MILEAGE

Mentorship development for quality practices in higher education

Report about internship supporting services at the University of Palermo

CESIE ETS, Università degli Studi di Palermo (UNIPA)

Deliverable information

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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
UNIPA	University of Palermo
NGO/CSO	Non-Governmental Organisation / Civil Society Organisation
CFU	*Crediti Formativi Universitari* (transl. University Educational Credits)
C.O.T	*Centro di Orientamento e Tutorato* (transl. Centre for Guidance and Tutoring)
CV	Curriculum Vitae
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions

Terminology note

To ensure consistency with the MILEAGE project publications, this report adopts the term '**mentor'** to refer to the hosting organization's tutor [*tutor aziendale*] (i.e., the supervisor responsible for overseeing the intern during the internship).

While the term **'study practice'** is used across MILEAGE project publications, this report adopts the term **'internship'** as a more accessible and widely understood equivalent. This choice is intended to improve clarity without altering the intended meaning.

Analysis of the state of internships at the University of Palermo (UNIPA)

1. How are internships structured?

1.1. Statistics

According to the 2024/2025 edition of the CENSIS ranking of Italian universities, the University of Palermo (UNIPA) ranks 4th among the largest state universities (with over 40,000 students), with an overall score of 83,8. Anyway, for graduate employability, UNIPA'S score in this category was of 79, last among the largest state universities and around 42th out of 58 Italian state universities.[1]

1.1.1. How many students participate in internships each year?

The students from UNIPA who typically participate in internships every year are 5,434.

1.1.2. What percentage of students successfully complete their internships?

To evaluate the success rate of internships, it is essential to define what is meant by "successful completion." In this context, a successful internship may refer to an experience where students:

A. Fulfil the required hours established by the study program.
B. Achieve the learning objectives set for the internship, developing relevant skills and competencies.

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[1] Source: CENSIS (2024/2025), https://www.censis.it/formazione/la-classifica-censis-delle-universit%C3%A0-italiane-edizione-20242025

C. Receive a positive evaluation from the hosting organisation or university supervisor.

Considering criterion A alone, then 100% of UNIPA graduates successfully completed their internship, as fulfilling the required hours is a mandatory condition for graduation. For criteria B and C, there is no available data to assess whether students achieved the specific learning objectives or received positive evaluations from supervisors. Specific data on the percentages is not available.

1.1.3. What percentage of students give positive feedback about their hosting organisations?

Specific data on the percentages of positive feedback on hosting organisations is not available.

1.1.4. What are the most common sectors in which students carry out internships?

The sectors in which students typically undertake curricular internships are:

- Education, training, research, and development: 28%
- Public administration: 12.7%
- Services: 11.5%
- Healthcare: 9%

In the calendar year 2023, a total of 7592 students graduated from the University, including 4,324 first-level (bachelor's) graduates and 3,268 second-level (master's) graduates. Of these graduates, 6,668 completed the survey on the evaluation of their university experience, providing insights into their academic pathways and professional preparation.[2]

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[2] Source: AlmaLaurea (2024), XXVI Indagine Profilo dei Laureati 2023, https://www.AlmaLaurea.it/en/gli-atenei/universita-degli-studi-di-palermo

The following analysis focuses on the number of graduates who completed curricular internships or work activities during their study program:

Table 1 - Internships [Source: AlmaLaurea, 2024]

	They completed curricular internships or work activities recognized by the study program (%)	Curricular internships organized by the program and carried out within the university	Curricular internships organized by the program and carried out outside the university	Work activities later recognized by the program
TOTAL	**64,8**	**6,4**	**50**	**7,6**
Industrial and Information Engineering	22,9	4,7	11,3	6,3
Literary-Humanities	54,1	3,6	40,3	9,5
Architecture and Civil Engineering	57,1	2,4	43,9	10,8
Art and Design	71,9	4,8	53,5	11,3
Linguistic	72,6	14,7	46,7	10,4
Political-Social and Communication	73,1	3,9	53,2	15,1
Sports Science	73,6	3,8	55,7	14,2
Medical-Health and Pharmaceutical	74,3	15,3	56,2	2,2
Economics	74,8	1,5	61,5	11,6
Scientific	75,5	16,4	54,5	3,3
Psychological	76,2	1,8	63,1	10
Agricultural-Forestry and Veterinary	76,7	2,8	66,7	6,7
Education and Training	77,4	2,2	70,8	2,9
Law	78,2	2,1	64,4	11
Computer Science and ICT Technologies	96,6	-	82,8	13,8

1.1.5. How many students do complete internships in NGOs/CSOs?

There is no specific data on the number of students who complete internships in NGOs or civil society organisations.

When registering to establish an internship agreement with UNIPA, organisations are requested to provide their sector of economic activity, while NGO/CSO represent a type of entity rather than a specific sector. NGO/CSO select the sector that best represents their area of work even though this does not fully reflect their legal stats. They might fall under "recreational and cultural services", "business services/consulting", or "education, training, research and development", depending on their

specific activities. Ideally, there should be a separate category for NGO/CSO, or these organisations should have the option to register under a more general label such as "Nonprofit," "Third Sector," or "Social and Civil Organisations."

1.2. Preparation. Before the internship

1.2.1. What are the requirements for students to access internships?

Requirements to access to curricular internships

Before starting the internship, students must meet the minimum academic requirements. These criteria are essential to confirm that students have acquired the foundational knowledge necessary to successfully engage in the practical activities of the internship. Without this basic preparation, it would be challenging to develop the operational skills aligned with the internship's learning objectives, even within dynamic and stimulating work environments.

At UNIPA, the general requirements for students to access curricular internships are determined by the relevant Academic Boards and vary based on the degree programme:

- **For Bachelor's Degree (*Laurea*) students:**
  - Enrolment in the third year of the program.
  - Completion of at least 80 ECTS earned in the academic years prior to the internship year,
    or
  - Completion of at least 60 ECTS from previous years, plus an additional 9 ECTS earned during the academic year of the internship.
- **For Master's Degree (*Laurea Magistrale*) students:**
  - Enrolment in the second year of the program.
  - Completion of at least 40 ECTS completed in the years preceding the internship,
    or
  - Completion of at least 30 ECTS from prior years and an additional 9 ECTS obtained during the internship year.

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To proceed with the internship, UNIPA students can:

- **Browse available internship offers:** Students can explore internship opportunities listed by accredited organisations on the notice board of the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform[3]. These offers provide detailed information on the available position, characteristics of the candidate, and the learning objectives students can achieve through the internship.

- **Search for a specific hosting organisation:** If a student has a particular organisation in mind, they can verify in the system (https://almalaurea.unipa.it/it/lau/lau_aziendeconvenzionate/) whether it has an active agreement with UNIPA. This step ensures that the chosen organisation is eligible to host interns as part of the academic programme.

Despite Almalaurea online platform, approximately 40% of students select their hosting organisation based on personal contacts or informal networks, rather than through Almalaurea.

- **Proceed with internship activation:**
  - **For internship within non-accredited hosting organisations:** If the hosting organisation of their choice is not yet accredited with UNIPA, the student must persuade the organisation to initiate the accreditation process before moving forward. This usually involve contacting the relevant department or office in the organisation to promote and then check on the accreditation procedure. The accreditation process typically takes around 3 to 4 weeks, depending on administrative procedures and how quickly the required documents are submitted.

