts analysed – Slovenia, Italy, and Finland – MILEAGE partnership’s analysis has highlighted both shared challenges and diverse institutional approaches to organising and supporting study practices within Higher Education. Despite differences in structure, regulation, and tradition, the findings converge on one central point: the increasing need for a coherent, quality-oriented framework that connects students, higher education institutions, and host organisations in a mutually supportive way.

In all countries, study practices are recognised as a crucial bridge between education and the labour market. However, the way they are embedded in academic programmes and supported by institutional actors varies substantially.

1. In Slovenia, study practices are framed as an integral part of vocational and professional study programmes. Collaboration with NGOs and companies is frequent, but support systems remain uneven across institutions, depending on the motivation and availability of individual coordinators.
2. Italy presents a different scenario: study practices are regulated at national and regional levels and are compulsory in most degree programmes. Yet, coordination between universities, career centres, and host organisations often suffers from bureaucratic fragmentation and lack of shared standards for quality mentoring.
3. Finland, on the other hand, stands out for its strong policy framework and cultural emphasis on guidance and student-centred learning. Here, study practices are embedded in a broader ecosystem of career counselling and lifelong learning, supported by the autonomy of universities and the digitalisation of processes.

While Finland demonstrates a mature integration of guidance services and curricular study practices, both Slovenia and Italy show a growing awareness of the need to strengthen coordination and ensure equal access to meaningful learning opportunities. In all three contexts, there are similar needs: clearer role definitions, better preparation of mentors and supervisors, and tools for systematic evaluation of study practice quality.

The cross-country comparison also revealed **common tensions between educational and labour market expectations.** Universities aim to ensure that study practices serve pedagogical goals, while host organisations often focus on employability or operational support. Students, caught between these two logics, sometimes experience their study practice as an administrative

requirement rather than a learning opportunity. Even in Finland, where support structures are well developed, the balance between autonomy and institutional oversight remains delicate.

Career counsellors emerge everywhere as key mediators in this process, yet their professional profile and recognition differ greatly. In Slovenia, they often act as informal advisers within faculties; in Italy, they are part of dedicated Career Centres but frequently manage the whole university student population with limited resources; in Finland, counsellors are fully integrated into the educational process and work closely with academic and organisations mentors. This diversity underscores the importance of professionalising the role and equipping counsellors with resources and tools to guide students effectively through complex transitions.

Higher Education Institution (HEI) coordinators play a critical role in supporting study practices, but their involvement varies considerably across countries. In Slovenia and Finland, tutors or coordinators actively supervise and guide students throughout the study practice, working alongside external mentors to ensure both educational and professional development. In Italy, by contrast, academic tutors have primarily administrative responsibilities, approving training projects and validating documentation, while the quality of the learning experience relies almost entirely on the external mentor. This structural distinction highlights a gap in the Italian system: without an internal coordinator actively following the student's progress, pedagogical support remains fragmented and integration with the university is limited. The Finnish model, with its active institutional engagement and accountability, offers valuable lessons on how strategic support can enhance study practices quality and consistency.

Mentors and supervisors in NGOs and other hosting organisations play a decisive role in transforming a study practice into a meaningful learning experience. Yet, their preparation and involvement are often overlooked. Across all countries, mentors expressed the need for clearer guidelines, recognition of their pedagogical role, and structured communication with academic staff. The analysis suggests that while the commitment of individual mentors is high, systemic mechanisms for supporting and training them are largely missing.

Digitalisation appears as both an opportunity and a gap. Finland has implemented integrated digital platforms for managing study practices and tracking learning outcomes, which support transparency and feedback loops. Slovenia and Italy are developing similar tools, but often without a unified

national or institutional vision. Digital tools could significantly enhance coordination and monitoring, provided they are embedded within a broader strategy for quality assurance and inclusion.

Overall, the cross-case analysis highlights three main lessons:

1. First, effective study practices require shared responsibility and communication among all actors – students, HEIs, and host organisations.
2. Second, quality mentoring and guidance are indispensable to transform study practices placements into genuine learning experiences.
3. Third, there is a growing need for structured yet adaptable tools that help each actor understand their role and contribution within the study practices ecosystem.

These lessons collectively point to a systemic gap that the MILEAGE project set out to address. By comparing these three European contexts and engaging career counselors and HEI coordinators from universities and NGO mentors, the project identified the urgent need for a common reference model that could articulate the principles of quality, inclusion, and collaboration in study practices. This common need led to the creation of the **MILEAGE Model**, accompanied by three dedicated toolkits for career counsellors, HEI coordinators, and NGO mentors – each designed to strengthen cooperation and ensure that study practices truly contribute to students' academic and personal development.



2. THE MILEAGE STUDY PRACTICE MODEL

The MILEAGE study practice model is based on a combination of the eWBL Framework (2024), the Kiser Model (2000), the DS12 Model by Sweitzer and King (2019), and the Practical Guide for Employers for a Quality Internship (2015), created by the National Association of Colleges and Employers and the NACE Centre for Career Development and Talent Acquisition.

Six main stages have been identified in implementing high-quality study practices (see also Figure 1 below):

1. Clarification of priorities in the study practice
2. Finding a suitable organisation
3. Preparation phase
4. Implementation phase
5. Termination phase
6. Reflection phase

At each stage, guidance on delivering a high-quality study practice for each involved parties are described in detail: for *intern*, the home institution (Higher Education Institution, hereinafter HEI), *faculty/educational mentor (HEI mentor)*, or *study practice coordinator at the programme level* where the study practice is mandatory or optional, the *organisation/company hosting*

the study practice; and finally, a special focus is given to the in-company/organisational mentor and supervisor directly responsible for training the intern.

