

Virtual Exchange & Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)

Virtual Exchange is an accessible, ground-breaking international experience, which leverages on new technologies and does not entail physical mobility. Organized jointly between at least two universities in geographically distant locations, Virtual Exchange is a form of student-centred learning, consisting of little traditional/lecture-based teaching so as to encourage a learner-led collaborative experience aimed at developing greater understanding of the common project, and/or discussing interdisciplinary topics with a challenged-based approach.

Students work remotely in intercultural (and often inter-disciplinary) groups, either autonomously or with a facilitator, who encourages active participation of group members and helps create a positive and collaborative debate without interfering with the contents of the course.

Virtual Exchange distinguishes itself from other forms of online learning in several ways:

- The focus is primarily on people-to-people interaction and dialogue whereas the primary focus in many ‘traditional’ e-learning programmes is on content
- The learning goals or outcomes include soft skills that are often not formally recognized, such as the development of intercultural awareness, digital literacies, group work, etc.

Finally, a key tenet of Virtual Exchange is that intercultural understanding and awareness are not automatic outcomes of contact between different groups/cultures. Virtual Exchanges need to be intentionally designed to promote intercultural learning and collaborative learning. This requires an understanding of pedagogic design, intercultural communication and transnational collaboration. It also requires dedicated support, incentives and recognition.

Closed questions for activity description	Detailed description	
Place: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On campus ● Off campus (online) ● Blended 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Off campus (online) 	<i>VE / COIL activities are - by definition - implemented only off campus (online). These activities can be part of Blended activities, such as BIPs, or can be preparatory and/or follow-up activities for physical mobility.</i>
Pace: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-paced (at their own pace) ● Time bound (synchronous/asynchronous) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Time bound (synchronous/asynchronous) 	<i>VE / COIL activities are normally time bound with both synchronous and asynchronous activities. Normally, asynchronous activities are individual activities and are preparatory activities or individual reflection activities linked to the synchronous activities. Synchronous activities are normally dialogues or team-working activities in a challenge-based format.</i>
Access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Open ● Restricted ● For limited number (add comment, what is the maximum number of participants) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● For limited number (add comment, what is the maximum number of participants) 	<i>VE / COIL activities are generally for a limited number of participants, which is normally bounded by the number of available facilitators. Participants normally work in groups of 5/6 members in order to allow an effective and manageable dialogue and inclusive participation. Each team is facilitated by an external facilitator.</i> <i>Moreover, depending on the VE topic, participation may be restricted to participants with a specific education background. On the contrary, in case of interdisciplinary VEs, the target group is broader.</i>
Funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-funded ● Grant/ Government funded ● Alliance-funded/ project funded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-funded ● Grant/ Government funded 	<i>VE / COIL can be funded by all types of grants depending upon the availability for the participating HEIs.</i>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free of charge/ funded by university • Other (comment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alliance-funded/ project funded • Free of charge/ funded by university • Other (comment) 	
<p>Inclusion into the curriculum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of the curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ the compulsory study subject ◦ the elective study subject • Extracurricular • Both options are possible (included/ apart from it) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part of the curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ the compulsory study subject ◦ the elective study subject • Extracurricular • Both options are possible (included/ apart from it) 	<p><i>VE / COIL activities can be included in the curriculum, more easily as elective subjects, but also as compulsory study subjects (or part of a compulsory study subject).</i></p> <p><i>VE / COIL activities can also be extracurricular, especially when their topic is highly interdisciplinary and /or when their aim is to develop soft and transversal skills.</i></p> <p><i>The way VEs / COILs are included in the student career highly depends on the topic.</i></p>
<p>Open questions of activity description</p>	<p>Detailed description</p>	
<p>Volume of the activity Length in ECTS/ semesters</p>	<p><i>VEs / COILs can provide ECTS (normally they do, and this is desirable). Length can be diverse depending on the specific activity (at least a month)</i></p>	
<p>Price of the activity If the academic offer activity has a fee (as indicated in question above), what is the fee</p>	<p><i>VE / COIL activities should be offered without any charge to the student</i></p>	
<p>Student application & selection How students can apply and/ or are selected/ approved for each activity</p>	<p><i>Depending on the VE format, a student selection might be required or not.</i></p> <p><i>If the VE is a compulsory study subject (or part of it), there will be no selection, as all the students taking that subject participate in the VE.</i></p> <p><i>If the VE is elective or extracurricular activity, then participants must be selected via a transparent and public call for application which guarantees equal treatment of applicants. The call can be opened to all the students or only to some categories, depending on the VE topic and on the skills / knowledge required to participate in the VE. The selection criteria might be composed of a mix of foreign language requirements, academic standing and student's motivation.</i></p>	
<p>Student evaluation What methods are used to evaluate student performance in each activity</p>	<p><i>Evaluation methods are set jointly by all the teachers involved in the VE design and delivery and can be different from one VE to another, depending on the expected learning outcomes and specific activities to be carried out.</i></p> <p><i>Students can be evaluated based on reflective reports or videos, technical /academic reports, presentations, online portfolios, etc. The reflection on the activities should be part of the assessment.</i></p>	
<p>Recognition of student results How student results are transferred (if applicable)</p>	<p><i>Student results are automatically recognised at their home university after they conclude the activity. They are part of a study subject, so the marks (if any) and the credits are included into the final assessment and should be made visible as a result from an international study experience using an open badge dedicated to VE activities. The open badge is necessary because VE is not necessarily a mobility activity: credits can be issued by any of the universities involved in the VE, and this is not formally a mobility activity</i></p>	
<p>Sustainability strategy How the sustainability of each academic offer would be ensured</p>	<p><i>Sustainability should be assured from professors' side. An important step would be to have the teaching hours linked to VE activities formally recognized within the standard teaching hours for each professor, and not on top of that.</i></p> <p><i>To ensure sustainable funding, not only from project budget, universities are offering additional funding possibilities: Erasmus (e.g. KA2 or VE projects) or internal budget, according to their possibilities. This funding can be used as an incentive for teachers who are developing VEs and can be used, for instance, to pay for facilitators, tutors, or also meetings with the teachers of the other</i></p>	