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[3] The AlmaLaurea Platform (https://www.almalaurea.it/) enables university Placement Office to register organisations and companies and to carry out intermediation and support activities in the selection of the professional profiles they are looking for. Through the Platform, organisations and companies can register, accredit themselves and access the University's CV database of graduates and the University to comply with regulations. In addition, the platform provides the university staff with reporting tools to support all activities managed.

o **For internship within accredited hosting organisations:** If the chosen hosting organisation is already accredited within UNIPA, the student can follow the standard internship activation process.

UNIPA has established the following procedure for students to activate their internships:

- **Access the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform:** The entire management process of the curricular internship is handled through an online procedure available which can be accessed via the student's Personal Portal on https://studenti.unipa.it/

- **Find a university tutor:** After registration, the student must independently choose their university tutor from the faculty members of their department. The choice is made based on several informal criteria and practical considerations. These include alignment between the professor's expertise and the internship topic, previous positive academic interactions, and the professor's reputation for being easy and quickly accessible. As for the choice of the internship experience, peer recommendations play a significant role.

- **Development of a Training Project *(progetto formativo)*:** Student and the hosting organisation agree on a detailed plan for the internships outlining the internship's objectives, activities, weekly hours and duration according to the required hours established by the student's study program. The hosting organisation registers the student on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform.

- **Validation of the training project**: The university tutor is formally required to review and approve the internship training project via the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform. But in practice their involvement is often limited. In many cases, as the project is prepared by the student and the hosting organisation, the university tutor provides formal approval only, without a thorough review.

- **Activation:** The internship is formally activated through the university's administrative processes, ensuring official recognition and support.

While official guidelines state that the training project (*progetto formativo*) should be jointly developed by the university tutor and the hosting organisation's supervisor, in practice it is usually prepared by the student in collaboration with the hosting organisation (see [Internship activation process](#)). The university tutor's role is often limited to providing formal approval rather than actively contributing to the project design.

The Training Project outlines the essential elements required to structure and manage an internship, ensuring academic alignment and legal compliance:

- **Internship overview**: Includes the type (curricular/extracurricular), location, start and end dates, total duration, hours, weekly schedule, and credits (if curricular).

- **Intern's personal and academic information**: Covers personal details (name, birth data, contacts, tax code) and academic background (degree type, course of study, department, academic year, and earned credits).

- **Hosting organisation details**: Contains hosting organisation information (name, VAT number, legal status, contact details) and specifics about the internship site (location, number of interns/employees, and safety contacts).

- **Supervision structure:** Identifies both the university tutor and the hosting organisation mentor (from the hosting organisation), who are responsible for supporting the intern.

- **Objectives and activities:** Defines the internship objectives, focusing on developing basic skills, professional skills (field-specific), and soft skills, along with the description of planned activities.

Before the internship

•Register on AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform using university credentials
•Choose an Internship Option
•Choose a university tutor from student's department

Develop the Training project

•Create training project on AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform
•Print, sign, and have hosting organisation mentor sign/stamp
•Upload signed document for administrative approval

Approval process and activation

•Initial status: "APPROVED NON-ACTIVE"
•Final status: "ACTIVE" (internship officially starts)

During the Internship

•Follow the approved schedule
•Maintain a daily attendance register (signed by hosting organisation mentor)

End of Internship

•Complete evaluation forms (student & hosting organisation mentor)
•Upload attendance register & final report
•Register for ECTS credit validation (if curricular)

Figure 1 - Curricular internships activation procedure for UNIPA students

1.2.2. How does UNIPA collaborate with hosting organisations to start the internship?

Prospective hosting organisations must undergo an **accreditation process** to establish a formal partnership agreement (*convenzione*) with UNIPA and host curricular or extracurricular internships. This process involves registering on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform (https://almalaurea.unipa.it/it/aziende/registrazione/) and submitting organisation's relevant information and documentation, such as hosting organisation description, sector, number of employees, the legal representative's identification and, for private entities, self-certification of registration with relevant bodies (e.g., Chamber of Commerce for companies, professional orders for freelancers, or appropriate registers for

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associations and non-profits). Upon verification by the UNIPA Placement Office of the completeness of the data entered, a formal agreement is signed between UNIPA and the hosting organisation, outlining the terms and conditions of the internship. This process typically takes around 3 to 4 weeks, depending on administrative procedures and how quickly the required documents are submitted.

Registration to the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform
•Fill in the registration form
•The organisation receive access credentials

Access to the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform

Activation of an Internship Agreement
•Request internship agreement activation
•Fill out the agreement form

Finalisation and submission
•Wait for UNIPA verification
•Upon approval, submit signed documents via verified mail
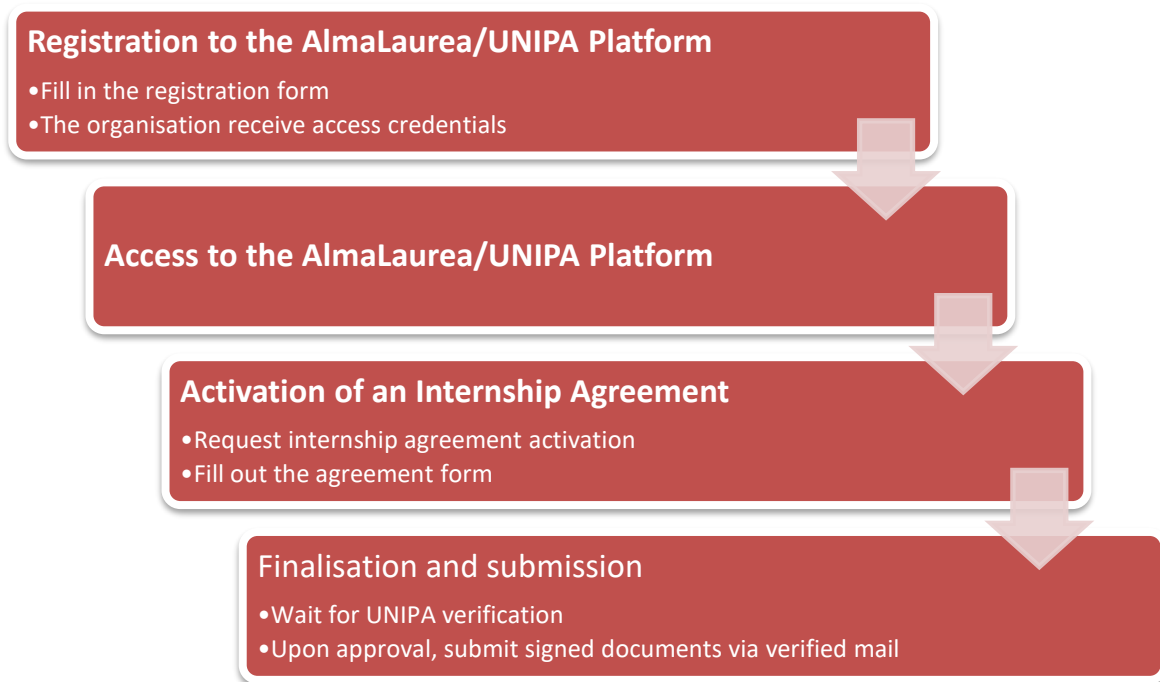
Figure 2 - Procedure for establishing an agreement with UNIPA for curricular or extracurricular internships

Once the hosting organisation has an active internship agreement, there are two main ways to find interns:

▪ **Publishing an internship offer** – The hosting organisation can post an internship opportunity on the platform, specifying the role, requirements, and other details. Students can then apply directly through AlmaLaurea/UNIPA. It is not mandatory for organisations to publish an offer on AlmaLaurea/UNIPA to recruit interns from UNIPA.

