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Key drivers' perspectives on the institutional uptake of virtual exchange.

EVOLVE Project Team

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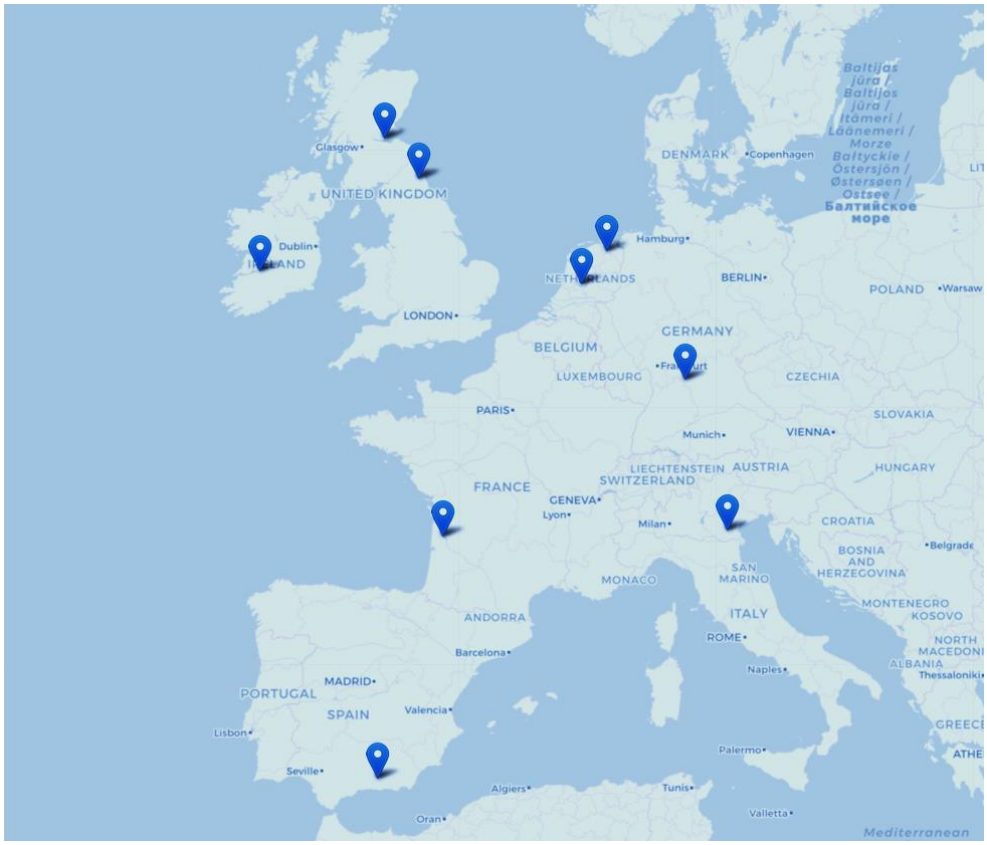

Key drivers' perspectives on the institutional uptake of virtual exchange

Case Studies from 9 European HEIs

December 2020

EVOLVE Project Team

Evidence-Validated Online Learning through Virtual Exchange

About this publication

This study is an output of the Erasmus+ Forward Forward-Looking Cooperation Project EVOLVE (www.evolve-erasmus.eu), under Erasmus+ Key Action 3: Support for policy reform, Priority 5 – Achieving the aims of the renewed EU strategy for higher education (Erasmus+ project: 590174-EPP-1-2017-1-NL-EPPKA3-PI-FORWARD).

The project aims to mainstream Virtual Exchange (VE) as an innovative educational practice in Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) across Europe and runs from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020. It is coordinated by the University of Groningen, The Netherlands. The other partners in the project are: The University of León (Spain), Université Grenoble Alpes (France), The Open University (United Kingdom), Jan Dlugosz University (Poland), University of Padua (Italy), University of Warwick (United Kingdom), Malmö University (Sweden), Sharing Perspectives Foundation (the Netherlands), Soliya/Search for Common Ground (Belgium), Coimbra Group (Belgium) and SGroup (Belgium).

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Authors: Gerdientje Oggel, Juan Albá Duran, Sophie Millner, Francesca Helm, Linda Plowright-Pepper, Salma Elbeblawi, Mirjam Hauck

Editors: Sake Jager, Sophie Millner, Gerdientje Oggel, Juan Albá Duran

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Contributors

Juan Albá Duran is Lecturer of Spanish Proficiency in the department of European Languages and Cultures at the University of Groningen (The Netherlands). He has developed VE projects linking students of Teacher Training, Journalism and Second Language Learning from universities in Spain, Chile and The Netherlands. He has presented the outcomes of his research and VE projects in several international conferences. Within the EVOLVE project he has participated in the development of the training programmes and in the mentoring of teachers' development of VE. He has also contributed to the EVOLVE research study on students' disciplinary learning through VE and co-authored the report on the institutionalization of VE in European HE institutions.

Salma Elbeblawi is the Chief Program Officer at Soliya. As Chief Program Officer, Ms. Elbeblawi oversees strategy and execution for Soliya's dialogue and training programs across North America, the Middle East and North Africa, Europe, and Asia. She oversees the design, implementation, and evaluation of virtual exchange programming and designs yearly strategy and operational plans for Soliya, leading the organization in the most appropriate direction to best serve the needs of young adults. Significantly, Ms. Elbeblawi oversees Soliya's research efforts, evaluating virtual programming, including working with social scientists, Dr. Emile Bruneau from the University of Pennsylvania and Dr. Sandy Schumann from University College London, to design new measures for virtual exchange. Previously, Ms. Elbeblawi was involved with youth empowerment efforts across the MENA region and in Europe, serving at the Ford Foundation, the Canadian International Development Agency, and Centre for Widening Participation and Social Inclusion at University of Wales. She holds a Master's in Public Health from Boston University.

Mirjam Hauck is Associate Head for Internationalisation, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the School of Languages and Applied Linguistics at the Open University/UK and a Senior Fellow of the UK's Higher Education Academy. She has published widely on the use of technologies for the learning and teaching of languages and cultures, in virtual exchange contexts in particular. Her work covers aspects such as learner and teacher autonomy, intercultural communicative competence, and critical digital literacy. She presents regularly at conferences, seminars, and workshops worldwide. She is the President of the European Association for Computer Assisted Language Learning (EUROCALL), serves as Associate Editor of the CALL Journal and is a member of the editorial board of ReCALL and LLT.

Francesca Helm is a researcher at the Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies at the University of Padova. She is also chair of the Education Innovation working group of the Coimbra Group, a European network of universities, and co-coordinator of the Italian section of Scholars at Risk. Her research over the last 10 years has focused on intercultural dialogue, virtual exchange and internationalisation of higher education, including English-medium education. From 2018-2020 she has been leading the monitoring and evaluation of the European Commission's Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot project.

Sophie Millner is a VE practitioner. In her role as Senior Partnerships Officer for the Sharing Perspectives Foundation she is responsible for designing Cultural Encounters, the flagship intercultural VE course, and for working closely with partners across Europe and the Southern Mediterranean, to implement VE in their HEIs. Prior to joining the field of VE, she worked as a Parliamentary and NGO researcher on socio-political issues before completing her doctoral research on national belonging and embodied citizenship.

Gerdientje Oggel is a teacher of Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) in the department of European Languages at the University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Within the Chair of Language Learning, she is the exchange coordinator for students majoring in Spanish in particular. She is a trainer / researcher in the European EVOLVE project. In the context of this project, she coordinates the case study research. For this study, the research team has looked into how virtual exchange has been finding its way into 9 Institutions of Higher Education in Europe and in what directions VE should be growing from the perspective of its key-drivers in these institutions.

Linda Plowright-Pepper is a Research Associate at the Open University/UK. She has a particular interest in qualitative analysis of people's lived experiences and has applied qualitative analysis methods to a broad range of topics, particularly with young people.

Glossary of acronyms

COIL:	Center for Collaborative Online International Learning
EC:	European Commission
EU:	European Union
EVOLVE:	Evidence-Validated Online Learning through Virtual Exchange
HE:	higher education
HEIs:	Higher Education Institutes
IaH:	Internationalisation at Home
ICC:	Intercultural Communicative Competence
IoC:	Internationalisation of the Curriculum
iOOC:	Interactive Open Online Course
ITL:	Internationalisation of Teaching and Learning
NICE:	Network for Intercultural Competence to facilitate Entrepreneurship
OER:	Open Educational Resources
SPF:	Sharing Perspectives Foundation
TEP:	Transnational Virtual Exchange Project
VE:	Virtual Exchange

Executive summary

This report is an output of EVOLVE[1] (Evidence-Validated Online Learning through Virtual Exchange), an Erasmus+ KA3 Forward-Looking Cooperation Project which aims to mainstream Virtual Exchange as an innovative educational practice in Higher Education Institutes across Europe. The project ran from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2020. It was coordinated by the University of Groningen, Netherlands.

This report presents the findings of the EVOLVE case study research. Our research objective was: to identify key drivers' motivations and steps taken towards the introduction and implementation of VE across disciplines in European Higher Education Institutes (HEIs). The studies were conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews (through video conferencing) with key drivers of VE at nine HEIs in Europe. The research was carried out as a follow-up to the EVOLVE Baseline study[2] (Jager et al., 2019) which aimed to understand the current state of the art as regarding the understanding and implementation of VE in HEIs across Europe through a survey directed to four different types of stakeholders: educators, educational supporters, internationalisation officers and policymakers.

Virtual Exchange (VE), also referred to as telecollaboration, Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) or Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is an innovative transnational and intercultural pedagogical activity based on sustained, digitally mediated communication and interaction between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Under the guidance of trained educators or facilitators, VE engages students in HEIs, who are at different geographical locations, in online collaborative activities, which enables them to develop foreign language skills, media literacy, and intercultural competence as well as to learn how to approach course content and/or societal issues from different cultural and/or disciplinary perspectives. Although VE has been implemented successfully across the globe over the last 20-30 years mainly in language education, the humanities, social sciences, and business & economics, integrating it as a structural, institutionally supported component in existing teaching practices, has proved to be a major endeavour (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016).

However, the challenges to physical mobility, such as (environmental) costs and lack of inclusivity, have been leading to an increased interest from policy makers and managers in, and outside, higher education (HE) to use VE as a digital tool for Internationalisation at Home (IaH) and Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC) (Beelen & Jones, 2015; Leask, 2015). The current Covid-19 pandemic has strengthened the earlier voices who have been calling for alternative and complementary means to physical mobility, in order to open the opportunity of a relevant international experience to all students without the necessity to go physically abroad. Several EU funded VE projects, such as NICE[3], Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange[4] and EVOLVE which have been implemented over the past three years, are a strong indicator of this top-down interest. In addition to this, and as of recently, VE is being introduced and researched as a tool for the development of

[1] https://evolve-erasmus.eu/

[2] https://evolve-erasmus.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Baseline-study-report-Final_Published_Incl_Survey.pdf

[3] https://www.nice-eu.org/

[4] https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual

transversal and discipline-related knowledge and skills in other disciplines than language education, the humanities, social sciences, and business & economics (e.g. O'Dowd, 2018).

It is to be expected that these developments, in combination with the sudden shift to worldwide online education due to the pandemic, will help pave the way for VE to become a mainstream activity in HE, and a tool for blended mobility which is a combination of physical or virtual mobility and structured online collaboration (Helm & O'Dowd, 2020).

Through this case study research of institutions that appear to be moving towards further integration of VE, the EVOLVE project aimed to provide a better understanding of the integration of VE in HEIs by reporting on how VE has been finding its way into institutions, what strategies have been adopted, which key interactions and stakeholders were involved, in what directions VE is growing within institutions and to what extent there is an institutional recognition of VE practices. In order to achieve this, we have focused on the key drivers' motivations and steps taken towards the introduction and implementation of VE in their institutions.

Results

The results of this research contain a set of seven key findings and five recommendations for successful institutional uptake of VE. These are outlined below. However, to begin with, here are four key take-aways for the reader.

Take-aways

1. The first is **the significance of bottom-up drivers for initiating and implementing VE in HEIs**. This research found that across all nine universities VE activities were introduced and implemented by bottom-up drivers of whom we include educators and staff in service centres. These highly motivated individuals have worked to implement VE at their universities often at some personal cost or risk to their career development, time, or resources. To this end, we can say that these individuals are pioneers of VE at their universities. The significance of bottom-up individuals in the implementation of VE, is a finding that runs throughout this report and is highlighted in section 3.1.
2. The research question asked about the motivations of the interviewee for engaging in VE and, **for the key drivers, their motivation was strongly linked to the learning outcomes of students.** In particular, the educators, but also drivers in other areas, spoke passionately about enriching the learning experience of students, creating international encounters that students would otherwise not have been exposed to, and having a positive impact on their skill development. Their commitment to enhancing students' education was palpable and went some way to explaining why these key drivers continued to implement VE despite the challenges and costs.
3. As described above, VE is implemented by bottom-up drivers who are highly motivated by the learning outcomes for their students. However, **key drivers noted the need for more formalised support**. Support to staff implementing VE could come in the form of practical provision such as time-release, funds, or additional staff and/or in supportive conditions such as a culture of innovation, offering professional development, and willingness to adapt

curriculum. Whilst the key drivers noted that some support was available to them, this research showed that the degree of support and commitment offered from colleagues and supervisors in departments, service centres or at institutional level remained limited and informal overall.

4. The other area this research focused on was the steps taken by key drivers to implement VE. At the same time as highlighting the gaps in provision of support for these individuals, this research also showed that where support *is present* it can significantly strengthen the implementation of VE. In a nutshell, **this research found that more collaboration between stakeholders active in different areas resulted in more integration of VE**. This means that the more support and commitment key drivers receive for their VE activities (both horizontally from service centres and vertically from decision-makers at both the middle and higher institutional levels), the more integrated and sustainable are the VEs. This can be seen in tables found in section 3 of this report. These tables show how, regardless of who the key driver is, until all three levels are engaged, VE remains a localised rather than an institutionalised practice.

Findings

The research from the nine case studies provides an overview of the ways that VE is currently practiced and implemented and shows the level of support and conditions within which the key drivers are aiming to establish VE at their universities. Each finding connects to the other factors at play; reinforcing the situation in which bottom-up drivers work independently from each other and lack the formal structure of resources, funding and connections to grow VE across the university.

1. **Definitions**: Understanding and definitions of VE differed amongst those we researched. However, whilst there is not yet an institutional definition or a consistent understanding of what VE is by those implementing VE activities, this in itself tells a story of the emergence of VE as an institutional practice. The variation in understanding reveals how VE is emerging from the bottom-up, largely driven by individuals. Furthermore, the way VE is defined by key drivers offers a fascinating insight into the elements they perceive as most valuable in the practice and that motivate them to implement VE.
2. **Blending models of VE:** In a similar vein to the previous finding, the universities in this research implemented VE in various forms and in some cases already as an alternative or complement to physical mobility. This variety in form and implementation reflects the ingenuity of key drivers and the flexible way in which VE can be fit into the curricula of individual departments as an online extension of IaH and IoC.
3. **Intercultural competence**: VE provides the learning environment to develop intercultural competence and soft skills. However, not all disciplines see these skills as equally relevant, meaning that VE activities tend to remain confined to specific disciplines, namely language education, the humanities, social sciences, and business & economics.
4. **Silos**: VE activities are happening in silos across the university. In cases where VE activities were taking place in more than one department, the drivers implemented VEs mostly independently.

5. **Institutional investment**: The research found noticeable gaps in institutional level investment in terms of funding, support and resources. This gap is significant as the research indicated that institutional investment is critical for successful integration of VE.
6. **Bridging the gap**: Linking to the previous finding, this research found that where there was more institutional investment and collaboration between different areas, the support necessary for successful implementation of VE was beginning to materialise. This highlights the need to bridge the gap between bottom-up commitment, commitment from the institutional middle at departmental and service area level, and top-down, higher institutional involvement from faculty/school or university boards. The data from this research indicates that engagement of all stakeholders (educators, service centres, departments and the higher institutional level) are necessary if VE is to become successfully and widely implemented at HEIs.
7. **VE in the time of Covid-19**: As a result of the global pandemic, since March 2020 international travel has been severely restricted. Whilst at the time of writing (December 2020), a potentially effective vaccination has been declared, the immediate future of international mobility and therefore the immediate need for VE remains pressing if current students are to continue to benefit from an international experience as part of their studies. Furthermore, courses are transitioning online, meaning that educators across the board are becoming familiar with teaching in virtual environments. Universities in this research responded that VE had moved up the agenda in a way that had not been seen prior to the pandemic creating a 'momentum' for VE to be implemented as part of a viable and inclusive strategy for internationalisation. Over the past year, VE has become a higher priority but it remains to be seen what impact these changes in educational practice and perspective may have beyond the immediate crisis.

Recommendations

Given how VE is being viewed in a new light under the current conditions of Covid-19, this research has identified five pieces that need to be in place for successful implementation of VE at HEIs.

1. In response to the finding on institutional investment, this research pinpoints the need for implementers of VE to benefit from institutional funding for support structures and training.
2. Active bottom-up and top-down commitment through involvement of relevant areas of expertise and directors of study in departments and heads of service areas is important if VE is to grow.
3. Clear written policy on VE at university and faculty/school levels in order to establish VE as a standardised practice.
4. Clear strategies to promote VE amongst and in collaboration with (pioneering) educators to build educator capacity at HEIs.
5. Recognition of VE for students, most notably in terms of ECTS and a more flexible approach to international learning.

Conclusions

This study is meant to be a preliminary step for further research and for exploration of developments over time as case studies can involve a series of interrelated events (Starman, 2013). The case study reports have indeed given us important insights into how to further use and research of VE as an active and experiential form of learning in order to help integrate VE as a more recurrent practice in university education. Below we list a few of these.

1. To be able to see the real value and benefits of VE for teaching and learning, and to get truly committed to it, **it is highly recommended for staff to experience the practice first hand** through experiential VE training as offered as OER through the EVOLVE, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and NICE projects.
2. For both students and educators to benefit fully from VE, **it should become a recurrent and sustainable practice throughout the curriculum.** That is, if students are given the opportunity to participate in various VEs throughout their career, they will have the chance to learn from their previous experiences and thus improve their skills in further VEs. Educators will be able to implement the same VE each semester or year allowing them to become better VE facilitators, reducing their workload as well as helping to create a sense of VE community within a department, faculty or even university.

In this sense, we can envisage scenarios whereby students, instead or in addition to taking part in a semester abroad at one point in their career, as now usually is the case, can build on their international experience through participation in different VE activities in combination with an optional short stay mobility for the duration of their career. This type of blended mobility would allow for more inclusivity since it would give students, who for whatever personal, financial or other reasons cannot go abroad, the opportunity to have a valuable and quality virtual international experience that aligns with the goals of HEIs to prepare students for the many challenges of our 21st century global society.

For all of this to happen, **expansion of institutional VE support and expansion of VE pedagogy is necessary**, preferably within existing professional development schemes that promote innovative and active forms of teaching and learning, because this is exactly where the practice of VE fits.

1. Introduction

As the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education (HE) becomes clear, with predictions of huge decreases in student mobility, universities are actively seeking ways of continuing to offer students international and intercultural experiences. Virtual exchange (VE) is a transnational and intercultural activity which HE students and staff can engage in, without the need to travel abroad. Interest in learning more about this activity has grown exponentially in the last few months, although it is a practice which has been developing over the last 20-30 years. This report presents the findings of the EVOLVE case study research which sought to identify key driver's motivations and steps taken towards the introduction and implementation of VE across disciplines in European Higher Education Institutes (HEIs).

This study was carried out between fall 2019 and fall 2020 as a follow up to the EVOLVE Baseline survey study (Jager et al., 2019) which aimed to understand the current state of the art regarding the understanding and implementation of VE in HEIs across Europe. That initial survey was directed to four different types of stakeholders: educators, educational supporters, internationalisation officers and policymakers. These were primarily members of the Coimbra Group[5] and SGroup[6] University Networks. The main findings of the Baseline study showed some discrepancy with regard to the institutional uptake and interest in VE in institutions: on the one hand it found that there was, in 2018, no institutional recognition for VE in HEIs and that VE was not widely referenced in strategies of internationalisation. At the same time, it found that all stakeholders do acknowledge the potential of VE for educational innovation, skills development and internationalisation and it also identified some institutions reporting to have included VE in one of the strategic areas of e-learning, internationalisation or professional development. This led to our interest in carrying out this case study research, namely, to understand better how VE, an online, international and intercultural activity, has been finding its way into institutions, what strategies have been adopted, which key interactions and stakeholders were involved, in what directions VE is growing within institutions and to what extent there is an institutional recognition of VE practices.

Through a semi-structured interview protocol and additional secondary research on the institutions' websites primarily, these case studies explore key drivers' motivations and the steps taken by these individuals in institutions who appear to be moving towards further integration of VE. These case studies are meant for different stakeholders interested in VE in order to identify efforts which they may consider to be relevant for their context in the complex journey towards institutional recognition of this promising field of educational innovation and comprehensive internationalisation[7].

In this introduction the reader is first introduced to the concept of VE in section 1.1. Section 1.2 explains the EU-funded EVOLVE, Erasmus + Virtual Exchange projects and NICE projects, which

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5 https://www.coimbra-group.eu/

6 https://sgroup-unis.eu/

7 "Comprehensive internationalization is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students, and all academic service and support units. (…) [it] not only impacts all of campus life but the institution's external frames of reference, partnerships, and relations." (Hudzik, 2011, p.6)

are the basis and background to this study. Section 1.3 deals with the importance of institutional recognition and support of VE for it to become a mainstream practice at HEIs. In section 2, we outline the research methodology and section 3 is dedicated to the findings. Section 4 is compiled of the detailed case studies, from which the reader can pick and choose the ones which are of most interest.

While drawing together the findings from these case studies, the global context has changed dramatically. The implications of the Covid-19 pandemic for HE have already been enormous. All courses have had to 'pivot' to remote teaching mode more or less overnight, and mobility of students and staff has completely stopped. HEIs were not prepared for this transition into online teaching and learning, though some were more prepared than others. However, the sudden halt to student and staff mobility was not predicted at all. The medium and long-term consequences are only beginning to be considered in most institutions, but what is clear is that the impact of Covid-19 is going to last many years and HE will not be the same as it was before. As Helm and O'Dowd (2020) argue in their recent position paper, in this new context, VE offers an opportunity for students and staff to engage in and benefit from the deep impact of international collaboration without the need to physically go abroad.

1.1. How to read this report

The structure of this report is intended for the reader to easily pick and choose the case studies report(s) which are of most personal and/or institutional interest.

This report is composed of four sections. The first three sections are the core of this report and outline the background to the report (section 1), the research method (section 2) and the key findings and recommendations collected from the interviewees conducted with drivers of VE at nine universities in Europe (section 3). Section 4 is introduced with an example of the table we use to give an overview of the VE activity reported at each case study institution. This table gives the reader a quick overview of the different areas and stakeholders in service areas and at the institutional levels involved in VE, how VE is integrated in education and which are the funding schemes behind these (if any).

In line with our findings in section 3, the case study reports are themselves categorised in one of the three broad scenarios identified, each of which shows particular tendencies towards the introduction and implementation of VE at the times of the interviews with respect to the following factors: the main driver's position in the institution, the level of collaboration with stakeholders in other areas and the involvement in VE at institutional levels of which funding and/or support structures and incentives for teachers are the most important indicators.

The three broad scenarios are:

1. **Educator-led Virtual Exchange**: VE is mainly driven by educators. Institutions that fit into this scenario are: the University of Limerick and the University of Padova.
2. **International Division-led Virtual Exchange:** VE is mainly driven by support staff working in International offices or divisions. Institutions that fit into this scenario are the University of Edinburgh, the University of Granada and the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht

3. **Collaboratively-led Virtual Exchange:** VE is led through collaboration between staff in different (service) areas of expertise, education and/or the middle or higher institutional management levels. Institutions that fit into this scenario are the University of Bordeaux, the University of Groningen, Newcastle University and JMU Würzburg.

1.2. What is virtual exchange?

At the beginning of the project in January 2018, the EVOLVE consortium developed a definition of what is meant by virtual exchange. This definition is published on the project website:

> *Virtual Exchange (VE) is a practice, supported by research, that consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators. Virtual Exchange combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology. (https://evolve-erasmus.eu/about-evolve/what-is-virtual-exchange/)*

VE is also referred to as telecollaboration, Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) or Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Globally Networked learning, but the term virtual exchange has gained traction in the last five years amongst policy makers in organisations and foundations at both the national and international level. VE has been implemented successfully across the globe over the last 20-30 years in foreign language education, humanities and social sciences, and business/economics mainly, and various models of VE have been developed from these areas. Nonetheless, integrating VE as a structural, institutionally supported component in existing teaching practices, has proved to be a major endeavour (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016).

However, the challenges to physical mobility, such as (environmental) costs and lack of inclusivity, have been leading to an increased interest from policy makers and managers in, and outside, HEIs to use VE as a digital tool for Internationalisation at Home[8] (IaH) and Internationalisation of the Curriculum[9] (IoC). The current pandemic has strengthened these earlier voices that have been asking for alternative and/or complementary means to physical mobility in order to open the opportunity of a relevant international experience to all students without the absolute necessity to go physically abroad. Several EU funded VE projects, such as NICE[10], Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange[11] and EVOLVE[12] which have been carried out over the past three years, are a strong indicator of this top-down interest in VE (Helm, 2018).

In addition to this and as of recently, VE is being introduced and researched as a tool for the development of transversal and discipline-related knowledge and skills in other disciplines than the

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8 "Internationalization at Home is the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69).

9 "Internationalization of the curriculum is the incorporation of international, intercultural and/or global dimensions into the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods and support services of a program of study." (Leask, 2015, p. 9).

10 https://www.nice-eu.org/

11 https://europa.eu/youth/erasmusvirtual

12 https://evolve-erasmus.eu/

humanities, social sciences and business/economics (e.g. O'Dowd 2018). It is therefore to be expected that these developments, in combination with the sudden swift to worldwide online education due to the Covid-19 pandemic, will help pave the way for VE to become a mainstream activity in HE, and a tool for blended mobility, a combination of physical or virtual mobility and structured online collaboration (Helm & O'Dowd, 2020).

1.2.1. Models of virtual exchange

There are many different models or examples of VE which can be designed to meet a range of objectives. One distinction is between ready-made exchanges and co-designed exchanges as shown in table 1 - though there are also other models of exchange which come in between.

Table 1: *Ready-Made and Co-Designed Models of Virtual Exchange*

Ready-made exchanges		**Co-designed exchanges**
These exchanges are in a sense 'pre-packaged', having been developed by consortia of universities or external organisations. Universities can integrate these projects into curricula and students can be awarded recognition for their participation through ECTS. In the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project, several exchange activities of this type are available (at no cost) to universities. These are dialogue-based and facilitator-led programmes involving students from multiple universities and have been developed by the non-profit organisations Soliya and Sharing Perspectives Foundation (SPF). The NICE project consists of seven modules over 12 weeks (flexible). Students who join the NICE project are put into a group with four other students from the partner universities and they work through the modules together. Students learn about intercultural competence and entrepreneurship, concluding each module in a virtual meeting with a staff facilitator to talk about what they have learned.		These 'grassroots' exchanges are co-designed by educators who collaboratively design a shared curriculum for part of their course; bringing together their students to interact and collaborate with one another on specific activities or projects. These exchanges are also known as telecollaboration in the field of foreign language education and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)[13] Globally Networked Learning environments or Virtual Transnational Teams to solve Global Challenges (NICE project) The EVOLVE project provided training and mentoring for university staff in 2018 and 2019 to develop VEs of this type which are currently available on the website as Open Educational Resources (OER)[14]. In the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project, training courses and mentoring for educators for designing these exchanges was available until the end of 2020.

