

EDITORIAL

VIRQUAL has fulfilled all activities and tasks that the consortium announced for 2011. The partners of VIRQUAL feel very proud for all the achievements and the high interest received from the audience. Although this newsletter you are reading now is the last produced by the project, we nevertheless hope you enjoy it and distribute it amongst your colleagues. There is still the possibility to join the social networks created by the project and insert news and information on activities related to Virtual Mobility, Learning Outcomes, e-Assessment, EQF and Recognition of Prior learning. If the stakeholders continues posting news in the project on-line tools then the network will continue updated with information of interest such as forthcoming events. There is no doubt the subjects highlighted by VIRQUAL will become increasingly important for all Higher Education stakeholders as distance education takes a stronger and more important role in our society every day.

Latest dissemination activities attended by the VIRQUAL consortium

The VIRQUAL partnership conducted a number of very successful dissemination activities at the recent S-ICT 2011 and 42th EUCEN Conferences, held respectively in Vienna and Genoa, in November. The main aspects concerning the VIRQUAL Model for virtual mobility were addressed both in the keynote and in specific workshops as well as in special panel discussions with stakeholders. Amongst others, it was addressed how the VIRQUAL model and guides contribute to help learners, institutions, companies and governments dealing with different scenarios of higher and continuous education organization and legislation implement student mobility at a large scale across Europe.

The debates concerning the 'Institutional', 'Teacher' and 'Learner' versions of the VIRQUAL guides were attended by several experts, teachers and learners who had the chance to have an in-depth look at the document and analyze the relevance of these tools in order to provide institutions with the capacity to improve transparency and facilitate virtual mobility. Participants concluded that this guide covers of the most significant aspects that arise when institutions deal with issues of student's mobility. In this sense, they've all felt the VIRQUAL Model and Guide will indeed help institutions and teachers design new programmes and courses in a more friendly way to foster of virtual mobility across the old continent. Besides this, institutional representatives also remarked issues related with inter-institutional agreements (e.g. accreditation, validation and transparency) and are confirmed that those are some problems in implementing virtual mobility more widely. The same observations were made by participants in the Genoa Conference. It should be underpinned however, that participants at these roundtables all mentioned how decisive institutional commitment is for assuring the quality of the learning process, thus also assuring the credibility of the virtual mobility process. Tools supporting virtual mobility exist and it is just a question of applying the proper methods and procedures to facilitate mobility.

S-ICT conference – Feedback from participants

The sessions dedicated to the project Virqual in the conference S-ICT 2011 "Virtual Mobility" (http://www.ai.tuwien.ac.at/s-ict_2011/) were composed by a plenary session, a session to analyse the guides for different stakeholders and a final plenary session to discuss a better future use of the project results. The first plenary session was made by four partners presenting the model, guide for learners, guide for teachers and guide for institutions. The final plenary session was led by Carme Royo from EUCEN and had the participation of a former Erasmus student from TUWien Mr. Gergely Rakoczi, of Prof. António Teixeira from EDEN and of Dr. Bart Rienties from University of Surrey and University of Maastricht. The debates organised by VIRQUAL at the recent S-ICT 2011

Conference, held in Vienna on 3rd and 4th November, were lively and attended by a variety of stakeholders participated (students, teachers, higher education institutions, professional associations). They analysed the outputs of the project and its relevance for students, higher education institutions and course designers. All agreed that simplicity and transparency of the process is the key to its success and expressed that the VIRQUAL model and guides contribute innovatively to this goal. Stakeholders were very positive regarding the development of virtual mobility in the near future and its relevance to quality improvement of higher education provision in Europe. All seemed convinced the link between virtual mobility and the EQF could be essential for that. Besides this, institutional representatives also remarked important organisational issues related with inter-institutional relationship and confirmed that the VIRQUAL tools are very important to solve the key problems in disseminating virtual mobility. The main points that the participants highlighted are:

- The ILO database entries are useful and its entries could be used as a checklist for any teacher
- Accreditation details of the courses is missing in the template
- The purpose of each course could be addressed and added to the template
- Learning Outcomes should be written for each guide to inform the user
- The assessment matrix should be redesigned to make it easier to use

In the framework of the conference, VIRQUAL presented the opening keynote address and organized a workshop and a stakeholder's panel discussion. All the main aspects concerning the VIRQUAL mobility and how the VIRQUAL Model and guides can contribute to its wide-scale implementation across Europe were discussed.



