EAIE

FORUM

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Discussing international education

MOBILITY
IN THE BALANCE

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

While the COVID-19 pandemic has in many ways left the world of physical mobility in suspended animation, new opportunities have emerged and may well be leading to a paradigm shift in approaches to internationalisation. The Summer 2021 issue of *Forum* thus explores whether alternatives to physical mobility are now gaining new ground, and what this might mean for the status of physical mobility. Conscious that student participation levels in outbound mobility were low prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, we sought contributions that assessed the opportunities and challenges afforded by the current moment of transition. I am indebted to fellow members of the EAIE Publications Committee Dr Jos Beelen and Ragnhild Solvi Berg, who joined me in reviewing submissions for this edition.

Authored by Tiina Piipponen from the EAIE Expert Community *Mobility Advising*, the opening article in this issue argues passionately that mobility still matters, and points to the need for increased staff professionalism in the face of an ever more complex external environment. Presenting an alternative view, Joyce Gelling from the Netherlands highlights the impact on institutions of immobile students, noting that new and alternative modes of mobility have required a range of adaptations to local systems and processes. While we generally consider staff and student mobility to be optional, Sjur Bergan (Head of the Education Department at the Council of Europe) looks instead at forced and involuntary mobility, taking the example of refugees and other displaced people and outlining the merits of the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees initiative.

Returning to voluntary mobility, Matt Greig and Björn Nyström from Sweden argue that the case for physical mobility is now clearer and stronger than before in the face of online fatigue and corona angst. Drawing from their experience as members of the Erasmus Student Network, Tajana Mohnacki, Wim Gabriels and Kaspars Ābelnīca nevertheless advocate for a student-centred approach to the development of new mobility programmes and the educational methodologies which underpin them. Meanwhile, Nawazish Azim and Syed Rahamat Ali from King Abdullah University of Science and Technology in Saudi Arabia outline the pros and cons of building digital community spaces via virtual exchange, and emphasise the importance of maintaining fluid and permeable transitions between physical and virtual mobility.

The interviewee for this issue is a student, Sorcha Leveque, a dual Irish/French citizen who has been studying in the UK and who has seen her mobility programmes interrupted twice for different reasons. Sorcha's reflections on her experience are fascinating, and I'm delighted that we could include a student testimonial in this issue.

Access to outbound mobility has been a key area of focus for institutions and mobility professionals for many years. As such, articles from Ainslie Moore and Brett Berquist (New Zealand) and Hugo Buitrago Carvajal, Nathália Cristina do Rosário and Jessica Schueller (Columbia, Brazil and Finland) will be of particular interest for those seeking to enable greater access, whether through virtual learning abroad, through other local opportunities or via transnational education. Maximilian Köster from Germany then usefully questions whether institutions have the appropriate support structures in place to facilitate new forms of virtual mobility.

A cluster of articles then looks at the particular situation of study mobility within Europe. Ana Beaven, Francesca Helm and Sara Pittarello from Italy outline different models of virtual exchange, drawing on the European Commission's recent Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiative. Kyriaki Rousou and Nadia Manzoni from the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture in the European Commission then highlight the evolution of the new Erasmus+ programme, with its horizontal priorities of inclusion, digitalisation, environmental sustainability and active citizenship. Michael Gaebel from the European University Association provides a timely status update on study mobility in Europe and looks forward to its next phase.

Closing out this issue, Randall Martin from the British Columbia Council for International Education in Canada invites us to reflect on new beginnings and the current opportunity to redesign mobility for a new world.

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MOBILITY
STILL MATTERS

With mobility hanging in the balance, perhaps the most fundamental questions confronting international higher education are: Does mobility still matter? Does the physical movement of students and staff across borders still have a role to play in the era of digital technology and climate change? A look at recent history suggests that mobility isn't (and shouldn't be) going anywhere anytime soon – but it will need to evolve to fit into the broader ecosystem of internationalisation.

Photo: Shutterstock

Those not working directly with mobile students may have assumed that mobility advisers haven't had much to do since mobility came to a halt in early 2020. However, those of us working in mobility advising – whether with outgoing or incoming exchange students or international degree students – have seen one of the busiest years in memory, one of unforeseeable twists and turns, with mixed emotions of frustration, uncertainty and little glimmers of hope.

As soon as borders of different countries started to close and governments started to call their citizens back home, with higher education institutions (HEIs) closing their premises, for the mobility adviser community phones started ringing, email inboxes started filling up and instant messages started beeping. As a mobility adviser, I felt like a 'front-line worker', contacting students and being contacted by students with varying questions, helping them to receive relevant information, searching and creating it for them, but also helping them to cope with uncertainty. As the COVID-19 situation and related restrictions continue, mobility advisers are left in a sort of survival mode.

The biggest glimmers of hope and joy for us have been witnessing how resilient our students have been, despite rapid changes in their plans and in some cases cancellation of long-held dreams. Despite a string of disappointments for some, many have managed to find a silver lining and positive outcomes and learning experiences from what they had. 2020 also has shown us how creative we can be in creating ways to manage constantly changing circumstances and to connect with our mobile students.

AN ECOSYSTEM FOR INTERNATIONALISATION
Although the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions have been absolutely devastating for student mobility, there is something to celebrate in this situation. With mobility on hold, there has been a great boost to interest in virtual exchange and intensified focus on Internationalisation at Home activities in general. Overall, HEIs have experienced giant leaps in digitalisation for teaching and learning and for providing support and services. From the perspective of mobility advisers, this is a fantastic and highly-anticipated development. Contrary to what many seem to perceive, mobility and Internationalisation at Home activities are not in opposition – rather, they are both important parts of what I call an ecosystem for internationalisation. Like in an ecosystem in nature, these different activities affect each other and work well together, and the loss of one or more would have a negative impact on others *(Fig. 01)*.

Contrary to what many seem to perceive, mobility and Internationalisation at Home activities are not in opposition

While a heightened focus on Internationalisation at Home activities and building of virtual exchange possibilities is a much-appreciated and long-overdue development, there is some concern among mobility advisers whether one of the side effects might be reduced mobility in the future. There are fears that HEI leadership and those deciding on funding will start to view mobility as too expensive and high-risk. Internationalisation at Home activities including virtual exchange would be seen as sufficient to tick the 'internationalisation' box and at the same time might seem to be cheaper and more inclusive. However, this would be too short-sighted. If we look for example at the principles of Internationalisation at Home in practice as described by Elspeth Jones and Tanja Reiffenrath, these include:
1. Offers all students global perspectives within their programme of study, whether or not they spend time abroad.
2. Moves beyond electives or specialised programmes.
3. Involves developing international and intercultural perspectives through internationalised learning outcomes in the formal curriculum.
4. Is supported by informal (co-)curriculum activities across the institution.
5. Makes purposeful use of cultural diversity in the classroom for inclusive learning, teaching and assessment practice.
6. Creates opportunities for student engagement with 'cultural others' in local society.

Short-term student exchanges

Internatio-nalisation of degree students

Work placement abroad

Virtual exchanges

ECOSYSTEM FOR INTERNATIONALISATION

Student exchange (sending/receiving)

Internatio-nalisation at home

Thesis/project work abroad

Internatio-nalisation of curricula

Figure 01.

7. Involves all staff, not only academics and international officers.
8. May or may not include teaching in English or another *lingua franca*.
9. Can include virtual mobility through online working with partner universities.
10. Fosters purposeful engagement with international students.[1]

Student mobility plays an important role in enhancing and fostering these activities: having international exchange and degree students in the classrooms and as part of the university community is a way to increase the availability of international and intercultural perspectives for students, teachers and non-teaching staff. Indeed, yes, mobility still matters.

COMMITMENT TO MOBILITY

Now that travelling for tourism is dramatically restricted, studying abroad provides a more sustainable and considerate way to travel and explore the world and develop international competencies; travelling for studies is indeed essential travel. We mobility advisers know that such transformative learning experiences are essential for our students' personal and professional development. The Erasmus Impact Study is one of many analyses highlighting the impact of mobility on students and institutions. The need for international competences is now even greater, with growing recognition of global challenges and the need for shared global responses.

Though mobility is now on hold, within the European context, commitment to mobility is luckily still there. The new Erasmus programme aims to increase mobility targets threefold,

from 4 million to 12 million during the programme cycle, and also aims to address concerns about inclusive mobility by creating more varied mobility opportunities and encouraging participating institutions to reach out especially to students from underrepresented groups. While the new Erasmus programme now includes also virtual exchanges as part of a new blended mobility funding mechanism, indeed as the Erasmus Student Network states: "Quality physical mobilities should remain a priority, and human contact, engagement and integration should continue to be at the core of the programme."[2]

Professionalism at a high level is needed to ensure the continuation of safe yet rewarding student mobility. How do we continue to conduct student exchanges and degrees abroad despite the impact of the pandemic? What is possible and what should we take into consideration? Mobility advisers need to help students to make educated decisions regarding their time abroad and equally help institutions to make educated decisions on mobility and how to provide it safely. Mobility still matters, and the work done by mobility advisers is needed now more than ever.

— **TIINA PIIPPONEN**

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2. Erasmus Student Network. (2020). *The revised EU Budget: Is the investment enough to make Erasmus+ inclusive and sustainable?* Retrieved from https://esn.org/news/erasmus-budget-proposal-reaction

THE IMPACT OF THE IMMOBILE STUDENT

Student mobility –
or lack thereof – does
not exist in a vacuum.
The movement of students
between universities and across
borders has subtle but far-reaching
ripple effects for both the home
community and the host community.
As the balance between physical mobility
and other international activities gradually
recalibrates, higher education institutions will need
to consider new strategies for a changed landscape. ▶

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The COVID-19 crisis has facilitated – or rather necessitated – a shift to online mobility, virtual mobility and various forms of blended mobility. Higher education institutions have had to react quickly to ensure mobility requirements are met within study programmes. Physical exchanges and internships abroad have been postponed, restructured or even cancelled. Now, after more than a year of improvised and temporary solutions, institutions are exploring more permanent forms of mobility for immobile students – students whose mobility experience does not involve being physically present at the host institution.

Online mobility has a significant impact on home institutions and their allocation of funds

How do these immobile students affect the services of the home and host institution, and how do they affect student communities and local society? In traditional exchange semesters and internships, the key element is the immersion of the student in a different academic system, a new student community and a different culture, with the goal of having an impact on the student's maturity and cultural awareness. Online mobility, however, has a significant impact on home institutions and their allocation of funds.

CHANGING ROLES
Online and virtual forms of mobility require new developments at the host institution. Students are welcomed online, receive virtual tours of the host institution and take their courses online. What they will not do is ever meet the support team of the host institution in person. Consequently, they will look to the host institution only for short-term guidance, mostly in administrative matters. For more intensive or long-term guidance, they will fall back on their advisers at the home institution.

It is a similar story for courses. On location, during a traditional exchange semester, a student was reliant on the course offer of the host university. If courses did not fit entirely, resolving that was part of the learning process. Now, however, if a course does not fit, the student can fall back on courses offered by the home institution. So in online and virtual forms of mobility, with students not being present at the host institution, some of the roles of the host institution shift back to the home institution. This requires more from the home institution during the exchange semester, in terms of guidance and support, while at the same time taking away some of the requirements and expectations of the host institution.

