



Virtual Exchange

**Information package for
teachers**

Testimonials

“The impact has been extremely positive in many ways. The students became **more aware of cultural differences, improved their speaking skills** and are feeling more confident about their capacity to communicate with speakers of the foreign language.

“I believe that in order to prepare our students for the 21st century, Virtual Exchange offers a unique opportunity **to foster their employability and life-long learning skills** in a way that would be impossible in the traditional face-to-face classrooms we find in most educational settings in Spain.”

[Margarita - Associate Professor, Autónoma University of Madrid, Spain](#)

“The collaborative activities aimed at raising awareness were complemented by facilitated dialogue, and the session helped us be **respectful and open-minded about other cultures**. We also had the opportunity to understand how Spanish teachers are viewed abroad and this was surprising to me. Colleagues from other countries have the impression that we are far more traditional in our teaching methods than we are! **I think it’s been a great help with our professional development.**”

[Abraham - English language lecturer, Florida Universitaria in Valencia, Spain](#)

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What is virtual exchange I

In virtual exchange, the word “exchange” means sharing ideas, thoughts, visions and cultural practices amongst students. Virtual exchange is... →

How can I as a teacher offer virtual exchange to students?

You can simply replace one part of your course with a virtual exchange component!



...an established term and can also be considered as “an umbrella term”. Other terms used: telecollaboration, online intercultural exchange, globally networked learning environments, collaborative online international learning (COIL).



...a teaching method, a component within your “normal” course.



...planned together with a colleague from a partner university.



...usually offered in a blended format, meaning your course will consist of “normal” contact teaching at your home university + an interactive virtual exchange component with a partner university.

What is virtual exchange II

Roughly defined, virtual exchange is considered as something students participate in as part of their home university course, receiving credits from their home university.

Virtual exchange includes the following aspects →

Sustained interaction between your students and partner university students (not just one session) → Students will engage with difference and develop their intercultural understanding.

Synchronous sessions via technology → Students will use video conferencing tools for real-time interaction with partner university students.

Sessions are held in small groups. → Small group size allows for more personal dialogue and greater contribution from students

Supported by educators or facilitators → Dialogues are guided and outlined for example around certain themes and joint tasks.

Experiential learning → Students will learn by taking part in interactive sessions and by reflecting on their experiences.

Learner-led → Learning through dialogue means that students will be seeking mutual understanding and co-creating knowledge in small groups.

Soft skills → The learning goals or outcomes include soft skills (group work, self-confidence, cosmopolitanism, etc.). Virtual exchange focuses on constructive interaction and is not a content-centered part of the course.

Virtual exchange is NOT:

Online courses/distance learning/virtual mobility at another university

Courses without real-time, technology-enabled small group dialogue or interaction

Creating social media groups or non-moderated programmes

Why participate and what to achieve?

- ▶ Learn and create something new and expand your competencies as a teacher.
- ▶ Contribute to creating new ways of internationalising the curriculum.
- ▶ Help students engage with students from other cultures and increase their intercultural understanding.
- ▶ Make internationalisation more accessible to those students who are not able to participate in other forms of internationalisation.
- ▶ Help students to develop their employability skills.

Examples of virtual exchange

See more sample projects on the [UNICollaboration website](#).

“Nadia teaches entrepreneurship at the Higher Institute of Technological Studies of Béja (Tunisia), and her partner, Gosia, is a research and teaching assistant from Cracow University of Economics. She gives classes in strategic management and international negotiations. (...) Together they developed a project which explores entrepreneurial eco-systems in European countries.

‘It helps students be aware of the differences and similarities between Poland and Tunisia’, explains Nadia. “We want them to feel inspired to adopt new practices.’ Gosia explains that comparing and contrasting practices with another country is a good way of making us aware of what we do in our own society.”

(Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange Handbook for International Relations Officers)

How to design a virtual exchange component?

The virtual exchange component can be:

- simple and uncomplicated: you can substitute one part of an existing course with virtual exchange.
- short: for instance, 5 weeks within a semester long course. It can also be longer – the exact length is up to you and the partner!



