



Comparative case: University College of Teacher Education Burgenland (AT), Hibernia College (IE), University of Education Weingarten (DE)

Abstract

This comparative case study explores how three HEIs—Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University of Education, and PH Lucerne—advance internationalisation through virtual mobility. They use initiatives like COIL, Blended Intensive Programs, and hybrid exchanges to enable global collaboration without travel, aligning with goals such as expanding access, building global competencies, and overcoming structural challenges.

Through regional networks, partnerships, and digital tools, these institutions integrate virtual mobility into teaching and staff development to foster inclusivity and sustainability. The result: stronger international collaborations, enriched curricula, and greater access to global learning opportunities.



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HEInnovate dimensions:



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Introduction

This comparative case study, conducted within the framework of the HEInnovate initiative, delves into the overarching goal of improving educational quality by increasing internationalisation through virtual mobility initiatives implemented by higher education institutions (HEIs). Knight (2004a) defines internationalisation as the integration of an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the core aspects of postsecondary education, including purposes, functions, and delivery.¹

Internationalisation has long been important in higher education, with a focus on promoting student and staff mobility as well as cultivating international partnerships. When strategically integrated into the HEI's framework, internationalisation provides numerous benefits to students, faculty, and the institution itself. These benefits include fostering strategic thinking that leads to innovation, modernising pedagogy, promoting collaboration among students and staff, catalysing new approaches to learning, and new research collaborations.²

Van der Wende (1998) defines virtual mobility as an evolving facet of internationalisation in which students participate in courses offered by foreign institutions while interacting with students, teachers, libraries, and databases all over the world. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) in this context broadens cooperative and competitive opportunities among institutions, providing students and academic teachers with internationalisation benefits without requiring extensive physical travel.^{3,4}

The objective of this comparative case study

This study compares three HEIs: Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University of Education and the University of Teacher Education Lucerne. Using data from public sources such as websites, strategy documents, and newsletters, as well as information gathered through communications and interviews with HEI representatives, the study demonstrates how virtual mobility within these HEIs contributes to improved internationalisation.

This HEInnovate case study compares the three HEIs' experiences with the integration of virtual mobility initiatives in their institution, focusing on the following questions:

- What are the goals that the HEI wants to achieve?
- What challenges have been identified to achieve internationalisation?

¹ Knight, J. (2004). Instructional Coaches Make Progress through Partnership. *Journal of Staff Development*, 25, 32-37.

² <https://heinnovate.eu/en/heinnovate-resources/resources/internationalisation-integral-part-heis-entrepreneurial-agenda>

³ van der Wende, M. (1998). Higher Education in Europe: National, Regional and International Perspectives. In Universite, Europe, Region, Proceedings of the FEDORA Summerschool.

⁴ Tereseviciene, Margarita & Volungeviciene, Airina & Dauksiene, Estela. (2013). Fostering Internationalisation in Higher Education by Virtual Mobility. *Acta Technologica Dubnicae*. 3. 1-15. 10.1515/atd-2015-0015.

- What policies and other tools are used to embed virtual mobility initiatives throughout the education and research activity in the institution?
- What factors facilitate or obstruct a successful change towards internationalisation?

The case study explores the motivations driving these institutions, their initiatives in internationalisation through virtual mobility, and the challenges encountered in achieving their objectives. The case study not only provides insights into the three HEIs' experiences, but it also provides useful guidance for HEIs looking to implement more virtual mobility measures in their institution.

The individual cases

Hibernia College

Institutional characteristics

Hibernia College is Ireland's sole government-accredited eLearning institution. They specialise in postgraduate and continuing professional development (CPD) programmes for students and professionals all over the globe.⁵ Hibernia College employs nearly 100 full-time staff and 600 part-time contractors who support approximately 2,000 full-time students and over 3,000 CPD students.⁶ Hibernia College has been providing educational programmes using blended learning since 2000.



HIBERNIA COLLEGE

Since its inception in 2000, Hibernia College has had its primary focus on the indigenous Irish education market, with a particular emphasis on teacher training in this market. Hibernia College has taken a more proactive approach to internationalisation since 2016, coinciding with their first Erasmus charter.⁷

Activities

Participation in Strategic Plan Making

Hibernia College first received the Erasmus+ Charter in October 2016.⁵ Hibernia College has several specific internationalisation and Erasmus objectives in its strategic plan:

1. Seek to build partnerships and alliances that offer strategic advantages to the College and its potential learners.
2. Establish a greater presence in the European Higher Education Area.

