NETACTIVE: BASES AND PROPOSALS FOR GOOD PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY (AN INTERCONTINENTAL APPROACH)

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Netactive: Bases and proposals for good practices in virtual academic mobility

(An intercontinental approach)

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PRESENTATION

This work is the outcome of a process of investigation that has lasted for two years, during which an ample group of researchers and experts, from Europe and Latin America, has collaborated. This study analyses the convergences and divergences on issues of distance and virtual higher education between these two continents, focusing on the development and delivery of distance postgraduate courses, and the possibilities that the identified parameters may offer for the inter-institutional collaboration, the exchange of students, the academic recognition, and the use of the information and communication technologies (ICT), promoting virtual mobility. The main purpose of the present report, elaborated on these data, has been to establish the bases for a quality virtual mobility, and also to offer a panoramic view on the practices developed, in both geographic contexts, emphasizing the processes, resources, dynamic models and strategies that promote and ensure the success of academic exchange programs, and the collaboration between higher education institutions.

All the process of research, NET ACTIVE Project (AIESAD-EADTU Credit Transfer in Virtual and Distance Education), has been developed under the financial support of the Program ERASMUS MUNDUS (EM), an initiative from the European Union aimed to improve the quality of higher education in Europe, and to promote the intercultural understanding through cooperation with third parties countries. This Project has been funded by Action 4, within the EM Program, and its main objective is to enhance attractiveness of the European higher education. The innovative contribution to this Action 4 has been to introduce the study of virtual mobility as an additional option for students from any university, independently of its geographic location or its teaching-learning methodology. Thus, the information detailed in these pages constitutes one of the NetActive Project main outcomes.

Virtual and distance resources undergo a continuous development, and at present there is no rigorous and quality educational offer which does not include, fully or partly, some of these means. Consequently, virtual learning environments are reshaping the educative scope with new forms and procedures, based on
INTRODUCTION

The Bologna Declaration (1999)\(^1\) and the Lisbon Special European Council (2000) laid down a series of initiatives aimed at achieving some ambitious targets in the field of higher education, to be reached by 2010. The mobility of professionals was considered as a key factor for citizenship.

Amongst the key factors underlying this initiative are the encouragement of mobility of teachers, students and administrative and services staff (understood as the ideal means with which to improve communication amongst people); to join efforts in expanding our knowledge; to increase possibilities for innovation; and to jointly work towards the achievement of inter-cultural abilities to help in the training of future citizens. However, after checking the latest reports issued by the European University Association (EUA), particularly Trends III (Reichert, Tauch 2003), IV (Reichert, Tauch 2005) and V (Croisier et al, 2007), two main issues may be identified with respect to mobility: the additional cost entailed and current difficulties in the recognition of academic qualifications, both of which are significant when making mobility proposals for third countries.

As part of the experience obtained in this field, the European Union basically finds support in its clear and acknowledged Socrates/Erasmus programme, which has been operating for more than 30 years now. Without a doubt, despite its drawbacks, it has opened an invaluable path to the promotion of student mobility. In turn, in a second stage, the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) intends to open itself to the rest of the world, particularly encouraging Postgraduate studies through the Erasmus Mundus programme\(^2\), in order to enable everybody to access these studies, without this affecting quality. This has also entailed the creation of mobility schemes.

Within this framework and as an answer to these problems, distance and virtual education offer solutions to many of the situations involving student mobility, and

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\(^1\) All documents related to the meetings of the European Ministries of Education about the EHEA can be found in the web: http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/

\(^2\) The following web address offers information about the Erasmus Mundus Programme and the actions that are being carried out: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/mundus/index_es.html
universities and host institutions, which become responsible for the international mobility of post-graduate students. Its main objective is to ease the implementation of the Bologna structure, the interchange of students, and the academic recognition between universities, thus facilitating the process for managers and administrators from the implied universities in programmes of virtual mobility (VM), offering, guidelines, tools, procedures, and issues related to the adaptation to the ECTS system (European Credit Transfer System) this area.

At the same time, this Guide is completed with a Catalogue of courses and modules for the VM offer, together with a training course intended for managers and teachers responsible for the planning and implementations of mobility in their campuses.

In short, the aim is to encourage reflection and to prove both to professionals working in higher education institutions, in relation to Masters and Doctorate programmes, that this proposal is feasible. The following is required:

— To identify the programmes and experience available in Europe and Latin America that are aimed at establishing, improving and increasing mobility, exchange and academic recognition.