REAL-TIME SHARING
With students doing online and virtual mobility, exchange communities shift from the country of the host institution to the country of the home institution. Resources that would have been put into activities for incoming exchange students can partly be reallocated to virtual and online mobility activities, accessible to home *and* visiting students. But basically, students will remain part of the student community at the home institution, sharing their mobility experience directly with their peers. During traditional exchanges, they may have shared experiences with the home front via social media, for example, but now they can share them in real time and in depth with their friends and fellow students.

Resources that would have been put into incoming exchange students can partly be reallocated to virtual activities, accessible to home *and* visiting students

While not meeting the strict definition of Internationalisation at Home because it involves soft skills instead of credit-obtaining activities, this will give the student community at the home institution a form of indirect intercultural experience. To give an exaggerated and stereotypical example, a student might be doing online mobility at a Dutch institution and complain to their friends at their home institution about the strict Dutch deadlines. Real-time intercultural awareness!

LOCAL SOCIETY

Similar to the impact on the home student community, the impact of mobility when done online shifts to the local society around the home institution. Physical exchanges affect the host area

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

From the perspective of the host university, the initial shift to virtual and online mobility leads to less impactful student mobility: not meeting incoming students in person, not being able to contribute

From the perspective of the host university, the shift to virtual and online mobility leads to less impactful student mobility

socially and economically. Local society and businesses benefit from the influx of international students, who bring with them their cultures, consumptive demands and their experience, which can be applied to local projects.

A shift away from traditional exchange on location does not, however, take away these benefits entirely. Immobile home students have the possibility to continue at their jobs and do internships locally that would otherwise have been done by visiting students. They will bring their online intercultural experiences in a similar way and can continue to be active members of their community. Take, for example, an incoming exchange student contributing to the development of a website for a student organisation. They would be able to point out cultural sensitivities and user (un)friendliness. But a home student can do the same by applying the knowledge and skills acquired during their online mobility.

significantly to the student experience. Objectively, however, less impact on the host institution and host community does not equal less impact for student mobility as a whole. Educationally, socially and economically, the impact of the mobility shifts to the home institution.

How do we reach out to exchange students? What services should we provide to online guest students? But equally important, what services should we provide to home students engaging in online or local mobility? These topics require institutions to consider reallocating funds to services for the immobile exchange student, such as preparatory meetings that aim to enhance technical skills for an optimal online experience; online or physical community-building; guidance groups and services; blended mobility assignments; and grants for home internships. The possibilities are endless, as is the impact of the immobile student.
— JOYCE N. GELLING

WHEN MOBILITY IS FORCED

'Compulsory mobility' takes on a new connotation when considering those truly compelled to cross borders in search of safety. Often overlooked in discussions of education abroad, the flow of refugees and other displaced persons is perhaps a unique piece in the greater mosaic of student mobility, but one we must not lose sight of in considering the way forward for international higher education.

In higher education policy, 'mobility' has positive connotations. Many institutions and public authorities seek to increase it and many students want to be mobile – preferably for real rather than virtually.

One kind of mobility is, however, involuntary: that of people forced to flee their homes. Sadly, this has increased, at least in a European context, over the past decade. Refugees often live in difficult conditions and for the most part would rather not have left their homes. The prospects for a return are uncertain. The average length of displacement is 20 years for refugees and more than 10 years for 90% of internally displaced persons. Unlike other forms of mobility, numbers are only marginally affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

One kind of mobility is involuntary: that of people forced to flee their homes

In considering 'mobility in the balance', we therefore also need to consider involuntary mobility. 'Refugees' may be convenient shorthand, but involuntary mobility also comprises many other situations, including asylum seekers, internally displaced persons, forced migration and persons waiting for their formal status to be decided.

A CULTURE OF WELCOME

One important element in seeking to ensure that refugees can lead meaningful lives in their host communities is developing a culture of welcome. Host societies must see refugees as a potential resource and not as a problem. They must recognise that refugees are as diverse as any other group. Some come with traumas that make it difficult for them to function in a new environment, but many come with both motivation and competences. Some dream of a quick return to a radically changed homeland, rid of the regime that drove them into exile, but many understand that their exile will be long and that they need to settle into a new society without forgetting about their homeland.

A culture of welcome may seem like something of a utopia in present-day Europe, but many individuals, associations and communities go against the prevailing stream. As recently as the summer and autumn of 2015, refugees arrived in numbers that most of Europe had not seen for a very long time and received a warm welcome by both governments and civil society in several countries.

A culture of welcome is, however, not sufficient. We need not only the will but also the means to help refugees find their place in their new societies. Many come with qualifications but fewer come with the diplomas that could document their qualifications. Diplomas may not be the first priority when refugees have to uproot from their homes at short notice.

QUALIFICATIONS PASSPORT

We therefore need to devise ways in which we can assess qualifications that for good reasons cannot be documented. This is precisely what the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees (EQPR) aims to do. Launched in 2017 and now encompassing 11 European Networks of Information Centres (ENICs) as well as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, this Council of Europe project has a double aim: to provide a sound method for assessing qualifications that cannot be fully documented and to describe the assessment in a format that can readily be accepted if and when refugees move to a new host country. It aims to help make Article VII of the Lisbon Recognition Convention a reality, so that countries fulfil their obligation to assess refugees' qualifications even in the absence of documentation.

The EQPR methodology relies on international cooperation. Each applicant is interviewed by a team of two credential evaluators from different countries. Before the interview, the evaluators read the self-assessment completed by the refugee and check any documentation the refugee can provide. Even if the applicant does not have the diploma, they may be able to submit course plans, proof of registration at a university or similar documents.

At least one of the credential evaluators has specialised knowledge of the education system from which the refugee has qualifications, as well as the language in which it teaches. This specialised knowledge has in a few cases enabled the evaluators to establish that the applicant had no knowledge of the system or institution at which the qualifications had supposedly been earned.

Nevertheless, most applications for the EQPR are solid. So far, 525 of the 629 applicants interviewed have received the EQPR. It would, however, make no sense if refugees who then moved to another host country would have to undergo a new assessment. The standard format of the EQPR and the involvement of 11 ENICs should make it easier to gain acceptance for the EQPR across Europe.

The ENICs and National Academic Recognition Information Centres, as well as the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee, are also important in developing knowledge and understanding of the EQPR. In some cases, countries may need to change their legislation, a point included in a recommendation adopted by the convention committee in 2017.

The EQPR cannot replace a professional licence required to practise but it could help refugees qualify for the exams for the licence. In the COVID-19 crisis, many countries have called on advanced students in health fields to help out under the supervision of licensed health professionals. There is no reason why qualified refugees could not do the same, and some countries have allowed them to do so.

The EQPR has proved its merits, and more than 500 refugees from quite diverse backgrounds have received it. The next phase of the project will see a stronger involvement of those who can provide refugees with meaningful work or opportunities for further study. Ultimately, the goal is that any refugee can ask any ENIC for an assessment towards the EQPR, be assessed relatively

> By catering to involuntary mobility, we will give refugees the opportunities they deserve – and we will help ourselves in the process

STUDY AND WORK OPPORTUNITIES

The EQPR is intended to open doors to work or to further studies. More than 50 EQPR holders have obtained study places at Italian universities. One Italian scholarship scheme has been opened to EQPR holders and several EQPR holders have found work in areas relevant to their qualifications.

Some 10% of EQPR holders have health-related qualifications, which are relevant to professions that for the most part are regulated. Medical doctors and nurses are typical examples, as are engineers, lawyers and teachers.

quickly – still by an international team and mostly online – and get an opportunity to work or study. Then we will have succeeded in providing opportunities for well-qualified people who may not have come voluntarily but who are likely to remain in our societies for quite some time. By catering to involuntary mobility, we will give refugees the opportunities they deserve – and we will help ourselves in the process.

— SJUR BERGAN

MEETING MARKET DEMAND
SKILLS GAINED ABROAD

Traditional mobility is admittedly inherently flawed, not only due to its exclusive nature but also its frequent failure to cultivate an awareness of the skills developed while abroad. But rather than to put a nail in the coffin, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the crucial role physical mobility can play in supplying the skills that economies continue to demand. ▶

Photo: Shutterstock

Despite the funding available, the removal of barriers between nations and the tireless efforts of institutions to promote and support exchange studies, long-term physical mobility remains out of reach for many students.

The rise in the availability of other opportunities, such as internships, summer schools, field studies and short-term mobility, coupled with a greater emphasis on Internationalisation at Home, is key

LABOUR MARKET NEEDS

The benefits of international mobility are irrefutable. An Erasmus+ impact study in 2019 showed that, through exposure to the unique cognitive, emotional and social challenges of living abroad, around 90% of more than 70,000 international Erasmus students developed the type of hard-to-gain transferable skills that employers valued. Psychometric analyses indicate that this process is up to 400% as intensive as in non-mobile control groups.

collectives with dynamic upskilling capabilities. Intermittent reskilling and upskilling is not only a key to success but also a matter of survival. And this was before the volatility caused by COVID-19, with newly graduated Gen Z students now finding themselves competing with displaced mid-career millennials.

INHERENT FLAWS

This skills economy requires immense skills awareness from the individual. It demands that universities impart such skills awareness to their students, which provides an opportunity for universities to finally address the two inherent flaws of traditional mobility that have obscured its potential as a world-class soft skills training programme in the first place: low inclusion and low awareness of transferable skills.

Nannette Ripmeester, Founder and Director of Expertise in Labour Mobility, clearly illustrated this shortcoming when

The COVID-19 crisis has, paradoxically, made the case for long-term physical mobility clearer and stronger than before

to offering international experiences to a broader demographic. With the prominence of online education during the coronavirus pandemic, and with the availability of technology platforms to enable meaningful, real-time collaboration online, there is for the first time a real chance to offer all students and all staff at our institutions the opportunity to participate in an international experience.

What, then, is the fate of long-term physical mobility? Is it a carbon-emitting dinosaur that has no place in the modern institution's internationalisation toolkit? Indeed, in the era of feeling isolated and over-Zoomed, the value of meeting someone and experiencing something in the flesh is incontrovertible. We believe that the COVID-19 crisis has, paradoxically, made the case for long-term physical mobility clearer and stronger than before.

We believe that this long-term physical mobility is more important than ever. Why? The answer is that while physical mobility has lost momentum during the pandemic, the labour market needs to which it caters have not. As a matter of fact, they have only intensified.

The World Economic Forum's *Strategies for the New Economy* white paper frames skills as "the currency of the labour market".[1] What these words boil down to is that in today's labour market, an academic degree does not necessarily last us a lifetime. If a degree is what gives us access to the labour market, skills are the currency of trade once we are in. In the ongoing fourth industrial revolution, with its breakneck speed of interdisciplinary innovation and interconnectivity, success belongs to those who can adapt and self-lead, who form lean knowledge

If a degree is what gives us access to the labour market, skills are the currency of trade once we are in

she quoted David Hulsenbek, former Human Resources Director of Accenture in the Netherlands, as saying: "Yes, we do look for international experience, but simply studying abroad is not enough – you have to be able to articulate very concisely

what you have learned and how this can benefit your work for our organisation."[2]

This is common knowledge among former exchange students: transferable skills recognition is not automatic. It is an essential skill in itself, which needs to be trained and requires a language all of its own.

SHARED VOCABULARY

The EU European Skills Agenda for 2025 states it plainly: "While schools have a role to play, soft skills are often developed outside formal learning, at work and throughout life. It can be difficult to identify, recognise and communicate those skills. This is why in the next phase of EU action on transversal skills, more needs to be done to capture them."[3] This call to action reinforces the notion that employers require institutions to train their students to articulate transferable skills in an updated and skills-oriented shared vocabulary between institutions and the labour market.

