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| Project description **(2015-04-10)** |

Virtual Mobility for Linnaeus University- Connecting with the world

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Introduction **Fel! Bokmärket är inte definierat.**

# Summary

Today university students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff expect and are expected to participate in international and intercultural professional contexts. Present internationalisation activities at Lnu involve only a minority of university staff and students since the focus has so far been on physical mobility. However, digital media enable all to be involved in international professional networks and collaboration, both as a complement to physical mobility and when physical mobility is simply not practical or feasible. This type of internationalisation is known as virtual mobility (VM), a concept already widely spread within global higher education.

The primary aim of the project is to develop a framework for virtual mobility within Lnu, which will enable us to establish international networking and collaboration as a key element in all courses at undergraduate and masters level.

The project will run from 2015 to 2017.

# 1 Background

The globalized world needs well-educated people with knowledge about and an understanding of intercultural processes. Being part of this world and a partner with international enterprises in the region like IKEA, Volvo and Sigma Technology, Linnaeus University needs to ensure the participation of students and staff in internationally oriented education and research and development with a familiarity of intercultural behaviour. Therefore, internationalization is a fundamental strategy in Linnaeus University’s corporate identity (Dnr: LNU 2011/439). The vision is to establish a creative and international knowledge environment promoting curiosity, creativity, companionship, and utility (A Journey into the future, 9). A range of internationalisation arrangements like exchange programs for students, teachers, researchers or staff are already integrated in the Linnaeus University culture. Another example is the Linnaeus Summer University. Furthermore there are a number of courses and programs with international collaboration. Seen from a student’s perspective, familiarity with working in international groups benefits not only their work experience, it also contributes to developing soft skills and a good general educational background (Brandenburg, 16ff). To enhance the opportunities for students and staff to work in an international environment the university’s strategy for the next five years is to develop and deepen partnerships with prominent universities abroad, to develop the ability in students and members of staff to understand and act in a global context, to make use of international experience in students and members of staff and to provide students and members of staff with the opportunity to establish lasting contacts with foreign education and research environments (*A Journey into the future*, 17).

However, there are still a number of students and colleagues who, for various reasons (eg. lack of financial resources or family matters) are unable to take part in these programs (Brandenburg, 74f.).

At Linnaeus University there are at present approximately 31,000 (15,300 full time equivalent) students and 2,000 staff. Over the last five years only 390 Lnu students have participated each year for one or two semesters in exchange programs. Most internationalisation activities focus on physical mobility; exchange studies, international programmes, projects, study visits, staff exchange etc. In addition to these efforts Lnu will develop a concept to strengthen internationalisation at home with the help of virtual mobility.

The term virtual mobility adds new dimensions to physical mobility using technology to enable international net-based collaboration. Virtual mobility can lead to more rewarding physical mobility but also, more importantly, offer staff and students the opportunity to experience international collaboration without the costs and environmental impact of travel. Internationalisation at home will contribute to greater equality of educational opportunities, sustainable development and a good working environment.Developing a corporate VM concept for the university and implement it in the environment will bring the vision of being a “modern, international university” in the heart of Småland one step further.

Virtual mobility is defined by the European Commission as follows:

*“A complement; or as a substitute to physical mobility (Erasmus or similar) in addition to a type of independent mobility which builds on the specific potentials of on-line learning and network communication. It may prepare and extend physical mobility, and/or offer new opportunities for students/academic staff who are unwilling or unable to take advantage of physical mobility. It involves the development of virtual mobility for academic staff. It means that full academic recognition is given to the students for studies and courses based on agreements for the evaluation, validation and recognition of acquired competences via virtual mobility. In this context, cooperation agreements are key to ensuring sustainable mobility schemes.”* (European Commission, 2008. The lifelong learning programme 2007-2013 – glossary).

This project intends to build on existing internationalisation activities at Lnu and add the element of online collaboration to allow all students to get first-hand experience of international work, even if many will not be able to take part in physical mobility. This aim will naturally involve all teachers and to some extent also administrative and management staff. Using current tools and methods for online communication we can raise Lnu’s international profile as well as helping to integrate internationalisation and intercultural communication into the everyday routines and activities of staff and students. The project aims to stimulate the development of virtual mobility by providing a toolkit of guidelines, quality criteria, process descriptions, recommendations of tools, methods and technology as well as working closely with faculty internationalisation staff to promote VM and supporting a number of pilot activities. Good practice both within Lnu and internationally will be highlighted and a number of key international partner universities will be identified and will be involved in a variety of pilot projects.