— To extract from this experience any practice applied by institutions that has revealed to be efficient and able to promote the exchange of Higher Education students, with a particular focus on:

  o Ascertaining the level of implementation of the ECTS model amongst European institutions, and the possibility of applying it in other international contexts.

  o Detecting those factors that may encourage and restrict European mobility and exchange.

  o Designing the main models, processes and documents to encourage effective student dynamics for mobility and exchange.

  o Analysing trends in the implementation of agreements and treaties between European and Latin American higher education institutions, identifying the main triggering factors.
PART I
THEORETICAL KEYS FOR
VIRTUAL MOBILITY
1. THE NETACTIVE PROJECT

1.1. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and its plans for internationalisation

Over the last decades of the 20th Century, an idea has gradually gained strength that higher education should meet society’s real needs, as a catalyst or the entire educational system. This entails the implementation of an open, flexible and permanent space for learning, breaking away from the traditional idea of university. Therefore, Europe, as in any other continents, is naturally reconsidering the role of University, questioning the role it should play at the present time. It is not a case of a simple reform to adjust universities to new social requirements, but a radical change in a thousand-old institution that must transform all the premises from which it acts.

When examining the European harmonisation process in universities, Bologna is the inevitable key to the well-known «Bologna Process»3, which identifies the European university reforms through the incorporation of the EHEA and in which there are two main dates for understanding the process.

On one side, the meeting of the European Ministries of Education held in Bologna. At that moment there is a lively discussion about how to build the society of knowledge, in which the massive and constant distribution of information through information and communication technologies (ICT) are already a fact that breaks the spatial and temporal boundaries, and education appears as the key path to settle it in a competitive way.

The Bologna Declaration that was signed at the time provided a new definition of university in line with the European Union’s economic and social needs.

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3 If we enter «Bologna Process» into any search instrument, a considerable number of entries may be found. For instance, at the time of drawing up this report, in www.google.com, the words «Bologna Process», between inverted commas, came up with 537,000 registries. This indicates the strength of this movement.
for global citizenship and the sustainable development of society in the XXI Century.

Consequently, Bologna has provided a definition of what higher education and research should be today for all of Europe, affecting countries in other continents. This necessarily requires structure and content to be renovated and updated in educational matters; a European outlook to be strengthened based on common denominators that ensure compatibility amongst institutions; thereby encouraging forms of mobility to achieve a legible, attractive and competitive system at a national, European and international level, directed at the full employability of all graduates. This focus on universities is not only characteristic of European policy, but a further factor in all decisions taken to shape Europe’s new political system.

The EHEA is referred to from this time onwards; a Europe of knowledge will be established to encourage growth and social cohesion based on competitiveness, establishing a quality educational system. In turn, the Bologna Process cannot be thoroughly understood without applying the principles approved in the Declaration of Lisbon (2000), which already specified lifelong education, the importance of university training in professional qualifications, and the Declaration of Copenhagen (2001), which laid down the guidelines for initial and permanent professional training. The same premises underlie these three parameters:

— a need to contribute education in order to develop the economy,

— social cohesion,

— training as an essential means of consolidating a competitive European society of knowledge, able to become a world leader.

Each one of these stresses the relevance of education to achieve a truly competitive Europe worldwide and the response of European countries to the management of knowledge and citizen training. In summary, a new EHEA which assumes the settlement of:

• a Europe of Knowledge to favour the growth and social cohesion through education and training of citizens;

• a quality educational system parallel to research (European Research Area - ERA);

• a European referent with an increase in international competitiveness.
become European harmonisation aimed at joining effort towards an easily compatible and comparable system, defined by six objectives:

- A qualifications system that is easily legible and comparable.
- A system essentially based on a two-tier structure: graduate and postgraduate.
- A common credit system (ECTS), in order to encourage student mobility.
- The promotion of mobility and removal of all obstacles to the freedom of mobility exercised by students, professors and administrative staff.
- European cooperation to guarantee quality, developing comparable criteria and methodologies.
- The idea of a European higher education and, particularly, the development of course content, institutional cooperation, mobility plans and integrated programmes for studies, training and research.

