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Virtual Exchange in the new EC communications
and programmes

Coimbra Group High Level Webinar on
Education Policy (3 December 2020)

Overview

- What is Virtual Exchange? How is it be present in the new European communications and programmes?
- Based on recent large scale research studies, how should universities promote and support Virtual Exchange?

Virtual Exchange in the new EC communications and programmes

- Communication from the Commission on achieving the European Education Area by 2025
 - “...the future Erasmus and European Solidarity Corps programmes will be greener and more digital. **Virtual and blended mobility** could complement physical mobility.” (p.18)
- Digital Education Action Plan (21-27):
 - “**Blended mobility** will be ‘mainstreamed’ (i.e. integrated) into the Erasmus programme by introducing a ‘**virtual learning**’ component to Erasmus” (p.38)
 - “...greater use will be made of **virtual exchanges** between young people and education institutions in Europe, and around the world, to further engage young people in intercultural dialogue and improve their soft skills” (p.38)
- Commission Staff Working Document on the Digital Education Action Plan:
 - “**Virtual exchange** activities help teachers to step away from their accustomed learning and teaching approaches and develop new skills to engage in linguistic, intercultural, and digital learning experiences, which they may not be confronted with in their day-to-day practice” (p.35)

First things first: What is Virtual Exchange?

The different ways in which students are engaged in sustained online intercultural interaction and collaboration...

...with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations....

...as an integrated part of course work....

...and under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators.



Blended mobility is a deliberate combination of both physical mobility and virtual exchange.

What makes Virtual Exchange different to MOOCs and 'Virtual Mobility'?

Virtual Exchange	MOOCs and online courses
Emphasis on people to people intercultural dialogue	Emphasis on online access to university course content, video lectures, and other course materials
Intercultural learning and active global citizenship are key aim and outcome - but can also address specific themes and content	Mastery of course content is considered main educational outcome – may also include intercultural learning
Usually includes real-time synchronous video interaction with peers in small groups, combined with asynchronous activities and assignments	Communication is predominantly asynchronous

Recent Landmarks in Virtual Exchange

- The EVALUATE project

<https://www.evaluateproject.eu/>

‘Evaluating and Upscaling Telecollaborative Teacher Education’

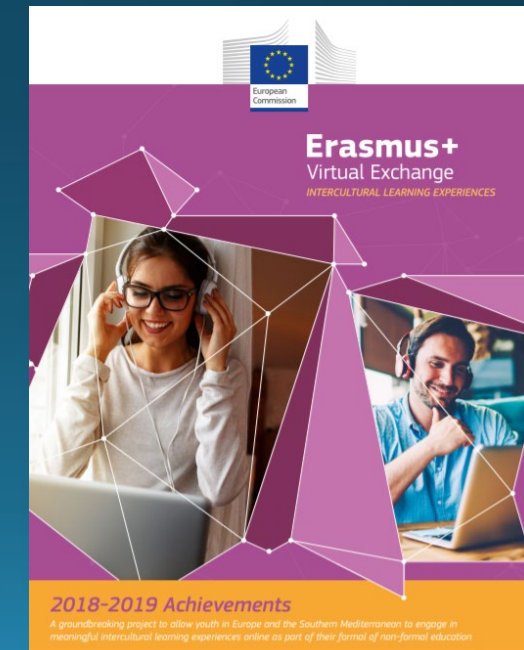
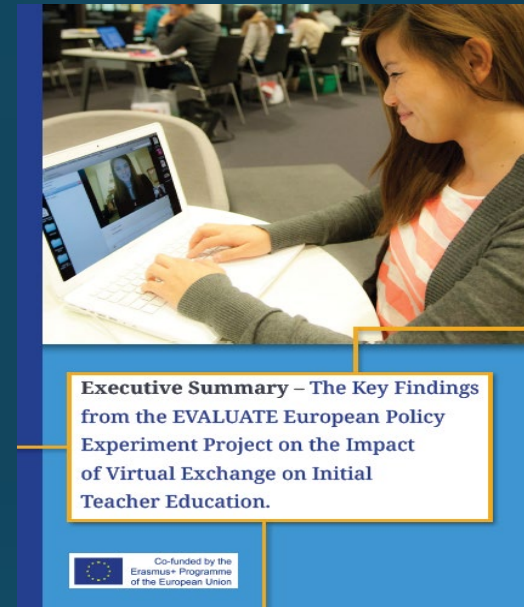
- The EVOLVE project

<https://evolve-erasmus.eu/>

‘EVOLVE Project Baseline Study’

- Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange

<https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual>



How is Virtual Exchange being integrated into university education?