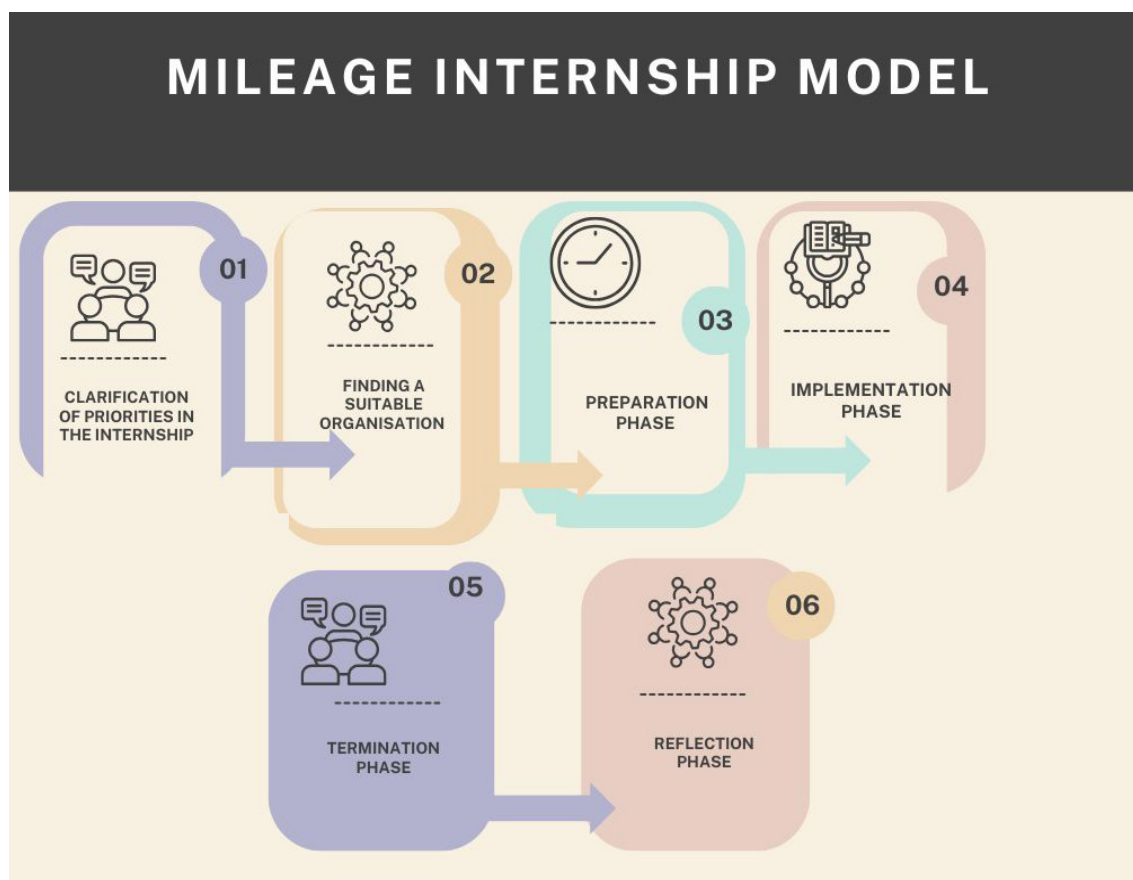


Figure 1 - MILEAGE study practice model

2.1. Stage 1 - Clarification of priorities in the study practice

Starting with the first stage, **clarification of priorities in the study practice**, it is essential for the **intern** to customise specific goals and objectives for their study practice journey. This includes identifying career goals and aspirations related to the study programme and understanding the skills required for success in the study practice. It is helpful to conduct a self-assessment of current skills and knowledge developed and offered by HEI. If the study practice will be conducted in a hybrid or remote mode, particular attention should be paid to interns' digital skills.

For the **HEI and mentors in HEI**, in the first stage, it is important to begin by designing the study practice curriculum and planning in which semester the study practice will take place and how long it will last. It is important to determine how many learning credits will be awarded and what the intended learning outcomes of the study practice are. It is highly recommended to

establish the rules and methodology for assessing these learning outcomes, and, if possible, the HEI should ensure that study practices align with national qualification standards. As mentioned above, aspects of digital skills and equipment availability should be taken into consideration in case the study practice is planned to be conducted remotely (check if the intern has available WIFI, a laptop, and space). Finally, a key aspect at this stage is to design an individual learning plan in collaboration with the intern and the organisation.

The **organisation or company and its in-company mentors** should design the job description and define the general responsibilities of the interns, determine the length of the study practice or employment, and decide on the type of study practice contract and compensation. The telework potential of the study practice should be explored, and it should be clear which competencies are to be fostered. The organisation or company should ensure that the targeted learnings (skills, knowledge, and attitudes) matches the learning outcomes and qualifications specified by the HEIs. To guarantee sustainability, potential opportunities for long-term employment should be explored.

2.2. Stage 2 - Finding a suitable organisation

The **intern** searches for and secures a placement through study practice job portals, career counselling at the HEI, or specialised agencies offering study practice opportunities. Most commonly, a **faculty or professional staff member at the HEI** (such as a coordinator for work-based learning or a career counsellor) who oversees the student's field may help the intern find a placement and provide all necessary information. Job fairs organised by HEI in collaboration with future employers can also be held face to face or virtually. The **HEI** may provide training for future interns, ranging from sharing resources and guidelines to more in-depth one-to-one or group coaching, including curriculum vitae (CV) reviews and simulated face to face or online interviews. The **HEI** should also consider offering applicants access to testimonials from previous interns.

For the **intern**, this task is associated with feelings of excitement, ideal expectations, high motivation, and sometimes self-doubt. A good CV is essential to highlight the ability to work independently and to provide evidence of self-awareness. In the case of remote work, it is important to become familiar with the rules of netiquette (e.g. having enough space to participate in interviews, avoiding interruptions, using formal language, turning on the camera, etc.), especially at the interview stage.

HEIs and mentors should provide advice or counselling on whether an study practice is suitable. If there is a skills gap, it should be identified and addressed together with the student. To make study practices as accessible as possible, positions should be filtered based on location (city, region, or country), mode of delivery (online, blended, or face-to-face), and the employer's industry/field.

2.3. Stage 3 - Preparation Phase

The preparation phase marks the official confirmation that entry into a company or organisation will begin, where everything is ready to start the study practice. **Interns** can assess their aptitudes using self-assessment tools focused on time management, self-efficacy, problem-solving, and communication, cooperation and conflict management. It is highly relevant to use various tests, such as the "Big Five Personality Test".

HEIs and their mentors have already integrated training for the competencies into the curriculum, which is particularly relevant at this stage. If any skill gaps are identified, seek readily available alternatives to address them. Support students in identifying their aptitudes for these attitudes by encouraging the use of self-assessment tools. **HEI mentors** can play a role in encouraging students to complete the Big Five Personality Test. Train faculty mentors, coordinators, or career counsellors to deliver high-quality study practices by introducing all stages and the necessary tools.

Organisations and in-company mentors should consider providing training for staff on study practices and mentoring, as this is a crucial component. Mentors may not always be familiar with the latest technology or the various productivity tools (e.g. virtual workspaces, collaborative tools) that are often essential for successful (remote) work. Similarly, in-company mentors may be unaware of the pedagogical requirements, such as the need for more frequent feedback, a closer relationship between intern and mentor, fostering the intern's ability to work independently, and addressing issues related to poor socialisation. The company should assign mentorship of interns to someone with a clear interest in taking on this role. The selected mentor should also possess the appropriate skill set, typically including strong communication and teamwork abilities, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the organisation's structure. The in-company mentor could also be rewarded for their work (e.g. higher salary, career development opportunities, or other incentives to motivate those accepting the mentor's role).