All these issues were soon assumed to reform the university system in many other foreign countries, such as in Latin America. In 2001, two years later, at the meeting of Ministers of Education in the European Union, scheduled every two years to assess achievements and the problems encountered, other targets were added:

- Long-life learning, as the key to achieve greater European competitiveness, to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and quality of life.
- The active role of higher education institutions, through all members of the university community, in the harmonisation process, giving them greater autonomy and allowing the students to speak in this process.
- Making the EHEA more attractive by developing quality guarantee systems and certification and accreditation devices (Prague, 2001).

The Berlin meeting (2003) highlighted the relevance of Doctorate studies and the need to strengthen the relationship between the EHEA and European research, the true engines of development. From this moment onwards, the two cycles (Graduate and Postgraduate) are replaced with three (Graduate, Masters and Doctorate), reincorporating this relevant third level.
• Recognition of studies and professional qualifications, able to respond to the needs of the job market.

• Competitive research.

• Increased mobility both among students and professors.

• Quality accreditation.

Procedures for the exchange and academic recognition of studies are the key issue underlying the EHEA and all other university areas, such as Latin America, and are essential to ensure student mobility. The execution of higher studies in another institution is not only an enriching experience in personal terms, but is also enriching from an academic point of view, and is essential in order to train citizens with a clear globalising perspective.

On the other hand, the employment mobility of European citizens is based on the possibility of training and certain professional competences to be relevant in other countries, involving educational structures that are comparable and able to be assumed by all countries. This encouraged mobility has been carried out through the European Socrates-Erasmus programme (*European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*), one of the European Union’s best and oldest actions.

However, this has not been the only programme to focus on the development and consolidation of mobility, as a governing principle to consolidate a common European area. Without a doubt, the European Union has realised that mobility «not only helps to develop citizenship and encourage Europe’s sensitivity by helping understand cultural and linguistic diversity, but also helps to establish a European area (...)» (COM 2005, 2) for education, training, employment or research. This is one of the best ways in which to consolidate the skills and feelings of European citizens, without which it would be very difficult to consolidate the European Union as a common project amongst so many different states. Logically, these affirmations are valid in any other context.

This explains why the key recommendations covered by this document focus on:

a) Taking on the opportunity of creating and consolidating the idea of an attractive Europe due to its quality higher education, tradition and internationally compatible qualifications.
• To encourage high-quality associations between the selected Masters and higher education institutions in third countries (third countries) (Action 3).

• To select projects from at least three institutions in at least three participating countries, in order to increase accessibility and the attractiveness and visibility of higher education in the European Union (Action 4).

Actions 1, 2 and 3 are coordinated by the Education, Audiovisual & Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), whereas Action 4 is directed by the Directorate General for Education and Culture (EAC).

1.3. The NetACTIVE Project

Although a key issue for the consolidation of higher education is the mobility of students and professors, reality confirms that not all students and professors can or wish to stay at a higher education institution abroad. Apart from this specific aspect involved in academic mobility, many students are not eligible due to their personal, family, professional, geographical and/or financial situation. For this reason it was decided to examine the feasibility of «virtual mobility» (VM) as an alternative and complement to physical mobility, essential to any training process. Against this background, the NetACTIVE project emerged (AIESAD-EADTU: Credit Transfer In Virtual and distance Education), as part of Action 4 of the Erasmus Mundus Programme.

The main aim of this project is to increase the virtual mobility of students in third countries through fully distance or blended European Masters.

✓ The first NetACTIVE objective focuses on the development of the necessary tools for the Latin-American students mobility with European Higher Education institutions. We addressed this continent due to our mutual interest, the high number of students y their already settled path towards academia recognition, and the creation of a common area of higher education in this continent.

✓ The second NetACTIVE objective focuses in the diffusion of the European masters in study areas of special interest for third countries. While the first objective focuses on Latin-America, the second one has a world vision.

The actions involved in this project are executed through the joint effort of two of the largest associations of distance teaching higher education institu-
In promoting VM, NetACTIVE’s final aim is to:

- Encourage a quality higher education in Europe;
- Encourage intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries;
- Promote the mobility of graduates and professionals from third countries;
- Strengthen cooperation with higher education institutions in third countries;
- Boost the image, visibility and accessibility of European higher education worldwide.