[13] https://online.suny.edu/introtocoil/

[14] https://evolve-erasmus.eu/training-resources/

The 21st century drive for students to develop so-called employability or soft skills such as digital competence, media literacy and the ability to work in a diverse cultural context have made VE potentially relevant for all disciplines in HE. VE can also allow students to gain new perspectives on disciplinary content, fostering mutual understanding and global citizenship.

The stress on the collaborative character of VE between small groups of learners from different cultural backgrounds, is what distinguishes it clearly from already mainstreamed distance learning activities such as virtual mobility and MOOCs which refer more to students taking online courses (at a foreign university). However there is considerable confusion around the terminology and the pedagogical approaches, as also found by the EVOLVE Baseline study (Jager et al., 2019, p.15). In order to be clear about the concept of VE in the context of these case studies, each of the interviewees was explicitly asked for their own and their institution's understanding of the term.

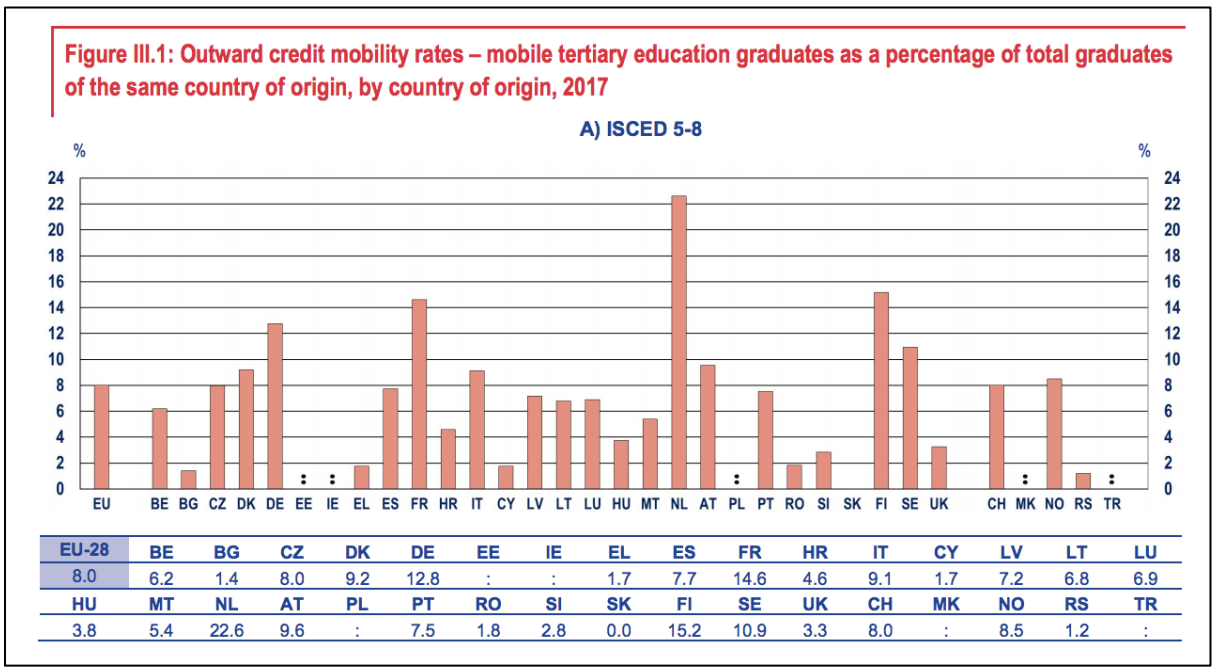
1.3. EVOLVE, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and NICE

What has become clear through this EVOLVE research is that VE seems to have evolved from an innovative, bottom-up form of international teaching, into a practice that has caught the attention of both university management and policy makers outside academia in Europe and beyond. This top-down interest in VE finds its origins in the fact that student mobility numbers turned out to be limited to a much lower percentage than originally targeted in accordance with the learning credit mobility benchmark:

By 2020, an EU average of at least 20 % of higher education graduates should have had a period of higher education-related study or training (including work placements) abroad, representing a minimum of 15 ECTS credits or lasting a minimum of 3 months. (Official journal of the European Union, 2011, p. 34)

Figure 1 below, published in the Mobility Scoreboard 2018/2019 report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2020) shows an average outward credit mobility rate of only 8%.

Figure 1: Outward Credit Mobility Rates



EU-28	BE	BG	CZ	DK	DE	EE	IE	EL	ES	FR	HR	IT	CY	LV	LT	LU
8.0	6.2	1.4	8.0	9.2	12.8	:	:	1.7	7.7	14.6	4.6	9.1	1.7	7.2	6.8	6.9
HU	**MT**	**NL**	**AT**	**PL**	**PT**	**RO**	**SI**	**SK**	**FI**	**SE**	**UK**	**CH**	**MK**	**NO**	**RS**	**TR**
3.8	5.4	22.6	9.6	:	7.5	1.8	2.8	0.0	15.2	10.9	3.3	8.0	:	8.5	1.2	:

The 2018 Bologna Process Implementation Report, mentions the following regarding obstacles to student mobility:

> *(...) countries and students both ranked financial issues as the main obstacle to mobility. They also gave similar priority to study/curriculum organisation and language-related barriers. Students' personal situation was another significant obstacle cited by students themselves, while country answers gave more weight to issues related to recognition and information provision" (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2018, p.265).*

Already back in 2013, the 'European higher education in the world' communication encouraged EU member states to develop 'comprehensive internationalisation strategies' (European Commission, 2013, p.3) "with three key pillars promoting the international mobility of students and staff; promoting internationalisation at home and digital learning; and strengthening strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building" (De Wit, 2016, p.72). The 2017 communication 'Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture' called for further actions to boost mobility and facilitate cross-border cooperation (European Commission, 2017, pp. 4-5). De Wit, who is a renowned scholar on internationalisation in HE, also argues that, in particular, the linking between Internationalisation at Home, digital learning and international cooperation points to VE as a practice which "can play a crucial role" (2016, p.73) in the long and complex process towards a more inclusive, innovative approach to internationalisation of HEI. However, in the next section we will see that this is only possible if cooperation and connection between top-down management, bottom-up activities by (individual) educators and institutional service centres like international offices, educational innovation and professional development areas are explored and established.

As mentioned before, the launchings of the EU funded NICE project (September 2017), the EVOLVE and the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange projects (January 2018), can be seen as examples of the fact that VE is indeed considered to be a practice with potential to become mainstreamed (Helm, 2018, p. 42). Evaluating and researching the effectiveness of VE as an innovative form of

collaborative international learning across disciplines in HEIs in Europe and beyond is of great importance and has been one of the key activities in EVOLVE and similar projects or organisation involved with VE[15]. To this end, participants in both the EVOLVE and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange training courses who have successfully completed the training are eligible for an EVOLVE or Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange digital badge, which they can use to show and share their learning. Furthermore, both projects have been researching the impact of VE in terms of learning outcomes for participants, and EVOLVE has also looked at the impact on educators. The EVOLVE project reports will be published before the project comes to its end in December 2020. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative publishes annual impact reports[16] with findings such as participants' perceived gains in intercultural awareness, digital competences and understanding of global events and positive engagement with difference.

1.3.1. The EVOLVE project (2018 - 2020)

The EVOLVE research team has undertaken several studies to measure the impact of VE at student, educator and institution level in HE in Europe. These studies have been conducted in the context of the exchanges established mainly through the two highly interactive six and five week EVOLVE online courses on VE that ran in the autumns of 2018 and 2019. Following an experiential learning approach, the training focused on how educators can design and implement their own VE with a foreign partner. Other stakeholders, like international officers and support staff were also encouraged to participate to get a clear understanding of educators' needs when designing a VE. Under the guidance of experienced VE trainers, the participants explored the various aspects of VE design and delivery, including the pedagogy of VE, technology preparation and the handling of organizational and intercultural challenges before implementing their own VE together with the foreign partner (in the case of educators). The training materials, the evaluation reports of the training and the research outputs of the project will be made available to the community at large as OER under the research section of the EVOLVE website before the end of the project in December 2020. As of June 2020, the EVOLVE, Erasmus + Virtual Exchange and NICE projects have joined forces to ask for attention on the current state and future directions of VE in HE and its relevance in the light of the Covid-19 pandemic by presenting their (preliminary) results in the three event series "Virtual Exchange: Next Steps in University Education"[17] before the end of the three projects in December 2020.

1.3.2. The Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project (2018 - 2020)

In 2018, the European Commission (EC) launched the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot project "which aims to expand the reach and scope of the Erasmus+ programme through Virtual Exchanges". The project offers a safe online community for young people between 18 and 30 years old from Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region to participate in different models of VE activities sustained over a period of time. These different VE activities have been developed by

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[15] Through its individual members there are strong ties between the Erasmus+Virtual Exchange and EVOLVE projects and with other projects and organisations involved in VE in Europe and the US such as the EVALUATE project, UNIcollaboration, the Suny COIL Center and the Stevens Initiative.

[16] 2018 & 2019 Impact Report available here: https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0ee233d5-cbc6-11ea-adf7-01aa75ed71a1/language-en, 2020 report forthcoming.

[17] https://evolve-erasmus.eu/events/

organisations that are working together in a consortium that won a tender with the EC for the implementation of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange[18].

- The Connect Programme, designed and run by Soliya, uses an online facilitated dialogue model that is designed to be integrated as part of existing courses or activities offered by universities. There are various exchanges that last between 4 and 8 weeks.
- Cultural Encounters is a 10-week course designed and run by SPF which combines online facilitated dialogue, academic audio-visual content and interactive assignments related to specific topical themes (such as refugees, populism and nationalism, the climate movement).
- SPF also runs exchanges of variable duration with facilitated dialogue on specific themes such as Countering Hate Speech, Gender and Media, Sustainable Food Systems: A Mediterranean Perspective, and Soliya runs Social Circles. In all of these courses, "participants discuss current issues that matter to them and develop a better understanding of each other's viewpoints in small group discussions".

Next to these ready-made exchanges, the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Project offers training opportunities to build capacity within the education and youth sectors to design and facilitate VE projects. There are different trainings offered for educators to develop a co-designed VE and customized support for Youth Organizations. These trainings are called Transnational Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Projects (TEPs) run by UNICollaboration[19], the cross-disciplinary professional organisation for telecollaboration and VE in HE, and are meant for youth workers and/or university educators from two or more different countries to jointly develop exchanges in existing programmes. For individual young people there are online debates run by Anna Lindh Foundation. Facilitation trainings prepare facilitators to act as third parties who help groups in all Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange activities have constructive, respectful and authentic dialogue and learning processes.

1.3.3. The NICE project (2017 - 2020)

The European funded NICE project consists of a consortium of eight European universities led by the University of Edinburgh. It incorporates VE components such as facilitated dialogue and virtual transnational team meetings between small groups of students from each of the partner universities who work together on a final product. According to the website, the project aims "to enhance students' employability by helping them to develop intercultural competencies and entrepreneurial skills". The project is especially designed for those students who have limited possibilities to travel or study abroad, but student teams are also offered the opportunity to meet each other and their facilitators face to face by applying for the one week NICE Summer School. In this sense, the NICE project is a form of blended mobility that combines VE with physical mobility.

[18] Search for Common Ground, Sharing Perspectives Foundation (SPF), Anna Lindh Foundation, UNIMED, UNICollaboration, Kiron Open Higher Education, and Migration Matters are in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot project consortium.

[19] https://www.unicollaboration.org/

1.4. The need for institutional recognition and support

Despite the reported growth of VE in both practice and research for the last two decades and the more recent attention policy makers and university management have shown in it as a tool for comprehensive internationalisation, it still concerns a form of international online teaching which is mainly initiated, implemented and promoted by motivated and dedicated lecturers (mostly in the field of foreign language but lately also in other disciplines) who receive none or very little institutional support for it (Guth, 2016). Although educators' motivation and dedication are key for VE to be successful, the lack of institutional support is an indication that VE continues to be considered a new and innovative activity that has not yet passed through the process of institutionalisation necessary to turn it into a normal practice within HEI according to Surry & Ely in Nworie (2015):

> *The goal of institutionalization is to achieve continuous use of an innovation so as to reach its full potential after its development and implementation. Institutionalization means that the implementation process of innovations or new practices resulted in routine use and dissemination of the product or innovation where it was developed. Once an innovation becomes routine and an integral part of the institution, it can be said to be a normal practice and no longer considered to be an innovation. (p.22)*

The persistent focus on physical mobility programmes in HEIs as the main form of international education despite the growing attention for alternative strategies and approaches, is seen as an important reason why "the pedagogy and practice of using technology to connect classes of learners and to promote intercultural learning" have not yet been normalised in HEI (Guth, 2016, p.84). Consequently, VE is still a very vulnerable practice because "when an innovation fails to become institutionalized, it remains with its developers and is likely to be abandoned with time" (Nworie, 2015, p.22).

As in other innovative educational practices such as blended learning, it seems that bottom-up actions and top-down policies have a hard time finding each other (Graham et al., 2012). The fact that all stakeholders who participated in the EVOLVE baseline study (educators, educational supporters, internationalisation officers and policy makers and managers) do recognise the potential of VE but at the same time hardly collaborate to take the institutionalisation of VE a step further, is a strong indicator of this.

One of the recommendations of the EVOLVE Baseline study (Jager et al., 2019) has therefore been to use VE to enhance institutionalisation and build bridges between areas in HEI that often operate separately:

> *As such, it potentially involves departments/faculties and teaching staff; centres for professional development; international offices as it is an international activity and can enhance and support both student and staff mobility, joint degree courses, university partnerships; and finally policy makers who can support this type of activity through specific university policies or strategies (...). (p. 10)*

By conducting interviews with key drivers of VE and focusing on both their professional and personal motivations as well as on the steps they have taken to introduce and implement VE in their institutions, these case studies explore and show what efforts from and relationships between stakeholders in the different areas in HEI are key for the transition from individual towards institutional implementation.

By asking our interviewees for their reflection on concrete changes or future proposals regarding VE at their institutions in light of the Covid-19 crisis, we hope that this report will also provide some insights into how VE can be harnessed by institutions so they can continue to offer both students and staff valuable international learning experiences, and develop strategies for integrating VE into their internationalisation portfolios.

In the words of Mohamed Abdel-Kader (2020), executive director of the Stevens Initiative: "This isn't a time to abandon global learning. It is an imperative to continue to prepare students to contribute personally and professionally to the world they'll inherit and lead, and virtual exchange makes this possible."

2. Research methodology

This research report is a follow up of the EVOLVE Baseline study (Jager et al., 2019) and uses a multiple, exploratory, case study research approach. The main findings of the Baseline study showed a discrepancy: on the one hand it found that there was, in 2018, no institutional recognition for VE in HEIs and that VE was not widely referenced in strategies of internationalisation. At the same time, it found that all stakeholders did acknowledge the potential of VE for educational innovation, skills development and internationalisation. It also identified some institutions that report having included VE in one of the strategic areas of e-learning, internationalisation or professional development. This study intents to provide insights into VE implementation at institutions in the Baseline study sample and others who, to the research team, appeared to be moving towards further integration at strategic and policy levels.

2.1. Research approach

Multiple, exploratory case study research is characterised by an intuitive and flexible design. Although this has brought certain limitations to these case studies such as the lack of specially formulated hypotheses that can be tested, and a specific collection of data resources, the approach is very suitable for exploration of new fields as the research into institutional uptake of VE certainly is. In this sense, this study is meant to be a preliminary step for further research, and for exploration of developments over time as case studies can involve a series of interrelated events (Starman, 2013).

Exploratory case studies allow, for example, for research protocols to be adapted on the basis of the findings (Yin, 2009 in Streb, 2012). The quality of case study research is guaranteed by the trustworthiness and authenticity of findings; measures which characterise qualitative research methodologies (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Trustworthiness relies upon the credibility of research findings; the transferability, dependability and confirmability of research methods.

We have sought to ensure the trustworthiness of these studies through the transparency of our research methods and our engagement with a broad range of experienced, internationally-based academics and practitioners who are actively engaged in developing VEs. Authenticity of our data and findings is ensured by the collection of raw interview data from those actively experiencing and managing the exchanges.

2.2. Data collection and analysis

As a first step in the data collection process, we identified the institutions for the case studies. Purposive sampling was used, in that we identified institutions and individuals that have experience and knowledge of the phenomenon of interest (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011), that is, VE. Purposive sampling was also deemed appropriate as the number of primary data sources who can contribute to the study is somewhat limited (Palinkas, et al., 2015) due to the scarcity of HEIs moving to further integration of VE. A heterogeneous sampling approach was adopted, seeking to cover geographically different areas, albeit within the European context since EVOLVE is an EU-funded project and involved two European HEI networks. The sampling was partly based on the information coming from the Baseline study (whose participants were generally Coimbra and SGroup Networks members) and partly on sources and contacts within the community academics

and practitioners who are actively engaged in developing, researching, and disseminating VEs through the EVOLVE, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, NICE, UNICollaboration and COIL networks. These contacts helped us to identify not only the relevant institutions but also the main drivers of VE within these institutions. Moreover, the collective research approach applied by the team who themselves belong to the active VE community, helped to fully dive into, contrast and understand our rich set of data.

In alphabetical order, the selected Universities for this study are the following: University of Bordeaux (France); University of Edinburgh (Scotland); University of Granada (Spain); University of Groningen (the Netherlands): University of Limerick (Ireland); Newcastle University (UK); University of Padova (Italy); HU University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (the Netherlands), University of Würzburg (Germany).

Each of the case study reports is based on the semi-structured interview protocol as proposed by Graham et al. (2012) which they used to develop their framework for institutional adoption and implementation of blended learning in HE (see the Appendix). At each institution, we aimed to establish contact and interview key drivers active at different levels of the institution in an attempt to cover and connect the bottom-up level, the institutional middle (directors of study at departmental level and heads of service areas) and the top-down perspectives at the levels of faculty/school and university boards (Casanovas, 2010). In practice, however, it turned out to be difficult to organise interviews with stakeholders at the higher (institutional) level for two reasons. In the first place, VE is mostly driven bottom-up by educators or staff in service areas. In the second place, stakeholders at higher institutional level didn't seem to consider the interview on VE as a priority, which somehow also shows that, although drivers do confirm that institutions see the relevance of VE for their institutions' IaH agenda's, higher institutional management levels are not really committed to the topic yet.

As mentioned before, we chose to build upon the interview protocol developed for blended learning by Graham et al. (2012), because of the similarities between the two innovative educational approaches: firstly, VE is often offered as a form or part of blended learning, understood as a combination of face-to-face and technology-mediated instruction (Nissen, 2016). Secondly, both are grass-roots initiated activities that, despite being recognised by institutions as strategically valuable practices for various reasons, have not been clearly defined, nor widely adopted, by the institutional management - though the current situation under Covid-19 is likely to soon change this. Unlike Graham et al. (2012), however, who were able to organise their findings into three broad categories of institutional policies (strategy, structure, and support) which they subdivided into three stages of adoption by institutions (awareness/exploration, adoption/early implementation, mature implementation growth), the lack of clear patterns towards institutional adoption in our findings, showed us that it is still too early for VE to apply such a framework.

Instead, we followed Casanovas (2010); taking the human (inter)actions undertaken by our interviewees as a starting point to identify the common themes across all case studies in stakeholders' efforts to establish a transition from individual adoption, through collaboration, towards institutionalisation.

Finally, as a follow up of these multiple, exploratory case studies, we hope to have the opportunity to develop consecutive research and provide a framework or roadmap for the institutionalisation of VE like Graham et al. (2012) did for blended learning.

3. Findings and recommendations

The aim of this study has been to identify key drivers' motivations, understandings and steps taken towards the introduction and implementation of VE across disciplines in nine European HEIs that appeared to be moving towards more institutionalisation of this practice. Through semi-structured interviews, conducted with key drivers, we have looked at how VE has been finding its way into the institutions; which stakeholders have been involved in this goal; in what directions VE is growing; and to what extent there is an institutional recognition of VE practices. We have also included the drivers' visions on VE, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, which took place during the writing up of this report.

In this section, we will give an overview of the main findings identified across the institutions. In section 3.1, we will present both the common and specific topics and trends that we have explored through our research question and emerged from the different case studies. In section 3.2, we present a series of common issues identified across all case study reports that we consider to be crucial for a successful institutional uptake of VE and its future in the institutions. In section 3.3, we will conclude with listing the pieces in the implementation jigsaw found across the studies that are crucial for institutions to implement and/or further develop VE as a common practice across campus.

3.1. Topics and themes explored across cases

The research design of this report has been a multiple, exploratory case study. We have chosen this approach because both the area of study into institutionalisation of VE and the HEIs moving towards institutionalisation of this practice are still limited. The exploratory nature of the study has allowed us to investigate the main topics from our research question as well as other themes that have emerged from the interview data themselves.

The topics from our research question are the:

- Stakeholders involved
- Institutional level at which drivers operate
- Driver's motivations
- Driver's collaboration with other stakeholders
- Interest and involvement of stakeholders at the middle and higher institutional levels

New themes that have emerged from the data are the:

- Models of VE used
- Role of EU funded projects
- Recognition of VE for students and teachers

Through a detailed exploration of these topics and themes, we have been able to identify a series of trends across institutions regarding the integration of VE in their activities. We have found that some of these trends are common to all institutions, whilst others remain specific to certain institutions. In the paragraphs below, we will explain the common trends and show how we have categorised the specific trends into three broad scenarios.

3.1.1. Common Trends

As table 2 below shows, the trends common to all institutions concern the following topics:

1. Lack of a common understanding or definition of VE
2. VE is mainly introduced and implemented by bottom up drivers
3. General institutional interest in VE is there
4. Role of EU funded projects to introduce and/or further implement VE. The model(s) implemented (column 4.1) ready-made (RM) and/or co-designed (CD) and recognition of VE in terms of credits, digital badges or replacement of study abroad for students (column 4.2) are indicative of this significant role

***Table 2**: Common Trends across all Case Study Reports*

University of (alphabetical order)	1. Common understanding of VE	2. Operating level of drivers	3. General institutional interest in VE	4. European VE project involved	4.1 VE model(s) implemented	4.2 Recognition VE for students (related to project)
Bordeaux	no	both	yes	yes	both	yes
Edinburgh	no	bottom-up	yes	yes	RM	yes
Granada	no	both	yes	yes	RM	yes
Groningen	no	bottom-up	yes	yes	CD	no
Limerick	no	bottom-up	yes	yes	both	yes
Newcastle	no	both	yes	yes	CD	no
Padova	no	bottom-up	yes	yes	both	yes
Applied Sciences Utrecht	no	bottom-up	yes	yes	both	yes
Würzburg	no	bottom-up	yes	yes	both	yes

Below we give a short description of the findings for each of these topics:

1. There is not yet a common understanding of VE

We have found a variety of practices across the case studies which integrate VE or VE elements as defined by the EVOLVE consortium. Educators tend to base their understanding of VE on the outcomes of these practices and their own experiences rather than defining VE according to the literature. This in itself tells a story of the emergence of VE as a practice. The variation in understanding reveals how VE is developing from the bottom-up, largely driven by individuals. Furthermore, the way VE is defined by key drivers offers a fascinating insight into the elements they perceive as most valuable in the practice and that motivate them to implement VE. Drivers in service areas such as international offices or educational innovation, do tend to use and promote VE by, for example, defining it on their own webpages but this does not mean that VE is also defined and integrated in policy documents. Generally, this lack of common understanding and uses

of terminology seem to be one of the factors that hinders (wider) embedding of the practice in the institutions.

2. The motivation and efforts of bottom-up drivers

Across all of the institutions studied, a pivotal finding has been that VE has been introduced and is implemented thanks to bottom-up drivers who report to be intrinsically motivated by the benefits of VE for both learners and teachers. The benefits they name range from the fostering of "deep learning", "equality of education", "familiarising students with digital interaction", "critical thinking', "global responsibility" and "multiple perspectives on global issues" but also opportunities for research for teachers and students, professional development and integration of VE in blended learning or blended mobility models.

3. There is a general institutional interest in VE

The institutional interest in VE is generally limited to the Internationalisation (at Home) agendas of the different institutions. This means that VE is mostly seen as a means to provide all students with an international learning experience that is high impact and low-cost compared to traditional mobility. Unfortunately, it is not yet seen as a practice leading towards comprehensive internationalisation by preparing students for the many challenges of our global societies through the enhancement of their digital, critical, intercultural, language and employability skills while giving educators the opportunity to develop themselves professionally and internationally. Institutions themselves can benefit from VE by strengthening the ties with partner universities or university networks.

4. The role of EU funded VE projects

It is important to highlight that in all institutions, EU funded projects have been key to either initiate or further develop VE. This is especially true for the ready-made model of VE. Through EU projects, the numbers of students participating in VE has increased significantly, and students are obtaining recognition of this activity in the form of credits and/or (digital) badges.

3.1.2. Specific scenarios

As table 3 below shows, we have been able to categorise the institutions in three broad scenarios indicated in different colours. Each of these scenarios show particular tendencies towards the introduction and implementation of VE at the time of the interviews of these case studies with respect to the following factors:

- Main driver's position in the institution
- Collaboration with other stakeholders
- Active involvement of the institutional middle or higher level in VE of which funding and/or support structures (column 3.1) and incentives for teachers (columns 3.2) are the most important.

Below we give a short description of each scenario and we indicate which institutions fit into these scenarios. Some institutions can considered to be in more than one scenario or be moving

from one scenario to another but for the clarity of these findings we have chosen not to include this in the descriptions below[20].

Scenario 1 (in blue): Educator-led virtual exchange

Institutions that currently fit best into this scenario are the University of Limerick and the University of Padova. In these institutions, the following applies:

1. VE is reported to have a tradition of co-designed exchanges driven by educators, who are generally foreign language teachers.
2. There is some collaboration with other stakeholders in the institution (educational innovation, career development, international office) but collaboration is growing, especially under the Covid-19 circumstances.
3. There is little to no institutional involvement in VE and therefore a lack of funding and support structures for educators.

Scenario 2 (in yellow): International division-led virtual exchange

Institutions that currently fit best into this scenario are the University of Edinburgh, the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht and the University of Granada. In these institutions, the following applies:

1. VE is mainly driven and coordinated through international offices or international policy makers who are in charge of the coordination of mostly externally but also internally funded and supported projects.
2. There is a lack of collaboration with stakeholders in other areas of the institution (such as educational innovation, career development). It is hard to get and/or keep educators involved.
3. If there is any active institutional involvement in VE, this is not yet sufficiently translated into funding or support structures for educators.