⁵ <https://www.educationinireland.com/en/where-can-i-study-/view-all-private-higher-education-institutions/hibernia-college-introduction.html>

⁶ <https://hea.ie/assets/uploads/2024/07/Hibernia-College.pdf>

⁷ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2018-1-IE02-KA103-000607>

3. Devise a staff development strategy to nurture talent and offer opportunities for advancement.⁷

Participation in Erasmus+ Staff Training Mobility Projects

Hibernia College actively participated in the Erasmus+ Staff Training Mobility programme, which facilitated international collaboration and professional growth through two key initiatives. In one initiative, a staff member spent five days at the University of Maastricht studying the integration of technology into teaching. This included looking into Maastricht University's digital learning environment, the problem-based learning approach, and educational innovation technologies including video for learning, peer feedback mechanisms, and plagiarism detection. The staff member took part in talks regarding the EDLAB education innovation initiative (EDLAB is an education expertise centre) and gave a presentation on effective teacher assistance.⁸

Advancing International Collaboration Through Erasmus+

Hibernia College has actively pursued internationalisation by participating in the Erasmus+ Higher Education Student and Staff Mobility project (2018–2020). Building on its initial Erasmus+ Charter from 2016, the college has worked with institutions such as Vienna University of Technology (Austria), West University of Timișoara (Romania), and Centro Autonómico de Formación e Innovación (CAFI) (Translated as Regional Centre for Training and Innovation) (Spain) to foster educational partnerships throughout Europe. The mobility programme is consistent with Hibernia College's strategic goals of increasing its presence in the European Higher Education Area, forming alliances that benefit students, and enhancing staff development. During this time, the college organised two outgoing staff mobilisations to Rouen, France, and Dalarna, Sweden, as well as one incoming mobility from Burgos, Spain.⁷

Hibernia College has also committed to fostering international collaboration and professional development through its participation in the Higher Education Student and Staff Mobility project for the years 2023–2025 and 2024–2026. This initiative, funded by internal policy funds, promotes physical and blended mobility for students and staff from EU Member States and Erasmus+ associated countries to destinations around the world. Students from all disciplines and academic levels can participate in study exchanges or traineeships abroad, broadening their educational experiences with international perspectives. Similarly, higher education teaching and administrative staff can benefit from professional development initiatives, while industry professionals contribute to teaching and training in higher education institutions, bridging academic and practical expertise.⁹

Advancing Skills and International Collaboration Through Erasmus+

Hibernia College uses the Erasmus+ programme to achieve its organisational goals of improving skills and fostering educational innovation. By increasing opportunities for

⁸ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2017-1-IE02-KA103-000517>

⁹ <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/projects/search/details/2023-1-IE02-KA131-HED-000141671>

learning mobility, the college hopes to improve participants' key competencies, ensuring their relevance to the labour market and contribution to a cohesive society. These efforts are supported by strengthened collaboration between education, training, and the professional world, which aims to bridge the gap between academia and industry to prepare graduates for impactful careers.¹⁰

Planning and implementing blended and online learning programs

Hibernia College is committed to providing flexible and accessible learning opportunities in response to the growing demand for postgraduate education. The college's online materials are carefully designed to be both visual and auditory, allowing students to interact with content at their leisure. With a strong IT platform in place, the institution intends to invest significantly in student support over the next five years, ensuring that students are well-supported throughout their educational journey.

Hibernia College's strategic priorities include expanding its offerings internationally. While current Quality Assurance (QA) policies accredited by QQI do not allow for international program delivery, the college is working to address this by developing quality assurance documentation and a "trust mark" for international course providers. The institution has applied to maintain online delivery under its QA framework and is considering all necessary factors to launch its international programmes, which according to their plans should've been available to students from September 2024.¹¹

Outcome/Impacts

Enhancing Early Childhood and Teacher Education Practices

The Erasmus+ Staff Training Mobility project at the University of Helsinki enabled Hibernia College staff to gain a better understanding of Finnish approaches to early childhood education and initial teacher training. The four-day immersive experience included professional discussions with key academics as well as observations of innovative practices in secondary education, such as playful learning and teacher training. These activities resulted in significant skill development in reflective practices, playful learning methodologies, and early education frameworks. The acquired expertise is expected to enrich Hibernia College's teacher training offerings and encourage the integration of innovative practices into its programs.¹¹

Fostering Innovation in Digital and Blended Learning

Between 2018 and 2020, Hibernia College participated in Erasmus+ mobility projects to improve its blended learning environment. Mobilities to institutions in France, Sweden, and Spain allowed staff to learn about innovative teaching and assessment methods, as well as experiment with advanced technologies such as virtual reality. These experiences helped the college prepare to launch a new nursing programme and create engaging,