As a starting point for the achievement of these objectives, the actual academic offer of distance postgraduate courses was analysed, both in the European Union and in Latin America. This generated two reports on the situation in both continents, which are available in annex 1. Further to a comparative analysis of the conclusions reached in both reports, the Virtual Mobility Schema (VMS, annex 2) was drawn up as one of the products of the NetACTIVE Project, with the aim of increasing the number of Latin American students participating in VM programmes for fully distance or blended European Masters, applying the ECTS model.

No doubt, one of the most serious problems that arose from the development of these initiatives was the academic recognition of higher education, a task that is practically and exclusively carried out by universities. This process, in most institutions, follows certain regulations, rules and procedures that are generally not very flexible and quite bureaucratic, disclosing a conservative attitude mainly addressed to the local population of potential students.

The initiatives and experience in on-campus mobility that have been developed for some years now help overcome these difficulties and resistance. However, this experience should be structured and extended in order for higher education institutions to become more involved in processes for physical and VM, exchange and academic recognition, and to provide flexibility to their academic and administrative processes. On the other hand, postgraduate studies will become one of the distinctive components of university offers, with growing significance both
and needs, and to be open to change and to emerging situations, as «(...) growing competitiveness and globalization are creating a need for learning that goes well beyond the scope of a textbook or diploma, due to the need for open and continuous learning.» (Tschang and Della Santa, 2001, 1).

On the other hand, it should generate a dynamic and trans-national interaction able to take on training with no conditioning factors as space or time, as well as offering quality and competitive training in a highly demanding world. In this scenario, distance education has become a training reference able to meet these demands and to offer action-based learning that is distributed, largely personal, multi-functional and with multiple channels, with no conditioning factors as time or space (Tschang and Della Santa, 2001). A step has been taken from distance education to an education without distances, thanks to ICT that provide virtual learning environments.

In the context of radical changes being experienced by the diverse training scenarios, distance education provides the parameters inherent to any training action, as it envisages from the very beginning the educational indicators behind all quality education scenarios. In the regard, when currently examining the conditioning factors of the teaching-learning process, it is clear that these have been the background of all distance education proposals for a long time, regardless of the resources and technological devices on which it is based. This has enabled distance and virtual education to provide an earlier and better response to current training needs, and to be permanently offering education regardless of the time and space where the student and teacher are found.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameters for distance and virtual education</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Space</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The physical dimension of space disappears, and all barriers are broken down.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The trans-nationality of educational institutions is a fact, opening the way to VM of teachers and students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A radical change in training plans by doing away with time linearity, thereby also removing sequential learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Total flexibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning is generated in non-linear or sequential environments (hypermedia, hypertexts).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Learning devices are multiplied.</td>
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This new space does not intend to replace traditional educational space or to highlight on-campus education or distance and virtual training: education no longer has a specific location. The learning activity is based on the use of technologies, interactive, synchronous and asynchronous learning between close and remote locations, allowing students to simultaneously receive various training services. The issue does not reside in the technology itself but in how to use it in order to achieve effective and responsible education for all, in any place and time (Hadad, 2002), where distance and virtual education materialises its significance as an essential method included in every educational process.

Distance and virtual education offers students the possibility of studying at their own pace, in the place they choose (at home, at work or at learning centres) with no face-to-face contact with a teacher. Thanks to ICT and their development, directly involved in the evolution of distance education, over the last twenty years a move was made from single-mode learning to a multi-mode system where all participants, teachers and students, are permanently interconnected, enabling an unprecedented interaction in the field of education.

![Blended Education Diagram](image)

**Fig 1. Evolution of technology-based learning (Bates and Poole, 2003).**

With ICT, particularly the Internet, virtual education has become the easiest way to access education and training, overcoming any barrier in terms of time and space. Distance education and training have therefore become open, flexible and lifelong (Open, Flexible and Lifelong Learning, LOF)\(^5\).

The future outlook for a network society indicates that virtual and international aspects will prevail, and anticipates a radical change in the content of all

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\(^5\) Definition developed by EADTU
• Providing wide trans-national access to educational resources in Europe;
• Encouraging equal opportunities in all sectors of education;
• Strengthening the intercultural scope of education;
• Encouraging cooperation and mobility in the field of education (boosting exchange, distance education, etc.) and to help remove any barriers in this field;
• Encouraging innovation in relation to teaching practice and pedagogical material, particularly through the use of ICT.