Scenario 3 (in green): Collaboratively-led virtual exchange

Institutions that currently fit best into this scenario are the University of Bordeaux, the University of Groningen, Newcastle University and JMU Würzburg. In these institutions, the following applies:

1. VE drivers are active in different (service) areas of expertise in the institution, for example, in career development, international offices and educational innovation.
2. There is (some) collaboration between the drivers in these different areas and with stakeholders at the middle and/or higher institutional levels and the community of VE practitioners and experts at large.
3. This is slowly leading to the development of institutional funding and/or support structures for educators. Nonetheless, it is still difficult to get and/or keep educators involved.

[20] For a more detailed overview of our findings per case study, we refer to section 4.

Table 3: *Scenarios Showing Particular Tendencies*

University of	1. Driver's position	2. Collaboration between different areas	3. Active top - down involvement	3.1 Funding and/or support structures: external and/or internal	3.2 Incentives for educators	SCENARIO IDENTIFIED
Limerick	Educators	some	no	external	no	Educator-led
Padova	Educators / Career Service Centre / International Office	some	some	external	no	Mainly educator-led but moving towards more collaboration with other areas
Edinburgh	International Office	some	some	external and internal	no	International division-led but moving towards more institutional involvement and collaboration with other areas
Granada	Vice-Rectorate of Internationalisation / Educators	some	yes	external	no	International division-led
Applied Sciences Utrecht	International Office / Departments	some	some	external	no	International division-led
Bordeaux	Educators / Vice Dean of internationalisation / Learning and Teaching Centre	yes	yes	both	some	VE led by collaborating drivers in different areas, including the institutional level
Groningen	Service Centre for Educational Innovation / Educators	yes	some	both	yes	VE led by collaborating drivers in different areas, including the institutional level
Newcastle	Educators / Pro Vice-Chancellor	yes	no	external	some	VE led by collaborating drivers in different areas, including the institutional level
Würzburg	Service Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning / Career Service Centre	yes	no	external	yes	VE led by collaborating drivers in different areas, including the institutional level

The three scenarios compared

Table 4 below shows a comparison of the three different scenarios with regard to the three factors identified earlier:

- The main driver's position in the institution
- The collaboration with other stakeholders
- The active involvement at the middle and/or higher policy levels in VE of which funding and/or support structures and incentives for teachers are the most important

Table 4: *The Three Scenarios Compared*

Bottom-up driver	1. Educator-led VE (active in 1 area)	2. International division-led VE (active in 1 area)	3. Collaboratively-led VE (active in >1 area)
Collaboration with institutional areas of expertise	2. International division-led VE (collaboration with international policy makers)	3. Collaboratively-led VE (collaboration with career development, educational innovation, international office, policy makers)	
Active institutional involvement	3. Collaboratively-led VE (funding, training, recognition for teachers and students emerging)		

From the comparison in table 4, we can conclude that the more collaboration drivers have generated between different stakeholders in the institution, the more tendency towards institutional involvement and support structures there is. Scenario 3 (in green) clearly shows this. Scenarios 1 (in blue) and scenario 2 (in yellow) on the other hand, in which the drivers are operating mostly in one area, show less tendency towards institutional involvement.

3.2. Common themes for successful implementation

We have identified a series of common issues across all case study reports which are currently missing but which VE drivers consider to be crucial for the successful institutional uptake and future sustainability of VE in their institutions. These issues are:

1. Differing understandings and definitions of VE
2. Blending models of VE
3. The lack of soft skills acknowledgement across disciplines
4. VE activities happening in silos across the university
5. Lack of commitment and resources for VE from the institutional level
6. The gap between bottom-up commitment and institutional involvement
7. The future of VE in times of Covid-19

Below we will present a short description of each of these issues explaining how institutions are dealing with them. We do this by using quotes from the different case studies and giving examples of best practices primarily from the institutions that fit in scenario 3, and proposing recommendations based on these good practices.

3.2.1. Differing understandings and definitions of VE

The many different understandings and definitions of VE at the institutions are mainly based on stakeholder's own experiences and motivations to become involved in VE. Involvement in external projects and/or connection with (external) experts from the VE community at large as has established by the drivers at JMU Würzburg and the University of Groningen helps to generate a more common understanding of VE and to structure its implementation. Nonetheless, this is not an easy process and stakeholders need to be prepared to invest the necessary time and efforts in it.

Synergies between the different networks and collaborative structures (Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, EVOLVE, Coimbra Group) actually do have a significant impact on implementation processes in HEIs. She also mentions "the effort and time that went into mentoring and training through her contacts with the VE community of experts and practitioners, as an important message to convey. (University of Würzburg report)

Implementing VE in the institution is a slow process "because it can't be taken for granted that relevant stakeholders have a clear idea about what VE is and how it could enhance teaching & learning, internationalisation and global skills development at universities (....)". (University of Würzburg report)

How to achieve a common understanding of VE in the institution?

A thorough, institution-wide understanding of what VE exactly is and entails, should not only be included in university policy but also be shared bottom-up with the university community. Including VE in workshops where the concept of VE and good practices are shared by experienced educators are a good means to this end. These workshops can either be organised by the relevant service areas of expertise, such as professional development, educational innovation and international offices, or by educational departments itself in collaboration with these service areas. Below, is an example of good practice from the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, where international officers are the main drivers:

Business school staff and educators who have been involved individually in virtual exchange integration, are invited to present about their experience and successes to colleagues across departments in sessions and workshops organised on internationalisation, in order to spread awareness among other educators, and inform them about upcoming opportunities. (Driver at University of Applied Sciences Utrecht)

3.2.2. Blending models of VE

Five out of the nine institutions implement both models of VE, while the others implement either the co-designed model, or the ready-made model. Each model presents opportunities and challenges for institutional implementation.

The institutional uptake of ready-made models of VE as promoted through the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project seem to be easier, as these are implemented with the help of facilitators and experts from third parties. Next to this, the ready-made model fits easily into 'transversal competencies credit schemes', such as high level English language courses which are open to students in all programmes. Whilst they still require coordination and support of educators, the demands they place are low and they are scalable, allowing for a large number of students to have a high-quality VE experience.

Co-designed models of VE are more labour intensive on the part of the educator but may be more easily implemented across the disciplines and allow for partnering educators and their institutions to (further) develop and embed international collaboration and skills in teaching and in research.

There are also examples of VE that lie between the two, for example the NICE project reported by the University of Edinburgh, which was co-developed with multiple partners and offered to students at multiple institutions. A further model is blended mobility - which also comes in various

forms - for example the NICE project which offered an intense mobility experience for some participants, the eTandem project at the University of Padova which aimed to prepare outgoing and incoming students for their international mobility and the 'eTandem Global' project, a virtual language programme allowing students from the University of Edinburgh and partner universities to practice their language skills at a time where physical mobility has become a challenge.

How to blend the models?

For a comprehensive strategy, HEIs could offer a 'portfolio of virtual exchanges' that students can take part in, and this should comprise ready-made solutions, blended mobility projects and co-designed VEs integrated in courses across disciplines.

It is important that the quality of ready-made exchanges is ensured for HEIs to be able to offer these experiences and award credits to students for participation.

Below an example of how VE started at the University of Granada that illustrates a similar process:

> *The interest for VE came, among others factors, as a result of their participation in virtual mobility programmes (...) in which students from each university had to carry out tasks together. This experience of virtual mobility, quite close to the concept of VE in its realisation, made the Vice-Rectorate of internationalisation realise that it was not enough to allow students from one university to follow online courses at another university, but that it was important to stress how different cultural backgrounds can be used in the (online) classroom to bring new perspectives on the subject matter. VE arrived at the UGR to give response to this already identified need of developing intercultural skills within the discipline. (University of Granada report)*

3.2.3. The lack of soft skills acknowledgment across disciplines

There is a general challenge in scaling up and engaging educators in VE. It is particularly difficult across the (STEM) disciplines, as educators in this sector do not always see the value of the development of soft skills like Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) as easily as educators from the arts, humanities and social sciences.

> *Dr Giralt would welcome being asked to contribute to shaping the institution's future plans and, through long standing practice of telecollaboration within the Faculty of Arts at Limerick, she has gained experience in developing models of VE implementation. Her proposals would include extending and expanding VE beyond Arts and Humanities and particularly targeting natural sciences and engineering students as they don't go on Erasmus+ mobility programmes to avoid some sectors of the student population being "condemned to be lacking ICC". (University of Limerick report)*

How to scale up and engage all educators in VE?

It is important to attend to differences at faculty or departmental levels when it comes to recruiting educators for VE as a relevant practice for international learning and teaching. The ENVOIE project at the University of Groningen shows a good example of how to do this by appointing VE coordinators in each faculty. These coordinators are preferably experts in relevant educational support areas (curriculum development, international education) and have insight in the specific needs and interests of educators in the different disciplines and know how to approach them.

Showing that VE is a practice which covers other innovative approaches and practices to education and research such as active learning, blended mobility, digital literacy and sustainable development makes it more attractive for university management and also easier to establish collaboration between different areas of expertise like university professional development areas and internationalisation areas.

Ensuring that educators are able to undertake proper evaluation and research on their VE practices as well as including it in professional development schemes will also help to get (a wider range of) educators on board.

3.2.4. VE activity happening in silos across the university

In institutions where VE is reported to be a university-wide practice such as at the University of Bordeaux or Newcastle University, VE activities (or activities which have the potential to mature into VEs) still tend to take place in pockets and/or are being carried out by individuals who are working in isolation. This means that VE is being implemented on an autonomous learn-by-doing basis by motivated educators, showing a wide range of different cultures and practices within the university. This type of experiential VE also tends to rely on individual drivers' own personal and professional networks. When those people move on to other roles or Institutions it appears that VEs can be in jeopardy.

> *The availability of committed partnerships was identified as a challenge for sustaining VEs. Much could depend on individual champions in other institutions and organisations who could move around in their roles and disrupt established partnerships. (Newcastle University report)*

How to implement VE across the university?

Making an inventory of (experiential and isolated) VE activity across the institutions, as has been done by Newcastle University and Bordeaux University, is a good starting point for institutions to undertake a needs analysis on the structure, funding and support needed by pioneering educators and the development of a VE strategy. At the University of Bordeaux individual champions of VE have been invited to help develop strategies for (wider) extension of VE as members of an expert working group. This gives them credit and visibility for their pioneering work whereas their experiences will help shape funding and support structures.

> *The working group has been set up with the idea of transferring this enthusiasm and experience into a clearer typology of what VE can be and also of the skills and tasks involved. This was planned before COVID but it has been boosted by it. The key shift is having the educational developers, international office, motivated teachers working together to better determine VE and what is needed to support it across the institution (as opposed to isolated pockets, people in their silos). It is also important to balance the perspectives of teachers who are not language teachers on VE - we need the scientific project to get a better typology of possible VE and a better idea of the value for disciplines". (Driver at University of Bordeaux)*

At the University of Edinburgh, a similar initiative is being put in place as of recently:

> *The UoE as a large organisation is very complex, but the VE Task Force is a first step in understanding all the different VE activities that are going on within the university. Ms Creery and Ms Majewsky Anderson are hopeful that this understanding can then inform how the*

institution as a whole engages with VE, which will help develop a detailed strategy for VE. (University of Edinburgh report)

3.2.5. Lack of commitment and resources for VE from the institutional level

These case studies show that the EVOLVE, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and NICE projects, which offer training, educational support and/or a digital platforms for the implementation of VE as a meaningful online collaborative international learning experiences for all students in HEIs, have helped to initiate or further develop (already existing) VE activities in institutions. Numbers of students participating in VE have increased significantly thanks especially to the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project.

Generally, drivers have reported that VE funding and support structures available for educators at the institutions depend on these external projects or other external funding schemes. For example, thanks to the free training offered through Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and EVOLVE educators had the opportunity to learn how to develop and implement co-designed exchanges or how to become a dialogue facilitator. The projects also support educators to find a partner in the case of co-designed exchanges and/or to embed the exchange in the curriculum for both models.

In order to guarantee the continuation of the VE activities in the institution after the life of these projects or other external funding schemes, institutions need to invest in training and support themselves. It is also important that these training programmes are recognized within the institution's professional development programmes and that follow-up educational and technical support is offered throughout the implementation and evaluation phases of the projects.

Examples of good practice are given by the JMU University of Würzburg, where the EVOLVE and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programme are officially recognised within the Teacher Professional Development programme and educators can request VE coaching. The Centre for Educational Innovation at the University of Groningen has developed its own short VE training. After the conclusion of this training, educators are awarded a small amount of money that they can use to invest in the development of their VE or use to be released from other tasks. They are also offered mentoring by educational supporters throughout the implementation of their VE.

At the same time, the educator's personal motivation for the implementation of VE continues to be key for its success on an individual case basis. Whilst a top-down strategy with incentives for VE is desirable, VE should not be imposed on educators. The Utrecht University of Applied Sciences is very explicit about this:

(...) VE is not yet fully recognised within the university's strategic plan for internationalisation. The university board acknowledges the value and significance of internationalisation as an important focus for the university, but does not mandate for educators to adopt specific strategies or programmes. At HU, internationalisation efforts are left to develop bottom up. (...) Within each department, the implementing educator works with the institute manager and the curriculum steering group to decide if they plan to integrate a VE component in their course (...). (Driver at University of Applied Sciences Utrecht)

How to assign resources to VE?

Institutions have a number of possibilities to keep engaging in VE. Erasmus + Virtual Exchange has been implemented as a pilot to expand the scope of the Erasmus+ programme providing online, transnational training and a package of ready-made VEs. Although the pilot programme

will not continue in its present form, institutions, educators and students will have the opportunity to keep benefiting from the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange models through the continued support of the organisations involved in the pilots.

Institutions have the possibility to keep implementing ready-made VE in collaboration with the non-profit organisations Soliya and SPF who have been responsible for the development of the ready-made models of VE offered through Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. Ensuring continuation of the VE activities developed through these projects, however, can only be successful if institutions allocate funding and support structures available to continue their implementation as drivers at the international office of the University of Edinburgh are trying to do:

> *The SWAY team is also working on a proposal for the NICE consortium on how to continue after the life of the project with funding to allocate staff resources from the institutions itself. (Driver at the University of Edinburgh)*

Thus, offering educators but also staff in areas of expertise which are relevant for VE (policy makers, international officers, educational and technical supporters), the opportunity for training and networking in order to get familiar with VE and/or learn how to develop their own exchanges in collaboration with fellow educators abroad or in collaboration with third parties as part of structured professional development programmes, is a vital step towards institutionalisation of VE.

Institutions will also be able to build upon the EVOLVE, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and NICE (training) materials which will become available as OER, and to involve VE experts through existing VE networks such as UNICollaboration, which will continue to provide training and where practitioners can meet and share experiences.

Nonetheless, institutions will still need to provide educational and technical support staff with the necessary skills to adapt and run these trainings (or develop their own) and educators with the necessary time release to develop the exchanges. Next to this, the institutions will also need to monitor their partnerships to ensure they are sustainable over time and firmly embedded into the (university-wide) curriculum:

> *The precise tasks needed to pilot VE in a more strategic cross-campus way need to be determined: we need to establish guidelines and models for teachers, promote and educate for VE and then administrative processes which track and support those who participate in it. (Driver at the University of Bordeaux)*

3.2.6. The gap between bottom-up commitment and institutional involvement

Bottom-up commitment

For the drivers at the bottom-up level it is characteristic that these individuals (educators, international officers, educational supporters or innovators) are highly motivated and dedicated to the introduction and implementation of VE because of its benefits for student learning outcomes, teacher professional development, internationalisation, and educational innovation. These bottom-up drivers show an innovating, learn-by-doing mentality even without time release or financial reward, on occasions even at some risk to their career development.

> *I suppose at the beginning it can be a bit discouraging for the teacher because the students, they are not that happy" but "as time goes on they start seeing benefits" and by the end of the course they are able to "name" the skills they have gained such as greater confidence,*

> *knowledge and interest. So, although students are clients and need to be kept happy, Dr Giralt is prepared to accept a certain level of dissatisfaction, calling into question whether happiness and learning necessarily go hand-in-hand (...) Dr Giralt is convinced of the learning outcomes from engaging in virtual exchange, primarily critical and intercultural skills, but also transversal skills such as self-esteem and empathy. (....) VE "brings the world into our classes". She observed that some students had strong realisations through this experiential learning environment which put their own lives into perspective. She noted that some students conveyed to her that were shocked by hearing others' stories and felt lucky and privileged. (University of Limerick report)*

Institutional involvement

At higher institutional levels, VE is considered to fit well within the IaH and IoC strategies and is therefore slowly being recognised as a means to offer all students the possibility to engage in international learning.

Students are starting to receive credits or Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Open Badges for participation in VE. In some cases, ready-made VE is offered as an alternative to a course, or as an elective.

> *Inclusion and wanting to develop virtual exchange to make sure that the benefits of an international experience and intercultural encounter and all the skills that students learn in that context in terms of graduate employability can be as widely spread as possible in terms of scaling up the number of students who have that experience in different ways, are the strong drivers for virtual exchange initiatives at the University of Edinburgh. (Driver at the University of Edinburgh)*

Nonetheless, the case studies show that the institutional interest in VE is not yet sufficiently translated into the practical support or steps for how to implement VE in education. Furthermore, education generally and innovative educational practices like VE more specifically, are undervalued in terms of career progression:

> *Challenges have varied across the years and depend on many factors. There has been a decrease in VE activity on the part of language teachers who had been the main drivers of VE, due to pressure to work on testing and teaching, as well as lack of recognition of the time invested in developing and implementing VE. (University of Padova report)*

How to bridge the gap?

Institutions should reward and recognise the work of bottom-up drivers by involving them across the relevant institutional areas in strategic planning and dissemination activities of VE in the institutions. Institutions should look for expertise and cooperation with institutional areas and centres (educational innovation, professional development, international offices, career centres, and related research areas) which are relevant for the practical support of VE implementation and set up transversal working groups, as has been done at the University of Bordeaux. For this to be successful, institutions should allocate funding to involve the relevant educators and supporters. Bottom-up drivers at the University of Groningen and Würzburg have set a good example for this. At these institutions, drivers have also established important connections with the VE community at large, involving professional organizations for professional development (UNICollaboration) and networks for exchange of practices and dissemination (Coimbra Group). Last but not least, the departments itself and service areas (directors of studies and areas or their equivalents), that

is, the institutional middle level, need to become more actively involved to get and keep educators on board:

> *There is both top-down and bottom-up but the weak link (the hole in the middle) is the college level - they need to integrate the credits via their academic councils and allow hours in teaching posts to support VE. We can provide top-down project support and incentives but ultimately we will go nowhere if each college/faculty does not engage with it as a valuable initiative. (Driver at the University of Bordeaux)*

3.2.7. The future of VE in times of Covid-19

Answers to our questions about how drivers envision the future of VE in light of the Covid-19 pandemic show that there is an increasing interest in VE because of student and staff physical mobility being restricted or even impossible. It is up to the institutions to take advantage of this momentum to implement VE more firmly in university strategies in collaboration with indicated stakeholders such as pioneering drivers, international offices, international policy makers, and university networks.

> *VE is an online extension of Internationalisation at Home and provides a complement or alternative to physical mobility. This is why it is particularly relevant under the current crisis, where physical mobility is impossible or highly restricted and where international and intercultural learning experiences for students on campus are also constrained by limited access and a smaller influx of international students. (University of Groningen report)*

> *In fact, I do not see how VE can really be scaled up at the institution without being part of a close network of partner universities who have the same impetus for developing educational collaboration - the European University Initiative is thus a key driver (in Europe) for VE. (Driver at University of Bordeaux)*

A much more flexible integration of VE as an alternative and/or complement to a one semester physical mobility experience, for example through blended mobility and an internationalisation portfolio for students rewarded with credits and badges, is highly recommended.

At the same time, we also need to be realistic as university employees at all levels have seen themselves overwhelmed with extra workload due to the shift to online education because of the pandemic. Ms Pagèze agrees that the pandemic might offer a momentum for VE to be taken up more easily by educators and management, but also warns of the risks of a too rapid integration of VE and the importance of relevant areas of expertise to be involved:

> *We are starting a network teacher matching exercise - but I wonder how any teachers will really wish to engage. The recognition of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange credits by faculty boards is progressing, slowly. We have to develop better international office and educational development support if we are to scale up/embed VE more widely.*

3.3. Components for successful institutional integration of VE

We will finish this section by giving an overview of the pieces in the implementation jigsaw found across the institutions that we believe need to be in place for an institution to successfully integrate VE as a common practice. These are:

3.3.1. Institutional funding for support structures and training

- Institutional funding is needed to provide educators with incentives, training and rewards. 'Calls for VE projects' should be developed, asking educators to submit proposals for the collaborative development of VE projects.
- EC funded projects have helped institutions to initiate or further develop VE. This shows the importance of these projects and the need for their continuation as well as for their OER materials to be used accordingly in institutions by allocating proper funding to VE.
- Ready-made VEs are an effective and 'easy' way for institutions to offer students from all disciplines a high quality VE experience, and should be a part of their 'internationalisation portfolio'.

3.3.2. Active bottom-up and top-down commitment

- Connect bottom-up initiatives and top-down strategies, by including pioneering drivers and experts of VE in the development of alternative internationalisation strategies and institutional approach to VE as an online extension for IaH and other innovative educational practices.
- Attend to differences at faculty or departmental levels to convince directors of study in departments and educators (across disciplines) of the importance of the inclusion of an international and intercultural component in their teaching throughout the curriculum.
- Set up an institution-wide 'working group' or 'steering committee' for IaH and VE activities together with faculty representatives and staff from service centres (continuous professional development, IT/eLearning, international office, careers).

3.3.3. Clear written policy on VE at university and faculty levels

- Generate a common institution-wide understanding of VE through connection with (external) experts from the VE community.
- Include flexible integration of VE as an alternative and also complementary activity to physical mobility and virtual mobility, especially under Covid–19.
- Given the likelihood of online learning continuing in HE, universities could use this opportunity to reflect and elaborate on renewed models of IaH. It is important that this process involves the entire HE community: top management, academic and administrative staff and students.
- Promote VE as part of other innovative approaches and practices concerning international education, international collaboration between (networks of) institutions and sustainable development.
- Use VE for blended mobility programmes, and establish procedures and support for ensuring the quality of the VE.

3.3.4. Promote VE amongst and in collaboration with experienced educators

- Advocate for VE through experienced educators, using peer-support between educators.
- Reward innovation in teaching in terms of recognition of professional development, teaching awards, career progression, teaching load reduction.

- Provide opportunities for professional development and training on VE and recognise staff participation in online international professional development programmes on VE.
- Make sure educators are able to undertake proper evaluation and research on VE.

3.3.5. Recognition of VE for students

- Integration of VE in the curriculum through the recognition of learning outcomes and credits for students.
- Award students with badges for participation in VEs. Ideally, students are allowed to replace part of their physical mobility with VE activities.
- Allow students to build an 'internationalisation portfolio' through participation in VE and other forms of international learning.

4. Case study reports

In this section, we will report on the interviews with key drivers of VE and secondary research which we have carried out at each of the institutions selected for this study. First, we will give a short introduction to the institution. This part contains information about the location, the year of founding of the institution, the degree programmes offered, the student population, the number of international students, the level of international collaboration, the international strategy and courses with an international dimension.

The introduction to each report is followed by a subsection which contains a table showing an overview of the VE activity at the institution as reported by the interviewees and found through additional research. In line with our findings in section 3.1, in the heading of this subsection it is indicated in which of the three specific scenarios the institution fits best. The main scenarios are:

1. **Educator-led Virtual Exchange**. VE is mainly driven by educators. Institutions that fit into this scenario are: the University of Limerick and the University of Padova.
2. **International division-led Virtual Exchange**. VE is mainly driven by support staff working in international offices or divisions. Institutions that fit into this scenario are the University of Edinburgh, the University of Granada and the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht.
3. **Collaboratively-led Virtual Exchange**. VE is driven by staff in different areas. Institutions that fit into this scenario are the University of Bordeaux, the University of Groningen, Newcastle University and JMU Würzburg.

The scenarios are reflected in the table containing the overview. Table 5 below shows a template of the table providing a visual overview of the parts of the institutions where VE activity is taking place. If the interviewees have reported VE activity in these areas, the parts are highlighted in blue. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. The table indicating where VE activity is taking place shows:

- The name and acronym of the institution (row 1).
- Stakeholders and/or actions at the middle or higher institutional levels involved in VE (row 2).
- Stakeholders and/or actions in the service areas involved in VE: educational support and innovation (including staff and student career development) and international offices (row 3).
- The education fields where VE is taking place based on the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2013[21] (row 4).
- The characteristics of VEs being implemented: whether the VE activity is free choice or a compulsory part of (a) degree program(s) (curricular) and whether the VEs are recognised in terms of ECTS or badges; whether the ready-made and/or the co-designed model(s) is used; whether the VE is facilitated by educators or by a third party (row 5).
- A short description of the type of funding scheme in place behind the VE activity (row 6).
- A short description of VE research output by staff and/or students, if reported (row 7).

[21] http://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-fields-of-education-and-training-2013-detailed-field-descriptions-2015-en.pdf see page 54 and further.

Table 5: *Template: Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE*

row										
1	Institution and, highlighted in blue, areas in the institution where VE activity is taking place									
2	Name of University (acronym)									
3	**Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme** (stakeholders involved at the middle or higher institutional levels and/or summary of actions)									
4	**Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development** (stakeholders involved and/or summary of actions)					**International offices** (stakeholders involved and/or summary of actions)				
5	01 Education	02 Arts and humanities	03 Social sciences, journalism and information	04 Business, administration and law	05 Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	06 Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	07 Engineering, manufacturing and construction	08 Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	09 Health and welfare	10 Services
6	Free choice (+ECTS/Badges) and/or curricular | Model: Co-designed and/or ready-made VEs| Facilitated by educators and/or third party									
7	**VE Funding schemes in place: internal and/or external (European, national or regional)**									
	VE research output by staff and/or students									

The visual overview is followed by the specific journeys towards implementation of VE undertaken by the interviewees who are also considered the key drivers of VE at their institution. These sections are their key (inter)actions together with an overview of the VEs implemented until the date of the interview, as well as the key challenges and future steps as reported by the interviewees.

4.1. University of Bordeaux (UB)

Sophie Millner

4.1.1. Introduction

According to information on its website, the University of Bordeaux (UB) is a multidisciplinary, research-focused, international institution. The UB offers 250 master programmes, 150 bachelor (incl. vocational) programmes in the areas of science and technology, law and political science, economics and management, life and health sciences, and social and human Sciences. Approximately 12% of a total number of 56,000 students are international. The university welcomes approximately 7,000 international students each year and has developed a wide range of international study programmes that are taught in English (or other languages such as Spanish and German) and that offer students the possibility of completing joint or double degrees. UB is a leading university in France for participation in the Erasmus Mundus Program. There are nearly 700 partner universities based in over 80 countries, dedicated exchange programmes with more than 60 countries worldwide and strategic partners in 3 continents of the world: Africa, Asia, North America and one Euroregional campus, Bordeaux-Euskampus. UB is also an active member of major international HE networks, such as the European Association for International Education (EAIE)[22] and the European University Association (EUA)[23] and very recently, the ENLIGHT[24] consortium of nine European universities. For its Strategic Plan U25 for the University of 2025, the UB has identified four transversal priorities which will be the catalysts to transform the university: internationalisation, digitalization, campus urbanization and talent management.