42nd EUCEN conference – Feedback from participants

The strand prepared for the 42nd EUCEN Conference “Bridging the Gaps between Learning Pathways” (<http://www.eucen.eu/node/3704>) was divided into three sessions. The first one was dedicated to a presentation of the project results in a Socratic structure with the help of project partners with the participation of partners that delivered and explained the project to the attendants. The second session consisted in a hands-on workshop to apply the guides and tools to individual experiences and obtain the feedback from participants. This session was led by project partners acting as animators of the session and others performing the tasks of the session rapporteurs. The third session was an extended open debate with some experts led by project partners. In this session there were four students from the University of Genoa, Dr. Chrisann Schiro-Geist from the University of Memphis (USA)

and Dr. Martine Carette from the Université de Lille 1 (France). Dr. Chrisamm Schiro-Geist made a presentation about the issues related with Globalization and Accreditation about Rehabilitation Education and Dr. Martine Carette about the questions of Recognition of Prior Learning. The students were especially active in the discussion about the guides and were interested in using the VIRQUAL model for the virtual mobility. Two of the four had already finished a master degree and were already looking for a job. The students gave feedback on the technical side of the learners' manual as well as the usability of the VIRQUAL model to benefit from it. The project had also a poster that was presented by partners during the poster session. In that regard, all contributions were helpful for improving our guides technically and also to take advantage of the useful comments that were received for making the VIRQUAL Model more understandable by learners, teachers and institutions. Some of the comments received were:

General Comments

1. The student/learner is primarily interested in whether the chosen course/module is accepted by his/her institution. Students would like to see the list of all courses/modules at the first instance rather than willing to check the suitability of the course/module to his/her needs.
2. Students thought knowing all pedagogical details of the courses such as learning outcomes, ECTS credits, Level requirements for assessment etc. was not so useful for them. Though, checking the course against these seemed reasonably acceptable.
3. Learners were happy to be able to check the course/module against a set of guidelines as proposed in the VIRQUAL Model (this would help them to convince their teachers or institutions of the suitability of the course/module chosen at a different institution/country).
4. Students commented that "*...keywords may differ in different languages, how will I know that what I select is the course I am looking for?*" and invited the project partners to consider addressing the issue of languages.

Technical Comments on Guides

1. The guide should comprise the scope of the VIRQUAL project placed at the beginning.
2. The steps to use the guides could be followed better with some illustrations or diagrams.
3. The readability of the table of assessment methods could be improved.
4. It was recommended to add some explanation on how to register to the ILO database.

VIRQUAL Webinar 3

The third webinar of Virqual was held on 20 October 2011. The topic was "EQF and recognition of prior learning" and the keynote speaker was Dr. Michel Feutrie from the Université de Lille 1, France. The webinar had forty seven registered participants and was managed by Ana Dias, Universidade do Minho, with the support of the webinar room provided by Barbara Class from the Université de Genève, Switzerland. There were many questions about the topic and the relations with the topics of the Virqual project. The webinar was recorded and is available in the project website under the theme Events.

VIRQUAL at EADTU

The Virqual project was presented at the conference of EADTU on 3rd and 4th November in Eskisehir, Turkey. The presentation was made by the partner Middle East Technical University with the title "Network for integrating

Virtual Mobility and European Qualifications Framework in Higher Education and Continuing Education Institutions – The Virqual Project” that is in pages 198 to 203 of the conference proceedings.

Université de Genève Workshop

The Université de Genève has held a seminar on 8 December “Développer la mobilité virtuelle et les learning outcomes pour la formation continue” where Alfredo Soeiro, Universidade do Porto, presented the project VIRQUAL and Dr. Diane Lalancette, OECD, talked about Learning Outcomes and the project AHELO. The presentations were followed by a debate with participants.

Plans for the future

The consortium decided that the network built by the project should remain open. You are invited to join the group and to enter information, news, description of activities, etc. on topics related to VIRQUAL at any of the following points:

- Official website: <http://virqual.up.pt>
- Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/VIRQUAL/81812403998>
- LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/groups/VIRQUAL-2000111?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr
- Email: virqual@reit.up.pt

The current VIRQUAL consortium is considering furthering the work done so far by working in a new project. The new project is considering implementing and testing the recommendations of the project. The feedback received so far is very encouraging due to the interest it raised among the several stakeholders. VIRQUAL will keep the members of the its network (active and passive) updated if any developments are done in this respect. The project has developed a website (virqual.up.pt) where all outputs are available and where those interested can register at the VIRQUAL network.

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