

# Coimbra Group & VICTORIOUS Project Final Seminar 'Virtual Mobility Forum'

## Background: Virtual Mobility in the educational and societal context

As we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the universities of Europe are changing to new ways of working, but at the same time they continue to support some valuable traditions that are centuries old. Amongst these is an open-ness of each university to study visits and exchanges with students and staff of other universities, ensuring that the academic community is healthy and thriving, that ideas are exchanged and continue to flow freely in the public domain, and that cultural awareness is maintained at a high level.

Increasingly, universities are sharing students between them, either sequentially under the Erasmus mobility or similar schemes, or concurrently on joint courses that now include those delivered entirely by e-learning (part of an area known as 'virtual mobility'). These developments are supported by individual governments and through the enhanced Erasmus scheme and through the Erasmus Mundus programme. On Erasmus, Ján Figel', European Commissioner in charge of Education, Training, Culture and Multilingualism said "Encouraging mobility will remain a priority for the Commission in the coming years, as we expect to reach the target of 3-million Erasmus students by 2011 with almost 300,000 students per year."

<http://europa.eu.int/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/05/190&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

This intended expansion of both numbers of students and study modes raises challenges for universities which involve technical areas and business processes. To move to large scale physical and virtual exchanges requires a move from bespoke and hand-crafted processes to automated and systematic processes, which will include enrolment (matriculation), password generation, authority to access restricted materials plus awareness of the need for advance information about digital resources that may be hidden behind authentication barriers. Students accustomed to working with efficient ICT systems in one university may find a less welldeveloped situation in the one they visit, which will impact upon their view of the quality of the experience. Those who have good experiences with technology whilst away may feel less satisfied on return, and wish continued access to the good resources they had whilst on their exchange visit.

These impacts of technology on the physical exchange signal warnings for universities if they wish to venture into virtual exchanges, offering courses online to students at other universities. Automatic digital library access, information and matriculation online and well in advance of course starts, ability to see credits gained and for these to be passed smoothly to their home university will all be essentials of a successful experience. Few universities at the present time are in a position to be fully confident that all this works well and with little need for human intervention to problem-solve.

The VICTORIOUS Project is addressing a range of these challenges. Using 'physical mobility in a digital world' as a proxy for virtual mobility and also as a phenomenon which is with us on a large scale and which will remain, we are using our own universities (Bristol, Edinburgh, Granada, Groningen, Pavia, Siena, Tartu, Turku) as 'testbeds' and also exploring the experiences of students and universities across Europe. We have a particular interest in the universities of the Coimbra Group as they take more than their proportional share of Erasmus and other exchange students.

---

Coimbra Group & VICTORIOUS Project Final Seminar,  
28th November 2006

## The programme

The Virtual Mobility Forum took place on Tuesday 28 November 2006 and was one of the pre-conference events of Educa Online Berlin 2006. The Forum was co-organised by the Being Mobile and Victorious projects.

9:30 – 11:00 Plenary Session

This session will feature several leading Virtual Mobility Experts who will set Virtual Mobility in the wider educational and societal context.

Keynote speakers

- Prof. Ray Land, University of Strathclyde, UK  
"The Next Generation of e-Learning: Time, Mobility and Identity"
- Prof. Jeff Haywood, VICTORIOUS, University of Edinburgh, UK  
"Understanding Mobile Students in a Digital University World – the VICTORIOUS Project"
- Helena Bijmens, Being Mobile, EuroPACE ivzw., BE  
"Learning Apart Together: How Virtual Mobility Leads to International Collaboration"

11:00 – 11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 – 13:00 Parallel Sessions

Drawing on the experiences of various cross-border initiatives and projects, each parallel session will be led by practitioners who will illustrate the topic with a case example. This will be followed by discussion.