▪ **Receiving direct applications** – Students who are interested in a specific organisation can reach out directly and apply for an internship, even if no offer is published on AlmaLaurea/UNIPA. In this case, the organisation can evaluate the application and agree to perform the necessary administrative steps to

formalise the internship. However, the organisation <u>must be registered</u> on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform to establish an internship agreement and for the student to perform their curricular internship there.

1.2.3. How does UNIPA ensure that hosting organisations are prepared to welcome and support interns?

UNIPA defines clear criteria and responsibilities for the hosting organisation mentor, who plays a central role in guiding the intern's learning experience:

- **Impartiality and integrity**: The hosting organisation mentor must not have family ties up to the second degree with the intern or be part of an organisation where key figures (legal representative, partner, or manager) have such ties.

- **Professional qualifications**: The mentor must hold an appropriate role within the organisation and possess the necessary skills to guide the intern, ensuring their proper integration and continuous support throughout the internship.

However, control by UNIPA focus on the **documents provided** by the hosting organisations, ensuring compliance with administrative requirements. This bureaucratic control does not extend to evaluating the actual quality of the internship experience or verifying whether the hosting organisations are effectively prepared to support interns.

This means that while internships are formally approved, there is no systematic and standardized monitoring of the training environment, mentoring, or learning opportunities provided by the hosting organisations.

1.3. Implementation. During the internship

1.3.1. What types of support are available for students during the internship?

Currently, the support provided to students during internships at the University of Palermo is primarily administrative in nature. This includes assistance with the formal procedures for activating and managing the internship through the Almalaurea/UNIPA portal, help in understanding how to complete and submit the training project, and general guidance on documentation such as attendance registers and evaluation forms.

However, guidance-based support is largely lacking. There is no formal system in place to ensure that students receive regular academic or professional guidance in choosing their internship or once the internship begins. The role of the university tutor does not extend to active monitoring or coaching throughout the internship experience. Similarly, the hosting organisation mentor may supervise the student's tasks, but the depth and quality of mentorship depend greatly on the individual hosting organisation and are not standardized or coordinated by the university.

1.3.2. What monitoring and evaluation tools are used?

- **Attendance Register:** Students are required to maintain a detailed attendance register throughout their internship. This document records the hours and days worked, providing a transparent account of the student's commitment and involvement. Each entry must be signed by the intern and the hosting organisation's supervisor. The register must include the signature of the university tutor at the bottom of each page. Although guidelines may suggest more frequent involvement, in practice the university tutor signs the register only once, usually at the end of the internship, to confirm completion.

1.4. Evaluation. After the internship

The final stage of the internship process involves a series of steps aimed at validating and officially recording the student's experience. This phase ensures that the internship is recognized for academic credit and that all required documentation has been properly completed and reviewed.

- **Closing the Training Project**: Upon completion of the internship period, students need to mark its completion on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform and upload the Attendance register, the Final report and the validation document signed by the university tutor.

- **Validation by the university tutor, the student and the hosting organisation mentor**: Once the documents are uploaded, the university tutor receive a notification for approval and evaluation. After receiving confirmation from the university tutor, the project must be printed and signed by both the student and the hosting organisation mentor.

- **Closing the Training Project**: Upon completion of the internship period, students need to register its completion on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform and upload the Attendance register, the Final report and the validation document signed by the university tutor.

- **Internship recorded by the Degree Program Coordinator**: To officially register the internship, the student must book the first available session. Each exam period includes a dedicated session for internship recording. All available sessions can be used for this process. The internship will be recorded by the Degree Program Coordinator, not by the university tutor.

1.4.1. What services are available to help students reflect on their internship experience?

At present, there are no structured career guidance services systematically integrated into the internship system. While the C.O.T. – *Centro di Orientamento e Tutorato* (transl. Centre for Guidance and Tutoring) and some departments may offer occasional seminars, workshops, or meetings focused on employability or career planning, these are not coordinated with the internship process, nor are they offered as a standard part of the post-internship experience.

As a result, students often complete their internships without any formal moment of reflection supported by university staff or tutors, apart the self-assessment questionnaire they fill online and the report they produce. There is no structured opportunity to analyse with a professional how the internship contributed to their personal growth, academic development, or professional aspirations. This gap limits the potential for students to connect their practical experiences with long-term career planning or further educational goals.

1.4.2. How are internships evaluated by students (e.g., satisfaction surveys, feedback)?

- **Final Evaluation Questionnaires:** Upon completion of the internship, the system will automatically send an Evaluation Questionnaire to both the intern

and the hosting organisation mentor. These questionnaires must be completed mandatorily.

- o **Student's evaluation***:* This self-assessment allows interns to reflect on their experiences, providing insights into the effectiveness of the internship opportunity from the student's perspective. It includes a series of structured questions aimed at assessing the overall quality of the internship experience from the student's perspective. It gathers information on how effectively the internship met its training objectives, the relevance and clarity of assigned tasks, the development of professional and soft skills, and the support provided by the hosting organisation. Students are also asked to evaluate the adequacy of the internship's duration and workload, the level of supervision received, and the compliance with health and safety regulations.

- ▪ **Final Internship Report:** Students are required to submit a comprehensive final report at the end of their internship. This document encapsulates the activities undertaken, challenges faced, and learning outcomes achieved during the internship. It serves as a reflective piece, enabling students to articulate their practical experiences in relation to their academic knowledge.

1.4.3. How are internships evaluated by hosting organisations (e.g., satisfaction surveys, feedback)?

Internship evaluation practices vary significantly from one hosting organisation to another, as there is no standardized procedure or mandatory evaluation framework imposed by UNIPA. Each hosting organisation or institution is free to adopt its own internal methods for assessing the intern's performance – some may conduct informal feedback sessions, others may use internal forms or checklists, while some may not provide structured feedback at all.

The only required action is the completion of the final online questionnaire automatically provided by the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform at the end of the internship. However, beyond this administrative step, there is no obligation for hosting organisations to provide additional feedback or

engage in a more comprehensive evaluation process. This leads to variability in the quality and depth of feedback received by students.

- **Final Internship Report:** Students are required to submit a comprehensive final report at the end of their internship. This document encapsulates the activities undertaken, challenges faced, and learning outcomes achieved during the internship. It serves as a reflective piece, enabling students to articulate their practical experiences in relation to their academic knowledge.

- **Final Evaluation Questionnaires:** Upon completion of the internship, the system will automatically send an Evaluation Questionnaire to both the intern and the hosting organisation mentor. These questionnaires must be completed mandatorily.
  - **Hosting Organisation's Evaluation**: The hosting organisation plays a crucial role in the evaluation process by providing feedback on the student's performance and the overall quality of the internship experience. It evaluates key aspects such as the achievement of the training objectives, the quality of collaboration with the university tutor, and the intern's effectiveness in carrying out assigned tasks. The questionnaire also focuses on the development of specific soft skills (e.g. communication, teamwork, time management, autonomy, responsibility, and problem-solving). Additional questions explore the intern's integration into the hosting organisation, their readiness for employment, the adequacy of the university's academic preparation, and the potential for future hiring.

1.4.4. What metrics are used to measure the success of internships?

UNIPA considers the only metric for measuring success to be **whether the intern receives a job offer** from the hosting organisation. However, no specific statistics on the percentage of UNIPA students receiving job offers from their internship hosting organisations are available at UNIPA.