	<p>universities (it is true that meeting in person helps the design of activities, especially if the involved teachers do not know each other's already)</p>
<p>Support</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How students are supported while studying through each academic offer activity • How teachers are supported to develop each academic offer activity (administrative, academic support, training, etc.) 	<p>Students are tutored (academic tutor) and / or facilitated during their VE activities, but not strongly. VEs are typically student-led activities with only a general supervision by the teacher or a mild facilitation by a third person (professional facilitator).</p> <p>Training of professional facilitators is desirable.</p> <p>The university could / should provide training courses to teachers who are keen to design a VE course, in order for them to understand the VE characteristics and design methodologies.</p> <p>Teachers should be supported by an instructional designer who supports the teacher in the design of the VE activities in order to fulfill the required specificities of dialogue and learner-led activities (none of those features are spontaneous and they must be intentionally embedded in the course).</p>
<p>Infrastructure</p> <p>What infrastructure and technical equipment is necessary for successful implementation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • for teachers • for students. 	<p>For both teachers and students, the most important technical equipment is their computers' video conferencing tools and stable internet connection.</p>
<p>Analysis and QA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What data (and how) is collected to evaluate each academic offer activity success; • What QA tools/ policies are existing to assure quality (if there are any) 	<p>Pre and post VE surveys are very useful tools. The "pre" survey supports the student to self-assess the starting point and the "post" survey allows the student to reflect on the learning experience and its results. This is also useful for the teacher to assess if the VE was able to deliver the expected learning outcomes. Several aspects of the VE can be assessed, such as: the accomplishment of the learning outcome(s), the intercultural experience, the interdisciplinary aspect (if any), the facilitation, etc.</p>