Being Mobile Session

- *The Practicalities of Organising Virtual Student and Staff Exchanges*
- *The Implications of Joint Course Development and Delivery (Accreditation, IPR, Culture and Technology)*

Chairperson: Helena Bijmens, Being Mobile, EuroPACE ivzw., BE

- Helen Keegan, University of Salford, UK  
"The ESMOS Project: a Blended Approach to Mobility Support"
- Maria-Sanziana Vinatoru, BEST, RO  
"Student Perspectives on Virtual Mobility"
- Domingo Sanchez-Mesa, University Carlos III, ES  
"Cinema and Literature: the Myth of Virtual Mobility Becoming Real"
- Herman Van den Bosch, OUN, NL  
"Virtual Mobility beyond Virtual Reality"

VICTORIOUS Session

- *The Student Experience of Mobility in a Digital World*
- *The Current State of University Support for Student Mobility in a Digital World*

Chairperson: Isabel Perez, University of Granada, CEVUG, ES

- Sue Timmis, University of Bristol, UK  
"The Student Experience of Virtual Mobility - Findings from the Victorious Case Studies"
- Aune Valk, University of Tartu, EE  
"The VICTORIOUS Student Survey: Findings from the Questionnaire"
- Steven Verjans, AVNet - K.U.Leuven, BE  
"Piloting Solutions for Enhancing the Students' Electronic Experience"
- Cesare Zanca, University of Siena, IT  
"Results of the University Survey"

---

Coimbra Group & VICTORIOUS Project Final Seminar,  
28th November 2006

13:00 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 16:00 Round Table Discussions

Round tables each seating 10 people will be set up and conference participants will be invited to join these tables. Each table will have a moderator drawn from the project team and will have resource people allocated from those who have presented best practice examples earlier. Each discussion will last for an hour so participants can choose to join two different round tables, one for the discussion taking place from 14.00 to 15.00 and the other for the discussion taking place from 15.00 to 16.00.

- Annemie Boonen, EuroPACE ivzw., BE (Moderator)  
Frances Bell, University of Salford, UK (Rapporteur)  
"Which cultural and language issues need to be taken into account while implementing Virtual Mobility?"
- Paul Fenton, UOC, ES (Moderator)  
Machteld Boussemaere, EuroPACE ivzw., BE (Rapporteur)  
"What is the most effective way to introduce sustainable Virtual Mobility schemes in Higher Education institutions? What are the barriers to implementing such schemes? What practical steps can be taken to overcome such barriers?"
- Fred Truyen, KULeuven, BE (Moderator)  
Kamakshi Rajagopal, EuroPACE ivzw., AVNet - K.U.Leuven, BE (Rapporteur)  
"Staff development schemes to support Virtual and Real Mobility"
- Regitze Kristensen, TietgenSkolen, DK (Moderator)  
Greta Vandeborne, SPACE network, BE (Rapporteur)  
"What are the issues concerning accreditation of virtual courses? Has the time come to have a full-fl edged Virtual Erasmus Action by the European Commission?"
- Eija Källström, ARCADA, FI (Moderator)  
Veronika Bleyerova, University of West- Hungary, HU (Rapporteur)  
"Opportunities and challenges of collaboration in international university-business projects."
- Jasper Tredgold, University of Bristol, UK (Moderator)  
Angela Joyce, University of Bristol, UK (Rapporteur)  
"How could Erasmus students take their digital identities with them?"
- Anthony Baldry, University of Pavia, IT (Moderator)  
Axelle Devaux, Coimbra Group, BE (Rapporteur)  
"How do we support learners making transitions between very different digital environments?"
- Louwarnoud Van-der-Duim, University of Groningen, NL (Moderator)  
Cesare Zanca, University of Siena, IT (Rapporteur)  
"What will universities need to do to support the mobile students of tomorrow?"
- Nicki Mrose, AVNet - K.U.Leuven, BE (Moderator)  
Steven Verjans, AVNet - K.U.Leuven, BE (Rapporteur)  
"Will students in search of courses in other countries ever have a digital database to assist them?"
- Isabel Perez, University of Granada - CEVUG, ES (Moderator)  
Matti Lappaleinen, University of Turku, FI (Rapporteur)  
"What is good practice in providing excellent information for incoming and outgoing exchange students?"

---

Coimbra Group & VICTORIOUS Project Final Seminar,

28th November 2006

16:00 – 16:30 Coffee Break

16:30 – 17:30 Plenary Session

This final session will draw on the reports from the round tables and will be used to create the forum summary. This summary will be included in the final version of the Being Mobile Handbook available online from the Being Mobile web site. The VICTORIOUS Project will identify further examples of good practice or items of advice and guidance for University staff and students.