2.4. Stage 4 - Implementation Phase

The **intern** will get familiar with the overall process of the study practice in this phase; both mentors, HEI with the organisation, are leading the process.

HEI and mentors in HEI guarantee that goals for intern are clear. The introduction to the study practice aims should explain the main objective of the study practice, the intended learning outcomes, the different stages the intern will go through, the feedback and assessment mechanisms.

Organisation/company and mentors in organisation (in-company mentors) play the central role in this phase. The introduction about the study practice – to intern - should take place in a meeting with the supervisor at the company. It is an opportunity for the company to introduce its history, work culture, and long-term goals to the intern (also HEI coordinator or HEI mentor could participate). It is important or rather an opportunity to assess the digital skills and remote work readiness of the students if it was not done in previous stage. If any significant gaps are identified, consider providing training sessions at the beginning and throughout the study practice to bridge these gaps. This is also an excellent opportunity to present interns to key IT and other staff for smooth implementation of the study practice. In the following phase, pay special attention to intern-supervisor/mentor communication. Mentors are often unaware of what interns are doing. Similarly, interns frequently complain of unclear instructions and inadequate support. Plan recurring meetings, briefing sessions, and follow-ups with intern and make a structured workflow of the study practice, esp. if it takes place remotely (include a timeslot to explain how the workflow will be structured – schedule the meetings, e-mail, platform). Pay attention to the frequency that tasks will be distributed (daily, weekly), determine the start and end of the workday. In-company mentors should introduce work assessment methods.

It is highly relevant for **company/organisation** to introduce “buddy system”: assign interns to an existing employee (buddy) who guides the new intern through the first few weeks or months on the job. The buddy is typically someone who was an intern and has now been hired for a more permanent position at the company. This creates empathy and closeness between the buddy and the new intern, which can be highly beneficial when it comes to explaining the company workflow.

Offer interns IT equipment and a tutorial on how to navigate the company systems, access shared platforms, etc.

The organisation/company could set weekly briefing meetings - communicate the objectives and expectations for each task. This ensures that interns have a clear understanding of the desired outcomes. Outline any necessary background information, such as reference materials, guidelines, or access to relevant databases. Address questions interns may have or indicate the best person to refer to, if not the supervisor himself. Specify the deadlines and important milestones associated with the assigned tasks - this helps interns manage their time effectively and prioritise their workload. If there are many interns or any other occasions, meet and greet event for them, in the form of a group breakfast or lunch, corporate visits to showcase the company's departments, ice-breaking activities or a small party.

2.5. Stage 5 - Termination Phase

The termination stage is the stage of completing the study practice, and aims at validation and finalisation of the credit points. It involves all parties. **HEI and company/organisation** should adhere to measurable criteria, such as the intended learning outcomes set in the early stages, i.e. individual learning plan, evaluation criteria with level descriptors, and at the termination phase, checking the achieved learning outcomes.

Assessment, which is carried out in close cooperation between the **company/organisation and HEI**, can take place throughout the whole study practice. It can be based on self-reports, one-on-one discussions, group feedback or all of them and should include multiple dimensions: practical knowledge acquisition, development of soft skills and attitudes, networking and career prospects.

Companies and HEI should offer interns multiple opportunities to discuss and reflect on how work is contributing to learning. Feedback for example should take into consideration the different dimensions that study practice fosters, including practical knowledge acquisition. Feedback should also encompass different formats including self-assessment, one-on-one interviews and group feedback. One possible way to integrate these multiple forms of feedback would include, firstly, asking interns to fill out a pre-designed self-assessment form and then using the results as a basis for a one-on-one discussion with the supervisor. Secondly, if conditions allow, group feedback can be added to it, including the intern, his supervisor at the company, co-workers and the supervisor at the HEI.

The study practice report aims to encourage the learner to critically reflect on the tasks performed, relate to the theory acquired at the HEI, and identify

the development of transferable skills. It is important, that the report is reviewed by the supervisor at the HEI in consultation with the supervisor at the company. For such evaluation to work, it is critical to adhere to measurable criteria.

Learner-centred evaluation should ideally encompass learning outcomes, stating what the learner should be able to do at the end of the study practice. Evaluation criteria, showing how the learning outcomes can be demonstrated are essential to be taken in consideration as well as level descriptors about the characteristics of each learning outcome.

2.6. Stage 6 - Reflection Phase

This phase occurs after the **intern** has left the company or organisation. According to Kiser (2000), it is a time for the student to reflect on their accomplishments, as well as the professional and personal lessons learned. It is a time to celebrate achievements and embrace the experience (Switzer and King, 2019).

The most meaningful prompts for reflection can be provided, organised and supported by the HEI or HEI coordinator. Rating the scale of the study practice experience can make reflection easier for the intern (see Sweitzer and King experience scale, 2019). According to their scale, experience matters, so **interns** can reflect on the most challenging aspects and reflecting on starting an study practice, considering to identify strengths gained from previous study practices or life experiences that may help them meet future challenges. Using any class (course) the intern has taken, students can describe how it affected their personal, professional, and civic development by noting the knowledge gained during the study practice. Most importantly, the skills developed and any attitudes or values that were recognised or changed during or after study practice. **Interns** face final two questions: “*Now what?*” and “*Then what?*”.

For other involved parties – **HEIs, mentors within the HEI, and in-company mentors**—this is a phase in which data collected in previous stages provides an opportunity to reflect on and analyse the outcomes of participation and satisfaction with study practices at the programme level, and to evaluate the impact of the placement on the identified learning outcomes from the assessment phase. It is important to evaluate the data and examine any potential quality issues. A feedback loop can promote quality enhancement in the different phases of the study practice, for both the HEI (at the programme level) and the organisation providing study practices.

2.7. Conclusion. Key Recommendations for Effective and High-Quality Study practice

HEIs and organisations should collect data during all stages, esp. at the implementation phase to monitor student participation and satisfaction at the programme level, and assess the impact of the placement on the defined learning outcomes during the assessment phase.

In addition, analysing the data offers the possibility to investigate and detect potential quality issues. HEIs and companies should adapt assessment and evaluation procedures and methods to the type of study practice, distinguishing between face-to-face, blended, and online modes. Feedback, supervision, and assessment procedures should be introduced to students (potential interns) in the pre-study practice phase (preparation phase in collaboration between the HEI and the organisation). To guarantee a high-quality study practice for all involved parties, use multiple forms of assessment (a combination of formative assessment with feedback and reflection, and summative assessment at the end of the study practice, focusing on the assessment of learning outcomes).

