

EDITORIAL

VIRQUAL is implementing all the tasks scheduled for its final year. Since January 2011 the project done many activities, such as: organising two webinars (one in April on “Virtual Mobility” and another in May on “Learning Outcomes and eAssessment”); drafting and testing the handbook for integrating Virtual Mobility and EQF; attended various events (including the IMS Global Learning Conference 2011 in USA, where the project was awarded a prize); etc.

Below this brief editorial there are more details on all these activities and the rest of activities prepared from now to the end of the year. We hope you enjoy this newsletter and that you join our big community!

Award from IMS Global Learning

The VIRQUAL Network was awarded with the “**Learning Impact Leadership Award**” in May 2011 at the IMS Global Learning Consortium Conference 2011, held from 16-19 May 2011 in Long Beach, California (US).

The award was presented on 18 May following the evaluation of various applications submitted to the jury. The VIRQUAL project was presented by Ana Dias (TecMinho) and Rita Falcão (Universidade do Porto) - see photo. The various awards that comprise the Learning Impact Awards are designed to recognize the worldwide use and greater impact of technology to support learning. This unique program evaluates established, new and research efforts in context at an implementing learning level.

You can read more about this programme following this web link:

<http://www.imsglobal.org/learningimpact2011/>



Webinars

The two first VIRQUAL webinars took place on the scheduled dates. The number of participants was very high (i.e. over 55 in April and over 60 in May). The two sessions were recorded and are available to see on-line on the VIRQUAL's web site <http://virqual.up.pt/?q=node/7>

1. **Virtual Mobility** – The expert speaking in this webinar was George Ubachs, Director of EADTU.
2. **Learning outcomes and e-assessment** – The expert speaking in the second webinar was Karine Tremblay, Senior Survey Manager at OECD Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO).

The feedback received by participants has been very positive and encouraging. The project is very pleased with the result.

The third and final webinar will be “**EQF and Recognition of Prior Learning**” and has been scheduled for 16 September 2011. The name of the expert talking at this webinar will be confirmed in due course.

You can registration for this final webinar by sending an e-mail to soeiro.alfredo@gmail.com. Please, be aware that there will be a limited number of participants allowed. We encourage you to register as soon as possible in order to ensure you have a place in this session.

The participation in VIRQUAL webinars is free, supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission.

Next events on the pipeline for VIRQUAL

The three main events in the pipeline are:

- **EDEN 2011 conference in Dublin**, where VIRQUAL will run the workshop *“Workshop on Learning Sustainability: From e-Competences to e-Credits”*, make a plenary presentation on the Closing session (Prof Alfredo Soeiro, *“Valuing Learning for All, Everywhere and in Any Mode: A Dream?”*) and present a poster. Dublin (IE), 19-22 June 2011. To see the full programme of this event, you can follow this link http://www.eden-online.org/2011_dublin.html
- **S-ICT 2011 conference in Vienna**, where VIRQUAL will have a seminar and a hands-on session. Vienna (AT), 3-4 November 2011. The website of this event is http://www.ai.tuwien.ac.at/s-ict_2011/ There is a Call for contributions out for this conference. We encourage you to visit the website of the conference and send your contribution to the conference organisers as soon as possible. The schedule to present the papers is presented at the website.
- **EUCEN conference in Genoa**, where VIRQUAL will run 3 workshops under the global title of *“Integrated tool for recognising virtual qualifications: VIRQUAL”*. Genoa (IT), 16-18 November 2011. The official conference website is <http://www.perform.unige.it/eucen/index.html>

VIRQUAL will also be present at Edulearn11 in Barcelona (ES), 7-8 July 2011, where VIRQUAL will present the poster and the full paper *“Network for integrating virtual mobility and European Qualifications Framework in Higher Education and Continuing Education institutions: the VIRQUAL project”*.