4.1.2. VE activity reported at UB: Collaboratively-led

Table 6 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

[22] https://www.eaie.org/

[23] https://eua.eu/

[24] https://enlight-eu.org/

Table 6: *Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at UB*

University of Bordeaux (UB)									
Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme One of the objectives of the Vice-President for Internationalisation is to embed VE across the institution									
Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development There is VE training through *Défi Internationa*l in collaboration with the learning and teaching centre MAPI					**International offices** The international office helps connect with interested partners and VE is being showcased when presenting the international offer				
01 Education	02 Arts and humanities	03 Social sciences, journalism and information	04 Business, administration and law	05 Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	06 Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	07 Engineering, manufacturing and construction	08 Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	09 Health and welfare	10 Services
Curricular (+ECTS/Badges) | Ready-made and co-designed VEs | Facilitated by third party or educator									
VE Funding schemes in place: Internal & external (European) **Internal:** The New Deal programme/IdEx (Initiative of Excellence) **External (European):** Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange/EVOLVE/ENLIGHT									
VE research output by staff: Various staff members have published on VE									

4.1.3. Key drivers

The case study for UB was informed by Ms Hoskins, teacher of English as a Foreign Language for Health and Human Sciences, who completed the interview protocol in writing followed by a 1.5 hour online interview in February 2020. Ms Joanne Pagèze, currently Vice-President for internationalisation at UB, added to this case study in writing and completed the same interview protocol questionnaire in June 2020.

Ms Joanne Pagèze's background is in English for specific/academic purposes. She teaches at the Department of Languages and Cultures. As such, she has been involved in blended learning, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and in the last ten years in teacher development for internationalisation, and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) training. Her research interests are in international learning and teaching, language policy and educational development. She is co-editor of the European Journal of Language Policy (EJPL) for which she edited a volume on VE. She is chair of the European Association for International Education (EAIE) Language and Culture Expert community and developed the university's *Défi International Initiative*[25] ("an educational and linguistic support system for teaching in a multicultural context aimed at developing internationalisation"). Next to this, she uses VE in her teaching. In her current position as Vice-

[25] *Défi International Initiative (2017):* http://langues.u-bordeaux.fr/Sciences-de-l-Homme-et-sante/Defi-international

President for internationalisation at UB, one of her objectives is to embed VE across the institution.

Ms Pagèze heard about Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange at the EAIE Conference in Seville held in September 2017. At that time, there already existed several other VE activities in different small pockets across the UB but these were running in an informal way.

> *The international office organised a workshop in 2017 and in March 2018 Dr Helm came to Bordeaux to give a talk on the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot: "VE was seen as an interesting, developing addition to Internationalisation at Home and some of those informal projects have received funding from the IdEx[26] (Initiative of Excellence) to support the contact/exchange with other institutions. In parallel, Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange has progressed very well thanks to Laura's Hoskins promotion and tracking, and Alexandra Reynolds taking it up in Science and Technology. (Ms Pagèze)*

Ms Hoskins is an English as a Foreign Language teacher within the Language Department for Human and Health Sciences and the key driver in the implementation of Cultural Encounters, an Interactive Open Online Course (iOOC) within the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project. Ms Hoskins is an innovative educator, continually looking for ways to expand her teaching repertoire and has, of her own initiative, followed the EVOLVE training, Erasmus+ TEP advanced training and the Introduction to facilitated dialogue training. Ms Hoskins teaches English to students enrolled in human sciences (psychology, sociology) and health sciences (biomedical sciences, neuroscience, medicine, dentistry, public health) at undergraduate and postgraduate level. She has a special interest in blended language learning and has developed several blended learning courses using Moodle.

Over the two years of engagement, Ms Hoskins has engaged colleagues from departments across the university in the Cultural Encounters Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange course and has seen student participation rise to ten times the initial number. Recently, extensive Information on the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programme and student experiences has been published on the website[27].

In addition to her role as a teacher, Ms Hoskins also heads *Défi International*. Since the interviews were conducted, Ms Hoskins has been increasingly consulted by the institutional and strategic level due, both to her portfolio of projects and experience coming into fruition, as well as the Covid-19 crisis creating a demand for expertise in online education.

Nonetheless, it is the students that Ms Hoskins teaches who are her motivation. Their needs have driven her to create a learning environment that can answer the demand to diversify her classroom from what she describes currently as a "heterogeneous group" and in so doing, create an "authentic opportunity to interact" with others. However, Ms Hoskins' motivation stems from a deep value in educational equality. She explains that she is determined to provide opportunities for students whom she considers to be the "hard to reach"; for whom language is a "big barrier" in order to give them the first step to mobility. Currently, the majority of those who participate in Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, already have good English and are ready to go abroad. In Ms Hoskins' own words:

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[26] https://idex.u-bordeaux.fr/fr/n/Formations-de-demain/NewDEAL/r3452.html

[27] https://www.u-bordeaux.com/News/Experience-international-distance-learning-with-Erasmus-Virtual-Exchange

> *I, myself, am motivated by the return I have seen from students on the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. I am motivated in particular, to draw the students that are typically not very mobile or internationalised - sociology students for example, where levels of mobility and second language proficiency are generally low.*

Ms Hoskins has encouraged several colleagues from different departments at the university who teach English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to engage in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange course as well as involving students from the classes of five other colleagues within her department. For these latter colleagues she uses Moodle to provide a centralised place where students' attendance records and assignments can be viewed. Her outreach efforts have resulted in the scale of participation increasing; a disciplinary expansion from health and human sciences into science and technology and the output of academic research.

It was Ms Hoskins who brought her fellow ESP colleague, Dr Alexandra Reynolds, into the coordination of Cultural Encounters Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. Both Ms Hoskins and Dr Reynolds work together as local coordinators within their own respective departments and on separate campuses. Dr Reynolds is an English lecturer who coordinates students in her sector of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects. She and her colleagues are engaged in developing VE as an international track in the science degree programme and as an IaH initiative. Ms Pagèze knows that "they have had good results in chemistry which is important because it has helped to develop the value of intercultural learning in a scientific master programme. There is the risk that VE gets shut in the language and culture cupboard". Furthermore, Dr Reynolds has carried out research into the "relationship between language experience, agency and autonomy" during intercultural encounters that take place in the context of VE.

At the institutional level, UB is aiming to develop their IaH agenda and to use VE as a means of achieving this, so knows Ms Pagèze:

> *The main reason for extending intercultural experience on campus and embedding it into curriculum is to develop an open mind-set as a fundamental quality in our graduates - even if they never leave the South West. This may be connected to mobility - widening access to groups that do not consider it - but it is much more the idea of graduate profiles. (...) The second important aspect is we have large funding grants for innovative learning and teaching at the undergraduate level (The NewDeal programme[28]) one strand for this is internationalisation for a wider public and (importantly) the necessary pedagogical transformation to do that. VE is a strand of the NewDeal programme in Science and Technology - but it is just getting off the ground.*

In answer to the questions what, if any, policies and strategies her institution has, Ms Pagèze further explains:

> *In early 2020 (before COVID), an IdEx programme, to support VE in a blended mobility model with short programmes, was approved with the idea to scale up and extend. All of this is linked to the timeline of our university course accreditation (2020-21). The funding for VE projects and pedagogical support for that is timed to coincide with the review of degree programmes (colleagues would be invited to apply for funding for their projects). The second driver is our Erasmus+ European University Alliance project (ENLIGHT). VE is integrated*

[28] https://idex.u-bordeaux.fr/fr/n/Formations-de-demain/NewDEAL/r3452.html

> *across the project not just as stepping stone to mobility but for the 21st century citizen/societal responsibility aspect mentioned above. This close network with aligned objectives is essential to going further. In fact, I do not see how VE can really be scaled up at the institution without being part of a close network of partner universities who have the same impetus for developing educational collaboration - the European University Initiative[29] is thus a key driver (in Europe) for VE.*

Thus, within UB, VE is driven by Ms Hoskins together with her fellow ESP colleagues Dr Reynolds, who is a key player for Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange in science and technology but also Thierry Villard, who has been involved for many years in several successful projects which are technology/language/culture focused. From top-down, the driver is Ms Pagèze, the Vice-President for internationalisation who states:

> *There is both top-down and bottom-up but the weak link (the hole in the middle) is the college level - they need to integrate the credits via their academic councils and allow hours in teaching posts to support VE. We can provide top-down project support and incentives but ultimately we will go nowhere if each college/faculty does not engage with it as a valuable initiative. This is now the case in Science and Technology and we are nearly there in Social and Human Sciences. One brake on development is that VE is associated with language departments who participate in programmes but do not have their own programmes (no languages degrees at university of Bordeaux) - so there is weak disciplinary engagement at the college level. We need wider understanding and engagement from academic staff.*

4.1.4. Key (inter)actions

Ms Hoskins's story of VE started because UB were approached by SPF, an implementer of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project. The opportunity "came to us and sounded interesting, so Ms Hoskins and her colleagues tried to see how it could be fitted into an existing course and structure. Ms Pagèze and Ms Hoskins were attracted by the opportunity to give "high level students an authentic opportunity to interact."

Cultural Encounters has been ongoing since spring 2018 within the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project. This is a model of VE designed as a ready-made package of expert content combined with weekly, live, facilitated dialogue sessions. Ms Hoskins and her colleagues have implemented five iOOCs over this period. The VE course is offered as a replacement to the mandatory English language course for students with sufficient English competency.

The model used entailed offering the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange interactive Cultural Encounters course to the C1/C2 level English speakers taking second year sociology (three students), first year biology students (one student), and optionally to second-year psychology students (2 students). That first semester had only six students in total enrolled in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange interactive course. With "positive feedback" they extended the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange opportunity in the Autumn 2018 semester to MA programmes in public health and chemistry as well as BA programmes in dentistry, pharmacy, psychology and education. The numbers increased significantly from the six in the first semester to a peak of sixty students. Table 7 below shows an overview of the above mentioned implemented VEs:

[29] https://ec.europa.eu/education/education-in-the-eu/european-education-area/european-universities-initiative_en

Table 7: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at UB*

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other
Different informal VE activities in pockets across the university	Since 2017	unknown	These initiatives are mostly initiated by language teachers but also in other disciplines.
Cultural Encounters iOOC (Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange)	Spring 2018 & Autumn 2018 - 2020 (to date)	From 6 to >60	English as a Foreign Language course. Replacement for students' core English course within a range of disciplinary subjects. C1/C2 level second-year sociology students C1/C2 level first-year biology students Optional course to second-year psychology students Extended further to MA programmes in public health and chemistry, and BA programmes in dentistry, pharmacy, psychology and education

Ms Hoskins has always been an innovative educator. She has applied online, audio-visual and exchange pedagogies and even used the model of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Cultural Encounters course for the students with lower English language competency. She has since created a co-designed VE focused on exploring "youth attitudes across cultures" and following elements she saw in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Cultural Encounters courses that her students engaged in.

Ms Hoskins reflects that she is always in an experimental phase. Never doing things the same from one year to the next. It was in this spirit that Ms Hoskins was:

> *inspired by the return we were having on these experiences, [so] I myself set up a small VE programme for an online master's programme in neuroscience (EMN-online[30]) in September 2018. This programme is taught entirely online, with students enrolling from around the world, so the stage was already set for connecting students in remote geographic locations and implementing VE.*

As part of a small university-wide expert working group of experienced people, Ms Hoskins knows that at least nine VEs exist within UB where language teachers have been using VE initiatives. In particular, an ESP colleague, Mr Villard, who ran quite a few co-designed VE projects, one of which through the EVOLVE and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programmes with the University of León in Spain in spring 2019 on which a paper was published (Fernández-Raga et al., 2019). Since September 2018 Ms Hoskins notes that there are other initiatives run by disciplinary teachers that "could be qualified as VE - without having been officially flagged as such." Science without Borders is one such example, which is being run out of "personal motivation - no financial incentive or time release". This is significant as it shows that there are pockets of VE initiatives throughout the university that are working in isolation from each other and not coordinated. Ms Pagèze further explains:

> *The working group has been set up with the idea of transferring this enthusiasm and experience into a clearer typology of what VE can be and also of the skills and tasks involved. This*

[30] https://emn-online.org/

> *was planned before Covid-19 but it has been boosted by it. The key shift is having the educational developers, international office, motivated teachers working together to better determine VE and what is needed to support it across the institution (as opposed to isolated pockets, people in their silos). It is also important to balance the perspectives of teachers who are not language teachers on VE - we need the scientific project to get a better typology of possible VE and a better idea of the value for disciplines.*

This raises the important question of defining what VE is and whether this understanding is shared by all educators working at UB. For Ms Hoskins, VE is bringing together individuals from geographically remote places in order to capture diversity and bring this difference in thinking and ways of doing things to the encounter. There are a few key elements that Ms Hoskins highlights, namely having a purpose behind bringing individuals together; that they should be there in order to do something; to have a shared goal or task. Furthermore, it is through working with others to a shared goal that students will learn about each other's and their own culture (developing self-reflective skills). Ms Hoskins values the experiential process where encountering different ways of doing and thinking places individuals outside their comfort zones and exposes them to conflict and tension that offers them the chance to learn how to negotiate and find ways to overcome this in the future.

These highlight the *practice-based, skill-oriented* nature of the VE experience and are not the same principles listed in the definition of VE used by EVOLVE, yet, this experiential interpretation of VE more closely reflects the purpose of VE and offers a valuable insight into why Ms Hoskins implements VE and importantly why she considers it so valuable to her students' education. In her definition, she is describing less the principles of VE and more the experiential pedagogy and learning outcomes.

This brings Ms Pagèze to an important point: "better qualification of the practice is urgent now for wider embedding. We are currently preparing the guide documents for accreditation and there will be a clear definition of what VE is and its positioning".

4.1.5. Key challenges and future steps

The challenges to promoting and implementing VE at UB run across a number of levels. Ms Hoskins summarises these as:

> *Difficulty with integration and recognition; difficulty making VE fit with course learning outcomes; difficulty finding time/hours/finance to add into programmes; and needing to raise awareness and train teaching faculty. The complexity of faculty, course organisation means this takes a little time.*

Yet, she notes positively, that with the forthcoming educational reform these issues should be addressed.

Following on from the issue of faculty complexity, Ms Hoskins comments most notably on the different cultures and practices within the university teaching staff. Departments and teachers work within silos in a teacher-centred rather than learning-outcomes model that sees the teacher as the representative; the source of specialist knowledge and with this comes the pedagogical freedom that entails a reluctance to standardise. She reflects, it's "not for me to tell others how to teach" however, this means teachers cannot "harmonise".

In addition to this, VE is also seen as a threat to the security of their job by dividing their role with external educational organisations. There is, furthermore, a "reticence to technology, fear of Moodle and an undervaluing of online, distance learning".

At institutional level, Ms Hoskins highlights how language teachers are seen as "secondary". Research is considered to have a higher value within the university system than teaching in terms of career paths and by contrast there is no career incentive for engaging in VE; no time release, no impact on pay and "we don't really have the support staff to organise and implement VE". In short, staff won't be promoted for it, whilst carrying out research can lead to promotion.

There is also the focus on knowledge-based rather than skills-based learning methods. This is reflected in how general language teaching is taught. For Ms Hoskins, it is not just "mechanical language skills" such as learning grammar, but rather skills that surround dialogue, interaction, intercultural communication. Which, Ms Hoskins believes, should be embedded everywhere, not just in language. Ms Pagèze adds that "although there are courses and researchers focusing on Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) within business school programmes, ICC is not seen as a transversal skill that should be taught across the disciplines". Consequently, there is no particular fit for VE which has at its core ICC in other disciplines than languages. Ultimately, these barriers matter to Ms Hoskins because they create gaps in reaching those who would benefit most. However, with the new accreditation round there has been a recent pedagogical shift to include more skills-based elements which Ms Hoskins stresses is very new to disciplinary teaching.

A further challenge to VE being implemented across the university is the issue that:

> *VE is not yet clearly defined or well understood in my institution but I have been asked to be part of a small working group that aims to do so. I'm not sure teachers and researchers distinguish between different forms - facilitated dialogue for example is not well known. I've heard it referred to as "virtual mobility" (mobilité virtuelle) - which is a bit reductive I think. I've also heard people refer to it as telecollaboration (sounds dated to me).*

Ms Hoskins goes on to say that "on the ground, there are disciplinary teachers who are doing VE, though perhaps not calling it that and not specifically targeting intercultural communication skills as a learning outcome. They may be targeting disciplinary outcomes." Thus, there is not a coordinated approach to VE across the university.

Ms Pagèze confirms all of this when summing up the following challenges:

- ICC is poorly understood outside of the core group, training only reaches those who search for it
- Getting academic staff interested and engaged is difficult
- Getting faculties and colleges (outside languages) to recognise the intercultural value and make it a priority is difficult
- The lack of interest in online learning was an issue before Covid-19, now we need to surf on the disruptive moment

In answer to the question as to whether UB has future plans to further develop or mainstream VE, she mentions the following actions:

- The university-wide expert working group
- The NewDeal Internationalisation@home strand which includes different VE and participation in E+VE
- Typology/guidelines for teachers for different models of VE
- Define support
- Develop efficient administration systems for partnering mechanisms (already put in place in the context of ENLIGHT and other networks) tracking and organisation of VE in collaboration with international office, academic structures and staff
- Set up a project application process
- Reach out to wider academic community
- Work closely with colleges to integrate into an educational offer during the 2021 accreditation campaign so it moves into curricula

She explains that the strategy for wider extension of VE is being developed through the uni-wide expert working group. In Science and Technology there is a clear strategy for implementation in 2020/21 through the New Deal internationalisation work package, but:

> *The structure of our university has meant that in Science and Technology VE has been identified as a key strategy for widening internationalisation, which means support and funding. But this implies transferring skills, experience and providing support from the Social and Human Sciences College where there is expertise but where VE has not been targeted as a core transformational project. This shows that strategic initiatives for VE can only be mainstreamed if there is a strong impetus to internationalise a programme or faculty and if VE is understood as a means to achieve this goal.*

Training in VE for teachers has been put in place very recently through *Défi International*. It is one strand of the professional development programme for internationalisation. An educational developer and a pedagogical engineer from the learning and teaching centre MAPI have joined the working group. The learning and teaching centre is key to extending the practice across the colleges and faculties. The new IdEx initiative (January 2020) will provide hours and also support for developing links with partners as well as educational development. The international office helps connect with interested partners and VE is being showcased when presenting the educational offer. However, Ms Pagèze stresses that:

> *The precise tasks needed to pilot VE in a more strategic cross-campus way, need to be determined: we need to establish guidelines and models for teachers, promote and educate for VE and then administrative processes which track and support those who participate in it.*

In conclusion, in order to support the implementation of VE, UB aims to:

> *Promote it to faculty teams and management; provide seed funding to support its integration; provide seed funding to combine VE and blended mobility; include it in internationalisation blocks of competences and embed intercultural skills into existing curricula.*

Although it has not yet been proposed as a structural component of the curriculum, Ms Hoskins is confident that "in the next wave of accreditation (2020/2021) it will be formally included by some programmes".

In light of the Covid-19 pandemic that has seen international mobility halted, Ms Hoskins was asked whether any concrete or future plans had arisen as a result of these changes in circumstances. Ms Hoskins noted that Dr Millner's invitation to co-present at an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Masterclass webinar to over 500 educators globally gave her confidence to run her own local masterclass:

> *We had the local webinar to present ready-made solutions and at the time of writing we have at least 30 students in a wide variety of programmes that will be completing an SPF iOOC to replace credits they couldn't obtain because of the Covid-19 crisis.*

In terms of future plans Ms Hoskins states that "one participant in the local webinar in pharmacy wants to put Cultural Encounters on a list of electives from next year. There is new interest in VE." Ms Hoskins adds later that the Anthropology Department has since incorporated Cultural Encounters into its curriculum offering it as an optional accredited course in its own right and that she will be in charge of following these students.

Ms Pagèze feels the same about VE under Covid-19 but also warns of the risks of a too rapid integration of VE and the importance of relevant areas of expertise to be involved:

> *We have an opportunity to go further faster because the faculty leaders, college leaders and academic staff in general are more open to virtual interaction and also because they see mobility has taken a hit. Things that were in development will be easier to get done because the wider community will understand VE better. However, we have to navigate the risk of an easy equation with mobility and the loss of the pedagogical value in the way it is approached. There is a little bit of a bandwagon effect. We are starting a network teacher matching exercise - but I wonder how any teachers will really wish to engage. The recognition of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange credits by faculty boards is progressing, slowly. We have to develop better international office and educational development support if we are to scale up/embed VE more widely.*

4.2. University of Edinburgh (UoE)

4.2.1. Introduction

The University of Edinburgh (UoE), founded in 1583, is a broad-based, large, historical research university located in the capital of Scotland. The university is divided into the Colleges of Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), Science & Engineering (SCE) and Medicine & Vet Medicine (MVM). Together, the colleges compromise 21 schools. The UoE is also known to be one of the most international universities of the UK. According to the factsheet of student figures[31] and annual review 2018/2019[32], about one third of the total student population of 43,380 under and postgraduates are internationals. A total number of 2400 students (about 5%) undertake international opportunities each year, including exchanges, traineeships, short-term programmes, and VE. Besides this, the UoE is an active member of several international university networks such as Coimbra group, and UNA Europa[33], which is a 3 year pilot funded by the Erasmus+ program that started in January 2020.

4.2.2. VE activity reported at UoE: International division-led

Table 8 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

4.2.3. Key drivers

The report for the UoE has been informed by three members of the Study and Work Away Service (SWAY)[34] which is part of Edinburgh Global, the central international office at the UoE. The interviews were conducted with Dr Justin Seran in November 2019, who at the time of the interview was a Project Advisor in the team and with Ms Anna Creery in October 2020 who is the Projects Manager of the team since November 2019. The Head of SWAY, Ms Isabell Majewsky Anderson, gave some input to the report in writing.

[31] http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/gasp/factsheet/Student_Factsheet_31072019.pdf

[32] https://www.ed.ac.uk/about/annual-review/student-numbers

[33] https://www.una-europa.eu/

[34] https://global.ed.ac.uk/study-work-away

Table 8: *Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at UoE*

<table>
<tr><th colspan="10">University of Edinburgh (UoE)</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme

University management is supportive of VE</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development

The Interactive Content Services (ICS) team collaborated on the structure of the NICE platform</td><td colspan="5">International offices

The Study and Work Away Service (SWAY) provides support and information to schools wanting to engage in VE and is currently leading the VE taskforce</td></tr>
<tr><td>01*

Education</td><td>02*

Arts and humanities</td><td>03*

Social sciences, journalism and information</td><td>04*

Business, administration and law</td><td>05*

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics</td><td>06*

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td><td>07*

Engineering, manufacturing and construction</td><td>08*

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary</td><td>09*

Health and welfare</td><td>10*

Services</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Free choice (ECTS) | Ready-made | Facilitated by third party or educator</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE Funding schemes in place: Internal & external (European)

Internal: INCiTE summer school

External: NICE project & eTandem Global developed through European University Alliance UNA Europa</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE research output by staff: There are a few publications on VE</td></tr>
</table>

Note. * Students can apply individually for participation in VE offered through the NICE or INCiTE programmes.

Thanks to the blogpost 'Developing virtual exchange at the University of Edinburgh' published on the University of Edinburgh's Teaching Matters website on December 11th 2018 by Dr Seran, the EVOLVE Baseline study (Jager et al., 2019, p. 16-17) identified the international office Edinburgh Global as the driver behind some of the activities related to VE at this institution.

Within Edinburgh Global, the SWAY team is the main driver of VE and also supports schools and colleges within the university to engage with VE. The team works specifically on coordinating Erasmus+ strategic partnerships and creating non-traditional forms of mobility, such as short-term mobility, summer schools, and VE. They also set up new projects to support students through international experiences.

> *The policy is the internationalisation plan, it is broad and about internationalisation and about providing students with an international experience. It doesn't state virtual exchange. It is a term the International Office decided to adopt last year. We first started to call it virtual mobility and then read more about it and thought virtual exchange would be more accurate with regards to what we are trying to achieve. To my knowledge, the International Office is the only service using this term and it is not written in the strategy yet. It is something we have identified as a means to achieving some of the goals in the strategy. It is slowly being adopted into our service policy. (Dr Seran)*

Nonetheless, by the time of the interview with Ms Creery, the initiatives developed by the team are starting to fit better into the university's latest strategic visions which seeks to ensure "everyone has the chance to engage globally" (Global Engagement Plan 2017-2020[35]) and "to see a more international student body – offering all our students an international learning experience" (Strategic Vision 2025[36]).

Dr Seran's understanding of what VE is, comes close to the EVOLVE definition.

> *VE is a form of mobility that is happening through using online tools, that connects students or staff in an institution directly with students or staff in an institution in another country. Not everything we do online is a VE. There needs to be this connection directly between people, working on a collaborative project together, having regular conversations together. That point of encounter between 2 people or 2 groups of people from different (linguistic and cultural) backgrounds, being in different environments at the moment when they have the encounter. The encounter being facilitated by digital tools.*

Dr Seran's own motivation to get involved with VE has to do in the first place with her background in academia, having completed a PhD in English literature and taught at university for three years, "which is where my interest in getting trained as a VE facilitator through Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange came from, to reuse that tutoring and teaching experience".

Besides this, her having been able to enjoy the benefits of different international experiences has made Dr Seran, like her institution, very aware of the need of inclusive internationalisation:

> *The SWAY team are also very aware that not every student is able or willing to do that, pack their things and go overseas, so it is really important for the UoE that we develop alternative forms of mobility for those students who don't want to go or can't go. We have students at Edinburgh who are parents, who are carers for family members, students who are refugees who do not have papers to travel, students with disabilities. Any reason, really, they wouldn't even have to justify themselves for why they don't want to go away.*

Inclusion and wanting to develop VE to make sure that the benefits of an international experience and all the skills that students learn in that context in terms of graduate employability can be as widely spread as possible in terms of scaling up the number of students who have that experience in different ways, are the strong drivers for VE initiatives at the UoE.

For SWAY, these have indeed been the main reasons to embark on two blended learning pilot projects which incorporate VE elements: the Erasmus+ Key Action 203 Strategic Partnership project Network of Intercultural Competence to facilitate Entrepreneurship (NICE) which runs from September 2017 to December 2020 and the institutionally funded INCiTE summer school[37] running until the summer season of 2021. The SWAY team within Edinburgh Global is in charge of all activities related to these projects within the institution, such as the recruitment of educators and offering them training to become facilitators in these projects. Ms Creery points out that it is important to know why this is:

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[35] https://global.ed.ac.uk/sites/default/files/atoms/files/Our%20Global%20Engagement%20Plan.pdf

[36] http://www.docs.sasg.ed.ac.uk/gasp/strategicplanning/Strategic-Vision_web2.pdf

[37] https://www.ed.ac.uk/global/go-abroad/incite-summer-school

The SWAY Service is the place where these VE projects organically grew, because we were noticing that there was a gap for students who cannot go on a traditional exchange. It is our responsibility to engage educators and to build a network to make sure to grow internationalisation in different ways. We can push the agenda forward and support academics.