Chairperson

Prof. Jeff Haywood, VICTORIOUS, University of Edinburgh, UK

Rapporteurs from the round table discussions

- Frances Bell, University of Salford, UK
- Machteld Boussemaere, EuroPACE ivzw., BE
- Kamakshi Rajagopal, EuroPACE ivzw., AVNet - K.U.Leuven, BE
- Greta Vandeborne, SPACE network, BE
- Veronika Bleyerova, University of West- Hungary, HU
- Angela Joyce, University of Bristol, UK
- Axelle Devaux, Coimbra Group, BE
- Cesare Zanca, University of Siena, IT
- Steven Verjans, AVNet - K.U.Leuven, BE
- Matti Lappalainen, University of Turku, FI

17:30 Reception

Contributors:

Jasper Tredgold (Bristol), Axelle Devaux (Coimbra Group Office), Denise Haywood (Edinburgh), Louwarnoud van der Duim (Groningen), Nicki Mrose (Leuven), Anthony Baldry (Pavia), Matti Lappalainen (Turku), Kamakshi Rajagopal (Leuven), Angela Joyce (Bristol), Ivana Marenzi (Pavia), Isabel Perez (Granada).

All presentations and the report can be downloaded from the VICTORIOUS website at

<http://www.victorious-project.org>.

---

Coimbra Group & VICTORIOUS Project Final Seminar,  
28th November 2006

# **The Student experience of Mobility in a Digital World**

Chairperson: Isabel Perez, University of Granada

## **Student interviews & surveys I - student interviews**

Sue Timmis, University of Bristol

### **Interview process:**

The project team decided to investigate student experiences of ICT when studying abroad through interviews. From October 2005 to February 2006, each of the nine participating Universities interviewed between two and seven students. The targeted students were outgoing students returning from an exchange visit abroad and incoming students arriving to begin their period of study. Students had the opportunity to give their opinion, individually or in a group, on what was successful in their personal experience. Most of the interviews were video or audio recorded. The team collected data for 17 universities.

The interviews were structured using the same questions that were later used for a wider survey. These questions covered the areas of culture, access, support, resources and information, and all interviews used them although with some minor adaptations as a result of practical issues at each university.

As it was possible that we would wish to share the video and audio files the interviewed students were asked for their permission, however in the event the interview videos were sufficiently interesting for us to go back to some students and ask permission to make specific clips available at the Victorious project Seminar held in Tartu on 18 May 2006.

### **Preliminary findings: overview**

The interviews showed the role of ICT as an integral part of the modern student exchange visit, and that the use of ICT at the student's 'home' institution tends to set the standard for comparison and expectation in their mind. Many students had very good experiences during their exchange visits and the great majority enjoyed them, even when there were problems.

The preliminary results of interviews survey helped us to classify universities according to their 'ICT culture'. For example, some are ICT-oriented, whereas others are apparently less concerned with ICT. Some institutions are flexible in their provision of and support for ICT, and others are more bureaucratic. The interviews also showed that there are sometimes big differences in the provision and use of ICT between different departments in the same institution. Even when students benefit from quite good access to PCs in a particular university, ICT may not be used in teaching activities as much as it could be. That is, some institutions offer very good resources but they are not used well because they have not developed an 'eLearning culture'.

The student interviews helped us to identify some of the enablers and barriers to use of ICT by students, which include the ease or difficulty of obtaining and using logins/passwords, flexibility or inflexibility of rules and access, differences in 'culture' between the home and host university towards students in general, and ease or difficulty in understanding the way that academic programmes are organised and delivered.

Some students gave very good and detailed feedback on their visits, and many were pleased to be asked about their experiences. Most students were happy with the information they received from their host university, and with the help provided when they had a problem. Unfortunately, some of them had bad experiences with little help and sometimes refusal to provide help. The

main problem for many of them was the difficulty in understanding technical guidelines and rules in a foreign language. As a consequence, some had no means of access to last minute information which was often provided in the local language only. International students sometimes felt isolated.

### **Preliminary Findings: Detailed**

According to the students we interviewed, good access to digital resources and services was the main concern.

Most of the institutions offered PC-room facilities, some of them with convenient opening hours, no queue and fast internet connections. However, some others only opened few hours a day, students had to wait rather long time to get a PC, and the connection was sometimes very slow. When students could finally access a computer, they had to face login/password problems, which were not always solved quickly. Connection to the internet and access to email were necessary for them not only for educational purposes, but also because the internet is sometimes (perhaps mostly) the easiest way to communicate with family and friends whilst abroad.