It is also important to train staff involved in the study practice (coordinators, in-organisation mentors, and HEI staff responsible for study practices) and familiarise them with the specifics of digital implementation, if the study practice takes place remotely. Students' digital skills and readiness for distance learning should be assessed if the study practice is conducted remotely. Strategies for monitoring, mentoring, feedback, and assessment of progress should be included in the individual learning plan, created at an early stage of the study practice between both parties, the HEI mentor and the student. The HEI and company should establish a methodology to measure the process of skills development.

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3. THE MILEAGE TOOLKITS

3.1. Supporting the role of Career Counsellors: Professional Role and the MILEAGE Toolkit

3.1.1. Introduction

Career counselling represents one of the key components of the MILEAGE approach to improving the quality and inclusiveness of study practices in higher education. Career counsellors play a crucial role in preparing students for their first professional experiences.

By guiding students before and after their study practices, career counsellors help them identify career aspirations, develop self-awareness, strengthen employability skills, and connect with organisations whose missions resonate with their values. Through structured sessions and creative methodologies, career counsellors create spaces where young people can safely explore their strengths, reflect on their goals, and design their future career paths.

The Toolkit for Career Counsellors, developed within the MILEAGE project, was created to support these processes. It provides innovative tools and structured guidance that empower counsellors to work effectively with young people while promoting inclusion, reflection, and engagement with the NGO sector.

3.1.2. Key Responsibilities of Career Counsellors

Career counsellors accompany students through two main phases of their study practice journey.

In the preparation phase Career counsellors conduct one-on-one or group sessions before the study practices begin. Their primary task is to help students identify their interests, strengths, and motivations, and to match them with appropriate NGOs. Tools such as Supporting Study Practices in NGOs and Job Positions in NGOs introduce the opportunities available in the sector, while creative exercises (e.g. *Dixit cards*, *Career Coat of Arms*, *LEGO® Serious Play®*, and *clay modelling*) facilitate self-discovery and dialogue.

In the implementation phase career counsellors play a lighter role, remaining available for consultation.

In the follow-up phase career counsellors guide reflection sessions to assess the acquired competences, update the student's CV and cover letter, and prepare an action plan for the next steps in their career journey. This phase strengthens self-evaluation and long-term planning, ensuring that students integrate their experience into their future career planning.

Across all phases, career counsellors should maintain inclusive, empathetic, and reflective practices — fostering trust, encouraging self-expression, and ensuring equal opportunities for every student.

3.1.3. Challenges in Career Counselling and Support Needs

Career counsellors face multiple challenges when working with young people, particularly in the context of the NGO sector. These include limited awareness of non-governmental career opportunities, varying levels of student motivation and readiness, and the need for innovative, counselling methods that go beyond traditional guidance interviews.

A recurring issue is the lack of structured methodologies and materials tailored to the specific nature of NGO employment. Unlike the public or corporate sectors, NGOs often value adaptability, creativity, and social engagement more than formal qualifications. Career counsellors therefore need tools that help translate these qualities into employability language — identifying transferable skills and highlighting civic values.

The *Career Counsellor Toolkit* addresses these gaps by offering concrete

resources, session guides, templates, and exercises that make the counselling process more engaging, standardised, and effective.

3.1.4. The Toolkit for Career Counsellors

The Toolkit for Career Counsellors provides structured resources to support career counsellors in giving career guidance to students before and after their study practice. The counsellors' role is the most important in the preparation phase, where they must provide counselling to young people and support them in choosing the most suitable practice and in the follow-up phase, where they are expected to conduct a counselling session with students to evaluate the skills they have acquired during their practice, supplement their CV and cover letter and prepare a plan for the next steps on their career path.

In the preparation phase, career counsellors can use the tools *Supporting student practices in the NGOs*, *Job positions in the NGOs*, *Call for NGOs*, *Career Counselling - First Session*, *Career Counselling - second session* and *Career counselling event*. These tools help career counsellors to get to know the student, to uncover their potential, strengths, fears and motivation by using creative methodologies for career counselling, such as *Dixit cards*, *Career Coat of Arms*, *Clay* and *LEGO® Serious Play®*. Tools in the preparation phase also offer examples of how to prepare a call for interested NGOs, who are willing to offer mentorships to students, an important session of matching students with NGOs and how to help students in preparing their CVs and cover letters, practicing interview questions, etc.

In the follow-up phase, the tool *Career counselling - Third Session* provides detailed instructions for conducting a final session with students after completing their study practice. This tool guides counsellors through processes students' of self-assessment, competence evaluation, and long-term career planning, helping students consolidate their learning and translate it into actionable next steps.

3.1.5. Conclusion

Career counsellors play a vital role in connecting higher education with civil society. By empowering students to discover meaningful career paths within NGOs, they not only strengthen employability but also inspire participation in building a more inclusive and sustainable future.

The MILEAGE *Career Counsellor Toolkit* responds to the real needs identified in the field - providing a structured, accessible, and innovative framework that supports counsellors in delivering high-quality guidance. It promotes reflective, creative, and inclusive practices that help young people transition from study to meaningful employment with confidence, purpose, and a sense of social contribution.

3.2. Supporting the Role of HEI Coordinators: Professional Role and the MILEAGE Toolkit

3.2.1. National Variation and Shared Responsibilities

While the responsibilities of Higher Education Institutions' (HEI) Study Practice Coordinators vary across European countries – and even between institutions within a single system – the Erasmus+ MILEAGE project has identified a set of core functions that consistently define the role. Whether titled study practice coordinator, study practice supervisor, or placement advisor, these professionals operate at the intersection of education, employment, and student development. Their work is both administrative and pedagogical, requiring coordination of logistics as well as facilitation of learning. The MILEAGE project acknowledges these variations while offering a shared language and toolkit to support this crucial professional role across contexts.

3.2.2. The Core Responsibilities of HEI Coordinators

HEI Coordinators are engaged throughout all stages of the students' study practice process. Their responsibilities begin with strategic planning and integration of study practices into formal curricula. Coordinators help define learning outcomes, align placements with qualification frameworks, and ensure that the study practice meets academic standards. At this early stage, they may also play a key role in designing or approving Individual Learning Plans (ILPs), tailored to students' goals and institutional criteria (Mileage Study practice Model, 2025, p. 18).

In **the preparation phase**, coordinators advise students on readiness and help identify appropriate placement opportunities. This often includes supporting CV and interview preparation, collaborating with career services, and ensuring that students understand the expectations of their study practice. Some coordinators also assist in matching students with trained academic mentors and verifying the suitability of host organizations.

During **the implementation phase**, the coordinator's role becomes one of monitoring and support. This may include regular check-ins with students and mentors, resolving issues that arise during the placement, and ensuring alignment between intended learning outcomes and actual experience. This is particularly vital in hybrid or remote study practices, where clarity of roles and digital inclusion must be proactively managed.