In 2023, UNIPA administered a short online questionnaire to the 11,441 accredited organisations in order detect any staff placements in 2023. Only 554 (4,84%) organisations responded, most of which used the AlmaLaurea service of searching and downloading graduates' CVs and publishing

advertisements on the Platform. From the contents of the answers, it could be seen that only 12.6% (nearly 70) of the respondents had placed one or more young graduates at their facilities or had a selection process under way.[4]

1.4.5. Are there any data on disparities in outcomes among different faculties or departments?

Specific data on disparities in outcomes among different faculties or departments is not available.

1.4.6. What types of certification or recognition are offered to students who complete the internship?

At UNIPA, students who complete internships receive formal recognition through the awarding of CFU - *Crediti Formativi Universitari* (tr. University Educational Credits)[5]. Internships are integrated into the curriculum as compulsory activities, contributing to the total number of credits required for graduation. The allocation of CFU depends on the specific degree program and the duration of the internship.

1.5. Impact

1.5.1. Are there statistics showing a correlation between internship participation and employability?

No specific statistics correlating internship participation to employability are available at UNIPA.

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[4] Sorce: Relazione Annuale del Nucleo di Valutazione, 30 Ottobre 2024, https://www.unipa.it/ateneo/nucleodivalutazione/.content/documenti_Attivita_relazioni_annuali/Relazione-Annuale-del-Nucleo-di-Valutazione---Anno-2024---Approvata-il-30-10-2024.pdf

[5] The CFU (*Crediti Formativi Universitari*) is directly aligned with the ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System), which is used across the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to standardize academic credits and support student mobility. It is the unit of measurement used in the Italian university system to quantify the workload required for courses, exams, or other academic activities. 1 CFU equals approximately 25 hours of total work, including: Lectures, Individual study, and Labs, workshops, or internships. A full academic year typically consists of 60 CFU, spread across mandatory and elective courses, as well as other academic activities.

1.5.2. What percentage of students receive job offers from the organisations where they completed their internship?

No specific statistics on the percentage of UNIPA students receiving job offers from their internship hosting organisations are available at UNIPA.

2. Focus on: Disability, Special Educational Needs, and other Special Needs

In the context of this Report, **accessibility** refers to the design of inclusive policies and support mechanisms that **enable all students** – regardless of disability, Special Educational Needs, socioeconomic status, faculty of origin, migration background, or other factors – to participate fully and equitably in internships opportunities.

2.1. What are the statistics on internship participation by students with disabilities? Are there data on the participation of students from underrepresented groups? How are internships distributed across different categories of students (e.g., by faculty, socioeconomic background)?

In the 2023/2024 academic year, 563 students received tuition fee exemptions due to recognition of disability under Article 3, paragraphs 1 and 3, of Law No. 104 of February 5, 1992[6], or had a disability or invalidity degree of 66% or higher[7]. However, this number does not match the

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[6] Law No. 104/1992 is the main Italian law on the assistance, social integration, and rights of persons with disabilities. Article 3 provides definitions of disability:
- Paragraph 1: Defines a **person with a disability** as someone with a **physical, mental, or sensory impairment** that is **stable or progressive** and causes **difficulty in learning, working, or social integration**. These individuals have the right to benefit from support and protections.
- Paragraph 3: Refers to cases of **"severe disability"** (it.: "*handicap in situazione di gravità*"). This indicates **serious impairment** requiring **permanent, comprehensive, and ongoing support**. People under this classification have access to additional rights (e.g., priority in services, job protections, caregiver leave, etc.).

[7] In Italy, a disability or invalidity degree of 66% or higher is a benchmark used by public institutions to determine eligibility for benefits and accommodations.

number of students who requested services (148 with disability, 223 with neurodiversity).

No specific data on internship participation by students with disabilities, neurodiversity, specific learning disorders or other underrepresented groups (e.g., first-generation students, students with migrant backgrounds). was provided.

2.2. What services exist to support students with disabilities and other special needs during the internship?

On November 11, 2024, University Decree No. 11934 established the "*Service Charter for Students with Disabilities and Neurodiversity*". This document outlines the services provided by the University to students with disabilities and neurodiversity[8] enrolled in undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs at UNIPA. The Charter aims to ensure full inclusion and accessibility throughout the academic path – from admission to transition into the labour market.

Among the services the Charter provides, two specifically relate to internships:

- Personal assistance service, which provides support both within university premises and in external settings during academic activities, including internships.

- Transportation Service, which facilitates participation in university-related activities by offering mobility support.

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[8] To access the services outlined in the Charter, students must have valid documentation of disability or neurodiversity, such as a certificate of disability or a diagnosis of specific learning disorders (SLD) from the National Health Service or accredited professionals. The documentation should be current, typically issued within the last three years or after the student's 18th birthday.

These services facilitate access to internships for people with Disabilities and Neurodiversity.

However, UNIPA does not appear to have clear, specific, structured measures in place to provide ongoing support during the internship period itself. Across the institutional documentation reviewed, including the Service Charter and related regulations, there are no detailed provisions describing how support is operationalized during the actual internship experience.

In 2022, UNIPA also launched a targeted initiative offering 75 students and graduates with disabilities or specific learning disorders access to individual career counselling - to enhance their career prospects and enter the job market with confidence. Participants received up to 10 hours of personalised support from specialised career consultant to build customised employment plans tailored to their specific needs and career goals and improve their entry into the job market.

Though this initiative was publicly announced, there is no follow-up data available regarding its outcomes or implementation – no impact assessment, feedback, or results have been published.

2.3. How does UNIPA ensure internships are accessible to all students?

At present, UNIPA offers some mechanisms that **contribute to accessibility** in a general sense:

- **Integration into the curriculum**: Internships are embedded in academic programmes and are mandatory for all students. They are credit-bearing and students have the flexibility to choose when to complete them within the timeframe established by their department.

- **Diverse hosting institutions**: UNIPA recognises a broad range of organisations as eligible hosts, including public bodies, NGOs, private

companies, and cooperatives. This flexibility increases the diversity and availability of internship opportunities across different sectors.

- **Limited financial support**: Some funding is available for students who undertake internships, though access is limited and not guaranteed to all.

- **Legal accommodations for students with disabilities**: In accordance with national legislation, students with disabilities are entitled to specific accommodations (see [What services exist to support students with disabilities and other special needs during the internship?](#))

However, important gaps remain in ensuring full accessibility for all students.

- The formal agreements with hosting organisations do not include any explicit references to accessibility. While they aim to support students' career choices through hands-on experience, they lack concrete provisions to guarantee equal access for students with disabilities or other specific needs.

- These agreements require interns to comply with workplace safety and hygiene regulations but do not mandate any environmental or technological adjustments – such as barrier-free access or assistive technologies.

- UNIPA does not explicitly address structural or systemic barriers that may affect the participation of students with migrants, first-generation university students, or refugees.

- No monitoring mechanisms are in place to evaluate whether all student groups are effectively accessing quality internship opportunities.

- Hosting organisations do not receive training or guidance from UNIPA on how to create inclusive and supportive environments for interns from diverse backgrounds.

In conclusion, while UNIPA provides some foundational mechanisms that support general access to internships, it lacks a strategic and inclusive approach to accessibility, and does not currently ensure that all students – particularly those from underrepresented groups – can participate equally in these opportunities.

2.4. What adaptations or additional support are available for specific student categories?

Within the current framework at UNIPA, it appears there are no structured or targeted adaptations in place to support specific student categories (such as first-generation students, students from low-income backgrounds, working students, caregivers, international students, or members of underrepresented communities) in relation to either access to internships or internship guidance services.