Students also had problems accessing libraries and using digital libraries. Library access information is rarely available in English but is often quite complex and technical. Students were not informed that they were allowed to access the library resources. Language was again identified as a barrier to understanding and access. Students felt that information *should* be provided in the local language plus English or at least one additional foreign language. This is particularly true when the subject is difficult for no-technical students to understand. Students considered that network services in student areas or student rooms were very important when available, but it appears that this service is not widely available.

Many students complained about email services and access to email. A local email service was not always available for exchange students, forcing them to use their home university system (if they could) or to use external email. Even when it was provided, some students claimed they did not want to use that system because they knew that the service would not last longer than their stay abroad. Here again language problems existed as the help information needed to be able to access the email system was only in the local language.

Email featured strongly in student responses, not just because of its social value but because many universities used it as a communication channel with students and as a route to access services. Thus inability to use the local system had impacts on visiting students such as failure to receive important 'last minute' information about changes and exams. They tended to try to find alternative ways to overcome this such as MSN Messenger.

Another major concern was restrictions on access to web resources. The web is an essential tool for students living abroad but at some universities there were browser restrictions which meant that they could not use the web to deal with banks, travel and other services. Unlike local students, exchange students do not have a home PC to work with and rely on the university PCs for these essential activities.

Students normally have access to the same eLearning services as local students. Apparently most of them had some sort of access problem, and here again they needed to find alternative solutions. Difference in systems between universities meant that they had to learn some skills anew, for example VLE (virtual learning environment) which often differed between their host and home institutions.

Some Universities use paper-based solutions to digital problems: for example an "identity programme" for Erasmus students at one university in which students were given a paper attesting their right of access but there was no digital form of identification.

#### **Discussion points on student interviews:**

Students need ICT services even more than local students as they have to communicate with their home university, most of which is now done online, and they have social connections to maintain whilst away. They need information and access to the university systems as soon as they arrive, indeed ideally before arrival at host university so that they do not feel cut off and isolated. As a consequence, perhaps we need to adopt special access policies for exchange students to digital services and resources.

#### **Conclusions:**

- The interviews provided a detailed set of findings on the experiences of both incoming and outgoing students involved in placements abroad. They also helped to validate the questionnaire design for the survey and to identify additional issues that needed to be included. The institutions mentioned in the interviews presented a wide range of practices. University departments sometime present different levels of access, even in the same institution.
- They also helped us to understand student reactions towards ICT services abroad. Services offered by the university at home have a strong influence on students' expectation when abroad, sometimes were very much lower or higher in range and depth of provision. Students also showed their great ability to sort problems out and create 'handcrafts' solutions when needed.
- ICT services are often possibly accessible to students, but they have to be equally accessible to local and exchange students. Exchange students are in a special situation because their time abroad is limited. Access should not be time consuming. Language is almost always an issue. Support is needed in this direction. Induction and support are needed more than for local students.
- Access to ICT services and resources remains essential in terms of contact with teaching staff and materials, student life and integration, keeping in touch with family and friends at home.
- To make sure exchange students benefit from the available services should we set standard or minimal level of ICT service? What should the standard be?



## Findings from student interviews & surveys 2 - student survey

Aune Valk, University of Tartu

### Survey process:

The letter of invitation to participate in the survey and the questionnaire were sent to Coimbra Group universities and to partner organisations such as European Universities Association (EUA), the European Student Association (ESIB) and, the European Association for International Education (EAIE). The project partners also disseminated the questionnaire individually at a national level via Erasmus coordinators. The students were asked to fill in a questionnaire online, and offered the option to participate in a prize draw. It would take them approximately 20 minutes to fill in the questionnaire. A static PDF of the survey can be viewed at [www.victorious-project.org](http://www.victorious-project.org).

The questionnaire was made up of twenty-six questions grouped into broad areas. Students were asked what digital services at their host university they could access before they arrived, what they had available to them during their visit, and what digital services were still accessible after their stay abroad. We asked about the quality of these services and the support for their use. They were also questioned about the continuity of access during transitional periods (when moving from home to host and from host to home). We gathered information about them (age, gender), their home and host universities plus subjects of study. The questionnaire was anonymous but to enter the prize draw we required an email address.