This shared vocabulary finds its place in the World Economic Forum's metaphor of skills as the currency of the labour market, in the statement that "such a system demands a common currency – one that can recognise, certify, reward and enhance skills, and create a common framework".[4] For long-term physical mobility to maintain its value for students, universities and the labour market, it is our responsibility to ensure that we offer an experience that is based on conscious, guided skill development, and that this development is both an integral and integrated part of the mobility.

INCREASED VALUE

In framing long-term mobility and other international experiences in terms of their expected outcomes for a student's skill set, we are not only allowing students to gain radically increased value from their experiences, but we are also making these options more inclusive. No longer do students need to take a sabbatical for an experience with intangible benefits.

It is our responsibility to offer an experience based on conscious, guided skill development

We can more clearly articulate the value of physical mobility as a specific tool in our students' journey to employability. Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships such as Erasmus Skills and SkillMill are key components in achieving this.

With the plethora of funding programmes available to universities on both international and national levels, and through universities' continuing work on promoting and supporting mobility, we must start to increase inclusion and skills awareness in all types of mobility and internationalisation activities, including long-term physical mobility.

— MATT GREIG & BJÖRN NYSTRÖM

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STUDENTS AT THE CENTRE OF INTERCULTURAL CLASSROOMS

The rapid shift to online teaching and learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has brought many of the existing fault lines within international higher education into stark relief. However, the looming pedagogical overhaul can be seen as an opportunity to place students, rather than teachers, at the centre of intercultural education.

The COVID-19 crisis has impacted the learning environment of students in higher education drastically in the past year, requiring emergency solutions to educational needs. Now that we have had the opportunity to reflect, it is time to move from crisis management to recovery planning, using this as an opportunity to build an even stronger education sector.

Looking to the future, it is pertinent to ensure a student-centred approach in the development of educational methodologies in mobility programmes. In order to adapt to the challenges the world will undoubtedly face in the wake of the crisis, it is important to put competence development at the forefront and to ensure that intercultural learning – one of the key components of student mobility – remains intact.

STUDENT-CENTRED LEARNING
Students commencing their third semester of distance learning have reported that they are experiencing more anxiety and stress due to the shift to online learning.[1] Furthermore, research on 'Zoom fatigue' at Stanford University has indicated that the cognitive load students process during virtual classes is higher, while the lack of physical movement impacts their ability to perform cognitively.[2] The lack of interaction with fellow students also affects their motivation and their ability to process information through peer-to-peer interactions. These experiences will undoubtedly affect their expectations as well as their engagement going forward.

The European Commission's *EUROGRADUATE Pilot Survey* showed that students participating in an "activating learning environment" were four times more likely to report feeling prepared to enter the labour market than those who participated in more frontal education and were left to study alone.[3] There is a risk that current forms of online learning follow a teacher-centred approach that focuses on the transfer of

Photo: Shutterstock

knowledge and facts rather than on the development and recognition of competences and skills needed by students to ensure the skills mismatch described in the European Skills Agenda is bridged.

student-centred approach in mind. These solutions need to involve students in both the design and implementation, to respond to their personal concerns and needs in a virtual learning environment and to ensure that the desired learning outcomes are reached.

MOBILITY AFTER COVID-19

The proposition to develop specific methodologies for online international learning is not new. Methodologies such as Collaborative Online International Learning

opportunity to innovate and develop new online teaching methods. It is important that such innovations are successfully integrated into the regular curriculum and provide more international experiences for students as we slowly move on from the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is vital, however, as we return to business as usual, that we avoid potential cognitive bias, which could lead to the misuse of these methodologies. An integral part of a mobility experience is the opportunity to widen your perception of other cultures and people through intercultural exchange. Given that in online mobility the living environment does not change and there is a lack of physical human interaction, it will not be as effective in achieving this outcome. This and the aforementioned 'Zoom fatigue' can be obstacles to successfully introducing opportunities such as COIL to students.

A shift to student-centred, outcome-based learning remains necessary to prepare students for the challenges of a globalised world

A shift to student-centred, outcome-based learning remains necessary to ensure a focus on preparing students for the challenges of a globalised world that will be recovering from the COVID-19 crisis. However, according to *Bologna with Student Eyes 2020*, the successful implementation of student-centred learning across Europe is still inadequate.[4] When considering how international student mobility should emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, it is imperative that solutions are developed with a

(COIL) have already been discussed and implemented successfully in the past decade. However, the COVID-19 pandemic is unique in that it has necessitated a radical shift towards online learning for learners to continue their international experience while attending courses from their homes.

This rapid shift, while in some aspects highlighting the work that still needs to be done to ensure consistent quality of online learning – particularly in relation to accessibility, engagement and collaborative work among students – is a golden

To ensure that international experiences are available to a wider audience, physical and online international opportunities need to be developed together, focusing on their strengths so that they can complement each other. Empowering learners and giving them the means to shape their academic experiences will be an important step towards higher academic achievements, laying the foundations for the university of the future.

INTERCULTURALITY IS INTEGRAL

According to the *Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study*, living abroad, learning or improving a foreign language and meeting people from different cultures are the top three motivators for students to take part in mobility programmes.[5]

Mobile students find themselves in a highly intercultural setting, and interactions and dialogue characterised by elements of various cultures follow them in the academic and social domain. Communities that students form during their mobility are highly intersectional: their participants come from diverse backgrounds where they have developed different experiences, perspectives and opinions influenced by their gender, nationality, ethnicity, race and other diversity factors. While this type of setting is ideal for the development of intercultural competences, we need to do more than rely on its mere existence. Taking into consideration that online spaces offer this opportunity in a limited capacity only, intercultural learning and bridging the gaps between students should be a priority for universities, educators and communities.

After COVID-19, universities will play a key role in developing the intercultural competences of their students, and educators have a responsibility to facilitate their diversity to build truly impactful intercultural classrooms. The main difference between students in intercultural communities and students in mono- or multicultural communities who are studying the same material is the possibility to advance their learning by facilitating a peaceful and constructive dialogue where students are challenged by diverging opinions and perspectives on the same topic. Consequently, universities have the responsibility to prepare their educators to facilitate intercultural learning and continuously invest in the development of the intercultural and global competences of their educators so that they can build inclusive and diverse classrooms.

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

Intercultural learning does not only empower the university from within; it also empowers staff and educators to collaborate with other universities and encourage their students to form meaningful connections with the communities that they live in. Universities are an integral part of local communities and they should form better connections with civil society organisations, facilitating intercultural learning for mobile students outside the formal education framework.

Intercultural learning empowers staff and educators to collaborate with other universities

By building global classrooms, universities are investing in a global community where challenges and opportunities are interconnected and shared by citizens. Initiatives such as the European Education Area and European Universities can help universities foster intercultural learning and build intercultural competence among their students, staff and educators.

It is important not to be constrained by the limitations caused by COVID-19. Instead, we must look towards the future and focus on providing great mobility opportunities for students, especially those from marginalised groups, as this will help create an ever-broader landscape of international opportunities that students can experience during their academic life.

— TAJANA MOHNACKI, WIM GABRIELS &
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BUILDING COMMUNITY
IN VIRTUAL SPACES

After a year of quarantines and video calls, most would agree that something is missing when our social connections move online. The same holds for students seeking a sense of community and solidarity with international peers via virtual exchange. To recreate a sense of camaraderie online, touch-based 'haptic' technology like the tablet screen is due for an injection of the 'phatic': the kind of purposeless social communication we might otherwise call 'small talk'. It's time for virtual water coolers. ▶

Mobility programmes have long been the flagbearers of internationalisation on university campuses, but they have encountered disruptions over the past year. Moving beyond traditional models of mobility has been a crucial way to deal with this problem, but the almost-overnight move towards virtual exchange – previously uncharted territory for many universities at an institutional level – has not been easy.

Students who traditionally traversed physical space to engage with their peers in other countries are now engaged remotely and virtually with them. What has this move meant for international educators and students – and how can we

These digital tools, which create 'meaning' and 'value' in online interactions beyond space and time, involve smart devices that function by the sense of touch. Using touchpads and smartphones to log in to an online meeting or to access specialised apps for learning and teaching is all part of what is termed 'haptic' technology – haptic being the sense of touch, which is key to operating all digital tools.

Haptic technology relates to 'meaningful' communication between users, established by virtue of smart devices at our fingertips. Sight and sound are the accompaniments of this experience, but the push is derived from touching the physical surfaces of devices. In the

by physical distance and the intervention of the haptic is to promote the phatic – the language of the social heart. Haptic, used for the meaningful interchange of information, is in contrast with phatic communication – a body of language that is not deemed necessary; it is trivial and ephemeral communication and is often termed 'small talk'.

The feeling of solidarity in everyday life, which is a result of physical proximity and shared experience, is what is usually missing from digital life. By cultivating the phatic in digital spaces, we can create and sustain social bonds. It is content-free but promotes social warmth. Nurturing the phatic aspect of language and communication in online groups can lead to politeness, friendships being built and, in the most successful cases, a common collective identity being created.

Haptic technology relates to 'meaningful' communication between users, established by virtue of smart devices at our fingertips

build a community in this virtual space? That is a question that many of us have struggled to answer.

HAPTIC TECHNOLOGY
Teaching, learning, assessing and communicating in a digital space has undoubtedly ensured continuity of faculty–student communication and programme delivery in uncertain times. It is important to note that this could only be achieved through the use of a multitude of digital teaching and learning tools, with a focus on objectives such as effective lesson delivery, collaboration across teams, and honest and open feedback and communication among users.

most extreme, futuristic scenarios, haptic technology in education has also meant pondering possible innovative applications of telerobotics. As we move mobility programmes to a digital domain, cognisance of the immense possibilities that this brings can allow us to fully explore its potential.

PHATIC COMMUNICATION
While it has been possible to connect to each other virtually, it is difficult to build an online community in the absence of physical mobility, with users who feel a sense of belonging to the group. What we can do to counter the alienation brought

THE VIRTUAL WATER COOLER
How can this be achieved? We propose a two-step process. The first task is to create a conducive ambience for phatic exchange. Dedicating a space in which to interact and post content online is the starting

By cultivating the phatic in digital spaces, we can create and sustain social bonds

point; the content could be leader-generated at first before eventually being more user-generated. The idea should be to create a 'water cooler' environment that

encourages conversation on light-hearted subjects as a way of discovering and building connections.

The communication leader then becomes more of a facilitator, a space designer and a curator of user-generated content. In intercultural virtual exchange, for example, users can share interesting

to be in the future, is what creates a sense of common identity among all.

Creating this identity in the collective imagination of all users can lead to the shaping of a community. Successfully sustaining this community depends on how well the users have imbibed the sense of collective identity. If this sense is

The idea should be to create a 'water cooler' environment that encourages conversation on light-hearted subjects

narratives about their own culture. Anecdotes and stories recounted in this space often lead to a frank exchange of perspectives, with all viewpoints respected. Empathy, compassion and openness are values that create a comfort level among users and have to be encouraged in this environment. This establishes building blocks for collaborative networks and circles of influence in the future.

COLLECTIVE IMAGINATION
Once this is achieved, it is critical to aim towards the creation of a community in the collective imagination of the individual users. In spite of personality and cultural differences, it is important to view everyone as equal parts of a homogeneous whole. Leader-generated content has to aim towards defining what it means to be a member of the group; the user profiles, as well as opportunities and benefits of the group, are often a good choice in terms of content. The idea of what the users aspire towards, and what they mean

well imbibed, the user-generated content, containing that underlying identity, can keep the community flourishing and even spill from online to offline spaces after the virtual exchange has been completed.