4.2.4. Key (inter)actions

The European funded NICE project consists of a consortium of eight European universities[38] led by UoE. It incorporates VE components such as facilitated dialogue and virtual transnational team meetings between small groups of students from each of the partner universities who work together on a final product. According to the website, the project aims "to enhance students' employability by helping them to develop intercultural competencies and entrepreneurial skills". The project is especially designed for those students who have limited possibilities to travel or study abroad, but student teams are also offered the opportunity to meet each other and their facilitators face-to-face by applying for the one week NICE Summer School. In this sense, the NICE project is a form of blended mobility which combines VE with physical mobility.

A total number of 20 students from each of the partner universities can apply individually and be selected for the NICE programme, which offers its own course and projects. This means that NICE is not embedded in regular university courses. However, students do have the possibility to get 10 ECTS if they decide to reflect on their participation in NICE through a so-called Student-Led Individually Created Course (SLICC). This reflection course is assessed by educators at the UoE and partner universities. The SLICCs are normally meant for students who are abroad to set up a project for themselves, but the SWAY team partnered with the academic designers course to also allow participation from students participating in the NICE project. Educators are also offered the opportunity to get trained by the SWAY team to become facilitators in the project.

The online NICE platform consists of seven modules over 12 weeks (flexible). Students who join the NICE project are put into a group with four other students from the partner universities and they work through the modules together. Students learn about intercultural competence and entrepreneurship, concluding each module in a virtual meeting with a staff facilitator to talk about what they have learned. Students need to commit three to five hours per module and an additional hour to meet with the team and facilitator each week. Students also need to be prepared to meet with the team virtually outside of the facilitated sessions to work on a solution to a Global Challenge, which is their final project. Each student team studies and analyses a Global Challenge and creates a business model to solve an aspect of this challenge. According to the website, this is how the project aims "to enhance students' employability by helping them to develop intercultural competencies and entrepreneurial skills". The project is especially designed for students who have limited possibilities to travel or study abroad, but student teams are also offered the opportunity to meet each other and their facilitators face-to-face by applying for the one week NICE Summer school. Therefore, NICE can also be considered a blended mobility project.

The INCiTE Summer School is a collaborative project which grew from already existing relationships between the UoE, University of Amsterdam in Europe, the University of Sydney in Australia, the Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, and Jiangsu Education Services for International Exchange in China. INCiTE began by using the materials created by NICE but the INCiTE

[38] University of Amsterdam, University College Dublin, University of Edinburgh, University of Goettingen, Alexandra Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Lund University, University of Padova, University of Salamanca

partners are putting institutional funds behind it: "It is still at the stage of a pilot. We hope to grow it, add new partners. If it could become embedded as a regular activity of the Service, that would be a great thing to aim for, but it is not yet the case." Like NICE, INCiTE aims to build student's entrepreneurial and intercultural skills but has a cohort of 30 students per institution, a physical summer school of two weeks, and involves students from outside of Europe as well. Building on the success of the 2020 NICE virtual summer school, the 2021 INCiTE summer school is now planned to take place virtually, with students in China who will be in charge of showing 'the local aspects' online:

> *The NICE Virtual Summer school was a great success. With the physical summer school leveraged, students didn't have to change their way of learning as they were already comfortable with working online. I was impressed by the quality of their solutions to Global Challenges and they were able to have very constructive conversations about it. And there was the benefit that the virtual summer school was accessible to everyone instead of only to 10 selected students.*

Table 9 below offers an overview of the numbers of students who have been involved in the NICE and INCiTE projects so far. In 2017/2018, the first year of the NICE project, all project processes were created (the platform, the courses, the tools, the format). The first and second cycles were run in 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 respectively.

Table 9: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at UoE*

Project/ course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other: academic and professional members of staff involved acting as tutors and facilitators
NICE project	2018/2019	515 (applications from all universities) 140 (participants from all universities) 18 (participants UoE)	6
NICE project	2019/2020	230 (applications from 5 partners[39]) 161 (participants from all universities) 19 (participants UoE)	9
NICE project	2020/2021	61 Interested students	Not yet applicable
INCiTE summer school	Summer 2019	132 (5 universities) 27 (UoE)	4
INCiTE summer school	Summer 2020	Postponed due to Covid - 19	4
INCiTE summer school	Summer 2021	42 Interested students	Not yet applicable

4.2.5. Key challenges and future steps

As indicated above, the strategies related to VE, such as the recruitment of educators to participate in the NICE and INCiTE projects as either facilitators or within the development of the SLICC courses, have been the responsibility of the SWAY team and the international partners in the pro-

[39] Ms Creery: "Three universities were responsible for their own applications and selection in the 2020 cycle and their application numbers have not yet been confirmed".

jects. The NICE project ends in December 2020 but SWAY is in the process of developing a proposal on how to push VE forward as a standard offering. According to Ms Creery, there is now a clear institutional appetite to go forward with VE at UoE:

The university is engaging positively with VE and as an institution, we must tailor the VE offering in different ways for different Schools and subjects. The University is a very large institution. Although our current Strategic Vision may not specifically focus on VE, there is recognition of the positive feedback we have received from students who participated in the NICE and INCiTE projects. We are in different times now, the university is engaging more with VE as a response to the pandemic: we saw that students participating in VEs were more prepared for digital learning because they were already engaged in it. The virtual aspect made the transition easier for them.

A clear example of this is the fact that the university has created the SWAY Resilience and Development group, and part of their remit is a focus on VE, which is partly due to the increased requirement for virtual learning due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The university is also putting into place a VE Task Force that is composed of senior representatives from across all three colleges:

> *There is a VE strategy currently being formalised, and the SWAY team is working on a proposal for the NICE consortium on how to continue after the life of the project with funding to allocate staff resources from the institutions itself. (Ms Creery)*

In 2020 the NICE project joined forces with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange facilitators are supporting some of the transnational groups. In addition, participants will receive an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange open badge that is a form of recognition of their participation in the project.

As for the challenges, there has been a change in focus during the Covid-19 pandemic. Resources have been devoted to ensuring that students are able to take courses online that were previously written and planned for in-person learning, which has not left much time or resources for additional VE development. In addition, prior to the pandemic, the UoE was relatively new to VE and the resources and education to move VE forward were relatively unknown and untested.

> *Within SWAY, VE started with Erasmus+ funding for the NICE project, that is how the staff at Edinburgh Global were able to engage with VE and use the NICE project as an example of how VE could work outside of the traditional course structure. We were fortunate that our Interactive Content Services (ICS) team was able to work with us on the structure of the NICE offering, providing valuable insight on what type of platform and activities had worked before and what they would recommend steering away from. This insight was incredibly beneficial to create something that students were able to understand easily and become comfortable using quickly. The ICS team also works with organisations outside of the UoE, so they were able to advise us on the different needs of different user groups. In addition, we had a lot of advice from the course organisers of the SLICC, which was valuable from a different perspective, as SLICC's are credited courses and the work is predominantly completed online by the student. Having an understanding of the work and information that needed to be provided to student users was incredibly helpful. The challenge was combining the advice and expertise from these two different areas within the university, to ensure that we provided equal balance to both aspects of the project.*

The UoE as a large organisation is very complex, but the VE Task Force is a first step in understanding all the different VE activities that are going on within the university. Ms Creery and Ms

Majewsky Anderson are hopeful that this understanding can then inform how the institution as a whole engages with VE, which will help develop a detailed strategy for VE.

On the question whether there already is a plan on how to recruit educators, Ms Creery has confirmed there is a plan in place to offer further education for staff within the university who wish to upskill in these areas, given the importance of VE over the last six months. The university has worked hard to make technology platforms better accessible and both Dr Seran and Ms Creery hope that the outputs of the NICE projects as OER in both their static and interactive forms will give the SWAY team the tools to work with educators and their units of the benefits of VE for both staff (professional development) and students:

> *VE is not a structural component in the curriculum but it is something we hope to achieve. We hope to support and work with schools and subjects to help them embed VE in the curriculum. When I did the Soliya training, they advised academics to replace one of the assignments for their course with regular participation in one of those discussion groups. This is something I personally would like to see because our students spend time writing essays and assignments during their time studying here. After they have graduated, a fair amount of their time working will be spent in physical and virtual spaces around a meeting table with people from various backgrounds and cultural origins. Replacing an existing assignment with that kind of project is something very exciting to think about. (Dr Seran)*

One of the outputs of the NICE project will be a handbook and a framework for policy makers on the lessons learned. Since university management is supportive of VE, both Dr Seran and Ms Creery believe "VE is considered to be an area of growth" and consider it to be likely that support will be provided for training and incentives for educators who want to embed VE in their university courses.

With regard to the current situation due to Covid-19 the SWAY team has joined forces with partners in the European University Alliance UNA Europa to pilot the 'eTandem Global[40]' project. This is a virtual language exchange programme to allow students from the UoE and partner universities to practice their language skills at a time where physical mobility has become a challenge.

In the meantime, Ms Majewsky is raising interest in the pedagogical input and tangible learning outcomes of the NICE virtual summer schools at the Coimbra Group and UNA Europa consortium in an attempt to scale up virtual learning opportunities amongst CG Universities, for example by connecting NICE and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange experiences and sharing the administrative task between all institutions.

[40] https://www.una-europa.eu/stories/how-a-virus-affects-language-learning

4.3. University of Granada (UGR)

Juan Albá Duran

4.3.1. Introduction

The University of Granada (UGR), founded in 1531, offers programs in fields like arts and humanities, social sciences and law, sciences, health sciences, technology and engineering and architecture, of which 89 are bachelors, 108 masters and 28 doctorate programmes.

UGR is one of the most international universities in Spain: 8,7% of the total of 47,096 undergraduates are from abroad; 16% of all master students (5,785) and 30% of the doctorate students (3,077) are international. In 2017-2018 there were 2.905 incoming international students and 2,606 of UGR students followed international mobility programmes. All of the faculties and schools (27) have internationalisation strategies and 56% of publications are jointly produced with other international researchers or research groups. According to their facts and figures[41], 40% of the courses have a significant international dimension.

4.3.2. VE activity reported at UGR: International division-led

Table 10 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

4.3.3. Key drivers

The main drivers of VE at the UGR belong to the Vice-Rectorate of Internationalisation of this university. On the one side, Dr Dorothy Kelly is the Vice-Rector of Internationalisation and the Coimbra Group representative at the UGR. She has been former Chair of the Executive Board of the Coimbra Group of Universities. The UGR is a very active participant of the CG and the team led by Prof Kelly takes part in all of the CG working groups. She has been a supporter and promoter of VE at the UGR, as she supervises and signs every official document. On the other side, Dr Ignacio José Blanco Medina, Director of International Strategy at the same Vice-Rectorate, has been a promoter and a recruiter in the development of VE at this institution. Furthermore, Dr Elena Arigita Maza, professor at the Department of Semitic Studies and former Deputy Director of internationalisation at the International School for Postgraduate Studies, has been the most active driver, since she has been the one coordinating the implementation of VE at the UGR. The interview was conducted with Dr Ignacio José Blanco Medina and Dr Elena Arigita Maza.

[41] Facts and figures, UGR: https://www.ugr.es/en/featured/facts-figures

***Table 10**: Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at UGR*

<table>
<tr><th colspan="10">University of Granada (UGR)</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme

The main drivers of VE at the UGR belong to the Vice-Rectorate of Internationalisation</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development

The coordinator of VE implementation and the Centre for Virtual Learning together, managed to get Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange courses accredited</td><td colspan="5">International offices

The drivers are currently working on promoting VE centrally by involving colleagues at the mobility office</td></tr>
<tr><td>01

Education</td><td>02

Arts and humanities</td><td>03

Social sciences, journalism and information</td><td>04

Business, administration and law</td><td>05

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics</td><td>06

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td><td>07

Engineering, manufacturing and construction</td><td>08

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary</td><td>09

Health and welfare</td><td>10

Services</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Free choice (+ECTS/Badges) | Ready-made | Facilitated by third party</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE funding schemes in place: External (European)

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE Research output by staff and/or students: not reported</td></tr>
</table>

It is interesting to know not only the motivation of the above mentioned drivers for taking in VE, but also to understand the specific institutional context that explains why VE and why now. The Vice-Rectorate for Internationalisation is a very active organization within the university, as evidenced by the 43 ongoing international academic cooperation projects, the 46 international networks and associations and the 90 International bilateral and multilateral agreements signed in 2017-2018. There is a strong interest from the Vice-Rectorate in fostering exchanges with other universities, especially with those that are part of their consortium of universities, as means of IoC and promoting IaH.

The interest for VE came, among others factors, as a result of their participation in EU-funded projects like OERTest, MOVINTER or VMCOLAB. This last one, VMCOLAB, aimed at fostering international relations between the universities of a consortium by means of a virtual mobility programme in which the students from all the partner universities participated in an online programme jointly created by the consortium. Each of the universities developed and taught one of the modules, and in each module international groups of students from each university had to carry out tasks together. This experience of virtual mobility, quite close to the concept of VE in its realisation, made the Vice-Rectorate of Internationalisation realise that it was not enough to allow students from one university to follow online courses at another university, but that it was important to stress how different cultural backgrounds can be used in the (online) classroom to bring new perspectives on the subject matter. VE arrived at the UGR to give response to this already identified need of developing intercultural skills within the discipline. In addition, Dr Arigita Maza who was at the time Deputy Director of Internationalisation at the International

School for Postgraduate Studies saw also from her position as professor at the Department of Semitic Studies a valuable opportunity for students following some of the master programs to benefit from having constructive intercultural dialogue with students from Middle Eastern countries.

4.3.4. Key (inter)actions

In 2018, the Vice-Rectorate for Internationalisation received, through the Coimbra Group network, an invitation by the SPF to participate in their VE projects that were part of the new Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative. As a starting point, Dr Blanco contacted all the master courses coordinators in order to send them the information. He received some responses of interest, and then the Vice-Rector contacted Elena asking her to take over the project coordination. She started to work on the practical aspects of its implementation together with SPF.

Around five to ten students from a selected number of master programs at the Faculty of Arts decided to enrol in the first VE. After the first edition took place, Dr Arigita proceeded with the accreditation of the project which she managed together with the Centre for Virtual Learning. Accreditation was a requirement from the Spanish Ministry of Education for undergraduate students to participate in a course offered by an external organization. After this had been achieved, the VE was opened to bachelor students. Now the third round is taking place, with a maximum number of 25 participating students.

Even if VE development is still scarce at the UGR, they have made a significant advancement in terms of institutionalisation through the recognition of students' learning outcomes with formal accreditation. Students received, after completing the VE, 2 ECTS as part of a total of 12 ECTS of free choice that they must obtain to finish their degree. In addition to these credits obtained in their transcript of records, students also receive an Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange badge issued by SPF, which provides additional information and can serve as evidence of the competences developed within the exchange.

Currently Dr Arigita has no management position anymore, but she is still the one coordinating this and validating the third party certificates. Dr Kelly signs the internal application forms as part of the process of institutional credit recognition. Dr Arigita would like to do more in this project, but she does not have so many hours: “This should be recognized as one task, we have so many things (research, teaching, administrative), in a way we need also to recognize this for teaching staff, not only for students”. They hope that in the future they can develop this project more consistently, with task allocation for staff, so that the broader community can benefit. Table 11 below shows an overview of the VEs implemented at UGR so far:

Table 11: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at UGR*

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other
Cultural Encounters iOOC (Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange) 10-week course	2018 - 2020	30	Tasks including intercultural dialogues in English L2

4.3.5. Key challenges and future steps

The following challenges refer to the reported experience of the above mentioned two key drivers in the development of a small scale project at the UGR, which is still at a very recent stage of development.

Apart from the great achievement of the credit recognition, and the bureaucratic and moral support from managers at the Vice-Rectorate of Internationalisation, there has been to date lack of support in terms of time compensation or tasks release. The drivers believe this can change in the near future and see this kind of structural support as decisive. Innovation projects on internationalisation rely often on external support and, at least at the beginning, on the shoulders of motivated educators. This could be one of the reasons why the chosen model, VE facilitated by a third party organisation, worked.

Concerning the accreditation of the VE program, provided by an external organisation, there have been a number of challenges. On one side, the amount of bureaucracy; for undergraduates there were bigger requirements and paperwork (from the Ministry of Education) than for the master programs (which deal with the educational authorities at the regional level). On the other side, even if the VE program implied a workload of 5 to 6 ECTS, it was only possible to get recognition of 2 ECTS for undergraduate students, which can explain the low number of student enrolments in the programme according to the opinion of the drivers. The drivers also believe that the used VE programme is more suitable for master students than for undergraduate, both in terms of contents and format.

As future plans for the promotion of VE at institutional level, these drivers are currently working on promoting VE centrally by involving colleagues at the mobility office and recognizing tasks for teachers and coordinators developing and promoting VE. However, according to Dr Maza, the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on staff's workload, is complicating the further promotion of VE as a tool for internationalisation in the institution considerably, at least in the first two semesters after the outbreak.

4.4. University of Groningen (UG)

Gerdientje Oggel

4.4.1. Introduction

The University of Groningen (UG), founded in 1614, offers programmes in 11 Faculties, of which more than 50 are bachelors and 100 masters in the fields of theology and religious studies, arts, sciences, law, spatial sciences, science and engineering, and philosophy. Ranked among the top 100 universities in the world, UG is one of the most international universities in the Netherlands: 23% of its 32,700 students and one third of the academic staff are international (October 2019[42]). In 2017-2018 there were 1701 incoming international students and 1374 of UG students followed international mobility programmes[43]. Almost all the master programs (90%) and more than two thirds of the bachelor programmes (72%) are taught in English. In 2018 there were 2,200 PhD candidates, 500 PhD theses and 9,000 research publications.

4.4.2. VE activity reported at UG: Collaboratively-led

Table 12 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

4.4.3. Key drivers

For this case study no interviews were conducted because two members of the EVOLVE research team, Juan Albá Duran and Gerdientje Oggel, have been actively involved in the development of VE at this institution both in their capacities as educators and VE experts.

The key driver at UG is Dr Sake Jager. Dr Jager is project manager Educational Innovation at the Centre for Learning Innovation and Quality (CLIQ), which is the centre for ICT & Education in the Faculty of Arts. The main activities of the Centre are: initiating and supervising educational innovation projects; supporting and coordinating educational innovations; advising on teacher professionalization and training. Next to this, Dr Jager is an assistant professor of applied linguistics with an expertise in the use of ICT in teaching and learning of foreign/second languages. He is also Vice President of EUROCALL (European Association for Computer-Assisted Language Learning)[44] and Board member of UNICollaboration. Currently, Dr Jager is involved in two European VE projects, as the project lead of the European funded EVOLVE project, and as a member of UNICollaboration in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project. Within the UG, Dr Jager is the project manager of the institutionally funded Enabling Virtual Online International Learning (ENVOIE)[45] e-learning project to develop VE as a university-wide practice. After a successful first edition in 2017/2018, a second, extended edition of this project runs between December 2019 and December 2021. Except for Dr Jager, the members of the ENVOIE project team, the ENVOIE steering

[42] University of Groningen facts and figures: https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/profile/facts-and-figures/

[43] Annual Reports University of Groningen: https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/profile/facts-and-figures/annual-reports

[44] http://www.eurocall-languages.org/

[45] https://www.rug.nl/let/onze-faculteit/organisatie/diensten-en-voorzieningen/cliq/projecten/envoie/exchanges

group and the involved educators are all contributing to the wider adoption of VE across the university.

Table 12: *Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at UG*

<table>
<tr><td colspan="10">University of Groningen (UG)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme

For the steering group of the ENVOIE II project, representatives are at the executive levels of the involved faculties</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development

Educational experts and instructional designers from the department of Educational Support and Innovation (ESI) and Teacher Development form part of the ENVOIE project team

They have developed a free, short, self-paced VE training for educators at UG and their VE partners which is offered through the regular ESI training programme</td><td colspan="5">International offices

An important aim of the ENVOIE II project is to look for bottom-up and top-down synergies with other projects, offices or stakeholders involved with internationalisation</td></tr>
<tr><td>01

Education</td><td>02

Arts and humanities</td><td>03

Social sciences, journalism and information</td><td>04

Business, administration and law</td><td>05

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics</td><td>06

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td><td>07

Engineering, manufacturing and construction</td><td>08

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary</td><td>09

Health and welfare</td><td>10

Services</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Curricular | Co-designed | Facilitated by educators</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE funding schemes in place: Internal & external (European)

Internal: The ENVOIE projects have been funded through the UG ICT Strategy fund

External (European): EVOLVE</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Research output by staff: There are several research outputs by different staff members

Research output by students: There are some students who have written their MA or BA thesis on VE</td></tr>
</table>

4.4.4. Key (inter)actions

In 2010, Dr Jager set up two telecollaboration projects for English and Spanish as a *lingua franca* with the University of Padova together with a teacher of English as a Foreign Language at the Language Center and a teacher of Spanish as a Foreign Language at the department of the former Romance Languages and Cultures department. These projects were presented at the Conference European Confederation of Language Centres in Higher Education (CercleS) held at UG in 2011 and also published (Jager et al., 2012). Building on the findings of this study, which revealed that students were highly motivated to participate, had developed a better understanding of their language ability and were made more aware of intercultural aspects of international communication,

Dr Jager received funding from the UG E-learning pilot project to prepare and carry out several grassroot telecollaboration projects in the new bachelor degree program of European Languages and Cultures at the Faculty of Arts during the course of the academic year 2013/2014. In this project, Dr Jager supported teachers in Spanish, French and Italian to set up projects in which students collaborate with foreign students through video conferences and other digital tools to enhance language proficiency and intercultural competences, and to prepare students better for the compulsory stay abroad. Dr Jager and the involved educators managed to implement these projects as a structural element in the European Languages and Cultures (ELC) programme for the duration of 3 years and also received a small amount of funding for it from the Faculty Board. These projects were presented at the teaching innovation at two international conferences: at EUROCALL2014, and at the UNICollaboration Conference (now IVEC), Dublin (2016). All projects were evaluated positively and presented to the Departmental Board of ELC and the Faculty Board. As Albá Duran et al. (2020, p. 26) briefly point out in a study on the factors of success of the Spanish editions of this telecollaboration project between the UG and the University of Barcelona (RUGUB), it would probably have continued until today if structural changes had not been implemented in the language learning sections of ELC. In fact, the RUGUB project laid the foundations for another telecollaboration project that continues to be developed between the University of Barcelona and the University of Iceland.

These successful telecollaboration projects in the field of language learning inspired Dr Jager to seek and find funding for the Enabling Virtual Online International Exchange project (ENVOIE I) involving six different faculties[46] and supported by teams from the Educational Support and Innovation (ESI), Language Centre (LC), and the International Classroom project (2013 - 2020)[47]. The project was co-funded by the Board of the University as part of the E-learning Tender 2017-2018 with a grant of € 100.600 because of its potential for enhancing ICC, language proficiency, digital literacy, and discipline-specific or transversal collaboration skills (21st century skills) and for it offering a relatively low-cost, additional tool for internationalisation. In the period between August 2017 and December 2018, the 11 VE projects that were planned, were carried out successfully in the six faculties. All projects were evaluated systematically with educators and students on each 'side' of the exchange and most teachers and students indicated that this form of online collaborative education should be continued or extended. As a result, seven projects indeed continued, provisionally supported by ESI and the Faculty of Arts, which released some extra faculty funding for this. Table 13 below shows an overview of the different sub projects carried out in the context of the above mentioned telecollaboration and ENVOIE I projects and an additional project carried out in the fall semester of 2020 at the Department of European Languages and Cultures.

[46] These are the Faculties of Arts, Economics and Business, Behavioural and Social Studies, Theology and Religious Studies, Spatial Sciences, and University College Groningen

[47] https://www.rug.nl/about-ug/organization/quality-assurance/in-practice/international-classroom-project/

Table 13: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at UG*

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of UG students	Other
Telecollaboration project within the Department for European Languages and Cultures at the Faculty of Arts in the proficiency level 3 courses for French, Italian and Spanish as a Foreign Language	French 2013 - 2014 2014 - 2015 2015 - 2016 Italian 2013 - 2014 2014 - 2015 2015 - 2016 2016 - 2017 Spanish 2013 - 2014 2014 - 2015 2015 - 2016 2016 - 2017	French 12 16 13 Italian 12 17 8 10 Spanish 24 21 22 37	During the years of implementation these projects were carried out with the same partner universities: French: University of Strasbourg Italian: University of Padova Spanish: University of Barcelona
ENVOIE I project. Various sub projects are carried out in a variety of BA and MA courses at the participating faculties	2018/2019	Between 7 and 32 depending on the subproject	Detailed information on the subprojects is archived on the ENVOIE public website[48]
Interdisciplinary VE project 'The new normality' involving students within various levels of the Spanish proficiency courses and students of psychology at the University of Valencia The VE is about how students experience university life during Covid-19 and how it influences their behaviour and wellbeing	2020/2021	57	ENVOIE II project (December 2019- January 22) Various VE subprojects are being prepared and expected to be carried out at the participating faculties In its second edition, 'The new normality' project is expected to become part of the ENVOIE II project

The successful results of the ENVOIE I project in combination with new experiences gained in the EVOLVE and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange projects, the Online Virtual Exchange for Global Engagement (ENVOIE II) project was funded through the UG ICT Strategy fund 2016-2020 for 4 semesters in 2 academic years. (December 2019 - January 2022). The project sits again under the leadership of Dr Jager, who this time is directing it on behalf of ESI. Besides the project manager, the project team consists of educational experts and instructional designers from the team of Educational Support and Innovation (ESI) and Teacher Development, Faculty of Arts VE experts working for and funded through EVOLVE and a coordinator from each of the involved faculties. As stated in the project plan, the main objective of the project is to implement Online International Exchange (OIE) or Virtual Exchange for Global Engagement more firmly as educational practice across disciplines and faculties at UG by:

- Starting the conversation with educational management and educators across UG about disciplines and areas where OIE/VE could be implemented in support of the faculties' and UG strategic aims in education and internationalisation

[48] https://www.rug.nl/let/onze-faculteit/organisatie/diensten-en-voorzieningen/cliq/projecten/envoie/archive/

- Developing improved training and structural support for educators to expand learning communities beyond their classrooms using Virtual Exchange; after the project this training and support will be integrated in the teacher professional development programme and innovation support structure offered by ESI
- Offering an international experience to students and practicing their intercultural skills in the context of internationalisation at home with UG strategic partners
- Supporting educators in the redesign of their courses towards operationalization of intercultural skills and learning outcomes
- Establishing new exchanges and providing continued assistance for existing exchanges
- Evaluating and researching exchanges systematically
- Disseminating project results and good practices among educators, internationalisation officers, managers and other stakeholders in the University of Groningen and beyond

A short, online, experiential training based on the model provided by DePaul University[49] (Chicago), which integrates VE with internationalisation and educational innovation, has been developed by the ESI team. The training will be delivered on demand to UG educators and their international partners. After having followed the training, educators will receive funding and support described in the project plan as follows:

> *The educators will then propose a project, which if awarded, will be run at a later period during the year. These exchanges will be evaluated systematically and they will be the object of quantitative and qualitative research. The project plans for 15 new exchanges and accommodating 8 which started in the context of ENVOIE I, at the Faculties of Arts, Spatial Sciences, Economics and Business, Behavioural and Social Sciences, Theology and Religious Studies, and University College Groningen. Each new exchange is budgeted at around €8000. This includes provision of central pedagogical and technical support to be provided by ESI and the involved Faculties and a personal budget for educators to be allocated to faculties, which they can use for hiring a student assistant or travelling to colleagues in the partner institute. As described above, this amount is granted after participation in the training and formal acceptance of a proposal to set up the exchange. There is also a small provision for renewed exchanges, again to be divided by the support team and educators.*

4.4.5. Key challenges and future steps

The VE projects ran to date under the supervision of Dr Jager at UG have been both successful in their implementation and evaluation by students and educators, and in terms of financial, technical and pedagogical support structures provided by the Faculty of Arts, the Educational Support and Innovation (ESI) services and co-funded received by the University Board. The main goal of the ENVOIE II project is to implement VE more firmly and strategically as educational practice across disciplines and faculties in UG. In addition to the activities stated in the project plan, an important aim of the project is to look for bottom-up and top-down synergies with other projects, offices or stakeholders involved with internationalisation, professionalization or innovative educational initiatives within the university as well as with key stakeholders at research and policy

[49] https://offices.depaul.edu/global-engagement/partnerships/programs-for-partner-institutions/Pages/Virtual-Exchange,-Online-Collaboration,-Global-Learning-Experience.aspx

levels in order to build a community of expertise and a governance structure around the online dimension of internationalisation.