### Survey results:

2378 students from 32 countries provided valid responses. Regarding the home country, there was a lower response rate from countries where the project partners were not represented (e.g. France) and a higher rate from VICTORIOUS partner countries e.g. UK, Finland and others. Regarding the host country the sample represented quite well the general major sources of students in the current ERASMUS population.

The majority of respondents were 21 to 25 years-old, with few over 30 years-old. 60% of the respondents were studying for a Bachelor (first) degree, 33% for a Master or other diploma. The male and female ratio was reasonably in agreement with the general student population (64% female against 36% male). Forty percent of respondents were studying sciences at their home university, with approximately 25% studying arts and the same science and engineering. The great majority took courses during their visit (90%) with 15% carrying out research and/or a dissertation. Half of the respondents stayed less than 6 months.

### Services available online before the visit:

Almost all students had sought information about their host university on the Internet before they left their home university. Only 10% could register for the courses they wished to take prior to their arrival at their host university.

The questionnaire results showed that language was an issue. Most of the institutions provided language courses – 86% of respondents said language courses were available - but when the institution provided courses taught in English, students may have expected that other services would be provided in English too.

Universities in five of the countries that were most represented in the survey were compared for their provision of information about student access to services. In general, the UK universities

appeared to be the best providers of information online and French universities seemed to make the weakest provision. Italian universities seemed to provide students with very good online information about language courses. However, these are generalisations and experiences varied greatly between universities, and between departments in the same university.

The short written answers in the survey from students were generally quite positive. The students valued good information about social events upon arrival and the ability to contact teachers before they arrived.

### **Services available during the visit:**

Students were asked if online learning materials of various types were made available to them during their stay at their host university. Just over half said that such materials were available and 40% said that they used it. Almost half did not know, did not answer or reported that such material was not available. Services accessible online were categorised into active and passive information. Passive information (times, locations, availability, reading lists) was often available online, while activities like test, exams, discussion groups, were much less available online.

Students made interesting comments about materials available to them during their stay and their reasons for not using them. They remarked that information available online was not always relevant to their studies, and also pointed out the issue of languages, when websites were only written in a host language. This led to a difference in ease of access between local and Erasmus students.

Regarding library services, only 25-50% of respondents used the electronic services, mostly the electronic catalogue. Electronic journals, borrowing materials online and access to databases were used by a quarter of respondents and another 20% reported that these were available. A surprising 41% of students did not know whether electronic journals, subject-related bibliographic databases or an online borrowing record existed in their host university library. Fewer students, around 20%, did not know whether the library catalogue was online. Most of the students did not know if other services existed and whether they could use them. Importantly, some 30% of students continued to use the host university online library after returning to their home university.

Most students (70%) took a personal PC or laptop on their study visit, however, over 20% said that they were not able to connect them to the internet. This may partly explain why 75% of students reported that they used university computers. Approximately half the students considered access to PCs and the Internet to be a problem to some extent, and for 23% it was reported as a major problem. They were required to pay for only a few services, which were mainly printing services. This did not seem to bother them unduly, probably because this is also the case in their home university.

When facing a problem, 57% of the students said that they could get assistance, half of them face to face. This does suggest that other students may not have had such good support.

Access to the home university from the host university was not a major problem. Around two thirds of students could still access their home university email and digital library, and half could access their online student record. Access to online filespace was more of a problem, with only a quarter of respondents able to access these. However, this access to home services has to be considered in the light of what the home university offers, as some students did report rather low levels of home university services.

Many students had little knowledge of what digital services of their host university were, or would be, available to them after their return to their home university. Forty to fifty percent did

not know this for the digital library, email, saved files and their student record online. Ability to access these services varied between 13% and 30% depending on service.

**Conclusions:**

- Almost all students could access some information online about their host university before going there, although what they were able to do online varied considerably, for example only ~14% could register for courses before going
- While at the host institution, the main problems for ~20% of students related to access to PCs and the internet
- In the case of online services at the host university, problems related to language; sometimes a limited availability of some services to exchange students; and lack of support (with 43% reporting little or no support)
- Most students lost their `connection` to their host institution after they had returned home, and this may matter more to students who visited a university with very good facilities



## **Piloting digital service solutions to support student mobility**

Steven Verjans, University of Leuven

The VICTORIOUS project team decided to test the preparedness of universities for large scale mobility in a digital university and also to consider this as a proxy for large scale virtual mobility. The aim was to see what is actually being done in universities in several areas, and to explore how to address the points raised by students in the questionnaires.