In this way, both the haptic and the phatic can help in building digital community spaces. As many institutions hope to move to a hybrid model this year, offering both physical and virtual exchange, it is important to ensure that online mobility is as effective as possible and can work well alongside its physical counterpart. Building an online community can only help in today's world, after all, and should supplement rather than detract from the overall appeal of mobility programmes.

— NAWAZISH AZIM & SYED RAHAMAT ALI

IN CONVERSATION WITH
SORCHA LEVEQUE

JACOB GIBBONS
EAIE

In the summer of 2019, third-year student Sorcha Leveque was preparing to embark on a year abroad as required by her programme at Warwick Business School in the UK. Little did she know that her first semester would take her to a country where long-simmering social strife was boiling over into massive protests, only to be followed by another semester at one of the early epicentres of the COVID-19 pandemic. After a year of interrupted mobility, Sorcha reflects on what she gained abroad, her experience continuing an internship online, and her hopes for the mix of international experiences to be offered to students like her in the future.

First tell us a bit about yourself: what are you studying, where, and how far along are you in your programme? Was your experience abroad a required part of your study programme, or something you pursued out of your own interest? Have you participated in other international activities at your home campus?

SL: I was born and raised in France, with an Irish mother and a French father, and then decided to move to the UK to do my studies at Warwick Business School (WBS). My major is called International Business with Spanish; it's a major in business, but the language requirement is compulsory and represents 25% of my degree. And that determines where I get to go on my year abroad as well.

It's all good and nice to be studying for four years, but I kind of have to prove that I can do stuff as well

So for my degree, the year abroad is compulsory, and actually, I chose the degree *because* of the year abroad. We are given a lot of flexibility: you can either study for a year, work for a year, or do half and half, depending on what you're looking for. I decided to study in Chile for one term and work in Spain for a second term, just to get two perspectives from different countries. Also, I felt that after a four-year degree, I needed to get out of that with some professional experience. Otherwise, it's all good and nice to be studying for four years, but I kind of have to prove that I can do stuff as well.

Your mobility experiences in that programme have come at an interesting time. You first visited Chile in Fall 2019 at the onset of massive protests and social unrest there, and went on to Spain in Spring 2020 only to find yourself in yet another crisis. How have these unexpected experiences enriched your study experience?

SL: It was hectic, I won't lie. I was studying at the Faculty of Economics (FEN) at the Universidad de Chile from July 2019, and the protests hit in October, which meant that I had a good two months of studying and real experience of being at university there before they started. At the onset, the educational system became a bit chaotic because no one knew what to do. Classes were suspended, but I still stayed in Chile until the end of the semester. The protests actually enabled us to learn more about Chile: they came as a result of social pressures that weren't necessarily visible beforehand. People had had enough and it just exploded. If it weren't for that, I wouldn't have learned as much about all the problems that exist in

Chile, because despite being a developed and advanced Latin American country, inequality is a huge problem there.

After that, I found an internship in consultancy in Barcelona through the Warwick Business School Network, and that's where I was when the pandemic started. I was meant to be in Barcelona for six months, but I only spent two months in Barcelona before returning home and continuing my internship online. For the two months I was there, I did a bit of sustainability consulting and a bit of financial consulting. Because I was in the office and there were maybe 50 people working there, everyone knew I was there, and they also knew that I spoke French and English, so I also got to help people in other departments. And then I left because of COVID. I'm very grateful I got to continue the internship remotely, but at the same time, it's not the same. I wasn't surrounded by Spanish-speaking people, and obviously, the work was different. Personally, I did not enjoy working from home, and I could just feel my language skills deteriorating.

Where did you turn for support during these crisis moments? Were there particular services from your home or host institution such as international offices, counsellors, academic staff or coaches?
SL: The WBS undergraduate office has a small team who serves as our first point of contact for administrative things, and during our year abroad, they were really there for us. But when we were in Chile, there was a time difference, so when all

the protests started – which was a Friday, around 16:00 Chile time – it was nighttime in the UK, followed by the weekend, so we didn't hear from them for another 48 hours. But in the end, they were super understanding, and they let us know that if we needed to return home, they would make sure that we wouldn't be penalised academically or financially. It really felt like they were there to support us.

At the host university in Chile, they also took good care of us. When the protests hit, we had a Facebook group and daily news from the head of the international office – we even had her phone number. That's something I'm very, very grateful for: FEN was super organised to welcome the international students. That helped and encouraged me to stay; everyone from my cohort at FEN stayed, because we were all together, and we were receiving information from the university.

When COVID came, I received so many emails, and to be completely honest with you, I don't exactly remember who the different emails were from each time. Usually, I was in contact with the international office of WBS because they know our partners, and they're the ones communicating with the partners. The university ultimately created a sort of COVID office – actually, I'm not too sure what it was. I was wondering: Who are they attached to? What is it for?

What opportunities exist for you to gain an international experience at your home university, and what does a short- or long-term mobility ex-

perience add to that? What kinds of international activities did you expect in your education, and what kinds of international experiences did you actually have?
SL: First of all, Warwick is a very international university, even more so in the business school. Out of around 600 people in my year in the business school, I think the number of British people could be counted on two hands; the rest is all international,

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Even though you can learn a lot reading about something, living it is just so different

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from Europe, Asia or Latin America. So you're kind of put into this international dynamic, as soon as you join.

In a more formal sense, we have some 'societies', which can be a big part of getting international experience. For example, I could have joined the Irish society, which is basically people who want to learn about the Irish culture, do some Irish stuff, meet Irish people or people who like Ireland. The one thing is that usually you have lots of people from that nationality in the society. So in the Irish society, you'll have Irish people, and then you have many Spanish people in the Spanish society, *etc*. It's also a way for international students to still have a part of home with them when they're in the UK.

In business, at least, I think it's super important to be exposed to that environment. Because ultimately, companies are becoming super diverse. This way, you kind of learn about cultural differences throughout your studies.

What have your experiences abroad contributed to your overall education? Do you feel there are other ways you could have attained similar benefits and insights without leaving your home country? What kinds of opportunities do you hope to see available to the generations of students who will come after you?

SL: The major thing this experience has brought me has of course been improving my language skills in a way I would have never been able to if I hadn't gone abroad. My Spanish really rocketed,

they function like that, being in the country is a necessity.

In the future I hope other students will still be able to travel and do exchanges like we used to until a year and a half ago. I don't really believe in online Erasmus. I worked from home in the UK during my internship, for example, and I can tell it was really not the same experience as being abroad in an office with people. So I can only imagine that the same gap would exist between being at the university abroad and having classes online with people in other countries while still in your environment. Also, if people from here can no longer go abroad, then international students elsewhere probably can't come to Warwick either. So how are the Warwick students meant to gain that international experience if nobody's coming into the country?

To better understand people and how they function and *why* they function like that, being in the country for me is a necessity

and I loved discovering the culture and really diving into it. Even though you can learn a lot reading about something, living it is just so different. I think you could get that kind of cultural awareness if you're in an international environment like at Warwick – you don't necessarily have to go abroad. But I think to have a more open mind, to better understand people and how they function and *why*

Overall, this year has just taught me not to think too far ahead, not to get too caught up on all the plans I've made, because you never know what's going to happen. You just have to try and make the most of the moment you have, because you never know what's going to happen next.

INCREASING ACCESS
VIRTUAL LEARNING ABROAD

Virtual forms of international learning have emerged as crucial stopgap measures during COVID-19, but their potential extends far beyond short-term solutions. Experience at the University of Auckland suggests that online internationalisation can widen access to international experiences while still garnering positive reactions from students.

Aotearoa New Zealand[1] is found in the southern Pacific Ocean and is so isolated from the rest of the world that humans only started to occupy it 700 to 900 years ago, with the arrival of seafaring Polynesian peoples.[2] After the Māori settled, the islands were rapidly colonised by Europeans in the 19th century, resulting in today's bicultural country.

Statistics New Zealand reports that approximately 4.5 million people live on the islands and an additional 15% of Kiwi citizens are abroad, many on their 'big OE', or overseas experience. The big OE after finishing study is such a cultural

norm that it has been defined in government data collection (as nine months or more overseas).

PARTICIPATION AND PARITY
At the University of Auckland, we've been seeking to grow participation in learning abroad over the past five years under a broad moniker: 'Start Your OE at University'. This generation of students

This success in growing participation among all students, including our Māori and Pacific Islander students, still leaves 75% of our students without an overseas learning experience

has connected with the idea as they can see the career benefits of learning abroad. As such, participation grew to 25% of the graduating cohort in 2019.

But a closer analysis of the participation data that year revealed inequitable

Photo: Shutterstock

access and far lower participation levels among Māori and Pacific Islander students. The university therefore set a parity goal between Māori and other students for participation in learning abroad, and it determined a strategy and a framework to achieve this goal.[3]

The university also established a multi-faculty degree in global studies that requires student participation in learning abroad and favours semester exchanges. The degree includes language and area studies for Asia, Europe, Latin America, Māori New Zealand and the Pacific. Supporting students in this degree forced the learning abroad team to consider our exchange and short course options. As a result, we've established new exchange and short course programmes in the Pacific and increased our reach in Asia and Latin America.

This success in growing participation among all students, including our Māori and Pacific Islander students, still leaves 75% of our students without an overseas

learning experience. Auckland has a diverse international student population: in 2019, 20% of our students were international and they came from more than 100 countries. Our degrees are designed to incorporate global perspectives and many of our graduates (both domestic and international) expect to work abroad upon graduation. This is to say that the three quarters of our students who don't study abroad still benefit from an internationalised education experience in Auckland.

PANDEMIC PROGRAMMING

A booming period of growth came crashing to a halt last year. A global pandemic arrived in March 2020 and our situation changed markedly. New Zealand has effectively closed its borders to most non-New Zealanders. The university has imposed a blanket staff and student travel ban, and we are yet to identify a comprehensive travel and health insurance product for our students in this environment. Physical mobility both in and out of New Zealand has slowed to a trickle. Student demand for learning abroad, though, still flows in a torrent.

Collaborating with our career development and employability service, the learning abroad team shifted quickly to offer virtual internships with existing partners. We then looked to short-term programming without credits, including a global citizenship course through Universitas 21; inclusive leadership training with our United States partner Diversity Abroad; and summer and winter school

We funded participation in all our programming through funds previously allocated to supporting student exchange

programmes with existing exchange partners in countries including Sout Korea and Sweden.

Before the pandemic hit, we had been intending to run a programme with Campus B in Brazil on indigenous rights, which is targeted at Māori and Pacific Islander students. With the enthusiastic and capable assistance of Campus B, we were still able to offer this programme virtually (with some

on-campus components, including a Brazilian cooking class). Importantly, we funded participation in all our programming through funds previously allocated to supporting student exchange.

STUDENT RESPONSES

This was emergency learning abroad programming – a scramble to meet our students' needs during a period of unexpected grounding. In total, more than 200 students participated in a virtual

to meet, talk and work with students from other universities globally. The least-valued programmes felt more like online study only, with little or insufficient student interaction.

One student, Tijuanna Falepeau, said: "I strongly encourage any student wanting to participate in virtual programmes to give it a chance. There will be many opportunities to learn and discuss important ideas relevant to the current world or nation that is of choice.

We're explicitly looking for programming that appeals to under-represented students and targeting our advertising to those faculties and programmes where they are found. We're consulting with students to ensure we're still on track and meeting their needs, and we're continually assessing where student interest lies.