Regarding access to internships, all students use the same process through the Almalaurea/UNIPA platform, with no differentiated paths, priority systems, or reserved placements for students who may face structural or socio-economic barriers. Also, if not mentioned in the internship offer, it is up to the student to negotiate with the hosting organisation any flexibility in scheduling, or dedicated internship formats (e.g., part-time, remote).

General career guidance services at UNIPA are not specifically adapted to diverse student needs. There are no dedicated orientation sessions, mentoring programs, or advisory services designed to support vulnerable or non-traditional students in navigating the internship search, selecting appropriate opportunities, or preparing for entry into the professional world.

2.5. How does UNIPA ensure that hosting organisations are prepared to welcome and support interns with disabilities and other special needs?

As of now, UNIPA does not have a formal, structured system in place to ensure that hosting organisations are adequately prepared to welcome and support interns with disabilities or other special needs. While the university has established a general framework for inclusion through the "Service Charter for Students with Disabilities and Neurodiversity" (Decree No. 11934/2024), this document primarily addresses support within the university context (e.g., assistance on campus, transportation, administrative support) and does not include clear operational guidelines or mandatory standards for external organisations hosting interns.

UNIPA does not provide specific training, tools, or orientation sessions for hosting organisation mentors or hosting organisations on how to accommodate students with special needs in the workplace. There is also no requirement for hosting institutions to demonstrate accessibility, provide reasonable accommodations, or designate inclusive mentorship practices before accepting interns.

In practice, support relies on case-by-case arrangements, often informal and dependent on the initiative of individuals. Moreover, no monitoring mechanisms or evaluation procedures are in place to assess how well hosting organisations meet inclusion and accessibility criteria during the internship period.

3. Description of existing services and planning, monitoring, and evaluation tools

At UNIPA, career counsellors work at the C.O.T. – *Centro di Orientamento e Tutorato* (transl. Centre for Guidance and Tutoring), where they are primarily responsible for managing orientation activities targeted at prospective and newly enrolled students: guidance related to academic pathways, admission procedures, and the overall transition into university life.

The institution does not currently have dedicated counsellors or structured support services specifically focused on internship orientation. The main tool used to identify potential hosting organisations is the Almalaurea/UNIPA platform (see [How to find an internship](#)). Students receive no guidance in choosing their internship, apart from the bureaucratic processes assistance typically provided by administrative offices.

This highlights a gap in structured support for students in making strategic and informed choices about their internship experiences, and suggests the need for more proactive and personalised counselling services in this area.

3.1. What resources does UNIPA currently use to support career counsellors?

In the most recent planning documents addressing human resources professional training (namely the P.I.A.O. – Integrated Plan of Activities and Organisation 2025–2027 and the 2022 annual and 3-year Staff Training Plan for Technical and Administrative Personnel) there is no clear indication of specific training or professional development initiatives targeting the C.O.T. and/or the Placement Office staff in relation to the core competencies required for their roles. This suggests that, at present, the professional

development of career counsellors may not be systematically addressed within the broader institutional training strategies.

3.2. What preparation materials (e.g., workshops, guides, apps) are used for student internship preparation?

At UNIPA, the materials and processes available for student internship preparation are predominantly administrative in nature. The primary resources include:

- University Regulations: UNIPA has established its own regulations on internships, as outlined in D.R. no. 708/2017[9]. Additionally, specific internship regulations are adopted by the university's Departments and Courses of Study.

- Online guidelines: Instructions and guides are available on the UNIPA curricular internships webpage and on the pages dedicated to internships and placements of individual departments.

However, these resources focus more on administrative procedures, such as the accreditation of hosting organisations, rather than on providing comprehensive career guidance to students.

Also, navigating the internship process is confusing for students due to the existence of multiple webpages on the UNIPA site about internships, each containing different content. Even the main curricular internships page is not entirely helpful, as it emphasizes the accreditation of companies over student-focused information. As a result, students often turn to informal sources, such as student associations, for guidance and support in securing internships.

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[9]   https://www.unipa.it/dipartimenti/dems/.content/documenti/placement/tirocini/Regolamento-tirocini-di-Ateneo.pdf

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3.3.   Are there examples of best practices or innovative tools UNIPA can share?

One positive practice recently introduced at UNIPA is an internship reimbursement scheme for students enrolled in specific Master degree programmes. This initiative supports students who complete internships between January and June 2025 by partially covering their expenses, provided certain academic and procedural requirements are met. While not a digital or pedagogical innovation per se, this measure represents an important step towards reducing financial barriers to internship participation.

However, this reimbursement is limited to specific eligibility criteria, and excludes internships conducted remotely or within UNIPA itself.

3.4.   Which workshops, methods, or materials have been particularly effective?

Previously, UNIPA implemented several initiatives aimed at supporting students in their transition to the job market. These included:

- **Workshops on personnel selection** – Practical training sessions featuring simulations and exercises on job search strategies, cv writing, and job interview techniques. A strong emphasis was placed on soft skills development, including effective communication and both individual and group interview management.

- **Career counselling** – One-on-one meetings designed to help students develop a career plan aligned with their education, skills, abilities, interests, and the evolving job market.

However, no data is available on the actual impact or effectiveness of these initiatives.

4. Strengths and weaknesses of the current system

4.1. Strengths

4.1.1. What are the strengths of the current internship system?

The internship system at the University of Palermo presents several structural strengths that help ensure basic accessibility and formal recognition of students' internship experiences. These include:

- **Institutional integration**: Curricular internships are formally embedded within all study programmes as compulsory, credit-bearing activities. This ensures that every student must complete an internship as part of their academic pathway, reinforcing its value for personal and professional development.

- **Clear eligibility criteria:** Academic requirements for internship access are clearly defined by degree type (Bachelor or Master), helping ensure that students have acquired a minimum level of preparation before engaging in professional contexts.

- **Standardised administrative procedures** and **Digital management system:** The use of the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform provides a centralised system for managing internship-related processes, including agreement registration, training project development, documentation upload, and final validation. This contributes to procedural transparency and consistency across departments. The platform enables efficient tracking of documents, training projects, and evaluations facilitating institutional oversight.

- **Flexibility in internship selection** and **hosting institution types**: Students can either apply for internships published on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA Platform or proactively contact organisations of their choice. A wide range of organisations (including public bodies, private enterprises, cooperatives, and NGOs) are eligible to host UNIPA interns, offering students the opportunity to explore diverse sectors.

- **Formalisation of training objectives**: Through the required Training Project, internships are aligned with specific learning goals, including the development of basic, professional, and soft skills. This formal structure supports the pedagogical function of the internship and clarifies expectations for all parties involved.

- **Mandatory evaluation by hosting organisations and students:** At the conclusion of each internship, both students and hosting organisations are required to complete structured evaluation questionnaires. This practice ensures that at least a minimum level of feedback is collected systematically.

4.1.2. Are there examples of best practices UNIPA can share?

Internship reimbursement scheme: in 2025, UNIPA has introduced a partial reimbursement scheme for internships completed between January and June by students enrolled in selected Master's degree programmes. This financial support aims to reduce economic barriers and promote broader participation in internships.