As a first step, in the context of the ENVOIE II project, Dr Jager has established regular meetings with stakeholders across the university, such as the EQUIPPING team at the Faculty of Arts. This is a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) programme which builds on the UG International Classroom project and on the tools and resources developed by the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership EQUiiP project[50] to support educational developers and university lecturers working in internationalised programmes. The EQUiiP Erasmus+ project has produced five modules for CPD in international classrooms, which are available through an online platform. The approach of the EQUIPPING team is to implement and embed the EQUiiP materials across the faculties at UG based on each faculty's approach, culture and needs. The EQUiiP training materials for lecturers and educational supporters can help make the relevance of ENVOIE and VE as a tool for internationalisation of teaching and learning more explicit to them. This way both projects can mutually support each other.

At the policy and research levels, for the steering group of the project Dr Jager has strategically sought the support and advice of the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Arts responsible for education and internationalisation and two full professors working in the areas of educational innovation and intercultural competence development at respectively the Faculties of Behavioural and Social Sciences and the Faculty of Economics and Business. Dr Jager is still looking for representatives at the executive levels at STEM and Medical Science Faculties and the International Classroom project. The ESI department is represented by Dr Jager himself (who has been partly allocated to ESI for the duration of the project) and the programme manager at ESI. It is hoped that through the involvement of stakeholders at these key research and policy positions across the university, a research agenda building on the outcomes of the EVOLVE research can be set up as well as a strategic internationalisation plan from which all activities can be coordinated. Commitment from the highest institutional levels is still lacking although the former Rector Prof Elmer Sterken, currently member of the Coimbra Group executive board, was briefed about the benefits of VE on the occasion of the establishment of a strategic partnership between the Universidad Autónoma de México and the University of Groningen in 2017[51]. This type of support is especially relevant and urgent in times of the corona pandemic where the UG, like other HEIs is looking for alternatives to traditional practices of internationalisation such as physical mobility programmes. In a letter to the University Board, Dr Jager and members of the ENVOIE steering group explain the special relevance of VE during the pandemic as follows:

> *Virtual Exchange (VE) is an online extension of Internationalisation at Home and provides a complement or alternative to physical mobility. This is why it is particularly relevant under the current crisis, where physical mobility is impossible or highly restricted and where international and intercultural learning experiences for students on campus are also constrained by limited access and a smaller influx of international students.*

[50] https://equiip.eu/

[51] https://www.rug.nl/news/2017/03/strategic-partnership-with-universidad-nacional-autonoma-de-mexico?lang=en

Nonetheless, the ENVOIE II project is experiencing some delays in recruiting educators since their workload has already increased considerably since the sudden shift to online learning due to the pandemic.

4.5. University of Limerick (UL)

Sophie Millner

4.5.1. Introduction

Established in 1972, the University of Limerick (UL)_ is situated on the Mid-West coast of Ireland. With a student population of nearly 12,000 students of which 2,000-3,000 are international each year, the majority come largely from surrounding regions of Ireland. UL offers undergraduate programmes in disciplines such as arts, languages, social sciences, education and health sciences, science and engineering and business.

4.5.2. VE activity reported at UL: Educator-led

Table 14 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

Table 14: *Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at UL*

University of Limerick (UL)									
Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme VE is supported on a case to case basis at the institutional level by the Assistant Dean International and Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Engagement									
Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development No activity reported					**International offices** No activity reported				
01 Education	02 Arts and humanities	03 Social sciences, journalism and information	04 Business, administration and law	05 Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	06 Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)	07 Engineering, manufacturing and construction	08 Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary	09 Health and welfare	10 Services
Free choice (+ECTS) and curricular |Ready-made and co-designed | Facilitated by third party and educator									
VE funding in place: external (European) Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange									
Research output by staff: By key driver									

4.5.3. Key drivers

The questionnaire for Limerick was completed by Dr Marta Giralt, lecturer in applied linguistics and course lead for the compulsory bachelor module Communication across Cultures and the

open bachelor module Language and Technology. Both courses integrate VE. The questionnaire was followed by a 1.5 hour interview with Dr Giralt.

Dr Giralt is the main driver of VE and leads the implementation at UL. She is supported at institutional level by Dr Mairead Moriarty, Assistant Dean International. Their application of VE fits within the institution's internationalisation framework. Dr Giralt writes:

> *I am the person leading VE initiatives with the support of our Assistant Dean Internationalisation and Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Engagement. Other colleagues in my school are also very involved: Dr Florence Le-Baron (French section), Dr Veronica O'Regan (German section) Dr Marie-T Baterdiere (French section) and Catherine Jeanneau (Language Learning Hub).*

Thus, Dr Giralt is the main driver promoting and implementing VE at UL which she does with the agreement of Dr Mairead Moriarty, Assistant Dean International.

Personal motivation drives Dr Giralt to continue promoting and implementing VE at UL. Dr Giralt is convinced of the learning outcomes from engaging in VE, primarily critical and intercultural skills, but also transversal skills such as self-esteem and empathy. This strongly drives her continuation of VE. The students she teaches are from a rural part of Ireland who are not exposed to different cultures so she explains that VE "brings the world into our classes", "I know they are benefitting from this". She observed that some students had strong realisations through this experiential learning environment that put their own lives into perspective. She noted that some students conveyed to her that were shocked by hearing others' stories and felt themselves to be lucky and privileged.

Dr Giralt therefore presents a high level of conviction in her methods that she identifies as a necessary quality. Dr Giralt laughs, "I suppose at the beginning it can be a bit discouraging for the teacher because the students, they are not that happy" but "as time goes on they start seeing benefits" and by the end of the course they are able to "name" the skills they have gained such as greater confidence, knowledge and interest. So although students are 'clients' and need to be kept happy, Dr Giralt is prepared to accept a certain level of dissatisfaction, calling into question whether happiness and learning necessarily go hand-in-hand. This power, of one individual, to drive the implementation cannot be underestimated. Dr Giralt notes that other colleagues may well have given up given similar feedback.

The top-down support comes as a green light for Dr Giralt to continue her implementation of VE. This, Dr Giralt speaks of as being "really supportive". The proactive examples that Dr Giralt mentions include fast-tracking bureaucracy and removing hurdles to enable continuity of her VE provision. Additionally, Dr Giralt has received International Relations Office (IRO) assisted funding to go to EUROCALL[52] to present papers on VE. Support, overall, is thus done largely on an informal, case-by-case basis and is dependent on the relationship of trust between Dr Giralt and the respective academics and administrative staff representing institutional and implementation levels. Poignantly, Dr Giralt observes "if the people in IRO change then this might not continue".

In terms of institutional goals, Dr Giralt explains that both the IaH and Internationalisation of the IoC agendas are "very strong" at UL. Currently, VE coheres with the IaH agenda; "it ticks a lot of

[52] https://www.eurocall-languages.org/

boxes" and "costs nothing and has a high impact" so she concludes "they are very happy with this". This prompts the question as to the formal place of VE as a means of internationalisation. Dr Giralt explains that they hope to make VE a standard practice across the university and reiterates that:

> *I know that the International Office and the Assistant Dean Internationalisation and the Vice President of Academic Affairs and Student Engagement are very interested in VE, but I have not been informed of any future plans.*

In answer to the questions: "Does your institution have explicit publicly available written or digital (policy) documents/reports/other surrounding VE?" Dr Giralt states: "No." And in answer to the question: "Is there a strategy for implementing VE across your institution?" Dr Giralt writes: "No strategy (as far as I know)".

Nevertheless, Dr Giralt would welcome being asked to contribute to shaping the institution's future plans and, through long standing practice of telecollaboration within the Faculty of Arts at Limerick, she has gained experience in developing models of VE implementation. Her proposals would include extending and expanding VE beyond arts and humanities and particularly targeting natural sciences and engineering students as they don't go on Erasmus+ mobility programmes, thus preventing some sectors of the student population being "condemned to be lacking ICC".

4.5.4. Key (inter)actions

Telecollaboration started in the School of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics in 2014 with "Ready, mobility, go!: A series of pre-mobility online projects promoting intercultural awareness among European university students' (...) to prepare them for their mobility programmes[53]".

The Interactive Open Online Courses (iOOCs) implemented by the SPF (such as Cultural Encounters) have been ongoing since Spring 2018 within the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange project. This is a model of VE designed as a ready-made package of expert content combined with weekly, live, facilitated dialogue sessions. Dr Giralt and her colleagues have implemented five iOOCs over this period. Educators at Limerick use a blended learning model to incorporate a VE component into their taught programmes. This means that students attend their taught lectures within their university as usual, but, in parallel, they watch the online lectures given by experts, as part of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange iOOC package, to help stimulate discussion in their international, online dialogue sessions.

The implementation of the Cultural Encounters VE began by including it within a compulsory BA module, Communication across Cultures, taught to 70-80 students. Then was offered within Language and Technology, an open module bringing 40 the first time and six in the second year. A shorter Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange iOOC called Gender Inequality in Media and Journalism was integrated in an optional, university-wide undergraduate course called Analysing Media Discourse. The students in the elective were self-motivated and positive about their participation. The students in the compulsory module saw some initial reluctance and mixed expressions of satisfaction but the internal student evaluation revealed changes in opinion towards the course

[53] https://ahss.blog/2017/06/14/ready-mobility-go-a-series-of-pre-mobility-online-projects-promoting-intercultural-awareness-among-european-university-students/

and strong learning outcomes. Dr Giralt refers to this and to poignant later reflections by her students as "late self-realisation". Table 15 below shows an overview of the VEs implemented:

Table 15: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at UL*

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other
Ready, mobility, go! A series of pre-mobility online projects promoting intercultural awareness among European university students	2014-2017	unknown	Partner institutions are: Universidad de León (Spain), Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain), Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium), and IMT Lille Douai (France)
Cultural Encounters iOOC (Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange)	2018 & 2019	50-80	Compulsory BA course: Communication across Cultures within Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics
Cultural Encounters iOOC (Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange)	2018 - 2020 (to-date)	40 first semester 6 second semester	Optional university-wide BA course: Language and Technology within Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics
Gender In/equality in Media and Journalism iOOC (Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange)	2020	40	Compulsory BA course: Analysing Media Discourse within Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Modern Languages and Applied Linguistics

When asked about the main steps or processes taken to implement VE at UL, Dr Giralt highlights the process of experimentation. Experimentation and evaluation, both of different models of implementation and with different groups of students, is a key process for Dr Giralt. In her own words "fail and then fail better". She acknowledges that for this it is crucial to have institutional level support in order to try, (fail) and learn from this experience as well as to encourage students to have the courage to try an innovative and more challenging learning environment. She explains this as a cycle of innovation, experimentation and consolidation. Consolidation of VE whilst continuing the experimental process of exploring different variables such as students taking this as an alternative to Erasmus+ mobility.

Dr Giralt explains that in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, "we are very aware of the impact that VE can have in the development of intercultural communication skills (ICC)". Also, the development of digital literacy is another factor that drives the VE in our context" as well as "enhancement of students' employability skills". In acknowledgement of this, VE is starting to be used to give the students the possibility to enhance their intercultural skills and develop their intercultural competence and, significantly for the institution, VE is starting to be used as an alternative to Erasmus+ mobility: "this semester I had some students that are doing VE as an alternative to Erasmus."

Dr Giralt understands VE as an umbrella of different activities but most important to her is the act of engaging individuals from different backgrounds geographically, culturally, and nationally to exchange online using videoconferencing or other "oral" interaction. In particular, Dr Giralt

values the spontaneous reactions; the fast pace, quick reflections and immediacy of a synchronous encounter. She goes on to explain that this is how students learn conversational dynamics, listening skills and gain confidence that then feeds into later experience of the course. In this definition, it is possible to see that what matters to Dr Giralt, as the main implementer, is the deeper learning she sees happening in a live encounter especially when students are challenged and supported to feel "uncomfortable". The reasons why Dr Giralt uses VE provides a valuable insight into the implementation of VE. Her answer may not correlate to the official definition but this working-definition is how VE is understood in practice at UL.

4.5.5. Key challenges and future steps

At staff level there is additional work without formal recognition. It requires a big commitment on the part of the lecturer and "courage" for students and teachers to implement what is, for them, a new pedagogy. Staff are therefore reluctant. In answer to the question "what is at stake for staff?" Dr Giralt lists time, judgement by her colleagues, particularly from senior colleagues, learning outcomes and student satisfaction. For students, it is time and grades. Students are hesitant to try the course and run the risk of getting a lower grade. Currently, satisfaction surveys count towards (or against) promotion. This creates a risk-averse culture and highlights the client-focused model of the university; that student satisfaction trumps student learning "Not that they haven't learnt but just that they are not 'happy'." Staff need to be supported to try without such a high risk attached to 'failing'.

The institutional level plays a key role in Dr Giralt's eyes. Overall, Dr Giralt feels like her university is on the right track. However, hurdles need to be removed, whilst support and investment increases. She argues that the university needs to scale up the inclusion of VE and she has approached the Director or the International Relations Office (IRO) about upscaling for Erasmus+ mobility preparation. The hurdle she faced was in convincing them of the value of VE and of ICC and the development of soft skills. Since the courses are in English and new language learning was not primary "why include VE?" they had asked. Dr Giralt suggests that support for the core learning outcomes of VE, namely soft skills and ICC need to be in place before scaling can take place.

In answer to what she felt would be the necessary steps for scaling it up she responded this was the "golden question!" Dr Giralt believes that teachers need to be shown examples of how it is done and what the learning benefits are as some disciplines have different priorities and do not necessarily see the value. She believes teachers are a resource themselves; using support between teachers to encourage others to try it and to share best practice with each other. Dr Giralt also proposes the institution undertake "proper research about it - need evidence and proof."

Dr Giralt considers the scaling up of VE implementation as a reinforcing cycle whereby the more teachers do it and it works, the more they will be motivated to continue. Furthermore, if institutions offer teachers incentives then more would take this pedagogical leap. Equally, she points out that if staff are busy they may not engage, so the university should make VE compulsory. The carrot and the stick. "Then once you try it..!" is Dr Giralt's resounding guarantee. She seems clear that the hurdle is in the first step from teachers that requires knowledge and support by the institution.

Certainly, without institutional policy in place, each new round of VE requires Dr Giralt to negotiate anew the implementation of VE within her courses, meaning VE does not have a stable or official place in the institution's practices.

Since the time of interview the world has faced the Covid-19 pandemic which has meant the closure of all universities and shift to online teaching and learning. Dr Giralt was asked whether any concrete or future plans had arisen as a result of these changes in circumstances. Whilst she awaits the response from The Assistant Dean International Dr Giralt answered that what "I can say from my side is that I am keeping with the same VE that I have been doing up to now - Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange with Sharing Perspectives and TEP." In terms of future plans Dr Giralt noted that:

> *At school level, we have been talking and discussing the possibility to start new ones [VE] with some MA modules next year. At faculty level, nothing has been confirmed yet, but also the institution is studying the possibility of new uses of VE - i.e. for the Applied Languages Europe (AEL) programme [for] students who come on mobility to UL.*

4.6. Newcastle University (NCL)

Linda Plowright-Pepper and Mirjam Hauck

4.6.1. Introduction

Newcastle University (NCL) is situated in the North-East of England. With its roots historically back to 1834, NCL was established as an independent University in 1963. The University operates internationally through three further campuses comprising London, Singapore and Malaysia and has cross-cultural partnerships with more than 200 overseas universities and institutions. The University hosts over 27,200 (2018/19)[54] students including 5,000 international students from over 120 countries studying approximately 175 full-time undergraduate and 340 postgraduate taught and research programmes across a wide range of subjects[55]. Programmes are structured under three Faculties: Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences (HaSS); Faculty of Medical Sciences (FMS) and Faculty of Science, Agriculture & Engineering (SAgE).

4.6.2. VE activity reported at NCL: Collaboratively-led

Table 16 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

4.6.3. Key drivers

This summary of VE at NCL has been guided by two key informants and drivers of VE. The first is Dr Müge Satar, who is an expert in VE and Lecturer in Applied Linguistics and TESOL, from the School of Education, Communication, and Language Sciences (ECLS). She is also the school's Director of Internationalisation. Ms Katie Lavender is the International Exchange Officer. Ms Lavender works within the university's international office with specific responsibility for identifying the role VEs can have in taking forward NCL's Global Strategy.

Both informants considered NCL to be relatively new to VE. Nonetheless, VEs were being driven throughout the university from the highest level to fulfil the university's strategic mission. At the time of writing this case study Ms. Lavender was charged with mapping VE activity across the university. 'Globalisation' together with 'equality of opportunity' and 'sustainable environments' underpinned the university's strategic vision. She affirmed that: "VE activity in general is seen to support globalisation - whether this be through mobility programmes, research collaboration, or educational initiatives". Furthermore she felt that the full range of VE activity across the university had not yet been revealed.

[54] Wikipedia - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newcastle_University

[55] NCL Global Strategy https://www.ncl.ac.uk/who-we-are/global-strategy

Table 16: *Activity Towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at NCL*

<table>
<tr><td colspan="10">Newcastle University (NCL)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme

VE is driven throughout the university from the highest level by the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Global)

NCL hosted the IVEC Conference 2020</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development

No activity reported</td><td colspan="5">International offices
The university's International Office is investigating the role VE can have in taking forward NCL's Global Strategy on request of the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Global)

One of the drivers was also the Director of Internationalisation in one of the Schools where VE was implemented</td></tr>
<tr><td>01

Education</td><td>02

Arts and humanities</td><td>03

Social sciences, journalism and information</td><td>04

Business, administration and law</td><td>05

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics</td><td>06

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td><td>07

Engineering, manufacturing and construction</td><td>08

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary</td><td>09

Health and welfare</td><td>10

Services</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Curricular| Co-designed | Facilitated by educator</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE funding schemes in place: External (European)

EVOLVE</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE Research output by staff: Published by driver and through IVEC Conference</td></tr>
</table>

Institutional drivers of VE were particularly rooted in the University's Global Strategy (supported by Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategies) evidenced by the Pro-Vice Chancellor's (Global) statement that internationalism needs to be: "threaded throughout the University here and abroad, at all levels from the activities of our students through to those of staff"[56]. This commitment led to the following institutional priorities:

- Student mobility;
- Widening access to mobility; physically and socially;
- Student exchanges and IaH;
- Environmentally sustainable mobility.

Dr Satar highlighted the institutional importance of VE in her reflection:

> *Virtual Exchange currently seems to be a good solution to the issue of providing equal opportunities to all students ensuring that our programmes and our offer is international. It helps with international curricula and our commitment to the UN sustainability goals.*

[56] https://www.ncl.ac.uk/who-we-are/global-strategy/

Whilst much of the work developing VE was in its earliest stages, personal drivers of VEs operated at all tiers of the university. At the highest level, the Pro-Vice Chancellor through the NCL Global strategy, commissioned the mapping of VE and convened a 'Video Conferencing Project[57]' to identify the resources needed to fulfil the university's internationalisation vision:

> *One step we have already agreed on is to increase our use of video conferencing technology, so that our Newcastle-based students can take courses or modules at institutions around the world without ever boarding a plane. I am also exploring the option of setting up a "Global Centre", which would be a dedicated space where students and staff could gain the whole international experience remotely, linking up with institutions, students' unions, academics and businesses abroad, as well as sampling the culture and even the food. Clearly this would still come at a carbon cost, it would be offset against flights saved.*

Dr. Satar was the academic representative on the steering group. As the International Exchange Officer, Ms. Lavender had responsibility for "the organisation and delivery of mobility opportunities to support (our) students to enjoy a truly global university experience". She saw potential in VEs to strengthen international partnerships. Meanwhile every faculty had a designated Assistant Dean for Internationalisation who could influence the inclusion of VE for instance in Faculty Learning and Teaching Strategies.

At a teaching level there were relatively few academic staff championing the development of VEs. However, NCL benefitted from the professional and academic expertise and enthusiasm of Dr Satar who had introduced VE into her course module using the EVOLVE project as a way of initiating a new partnership with a colleague in Turkey. In addition to her lecturing role she was the ECLS Director of Internationalisation. Outside NCL she was professionally engaged in promoting VE as one of two Publication Officers of the UNICollaboration project and active within IVEC in which role she was instrumental in attracting the IVEC Conference[58] to NCL in 2020.

4.6.4. Key (inter)actions

NCL had a broad interest in VE across at least two of the university's three faculties and probably beyond. VEs as defined by the EVOLVE project were clustered under the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences (HaSS) and its School of Education, Communication, and Language Sciences (ECLS). Table 17 below shows the two VEs implemented and two other VEs in development.

[57] https://www.ncl.ac.uk/press/articles/latest/2019/10/richarddavies/

[58] https://iveconference.org/2020-conference/

Table 17: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at NCL*

Project/ course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other
EVOLVE Virtual Exchange (ECLS) Within the Computer-assisted Language Learning module in MA Applied Linguistics and TESOL degree[59] Lead by lecturer in applied linguistics and TESOL and School Co-Director of Internationalisation	2018/19 2019/2020 (and continuing)	27 NCL and 21 TED 18 NCL and 20 TED	VE between NCL and TED University (Turkey) VE is a compulsory core element of the module Not assessed. Promoted as an important preparation (experiential practice) for students' future professional practice, particularly those aiming to become language teachers
VE in the combined Honours Degree (HaSS) Championed by the Senior Lecturer and Faculty Associate Dean	Not applicable	Not applicable	VEs in development as part of the degree programme following the COIL model
ECLS as part of Speech and Language Sciences Lead by Head of Speech & Language Sciences; Senior Lecturer/Speech and Language Therapist	Not applicable	Not applicable	Potential for a new VE partnership in development with the opportunity to form links between NCL students and students studying for speech and language therapy degrees in Lebanon and possibly in the future, Germany
Medical School: School of Dentistry VE as part of a blended learning strategy integrating virtual and actual student exchanges with USA	2016 to present	6 students from each institution (2016)	The UK-USA educational initiative The project uses VEs between exchange students in advance of their physical exchanges to 'pre-load' information from past exchange students and staff, and their future hosts about the tasks that students will face in their host community The VE also acts as a social space which enables student exchange pairings to bond socially and prepare them to work in partnership in some challenging community situations
Newcastle University Business School (NUBS) ACN (Academic Collaborative Network): Competition in which virtual international teams would solve business cases.	Years up to 2018/19	Approx. 72 per year	ACN comprised NUBS, Boston University, Xiamen University, IIM-A, Tsinghua University, Yonsei University and (sometimes) St Gallen University – competition participants were students from participating institutions Students were given e-introductions to one another and had to work across continents and time-zones over approximately two weeks to deliver a 4-page executive summary, a video presentation and a collaboration report
Architecture & Planning Assessed module with VE activity	Varied	Varied	Involves students across five institutions which won a prize from the Association of European Schools of Planning teaching innovation in 2018/19

[59] https://microsites.ncl.ac.uk/casestudies/2019/08/15/virtual-exchange-for-internationalisation/

Other activities with potential to lead to and/or support VEs included:

- A Language Resource Centre (LRC) providing free language learning facilities for all university members which 'supports independent language learning and tandem learning' comprising self-study resources in 150 languages[60]. Supporting facilities include: '80 PCs with language learning software; 40 satellite channels in 16 languages; 800 foreign language films and online English language study materials'
- Erasmus + projects:
  - Approaches and tools for IaH - (ATIAH)[61] to prepare an audit for universities to review their current practice; an online toolkit for an 'internationalising university experience' module; a framework for evidencing good practice internationalisation
  - Communities, Languages, and Activities App – (ENACT)[62] with potential for the development of a VE model based on a web app to establish online communities where people could share their cultural activities in their own languages
- UUKi three-year campaign – "Go International: Stand Out." NCL engaged in this campaign in 2017 to help increase and diversify the number of UK students going abroad as part of their degree. 389 student placements and 336 incoming European exchanges took place during 2018/19
- Teaching collaborations:
  - Co-tutoring a medical programme across NCL's international network of campuses between Newcastle and NUMed, Malaysia Medical School which offers medical and biomedical education
  - School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Politics MA; co-taught via a video link with students in a University in Toronto

4.6.5. Key challenges and future steps

Both informants felt that NCL had established good support for VE at a high strategic and faculty level but that further champions were needed operationally. Knowledge and understanding about VEs; time to engage; and technological competence and confidence were identified as challenges in recruiting further champions.

Dr Satar identified one of the key challenges for developing VEs that: "people don't really know what it is." Taking the role of Director of Internationalisation for the School she was working to inform and engage people from the school about VEs, how they worked and how they could enhance the student experience and deliver the University's strategic goals. Hosting the IVEC Conference at NCL was one of the ways "for more Newcastle staff to be involved in Virtual Exchanges" and "create a bit more awareness across the University of what it is".

The lack of knowledge about VE and potentially the range of different conceptualisations of VE may have contributed to Ms Lavender's challenge in mapping all VE activities. She felt sure that there was "more that is going on than I've managed to find out about". Coming to VE from a 'telecollaboration' background Dr Satar articulated the potential problem that as a discipline "we are still trying to work around … terminologies …. telecollaboration, … online intercultural exchange

[60] Language Resources Centre: https://www.ncl.ac.uk/language-resource-centre/about/

[61] https://research.ncl.ac.uk/atiah/

[62] https://enacteuropa.com

and the COIL model and now the label virtual exchange which is the term adopted by the Journal of Virtual Exchange[63].