# 2 Project aims and strategies

The Virtual Mobility concept at Lnu provides a basic infrastructure for university staff that enables collaboration with partner universities concerning teaching, placements and programs. The project will result in an integration of VM into Lnu’s mainstream activities and responsibility for continued development of VM will be assigned to the faculties in cooperation with the university administration.

## 2.1 Aims

The primary aim of the project is to develop a framework for virtual mobility within Lnu, which will enable us to establish international networking and collaboration as a key element in all courses at undergraduate and masters level.

Subsidiary aims:

1. to strengthen Lnu’s ties with partner universities and create a springboard for new projects and cooperation
2. to stimulate internationalisation for researchers, administrative staff and management
3. to build on and strengthen Lnu’s profile as a modern international university
4. to increase awareness of diversity and multicultural perspectives
5. to disseminate and build upon existing good practice within Lnu
6. to strengthen the level of digital skills among staff and students at Lnu

## 2.2 Outcomes (by end of 2017)

1. Five completed/ongoing pilot projects whose experience forms the basis of the framework/toolkit
2. Create a website highlighting existing good practice within Lnu
3. A framework and toolkit primarily for student virtual mobility
4. Established VM cooperation with at least three partner universities
5. Establish a community of practice to facilitate sharing of experience
6. Proposal for further development of virtual mobility at Lnu

The term Virtual Mobility (VM) covers a wide range of concepts but the common theme is to increase a university’s level of internationalisation by using digital communication tools. Mobility has until recently focused almost exclusively on physical exchange (study visits, work placement, exchange) for students or staff but VM enables international collaboration, discussion and network building as an integrated part of work or study.

# 3 VM models

Working in VM projects offers students and teachers the opportunity to deepen their cooperation with colleagues from other universities and countries. To face challenges such as the implementation of new teaching concepts, dealing with unfamiliar technical solutions and changes in classroom situations, extends the pedagogical skills of every teacher. VM can involve cooperation at different levels of involvement from informal activities between limited numbers of staff and/or students to the implementation of joint/double degrees between two or more HEIs. The following table provides a model for describing levels of involvement and has been adapted from Bijnens et al (2006) and Dondi et al (2013).

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Level 7 | A joint /double degree programme with one or more HEI in different countries |
| Level 6 | Quality assurance; benchmarking with one or more partner universities |
| Level 5 | Creating and offering common online courses (as part of a programme) or seminars (series) together with one or more HEI. |
| Level 4 | Developing and sharing common courseware or learning resources |
| Level 3 | Virtual student, teacher, administrator and researcher placements. Partnership with one or more person in your field from partner universities using synchronous and asynchronous communication tools. |
| Level 2 | Virtual support activities to enhance physical exchange (preparation activities, support during exchange and follow-up) |
| Level 1 | Informal cooperation with other HEIs, eg collaborating on PBL task, project, shorter assignments. |

This project proposes to use these models to describe a pathway for Lnu that may lead to level 7 but only if that type of cooperation is deemed viable and applicable to our overall strategy.

# 4 Restrictions (What is not in the focus of the project)

The project does not aim at creating a specific technical solution or focus on any particular tools or services. VM can involve a wide range of tools, methods, services and environments both physical and online and the choice of those should be decided from case to case. This project will provide frameworks, templates, examples, guides and quality checklists to help teachers find the right solution for their courses.

The project provides a springboard for development but the real work lies in the hands of the faculties and departments. It is vital that teachers and students see this initiative as an opportunity to investigate new pedagogical methods, promote collaborative learning and increase student engagement in an international context.

