



## Virtual Mobility Before and After Student Exchanges

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## GOOD PRACTICES IN E-COACHING: HOW TO COACH EXCHANGE STUDENTS AT A DISTANCE

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The VM-BASE project (Virtual Mobility Before and After Student Exchanges) wants to raise the quality of student exchanges by offering virtual support, both before, during and after the physical mobility. Virtual support is used to prepare and follow-up the mobile student, as a complement to the existing exchange programmes. Special attention is paid to support teachers in coaching exchange students at a distance (e-coaching).

The project started from a study giving an overview of the state-of-the-art in virtual exchange support measures and a needs analysis, making an inventory of student and teacher needs.

In general, the incoming students are paid a lot more attention to than the outgoing students. Both the size and the structure of the organization as well as the number of exchange students, among other things, affect how students can be supported. While the advantage seems obvious (teachers will benefit from better prepared students, and students themselves are more productive during their Erasmus stay) real course modules, tools and systems to facilitate the preparation of exchange students do hardly exist nowadays.

Nevertheless, possibilities on how students can virtually prepare their physical Erasmus are manifold. One can think of orientation guidelines (providing exchange students with very practical information on everyday life in the host institution to up-to-date information on courses they can follow at the host university), pre-selection tests (offering exchange students tools and tests to assess themselves in how far they are prepared for the studies at the host institute) or preparatory courses (on language, culture, digital literacy,...).

After the physical exchange, students are often forgotten, even though, in most cases, support and guidance are also needed in this final stage. Return activities aim at debriefing the student/teacher and evaluating the mobility experience, but also at reinforcing the social and content-oriented networks that have arisen during the period abroad.

The major activity of the VM-BASE project consists of several pilots focusing on the orientation and selection of students, preliminary courses for students preparing for a physical exchange and examination facilities at the end or even after the exchange. Each pilot testing out different kind of e-coaching methods. Next to the pilots the need and feasibility of a Virtual Alumni Association for Erasmus students is being investigated.

Some examples. The Katholieke Hogeschool Leuven introduced a "Virtual Buddy System" for exchange students whereby incoming students (already before their stay) get a 'virtual' buddy (a local student) that will be their 'real' buddy once they arrive at the institution. As a means of communication e-mail, Skype and MSN are used.

The "Virtual Window to Study Abroad" (University of Tartu) is an online course combined with forum on which experiences among former and future outgoing students can be shared.

The Katholieke Universiteit Leuven designed a course and preparation tests for a Master in Physiotherapy. In order to equalise the initial level of the knowledge of the (international) students for the Master, a course and tests are available on the K.U.Leuven learning platform which students can already access from their home country and allowing them to realistically test their chances to succeed for the master.

A final example is the "Exam Aquarium" (at TKK Dipoli), which is a camera-guarded and computer-equipped room reserved for writing exams and requires special software designed for writing exams. Teachers create the question database and can verify answers on the Internet. For (exchange) students it offers great flexibility as it allows them to reserve the time to use the exam aquarium in advance and to take exams independently and at a time suitable for themselves.

Students, teachers, international relation officers as well as higher education institutions in general can benefit from the results of VM-BASE which are collected in a manual with concrete guidelines, validated procedures and recommendations for blended mobility activities and a manual on good practices in e-coaching.