

The answers below are a proposal to be discussed. All the partners institutions contributions are welcome.

1. What is VM – definition and objectives (in students' perspective)

Virtual mobility can be defined as “a set of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) supported activities that realize or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching and/or learning”¹.

The term “activities” can be referred to teaching, learning or research.

The activities can be fully virtual (entirely at a distance and digital, without the need to travel) or blended (ICT is used to support physical mobility).

The aim of virtual mobility is to foster international and collaborative experiences to facilitate the knowledge of intercultural differences and to stimulate the development of intercultural competences.

The BEING MOBILE - Disseminating Virtual Mobility for Students and Teachers project² opts for the following definition: “Virtual Mobility is a form of learning which consists of virtual components through a fully ICT supported learning environment that includes cross-border collaboration with people from different backgrounds and cultures working and studying together, having, as its main purpose, the enhancement of intercultural understanding and the exchange of knowledge”.

The European Commission strongly believes in virtual mobility and defines it as “a complement or as a substitute to physical mobility (Erasmus or similar) in addition to a type of independent mobility which builds on the specific potentials of on-line learning and network communication. It may prepare and extend physical mobility, and/or offer new opportunities for students/academic staff who are unwilling or unable to take advantage of physical mobility³.

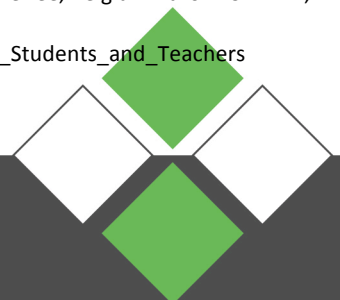
Virtual mobility can support (fully or blended) physical international exchanges, international internships and the internationalization of the curriculum (a course or part of it, seminars, workshops,...)

Based on these definitions, the keywords for virtual mobility are: ICT, internationalization, collaboration, intercultural, teaching and learning.

¹ Johannes De Gruyter, Mart Achten, Ilse Op De Beeck, and Wim Van Petegem. "Virtual Mobility: Definition and Types." In *Home & Away: Conference Proceedings*, eds. Mart Achten, Ilse Op De Beeck and Wim Van Petegem (Heverlee, Belgium: EuroPACE ivzw, 2010), 19.

² http://www.virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/BEING_MOBILE_-_Disseminating_Virtual_Mobility_for_Students_and_Teachers

³ http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/guide/glossary_en.html



2. What is a⁴:

a. Virtual course/seminar?

Learners in a higher education institute engage in virtual mobility for a single course (as part of a whole study programme) or a seminar (series) and the rest of their learning activities take place face-to-face in a traditional way.

b. Virtual study program?

Hereby an entire virtual study programme is offered at one higher education institute, giving students from different countries the chance to take this programme without having to go abroad for a whole academic year.

c. Virtual placement?

Student placements are organised between a higher education institute and a company (sometimes in a different country). In the virtual equivalent students are using ICT to support their internship, giving them a real-life experience in a corporate setting without the necessity to move from the campus to the company or to relocate to another country for a certain period of time, and providing them with a practical preparation for new ways of working through (international) collaborative team work.

d. Virtual activity to support Physical mobility?

Virtual mobility enables both better preparation and follow-up of students who participate in physical exchange programs. Preparatory activities could include student selection at a distance through video- or webconferencing (for checking social and language skills) and on-line language and cultural integration courses. Follow-up activities will help students to keep in touch with their peers, scattered around the world, to finish their common research work and/or paper work. They could also take on the form of a so-called 'Virtual Alumni' organisation, to foster life-long friendships and networks.

⁴ Source: http://being-mobile.net/pdf/BM_handbook_final.pdf



3. Why would I undertake a Virtual Mobility activity/experience? What are the advantages of Virtual Mobility (if possible make a list)? Which skills can I develop?