Importantly, in 2022 and beyond, even when we're able to run in-person learning abroad, we'll continue with virtual programming as we seek to better serve the 75% of our students who haven't been able to access learning abroad before now. COVID-19 has tipped the balance in highlighting the potential benefits of virtual learning abroad when it comes to enabling greater access for underserved students.

— AINSLIE MOORE & BRETT BERQUIST

What was surprising was that overwhelmingly, students would recommend the virtual experience to friends and future cohorts

learning abroad programme in 2020, which is about a fifth of the students we would have expected to have an in-person experience. We asked students to complete an evaluation of each experience, which led to some expected results and some surprises.

What was to be expected was that students still wished they could study or intern abroad in person. What was surprising was that overwhelmingly, students would recommend the virtual experience to friends and future cohorts.

The evaluation revealed participation by students who would never have had the opportunity to study abroad in person due to financial or family commitments. We also saw an increase in male student participation and students who studied part-time. The programmes that students valued the most were those with genuine cultural engagement and the opportunity

Being able to meet new people from different countries also allows the ability to learn about different cultures."

Heloisa Hartuwig De Freitas, a student on the indigenous rights programme, wrote: "My advice to prospective students is: don't overlook an online exchange! Getting to chat with people from around the world about topics that truly interest you is such a rewarding experience and by far one of my university highlights."

INCLUSIVE FUTURE

We're leaving the emergency scramble period behind now and are working to embed what we've learned. For 2021, we anticipate that all learning abroad will be virtual. We're taking what we learned during our emergency roll-out, walking away from some types of programming and embracing others.

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THREE PILLARS
OF INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONALISATION

How can higher education institutions intentionally and purposefully plan more inclusive approaches to internationalisation? Three recent research projects suggest a three-pronged approach that integrates the local engagement of Internationalisation in Higher Education for Society, streamlined virtual opportunities for international learning, and an expansion of transnational education. ▶

Transitioning to a new paradigm of internationalisation requires cultivating a more comprehensive portfolio of institutional programmes. The COVID-19 pandemic boosted the movement towards innovative – and arguably more inclusive – forms of internationalisation. Three separate research projects carried out by the authors of this article between January 2020 and March 2021 demonstrate the opportunities reshaping the field on the local, virtual, and transnational levels: Internationalisation of Higher Education for Society (IHES), virtual internationalisation and transnational education. By intentionally embedding inclusivity into internationalisation activities, these all-encompassing options set the stage for an era of balanced international opportunities for all.

LOCAL ENGAGEMENT

Internationalisation is gradually shifting towards a greater focus on social responsibility.[1] One example of this change is the emergence of the concept of IHES. Brandenburg *et al* described this as an overlapping area between internationalisation and social engagement, saying that IHES "explicitly aims to benefit the wider community, at home or abroad, through international or intercultural education, research, service and engagement".[2]

In general, however, social engagement still seems to be neglected in the internationalisation agenda. A study with nine Brazilian universities showed that, although the third mission was mentioned in their internationalisation plans, it was not explicitly integrated into their institutional strategies. Despite identifying some internationalisation initiatives involving social engagement, the findings showed that the integration between these two areas was mainly rhetorical.

In this context, an important question arises: How can higher education institutions intentionally and purposefully plan internationalisation activities to benefit wider society? Articulating the third mission in an internationalisation strategy is important to guide action, but it is ineffective if it does not go beyond rhetoric. It is therefore important to recognise existing initiatives and build on them in a more strategic and systematic way. Moreover, as posited by Knight, internationalisation is also about relating to the diversity of cultures that exist within countries and communities.[3] As such, in times of limited physical mobility, IHES can be an important tool to promote Internationalisation at Home, benefiting a greater number of students through engagement with local cultural and international groups.

VIRTUAL BENEFITS

More than just a measure to see us through the pandemic, virtual internationalisation offers a consolidated approach to comprehensive internationalisation. Bruhn developed a framework for virtual internationalisation from the perspective of international clientele and institutional curricula.[4] The author developed each perspective in global, intercultural and international dimensions. This framework must be enhanced to support alternatives to physical mobility effectively. A recent research project on internationalisation in European virtual universities shows that virtual internationalisation can contribute effectively to strengthening diverse dimensions of an institution. In the managerial dimension, it provides the possibility of international benchmarking and professional development. In research, it enables participation in international projects. In the third mission, it allows international knowledge transfer and innovation. In teaching, it allows global, intercultural and international content to be embedded, or network curricula to be developed. And for the academic community, it offers virtual mobility possibilities and collaborations. Beyond these dimensions, the major challenge for virtual internationalisation is establishing models of management and indicators that respond to an institutional strategy.

Virtual internationalisation activities are usually scattered and subject to staff initiatives. This hinders replicability of the practices, consolidation of a systematic approach and a strategic vision for virtual internationalisation. Institutions must urgently identify, systematise, incentivise and create plans for establishing a portfolio of virtual internationalisation activities across institutional dimensions. In doing so, they must address questions about overlap with digitalisation strategies; the role of international offices in virtual internationalisation; and the monitoring of virtual internationalisation in teaching, research and third mission activities.

Virtual internationalisation can be a strong alternative to physical mobility by being available for all. It can enhance participation, represent an inclusive perspective of internationalisation and advance the missions of higher education.

This research suggests that institutions must approach virtual internationalisation strategically by defining the operative dimensions and establishing an institutional plan to seize its broad benefits.

TNE AND LOCAL EMPLOYMENT

A swift return to traditional mobility is unlikely. As such, the pandemic has accelerated the relevance of transnational education (TNE), characterised by the movement of programmes and providers instead of students and scholars. TNE initiatives such as international branch campuses and international joint universities are being reimagined in this crisis as ways of providing students worldwide with an international education not only at home but also face-to-face.

International branch campuses and international joint universities are classified at opposite ends of the same category in the international programme and provider mobility framework, as independent and collaborative types respectively.[5] However, with students unwilling to move abroad to take online classes, this difference has recently taken on a less pronounced tone.

A recent study explored the role of labour market outcomes in TNE using a binational university as a case study.[6] As the research and the pandemic evolved and converged, one aspect became clear: TNE was likely to emerge stronger. Contrary to the popular belief that these institutions contribute to brain drain, nearly all graduates at the university surveyed in the study stayed in their home country, obtaining employment at top national and multinational organisations. A key benefit cited by the respondents was the accessibility of obtaining an international education without the expense of going abroad. Although only one case, it became clear that international joint universities and branch campuses were in a special position to articulate their graduates' labour market advantages and demonstrate their unique programmes in the context of local higher education markets.

This is not the case for all TNE projects, such as tuition-dependent institutions that were struggling before the crisis and are still challenged greatly by wobbly models. There is room for improvement when it comes to collecting employability data and responsibly marketing the connection between international education and employability. But as we move into the post-pandemic era, students will be looking towards options for international education at home, and TNE may just fill that need while preparing globally adept graduates for local labour markets.

MOBILITY ALTERNATIVES

With many people proposing alternatives to the 'gold standard' of physical mobility for internationalisation, our research investigated three pillars that sought to round out the previously myopic understanding of what international education was and could be. This is not about substituting physical mobility nor about contributing to any further status swerve of the various types of internationalisation. Instead, these models are invitations to reimagine internationalisation practices and think about more inclusive alternatives. They show the importance of connecting international education back to the three missions of the university.

IHES encourages the third mission and connection to local society; virtual internationalisation can enhance participation and inclusion; TNE extends access to quality international education to students who are unable to travel. Based on the results of our research, we propose that during this reinventive time for our field, these three pillars should be used in international education to increase the focus on cultivating greater inclusivity of individuals and countries.

— HUGO BUITRAGO CARVAJAL,
NATHÁLIA CRISTINA DO ROSÁRIO
& JESSICA SCHUELLER

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SUPPORT SERVICES

ONE SIZE FITS ALL?

The administrative services that have traditionally provided support for mobility are suddenly finding themselves operating in a changed environment. As higher education institutions shift towards incorporating more forms of virtual mobility, support services for students and lecturers will need to evolve as well.
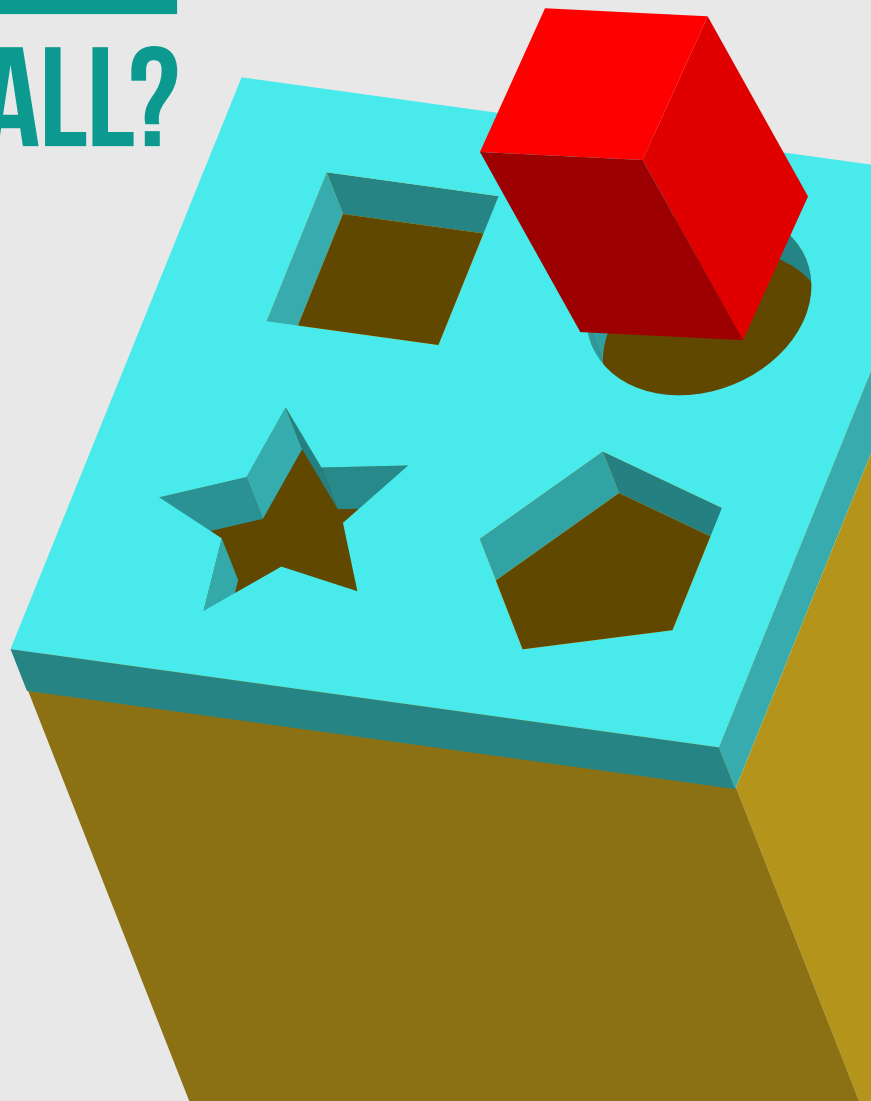
During the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual mobility has emerged from the shadow of physical mobility. Not only has it served as a backup plan for students whose physical mobility plans have been thwarted; it has also provided a chance to gain international experience for those students who had not planned any physical mobility in the first place. Some lecturers, meanwhile, have taken the pandemic as an opportunity not only to digitalise their courses but also to internationalise them.