4.1.3. What elements of the current system work well, and why?

UNIPA expressed satisfaction with the use of the AlmaLaurea platform, which is used to manage the entire lifecycle of hosting organisations accreditations and internship agreements and training projects. The digitalisation of these procedures has improved administrative efficiency, simplified bureaucratic processes, and reduced the workload for university staff. However, this reliance on AlmaLaurea seems primarily driven by goals of internal optimisation and delegation of administrative tasks, rather than by a clear strategy to enhance student development or provide direct support services. At present, the platform is not integrated with personalised guidance or active support tools that could improve students' internship experience and promote more inclusive access to available opportunities.

4.2. Weaknesses and challenges

4.2.1. Where are the main gaps or weaknesses in the current internship system? What malfunctions have been observed?

The internship system at UNIPA suffers from several important weaknesses that limit its educational value, inclusiveness, and relevance to students' professional development. The most critical gaps include:

- **Lack of structured academic and career guidance:** *S*tudents do not receive personalised support in choosing internships aligned with their academic goals or career interests. The role of the university tutor is often limited to formal approval of the training project, without active mentoring or engagement during the internship. There is no integrated career guidance throughout the internship cycle or dedicated support for post-internship reflection and planning.

- **Overemphasis on administrative compliance rather than learning quality:** The UNIPA/AlmaLaurea portal facilitates the administrative workflow, but not the quality of the learning experience. The internship process is focused on the fulfilment of required hours and documentation, with no mechanisms to evaluate whether students are developing relevant skills or gaining meaningful work experience. Mentoring and reflective learning are not structurally integrated into the internship framework.

- **Internship completion is treated as a formality:** The only guaranteed success metric is the fulfilment of required hours, regardless of the quality of supervision, relevance of tasks, or achievement of learning outcomes. Thus, internships are often perceived by students as a bureaucratic requirement, rather than as a formative step in their academic and professional development.

- **Limited or absent quality control mechanisms**: There is no standardised monitoring of the learning environment, quality of tasks, or mentorship at hosting organisations. There are no quality standards or training requirements for hosting organisations' mentors, leading to highly variable supervision experiences. More important, hosting organisations are not evaluated or

monitored on their capacity to deliver meaningful learning activities: UNIPA does not conduct site visits or structured feedback loops to assess whether internships are educationally valuable or inclusive. There is no safeguard against students being assigned routine or menial tasks disconnected from their academic pathway.

- **Operational inefficiencies:** Students often struggle to find clear, centralised information on internship procedures due to the fragmentation and inconsistency of content across different university webpages.

- **Limited inclusivity and accessibility**: There are no targeted support measures for underrepresented groups such as low-income students, working students, or international students. Formal internship agreements do not include any clauses on accessibility, and UNIPA does not provide training to hosting organisations on how to accommodate students with disabilities or specific needs. Internships are typically unpaid, which may exacerbate challenges for students who cannot afford to work without compensation and must balance internships with part-time jobs.

- **Weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms**: Post-internship reflection is limited to the completion of an online questionnaire and final report, with no integration into career counselling services. There are no dedicated services to support students' transition from internships to employment. Outcome tracking is minimal: there are no reliable statistics on skill development,

- **Low engagement of hosting organisations**: Many organisations registered on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform remain inactive and do not offer internship placements. A 2023 survey sent to 11,441 hosting organisations had a response rate of just 4.84%, showing limited engagement and poor feedback integration.

4.2.2. What challenges do students face during their internships?

During their internship experiences, students at UNIPA encounter a range of challenges that reflect both structural weaknesses in the system and inconsistencies in the quality of support and supervision across hosting organisations. These challenges include:

- **Organisational and logistical issues at hosting organisations**: According to data from 2023 student evaluation questionnaires, the most frequently reported problem was organisational (6.23%). Other notable difficulties included insufficient physical space to work effectively (4.49%), poor communication (3.92%), and underutilisation of the student's role (3.79%). In 2.56% of cases, students also reported a lack of engagement or interest from the hosting organisation mentor. While these percentages may appear modest, they point to recurring weaknesses in the quality and consistency of the internship experience.

- **Limited access to tools and resources**: Some students (5%) noted a lack of access to essential materials, such as computers, technical equipment, workstations, or books – limiting their ability to perform tasks meaningfully and independently.

- **Time-related pressures**: The process for signing internship agreements can be lengthy and bureaucratic, with delays of 3-4 weeks or more. This adds uncertainty to the internship planning process as it hinders timely access to internships and can affect students' academic progression. These delays may also discourage hosting organisations from participating in the internship system.

- **Lack of meaningful involvement and guidance**: In several cases, students reported being assigned routine or low-value tasks, receiving little supervision or feedback. This contributes to the general perception of the internship as administrative fulfilment rather than a formative experience, disconnected from both academic preparation and career development.

4.2.3. Have there been cases where internships did not meet students' expectations? If so, why?

Several cases have been reported in which internships did not meet students' expectations. Although the majority of students evaluated their hosting organisations positively, a non-negligible share (just under 5%) expressed dissatisfaction in their final evaluation questionnaires.

The reasons most frequently cited for dissatisfaction include:

- **Limited access to essential tools and resources:** Students reported that they were unable to access basic work equipment, such as computers, dedicated workstations, technical materials, or books. This lack of resources hindered their ability to participate meaningfully in assigned tasks and contributed to a sense of marginalisation within the workplace.

- **Low quality of supervision and engagement:** In some cases, students experienced minimal involvement from the hosting organisation mentor or other staff members. A lack of clear guidance or mentorship resulted in interns being left without direction or feedback, reducing the educational value of the experience.

- **Underutilisation and routine tasks:** Several students described being assigned repetitive or low-skill tasks unrelated to their field of study or learning goals. As a result, they felt that the internship did not contribute to their personal or professional development.

4.2.4. How can UNIPA improve support for students during their internships?

UNIPA identified "monitoring by the university tutor" as the main way to support students during their internships. However, while oversight is important, the role of academic staff is not designed to cover student support during internships: expecting academic staff to take on additional responsibilities such as career guidance, conflict resolution, or skills mentoring, goes beyond their current mandate and training. Currently, the university tutor's involvement is limited to approving and signing the internship agreement, with no engagement in follow-up or problem-solving during the internship itself.

5. Quality in Internship Management: defining NECESSARY tools and services to support students, coordinators, and mentors in hosting organisations before, during, and after the internship

5.1. Preparation. Before the internship

5.1.1. What services would be useful to prepare students for internships?

To effectively prepare students for internships, UNIPA should implement a **multilevel support model** combining individualised counselling, structured training, and clear information channels. Recommended services include:

- **Establishing trained internship counsellors (better if at department level)**, with clear tasks such as:
    - Helping students define personal and professional goals.
    - Advising on suitable hosting organisations and opportunities.
    - Supporting students in drafting their Training Project.
    - Guiding students through the administrative process on the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA portal.

- **Integration with career services**, so that pre-internship preparation also supports long-term career planning.

- **Pre-internship orientation workshops** to cover:
    - Expectations and responsibilities during the internship.
    - How to get the most out of the experience.

- Practical tools: communication, time management, goal setting.
- **Development of online resources**, including:
    - Interactive tutorials on navigating the AlmaLaurea platform.
    - Testimonials from former interns and mentors.
    - FAQs and checklists.
- **Targeted support for vulnerable students**, e.g., first-generation students, those with disabilities, international or working students – who may need specific guidance or adapted internship formats.

5.1.2. How can career counsellors better help students in finding and preparing for internships?

UNIPA acknowledges a major gap: the absence of counsellors for curricular internships. To address this, the university should define a clear professional role for internship-oriented career counsellors, with a proactive approach that supports students before, during, and after the internship. Their presence would not only improve individual internship experiences but also increase the strategic value of internships as stepping-stones into the labour market.