¹⁰ <https://qualityframework.hiberniacollege.com/document/view-current.php?id=64>

¹¹ Interview Notes with Hibernia College.

interactive online learning sessions. These exchanges have also strengthened networks, laying the groundwork for future collaborative research and cultivating a culturally diverse academic community.¹¹

Expanding Global Mobility and Capacity Building

Mobility projects supported by internal policy funds (2023–2026) align with the college's internationalisation strategy and aim to improve the skills and experiences of both students and faculty. These initiatives enable professional development, skill exchange, and knowledge transfer, thereby supporting Hibernia College's strategic goal of establishing a strong presence in the European Higher Education Area. The college continues to strengthen its global capacity for excellence in education, innovation, and collaboration by increasing outward and inward mobility and forming synergies with international institutions.¹¹

Ludwigsburg University of Education

Institutional characteristics

Ludwigsburg University of Education (LUE) is the largest of six universities of education in Baden–Württemberg, Germany, serving approximately 6,000 students with the support of 470 employees.

Established in 1962, the university has been on the Ludwigsburg campus since 1966.¹²

Baden–Württemberg's Universities of Education are independent higher education institutions.



Ludwigsburg University of Education, known as a "university of educational sciences," specialises in education-related fields and offers doctoral and post-doctoral degrees.¹³

Internationalisation is a strategic priority for Ludwigsburg University of Education and is integrated as a cross-sectional task into all university activities. This initiative, coordinated by the International Office, offers numerous international exchange and experience opportunities to students, educators, researchers, and administrative staff. The university's internationalisation strategy prioritises (blended/virtual) mobility, diversity, social participation, and sustainability, demonstrating its commitment to fostering global engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.¹² To provide a unified, forward-thinking framework for global education, the university's internationalisation initiatives

¹² <https://www.ph-ludwigsburg.de/en/>

¹³ <https://www.studies-in-europe.eu/s/3303/68671-Studies-in-Europe/1766-University-of-Education-Ludwigsburg.htm>

entail active cooperation among faculties, departments, and outside partners rather than being purely top-down.¹⁴

Activities

International Partnerships and Mobility Programmes

The International Office at Ludwigsburg University of Education has strong relationships with approximately 90 partner universities around the world. These collaborations allow many students, educators, and staff members to gain international experience through mobility and support programs in Europe and elsewhere. Every year, the International Office supports over 100 international exchange students and welcomes a variety of international visitors, including Fulbright professors.¹²

Collaborative International Online Learning (COIL) and Virtual Exchange Initiatives

Ludwigsburg University of Education uses COIL and virtual exchange programmes to promote inclusive internationalisation. These initiatives aim to reach out to students who may face physical mobility challenges, such as first-generation and non-traditional students. These programmes promote intercultural competence and joint projects by connecting participants with international partners, such as Indian universities. Activities include:

- Conducting fact-finding missions to form partnerships.
- Teaching modules alongside international colleagues.
- Virtual mobility opportunities that serve as a stepping stone to physical mobility.¹⁴

Internationalisation at Home

"Internationalization@home" is a priority at Ludwigsburg University of Education. To promote "Internationalization@home," the university implements initiatives such as co-teaching, Collaborative International Online Learning (COIL) formats, and the guest lecturer program "Ludwigsburg International Classroom (LICs)." These efforts are consistent with the university's overall internationalisation strategy, particularly through projects like the EU-funded Teacher Academy, which strengthens the international and European dimensions of teacher education.¹² This LIC initiative benefits both domestic and international students by creating a globally enriched learning environment. Activities include:

- Invite scholars from English-speaking universities to teach and collaborate.
- Preparing faculty to effectively teach international groups.¹⁴

Advancing International Research

Ludwigsburg University of Education uses its long-standing strategic partnerships with international institutions to host regular research conferences that serve as catalysts for collaborative research projects. The university places a special emphasis on assisting young researchers through partnerships that enable collaborative opportunities during the

¹⁴ Interview notes with Ludwigsburg University of Education.

doctoral phase. These initiatives bolster the university's reputation as a hub for international educational research.¹²

International Educational Programmes

The institution provides the English-taught master's program in "International Education Management" as part of its dedication to internationalisation. With an emphasis on worldwide educational leadership, this program gives graduates the credentials and abilities they need to pursue a wide variety of international employment options.¹²

In addition to advancing its strategic goals of strengthening international collaboration in teaching, research, and professional development, LUE hopes to promote global involvement and enhance educational experiences through these initiatives.¹²