In the final phases – **termination and reflection** – coordinators oversee the assessment process, collect final reports, and engage in debriefing with both students and host mentors. Feedback collected during this phase feeds directly into institutional quality assurance processes (MILEAGE Study practice Model, 2025, pp. 21–22).

Overall, HEI Coordinators are not simply facilitators of logistics; they are key educational actors. They help shape students' professional identities and guide them through personal and civic development, not unlike career counsellors, with whom their roles often intersect (King & Sweitzer, 2014, pp. 39–47).

3.2.3. Challenges in Coordinating Study Practices

Despite their critical role, coordinators often face a variety of practical and structural challenges. These include:

1. Fragmented communication between students, academic mentors, and host organizations
2. Inconsistent or unclear documentation and learning goals
3. Time-consuming administrative duties that reduce focus on pedagogical support
4. Limited institutional recognition of their developmental role
5. Lack of resources for onboarding new coordinators or partners
6. Variation in partner engagement, particularly when NGOs or companies are new to mentoring students

Additionally, coordinators are expected to balance sometimes competing expectations from students, academic staff, and external partners – often with minimal time allocation, training or standardized tools. These issues can compromise the quality and equity of the student experience if not addressed systematically.

3.2.4. MILEAGE Toolkit for Coordinators

The MILEAGE Digital Toolkit for Coordinators offers a structured set of resources that bring clarity, consistency, and pedagogical coherence to the coordinator’s work. It provides document examples and templates to use for a structured path to guide both coordinators and students through the essential phases of a study practice period.

The journey begins with clear role definitions: the Tasks and Responsibilities Checklists for HEI coordinators and students ensure mutual understanding and accountability. Once expectations are set, the *Traineeship Agreement Example* helps formalize the collaboration between students, institutions, and host organizations. As the practice period progresses, students can document their experiences and achievements using *the Study Practice Portfolio Template*, fostering reflective learning and professional growth. To align academic and professional goals, the *Competence Goals for Students* provide a selection of skills that the student may opt to choose their competence goals to work toward during their practice. After completing the practice, the *Study Practice Report Content Requirements* provide topics for students to reflect on during their journey, consolidate their learning, and demonstrate their progress.

3.2.5. Complementary Toolkits

The “*Guiding Student Success: Toolkit for Study Practice Coordinators*” is part of a broader suite of role-based toolkits developed by the MILEAGE project that the Coordinator may benefit from. The *Toolkit for Career Counsellors* offers materials especially relevant to the preparation phase, such as readiness checklists and skills audit tools. Since the responsibilities of coordinators and career counsellors often overlap – in career planning, skills assessment, and employer engagement – these toolkits can be used in tandem depending on institutional structure and needs.

Lastly, the *Toolkit for NGO Mentors and Supervisors* serves as a practical guide for host organizations. Coordinators providing this resource to external partners – particularly those new to student mentoring – is a valuable gesture of professional respect and collaboration. It helps ensure that placements are not only productive for students but also enriching for mentors and sustainable for partner organizations.

3.2.6. Conclusion

In essence, HEI Coordinators are key pedagogical figures enabling experiential learning to fulfill its transformative potential as a path to professional growth and employability. Their work supports the educational, social, and civic objectives of higher education, aligning with broader European frameworks for quality and equity in work-based learning (Council of the EU, 2014; MILEAGE Project, 2025; European Commission, 2025). The MILEAGE toolkits provide them with tangible, role-specific resources that make their daily tasks more manageable while reinforcing the learning-centered mission of higher education study practices.

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3.3. Supporting the Role of NGO Mentors: Professional Role and the NGO Mentors Toolkit

3.3.1. Introduction

For many students, study practices hosted by NGOs represent their first substantial engagement with the professional world. This early experience can shape students' confidence, professional identity, and future career trajectory. Mentors and supervisors in the workplace play a central role in this process: through guidance, feedback, and encouragement, they can significantly influence students' professional self-perception and readiness for subsequent career steps.

The role of an study practice mentor or supervisor in the workplace varies across countries and organizations. In some contexts, it is a formal position, while in others it arises informally as part of staff duties. The support and guidance provided to interns may be delivered by a single person or it can be a shared responsibility among several staff members. Regardless of the variations across regions and organizations, clear role definitions and coordination are essential to ensure that interns receive consistent guidance and meaningful learning experiences.

Mentoring and supervising skills play a critical role in ensuring the quality of study practices. Organizations hosting interns are expected to have processes and practices in place to verify that mentors and supervisors possess relevant knowledge, effective communication skills, and a solid understanding of pedagogical methods. Well-qualified mentors with relevant experience and assessment skills inspire and engage interns, contributing significantly to the success and impact of the study practice.

The MILEAGE project has identified common elements of the study practice mentor and supervisor role, including structured guidance, skill development, inclusive practices, and reflective learning. Consultations with NGO staff members highlighted key challenges, particularly inconsistent guidance and a lack of structured supporting materials, which directly informed the development of the Toolkit for NGO Mentors and Supervisors.

3.3.2. Key Responsibilities of NGO Mentors

The organization hosting interns appoints an study practice mentor or supervisor who is typically the person most familiar with the intern's role and tasks and who provides guidance on both general and industry-specific

skills. They also play a central role in supporting interns' learning, professional growth, and integration into the work community. Mentors and supervisors guide interns through all phases of the study practice process: preparation, implementation, termination and reflection.

During the preparation phase, mentors and supervisors are responsible for clarifying their own roles and responsibilities in guiding interns. They often participate in the intern selection process and evaluate applicants' skills and knowledge to ensure alignment with study practice expectations. Access to support and preparatory materials is crucial at this stage, both for structuring the process effectively and for following organizational guidelines and quality standards. This is especially important for those new to the role. Clear guidance helps mentors and supervisors understand the expectations and responsibilities of their role, laying the foundation for a successful study practice experience.

The implementation phase begins when the student joins the work community as an intern. In this phase, mentors and supervisors are responsible for onboarding and orientation, providing all essential information, tools, systems, documents and other resources and skills that are needed to perform the work. Interns must be supported in understanding their statutory rights and the organization's practices. Mentors help to define learning objectives, provide support and guidance through regular check-ins and reflective discussions, while remaining attentive to the need for adjusted work methods, additional support, or further training. Mentors help interns achieve their learning objectives, promote professional autonomy and give constructive feedback. Mentors also support career planning, help building professional networks, and advocate for healthy, sustainable and ethical work practices.

Towards the end of the study practice, mentors encourage interns to reflect on their experience, consolidate learning, and evaluate the progress. Responsibilities and work tasks are wrapped up efficiently, and relevant documentation is prepared for the educational institution to award academic credit. In this phase, mentors also coordinate all questionnaires related to assessing the process within the organization for continuous improvement.