Career counsellors could better support students in the following ways:

- **Personalised guidance and matching:**
    - Help students identify internships aligned with their academic specialisation, competencies, and professional goals.
    - Support students in assessing compatibility between hosting organisation profiles and personal expectations.
    - Assist with the decision-making process (e.g., comparing multiple offers or pathways).
- **Practical preparation for application and onboarding:**
    - Help students prepare CVs, motivational letters, and elevator pitches tailored to internship contexts.
    - Organise workshops or mock interviews for competitive placements.

- o Coach students on workplace behaviours, communication, and soft skills before starting their internship.

- **Navigating challenges and risks:**
  - o Provide early advice on identifying low-quality or exploitative internship offers.
  - o Offer guidance on how to address difficulties (e.g., underuse, poor mentoring, mismatch of expectations).

- **Targeted support for disadvantaged students:**
  - o Offer adapted internship search strategies for students with limited networks or availability (e.g., caregivers, working students, students with disabilities, international students).
  - o Promote inclusive access to opportunities and help students articulate reasonable accommodation needs with hosting organisations.

- **Connecting internship to career development:**
  - o Encourage students to reflect on what they want to learn during the internship.
  - o Help define internship objectives that support future employability.
  - o Provide post-internship sessions to connect experiences to job search strategies or further study.

5.1.3. What preparation materials (e.g., workshops, guides, apps) would be useful?

While UNIPA rightly recognises the need for better student support in navigating AlmaLaurea, this should be part of a broader set of preparation materials and tools. To prepare students effectively, UNIPA should develop a comprehensive toolkit that includes both technical guidance and training on soft skills, expectations, and career relevance. Recommended materials include:

Technical and procedural tools

- **Step-by-step guides and video tutorials on how to:**
  - o Use the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform.

- - Search and compare internship offers.
  - Understand the Training Project structure.
  - Complete required documents and submissions.
- **Interactive FAQ and chatbot support** to reduce confusion about steps, deadlines, and procedures.

Orientation and decision-making support

- **Self-assessment quizzes** to help students:
  - Identify professional interests.
  - Clarify expectations from the internship.
  - Choose a sector or activity aligned with their goals.

Pedagogical and professional preparation

- **Workshops or online modules** covering:
  - Workplace behaviour and expectations.
  - Communication, teamwork, and time management.
  - Setting learning goals and managing supervision.
- **Peer-led video testimonials** from past interns and hosting organisation mentors.
- **Tutorials on how to reflect and report on internship experiences** (for use during and after the placement).

5.2. Implementation. During the internship

5.2.1. What types of support should be available for students during the internship?

UNIPA indicates that students are supported by both an university tutor and a departmental internship coordinator during their internship. While these roles are formally assigned, in practice their capacity to provide real-time, meaningful support is limited. Their involvement often does not go beyond signing documents or handling basic administrative tasks.

These figures typically lack both the time and the specific training needed to manage the relational or logistical issues that may arise between students and hosting organisations. As a result, students may find themselves without effective guidance or problem-solving support during critical moments of their internship.

To effectively support students during their internships, UNIPA should move from a minimal compliance-based model to a mentoring and development-oriented model. Recommended types of support include:

University supervision

- **Clear definition and training for the role of university tutor**, including:
  - Regular check-ins with students (midpoint and end).
  - Availability to respond to academic or procedural doubts.
  - Guidance in aligning internship tasks with study programme outcomes.

On-site supervision and engagement

- **Hosting organisation mentors** should be encouraged (or formally required) to:
  - Conduct onboarding sessions.
  - Offer feedback meetings at least once every 2–3 weeks.
  - Clearly define tasks and expected learning outcomes.
- UNIPA could provide **a short guide or training video** to help hosting organisation mentors understand their educational role.

Centralised student helpdesk

- A **dedicated internship helpdesk** (email/chat or hybrid) could provide:
  - Guidance on who to contact for various issues.
  - Support with urgent conflicts or breakdowns in supervision.
  - Escalation procedures if internships are not aligned with expectations.

Ongoing feedback tools

- **Short interim reports or reflective journals**, submitted by students midway through the internship, could:
  - Help identify emerging problems early.

- o Offer a structure for feedback from both student and mentor.
- o Encourage active learning and reflection throughout the experience.

Peer support opportunities

- Establish **internship peer communities**, e.g., via student associations' pages or online forums, to allow students to:
  - o Share concerns and tips.
  - o Exchange sector-specific experiences.
  - o Build a sense of connection with other interns.

5.2.2. How can hosting organisation mentors provide better support to interns?

Hosting organisation mentors should go beyond logistical supervision and act as **educational mentors**: they are essential in shaping the quality, relevance, and educational value of the internship. To better support interns, they should be equipped and encouraged to take on an active mentorship role, with the following practices:

Clarify expectations and goals from the start

- Mentors should conduct an **onboarding meeting** to explain:
  - o The intern's role and daily tasks.
  - o The learning objectives and connection to the Training Project.
  - o Workplace norms and communication channels.

Ensure regular feedback and check-ins

- **Midterm review meetings** (at least one during the internship) should be scheduled to:
  - o Assess progress.
  - o Discuss challenges.
  - o Adjust activities if necessary.
- Mentors should be accessible for **ongoing guidance**, not just at the beginning or end of the internship.

Promote a learning environment

- Tasks assigned should reflect the student's level and academic background, allowing gradual development of skills.
- Mentors can enhance learning by:
  - Introducing interns to different units or teams.
  - Encouraging participation in meetings.
  - Providing context for tasks (why it matters, how it fits into hosting organisation processes).

Use structured tools

- UNIPA could provide **a brief "hosting organisation mentor guide",** with:
  - Tips for planning intern activities.
  - Templates for giving feedback.
  - A checklist of supervision tasks.

Support soft skills and autonomy

- Involve the intern in projects that require problem-solving, teamwork, or initiative.
- Encourage interns to set weekly goals and reflect on their development.

5.2.3. What monitoring and evaluation tools could improve the internship experience?

To improve the internship experience through monitoring and evaluation, UNIPA should adopt a **multi-tool evaluation framework** that includes reporting tools, formative feedback loops, and digital systems to track progress and flag issues early.

Mid-term progress reports (submitted via the AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform and visible to the university tutor)

- Required for both intern and hosting organisation mentor around the halfway point of the internship. It could include: tasks completed so far, challenges encountered and level of satisfaction.
- Suggestions for improvement in the remaining period.

Feedback questionnaires at different stages

- Introduce **short satisfaction surveys** at:
  - o 1–2 weeks after the internship starts (to catch early problems).
  - o Midway through the internship.
  - o Final evaluation (already in place).

  These would assess:
  - o Whether the intern is receiving mentorship.
  - o Task alignment with the Training Project.
  - o Perception of inclusion and support.

Digital dashboards and tracking tools

- The AlmaLaurea/UNIPA platform could incorporate:
  - o A progress tracking bar for internship goals.
  - o A system for logging activities weekly (a lighter, digital version of the attendance register).
  - o Automated alerts if no activity or feedback has been submitted after X weeks.

Reflective journals or self-assessment templates

- Encourage students to keep a **reflective log**, which could be submitted at the end along with the final report. Prompts could include: *What was the most challenging task this week? What new skill did I develop? What kind of feedback did I receive?* This fosters active learning and improves the quality of final reporting.