Staff Training and Professional Development through Erasmus+

LUE actively promotes staff development through initiatives such as the Erasmus+ Staff Training Mobility Programme. Faculty and administrative staff attend training sessions abroad to learn about innovative teaching practices, intercultural communication, and the use of educational technology.¹⁴

Outcome/Impacts

Enhanced Internationalisation and Inclusivity

Ludwigsburg University of Education has established strong partnerships with international institutions, including Indian universities, and has implemented Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and virtual exchanges. These initiatives have enabled students and staff to collaborate globally without requiring physical mobility, providing greater access to international experiences, particularly for students from non-academic or underprivileged backgrounds. The university's emphasis on involving first-year students and those with limited mobility ensures a more inclusive approach to internationalisation. Erasmus-supported short-term and blended mobility programmes increase opportunities for global collaboration.

Professional Development and Increased Mobility

Faculty and staff benefit from professional development opportunities, gaining expertise in teaching diverse international groups and managing multicultural classrooms. International projects such as Erasmus provide faculty and administrative staff with training, preparing them to effectively support internationalisation initiatives. Students who participate in virtual mobility or COIL programmes frequently express an increased interest in physical mobility, resulting in a stepping-stone effect. Hybrid and blended mobility models, which combine virtual and physical experiences, make internationalisation more sustainable and accessible.

Institutional Strengthening and Curriculum Enrichment

The university's internationalisation strategy has been incorporated into its organisational and operational structures, reinforcing its reputation as a forward-thinking institution.

Strategic funding, such as Erasmus and internationalisation grants, helps to support these efforts. Hiring practices now prioritise international experience, promoting long-term institutional growth. Increased offerings of English-taught courses, interdisciplinary collaboration (e.g., migration studies), and a curriculum enriched by global perspectives further enhance the academic experience and attract international students.

Organisational Adaptability, Sustainability, and Networking

Ludwigsburg University has devised strategies to address issues such as term-break mismatches with international partners and disparities in teacher training structures across federal states.

Improved internal communication and collaboration, as well as a focus on sustainability via virtual mobility, help to reduce the university's carbon footprint.

The expansion of international networks through collaborations in Norway, India, and European teacher training networks enhances the university's global presence, positioning Ludwigsburg as a leader in sustainable and inclusive internationalisation practices.

University of Teacher Education Lucerne

Institutional characteristics

The University of Teacher Education Lucerne (PH Lucerne), located in the heart of Switzerland, is the country's smallest university, with 1,460 undergraduate and 1,258 postgraduate students. The university is dedicated to internationalisation through networking and mobilities, allowing its students

PH LUZERN
UNIVERSITY OF
TEACHER EDUCATION

to participate in global discussions about education, particularly the globalisation of education and learning. PH Lucerne promotes the "mobilities of education" approach, which encourages the circulation of knowledge across international borders while emphasising long-term networking and exchanges with institutions from the Global South. The university integrates its members into international knowledge spaces and specialises in global and socio-spatial learning, international development projects, and educational mobility research.^{15, 16}

The University of Teacher Education Lucerne is a centre for teacher education, pedagogy, and didactics located in central Switzerland's university hub. It offers valuable opportunities for exchange students from partner universities, who do not have to pay tuition fees. The university's international focus is evident in its contributions to global education initiatives and partnerships that promote collective learning and knowledge exchange at the global level.¹⁶

¹⁵ <https://www.phlu.ch/beratungen-angebote/international/en-international-studies.html>

¹⁶ <https://www.studyinswitzerland.plus/university/phluzern/>

Activities

International Collaboration in Blended Learning

The International Blended Learning Seminar, organised by PH Lucerne in collaboration with universities throughout Europe, is a significant step towards fostering international collaboration in memory cultures and public history. The seminar, which began in 2019, brings together students and lecturers from institutions in France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, and elsewhere, including non-European perspectives from Russia, Ukraine, and the United States. This transnational approach combines digital learning tools with in-person interactions to create a one-of-a-kind educational environment for students from various cultural and academic backgrounds to explore and analyse memory narratives in Europe and beyond. The seminar's success in 2019 paved the way for future international exchange, emphasising the importance of cross-border research and teaching.¹⁷

Blending Memory Studies and Public History

The seminar's emphasis on combining Memory Studies and Public History provides a unique opportunity for students to engage with cultural remembrance practices from a variety of angles. The project, led by PH Lucerne's Institute for History Didactics and Remembrance Cultures, focusses on collaboration across Western and Central European countries and engages students in critical discussions about migration, nationalism, and Europe's mythologisation. This international initiative not only enhances the academic experience, but it also provides a dynamic, cross-cultural environment in which students can navigate the complexities of memory and history on a global scale.¹⁷