# 5 Benefits of VM

## 5.1 General benefits

1. Complement and enhance physical mobility of students and staff
2. First-hand experience of international cooperation
3. Deeper understanding of the use of technology in international cooperation
4. Develop language and intercultural skills
5. Develop wider contact networks
6. Enable international exchange for students/staff who are unable to travel on physical exchange

## 5.2 Benefits for students

1. Participation in courses with students of diverse international backgrounds
2. Participation in international cooperation is a clear merit for future employment (credits from other universities)
3. Deeper understanding of how other countries’ education systems work

## 5.3 Benefits for teachers

1. Develop a personal learning network, community of interest with teachers from other countries and cultures
2. Enriched pedagogical development
3. Co-creation of learning resources

## 5.4 Benefits for administrative staff

1. Greater understanding for how administrative processes work in other countries
2. Benchmarking processes with other universities

## 5.5 Benefits for the university

1. Greater international profile
2. Deeper cooperation with partner universities
3. Attract more students
4. Widen our curriculum by offering courses from partner universities
5. Share knowledge and resources
6. Exploit ICT-potential
7. Exploit teaching capacity, sharing expertise
8. Establish joint degrees
9. Collaboration in teaching and research
10. Internationalisation at home, more inclusive

# 6 Challenges

The most crucial success factor of the project is management commitment. It is essential that both university and faculty management understand and support the aims of the project and support staff who wish to develop international initiatives. Coordination with the office for external relations and faculty internationalisation coordinators are key channels for the project, especially in order to avoid clashing with existing internationalisation projects and initiatives.

We aim to establish a net-based community of practice, which relies on staff registering their skills and areas of expertise and being willing to help colleagues. Without staff involvement and the development of a culture of sharing this concept will not be possible.

VM demands a change in culture for both staff and students and involves new tools and working methods. The benefits of VM must be clearly demonstrated and competence development will be required for the project to have any significant effect. VM involves developing linguistic, technical and pedagogical skills and initiatives should be recognised and rewarded in some way by faculty management.

If we do not develop VM there are a number of risks:

1. Our reputation as a modern and international university will be less credible
2. Not meeting increasing student need for international experience (an increasingly vital merit for employability)
3. Harder to recruit staff and students

# 7 Implementation

## 7.1 First year: Framing the project

1. Establish a project team with necessary competence
2. Establish a reference group representing both students and staff
3. Meetings with faculties, staff and student representatives to explain the project and gather input
4. Make inventory of existing mobility projects: documentation of field reports, highlighting activities on website
5. Make inventory of partner universities already active in VM
6. Investigate the interest of partner universities to participate in projects, contact and initiate collaboration
7. Dissemination via lnu.se: internal marketing and information
8. Start 2-3 pilot projects with selected partners
9. Design a framework for international collaboration, manual for teachers, students and staff

## 7.2 Second year: Planning the infrastructure

1. Apply for additional project financing (STINT/Erasmus+) for new pilot projects, staff costs etc
2. Put the pilot projects into practice, document the effort
3. Start building a web-based community of practice for Lnu staff
4. Initiate 1-2 new projects
5. Workshops with teachers based on the first pilot projects (intercultural communication, pedagogical aspects, online collaboration, practical experience etc)
6. Work with the manual/toolkit
7. Continued dissemination within Lnu and externally
8. Develop collaboration with partner universities
9. Develop plan for mainstream implementation of VM (support organisation, continued development and dissemination) within Lnu

## 7.3 Third year: Establishing the infrastructure

1. Further develop collaboration with partner universities
2. Continue supporting and developing existing projects
3. Revise and publish the manual/toolkit
4. Workshops for teachers and staff
5. Dissemination - conference paper, article etc
6. Final conference on internationalisation and springboard for the future

# 8 Organisation and fields of responsibility

Working group Virtual Mobility

Corina Löwe, Project management, public relations work

(25 % working hours)

Alastair Creelman, ICT- expert

(20% working hours)

Peter Diedrichs, ICT-expert

Referensgrupp

Yael Tågerud, Expert Interkulturell Kommunikation, Utvecklingskonsult

Emil Tyberg, Strategisk Internationaliseringssamordnare FKH

International Expert

Airina Volungevičienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania - expert Virtual Mobility

# 9 Resources and Budget

Year 1 (225000 SEK)

Corina Löwe’s salary (175000 SEK)

Travel expenses; Meeting with colleagues from University of Botswana in order to establish a cooperation

Expenses for homepage, communication

Year 2

Corina Löwe’s salary

Support the pilot projects: Expenses for teacher’s working time and travel

Workshops

Year 3

Corina Löwe’s salary

Support the pilot projects: Expenses for teacher’s working time and travel

Workshops

Conference

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·       Students’ guide to virtual mobility (2013)<http://vmcolab.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/studentsGuideA5_v06_FINAL.pdf>