### **Pilot testing process:**

The basis for the pilots came out of the interview and survey questions:

- What is offered to visiting students as a support?
- How much information can students find before they come?
- What is available for outgoing students when they leave?
- Does the library or IT service help students at a distance?
- Digital identities, problem of passwords?
- ELearning materials?

The project partners were aware that universities are often not prepared, and in some cases not aware that they are not prepared for providing for the needs of mobile students, both those visiting them and their own students studying elsewhere.

The project partners identified six key questions related to libraries and repositories, interoperability and quality of experience, and used their own universities as case studies to explore the following aspects of physical and virtual mobility:

- Quality of information about the host university (Pilot 1)
- Making courses more 'visiting student friendly' (Pilot 2)
- Interconnections between virtual learning environments (Pilot 3)
- Making course choice from a remote university easier (Pilot 4)
- Sharing digital identities between universities (Pilot 5)
- Remote access to the full digital service of the home university (Pilot 6)

### **Finding and challenges:**

Pilots 1, 2 and 5 were selected for discussion during the Seminar.

#### **Quality of information about the host university (Pilot 1):**

The first pilot aimed at exploring the quality of information available to supporting visiting students. In some universities, good information was available on the web, while in some others, there was no information at all. Some students had little information about their host university before they arrived.

Firstly, pilot participants collected and translated available information into English as common language to work with. They discussed the project with their International Office as the most likely location involved in providing this information to visiting students and the website most likely to be interrogated by them. It appeared that the main information needed was about computer services, how to get an email account, library services, VPN (Virtual Private Network), wireless connection, access and use of computer rooms plus support for these services. Other useful information could be collected at the general information desk.

The main problem met by the participants to this pilot was that, because of the timing, they were not able to present it to visiting students on arrival as they had already arrived. The pilot was tested anyway and students discussed what they wished they *could* have found available when they had arrived some months previously. It appeared that students were not even aware of what information was available. When they discovered the document created by the pilot participants, they were surprised by the possibilities offered, especially the VPN (Virtual Private Network). They welcomed the initiative. The international offices were impressed too and decided to include the documents in their web page.

### **Sharing digital identities between universities (Pilot 5):**

The aim of the fifth pilot was to explore the different ways to share student's digital identity between universities. When studying abroad, students have to combine the use of at least two digital identities (from home and host universities).

One possible solution is the use of a 'trust framework' within a federation of selected universities, in which each university allows certain defined information about students (and staff also if wished) to be searched online by other universities as needed. Students trying to connect to the host university via websites will be invisibly 'redirected' via their home university, which will check and confirm that it is indeed a known exchange student, and send this confirmation back to the host university. The host university then grants access to the student to the requested applications. As a consequence, the student would only need the one login and password for access to materials and services at both home and host universities.

The pilot team selected Shibboleth, a system that allows sharing of information, building on top of and without modifying existing individual organisation of the universities. It does not require actual **exchange** of personal information on teachers and students, merely reading access as required. The pilot testing aimed at delivering an online demonstration showing that the use of such a system is feasible and a report describing the steps to follow and the problems faced.

The pilot was tested in Bristol, Edinburgh and Leuven. A number of procedural policies and legal issues need to be solved to implement this system mostly related to the trust aspect. The importance of these issues depends on the size of the federation one wants to establish.

### **Conclusions:**

- Awareness of all the digital services useful and available to a mobile student is the main issue. It is not enough to make things available, it is also important to make people aware of the possibilities on offer. In these technical language is a problem, even for students with good language skills in academic settings.
- Another difficulty is bringing together the IT services, International Offices, Student Record Office, eLearning services and the Library to work on solutions to these problems. The partners identified lack of awareness of some of these problems even in IT departments.

## Results of the University Survey

Cesare Zanca, University of Siena

The aim of the survey was to explore the provision that universities make to meet Erasmus students' needs and expectations with respect to the digital education environment. This survey focused on the university's perception of the services provided to students.