3.3.3. Challenges in Mentoring and Supervising

Based on consultations with NGO staff during the MILEAGE project, mentors and supervisors encounter a range of practical challenges when guiding interns. A key issue is balancing the mentoring or supervisory role with other

professional responsibilities, as mentors often support interns alongside their regular duties. While this is primarily a management challenge, understanding the expectations of the mentoring role is essential for effectively allocating time and resources to mentoring.

Undefined expectations and the absence of structured guidance can make it difficult for mentors to clarify their responsibilities, follow organizational guidelines, and contribute fully to the interns' learning experience. The lack of practical tools, such as process charts, checklists, templates, and questionnaires has been identified as a significant barrier, affecting both the quality of the study practice experience and the efficiency of mentoring work. Insufficient training is another common challenge, as many mentors may take on the role without prior experience.

These challenges highlight the importance of the Toolkit for NGO Mentors and Supervisors. Challenges are directly addressed by the toolkit, which provides structured resources to clarify mentor roles, manage time effectively, track progress, and maintain inclusive, reflective mentoring practices, strengthening guidance, supporting mentors in their role, and fostering meaningful learning opportunities for students.

3.3.4. The Toolkit for NGO Mentors and Supervisors

The Toolkit for NGO Mentors and Supervisors provides structured resources to support mentors and supervisors throughout the study practice process and addresses many of the challenges commonly faced within NGOs. The Toolkit is organized around three phases: preparation, implementation, and follow-up, offering tools to ensure a meaningful and well-documented experience for both organizations and interns.

During the preparation phase, mentors and supervisors can use the *Example Structure for Study practice Interviews* to plan and conduct interviews, ensuring alignment between interns' skills and study practice expectations. The *How to be a Mentor guide* familiarizes mentors with the key responsibilities and pedagogical approaches of mentoring. The *List of Supervisor and Mentor Responsibilities* clarifies expectations and supports mentors in structuring their guidance effectively and identifying the time resources needed for the role.

In the implementation phase, the *Onboarding Plan and Checklist Template* ensures that interns receive all essential information, resources, and training to perform their work tasks effectively. It also guarantees that interns

understand their statutory rights as well as the organization's practices and workflows, addressing a common challenge of inconsistent guidance. The *List of Example Learning Outcomes* helps mentors and interns co-create clear, achievable objectives for the study practice. Regular meetings are structured using the *Check-in Meeting Example Agenda*, emphasizing ongoing support, monitoring progress, addressing challenges promptly, and providing constructive feedback.

During the follow-up phase, the *Exit Checklist* ensures all tasks and responsibilities are completed efficiently. The *Exit Interview Steps* and *Questionnaire Model* or the shorter *Feedback Questionnaire Template* can be used to gather valuable insights from interns and improve organizational processes.

Throughout all phases, cross-cutting resources such as the *Inclusivity Checklist*, *Mentoring Discussion Prompts*, and *Student Portfolio* serve as anchors to foster an anti-racist and inclusive work approach, encourage reflection, and document growth and learning. These tools directly support mentors in maintaining inclusive practices, tracking development, and promoting reflective mentoring.

By combining these tools with structured guidance and inclusive practices, the Toolkit empowers mentors to deliver high-quality study practices that support learning, professional growth, and long-term engagement with the NGO sector.

3.3.5. Conclusion

Mentors and supervisors are central to students' first professional experiences. Their guidance plays a significant role in shaping students' practical skills, confidence, professional identity, and future career trajectories. The NGO Mentor Toolkit addresses real challenges identified in mentoring, gaps in supporting materials, and the need for qualified and inclusive practices, providing structured, accessible resources that strengthen mentorship, foster inclusivity, and maximize learning and professional growth. All this work also has the potential to influence students' initial impressions of the NGO sector, helping to inspire a lasting interest in pursuing future career opportunities within civil society and nonprofit work.



4. QUALITY CHECKLIST FOR IMPLEMENTING STUDY PRACTICES IN HEIS

4.1. Introduction

The integration of study practices within higher education represents one of the most effective bridges between academic knowledge and professional experience. When implemented in a structured and quality-assured manner, study practices help to narrow the persistent gap between graduates' academic skills and the complex, evolving demands of modern employment.

Even though practical components are increasingly integrated into higher education programmes and are sometimes even mandatory, many study practices remain largely formalistic, unrelated to students' field of study or designed merely to fulfil curricular requirements rather than to foster students' employability and learning.

The MILEAGE model emphasizes the importance of a cross-sectoral collaboration as a foundation for ensuring the quality of study practices. This collaboration centers around students' practical learning experience and brings together three key actors: coordinators within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), university career centers and mentors in non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The MILEAGE model foresees that study practices are implemented in NGOs, recognising them as dynamic environments where

students can gain several important transferable skills, such as project management, project writing, facilitation of workshops, event planning, flexibility, adaptability, etc. while engaging and addressing real social challenges. Unlike more traditional corporate settings, NGOs expose students to safer environments, where students can experiment without being afraid of failing. Through such experiences, practices in NGOs contribute to shaping graduates who are not only employable in different sectors, but are also socially engaged and capable of contributing meaningfully to society.

The MILEAGE model builds on the good-practice project Social Innovators, which developed the innovative apprenticeship model and identified five key positions in the NGOs where apprentices could gain work-based learning: project manager, communication manager, administrator, advocacy officer and trainer/educator. The MILEAGE project takes this model and establishes a lasting bridge between NGOs and higher education.

This chapter introduces the quality checklist for implementing MILEAGE study practices in HEIs and NGOs, which serves as a practical tool for ensuring that study practices are designed and implemented in a quality manner.

4.2. Roles and responsibilities of HEI coordinators, career counsellors and NGO mentors in supporting study practices

As stated in the previous chapter of this publication, each actor involved in a student's study practice must fulfill a student's way of study practice, must fulfill distinct roles and responsibilities to ensure the overall quality and coherence of the experience.

HEI coordinators are engaged throughout all stages of the study practice process. Their roles include strategic planning, integration of study practices into formal curricula, defining learning outcomes, align practices with qualification frameworks and ensure that study practices meet academic standards.

Career counselors are primarily involved in the preparatory phase and follow-up phase of study practice. Their roles encompass guiding students through self-assessment and career exploration through counselling sessions, matching students with host organizations. After the completion of study practices they lead the follow-up and evaluation sessions.

NGO mentors are engaged throughout all stages of the student's study

practice. Their roles include: getting acquainted with the toolkit for mentors and familiarising themselves with mentoring responsibilities, ensuring structured onboarding, providing guidance, feedback and supervision for students.