Internationalisation Strategy at PH Lucerne

PH Lucerne has made internationalisation a core component of its mission statement. PH Lucerne actively promotes international engagement. A recent internationalisation strategy, developed in 2023, provides a clear framework for these efforts. The university prioritises mobility, not only in a physical sense but also through virtual initiatives like Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL).¹⁸

Located in the heart of Switzerland, Lucerne's vibrant international character and role as a tourist hub influence PH Lucerne's internationalisation strategy. The university works with local institutions such as the University of Applied Sciences and the University of Lucerne through the "Campus Lucerne" initiative, which funds innovative projects such as refugee integration programs. These efforts demonstrate how PH Lucerne uses its regional context to advance its internationalisation goals.¹⁸

¹⁷ <https://www.phlu.ch/ueber-uns/hochschule/taetigkeitsbericht/tb19/taetigkeitsbericht-ausbildung-2019/europe.html?452c4b64-8186-0188-bac5-475768356b6a#!/%23blended>.

¹⁸ Interview notes with the University of Teacher Education Lucerne.

Facilitating Student Mobility and Engagement

To encourage student participation in international opportunities, PH Lucerne has implemented flexible credit transfer policies. For example, students can earn "flat rate credits" for modules completed abroad, which eliminates the need for strict module-to-module equivalence. This approach allows students to focus on broadening their educational experiences rather than worrying about exact curriculum matches. Younger students in bachelor's programs, such as primary education, are more likely to study abroad, whereas older students in master's programs, or secondary education, frequently face constraints due to family and professional obligations. For the latter group, the institution is actively developing digital alternatives such as BIPs and COIL to help them gain international exposure.¹⁸

Expanding International Partnerships

PH Lucerne focusses on developing strategic partnerships primarily in Europe, but also in the United States and parts of Africa. These collaborations align with student interests as well as larger European agendas. The institution also works with national and international networks to improve its global standing. Membership in initiatives like Swisscore, which connects Switzerland to EU policies, and participation in Swiss-based networks of teacher education institutions demonstrate the organization's commitment to fostering international collaboration.¹⁸

Outcomes/Impacts

Enhanced Mobility and Inclusivity

PH Lucerne has taken innovative steps to address the challenges of mobility for teacher education students. The university provides students with opportunities to engage internationally through initiatives such as blended intensive programmes (BIPs) and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), which do not disrupt their rigid study schedules. The use of flat-rate credit recognition allows students to participate in international modules without meeting strict course equivalency requirements, promoting flexibility and inclusivity. These measures primarily benefit younger bachelor's students, who are more likely to participate in mobility programs, while also accommodating older students with family and work obligations through virtual and blended options.¹⁸

Professional Development and International Networks

The university prioritises staff professionalisation by encouraging international mobility and participation in global discourses on education policy and university governance. Faculty and administrative staff benefit from exposure to international collaborations and networks, which increases their ability to effectively support internationalisation efforts. PH Lucerne strengthens its international reputation and provides professional development opportunities for its staff and students by forming partnerships with Swiss agencies and participating in European and African educational networks.¹⁸

Research Excellence and Global Visibility

As part of its internationalisation strategy, PH Lucerne focusses on increasing its R&D activities to gain global visibility. Participating in international projects, conferences, and publication opportunities helps the university improve its academic standing, particularly in Europe, the United States, and Africa. These collaborations contribute to the diversification of its academic outputs and establish PH Lucerne as a key player in global teacher education research.¹⁸

Curriculum Enrichment and Digitalisation

PH Lucerne incorporates internationalisation into its curriculum by using digital tools to bridge the gap between mobility and accessibility. The emphasis on digital and virtual exchange formats is consistent with the university's commitment to preparing future teachers for diverse classrooms. By exposing students to international perspectives, PH Lucerne prepares them to handle cultural diversity and inclusion in their teaching careers. Furthermore, the institution's commitment to digitalisation aligns with its broader goals of sustainability and accessibility in education.¹⁸

Analysis

Facilitators

A key facilitator shared by all three institutions—Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University of Education, and the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (PH Lucerne)—is the emphasis on strong central oversight to support virtual mobility and internationalisation efforts. Each institution has a central body in charge of allocating resources effectively and carrying out internationalisation strategies. At Hibernia College, the board of directors is responsible for overseeing the financial resources needed for internationalisation, whereas Ludwigsburg University of Education relies on its International Office, which has its own budget and resources. PH Lucerne, too, benefits from its Department of Internationalisation, which collaborates with other departments to incorporate international mobility into curricula. While all three institutions have centralised oversight, Hibernia College's approach is more focused on board-driven strategic oversight, whereas Ludwigsburg and PH Lucerne provide more targeted budgetary support for internationalisation efforts at the departmental or project level.