The main idea is to use virtual exchange to add an intercultural dimension to your course and look at the course theme or topic from a new or different perspective.



Both partners design their own courses independently, apart from the joint virtual exchange component, which is designed together. This means the course content and learning outcomes may be different for each partner.



Find a partner before making detailed plans for the virtual exchange component. The idea is to share the planning task equally with the partner and create the component together.



Technology and apps should not define the course content. First define the content and the desired learning outcomes, then choose the suitable technology.

How to find a partner I

- Use your own networks – perhaps you already know someone suitable!
- See the online [platform by UNICollaboration](#) for potential virtual exchange partner candidates.
- Ask for help from the [International Mobility Services](#). They can give you more information about the current partner universities of Tampere University.
- [ECIU University](#)
- Tampere University [partner universities and networks](#) (see "International networks" and "International students" for more information)

How to find a partner II

The partner can be from the same field or a different field. Cross-disciplinary virtual exchange and cooperation can create new and original ideas and perspectives.

Starting with someone you know may be the easiest option.
Compatible personalities and ways of working always help.

Don't be afraid to look beyond Europe for even more diverse cooperation possibilities!

Step-by-step example:

1. **Your own course:** Decide whether virtual exchange is something you would be able to embed into your course and whether you have the time and resources to carry it out.
2. **Finding a partner:**
 - Option 1: Ask if one of your colleagues abroad is interested or use your networks.
 - Option 2: See the online platform by UNICollaboration for interesting collaboration ideas or leave your own message there.
 - Option 3: Check out the list of ECIU University partners and other partner universities of Tampere University. If needed, contact the International Mobility Services for more information.
 - Consider whether you could cooperate with someone from a different field!
3. **Needs and objectives:** Discuss what each partner is looking for in this cooperation and jointly specify the needs and objectives for both. Design the content for virtual exchange together with the partner.
4. **Suitable technology:** Discuss which technology would be the easiest for everyone involved and make the decision together. If needed, contact IT Services for questions regarding the technical aspects.
5. **Schedules, arrangements, and other practical details:** Decide on schedules and arrangements together and come up with a plan B, in case you encounter technical problems during the virtual sessions.

Practical tips I - rules



Create a common set of rules together with the partner, including netiquette. Students can be included in this process as part of the course.

Practical tips II – technical issues

- ▶ Discuss both partners' technological readiness and digital competencies well in advance.
- ▶ Partners should choose the technology together. Choose something both partners are familiar with.
- ▶ Always go with the simplest possible technology to avoid unnecessary technical difficulties.
- ▶ Technical issues are a natural part of the digital working environment and communication. Nevertheless, always have a plan B and a technical support person available for the virtual sessions.
- ▶ Don't assume students are digital natives.

Practical tips III – cultural perspectives



Pay attention to cultural perspectives and discuss the main differences. Spread awareness and think of non-judgemental ways to overcome any challenges.



Some of the typically clashing perspectives include:

1. perception of time: flexibility vs. punctuality;
2. speaking rules: being open and talkative vs. being quiet and reserved;
3. level of formality and hierarchy; 4. gender roles/norms



Remember:

- All differences are not cultural and not everyone from a specific culture behaves the same way.
- One country does not automatically equal one culture.

Practical tips IV - language



If one of the parties are native speakers, think of ways to balance this within the virtual component.



The idea is to offer virtual exchange to a diverse group of students. Find ways to deal with different levels of language proficiency among your students.

Practical tips V - schedules



The annual schedule of the partner institution may differ from ours. Discuss this in advance with the partner. Also note the different time zones when planning virtual meetings.



Typical sources of problems in scheduling include:

1. crammed programme, 2. unrealistic schedules, 3. overwhelming number of assignments for students, 4. insufficient amount of time for teachers to assess the assignments.



Remember to reserve enough time for planning!

Where to get support?

Your faculty:
curriculum process,
peer support

Teaching and Learning
Centre (TLC):
pedagogical support

International Mobility
Services: general
virtual exchange
questions, university
partners and networks

IT Services:
technical support