4.3. Concrete checklist for implementing study practices

This checklist is intended for HEIs, career centres and NGOs participating in the MILEAGE model. It provides a shared framework for ensuring quality and accountability across all stages of study practice implementation

4.3.1. Preparation phase

	Key responsibilities	Quality Indicators
HEI Coordinators	Preparing study practice guidelines	Clearly accessible instructions for implementing study practice Guidelines are communicated to all participants before the start of the study practice
	Preparing relevant forms for the study practice	Standardized study practice agreement
	Approving the study practice placement	NGOs/Host organizations are verified by HEI coordinator Placement are approved when they align with the student’s academic field, learning outcomes and institutional framework
	Signing the study practice agreement	Tripartite agreement between the student, HEI and host organization
	Reviewing the study practice plan	The study practice plan is reviewed and approved by the HEI coordinator to ensure alignment with curricular and institutional standards

	Key responsibilities	Quality Indicators
Career Counsellor	Guiding students through self-assessment and career exploration	<p>Counselling is designed to help students identify personal strengths, interests and goals</p> <p>Methods of counselling (Dixit cards, LEGO serious play, Coat of Arms) are used to facilitate self-assessment</p>
	Supporting students in identifying suitable NGOs and presenting available positions within the NGOs	<p>Counsellors maintain an updated database of NGO partners and study practice opportunities</p> <p>Students are informed about available placements in NGOs</p>
	Supporting students in preparing application materials	<p>Students receive guidance on writing professional CVs, cover letters, and other application documents tailored to NGO placements</p>
NGO mentors	Familiarizing with the toolkit for NGO mentors	<p>Mentors understand their role, responsibilities and quality standards for hosting students</p>
	Onboarding interview with the student	<p>The onboarding interview is held before the official start of the study practice</p> <p>Mentor ensures a welcoming and inclusive environment</p> <p>Mentor presents the NGO's mission and goals, team, etc.</p> <p>Mentor asks a student about their goals and wishes with the study placement</p> <p>Key points from the onboarding interview are documented and integrated into the study practice plan</p>
	Defining a Study practice plan in collaboration with the student	<p>Study practice plan with defined learning outcomes, co-created by the mentor and the student before the study practice begins</p> <p>Learning outcomes align with the student's study curriculum and the NGOs mission and activities</p>

4.3.2. Implementation phase

	Key responsibilities	Quality Indicators
HEI Coordinators	Providing feedback and support to student during the study practice	The HEI coordinator maintains regular contact with students and NGO mentors throughout the study practice period
NGO mentors	Introducing a student to the NGO	<p>The mentor provides a structured introduction to the NGO's mission, values, structure and main activities</p> <p>The student is introduced to the team, workspace, and communication channels</p>
	Offering a job-shadowing and learning opportunities	<p>The student is given the opportunity to observe and shadow the mentor (project manager, communication manager, administrator, advocacy officer and trainer/educator)</p> <p>Mentor ensures that the student participates in a variety of tasks and training to understand the NGO's interdisciplinary work</p>
	Providing regular supervision and feedback	<p>Regular supervision and feedback meetings are conducted according to agreed schedule</p> <p>Feedback is constructive</p> <p>Students are encouraged to provide feedback on their experience</p>
	Evaluating and adjusting tasks	<p>Mentor assesses study practice alignment with the study practice plan</p> <p>Tasks and objectives are adjusted collaboratively</p> <p>Any changes and adjustments are documented in the study practice plan</p>

4.3.3. After the study practice

	Key responsibilities	Quality Indicators
HEI Coordinators	Evaluate study practice report and provide feedback to the student	HEI coordinator reviews students' study practice report Feedback is comprehensive, constructive and focused on the student's professional and academic development
	Award credits and record them in the academic register after the completion of the study practice	Academic credits are awarded according to institutional and national regulations
	Utilize study practice reports, share students' experiences and maintain statistics on study practices	Data from completed study practices are used to improve study practice guidelines, curricula and partner collaboration
Career counsellors	Conduct evaluation session	Counsellors organize structured evaluation sessions after study practices are implemented Evaluation sessions encourage students to assess their achievements, challenges and transferable skills gained during the study practice
NGO mentors	Provide final feedback and complete evaluation forms.	Mentor conducts a final feedback session with the student to discuss overall compliance with the study practice plan and key takeaways from the study practice
	Reflect internally on the mentoring process for improvement.	Mentor engages in internal reflection on the mentoring process
	Collecting student feedback on the mentoring and study practice experience	Mentors invite students to evaluate the mentoring process Structured questionnaires are used to ensure consistent evaluation Feedback is analysed and discussed internally to identify improvements in mentoring practices



5. MILEAGE CORNER

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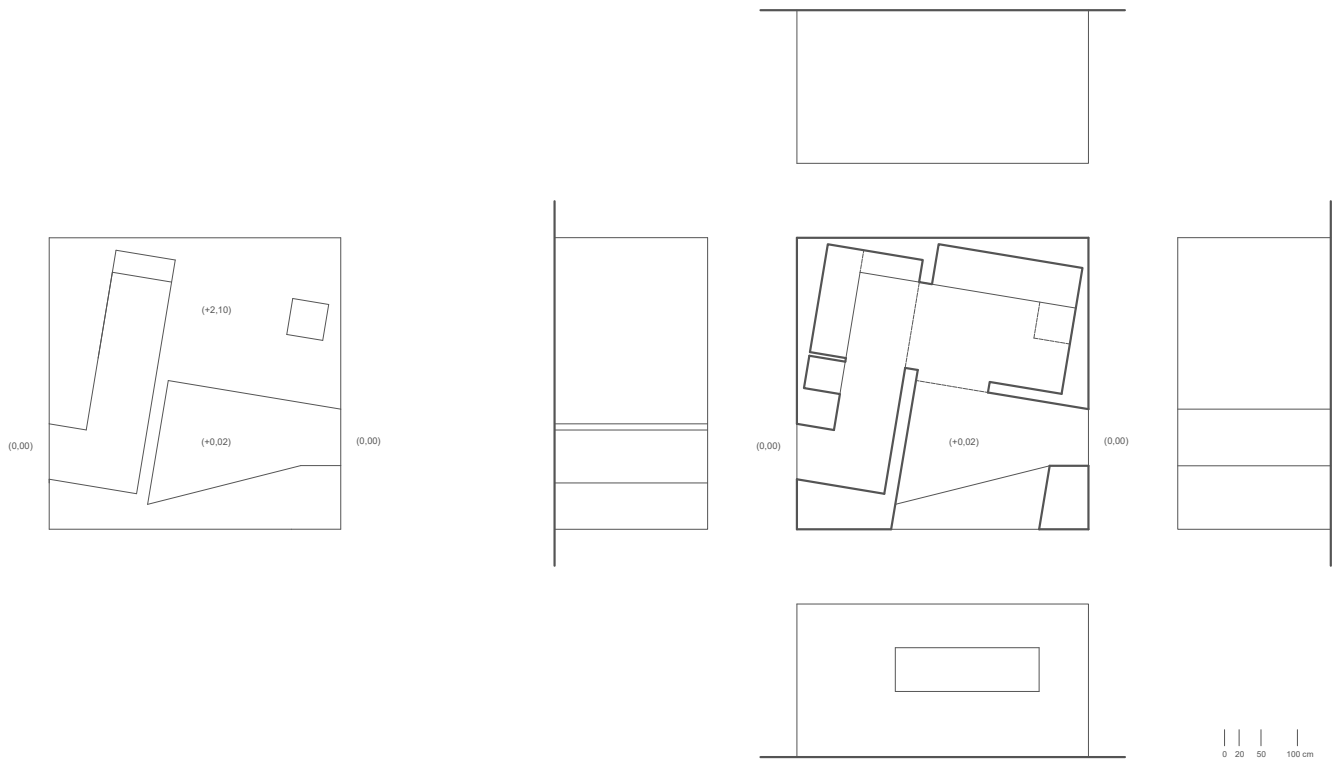
The MILEAGE Corner, developed within the ERASMUS+ KA220 HE project “MILEAGE – Mentorship development for quality practices in higher education”, represents the outcome of a design-research process centred on space and its construction, aimed at imagining new modes of encounter between people, skills, companies, and institutions. This exploratory and design pathway originated from a careful understanding of the needs of the various actors involved in the piloting phase – students, career counsellors, university coordinators, NGOs, and stakeholders – and from the intention to translate these needs into a device capable of welcoming, guiding, and streamlining the quality of educational and professional interactions. The ultimate goal was to define a small prototypical environment – a light, mobile micro-architecture – to be presented at the final dissemination event and further adaptable in future follow-ups, both possible and desirable, beyond the project’s duration. It is conceived for all those future situations in which the encounter between academic training and the world of work will require more sensitive and inclusive tools, attentive to the ways in which space itself can enhance the quality of the experience.