Another common facilitator is the emphasis on internal collaboration and communication among departments and units. At Hibernia College, clear policies and transparent practices ensure alignment across academic and administrative departments, fostering an environment conducive to virtual mobility. Similarly, Ludwigsburg University of Education promotes effective internal communication by streamlining synergies between Key Action 1 (KA1) and Key Action 2 (KA2) projects, which are aligned with the institution's overall internationalisation strategy. PH Lucerne also values internal collaboration, with the Department of Internationalisation working closely with study program managers and academic staff to ensure that internationalisation efforts are in line with academic goals.

These internal communication efforts ensure that internationalisation is not limited to one department but is woven throughout the institution.

The integration of virtual mobility programs is another important facilitator for all three institutions. Hibernia College promotes virtual mobility by providing a clear and transparent framework that allows faculty, researchers, and students to confidently engage in virtual learning environments. At Ludwigsburg University of Education, programs such as "LaTeX Work International Classrooms" and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) initiatives encourage cross-cultural interactions among students, even in virtual environments. Similarly, PH Lucerne has made significant efforts to promote blended intensive programs (BIPs) and COIL formats, which enable virtual interaction and collaboration with international peers. These initiatives reduce the need for physical travel while encouraging global engagement, demonstrating each institution's dedication to making international experiences more accessible through virtual mobility.

While these institutions place an emphasis on virtual mobility, their approaches to risk management and proactive strategies for continuous improvement vary. Hibernia College takes a more formalised approach to risk management, using a comprehensive risk register to anticipate and address potential issues. This enables the institution to mitigate risks before they jeopardise the success of virtual mobility projects. In contrast, Ludwigsburg University of Education encourages internal collaboration and alignment among various initiatives in order to reduce risks and maximise the impact of internationalisation. PH Lucerne's approach, while not explicitly based on a formal risk management framework, benefits from strong regional networks and national collaborations with Swiss universities and Movetia, which help to mitigate challenges through shared resources and collective knowledge.

Finally, external collaborations and partnerships play an important role for all three institutions, though the nature of these collaborations differs. While Hibernia College does not explicitly discuss specific external partnerships, it does engage with stakeholders through feedback mechanisms that inform its internationalisation policies. Ludwigsburg University of Education benefits from collaborations with institutions in English-speaking countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, and India, which promote cross-cultural exchanges through COIL projects and short-term teaching assignments. PH Lucerne, on the other hand, has strong ties to national networks such as Swissuniversities and Movetia, which provide additional resources and expertise to help it achieve its internationalisation objectives. These external networks, whether regional or international, enable institutions to share knowledge, lower barriers to internationalisation, and increase the impact of their global engagement efforts.

Incentives and Motivations

The desire to improve educational quality and inclusivity is a common motivator behind the internationalisation and virtual mobility efforts at Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University of Education, and the University of Teacher Education Lucerne (PH Lucerne).

Hibernia College prioritises virtual mobility as part of its overarching vision to transform education and make it more accessible to a diverse population. The college's teacher training programs are regarded as some of the best in the country, and by embracing virtual mobility, it aims to provide high-quality education to students from diverse backgrounds. This approach promotes lifelong learning by creating an inclusive environment in which students can engage with education on their own terms. Similarly, PH Lucerne's internationalisation strategy is driven by a desire to prepare future teachers for diverse classrooms. International exposure, including virtual mobility initiatives, provides students with the skills and perspectives needed to navigate cultural diversity in their professional lives, contributing to educational excellence. Thus, for both institutions, virtual mobility is about more than just increasing access; it is also about improving the quality and inclusiveness of their educational offerings.

Ludwigsburg University of Education's motivation is closely linked to its strategic planning processes, which serve as a major driving force behind its internationalisation efforts. The university's internationalisation strategy is part of a larger five-year institutional plan that addresses key areas such as teaching, research, and diversity. This incorporation of internationalisation into the institution's long-term strategic goals ensures its importance as a key component of the university's growth. The strategic involvement of the Board of Trustees and senior management reinforces the institution's commitment to promoting global engagement. Ludwigsburg is also driven by the desire to provide diverse and enriching educational experiences for its students. Initiatives such as the "LaTeX Work International Classrooms" program (**LaTeX** is a high-quality typesetting system; it includes features designed for the production of technical and scientific documentation), which invites international scholars to teach at the university, enable students to engage with global perspectives and enhance their academic journeys. By fostering international awareness and promoting academic diversity, Ludwigsburg underscores the importance of internationalisation in maintaining its institutional reputation and relevance.