For both lecturers and students, the shift to virtual mobility has raised the need for technical, administrative and didactic support, which could only be partially met by universities' existing support services for physical mobility. When striving for a new balance between physical and virtual mobility, it is important to consider that different forms of mobility require different support structures. This raises the question: What support services do universities need to offer to enhance virtual mobility as a complement to physical mobility?

The shift to virtual mobility has raised the need for technical, administrative and didactic support

BIELEFELD CASE STUDY

This article focuses on the case of Bielefeld University of Applied Sciences in Germany. In January 2020, the project Digital Mobil @ FH Bielefeld, funded by the German Academic Exchange Service and Germany's Federal Ministry of Education and Research, started to build up virtual mobility support offers for teachers and students.

Digital Mobil aims to enable all students to gain international experience, with virtual mobility an important part of the project's concept. When the

pandemic hit Germany, the project team was already operational: it was ready to support lecturers in implementing virtual exchanges in their courses and to support students in finding virtual mobility programmes. It can thus serve as a what-if scenario for other universities: What if we had separate support units for physical mobility and virtual mobility?

In many ways, virtual mobility can benefit from the support services that universities already provide for physical mobility, mostly in the international offices as the main drivers of internationalisation. For teachers, these services include, for example, the search for a suitable partner university; for students, advisory services are offered for country- or university-specific formalities and course offerings. Many of these services were digitalised at Bielefeld in 2020, partly because of the pandemic and partly in order to keep up with the recent developments of mobility programmes such as Erasmus+, which also includes virtual mobility.

The Digital Mobil project team and the international office supported each other in the implementation of these digitalised services: the project team was able to draw on the many years of expertise of the international office and, in return, provided digital expertise to help design advisory services digitally. For example, the project team supported virtual networking events and produced tutorials about IT platforms at Bielefeld that incoming physical and virtual students alike could use.

AREAS OF ADVICE

However, virtual mobility requires technical and media-didactic advice that international offices normally do not provide. It also raises administrative questions that physical mobility does not, such as whether incoming virtual students should have to pay the same fees as incoming physical students. Thus, the Digital Mobil team consists of employees from different departments: a mobility coordinator and two assistants in the international office;

a media producer and an IT developer in the IT department; an instructional designer and a virtual exchange facilitator in e-learning support; and a process optimiser in student administration. This has proven helpful in meeting the various challenges and needs for advice. For lecturers, these include the following fields:

- Searching for virtual exchange partners in Bielefeld's partner university network
- Connecting learning management systems to create shared virtual learning spaces
- Producing study materials, especially open educational resources
- Relieving lecturers of their teaching load while new course formats are designed
- Instructional design
- Virtual exchange facilitation
- Evaluation

Additionally, the team offers support for students when it comes to:

- Finding and signing up for suitable virtual mobility programmes
- Accreditation of virtual mobility programmes
- Gaining intercultural competencies and virtual collaboration competencies
- Virtual onboarding (get-togethers and tutorials)
- Financial support for virtual mobility
- Workshops on collaboration strategies in international virtual teams
- Conflict-solving in international virtual collaborations
- Reflecting on international virtual exchange experiences

CREATING A STRATEGY
Whether or not these or additional support services are necessary is a decision to make at each university individually. These lists give an overview of topics to take into consideration when establishing a sustainable virtual mobility offer. Sustainability also requires an academic internationalisation strategy that comprises

both physical and virtual mobility – and hybrid mobility, which is all too often overlooked. The strategy should cover the following questions:

- What kinds of mobility are suitable for our students, lecturers, researchers and staff?
- What resources (time, money, staff) do we want to invest in what kind of mobility?
- Is it possible for our existing staff to give advice on every facet of virtual mobility or do we need additional staff?
- How can we successfully combine physical and virtual mobility in hybrid mobility formats?
- Do we have to adapt our partnership agreements with universities abroad to meet the demands of virtual mobility?
- Do we have to modify our own enrolment conditions and processes for incoming virtual students?

- What virtual mobility offers can we make to students in other countries and how should we promote them?

Universities will have to answer these and follow-up questions individually – and they should answer them soon, since virtual mobility is already part of the new normal of academic mobility. At

Is it possible for our existing staff to give advice on every facet of virtual mobility or do we need additional staff?

Bielefeld, the physical mobility support staff and the virtual mobility support staff cooperate often. So far, no imbalance has arisen: instead, they have found synergies. The new forms of virtual mobility benefit from the experiences and existing partnerships of physical mobility; and thanks to virtual mobility, new partnerships have been established and students who did not want to or could not travel physically are profiting from the chance to gain virtual international experience.
— MAXIMILIAN KÖSTER

ON THE EVE OF
A NEW ERA

The European Commission's Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE) project was wrapping up just as higher education institutions everywhere began their scramble for short-term solutions to the pandemic. Europe's largest virtual exchange project to date, EVE generated new insights on the potential of virtual exchange and the necessity of a sound strategy for delivering it. ▶

In December 2020, the European Commission's three-year Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (EVE) initiative came to an end – ironically just at the time when it was most needed and when interest from many institutions was at its peak. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a surge of interest in virtual exchange (VE) as a form of Internationalisation at Home: universities are suddenly integrating VE into their strategies, and international offices are actively seeking opportunities to engage students in online international and intercultural learning.

educational offer. The non-profit organisations Soliya and the Sharing Perspectives Foundation, for example, have developed dialogue-based, facilitator-led programmes on global topics such as migration, populism and climate movements. The aim of the programmes is to enable people from around the globe to interact online with their peers and thus establish a deeper understanding of the perspectives of others on important sociopolitical issues, while at the same time developing crucial skills such as critical thinking and intercultural competence.

in training courses to facilitate VE and co-develop VE projects.

What distinguished EVE from other exchange programmes was that participation from the two regions involved – Europe and Southern Mediterranean countries – was balanced, with 49% of participants from the latter. In addition, there was no disparity in terms of direction of flows, as is the case with physical mobility programmes, in which more students travel to Europe (or within Europe) than out of the continent. As a female Syrian participant put it: "My family didn't let me go out of the country, so I tried to find anything online. It was my window for the world." VE can thus provide more balanced transnational exchange programmes, but this requires appropriate planning, investment and support.

VE is a sustainable form of academic internationalisation based on relations of equity, mutual learning and reciprocity

VE is by no means a new approach to Internationalisation at Home, but the pandemic, by putting the brakes on international mobility, has led to a new urgency to engage with it.

DIFFERENT MODELS
VE as a pedagogy connects and engages educators and students in collaborative and participatory forms of online learning, bringing people together and promoting intercultural dialogue. It provides a financially viable and ecologically sustainable form of academic internationalisation based on relations of equity, mutual learning and reciprocity.

There are different models of VE to meet different needs. Ready-made exchanges are developed and managed by organisations specialising in this type of

Co-designed exchanges, meanwhile, also known as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) courses, are developed by educators in two or more institutions, who jointly design a shared curriculum and a set of tasks for the whole or part of their course. These exchanges can involve educators of the same discipline working together, but they can also bring together those working in different fields who are interested in transdisciplinary projects.

BALANCE AND DIVERSITY
The EVE initiative was Europe's largest VE project and piloted these two models. Over three years and with a total budget of just under €6m, EVE involved more than 28,000 young people in exchange activities and over 5000 people

In ready-made VEs, the diversity of the groups was reported by many of the participants to be an important contributor to their learning experience. Few of the European students had travelled to or even knew people from Egypt, Palestine or Syria – and *vice versa*. The most important skill that over 90% of participants reported learning was active listening. What they listened to were the perspectives and experiences of fellow participants, as reported by a 20-year-old Italian participant: "Listening to people talking about the political situation, how they live, it was quite shocking for some aspects. For example, the girl from Gaza – it was shocking hearing about her experience – she talked about bombs striking. There were five minutes of silence and no-one knew what to say because we were

all very sad and then everyone shows their empathy with her."

CHALLENGING DEBATE

Another way in which certain forms of VE distinguish themselves from physical mobility programmes is by having participants engage with challenging issues, through programmes that are intentionally designed to address these themes with participants from a range of ethnic, religious, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds.

The groups do not merely socialise with one another but engage in dialogue on a range of global issues, such as the relationship between religion and politics, hate speech, gender, migration and the climate crisis. Participants share a wide range of often-diverging perspectives on these divisive themes, but this is done with the support of people who have been trained in online dialogue facilitation, which is grounded in theories of conflict transformation. Indeed, the majority of participants perceived that through EVE they developed a greater interest in and knowledge of global issues (85%) and of the relationships between societies (79%).

MEANINGFUL RELATIONSHIPS

In co-designed exchanges, learning to collaborate and work in teams is often the main outcome. As working in international, interdisciplinary teams is becoming increasingly common in many sectors of the economy, online international collaboration has been identified as a key employability skill.

Social proximity is at the core of intercultural experiences, and this aspect has been very much felt during the pandemic. Online teaching in higher education has focused primarily on content delivery, but 72% of participants in an EVE project reported building positive and meaningful relationships with other participants, which often lasted beyond the exchange itself.

Although developing soft skills and building meaningful relationships can

72% of participants in an EVE project reported building positive and meaningful relationships with other participants

also be outcomes of physical mobility, VE can ensure these outcomes extend to those who, for socio-economic, geographic or personal reasons, would not be able to spend time abroad.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

A key challenge for higher education institutions is to fully understand how to successfully integrate VE within their educational offer to allow as many students as possible to benefit from it. Evidence has shown that universities setting up a VE strategy, usually as part of an overall internationalisation strategy, are able to streamline this type of offering, drawing advantages from the opportunities it offers (in terms of pre-mobility preparation, short and flexible joint programmes and continuous professional development for staff), especially as regards Internationalisation at Home.

Although fewer resources are necessary to set up VE projects compared with physical mobility projects, VE does have its costs. Ready-made programmes can potentially allow large numbers of students to have a meaningful intercultural experience without placing much additional pressure on teaching staff. However, institutions will need to find resources to fund them – whether within their institutional budgets or, in Europe, from initiatives such as EVE or other European Union projects. Co-designed exchanges can be tailored to specific needs, languages and partnerships, but they also require resources in terms of additional teaching time, continuing professional development and support for educators.

Partly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education institutions have started to understand the long-term potential of VE to complement their internationalisation policies. The next step, then, is the development of a VE strategy. This must involve all the main actors – international offices, top management, educators, and technical and administrative support services – to ensure successful implementation by focusing on teamwork and on the innovative pedagogy behind VE.

— ANA BEAVEN, FRANCESCA HELM & SARA PITTARELLO

THE NEXT CHAPTER OF
EUROPEAN MOBILITY

Mobility in Europe dates back to medieval study stays, with Erasmus and the Bologna Process forming only its most recent chapter. With virtual exchange and questions of inclusion looming large on the horizon, the COVID-19 pandemic may mark the end of the 'physical only' era of European mobility and a shift towards something more varied and complex.

The European common market is based on four fundamental freedoms: mobility of people, services, goods and capital. Student mobility is therefore a key European principle, spearheaded and mainstreamed by the European Union (EU) in the mid-1980s with the Erasmus scheme, the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System and the promise of diploma recognition across member states. More than a decade later, student mobility also became a central goal and means of the Bologna Process, with an extension far beyond the EU to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which counts 49 European countries since San Marino joined in 2020.