2.2. The meaning of mobility in higher education

European universities currently understand the idea of student mobility as the possibility of completing part of their studies towards a certain degree (a period of time, course or subject expressed as a number of credits) at another higher education centre in the same country or abroad. Until now, this mobility was always understood as on-campus presence, i.e. the possibility for students physically moving to another chosen centre where part of their studies is completed. It is important to highlight that this is not a mere validation of certain subjects or topics, entailing the practical equality between matters as to content and number of credits, but an academic recognition which accepts the studies completed by the student at another institution as part of the academic certificate granted in the home university to all intents and purposes (Jaén; Madarro, 2004).

Apart from obtaining the agreed credits according to the subjects taught at the host university, and together with the learning inherent to each specific degree qualifications, any student that joins this type of programme also achieves other indirect goals that are just as relevant as the academic ones: learning a foreign language, the knowledge of other cultures and different educational systems, the development of communication skills or the acquisition of competences for personal development in international surroundings, all of which are essential and invaluable in this permanently changing and globalising world. Without a doubt, by achieving these objectives the training value of mobility in itself is made apparent.
• The internationalisation of higher education, entailing a complex configuration of strategic alliances and implementing regulations (de Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Avila, Knight, 2005)

All aimed to achieve greater transparency, cooperation and competitiveness in all universities, which entails the pursuit of actions that always uphold the diversity of higher education and each institution's identity. To achieve this, it will be necessary, according to experience, for all these programmes to focus on the need for trust amongst all participating parties in the process and the transparency of both their activity and documents, entailing the fulfilment of at least ten criteria to ensure mobility and, consequently, quality learning:

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1. **Guidance and information**: all must have access to trustworthy sources on the opportunity and terms of mobility.

2. **Learning agreement**: before undertaking a mobility action, all the individuals and institutions involved should draw up and agreed on a learning plan. This should include, at least, the objectives and outcomes expected and the way to achieve them.

3. **Personalisation**: mobility should always adjust as much as possible to each participant’s learning itineraries, including ability and motivation.

4. **General preparatory work**: initial preparatory work is essential for mobility, regarding language, education, legal, personal, cultural and technological issues, etc.

5. **Linguistic support**: whenever necessary, back-up courses will be provided before departure and during the stay.

6. **Logistic support**: related to the transfer of information and the provision of assistance for preparations before a stay, or any other practical issue.

7. **Tutorials**: the host institution should provide a tutor in charge of helping participants to become a part of the academic environment, acting as a contact between both institutions.

8. **Recognition**: to be included in the learning programme; students should be assisted in order to obtain a recognition and adequate certification, as well
• A more personalised learning proposal, enabling individual response according to each person's circumstances.

• Increased flexibility in access to learning.

• Studies which use material and environments that are significantly more interactive.

• Teaching in virtual environments which contribute to teamwork abilities, interaction through platforms, technological competences, etc., all these are indispensable in today's society.

• The possibility of collaborative and cooperative teaching in an intercultural environment.

Logically, the aim pursued by this VM is the same as that of on-campus teaching, by encouraging an exchange of knowledge and inter-cultural understanding through the access to other universities.

2.3. Virtual mobility vs. Physical mobility

VM arises at a time when new structural models are being developed through virtual campuses for higher education in Europe, focusing on the exchange and sharing of mobility programmes, based on the already existing European cooperation and giving a virtual scope to the necessary tools (ECTS, European Masters, quality assurance processes, mobility, etc.). These sets of proposals intend to provide a virtual scope to European initiatives in the field of higher education, upon the incorporation and development of ICT in the field of education. The EHEA is therefore assisted through tools, such as VM that complements or strengthens physical mobility, the recognition and validation of ECTS-based qualifications, information and guidance on services, or other synergies between traditional and virtual models. However, this project is based on an institutional agreement that always extends or complements already existing cooperation agreements in the context of Community mobility programmes.

VM opens the path to possibilities not contemplated until now, by offering access to courses and programmes abroad and allowing teacher-student commu-
ment that encourage collaboration without frontiers with people from different contexts and cultures, working and studying in a joint manner, with one of its main objectives being to encourage inter-cultural understanding and the exchange of knowledge (Being Mobile project, 2006). In this regard, VM is understood as:

the possibility of studying a Masters at a local, national or international level, in relation to the student's education, through distance and virtual education methodologies, a short study period or specific subjects. The academic recognition of the ECTS obtained will be assumed by the home university.