PH Lucerne's motivation to internationalise stems from a desire to gain global visibility and establish a strong presence in the international academic community. The university intends to use its strategic location in Switzerland, a country known for its international orientation, to form academic collaborations that will strengthen its global standing. This is especially important given Switzerland's non-membership in the EU, which forces PH Lucerne to rely on bilateral and international partnerships to access academic resources and funds. The university's active participation in the Campus Lucerne initiative, which involves collaboration among the city's three universities, helps to strengthen its internationalisation efforts. This collaboration fosters programs that promote international and community engagement, such as refugee integration programs, allowing the university to broaden its global reach. Furthermore, the integration of internationalisation and digitalisation is a powerful motivator for PH Lucerne. By prioritising virtual mobility initiatives such as COIL and BIPs, the university not only addresses the limitations of traditional mobility but also aligns with current trends in digital education, ensuring that its

students are prepared to participate in global collaborations via innovative, technology-driven platforms.

All three institutions' incentives for virtual mobility are influenced by a desire to keep up with current educational trends. Hibernia College embraces virtual mobility as part of its effort to push traditional learning boundaries, providing flexible learning opportunities to a diverse student body. The university aims to provide quality education in novel ways, allowing students to interact with global content without the need for physical mobility. Similarly, Ludwigsburg University of Education views virtual mobility as a means of making education more accessible and flexible, thereby attracting a broader range of students. The university's internationalisation strategy, which includes virtual mobility initiatives, aims to improve the student experience while meeting modern demands for educational flexibility. For PH Lucerne, digitalisation and virtual mobility are critical components of its educational strategy, providing an alternative to physical mobility while maintaining the institution's commitment to global interaction. By combining virtual mobility with digital education trends, PH Lucerne ensures that its students gain both international experience and the digital skills they will need in the future.

Barriers

Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University of Education, and PH Lucerne all face unique barriers to implementing virtual mobility and internationalisation, reflecting their respective institutional contexts and challenges. Hibernia College faces significant challenges due to a lack of understanding of market dynamics and accreditation requirements. Without a clear understanding of these factors, the college faces risks that may jeopardise its virtual mobility initiatives. Furthermore, understanding and meeting the diverse needs of its student population adds complexity and necessitates significant investment in market research. While necessary, such research is resource-intensive and runs the risk of yielding ineffective results. To address these issues, Hibernia College is prioritising targeted market research and investing in accreditation and market knowledge. By implementing these strategic measures, the college hopes to lay the groundwork for successful virtual mobility integration.

The logistical and structural challenges that Ludwigsburg University of Education faces when it comes to internationalisation via virtual mobility. Coordinating with non-European universities, particularly when transitioning from virtual or Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) collaborations to short-term physical exchanges, is a persistent challenge. Visa complications frequently derail these efforts, preventing participants from fully participating in mobility programs. Additionally, Germany's federal education system introduces significant structural barriers. The varying teacher training programs across Germany's 16 states and the discrepancies between German and international teacher training structures complicate collaboration and mutual course recognition. To address these issues, Ludwigsburg has taken a thematic approach, focussing on universal themes like sustainability, digitalisation, migration, and diversity. This strategy helps to establish

common ground, allowing for more seamless course recognition and collaboration across diverse educational systems.

PH Lucerne faces unique challenges as a young institution with a focus on teacher education. Applied sciences institutions' strict curricular structures leave little room for semester-long international experiences, particularly for students who are already working part-time. This rigidity is exacerbated by the demographic makeup of the PH Lucerne student population. Younger bachelor's students in primary and kindergarten education are more eager to participate in mobility programs, whereas older secondary and master's students frequently have family or professional obligations that make physical mobility impossible. In response, PH Lucerne has developed virtual mobility initiatives such as Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs) and COIL formats, which provide more flexible options for students with demanding schedules.

Another challenge at PH Lucerne is credit recognition for students studying abroad. Traditional module-by-module equivalence introduces administrative barriers that discourage participation. To address this, the university implemented a flexible "flat rate" credit recognition system, which simplifies the process and encourages more students to participate in mobility programs. However, these efforts necessitate collaboration with program managers, who must be persuaded of the importance of incorporating mobility into an already jam-packed curriculum. By addressing these internal barriers, PH Lucerne aims to make internationalisation more accessible and beneficial for its diverse student population.