Pre-mobility – Students are engaged in Virtual Exchange with partners from the partner university before their international mobility

Blended mobility – Periods of online collaboration between classes before travelling to meet and complete projects at one of the partner universities

Course integration - Teachers in two or more classes organise collaborative tasks for their students to complete online as part of their coursework

Learning from the research: How can universities promote Virtual Exchange? (1)



- Virtual Exchange should not be seen as being in competition with physical mobility – explore *blended mobility* and *pre-mobility* options
- Recognise that students require mentoring by teachers or facilitators as they engage in their online intercultural collaborations with different cultural groups. **Teachers should therefore be trained to run their VEs – re: UNICollaboration, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange.**
- Virtual Exchange requires integration into the university curriculum and **explicit recognition of students' learning outcomes – ECTS, Diploma Supplement etc. (Role of university management)**

How can universities promote Virtual Exchange? (2)



Teachers' engagement in Virtual Exchange initiatives requires time and a significant extra workload.

Universities can support teachers through the provision of academic recognition (for example through **teaching awards, time release..**)

International Office / Mobility Officers have a role to play – They can help by **connecting teachers in collaborative networks, organising pre-mobility exchanges.**

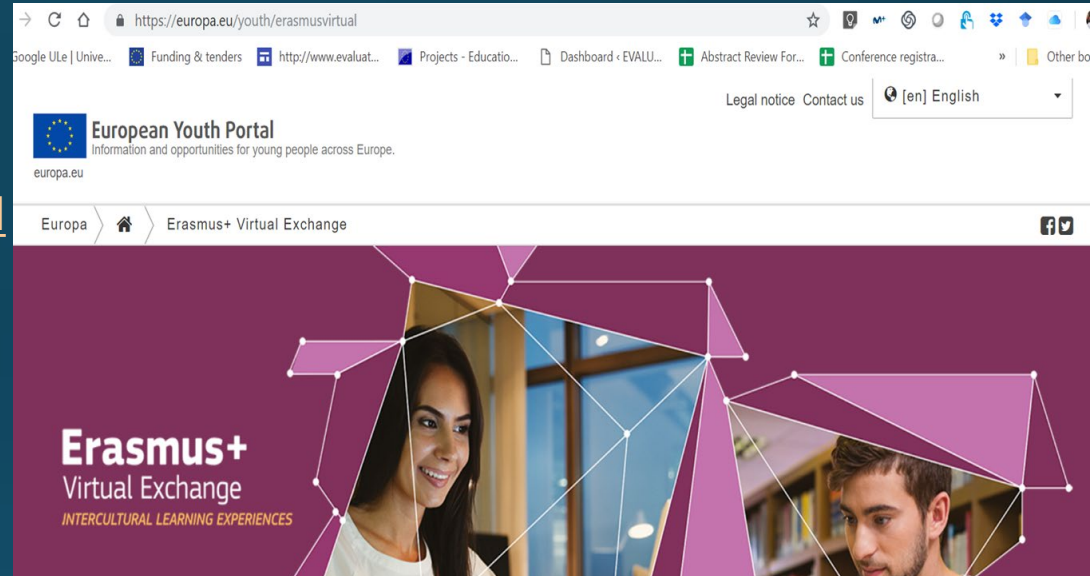
Training, resources, partner finding...

www.unicollaboration.org

<https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual>

<https://evolve-erasmus.eu/>

<https://www.stevensinitiative.org/>



Thank you for listening!



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