Over the years, Erasmus mobility became the most visible and popular initiative of the EU – it became so prominent that from 2014, it was used as the common name of all the EU's education programmes. It was also so successful that under the code name KA107, it was extended to mobility exchanges between Europe and the rest of the world.

BUMPY ROAD

The road that European mobility took was at times a bumpy one: while the political purpose of welding Europe together was uncontested, its academic benefits still had to be promoted. Whereas some systems had retained a memory of the medieval culture of study stays, study mobility was *terra incognita* for others and was not free of concern.

Inclusive mobility remains a goal rather than an achievement

There was and still is the issue of balance: some of the EU's bigger countries were already sought-after study destinations, but why would anybody want to study in one of the smaller ones, or those with

Photo: Shutterstock

less widely-spoken languages? While balanced mobility remains an issue to date, we witnessed how several European countries became international study destinations due to the quality of their research and education, as well as their economic success. Take the example of Estonia, where working foreign students and alumni last year contributed €13m in tax revenue.

Europe's student associations realised early on that mobility would not be automatically inclusive, which is why the Bologna Process launched the Social Dimension in 2001. But inclusive mobility remains a goal rather than an achievement. The Bologna Process itself was identified as an obstacle, as mobility periods were seen as difficult to include in the shorter Bachelor's and Master's degrees. But with the growing maturity of these degrees and a vanishing memory of the pre-Bologna system, this complaint has become rare. The knockout argument against any study abroad experience – 'it

is not the same' – is still in circulation: the idea that differences in learning contents and approaches hamper students, mobility and recognition. But the times are gone when mobility was epitheted by 'learning' and 'quality' to defend it against allegations of fostering touristic experiences, as in the film L'Auberge Espagnole, rather than academic ones. On the contrary, against a backdrop of increasing xenophobia and nationalism, the ability of study mobility to facilitate social learning and sensitivity towards other cultures is generally hailed.

VIRTUAL OPPORTUNITY

The social experience of learning, beyond knowledge and skills, is probably what is missed most about mobility in the COVID-19 crisis. The pandemic put mobility almost immediately on hold, even before universities had to close, with international staff and students generally facing more challenges than domestic ones. In this regard, it was very welcome that the European Commission allowed projects to defer mobility and to use blended settings. Last June, I speculated that 2020 could

A reliable date for 'back to normal' is not yet in view

be the year to advance virtual mobility,[1] hoping that the crisis would at least offer a good opportunity to pioneer and promote this kind of exchange.

It has not happened on a grand scale: a European University Association

report confirms that in early 2020, only a quarter of European universities used virtual mobility and only 9% offered it across the institution *(Fig. 01)*.[2] But there are good reasons for this: virtual mobility may not have been an immediate priority, given the planning uncertainties of the autumn semester and all the sanitary and technical matters, and there is likely to have been a lack of interest, as students preferred to wait for the 'real thing' and eschewed the uncertainty. Furthermore, Erasmus+ credit mobility was only recognised if the mobility was at least partly spent physically abroad, and the grant was only paid for those periods, not for the virtual parts. This is hardly an incentive.
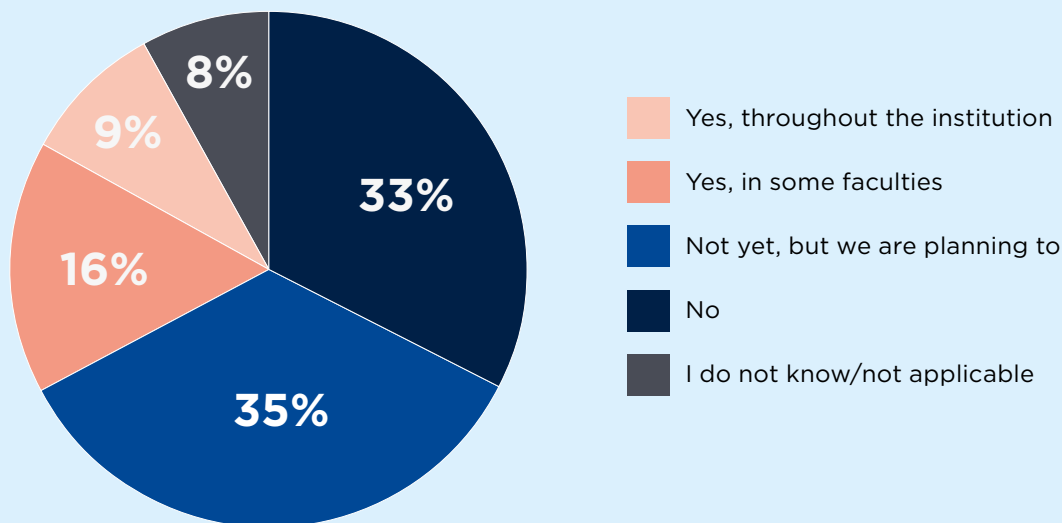
But the opportunity continues: of course, we all hope that the worst of the pandemic is behind us, but a reliable date for 'back to normal' is not yet in view. This could be a reason for preparing alternatives. Admittedly, virtual mobility is considered by many to be an insufficient substitute for physical mobility – but it might be better than risking yet another gap year. Furthermore, it is likely that the chances of transitioning from virtually-commenced mobility into physical mobility will be slightly better in the coming academic year than in the current one.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS

But there is also value beyond the pandemic: exploring virtual mobility could help to prepare and follow up physical mobility stays, enhance their quality and make them more flexible. This would be a major asset, given that we may never manage to align academic years across the EHEA.

Figure 01: Digitally enhanced learning and teaching – EUA 2021

Implementation of virtual student mobility

- Yes, throughout the institution
- Yes, in some faculties
- Not yet, but we are planning to
- No
- I do not know/not applicable

33%
35%
16%
9%
8%

Virtual could also enable new formats: in parallel to studying at their home institutions, students could take courses at other universities, elsewhere in Europe or globally, and have their credits recognised. And the international classroom could facilitate occasional exchange and collaboration, but also joint courses or even degrees. Much of this is already being done or at least under exploration at universities.

Given that the European Universities Initiative requires a commitment of 50% student mobility from participating institutions, virtual mobility is likely to

enhance this in the coming years. Economic and ecological aspects certainly play a conducive role in this.

In this regard, there are high expectations for the new Erasmus+ programme, which intends to support blended exchanges and collaboration in various formats. Policy support should come from the *Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025*, which puts a strong emphasis on digital but also on greening and inclusion, and the related *Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)*, as well as from the Bologna Process.

EHEA conference in November had to face the fact that only 9.4% had been achieved in the wider EHEA. The *Rome Communiqué*, however, not only renewed the commitment to the 20% target but also set the additional goal of international experience for all graduates, for example through virtual mobility.

The COVID-19 crisis and the missed benchmark may well mark the end of the 'physical only' era and enforce a long-overdue awareness of digital opportunities. In a post-COVID setting, considering resource and ecological challenges as well, digital formats will not replace physical mobility but should be used to complement and enhance it.

— MICHAEL GAEBEL

Exploring virtual mobility could help to prepare and follow up physical mobility stays, enhance their quality and make them more flexible

grow and spread: the aforementioned European University Association report indicates that another 33% of institutions have plans to establish virtual mobility exchanges; and while more than 60% say that digital formats enabled them to enhance outreach to international students and inter-university cooperation over the past five years, more than 80% expect to

THE NEXT ERA
Over the years, European student mobility has faced a number of changes and challenges. The year 2020 was the finishing line of the European mobility benchmark, agreed about a decade ago, which set a target of 20% of graduates undertaking a mobility experience. European ministers at the virtual Rome

1. Gaebel, M. (25 June 2020). *2020: the year of European virtual mobility?* European University Association. https://eua.eu/resources/expert-voices/182:2020-the-year-of-european-virtual-mobility.html

2. Gaebel, M., Zhang, T., Stoeber, H., & Morrisroe, A. (2021). *Digitally enhanced learning and teaching in European higher education institutions.* European University Association. https://www.eua.eu/downloads/publications/digihe%20new%20version.pdf

ERASMUS+
EVOLVING WITH THE TIMES

It's nearly impossible to consider the future of mobility without taking into account the role of the European Commission and the priorities it designates. The new Erasmus+ programme is poised to tip the balance of internationalisation in Europe towards inclusion, digitalisation, sustainability and active citizenship as it evolves to respond to the shifting higher education environment. ▶

Illustration: Shutterstock

It's now been over a year since the coronavirus pandemic swept the globe and radically changed our daily lives. Erasmus+ students have been affected by this crisis even more than their peers, facing issues such as not being able to return home as planned or uncertainty about the status of their ongoing or future mobility periods. There is no doubt that higher education took a hard hit, and traditional physical mobility activities are still struggling due to restrictions on travel and on being physically present at institutions. Given this context, what is the future of student and staff mobility?

The European Union (EU) has been implementing student mobility programmes for the past 34 years. Inevitably, these programmes have evolved as society has progressed and participants' needs have changed. The lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis have played a role in shaping the new Erasmus+ programme for 2021–2027 and ensuring that it can continue to foster and encourage safe and meaningful mobility.

LONG-TERM STRATEGIES

When the crisis struck last year, the European Commission moved quickly to propose solutions to students' problems. It encouraged the safe return of mobile students to their home countries when possible, the recognition of online learning mobility periods and the payment of Erasmus+ grants for ongoing and planned exchanges, together with additional costs incurred by the public health crisis. These temporary solutions brought to the surface the need for long-term strategies and planning to address the realities brought to light by the pandemic.

The EU's new *Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)* is set to support high-quality, inclusive and accessible digital education in Europe. It will focus on creating a high-performing digital education ecosystem for learners and professionals, as well as promoting skills and competences for the digital transformation.

On top of that, the European Commission envisions a European Education Area that will enhance cooperation specific measures and inform the novelties in the 2021–2027 programme.

A concrete example can be found in the new flexible mobility options, which will improve the overall inclusivity of the programme. Until now, it was significantly harder for working students or students with children to participate in mobility programmes. The Commission took into account the difficulties and needs of participants with fewer opportunities, based on their economic, social, cultural and health backgrounds, and proposed adapted mobility options.

The European Commission envisions a European Education Area offering exciting opportunities to learners and teachers by 2025

between institutions and will offer exciting opportunities to learners and teachers by 2025. As mentioned in the *Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025*, the transformation agenda for higher education is being extended to cover innovation, competitiveness and connectivity through transdisciplinary, learner-centred and challenge-based approaches.

FLEXIBLE MOBILITY

All of these elements were taken into consideration when preparing the new Erasmus+ programme, whose horizontal priorities are inclusion, digitalisation, environmental sustainability and active citizenship. These priorities translate into By lowering the minimum duration of study mobility to two months and by enabling blended mobility – which combines short-term physical mobility with virtual exchanges – we expect that more students will be able to incorporate Erasmus+ into their studies. A top-up amount will also become available for individual students who need extra financial support.

Through the new Erasmus+ programme, students and staff will also have the option to participate in blended intensive programmes, which combine short-term intensive physical mobility periods with an online collaborative learning experience. Institutions will receive incentives through the Erasmus+ programme

to set up, design, manage and implement these programmes with a minimum of two other international partners. The hope is that the education offer of blended programmes will expand over time, providing many more opportunities for blended mobility for students and staff and boosting Internationalisation at Home.