Context

Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University of Education, and PH Lucerne each operate within distinct societal, environmental, and organisational contexts that shape their internationalisation efforts through virtual mobility.

Hibernia College's organisational context is shaped by its statutory body governance, which requires adherence to regulations such as the European EM mark to maintain its standing in higher education. In society, the increasing demand for flexible and diverse learning options has created a need for virtual mobility to accommodate individuals who are unable to pursue traditional educational paths. The COVID-19 pandemic fuelled the demand for online learning, emphasising its importance and utility. Environmentally, rapid technological advancements, particularly artificial intelligence (AI), present educational opportunities and challenges. Hibernia College hopes to position itself as an innovative leader by embracing AI and virtual mobility, which will help it meet societal needs while also addressing regulatory and technological trends.

The broader German context has a significant impact on Ludwigsburg University of Education's internationalisation strategies. Germany's federal education system distributes decision-making across 16 states, complicating efforts to establish consistent frameworks for teacher training and international collaboration. Societally, there is an increasing demand for programs that address global issues such as sustainability, digitalisation, and

diversity, which the university incorporates into its internationalisation initiatives. Environmentally, the pandemic has accelerated the adoption of virtual and hybrid learning models, which aligns with Ludwigsburg's commitment to providing flexible and inclusive educational opportunities. Organisationally, the university incorporates internationalisation into its five-year development plans, ensuring alignment with larger institutional goals and reflecting Germany's emphasis on cross-border academic collaboration.

Societal, environmental, and organisational factors all contribute to PH Lucerne's internationalisation priorities. Located in Lucerne, a culturally vibrant city with a strong international appeal, the university benefits from its proximity to major European hubs such as Milan and Paris. However, Switzerland's non-membership in the EU restricts access to EU research programs, prompting PH Lucerne to concentrate on strengthening bilateral and global partnerships. Internationalisation is a strategic priority integrated into the university's mission statement, but it is supported by a small team of five staff members who facilitate mobility and collaborations. Despite limited resources, the team uses national and international networks to increase the university's global visibility.

The local context in Lucerne is also important to consider. As part of the "Campus Lucerne" initiative, PH Lucerne works with the city's other universities to achieve common internationalisation goals, such as refugee integration programs. These efforts reflect a broader commitment to inclusivity and diversity, with the university leveraging its location and cultural environment to incorporate internationalisation into its mission.

Conclusions and lessons learned

Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University of Education, and PH Lucerne all demonstrate various strategies for promoting internationalisation through virtual mobility. Hibernia College prioritises equitable access to high-quality education through risk management, financial support, and external collaborations. The institution guides its initiatives through board oversight and a commitment to lifelong learning. Ludwigsburg University emphasises strategic departmental collaboration and external partnerships to improve global learning opportunities, whereas PH Lucerne relies on its strong national networks and strategic location to support internationalisation efforts.

Motivations for internationalisation differ among the three institutions, owing to their distinct goals and contexts. Hibernia College is driven by a vision of educational transformation that prioritises accessibility and inclusivity. Ludwigsburg University's motivations stem from strategic planning and a desire to provide enriching experiences that promote global awareness. In contrast, PH Lucerne is motivated by the need for global visibility, the preparation of future educators for diverse classrooms, and the ability to leverage its Swiss location to maximise international reach.

Despite facing unique challenges, all three institutions have successfully used virtual mobility to meet the changing demands of modern education. Hibernia College focusses on bridging knowledge gaps in market dynamics and accreditation to help with virtual

mobility initiatives. Ludwigsburg University addresses coordination issues and structural disparities in teacher training programs, whereas PH Lucerne implements flexible credit recognition systems and virtual mobility initiatives to accommodate its diverse student body. These strategies demonstrate their shared determination to overcome logistical challenges and structural rigidity.

Institutional contexts reveal interconnected societal, environmental, and organisational factors that influence internationalisation strategies. Hibernia College prioritises meeting societal demands for flexible learning while also adopting technological advancements such as artificial intelligence. Ludwigsburg University navigates the complexities of Germany's federal education system while also addressing global educational issues through thematic programming. PH Lucerne uses its location, networks, and collaboration with regional institutions to break down national barriers and foster global partnerships.

In conclusion, all three institutions show how different contexts and strategies can successfully improve internationalisation through virtual mobility. Hibernia College, Ludwigsburg University, and PH Lucerne demonstrate how institutions can adapt to the changing demands of modern education while fostering inclusivity and global collaboration.

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