



Editorial

Europe has been investing in developing and implementing policies and tools to promote trans-European cooperation and mobility in many fields, including in Education. The Bologna Process is creating a European Higher Education Area where mobility, transparency and competitiveness are key concepts. The recent formal adoption of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was an additional and important step to achieve mobility in higher and continuing education. Joining e-learning and mobility together, we obtain a new concept Virtual Mobility, defined by elearningeuropa.info as "The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to obtain the same benefits as one would have with physical mobility but without the need to travel".

Virqual is a project in the form of a network that **proposes to help educational and training institutions to achieve Virtual Mobility and to guarantee EQF implementation through e-learning**, aiming at finding specific obstacles in institutions and proposing concrete and innovative solutions. Virqual will promote cooperation and joint work among partner organizations and will link with related initiatives. It will address other educational networks to help the dissemination of the results. More specifically, the **objectives** of Virqual are:

- a) To define, exemplify and promote discussion about using **e-learning as a scenario** to foster national and international collaboration of Higher Education and Continuing Education organizations to achieve **virtual mobility implementation**.
- b) To critically assess and exchange results, ideas and innovation about European, national and local policies and initiatives in the area of Virtual Mobility, aiming at **identifying obstacles and facilitators for collaboration**.
- c) To cooperate in the elaboration and implementation of concrete Virtual Mobility scenarios, by establishing partnerships among the network institutions, **and providing solutions and specific tools for different processes and stakeholders** involved in the process.
- d) To elaborate, implement, make available and disseminate **tools to analyse, support, manage** at Institutional level, contributing to improve the Virtual Mobility in Europe while trying **to implement EQF requirements**.

It is expected that through the results of the Virqual network, other European HE and CE institutions will find guidance, case studies and tools to integrate Virtual Mobility in their practices, contributing to the construction of a realistic European Learning Space.

This is a proposal of the project that aims at disseminating and promoting the activities of the current Virqual Network. It intends to **encourage other institutions to participate** in this network, joining the SIGs and contributing to the development of the European common knowledge in this area. This participation may be done as passive members willing to receive information or as active contributors in the research, in the debate and in the definition of the framework of the integration of virtual mobility and EQF.

Possible participants of this network are invited to join one of the **four discussion groups** that will address research questions of the **SIGs** (see next page). These are in fact the work-packages where the contribution of other institutions will be more influential and more useful to all, partners and newcomers alike. Of course the other work-packages are accessible for contribution but with expected reduced impact on the results.

In fact the definition of the terms of how this linkage, between virtual mobility and the system of the EQF, will be established, will be tested and will be accepted is the main advancement expected from this project. Therefore the contribution of a large group of interested partners and of other institutions may lead to an **easier acceptance** of any proposal by the learning community of e-learning. Another possible benefit of being involved as non formal partners can be the **access to the information** created in this project with an eventual creation of a network to progress in this theme.

If you would be interested in being an associated partner or other type of collaboration, please contact us through the e-mail: virqual@reit.up.pt and let us know to which SIG you would like to contribute.





SIG 1: Virtual Mobility, ECTS and E-learning

In the first phase, this SIG will gather information about the implementation of the Bologna process and about national/international mobility programs and integration in the labour market, looking for obstacles to mobility, concrete problems.

It will research how ECTS have been quantified on online/blended courses, what information is available for calculating ECTS and, in particular, which indicators have been used.

On a second phase, SIG 1 will aim at identifying potential barriers and facilitators to virtual mobility and will try to define specific rules to apply virtual mobility and ECTS calculation recommendations for on-line activities. [\[+ Info\]](#)

SIG 2: Fundamental Research

SIG 2 aims to **identify** and address the **obstacles** and **constraints** in implementing Virtual Mobility and European Qualification Framework in education. Through extensive analysis of initiatives in these two respective areas, a **model** will be provided to **propose** a set of **solutions** and **strategies** to overcome abovementioned obstacles.

At this stage the partnership is collecting relevant material for analysis ranging from completed projects and initiatives to reports, articles, conference proceedings etc. As a result, several **case studies** together with a **database** of information **will be available** for future analysis. [\[+ Info\]](#)

SIG 3: E-learning & evaluation of learning outcomes of EQF

One of the **obstacles for virtual mobility is the difficulty of mutual recognition of certificates**. There have been different efforts to meet this challenge. However, the European and national qualification frameworks don't allow for detailed recognition of single courses or other learning units of short duration because of their rough granulation.

The newest approach is the **application of learning outcomes** instead of input-based criteria for educational planning and recognition purposes. But this cannot be successfully done unless it is not fulfilled in cooperation of as many involved institutions as possible.

By means of an e-mail based survey among vice rectors, vice presidents and other persons responsible for teaching at European HE and CE institutions we try to achieve both, **to promote the idea of learning-outcomes-based course and curriculum design** and to get a **picture of the current European situation**.

First experiences indicate that most European countries are still at the beginning of the movement towards learning-outcomes-based planning. But their **up-to-date results** of learning outcomes descriptions could already bring forth a draft pattern of both, **the art of transparent description** and a **taxonomy of learning outcomes**. [\[+ Info\]](#)

SIG 4: E-learning contributions to EQF

In this SIG we intend to find and better understand the **contributions of e-learning to the EQF implementation**.

Besides the SIG is making an in-depth research to find the international and European groups, projects and experts that are already working on the field in order to involve them in the SIG discussions and **to create and share knowledge and practice**.

At the moment we are developing a **strategic document** about "the contribution of **e-learning to EQF implementation**" that will contain the main questions on the issue, namely:

- o **EQF Research and Implementation** at European and National levels
- o E-Learning and EQF **strategies** and main issues
- o The **European Government strategies**, if any,
- o The Professional Associations and other **stakeholder's strategies**
- o The **e-learning contributions** to EQF in **HE and Life Long Learning at Academic**, Continuing Education and Corporate Levels and finally presents
- o **Cases Studies and Examples** of e-learning and EQF projects, activities, and initiatives.

If you are working on e-learning at HE level and you also study the ways EQF/NQF is being implemented in your Country / University, please **contact us** via e-mail anadias@tecminho.uminho.pt or join our **VIRQUAL group in facebook**. [\[+ Info\]](#)

INFO - VIRQUAL

- **VIRQUAL Project starts at Porto**
The city of Port wine gathered the past 23th of January to the partner institutions of the VIRQUAL project. The work days were developed to establish the planning and guidelines of the project.
- **VIRQUAL Project begins with the ABC**
The partners of the VIRQUAL project begin their works defining the terminology to use along the project. This activity has been carried out using an electronic forum. A wiki has been created to include consistent terminology related with the project
- **VIRQUAL is in Facebook**
Social networks are an important tool to communicate and share information with people. You can find general information of the project on the wall of FACEBOOK
- **VIRQUAL Project was at EDEN 2009 (Gdansk, June 2009)**
Second project meeting was hold in Gdansk (Poland) during previous day at the EDEN Conference 2009. In this event Alfredo Soeiro and Rita Falcão (Universidade do Porto) presented one paper titled *A Proposal to Harmonize Virtual Mobility and the European Qualification Framework*.
- **VIRQUAL Project was at 6th European Conference In E-Guidance (Riga, September 2009)**
Last 16th of September Rita Falcão presented VIRQUAL Project in the conference by Videoconference.
- **other interesting activities about e-learning:**
 - o 5th International Conference on Open and Distance Learning-Open and Distance Education for Global Collaboration & Educational Development 27 to 28 November 2009, Athens
 - o ICERI 2009 International Conference of Education Research and Innovation. 16 to 18 November 2009 Madrid, Madrid, Spain