University tutor observation checklist

- University tutors could be given a **checklist** for evaluating hosting organisation support based on:
  - o Communication with the mentor.
  - o Student's description of assigned tasks.
  - o Coherence with the Training Project.

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Even if formal visits are not feasible, this could be done via email or in a short virtual meeting.

5.3. Evaluation. After the internship

5.3.1. What services should be available to help students reflect on their internship experience?

The final questionnaire – while useful as a feedback tool – does not constitute a reflective learning activity. It is completed independently, is not discussed with a tutor or career counsellor, and is not integrated into broader academic or career planning. UNIPA should develop a structured post-internship reflection phase. These activities would allow students to connect their experience to academic development, career planning, and personal growth, significantly increasing the educational value of internships.

Post-internship debriefing sessions

- Small group sessions or individual meetings (in person or online) facilitated by a university tutor and a career counsellor (COT or department-level).
- Topics could include:
    - What was learned: skills, knowledge, professional behaviours.
    - What challenges were faced and how they were managed.
    - How the internship influenced career goals or academic focus.

These sessions would help students **process their experience** and make it more transformative.

Career development follow-up

- Career services could offer:
    - **One-to-one counselling** to analyse how the internship aligns with job market opportunities.
    - Help with **integrating the internship into a CV or portfolio.**
    - Support in leveraging the internship to apply for future roles.

Reflective reports or learning journals

- In addition to the final report, students could complete a **reflection template** including:
  - Key learning outcomes.
  - Tasks they were proud of.
  - Moments of difficulty and personal growth.
  - Next steps in their career or studies.

  This could be used during the validation process by the university tutor to add **qualitative depth** to the internship experience.

Integration with degree programmes

- Reflection could be tied to final thesis preparation or seminar activities, encouraging students to link **theoretical learning with practical experience**.

5.3.2. How can UNIPA improve internship evaluation and feedback?

To strengthen evaluation and feedback, UNIPA should move toward a more **comprehensive, multi-actor, and cyclical evaluation model**, involving students, tutors, and hosting organisations.

Systematic data analysis and reporting

- Ensure **that evaluation data from final questionnaires** is:
  - Analysed at course and department level.
  - Disaggregated by sector, degree programme, and type of hosting organisation.
  - Shared with internship coordinators and faculty in an annual internship report.
- This would allow departments to identify:
  - Recurring weaknesses in certain sectors or types of organisations.
  - Differences in satisfaction by academic area.
  - Skill gaps or underperforming practices.

Close the feedback loop with hosting organisations

Create a **summary feedback document** based on students' final evaluation questionnaires, to be shared anonymously with hosting organisations. This document would highlight key strengths observed across internships, as well as areas for improvement – such as supervision quality, clarity of assigned tasks, and levels of inclusion. Sharing this feedback would encourage hosting organisations to reflect on their internship practices and make targeted improvements, ultimately enhancing the quality of learning experiences for future interns.

- *Strengthen the university tutor's evaluative role*

University tutors should be required to review both the final report submitted by the student and the evaluation completed by the hosting organisation mentor. Based on this review, they should provide a **brief written assessment** of the coherence between the tasks carried out during the internship and the learning objectives outlined in the Training Project. This would shift their role from that of a mere administrative validator to an active academic guarantor of the internship's educational quality.

Include qualitative feedback

- Add open-ended questions in student and hosting organisation questionnaires to gather:
    - Suggestions for improvement.
    - Reflections on unexpected learning.
    - Comments on supervision quality.

Introduce mid-term evaluation

As recommended in [What monitoring and evaluation tools could improve the internship experience?](), a mid-term progress survey would allow for real-time corrections and offer a fuller picture of the internship experience.

5.3.3. What types of certification or recognition should be offered to students who complete the internship?

While a certificate from the hosting organisation is a useful document, UNIPA should consider expanding recognition mechanisms to better

capture the **educational and professional value** of internships. By offering standardised university-issued certificates of completion, or Europass-style internship supplement that documents: tasks completed, competencies acquired (soft and technical), type of work environment, UNIPA would empower students to showcase their achievements more effectively in the job market and academic settings.

6. Ideas for new useful Materials (literature, workshops, innovative methods, quizzes, videos, etc.)

6.1. What new materials or resources would be useful to improve support offered by career counsellors?

In addition to student-facing tools (see [What preparation materials (e.g., workshops, guides, apps) would be useful?](#)), UNIPA could develop dedicated resources for career counsellors, such as:

- A training manual on internship pathways, academic regulations, and typical challenges.
- Access to data dashboards showing internship trends and student outcomes by department or sector.
- Templates and checklists to support students in decision-making (e.g., internship comparison grids, reflection prompts).
- A shared knowledge base or internal portal for counsellors to exchange strategies and resources.

These tools would allow counsellors to provide more consistent, informed, and proactive support across departments.

6.2. How can UNIPA integrate digital tools (e.g., apps, quizzes, videos) into career support?

To improve the reach and effectiveness of career support, UNIPA should systematically integrate **digital tools** into its internship and career services infrastructure. Many of these tools have already been discussed in [What preparation materials (e.g., workshops, guides, apps) would be useful?](#) and [What new materials or resources would be useful to improve support offered by career counsellors?](#)

For students, this could include an **interactive platform** that combines internship search, planning tools (e.g., self-assessment quizzes), and multimedia preparation materials (e.g., videos, tutorials, and success stories). A **mobile app or responsive web portal** could centralise these tools, increasing accessibility and usability.

For counsellors, a dedicated digital environment could offer real-time data on student placements, shared resources, and communication tools to track and guide students' progress. Embedding these tools into departmental and COT workflows would make career support more **scalable, personalised, and evidence-based.**

6.3. Are there innovative approaches UNIPA should consider to improve career guidance services?

To improve career guidance services in an innovative and impactful way, UNIPA should move beyond administrative assistance and adopt learner-centred, experience-based, and data-informed approaches. Some examples include:

- **Embedding career guidance into the academic curriculum**: As proposed in [What services would be useful to prepare students for internships?,](#) integrate short career readiness modules within existing courses or internship preparation seminars. These can include reflective exercises, goal-setting for internships, and links to labour market data.

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- **Peer-to-peer and near-peer mentoring**: To complement future efforts in establishing dedicated internship counselling services (see [How can career counsellors better help students in finding and preparing for internships?](#)) , UNIPA could activate a formal internship alumni networks or student ambassadors system who offer peer-level support. These mentors could share practical insights, suggest strategies, and help students navigate the internship process. While not a substitute for professional counselling, peer mentoring can play a valuable role in bridging the support gap, fostering a sense of community, and ensuring students do not feel isolated in their internship journey.

- **Pre-internship soft skills workshops**: Complement the resources discussed in [What preparation materials (e.g., workshops, guides, apps) would be useful?](#) and [What new materials or resources would be useful to improve support offered by career counsellors?](#) by organising interactive workshops focused on soft skills such as communication, collaboration, adaptability, and time management – possibly led by UNIPA's C.O.T. – Centro di Orientamento e Tutorato and the UNIPA Placement Office.

- **Guided reflection and career planning**: Address the gaps identified in post-internship support (see [What services are available to help students reflect on their internship experience?](#)) by offering structured debriefing sessions. These would help students connect internship experiences to academic and career goals.

- **Visible, unified communication strategy**: Resolve the confusion reported around resources and procedures (see [What preparation materials (e.g., workshops, guides, apps) are used for student internship preparation?](#)) by creating a centralised online space for all internship and career guidance materials, ensuring consistent and clear communication across departments.

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