Virtual mobility can offer you many advantages:

- It facilitates cultural exchanges and interactions for students who don't have the possibility to travel,
- it gives you flexibility in access to learning, regardless of the geographical location, financial situation, personal circumstances, etc
- it widens options in terms of subjects offered by other universities and of different learning methodologies,
- it lowers the costs of mobility,
- you can develop tele-collaboration and team work skills,
- through the collaboration with people from other countries you can develop intercultural skills and get aware of different points of view,
- you can meet and become friend with people from different countries and create the basis for physical mobility,
- you can develop your ICT skills through the use of many collaboration and communication tools,
- it will enhance your self-responsibility, autonomy and pro activeness,
- it reduces the impact of students' mobility on environment (green mobility).

4. Which technologies/ICT tools are used to realize Virtual Mobility (synchronous/asynchronous tools; horal/written production)?

Information and communication technologies that are used in the framework for virtual mobility are particularly, but not exclusively, focused on communication or collaboration. These technologies can support both synchronous and asynchronous interaction. Popular tools are video and web conferencing, chat, discussion forums, weblogs, wiki's, e---portfolios, sharing tools and social networking tools. Many of these are integrated in a virtual learning environment supported by the university.⁵

⁵ EU-VIP manual "Make it work" http://www.euvip.eu/resources/Manual_ONLINE.pdf



5. Which potential difficulties can I come across and how can they be solved?

When choosing a virtual mobility experience you have to be aware you might face some difficulties.

- Technical problems: you might find it difficult to use new ICT tools or they might not work properly. You will need proper instructions and time to practice and experiment with virtual communication. It is important that you know who in your university can give you technical assistance on this kind of problems and contact him/her for help,
- Availability of a supervisor: the choice of a supervisor is extremely important. You will need to count on a reliable person who can guarantee the presence in many of the collaboration activities and who can monitor the tasks,
- Lack of physical contact: in a fully virtual experience you will never meet face to face the people collaborating with you. You might feel isolated and feel the need of a physical contact. To overcome this difficulty videoconferencing and synchronous communication tools can be really useful as well as the organization of sessions for non-tasks related communication, and team working
- Language barriers: you will have to be able to understand the language and have a good level in comprehension, written and oral production. During your experience your language skills will improve,
- Motivation: you have to be motivated to respect the deadlines for the tasks you area assigned to. Motivation can be increased defining clear deadlines, providing test or exams and team working activities through an high quality of the e-coaching, and integrating the human factor (synchronous communication, sessions for non-tasks related communication, team working).

6. Which skills do I need to undertake a Virtual Mobility activity?

Virtual mobility is for all but before beginning make sure you have some specific talents and skills. Here is a short checklist of the characteristics a virtual mobility student should have:

- Motivation
- Self responsibility
- Pro activeness
- Language knowledge
- ICT skills
- Respect for diversity and intercultural differences
- Self reflection capability



7. How can I propose for a Virtual Mobility experience? Who can I contact?

In a University where virtual mobility programs are running, there will be an administrative office to receive students' applications.

Often this task is undertaken by International Relation Office, but the office might not be the same in each university.

There might be a virtual mobility coordinator who can be a teacher, tutor or a person in charge of the international exchange of students. The coordinator provides efficient support for potential virtual mobility students during the pre-virtual mobility phase and for students during their virtual experience in order to enhance their performance.

8. How is Virtual Mobility evaluated? Will I gain credits for this experience and how? Will there be homeworks/exams/evaluation tests?

The institution responsible for hosting virtual mobility students will decide which learning outcomes will be available for students virtual mobility, how many credits will these learning outcomes correspond to, what assessment methods and criteria will be used.

According to the European Commission, full academic recognition is given to the students for studies and courses based on agreements for the evaluation, validation and recognition of acquired competences via virtual mobility. In this context, cooperation agreements are key to ensuring sustainable mobility schemes⁶.

The condition of student academic record at a host institution is an obligatory condition in order to achieve academic certificate on the basis of study records and to ensure credit transfer recognition by two or more collaborating institutions, on the basis of commonly agreed academic forms and collaboration agreements.

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/guide/glossary_en.html