It is important not to forget that, in certain occasions, it is very positive to offer blended learning opportunities, which may require the students to physically attend to courses or modules at their home or host universities, as a part of the courses they are implied in, meanwhile they are virtually attending other courses or modules at the host or home university. This modality widens the possible learning scenarios which may be favoured through mobility.

There is still a third dual model for mobility, incorporating on-campus presence and virtual means. In other words, a student may transfer to another university in order to complete certain credits on-site, but he/she continues studying at the home university through a virtual platform. Another model involves completing credits at the host university, after an on-campus stay at the home university. In short, the possibilities of interaction between physical and VM are a continuum; the possibility of offering one model or another will depend on the objectives pursued and the means available. Logically, the idea is not to suggest that one type of mobility is better than another, but to highlight that both models are necessarily convergent. They should be both taken as complementary learning methods, able to meet every citizen's training needs and cover any gaps that may arise during one's life.

Nevertheless, what does each model offer? If physical and virtual mobility are compared, a series of characteristics arise that indicate each model's contributions and limits. From all these components, the most relevant are:
On the other hand, virtual mobility entails the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Demand for a high level of linguistic and ICT communication skills</td>
<td>• Learning of academic skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• More restricted intercultural experience</td>
<td>• Learning of an international perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limitations of new learning environments</td>
<td>• The stay does not involve abandoning daily responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Solitude when completing the course</td>
<td>• No particular time restrictions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Demand for accurate course planning</td>
<td>• Flexibility in course arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lack of flexibility in administrative proceedings</td>
<td>• Medium cost (registration and Internet connection)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Difficult accessibility of virtual platforms</td>
<td>• Experience of other learning styles</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demand for a highly technological infrastructure</td>
<td>• More individualised learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Greater attention from tutors</td>
<td>• Synchronous and asynchronous education</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Higher rates of uncompleted studies</td>
<td>• Learning of abilities demanded by current society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Accessibility to a large number of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Unrestricted access to education at any stage of life</td>
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<td>• More variety of training possibilities (stay at another university, joint programmes, joint seminars, teaching provided partly on-site, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Proposals for initial training and lifelong education</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

It is impossible to say which mode is better than the other, as each one contributes significantly to every student's training. However, there is no doubt that VM opens possibilities, unavailable until now, to a large number of students, due to their geographical location, personal and or family conditions, financial situation, etc. It also allows a better adjustment to the demands of on-line society in the XXI Century.

Both modes require a joint effort to achieve quality standards that guarantee university training. Without a doubt, the integration of university graduates into professional life and, eventually, into society, is one of the main responsibilities of higher education to society (COM, 2005), and all these innovating proposals are helping to achieve this.
geographical barriers; and it may be used as a channel of information to prepare students for physical exchange programmes.

On the other hand, the on-line learning system encourages students to assume responsibility for their learning, thereby increasing self-confidence, independence and the individual construction of knowledge. Participation in on-line debates helps students express their ideas, practise the specific language of the discipline and analyse the work of fellow students. Many teachers claim that they have found greater satisfaction in virtual interaction with their students, due to the greater quality and depth of their contributions (Mason, Rennie, 2006).

— Institutional level

At an institutional level, VM increases competitiveness amongst institutions, contributing to more competitive and attractive educational offers in general. VM also encourages institutions to analyse and develop their educational models: changes in the content offered and changes in learning tools, including educational and teaching models (Weller, 2000). These models are significantly implemented thanks to virtual learning environments, such as guided self-learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning, etc. All of these are being highly recognised.

As regards the cost of VM, this is still a bone of contention. No doubt, VM reduces student costs as an alternative to staying at another university. For institutions, schoolroom costs are reduced, despite an inevitable cost to establish the infrastructure of all these telecommunications and processes, the training of the staff assisting these students both in management and teaching terms, and the teaching teams that will participate (Rumble, 1997).

In turn, many of the opportunities traditional universities see in VM programmes are the same as those being offered by distance universities for a long time. In particular, these refer to assistance to students residing elsewhere, providing them telecommunication platforms, preparing teaching material or training qualified staff to handle this type of teaching. However, higher education institutions that wish to offer VM to their students must reflect on the following, in order to offer on-line learning programmes with a guarantee of success:

— Compatible systems

Certain specific characteristics of VM may raise problems if not adequately handled. One of these refers to system compatibility. Whilst the use of ICT in
On-line assessment should apply a wide range of valuation methods: an aggregate method, used to allocate a grade; and a training method to provide student feedback, helping them in their learning process. Diagnostic evaluation is used to determine the student’s prior knowledge; continuous evaluation is used throughout the course, whereas final evaluation is carried out at the end of the course.