TASK 1 – Guide for Virtual Mobility

VIRQUAL has prepared a draft version of a guide or handbook. This guide intends to provide a general introduction to the topic of virtual mobility (VM) in Europe, contributing to Higher and Continuing Education Institutions which offer e-Learning courses to implement Virtual Mobility in the framework of the European Higher Education Area. The main aim is to help establishing a common understanding on possible organizational, pedagogical and technical approaches to the implementation of Virtual Mobility within the European Qualification Framework.

It intends to be a step-by-step guide that may be used by students, course developers or Institutions, to help them to achieve Virtual Mobility in a diversity of scenarios. When referring to Virtual Mobility in the context of the European Qualification Framework, we are aiming at extending the current Erasmus experience by intensive use of ICT. Virtual Mobility lacks several components of the physical mobility, of course, but can offer other dimensions, including different learning pathways, creation of virtual communities, collaborative projects, and international cooperation with a lower investment.

The consortium has collected 13 Case Studies from 8 different countries and that have used the guide and its annexes with real courses offered at present. In general the feedback received from the testers is that the document is useful but some changes and improvements must be done.

If you are interested to have access to this document and test it within your institution, please, contact the project via email to virqual@reit.up.pt and let us know. The more feedback we receive the better the final product will be. VIRQUAL will be accepting this type of contributions until end of September 2011.

TASK 2 – Elearning and EQF

Task 2 has collected and analysed comprehensive data of the EQF implementation in Europe, compiling 32 country reports on EQF/NQF implementation, at levels 5 to 8. The report also includes the situation of e-learning in what concerns legislation and practice in each of the 32 countries.

For the model, the information will be presented in a format that allows for quick overview of the situation in a given country or comparison between different countries. This tool intends to contribute to the identification of potential obstacles and facilitators in Virtual Mobility scenarios that may include one or more countries. The information gathered constitutes the legal framework, at National and European level, that should be considered in Virtual Mobility situations.

TASK 3 – Global architecture of intended learning outputs

Task 3 developed tools and strategies to define, describe, write and assess Learning Outcomes. These tools help teachers and course developers to define the individual Learning Outcomes but that also to relate them to the correspondent modules and levels of the EQF Framework. The tool consists of a web-database, structured accordingly to the EQF levels and types of LOs and that uses other classification systems like ISCED code and ERASMUS subject code for better definition of LOs. The development of this tool was complex and included several intermediate tests with real users to achieve a version that is complete but not over-descriptive.

The main idea behind this work is that clear LOs are essential to achieve academic mobility, physical or virtual, to achieve transparency in Education and recognition. However, writing high quality LOs is not an easy task, not even for experienced teachers. This task intends to provide tools that facilitate the process but also, wants to provide examples, best practices that will guide other teachers in the process of defining, describing and assessing LOs. These examples as well as the templates will be compiled in the repository www.learning-outcome.net. This part of the model plays a crucial role in the achievement of Virtual Mobility. It defines what students are intended to learn and this should be fundamental for an informed decision when choosing a course to attend. Also, a clear statement of the Intended Learning Outcomes will provide the basis for the definition of assessment strategies, contributing for the whole education process.

How to participate in VIRQUAL activities?

The project is still welcoming people to join its network. You are invited to join and to distribute this information to others who might be interested to doing so. You can:

- visit the official website, read about our activity and see the results obtained <http://virqual.up.pt>
- join us via Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/pages/VIRQUAL/81812403998>
- join our discussions via LinkedIn http://www.linkedin.com/groups/VIRQUAL-2000111?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr
- join our virtual seminar in September by writing to soeiro.alfredo@gmail.com
- attend our workshops in Vienna and Genoa http://www.linkedin.com/groups/VIRQUAL-2000111?trk=myg_ugrp_ovr
- get involved using the guide prepared by Task 1 and sending your test to virqual@reit.up.pt
- or simply email us and request to be added to our network virqual@reit.up.pt

We are looking forward to welcoming you in our community!