She also suggested "techno-pedagogical training…could be another requirement for exchanges to become more mainstream". However, availability of time, either for training or for planning developments in teaching and learning strategies to include VEs were major challenges for colleagues.

Finally, the availability of committed partnerships was identified as a challenge for sustaining VEs. Much could depend on individual champions in other institutions and organisations who could move around in their roles and disrupt established partnerships.

Unusually, funding was not identified as a barrier to the current development of VEs at NCL. In fact, the IaH strategy using VE to connect students to other people in other countries and cultures was part of a solution to reduce funds for physical exchanges and for increasing mobility and opportunity for disadvantaged students. Ms Lavender spoke positively about high level support for the infrastructure 'video conferencing project' championed by the Pro-Vice Chancellor and the potential for "genuine capital investment in the project that will facilitate VE".

The Global Opportunities team at Newcastle University were quick to raise students' attention to continuing opportunities for international exchange via VEs, despite the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following 'Virtual Global Opportunities' were highlighted in their "Global opportunities Newsletter" 20.04.20:

> *Virtual Exchange Opportunity: Meet Students from Across the Globe Without Leaving Home!' - comprising an invitation from Drexel University, Philadelphia to join their Virtual Global Exchange Classroom! Described as an opportunity to: 'meet students from the US, Europe and many other countries for discussion and collaboration.*
>
> *Virtual International Internship Opportunity: General and Inclusivity Scholarships Available' –comprising 6 fully funded scholarships from CRCC Asia, for students unable to participate in study abroad or physical internships in the summer 2020. Scholarships enabled students to 1-3 month internships working 20-30 hours a week from home.*

This response to COVID-19 highlighted the University's strategic preparedness to provide students with an international experience 'from home'. The rapid promotion of the opportunities demonstrated the strength of the strategic positioning of VE within the University.

[63] Journal of Virtual Exchange (https://journal.unicollaboration.org), the official journal of UNICollaboration.

4.7. University of Padova (UNIPD)

Francesca Helm

4.7.1. Introduction

The University of Padova (UNIPD) was founded in 1222 and is the second oldest university in Italy. It is made up of 32 departments and eight schools, which coordinate the courses managed by each department. Students at the UNIPD can choose from a wide range of the first cycle (80), second cycle (84) and single cycle (9) degree programmes, as well as a vast array of postgraduate courses. English-taught programmes are increasing with 20 full degree programmes, 20 doctoral programmes, more than 700-course units and numerous short specialisation courses. UNIPED is a member of several international networks, including the Coimbra Group and UNIMED.

4.7.2. VE activity reported at UNIPD: Educator-led

Table 18 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

4.7.3. Key drivers

The main drivers of VE have been language teachers and researchers at the university who have been implementing VE projects within their classes since the early 2000s. Telecollaboration projects between Italy and the United States were amongst the first sustained projects, and subsequent projects involved teachers of other languages such as Spanish, French, Dutch and Hungarian. The initial interest of the university Language Centre in computer-assisted language learning, training workshops, staff mobility projects and individuals' collaborations with partner universities and networks (EUROCALL[64], the TAPP network, COIL at SUNY) were also contributing factors to the growing interest and expertise of language teachers. In addition, there have been several EC funded projects that some of these members of staff have been involved in. Most of these activities have taken place on the initiative of individual teachers, and have been concentrated in two departments, The Department of Linguistic and Literary Studies (DiSSL) and the Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies (SPGI).

[64] http://www.eurocall-languages.org/

Table 18: *Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at UNIPD*

<table>
<tr><th colspan="10">University of Padova (UNIPD)</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Board(s) of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme

Though the expertise exists within the university, the development of a COIL strategy or plan has not been of strategic interest, hence there has been no investment in developing VE</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development

The Careers service has been involved in several European projects regarding VE that had virtual internships for students

The organisations Soliya and UNICollaboration have signed institutional agreements with Career service which means that students can take part in exchanges and/or do facilitation training through Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange as part of an officially recognised internship</td><td colspan="5">International offices

The International Relations Division has (1) co-organized a pre-mobility e-Tandem project in collaboration with the Language Centre, (2) organised an online international staff training week on VE for Innovation in Education (2020) and (3) included VE in the risk mitigation strategy in the context of COVID19

The international office has coordinated the integration of the NICE project and published a call for applications on their university webpage</td></tr>
<tr><td>01
Education</td><td>02
Arts and humanities</td><td>03
Social sciences, journalism and information</td><td>04
Business, administration and law</td><td>05
Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics</td><td>06
Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td><td>07
Engineering, manufacturing and construction</td><td>08
Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary</td><td>09
Health and welfare</td><td>10
Services</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Curricular (+ECTS/Badges) | Co-designed & ready-made VEs| Facilitated by educators and third party</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE funding schemes in place: External (European)

UNIPD has been a partner in several EC-funded projects (KA3) on VE: INTENT (September 2011 - March 2014); The EVALUATE Project[65] (2017-2019), the EVOLVE project; The NICE project; Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="10">VE Research output by staff and/or students</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE research output by staff: (Key) drivers have published (extensively) about VE and disseminated the research outputs through funding and collaborations with UNICollaboration and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange
VE research output by students: Several students have written their thesis on VE projects</td></tr>
</table>

Two of the key drivers at the UNIPD are Sarah Guth and Dr Francesca Helm because of their wide experience, expertise and network in the field of VE. Dr Helm is a researcher at SPGI, where she has been coordinating several VE programs with the non-profit organisations Soliya (since 2009) and SPF since 2013. Her research interests are in VE and related areas such as intercultural dialogue, technology in education, language and education policies, and ethical internationalisation of HE. She is currently working on the Monitoring and Evaluation of the EC's landmark Erasmus+

[65] http://www.evaluateproject.eu/

Virtual Exchange project. Dr Helm represents the UNIPD in the Coimbra Group's Education Innovation Working Group - for which she is Chair - and is Second Research Officer of the UNICollaboration executive board. In addition to this, Dr Helm is engaged in regular networking amongst HE and high policy professionals.

Ms Guth is a Lecturer in English as a Foreign Language at the UNIPD. She worked as Program Coordinator for the SUNY Center for Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) from February 2013 to June 2014, designed their Professional Development Program and is currently working as an independent contractor for the COIL Center's Stevens Initiative grant. She carries out research on technology in foreign language teaching, telecollaboration, COIL, and ICC and has published widely in these fields. She is currently president of the UNICollaboration academic organization for telecollaboration and VE. UNICollaboration grew out of INTENT[66] – an award-winning project financed by the EC aimed at promoting Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) in European HEIs.

Both Ms Guth and Dr Helm have played important roles in the online international staff training week on VE for Innovation in Education organised by the UNIPD International Relations division in June 2020.

Despite the long standing tradition of both practice and expertise in VE at the UNIPD, there is not yet a strategy of the university regarding VE as a means for IaH. In the last few years, however there has been a growing interest on the part of the international relations division in VE through the e-Tandem project developed by the Language Centre in collaboration with the office for pre-mobility students, the EC-funded NICE project, and the planning of an international staff week on VE. As for the European University Alliance initiatives, the university is involved in ARQUS[67]. The Covid-19 crisis and the implications this has for student mobility has further increased this interest.

4.7.4. Key (inter)actions

Foreign language educators have developed bilateral VE above all that is, the telecollaborative co-designed model of VE. These were generally developed as a result of teachers' familiarity with the practice of VE through attending conferences, workshops or reading the literature on telecollaboration, and establishing a partnership with a fellow language teacher in the country where the foreign language is spoken. For example, teachers of English established a project with a colleague in the U.S. (eg. Dickinson University, Middlebury University, Penn University). Projects were also developed for other languages, for example Dutch, partnering with the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, Hungarian and Spanish. There was initially a degree of 'contagion' amongst the language teachers, with the exchange of practice and more and more teachers getting involved. Strong partnerships developed and continued over multiple years. These collaborations led to the possibility of presenting the exchanges at international conferences, and also to publications (e.g. Guth & Marini-Maio, 2010).

[66] https://uni-collaboration.eu/node/544

[67] https://www.arqus-alliance.eu/

In the Master's degree course in foreign languages within the translation course, students have been involved in the TAPP (Trans-Atlantic & Pacific Project) project[68] since 2009, around 60 students per year, according to professor Musacchio. The TAPP project was launched in the 1999-2000 academic year by Bruce Maylath and Sonia Vandepitte, and has developed into a complex educational network of bilateral writing-translation projects, bilateral translation-editing projects (since 2001), and multilateral projects (since 2010). TAPP's main aim is to share insights into collaborative writing across borders and cultures, and, in the course of this work, to gain knowledge of others' cultural base (e.g. Arnò-Macia et al., 2019). Several workshops have been organized at UNIPD in collaboration with TAPP partners.

The eTandem project[69] was developed by Lisa Griggio at the Language Centre in collaboration with the international office in 2015, with the aim of supporting the integration of international students who would be arriving at the UNIPD (e.g. Griggio & Rózsavölgyi, 2016). It also offers local students and outgoing mobility students the opportunity to develop their language skills. Students at DiSSL can have their documented participation in this project recognized for 3 ECTS. The eTandem project won the European Language Label award in 2016 from the EC. The project runs twice a year and the number of students taking part has increased, with over 100 in the last iteration.

UNIPD had been collaborating with the organization Soliya for the involvement of students in the Connect Programme since 2009, with between 10-30 students taking part each year from two departments, DiSSL and SPGI. This involvement was based on the departments' signing of agreements with the organization and the payment of a nominal annual fee. Fiona Dalziel, associate professor of English at DiSSL says:

> *What many of my students complain of is their lack of confidence in using the languages they are studying, so Soliya is ideal as it offers a safe, non-threatening environment where they can express themselves without the fear of being judged on their language skills. Many participants note how their confidence increased during the exchange. But perhaps the most important thing is the intercultural element. Many of my students have very limited experiences of communication outside a European context. Soliya helps them to break down preconceived ideas about other "cultures" by bringing to the fore the many-faced nature of intercultural communication.*

At DiSSL the Connect Program is available as an elective, and participation is recognised with 3 ECTS. Students are required to write weekly reflective journal entries and a final paper as well as receive a positive evaluation from Soliya to obtain the credits. Several students have gone on to write their thesis on this project or other telecollaboration and VE projects, hence VE has produced an opportunity for students to carry out empirical research[70].

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[68] https://www.ndsu.edu/english/transatlantic_and_pacific_translations/

[69] http://cla.unipd.it/en/e-tandem/

[70] See for example Bosi's thesis exploring the links between mobility, VE and intercultural competence. She found that for the 15 key mobility stakeholders she interviewed (at the university and in the national agency) for her study, intercultural communicative competence was not a key issue or concern and only 3 knew about virtual exchange - though on a positive note, they expressed strong interest when she explained the concept and opportunities available. http://tesi.cab.unipd.it/63382/1/Sara_Bosi_2019.pdf

Researchers at SPGI, in particular the Next Generation Global Studies group were involved in a partnership with the SPF in several EC-funded projects, starting in 2013. Lecturers from the university provided short video lectures for the projects [Europe on the Edge, European Refuge(es)] and small numbers of students could take part in the VE programmes developed around these lectures. The projects, which ran until 2017, could be considered as 'blended mobility', and one or two students from UNIPD were selected in each iteration to take part in the week-long mobility in Brussels where the results of the collaborative research project developed were presented to stakeholders. Gloria, an alumnus from the 2017 iteration who now works at a university office for education innovation:

> *I think VE changed my mindset in a sense, it improved my acceptance of the vision of other people, the capacity of understanding other points of view that are useful for me in my work, in team work in a large partnership even if I am working in a local, not international context. The importance of understanding the points of view of different cultures was important for me to understand the points of view of multiple actors with different roles and different interests in the same project.*

Since the launch of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange in 2018, there has been a considerable increase in the number of students taking part in these VE activities. Both Soliya Connect Programme and the SPF programmes are now part of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. These activities are integrated in different ways. The 10-week Cultural Encounters programme is an alternative to the traditional English language course for students of political science who already have a high level of English, or can be taken as an alternative to a placement - which has been found to be particularly popular with international students who can have difficulty finding local placements if they do not speak Italian. The 4-week Connect Express is an integral part of the course English as a Global Language. Students have always been enthusiastic about participation in the project and value it for the transversal skills they develop as well as the multiple perspectives and insights into issues relevant to their studies (migration, terrorism, foreign policy, religion and politics, populism, nationalism) through their interactions in the very diverse groups. From a research perspective, SPGI has been able to fund a one-year research assistant and a 2-year assistant with funding from EC-funded projects and a partnership with UNICollaboration for Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange research. Also some of the outputs from an EC-funded project on gender and media (AGEMI) with SPGI staff has become the key content for one of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange projects, thus disseminating the research outputs and expanding the impact.

The Career service

The Career service has been involved in several European projects regarding virtual mobility - for example VIVET[71] which had 'virtual internships' for students. They have signed agreements with some Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange consortium members for virtual internships for facilitator training.

The organisations Soliya and UNICollaboration have signed institutional agreements with Career service which means that students can take part in exchanges and/or do facilitation training through Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange as part of an officially recognised internship. A few students have already taken up this opportunity, which requires the support of a local tutor (the same

[71] https://www.unipd.it/vivet

lecturer who coordinates most VE activities at the university) as well as a company tutor. Three students so far have done these internships.

The International Relations division

Recently the International Relations division has become involved in VE activities through collaboration with the Language Centre on the eTandem project (connecting incoming and outgoing mobile students) and the EC-funded NICE project. Integration of this VE project has been coordinated by the International Relations division who published a call for applications on their university webpage. Participation was open to students from all schools, and there was a high number of applications. In 2018-2019 there were 113 applicants, and 20 were accepted from 10 different departments. In 2019-20 there were 86 applications, and 24 accepted, again from 10 departments. A panel was formed to evaluate the applications and students were selected on the basis of their academic record. In the first iteration of the programme, only students who completed the SLICC were awarded 10 ECTS by the University of Edinburgh. For 2019-20 UNIPD created a recognised course called 'Intercultural competence to facilitate entrepreneurship' which integrates the NICE project. To obtain the 6 ECTS for completion of this course, as well as completing the NICE modules and participating in the online meetings, students are required to write a report on each of the project modules and a final paper. Also in 2020 participants in the NICE project will receive Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange badges. It is hoped that these badges will appear in the students' diploma supplement.

In an interview carried out in April 2020, Dora Longoni, head of the International Relations division reported:

> *There is no doubt that we will strengthen VE at the University of Padova - in light of the Covid-19 situation we have carried out a risk assessment and developed a risk mitigation strategy, and here we highlight the need for VE - both to offer students an international and intercultural experience today when mobility is not actually possible, and to prepare students for quality mobility experiences in the future. The International Relations division is developing a strategic plan for the next 6 months and will include VE in this, above all in activities with key partners, such as the European University Alliance ARQUS.*

An Erasmus staff week on VE was organised in June 2020[72]. This was supposed to be a physical mobility but due to the Corona virus, this could not happen. Given the theme of the staff week and its great relevance to the current situation, rather than cancel the staff week the International Relations division decided to make it a virtual staff week[73]. This has allowed for many more participants to register for the staff week as the programme was adjusted to include open plenary webinars in addition to the workshop sessions with a limited number of registered participants.

[72] https://www.coimbra-group.eu/make-it-virtual-insights-from-the-international-staff-training-week-2020-on-virtual-exchange-for-innovation-in-education/

[73] https://www.unipd.it/en/international-staff-week

Table 19 below show a summary of the before mentioned VEs implemented:

Table 19: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at UNIPD*

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other
Different telecollaborative models of VR	Since 2000	unknown	These VEs have been initiated and implemented by language teachers
TAPP Project	Since 2009	c. 60 per year	Fully integrated into course and assessment
The e-tandem project to support the integration of international students	Since 2015	Over a 100 in the last iteration	Developed at the University Language Centre in collaboration with the International Relations division
Connect Programme (offered by Soliya)	From 2009 to 2017	c. 20 per year	The departments of DiSSL and SPGI were involved
EC funded blended mobility projects in partnerships with SPF	From 2013 - 2017	For selected students	Researchers at SPGI, in particular the Next Generation Global Studies were involved
NICE project in collaboration with the International Relations division	Since 2018	44	In 2020 6 ECTS
Connect Programme (offered by Soliya under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange)	Since 2018	196	3 ECTS depending on which programme
Cultural Encounters iOOC (offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange)	Since 2018	42	6 ECTS Alternative to work placement
Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange - facilitator training	Since 2018	5	Virtual placement Agreement signed with Career office

4.7.5. Key challenges and future steps

Challenges have varied across the years and depend on many factors. There has been a decrease in VE activity on the part of language teachers who had been the main drivers of VE, due to pressure to work on testing and teaching, as well as lack of recognition of the time invested in developing and implementing VE. The very high numbers of students in some classes (for some bachelor's courses there are over 300 students per course) are also a major inhibiting factor. Furthermore, several language teachers were invited to be part of EU funded projects about VE, including the EVOLVE project, but have not been permitted to do so.

Lack of awareness or interest on the part of educators of other disciplines, limited engagement with online teaching in general could also be seen as factors which have hindered the implementation of VE in the institution. Furthermore there is a strong focus on disciplinary content and a predominance of lecture-based teaching methods. Another contributing factor may have been the lack of incentives or interest on the part of higher levels of university governance. Though the expertise exists within the university, the development of a COIL strategy or plan has not been of strategic interest, hence there was no investment in developing VE at the university.

Looking ahead, however, things seem to be changing fast. The Covid-19 pandemic and its impact on student mobility has highlighted the relevance for VE on an institutional level. The International Relations division is planning to allocate some of their budget on VE to support IaH and is seeking to build the competences of a team of dedicated staff.

4.8. University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (HU)

Salma Elbeblawi

4.8.1. Introduction

Hogeschool Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (HU) is located in the city of Utrecht in the Netherlands and was founded in 1995. The university has over 35,000 students with over 1,000 international students representing more than 100 different nationalities. HU offers bachelor and master programs spanning business, engineering, teacher education, health services, communication and design.

Internationalisation is an important component of education and research at HU. HU currently has partnerships with 237 universities around the world. Around 200 of these partnerships are through an Erasmus+ Inter-Institutional Agreement. Between 2014 and 2020, between 320-345 students travelled or came to HU as part of Erasmus mobility annually.

4.8.2. VE activity reported at HU: International division-led

Table 20 below represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

4.8.3. Key drivers

Nikolien van Lidth de Jeude, Advisor of Internationalisation at HU's Central International Office, and Jelly Offereins, Director of International Affairs at HU Business School, are the key drivers for VE at HU and the interviewees of this case study.

Ms van Lidth de Jeude supports internationalisation efforts centrally at the institutional level by identifying and sharing relevant opportunities with programmes and educators. For instance, this is how Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange was introduced to the internal network of international educators at HU. Ms van Lidth de Jeude informs her network through meetings and a mailing list to share opportunities and conferences related to internationalisation, and manages a website dedicated to internationalisation, with a webpage[74] which she updates with information about VE opportunities.

[74] https://husite.nl/gointernational/events/

Table 20: *Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at HU*

<table>
<tr><th colspan="10">University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (HU)</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Board(s) of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme

VE is not explicitly mentioned in the university's strategic plan but fits in the IaH pillar

Decisions on VE implementation are left to develop bottom-up but involves the departmental level</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development

There is little in terms of overall pedagogical or technical support offered to educators to implement VE</td><td colspan="5">International offices

Support of Central Services and the International Affairs staff. They provide support to help students, staff, and educators to enable internationalisation opportunities involving VE</td></tr>
<tr><td>01

Education</td><td>02

Arts and humanities</td><td>03

Social sciences, journalism and information</td><td>04

Business, administration and law</td><td>05

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics</td><td>06

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td><td>07

Engineering, manufacturing and construction</td><td>08

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary</td><td>09

Health and welfare</td><td>10

Services</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Curricular | Co-designed (COIL) & ready-made VEs (+ECTS)| Facilitated by educators (COIL) and third party</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE funding schemes in place: External (European)

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Research outputs: Not reported</td></tr>
</table>

Ms Offereins supports the internationalisation of staff, educators, students, curriculum, and procedures for business studies. Ms van Lidth de Jeude and Ms Offereins joint efforts to keep up to date with new internationalisation opportunities have helped introduce VE to HU, and more specifically Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange in recent years. "When I read about the pilot of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, I reached out to faculty members in the Business School who taught courses I thought VE would fit in. I helped them integrate it in their curricula", Ms Offereins said. Given her early adoption of VE, Ms Offereins has become the primary point person at HU to support interested educators from a variety of departments, to learn more about this field, and to identify relevant programmes and partners. In many ways, due to Ms Offereins leadership in this field, the Business School is a pioneer of VE at HU.

VE is viewed as one way to achieve the university's Internationalisation Strategy, specifically the IaH pillar that aims to strengthen students' intercultural competencies without the application of travel, accounting for students who are unable to or uninterested in participating in physical mobility programmes.

Ms van Lidth de Jeude also sees the importance of VE through her personal observations:

> *It is now common in daily life to meet people online, that we do not interact with in-person. Oftentimes people get agitated in social media, and it creates problems, rather than connect people. The communication feels impersonal and creates tension. We need to learn how to communicate effectively online, express ourselves well, expect a real exchange, and create*

> *cultural awareness, rather than just a space for sharing ideas that generally does not lead to learning. Even research shows that mobility itself does not enable that kind of cultural learning, you can travel to another country but live in a bubble and not interact with the local culture, so mobility alone isn't sufficient. It needs conscious reflection.*

It has been a priority for HU over the last 7-8 years to increase intercultural exposure and engagement among students, educators, and staff. It was understood that VE would align with this goal, given research indicating that it promotes 21st Century readiness. There is not a single agreed on definition to VE at HU, Ms van Lidth de Jeude observes that "meanings change or are sharpened over time." Ms Offereins sees VE as

> *Relevant communication, interaction and/or collaboration between students who are geographically separated and from different cultural backgrounds - where those interactions are aligned with intended Learning Outcomes. The goal is to familiarise students with digital interaction, build students' awareness of their cultural perspectives, simulate 'real workplace', and strengthen students' English language capacity.*

The term VE, however, is not explicitly mentioned in the university's strategic plan; rather, it is understood by the institution to sit within the IaH pillar. Ms Offereins further explains that for the Business School in particular, given that virtually all business has an international dimension, it is crucial to introduce an international component to all their students as part of their learning. It is an essential competency to prepare them for real life interactions.

4.8.4. Key (inter)actions

HU does not employ a university-wide strategy for implementing VE, and currently the business school is the hub for VE programmes. As mentioned above, VE is not yet fully recognised within the university's strategic plan for internationalisation. The university board acknowledges the value and significance of internationalisation as an important focus for the university, but does not mandate for educators to adopt specific strategies or programmes. At HU, internationalisation efforts are left to develop bottom-up.

According to Ms van Lidth de Jeude, "VE is not cited explicitly as a tool for internationalisation at the institutional level at the moment. The university's strategic plan discusses the importance of internationalisation as well as digitalisation, which are two relevant umbrellas I see VE attached to". According to Ms Offereins, VE is written into the strategic plan of the Business School as an instrument of IaH. VE is also referenced in the business school's course catalogue (in course subjects included in the table 21 below, and include finance and accounting, international communication or strategic management), along with its intended learning outcomes, and how it is integrated in the relevant courses. The International Office and the Business School meet monthly to discuss IaH, and VE has been a recurring agenda item. Business school staff and educators who have been involved individually in VE integration, are invited to present about their experience and successes to colleagues across departments in sessions and workshops organised on internationalisation, in order to spread awareness among other educators, and inform them about upcoming opportunities.

The way Ms Offereins describes it, "there are two types of VE activities at HU: the discipline-based VE, and intercultural dialogue based VE" (see table below). The discipline-based VE usually follows a COIL[75] model that brings two partner universities together to focus on co-learning around their specific subject matter. The content in this case is leading and the core of the learning experience, and online exchange is an instrument to achieve that in an international setting. Students collaborate on professional tasks for example related to finance and accounting with their peers from colleges in the other countries. These take place for the most part with partner institutions that HU has worked with previously on student mobility. The intercultural dialogue VE came about through partnerships with VE providers such as Soliya, SPF and UNICollaboration. The core of the learning experience in this type of VE is more deliberately geared towards building global perspectives and global competencies that are essential for 21st century work readiness and which align very well with the university's internationalisation goals. For the intercultural dialogue type VE, the online exchange is the core experience, and the content is an instrument to achieve these broader learning goals, such as critical thinking and self-awareness, intercultural understanding, intercultural communication and collaboration.

Within HU, efforts to coordinate the implementation of VE are mostly led within departments with support of Central Services and the International Affairs staff such as Ms Offereins and her colleagues. Decisions on VE implementation are decentralised. Within each department, the implementing educator works with the institute manager and the curriculum steering group to decide if they plan to integrate a VE component in their course.

All VE components at HU are credit bearing, and are assessed individually against the learning outcomes of the course. VE is regarded as an additional tool to achieve the learning outcomes on the module and thus is included in an assessment matrix as one of the learning components. The assessment matrix indicates how VE distinctly adds to the learning outcomes of each course. Moreover, the matrix is accompanied with a reflection report containing questions specifically aligned with VE outcomes. Assessment for VE is considered within the context of each course separately, so there is no overall assessment on the impact of VE across departments or courses. Table 21 below shows an overview of the VEs implemented at HU:

Table 21: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented at HU*

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other
COIL: Department of Finance and Accounting / two Financial Management courses and one elective	2014 - 2020	150 student / year	Partnerships mostly with Student Mobility partners in Denmark, Brazil, Switzerland etc.
COIL: Department International Business	2015 - 2020	22 students / year	Partnership with University of Wellington
COIL: Department International Business	2016 - 2020	50 students / year	Partnership with 4 European universities
COIL: Institute for Communication, Creative Business	unknown	unknown	unknown

[75] https://online.suny.edu/introtocoil/

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students	Other
Institute of languages	Implemented once, in 2019	unknown	Exchange about ICC in languages, with a Taiwanese university
COIL: Institute for Education, Teacher Education	Implemented once, in 2017	unknown	About intercultural competencies, with Denver University
Connect Program: Piloted as a required component in International Communication Now integrated in Strategic Management, during the 3rd year of study, which focuses on global strategic issues facing business	2018 - 2020	120-140 students / year	Offered by Soliya under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange
Elective course in School of Business: -Cultural Encounters -Gender In/equality in Media & Journalism -Countering Hate Speech	2018 - 2020	5-15 students / year	Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange

There is little in terms of overall pedagogical or technical support offered to educators to implement VE. Ms Offereins and her staff's main role is to provide much of that support, to help students, staff, and educators to enable more internationalisation opportunities. For instance, Ms Offereins followed the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange courses Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation offered by Soliya and Advanced training to Design your VE-project offered by UNICollaboration. She then takes this learning to support educators in implementing VE. It is essential she first understands all the operational requirements to alleviate that component for educators and allow them to focus on content and learning outcomes. According to Ms Offereins, that is the real success factor. In the cases of COIL VEs, the initial matching and curricular adjustments may be time-consuming and require support and facilitation from the international office. Ms Offereins is familiar with the content of courses in the Business School, so she is able to provide pedagogical support to educators in her department as needed. Then once partnerships between institutions and the involved educators are established, they can be sustained over a long period of time.