The questionnaire was sent to Coimbra Group universities but was also advertised through other university networks, amongst which the European University Association (EUA). A message was also posted in the European Association for International Education (EAIE) mailing list. National Erasmus coordinators and universities in the Victorious partners' countries were also directly approached.

The questionnaire was divided in four parts addressing issues such as IT services, libraries, international offices, eLearning services, student registries, and virtual exchanges. The recipients were asked to answer 19 questions related to their own students visiting other universities, or visiting students. They were given five weeks to return the questionnaire, but the deadline was extended in order to have a higher response rate.

We received 42 replies from universities in 16 countries, which is more or less what we expected. But the statistical validity of the survey is limited. However, the survey led us to interesting conclusions.

The universities were asked general and specific questions. Specific questions aimed to compare access to services for home and visiting students. We focused on Digital library materials, distant support available for library, access to PC rooms, laptops, printers, wireless connection, access to IT services, blended learning available, and access to E-learning services. The survey shows that incoming students often have access to the same services both at the host university and at their home university. Outgoing students enjoy the same level of access to these services that at your university while visiting another institutions. Therefore, the first finding of the survey is that universities seem to be saying that exchange students are receiving the same services at home and host universities. Moreover, responding universities seem to take a 'boasting' approach for incoming students more than for outgoing students.

The second set of questions could more easily be verified. The survey showed that visiting students have the same access to information about digital services, general information about ECTS (European Credit Transfer System), digital access to credits acquired, and the possibility to enroll online before arrival. Outgoing students have the same access to information about digital services and ECTS.

The survey results also show that universities' 'boasting approach' is clearer for incoming students than outgoing students, after arrival than before arrival, for access to services than for information provided about the services.

The approach is also clearer for the general questions than for the specific and easily verifiable questions.

The open questions illustrate the diversity of situations within European universities. For instance language is quite often a problem, especially when information is available in the local language only. Universities also reported technical problems, mainly limited to the case of visiting students.

The surveys finding led us to the following conclusions. Universities seem to be backing what the students survey revealed. Universities are providing them with the same services but the provision is limited in some ways.

The 'Boasting' approach is different for incoming and outgoing students, general and specific services, theoretical access and practical availability, also depending on the information given. This statement challenges the equality rule.

Awareness also remains a problem. We had the feeling that many Universities and International offices had not fully realized the need for special attention towards exchange students.

Students are still perceived as entitled to full services only if they are physically present, and not before arrival or after their visit.

Online and centralized information is also often a problem.

The survey showed a great diversity in provision of digital services, mainly in relation to language and practical problems. Even if we are fully aware of the fact that diversity is part of the nature of the Erasmus scheme, we believe it should not interfere with equal opportunities.

Universities should deal with digital Services in the same way as they are working on improving recognition and mobility in general (ECTS).

### **Future perspectives**

Most of the participating universities are aware of the possibility to set up virtual exchanges, and almost half of them already started to implement them, though at a very limited level. The issues raised above will be, very likely, amplified by large scale virtual mobility.

## Round Table discussions: Reports

Ten roundtables were organised in the afternoon session of the seminar. Each roundtable took place twice, sometimes combined with another roundtable.

This exercise aimed at answering ten questions raised by the Victorious and Being mobile projects. Each roundtable moderator and rapporteur tried to lead the discussion and to formulate recommendations combining project findings and roundtable participants' remarks. Being mobile led 5 roundtables and tried to answer the following questions:

- "Which cultural and language issues need to be taken into account while implementing Virtual Mobility?"
- "What is the most effective way to introduce sustainable Virtual Mobility schemes in Higher Education institutions? What are the barriers to implementing such schemes? What practical steps can be taken to overcome such barriers?"
- "Staff development schemes to support Virtual and Real Mobility"
- "What are the issues concerning accreditation of virtual courses? Has the time come to have a full-fl edged Virtual Erasmus Action by the European Commission?"
- "Opportunities and challenges of collaboration in international university-business projects."

The Victorious partners focused on questions raised by during the two years life of the project. The Roundtable led us to the interesting conclusions on the questions raised.

The first roundtable leading question was **"How could Erasmus students take their digital identities with them?"**.