DIGITAL AND ECOLOGICAL

Digitalisation in the new programme goes beyond virtual mobility. The European Student Card Initiative is revolutionising all administrative procedures related to study mobility on both the student's and the institution's side. Through the Erasmus+ app, students will have access

supporting green travel. All participants will be encouraged to use environmentally friendly means of travel such as trains, buses and carpooling in order to reduce pollution caused by transport. Should they adopt these practices, they will receive a green travel top-up amount to their individual support. Moreover, as recent research showed the impact of mobility on students' active citizenship participation, the new programme will make it a priority for institutions and associations to harness the participation of Erasmus+ alumni.

Evolution, caused either by internal motives or by external pressure, is inevitable. The new Erasmus+ programme

Until now, it was significantly harder for working students or students with children to participate in mobility programmes

instantaneously to all the necessary information on their phones. In addition, they will initiate, modify and manage their Online Learning Agreement without having to print everything and ask for handwritten signatures from their coordinator. As for institutions, through the Erasmus Without Paper network, they will be able to exchange information digitally in a secure way, significantly decreasing printing and paper waste.

The ecological transition will be facilitated by the adoption of new digital technologies – and the Commission is moving one step ahead by promoting and

is a result of the opportunities and the challenges of our time. The principles it integrates – inclusion, digitalisation, environmental sustainability and active citizenship – echo and reflect overall European and global education community efforts. We invite all of you to make the new Erasmus+ programme yours and to be an integral part of the solutions our community seeks.

— KYRIAKI ROUSOU & NADIA MANZONI

MOBILITY
ACCORDING TO
NOSTRADAMUS

What might Nostradamus predict about the future of mobility if he were alive today? As we attempt to divine what the future has in store, the quatrains of history's most illustrious soothsayer suggest we would be better off looking inward than trying to read the stars.

The mobility of students and scholars between centres of learning predates both the nation-state and the university. It can be argued that 'international' existed before 'national'. Aristotle of Macedon was a student of Plato in Athens (approx. 368 BC), perhaps one of the first foreign students on record. More recently, post-Cold War global stability has been fundamental to the international higher education sector's success. With mobility now in the balance, pondering its historical influences and trajectories might better inform our anticipation of its future.

THE PROPHET AND THE PLAGUE

In 1555, Nostradamus predicted that after a period of disturbance, "the world becomes smaller, for a long time the lands will be inhabited peacefully, people will travel safely through the sky over land and seas." Pre-pandemic, there were conservatively over seven million students abroad, as well as countless academics, practitioners and road warriors engaging in foreign climes. Despite occasional roadblocks since mass mobility became 'a thing' (SARS, MERS, 9-11, Asian Currency Crisis, BSE, Black Monday *etc* – most of which, by the way, Nostradamus had a lot to say about), the sector has done scant introspection and had little motivation to revisit the value proposition of this successful endeavour.

But, "good advice comes too late." Nostradamus variously predicted "diverse plagues upon mankind, … the great plague of the maritime city, … great calamity through America and Lombardy." With COVID-19, mobility has truly been visited by a plague of Biblical proportions, as if Samson himself brought the pillars of the sector crashing down upon the academy, seduced as he was by the foreigners

from Philistine. The borders are closed, the ships idle, and mobility devastated.

The sector is awaiting a return to normalcy, but like a second marriage, this may represent the victory of hope over experience. Are we designing the new normal, or merely waiting for the return of a recent and nostalgic past?

NOSTRADAMUS THE EXCHANGE STUDENT

Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. Experience begets behaviour. Reliance on historical precedent is perhaps our best recourse to divine how mobility will return, and it is instructive to consult the experts. Michel de Nostredame was born in France (1503) into a Jewish family that converted to Catholicism prior to his birth; his quatrains are rife with Biblical imagery. He entered Avignon Université, which then closed during an outbreak of the plague. When lockdowns were rescinded, he became a poster boy for mobility and resumed PhD studies at Université de Montpellier, but was soon kicked out due to his part-time work as an apothecary, or hobby pharmacist. He worked variously as an apothecary, astrologer, physician, seer and finally a prolific author in serial publications. His opus *Les Prophéties* is a collection of obscure quatrains predicting the future. He denied that he was a prophet, rather that he was merely reading signs and basing predictions on 'judicial astrology'.

Today's academy is similarly prone to reading signs that might be omens, or those we choose to read, nuanced by whatever hope or despair we are disposed to. We make informed predictions supported by what we know to be true, what we think we know to be true, and what we hope to be true: mobility is universally missed; it is important,

transformational and fundamental to internationalisation, research and the academy; internationalisation is now embedded deeply into the core mission of higher education; economies demand international experience and intercultural skills; governments need to support international education; technology is part of the solution; we will build back better. If all of this were true, and if it were shared currency with senior levels of our economies, governments and institutions, we should have little to worry about.

PRAGMATIC PROPHECY
But we are worried. A reckoning over globalisation has been brewing since before COVID, and the pendulum was already swinging against our open world order. Democracy was in retreat, authoritarianism everywhere rewarded, walls erected, ships of homeless, tired and hungry pushed back to sea, and even cosmopolitanism contained strands of nationalism. COVID then nationalised supply chains, weaponised interdependence and in some ways can be seen as a logical conclusion, an exclamation mark on the global liberalism enjoyed for 30 years. This may be temporary.

Negativity is why people consistently underestimate the progress of humanity. Bad things happen suddenly and with immediate effect: the Spanish flu, World Wars, the roadblocks, COVID merely the latest. Pessimism fosters caution. There is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in. The instinct to focus on problems is sound, as it means things often get fixed.

Optimism argues that things are not falling apart. Good things are diffuse and happen incrementally, in spurts. Progress is not a steady march: no Obama, no Trump; no Trump, no Biden. Curiosity, youth and wanderlust will prevail, science will win, memories will lapse, and history will repeat itself better.

Pragmatism suggests that mobility will return, changed but recognisable. But still, we shouldn't waste the pandemic. There are things we should be talking about. Despite being a core tenet of internationalisation, mobility has been historically elitist. From the Grand Tour to the Semester Abroad, mobility has built programmes for the demographically privileged and conversely further privileged them by their participation.

WHY MOBILITY?
We also need to answer the question of "Why mobility?" for the unconverted. It is only since World War Two that nation-states have actively supported structured mobility through programmes such as Fulbright. Events from 1985–1995 (*eg*, Reagan, Thatcher, perestroika, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Cold War) relaxed borders, encouraged mobility and trade, and raised the speed and trajectory of globalisation. It is not coincidental that this same period saw the birth of Erasmus (1987) as part of an EU trade-bloc-and-nation-building exercise, the creation of NAFTA trilateral consortia (1993) for the same purpose, the repurposing of the term 'internationalisation' as the academic antithesis to globalisation (1994), and the birth of mass mobility and export education. It became imperative to support mobility to create globally literate populations, interculturalised
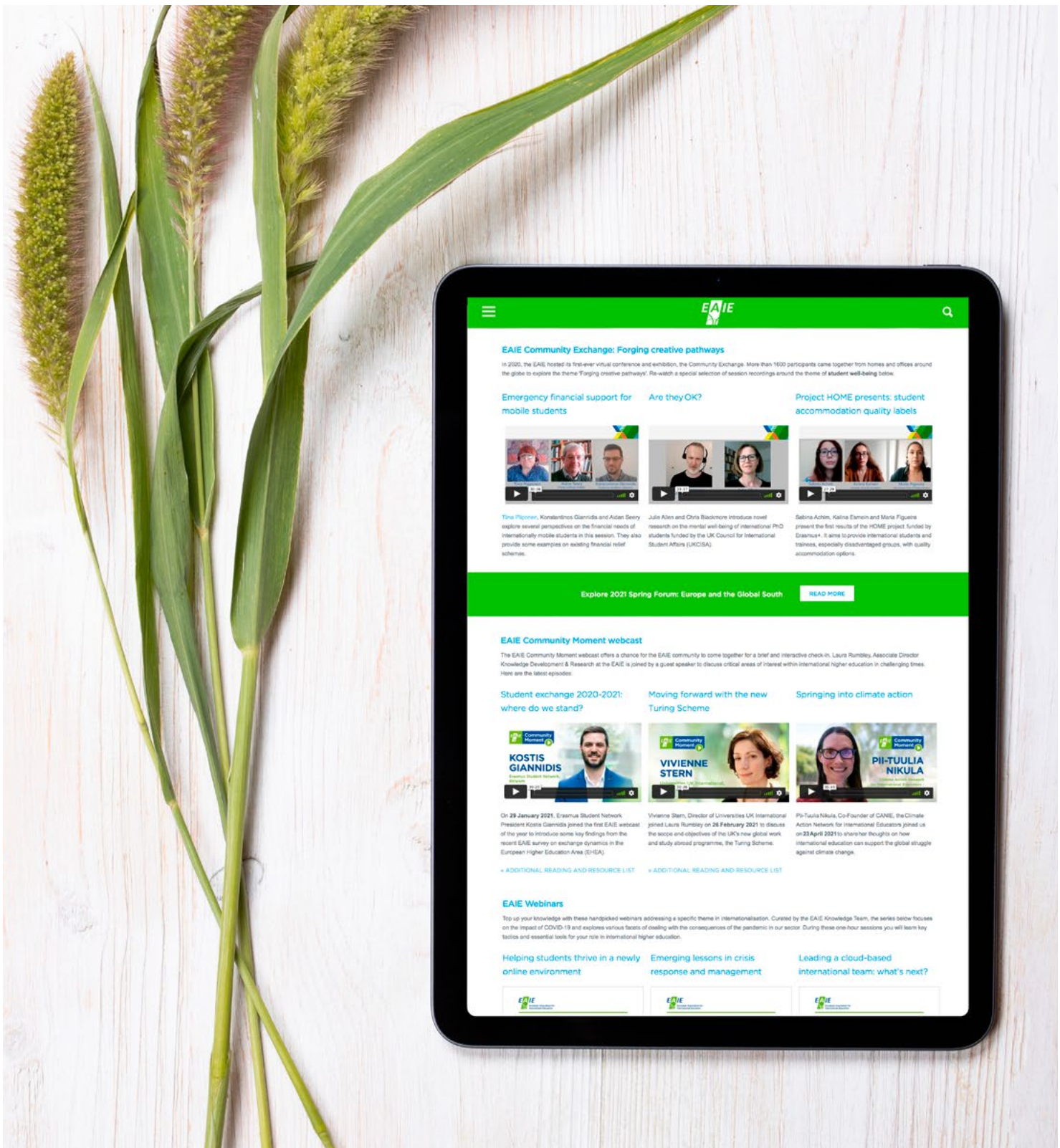
workers and interconnected economies. Universities may have always been international institutions, but globalisation altered the means and manner of government support, altered attitudes towards revenue, expenditure and international experience, and branded education as an export service rather than a social good. But with the recent weaponisation of interdependence, global economic recovery will increasingly restructure along regional lines with more local supply chains, and these will colour future mobility.

Plato argued that it is the role of the state to educate its citizenry, to educate each individual "for the place and work to which he is best fitted." Aristotle chimed in that "the state should educate its citizenry to play their parts in society." Our sector will not likely dictate how mobility will re-emerge but it can greatly influence its emergence.

Given the scarcity of original texts and the ambiguity of the quatrains, few have accurately translated Nostradamus' 16th-century French, allowing great latitude in interpretation. Many still believe the prophecies, although only in hindsight can they agree on what Nostradamus predicted. With mobility in the balance, our sector can similarly interpret the signs using judicial astrology, or we can make plans based upon what we know. We can watch passively as predictions come to pass, or we can help author a novel future for mobility marrying experience and core principles with perhaps some inevitable baggage from the pandemic. "Let those who read this verse consider it profoundly."
— RANDALL MARTIN

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