Some programmes require technological investments on the part of the university and that can be challenging. Ms Offereins explains that

> *Some partners such as Soliya and SPF provide a great technical platform that doesn't require any additional investments from the university, students can just join from their laptop, from any location, and without any added software. But for other forms of VE, we need to provide on campus rooms with screens, or access to skype or zoom. We find these more challenging, and sometimes struggle with technical issues.*

4.8.5. Key challenges and future steps

Internationalisation at HU is a bottom-up process, with educators taking the initiative to introduce VE at the department or course level with support from the International Affairs team. The decision whether or not to start a VE project lies within the department and the professor. The biggest challenge with this decentralised structure is that the spread of VE relies completely on individual initiatives. The Business School at HU distinguishes itself in pioneering VE, due to the leadership of staff like Ms Offereins taking the time to bring this to the educators in this school.

This is then compounded by educators' anticipation of the additional workload that implementing VE would carry. Educators generally have a very high workload, they simply do not have the time needed to learn about VE, identify the right model for them, and then to adapt their curriculum for it. Oftentimes, particularly when it comes to discipline-based VE, there is a lot of work required in curriculum redesign. It is also true though that educators may perceive the time required as more than the reality. Ms Offereins navigates this challenge by taking courses on how to implement VE and using the knowledge she learns to support educators, who then have time to focus on the content rather than the operations:

> *We invite champions of VE to present their successful experiences, and try to build momentum this way. We try to show that it's not essentially more work, it is a different type of work with oftentimes simple ways to integrate VE in their existing curricula, and that it has a strong impact on students' learning.*

Being very familiar with the business curriculum, she can convey to professors in her department how to integrate VE into an existing course in a way that is logical, natural, and not excessively time consuming. In this regard, the intercultural dialogue focused VE is an excellent illustration of this, as that requires minimal effort on the part of educators, with very little adjustment to curriculum, the integration is fairly easy and straightforward, and with no additional technical requirements for the department.

At the Business School, the International Affairs office supports students, staff, and educators with internationalisation, such as by ensuring that students have access to computer labs and video-conferencing platforms when necessary. Other departments, however, do not have similar support mechanisms, and at the institution level, there is limited technical and pedagogical support, leaving the challenge of time unaddressed.

Ms van Lidth de Jeude also notices that not all educators are enthusiastic to consider international partnerships, and do not always see the value of it in relation to their subject matter. It is often not easy to convince educators that VE, or an international component in general, would align with their discipline. The connection between VE and global citizenship isn't always understood. Ms van Lidth de Jeude hopes that:

> *As more examples of successful VE become available, particularly stories showcasing other educators speaking to similar concerns and then describing from their perspective how they found VE to be a worthwhile addition to their courses, that would certainly help convince more educators, over time. In fact, we are planning to have a national event at HU on VE at the end of June, to showcase our experiences, pending the current situation with COVID-19 of course.*

Looking ahead, the university's 2026 strategy puts a lot of emphasis on global citizenship. "This is a perfect match for VE", Ms Offereins explains, "the soil is ready, our biggest task is to continue building awareness and particularly around how VE is aligned with the core university strategy. There is just not enough understanding around its full potential."

Ms van Lidth de Jeude adds that if it was up to her, she thinks:

> *VE is the future: in Europe, diversity and inclusivity are very big and important topics in the new Erasmus+ programmes. However, internationalisation through mobility is limited to those who dare, and those who can afford it. VE is such a great way to gain a meaningful intercultural experience, and it is more accessible and more inclusive. It also makes it easier*

to take the step towards study abroad as well. For educators, I would add you can decide yourself, we can incorporate existing VE models or design your own VE, as big or small as you want. It is very flexible. It is a low boundary, low cost learning experience with very high achievement. I hope it becomes a priority for HU.

4.9. Julius-Maximilian-University of Würzburg

Gerdientje Oggel

4.9.1. Introduction

Its latest brochure[76] presents the university as one of the largest (28,000 students, 2,300 from abroad) in Germany. Founded in 1402, it is also the oldest university in the federal state of Bavaria. Its ten faculties can be divided in the main areas of humanities, law and economics, life sciences, and natural sciences. Together, these offer more than 250 study programmes at bachelor and master levels. Next to these, the JMU offers doctoral degrees in all study areas, and in interdisciplinary fields.

As mentioned on the international section of the website, the JMU works together with several international networks. It has representatives in each of the Coimbra Group's 11 Working Groups and is a member of the The German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)[77] which is the largest funding organization for the international exchange of students and researchers worldwide and serves as the National Agency for EU Higher Education Cooperation in the Erasmus+ Programme. The International Offices of the Bavarian universities meet twice yearly to exchange ideas and discuss various topics and challenges surrounding international education.

4.9.2. VE activity at JMU: Collaboratively-led

Table 22 below, represents a visual overview synthesising the VE activity in the institution as reported by the interviewees for this case study. The more activity there is, the darker blue the area colours. In the following section, we will give a detailed description of the key drivers, the key interactions, the key challenges and future steps of the reported VE activity.

4.9.3. Key drivers

The interview for the University of Julius-Maximilian-University of Würzburg (JMU) was conducted at the University of Groningen (UG) in October 2019 with Ms Kristina Förster. At the time of the interview, Ms Förster was a coordinator and educational supporter at *ProfiLehre/Hochschuldidaktik*. Additionally, written answers regarding specific information for the Career Centre was provided in April 2020 by Dr Annette Retsch, who is the Head of this centre at JMU. In addition to this, the Chair of the School of Pedagogy, Prof Dr Silke Grafe responded in writing to questions for her area of work in June 2020. Ms Förster and Dr Retch are involved as members in the Education and Innovation Coimbra Working Group and the Employability Coimbra Working Group, respectively. *ProfiLehre/Hochschuldidaktik* and the Career Centre are both part of the Service Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning (ZiLS), a university management staff office that occupies a central unit position in the university's administration. The ZiLS is active in the following areas: Academic Policies Office, Career Service and Professional Development in Teaching.

[76] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/presse/jmu/publications/flyer/

[77] https://www.daad.de/en/

Table 22: *Activity towards Development and Institutionalisation of VE at JMU*

<table>
<tr><td colspan="10">Julius-Maximilian-University of Würzburg (JMU)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Board/s of the University/Faculty or School/Department or Programme

VE fits into the general internationalisation strategies but the approach is not mentioned</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">Educational support and innovation, including staff and student career development

VE courses for students (Career Centre) and VE training for teachers within the Thematic Certificate of Internationalisation of Teaching and Learning (ITL)</td><td colspan="5">International offices

First meeting held with the International Office for establishing supportive and collaborative structures that aid the implementation and promotion of VE</td></tr>
<tr><td>01*

Education</td><td>02*

Arts and humanities</td><td>03*

Social sciences, journalism and information</td><td>04*

Business, administration and law</td><td>05*

Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics</td><td>06*

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs)</td><td>07*

Engineering, manufacturing and construction</td><td>08*

Agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary</td><td>09*

Health and welfare</td><td>10*

Services</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">Free choice (ECTS/Badges) & curricular | Co-designed & ready-made VEs| Facilitated by educators & third party</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE funding schemes in place: External (national and European)
Quality Pact for Teaching (national) & Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and EVOLVE (European)</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="10">VE Research output by staff: At the School of Pedagogy several articles on VE were co-authored with the partners with whom the VEs were implemented</td></tr>
</table>

Note. * Students in all education fields can opt for participating in a VE through the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programme as part of the 20 EC pool of General Key Qualifications.

ProfiLehre

According to the website, *ProfiLehre*[78] offers a "broad-based didactic training programme focusing on the development of practice orientated didactic competencies". It also offers educators the opportunity to obtain Teaching Certificates at basic, advanced and specialization levels. Ms Förster is one of the key drivers of VE at JMU because she developed the Thematic Certificate of Internationalization of Teaching and Learning (ITL), which teachers can acquire either in addition to or independently of the University Teaching Certificate programs established throughout the Bavarian Universities. Attending *ProfiLehre* coaching on VE and/or participation in one of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange online TEP and EVOLVE co-laboratory trainings, are recognised activities for the ITL Certificate. The workload for both the coaching and the online training are recognised as the so called 'work unit credits' for the Teaching Certificates of the Bavarian Universities. The integration of VE into the certificate has been implemented in cooperation with the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot project.

[78] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/teaching/profilehre/general-information/

The development of the ITL certificate has been made possible thanks to funding received from the Quality Pact for Teaching[79] which is the third pillar of the Higher Education Pact of the Federal Government and the German States to improve study conditions and the quality of teaching and mentoring. Since 2011, The Federal Government has made roughly 2 billion euros available for this purpose until 2020. At JMU and the other 10 Universities of the Bavarian Network, this funding scheme has been used to develop *ProfilLehrePlus*, which was granted funding through a joint proposal of the Federal State universities. Since the second funding phase in October 2016, internationalisation has become one of the three focus areas within the Network. *ProfilLehrePlus* has developed a training programme for internationally oriented University Teaching which is offered at the eleven Universities of the Bavarian Network as well as ten local projects. The ITL developed by Ms Förster, is one these local projects independently developed at the JMU.

Career Centre

Dr Annette Retsch is one of the key drivers of VE in her quality as professional advisor, and overall coordinator of a programme for developing professional competences[80]. In this role she managed to implement an own VE concept in the pool of General Key Qualifications[81]. In this pool, the bachelor's programmes as well as various central institutions at the JMU like the Career Centre or Writing Center can implement modules for the training of key qualifications totalling 20 ECTS credits. These key competences include social, methodological and communicative competences, which can be defined in a subject-related but also interdisciplinary way.

The Career Centre was founded in 2007 as a special staff unit of the university administration accompanying the implementation of the Bologna reform. It has been part of ZiLS since 2010. Across a range of 10 faculties, the Career Centre supports students in their individual career development and job orientation by offering up to 80 workshops and lectures as well as professional guidance. Next to this, the Career Centre is also developing its own modules where up to 5 academic credit points can be acquired. As of recently, the Career Centre plans to focus more on 21st century skills and lifelong learning in cooperation with partners from within and outside university. As a result, the Career Centre implemented two Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange pilot courses in the winter semester of 2019/2020 with Social Circles and Cultural Encounters because these train digital as well as intercultural competencies. As mentioned above, the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange modules are part of the pool of General Key Qualifications and present a blended learning format. This means that the iOOCs and Social Circles are offered in combination with two classroom-based sessions before and after the courses. The classroom-based sessions contain the preparation of a competence-profile in the beginning and a report of reflection at the end and aim to enlarge important transversal competences.

Scientific Driver

The Chair of the School of Pedagogy, Prof Dr Silke Grafe, is a scientific driver, implementer and researcher of VE at JMU in the field of media pedagogy. The contact and collaboration around the topic of VE between Prof Dr Grafe and Ms Förster started in September 2019 at the Young Researchers Week at the JMU. This is also how Ms Förster learned about the VE Prof Dr Grafe implemented and researched as part of one of her courses. When asking Prof Dr Grafe how she got the

[79] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/teaching/qualitaetspakt-lehre/quality-pact-for-teaching-at-jmu/

[80] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/career/startseite/

[81] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/career/links-material/counselling-further-trainings-institutions/

idea to initiate the VE project on which she co-authored an article with her American partner (Hobbs et al., 2018), whether they plan to continue the project and if she thinks it rose interest in her institutions or beyond, she replied:

> *The collaboration with Renee Hobbs has lasted for more than ten years. I have experimented with different kinds of VE since then (Boos et al., 2016). We plan to continue this project. This year a PhD student will start a project on VE with German and US students. Moreover, we are looking for funding opportunities to be able to expand our research about VE. As the journal of media literacy education is received worldwide the project was appreciated by other colleagues. Furthermore, we presented our project on the 12th national conference of the National Association of Media Literacy Education in Washington, USA in 2019, which inspired other colleagues to pursue the idea of virtual exchange.*

Since summer 2020, Ms Förster works as a research assistant and PhD candidate at the School of Pedagogy in the context of the interdisciplinary project Co-Teach[82]. A central goal of CoTeach is the interdisciplinary development of digital innovative teaching and learning environments for the initial teacher education programme at JMU, which will include VE[83] as well:

> *An important goal is to foster the educational digital competences of the teachers/ lectures with regard to professional collaboration and communication, reflective practice and to stimulate continuing education. Virtual exchange will play an important role with regard to the internationalisation of the teacher education programme. Apart from using synchronous and asynchronous common digital media such as Moodle-based digital learning environments or videoconferencing we will carry out research about using fully immersive social VR for virtual exchange and intercultural encounter.*

4.9.4. Key (inter)actions

Ms Förster became involved with VE in March 2018 through the Education and Innovation Coimbra Working group of which she is a member. Especially the input provided by Dr Francesca Helm, the current Chair (former Vice-Chair) of the working group, raised her interest in VE in general and the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and EVOLVE projects in particular as relevant practices to be incorporated in the didactic training programme offered by *ProfiLehre.*

At the Coimbra Group annual conference held in Salamanca in June 2018, to which both Ms Förster and Dr Retsch attended, Ms Förster participated in an intergroup meeting between the Education Innovation and Academic Exchange and Mobility Working Groups on Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange with a representative of the EC and Dr Francesca Helm (among others) on the panel.

In the early spring of 2019, VE was put as a new segment on the *Profillehre* homepage[84] in order to give interested educators an introduction to the subject. The entry gives the definition of VE as developed by the Virtual Exchange Coalition[85], contrasts it with virtual mobility and explains the

[82] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/professional-school-of-education/neu/forschen/co-teach/

[83] https://twitter.com/kristinafoerst5/status/1329763542745092102?s=11

[84] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/en/teaching/profilehre/internationalisation-of-teaching-and-learning/teaching-innovation-in-europe/virtual-exchange/

[85] http://virtualexchangecoalition.org/

differences between the online facilitated dialogue format of VE and the one developed by partnering educators (co-designed VE or TEPs). Besides this, VE appeared as an internal communication item through the university wide newsletter *EinBlick.*

Later that year, Dr Retsch (presentation) and Ms Förster (preparation) were given the possibility to discuss VE as a tool for educational innovation and IaH, based on what they had learned at the Coimbra Group annual conference, at one of the University/ZiLS *Jour Fix* at JMU. It was at this event that the new idea for a *Gute Lehre Vortrag* or Good Teaching Lecture was created. This is how workshop Virtual Exchange for Education Innovation and Internationalisation at Home[86], could take place on May 8, 2019 in the context of the *Gute Lehre Vortrag*. The lecture and workshop were introduced by the Vice President for internationalisation Prof Dr Barış Kabak. The lecture addressed educators and students equally but the workshop was aimed at educators who would like to implement VE themselves. About 30 people attended the lecture and at the workshop there were six participants.

After the *Gute Lehre Vortrag*, Ms Förster noticed an increase in demand at *ProfiLehre* for coaching about VE from educators and Dr Retsch started her activities to implement VE in the Career Centre programme and presented important information about this programme at the Career Centre's internet pages[87], in the Career newsletter and via social media activities.

In terms of recruitment for VE activities among teachers and students, between April and July 2019, part of the ITL Newsletter issued by *ProfilLehre* and aimed at educators, was dedicated to the latest developments regarding the topic of VE. The special VE flyer developed by *ProfiLehre* was announced as follows in the June 2019 newsletter:

> *So far, our goal has been to keep you up to date on news, training opportunities or coaching regarding Virtual Exchange in Higher Education via this newsletter or on the ProfiLehre website. Now that the VE-approach has been implemented in the Profilehre certificate program in cooperation with Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and through our own accompanying consulting our coaching formats, it is time to provide all the relevant information at a glance.*

Some examples of VE related activities announced through the *ProfiLehre* Newsletter and/or website are: a short workshop on International Perspectives on Teaching and Research with Virtual Exchange aimed at Young Researchers of the JMU Research Academy; the fall 2019 iterations of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and EVOLVE online training programmes and of course the ITL Certificate itself. The blended learning modules with VE offered by the Career Centre were mentioned in the newsletter and through postcards and posters in German and English (in order to recruit foreign students) and the Career Service Centre's social media channels and website[88].

Also, an introductory meeting about VE with colleagues from the International Office active in the Coimbra Group Academic Exchange and Mobility Working Group, took place in November 2019 to discuss the establishment of supportive and collaborative structures that aid the implementation of VE. In addition, a meeting with international partners chaired by the Vice President for

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[86] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/career/news-careerletter/meldungen/single/news/gute-lehre-vortrag-virtual-exchange-2/

[87] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/career/veranstaltungen/erasmus-virtual-exchange/

[88] https://www.uni-wuerzburg.de/career/veranstaltungen/erasmus-virtual-exchange/

internationalisation in December 2019 and Ms Förster attending the first conference on Virtual Exchange by the German Academic Exchange Service[89] (DAAD), followed.

Ms Förster points out that all the above mentioned activities and interactions show "how synergies between the different networks and collaborative structures (Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, EVOLVE, the Coimbra Group) actually do have a significant impact on implementation processes in HEIs". She also mentions "the effort and time that went into mentoring and training through her contacts with the VE community of experts and practitioners, as an important message to convey." In order to precisely explain the benefits of VE, especially for students at the JMU, Dr Retsch invited an Erasmus + Virtual Exchange facilitator for an introductory workshop on VE in September 2019 and again in June 2020:

> *At first hand the participating students increasingly become aware of the fact that VE not only offers a training of their foreign communication skills in an intercultural and digital setting but also other transversal skills such as critical thinking and global responsibility on highly discussed topics like sustainability, solidarity and climate change. Within the classroom based sessions, students discover the necessity to add their competence profile with digital and intercultural competences.*

In the ITL certificate including VE training or VE coaching participation was as follows:

- One teacher (plus Ms Förster herself) completed the spring 2019 iteration of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Basic Training.
- Two teachers (plus Ms Förster herself) took part in the autumn iteration of the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange TEP Advanced Training; one dropped out though.
- Two teachers from JMU plus two *ProfiLehre* staff (Ms Förster included) completed the TEP Basic Training in January 2020.
- There is an ongoing iteration of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange TEP Advanced Training: Number of participants is unknown at the time of writing.
- There is an ongoing iteration of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange TEP Basic Training: Two *ProfiLehre* staff are attending, number of JMU teachers unknown at the time of writing.
- Ms Förster offered 3 introductory workshops on VE; altogether 15 participants attended
- Numbers of coachings on VE: 12 teachers received coaching.

[89] https://eu.daad.de/service/veranstaltungen/2019/de/72305-documentation-virtual-exchange--borderless-mobility-between-the-european-higher-education-area-and-regions-beyond/

Table 23 below shows the VEs implemented at JMU.

Table 23: *Virtual Exchanges Implemented JMU*

Project/course/teacher	Years of implementation	Number of students or teachers	Other
Several VE projects implemented by Prof Dr Grafe together with a partner in the US	Since 2010 - ongoing	unknown	Different kinds of VE projects in the field of media pedagogy
Blended learning modules with online facilitated dialogue and and iOOC at Career Centre	Winter semester 2019/2020 (pilot phase)	10 Students attending 2 VEs	Cultural Encounters iOOC (offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange) and Social Circles (offered by Soliya & SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange)
Blended Learning modules with iOOCs and online facilitated dialogue at Career Centre	Summer semester 2020	9	Countering Hate Speech iOOC (Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange) Credits: 5 ECTS-Points + digital badge
Blended Learning modules with iOOCs and online facilitated dialogue at Career Centre	Summer semester 2020	11	Sustainable Food Systems iOOC (Offered by SPF under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange) Credits: 5 ECTS-Points + digital badge
Blended Learning modules with iOOCs and online facilitated dialogue at Career Centre	Summer semester 2020	8	June 2020 Climate Change Social Circle (Offered by Soliya under Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange) Credits: 3 ECTS-Points + digital badge

4.9.5. Key challenges and future steps

The challenges and future steps for VE activity to be continued at the JMU are the following: in the first place, Ms Förster and Dr Retsch have become aware that implementing VE in the institution is a slow process because:

> *It can't be taken for granted that relevant stakeholders have a clear idea about what VE is and how it could enhance teaching & learning, internationalisation and global skills development at universities (....) there is a general internationalisation strategy according to which it makes a lot of sense to implement VE, but the approach is not mentioned.*

As a second challenge, Ms Förster mentions the establishment of supportive and collaborative structures that aid the implementation of VE which is also a topic for the International Office.

The third, and maybe biggest challenge, is the fact that much of the VE activity has been made possible thanks to the funding received by Quality Pact for Teaching of the Federal Government and German States. This funding scheme will end in 2020 but a perspective for after 2020 has been developed since October 2019. At *ProfiLehre*, the interventions related to VE will be resumed as much as possible:

It is clear that the teams at *ProfiLehre* and the Career Centre are determined to keep addressing the topic of VE as much as possible with stakeholders at different levels of the institution (students, educators, heads of departments and central administrative institutions, the international office, the Vice Dean of internationalisation) and by looking for collaboration with other stakeholders both in, and outside of, their own institution:

> *Since our Career Centre has already received very positive reactions about the current program offers we are looking forward to new cooperations with coordinators of other Key Qualification programs and well chosen contacts within the political, social, economic and pedagogical study programs. The number of interested students has increased significantly during the last days. (Dr Retsch)*

After embedding Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange as a pilot project in the Career Centre, the Career Centre asked for constructive feedback. The participants of these courses were more than positive. Every one of them reported that the courses went beyond all their expectations. They highlighted the valuable content of the discussions and the possibility to improve one's English language and communication skills. While Social Circles help to understand the concept of VE and to share opinions with people from all over the world, the iOOCs consist more of getting to know one topic very well by discussing, reflecting and doing project work. Furthermore, participants told about new friendships with people from different parts of the world, that they made in their courses and which is one of the key goals of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. A participant reflects on the attendance to the iOOC Sustainable Food Systems: A Mediterranean Perspective as follows:

> *In my iOOC we were between 7-15 people who were talking two hours per week about sustainability and its different characteristics. We discussed how the mission to design a more sustainable production and consumption of food can succeed. It was very important to listen to opinions from people of different cultures and to gain experience beyond western thinking in order to broaden my horizon. As I will spend my last Bachelor's semester abroad with Erasmus, it was also a good training for me to speak English regularly and to deal with different dialects and expressions.*

Summarized, the feedback on this programme could not be more positive and the Career Centre is glad to share these experiences also with further students: "We are looking forward to the next iOOC: The Big Climate Movement, which will take place in October for 9 weeks the first time."

Dr Retsch has also taken on the challenge to create the Career Centre's first self-contained VE project with a partner at a foreign university. Next to this, the Career Centre is looking into possibilities for cooperation with the Department of Educational Sciences:

> *This department is offering a programme called Education, Ecology and Sustainability to students in the field of pedagogy. Within this programme students can participate in different seminars with various topics and get a certificate for this. Because of the interdisciplinary orientations of the above-named certificate, it will be a useful combination with the Social Circle about Climate Change and Sustainability of Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange and again a further step to collaborate within the University.*

With respect to the future of VE, in light of the Covid-19 pandemic, Dr Retsch confirms that the entire university has shifted from face-to-face teaching to remote learning and that all faculties, central institutions and administration departments have engaged to make available more resources for remote learning for all subjects, teaching, research and other activities in the 2020 summer semester. She received many positive offers from teachers and Erasmus Coordinators to explain to students the benefits of the special Career Centre VE programme which will work with the International Office to convince students to plan their periods abroad differently. The Career Centre will continue to offer the described VE modules and will also focus on developing more career opportunities in the area of international communication tasks.

For Prof Grafe the pandemic has shown us that teaching and learning at university level using digital devices has become vital. VE will be of high relevance in educational sciences and in university teaching in the future so extensive international and collaborative efforts should be made to advance this important field of education.

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Appendix: Semi structured interview protocol

a) General questions (start, definition, purpose)
   i) How did VE get started at your institution? Who or what event has initiated it? Are there champions of VE or persons leading VE initiatives?
   ii) How Is VE defined at your institution? Does it distinguish between different forms?
   iii) What motivated you to get involved in Virtual Exchange and what does your institution want to achieve with it (e.g. digital / educational innovation, Internationalisation at Home/Internationalisation of the Curriculum, enhancement of students' employability skills, teacher professional development, other)? Is VE a strategic priority for your institution in (any of) these areas?
   iv) Do you know how many VE's have been implemented at your institution and how many teachers/students have been involved?

b) Strategy/Vision
   i) At present, who is driving/promoting the implementation of VE in your institution? What is the balance between bottom-up and top-down initiatives?
   ii) Does your institution have explicit publicly available written or digital (policy) documents/reports/other surrounding VE? If so, would you be willing to share them?
   iii) Is there a strategy for implementing VE across your institution? What does it involve? Which faculties or programs participate most?
   iv) Are the partner institutions involved in the strategies? How?

c) Organisation/Implementation
   i) What kind of staff (for example, coordinators/managers) is available for the organisation and implementation of VE? How important is this?
   ii) Is VE planned as a structural component in the curriculum? If so, how? Allocation of credits, inclusion in course descriptions, etc.
   iii) Is there a governance structure/formal decision structure on whether or not to start a VE project? If so, who are the decision makers? Is the exchange partner included?
   iv) Is the implementation of VE evaluated in some way? What are typical forms of evaluation or research?
   v) Is training in VE / use of VE by staff related to professional development programmes?

d) Support
   i) What technological and pedagogical support is available for educators regarding how to adopt VE in their courses and pedagogy? Do you offer training to this purpose? Who offers it?
   ii) Do you provide incentives for staff participating in exchange? If so, in what form: time release, career benefits, (financial) awards, other?

iii) Do you help staff to find a partner?

iv) Is support provided at each side of the exchange?

e) Outcomes and objectives

i) What is the scope of VE in your institution?

ii) What issues and challenges have been faced, regarding awareness building amongst stakeholders, implementation, organisation etc)? What has been done to overcome these?

iii) What are the institution's future plans to further develop/mainstream VE?

iv) Are there people in your university leading VE initiatives? Are there (other) champions of VE?

Is there anything else you would like to discuss in relation to VE in general or at your institution?

EVOLVE Project Team

University of Groningen	Sake Jager Gerdientje Oggel Juan Albá Duran André Rosendaal Hongying Peng Fester Possel Steve Thorne
Université Grenoble Alpes	Elke Nissen Catherine Felce Catherine Muller Sabine Lhotellier Augustin Lefèbvre Rozenn Gautier Isabelle Rousset
University of León	Robert O'Dowd Ana Rosa Arias Gago Begoña Fernández Gutiérrez
The Open University	Mirjam Hauck Linda Plowright-Pepper Quan Nguyen Tim Lewis
Jan Dlugosz University	Malgorzata Kurek
University of Warwick	Teresa Mackinnon
University of Padua	Francesca Helm Alice Baroni
Malmö University	Shannon Sauro
Sharing Perspectives Foundation	Casper van der Heijden Sophie Millner Bart van der Velden
Search for Common Ground Soliya	Rafael Tyszblat Salma Elbeblawi
Coimbra	Catarina Moleiro
SGroup	Mariana Sousa Valère Meus