The work developed as an inquiry into the relationship between people and the environments that surround them. Every choice – both formal and material – stemmed from listening to and observing the dynamics that characterise mentorship processes: moments of confidential dialogue, rapid and spontaneous exchanges, brief yet decisive conversations, crossings that transform an anonymous passage into a threshold of possibility. The small space was equipped to precisely meet the needs of the matching process, including a dedicated waiting seat, a work surface for consulting and using the toolkits developed during the project activities, a niche for storing books, folders, and brochures, as well as a surface for projecting informational videos and orientation materials. Within the project, the theme of light played a central role, understood not only as a technical element but as a living material, capable of shaping atmospheres, suggesting proximity, and softening relational distance. Likewise, shadow – with its ability to protect, focus, and shelter – became an essential component for imagining micro-spaces in which students could feel welcomed, heard, and recognised.



The design research led to the definition of a modular prototype, built upon a balance between permeability and protection, transparency and definition,



openness and enclosure – an architecture capable of transforming itself according to the needs of each encounter. It is a place where the sequence of spaces, the arrangement of solids and voids, the lightness of surfaces, and the quality of openings guide users toward a more effective and more natural dialogue. In this small architecture, every detail – from the rhythm of the panels to the direction of the light, from the orientation of the entrances to the presence of surfaces inviting pause – was conceived to facilitate relationships, creating the conditions of trust and proximity required in career-guidance processes. The device was born from attentive listening, but also from the intention to offer a concrete response to the needs of the project. Its structural lightness makes it easy to dismantle, flexible, and replicable – qualities essential for its use in future impact events and in the follow-up phases envisaged by the MILEAGE project. Particular care was devoted to developing a recognisable spatial language, capable of conveying the project’s values – *inclusion, accessibility, and the quality of educational support* – through its spatial and formal configuration, even before any graphic or verbal communication.

As the final dissemination event approached, the research focused on defining an exhibition strategy that would not merely display an object, but would narrate the process that generated it: the observation, the mapping of needs, the care for relationships, and the attempt to translate into architecture the complexity of interactions between students and the world of work.

The aim was to deliver to MILEAGE – and, above all, to the broader community – not only a physical prototype, but also a method, a vision of how space itself can become an operational tool within mentorship processes. In conclusion, this simple yet complex architectural device emerges as a synthesis of theoretical research, spatial experimentation, and design sensitivity.

The developed prototype represents an active instrument, capable of generating new forms of relation and gently and precisely supporting the different phases of educational and professional pathways. It is a space that, in its essentiality, carries the idea of beauty that shapes the quality of an encounter – one that, when it happens in the right place, with the right light, with the right rhythm – can transform people’s experience and open new possibilities for growth, listening, and mutual recognition.





6. Conclusions

The MILEAGE project demonstrates that high-quality study practices emerge when academic learning, professional experience, and civic engagement are meaningfully connected. The comparative work carried out in Slovenia, Italy, and Finland revealed that, despite different national systems and traditions, higher education institutions face similar challenges: fragmented support structures, limited mentoring capacity, and uneven quality assurance. The MILEAGE approach addresses these challenges through integration, professionalisation, and shared responsibility among key actors.

By developing the **MILEAGE Study Practice Model**, the partnership has established a structured pathway that guides students, coordinators, and mentors through six essential stages – from preparation and implementation to reflection and evaluation. The three accompanying toolkits have proven to be practical resources that translate theoretical principles into concrete actions, supporting the daily work of those involved in study placements. The Quality Checklist ensures coherence and accountability across institutions, promoting transparency and continuous improvement.

The piloting phase confirmed the model's effectiveness in fostering active collaboration between universities and NGOs, strengthening the mentoring culture, and improving students' learning experiences. The results indicate that when mentors, coordinators, and counsellors receive proper training and institutional support, study practices become not only administratively efficient but also educationally transformative.

The expected impact of MILEAGE extends beyond the partner universities. The project has:

- encouraged the **adoption of innovative learning placements** within participating HEIs;
- increased awareness of **mentoring as a core component of Higher Education quality**; and
- built lasting **cross-sectoral partnerships** between academia and civil society.

Through these achievements, MILEAGE contributes to the European vision of inclusive, student-centred Higher Education, where experiential learning is recognised as a vital bridge between knowledge, skills, and civic responsibility. The model, toolkits, and checklist developed through this collaboration offer a replicable and adaptable framework for other universities and NGOs seeking to enhance the quality and social relevance of their study practices.

The MILEAGE model thus offers a valuable reference for European higher education policy, providing a scalable and evidence-based approach that can inform institutional strategies and national frameworks aiming to strengthen the quality, inclusiveness, and social relevance of study practices.



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