The Roundtable showed that students do not consider this question as an issue. However they regret the fact that when some students leave the host university, they lose their connection to the host university and therefore cannot access any of their work or materials there. Students also deplore the delay to have access to host university systems. They also regret the multiple sign-ons but confess they are used to it. As a consequence, students do not feel they need a single identity system as long as they have good IT access. It is important to make sure that they have access when they arrive, and it would be better if they could have access even before their arrival.

Students give more importance to face-to-face support and especially consider the implementation of a buddy system is an asset. It increases students' level of satisfaction even when technical problems remain.

Universities consider that a single identity system is desirable, but that external and internal factors make it difficult to realise it. These factors are issues like ownership, national policy, security or technical practicalities. Systems like Shibboleth and the Eduroam infrastructure are already being rolled-out in various places across Europe.

The following roundtable focused **on the support offered to learners making transitions between very different digital environments**.

Based on student interviews, the project findings showed student's reaction to the 'IT culture shock' met when changing university. Universities can provide students with shock absorbers, i.e. special measures introduced in order to tackle the culture shock problem and to integrate mobile students into university life.

Examples of such measures were proposed to the participants, and they were asked to classify them, from the university point of view and from the students' point of view. The roundtable reached the conclusion that students and universities have different point of views about the shock absorbers. Students consider that physical facilities (access to structures) and support, both from administration and from 'buddies' are very important for students. Universities consider information to students about culture shock before arrival is the most important shock absorber, whereas structures and physical facilities are less important.

In the continuity of the precedent roundtable, the third one focused on the **future of university support to mobile students**. Participants to the roundtable presented successful human support projects, such as Erasmus Students Network projects. Once again, the roundtable showed a difference between university and students point of view. Therefore, Universities should try and get regular feedback from students on their needs in terms of digital services.

The roundtable concluded that in the future the availability of online information on courses that mobile students can take should be a priority. Universities should also ensure that information is available before students start their virtual or physical courses abroad. In this respect, information databases at the national and international level may be useful, if they are regularly updated. Universities should ensure some flexibility and supply procedures for changing courses.

Information on digital services given only in local language is a problem that could discriminate students in mobility. On the other side, students are expected to learn and use the language of their host courses. A distinction between short and long study periods is suggested: only the latter should require attending courses entirely in local language.

Virtual mobility before physical mobility may alleviate both the language problem and cultural shock. The opinion of the participants to the roundtable is that virtual courses are compatible with face-to-face courses and would not reduce physical mobility.

The forth roundtable aimed to answer the following question: **"Will students in search of courses in other countries ever have a digital database to assist them?"**. Participants were divided in three groups of four people. Each group was given a motivating story and some stimulating questions: one for the student view, one for the university view and one for the international or national agency view. The groups discussed one "view" and wrote down answers and suggestions. After fifteen minutes of discussion papers were shifted around and the second group worked further on the suggestions of the first. In this way each group had fifteen minutes to discuss each view. Finally the last group presented the suggestions on their paper to the round table. The conclusion of the Roundtable were the following:

In order to be confident it is offering high quality in use of ICT to its visiting students, a university should provide them with a searchable database of courses and programs, which fulfils the ECTS-label requirements; (course) information and website not only in the local language but also at least in English. Information should not only be available on university website. The university should test if the information is also available via the European portals PLOTEUS and Study-in-Europe, and take steps to make information available there if necessary.

For STUDENTS to be confident that they are well-prepared for a visit to another university in terms of use of ICT, they need to check portals like PLOTEUS and Study-in-Europe for information on study opportunities in different European countries, to check and compare

university websites of interesting institutions before making a choice, and be well informed about course and examination modalities.

For international and national higher education agencies to be confident that the national infrastructure is well-prepared to support visiting students in terms of use of ICT, they need to support and stimulate international standards of course descriptions, to support and stimulate European projects like PLOTEUS and Study-in-Europe Support and stimulate country-specific databases on courses, programs, study modalities and student facilities. They also need to promote these portals towards Higher education institutions and interested students.

Finally the last roundtable worked on **good practice in providing excellent information for incoming and outgoing exchange students**. The roundtable participants had very different backgrounds: international office, educational technology unit, general administration, professional development, and students. A very issue was raised: a prerequisite for the development of practices and providing information about practices is good cooperation between international offices, computing services, libraries, educational technology units and other support units, local students and last but not least: exchange students.