No question that virtual learning environments are ideal in order to provide a diagnostic and training evaluation in most subjects. Computation evaluation systems could be analysed, where remote communication channels store and distribute the processes and outcomes of the evaluation, and where feedback is rapid and effective. In theory, computers seem to be the ideal tool with which to carry out certain evaluation strategies and, consequently, free the teacher from this heavy task. Nevertheless, designing a good evaluation system based on the foregoing is not easy and requires specific technical competences; thus, from the educational outlook it is necessary to establish the dimensions that will be assessed, considering the programme didactic elements: processes, contents and outcomes, consequently the issues to evaluate will be: implementations, productive processes, the virtual and distance programmes, objectives, resources and methodologies, (Aguado Odina, Álvarez González, 2003).

Another important issue to be remembered during evaluation is to guarantee the student’s identity, i.e. how to assure that the person being evaluated is really who s/he claims to be. For this reason, universities ordinarily hold on-campus exams to prevent fraud and to ensure the identity of the candidate. However, in any case, there are other appropriate methods offering on-line assessment experience, particularly for Masters that guarantee quality. First of all, it is clear that the most useful part of Internet-based evaluation consists of training strategies and self-assessment. Innovative practice is beginning to apply this type of assessment as part of the learning process, based on feedback to allow the opportunity of redoing exams, reviewing the exercises done, and enabling activities based on simulation and interactive teaching material. There are vast possibilities in this field and this is just the beginning.

In turn, Internet may provide a valuable documentation service in order to support the evaluation process:

➢ Other course tasks that may be available on digital format, as part of the course resources within the scope of all students.

➢ The tasks for the ongoing year may be available after the delivery date, regardless of whether or not they have been graded by the teacher.
relation to both these points, from an educational perspective, the significant relationship between cultural and linguistic factors underlying every learning process, and how they affect the construction of a cultural identity. Thus, this issue should still be reflected upon and the cultural identity of non-native students in virtual learning environments should be analysed, including its effect on cultural identity and how to act to reduce these effects in a VM proposal. If identity is shaped according to personal experience, it is therefore necessary to evaluate and analyse the scenarios in which education is offered (Edwards & Usher, 2000).

The issue of globalisation and cultural homogenisation is there, although some may believe that VM is a model that emphasises this perspective even more. But it also offers an opportunity to cross frontiers and to promote and develop culture itself.

• The acquisition of technological abilities for teachers and students

On-line teachers play a key role in the creation and consolidation of virtual learning environments, and in influencing a change of attitude further to the training provided. In this sense, teaching on virtual environments is not very different from on-campus teaching: any good teacher is concerned about their students’ learning. It is also clear that teachers need greater technological support from their institutions as, in general, students are more skilled in this regard that their own teachers.

In fact, although technological skills will be fully acquired both by teachers and students, a problem arises in another field. If VM students are able to individually direct their own learning and motivate themselves, as fully self-sufficient students, this will logically depend on many variables, such as age, academic level, prior studies, learning style or access to technological services. There are indications that older, postgraduate students, with easy computer access, are more self-sufficient and work better with their peers, thereby obtaining better results in on-line courses than those who do not meet these conditions.

On the other hand, teachers must also hold a series of technological abilities if their tasks are carried out in virtual environments. It is not easy to state which of these abilities is decisive but, at least, they should be aware of and understand the logic of these ICT supports, of on-line learning models, of the resources offered by learning objects or repositories, the ability to communicate in writing or to handle a lot of information, structuring it into learning units. In this sense, many teachers who are currently providing on-line teaching do not have these abili-
• VM offers mobility to students who cannot travel for employment, family, disability reasons, etc.

• VM may be used to prepare, complement or complete an on-campus stay at another institution, further to distance or virtual courses.

• A short period of physical mobility may also be used as an introduction to VM (or vice versa).

• VM may also be used to keep contact with the home university during a stay at another university.

• VM may provide access to many courses, at any stage in one’s life.

• VM may be used to enrich lifelong training proposals, at any time and in any place.

Clearly, the future possibilities of VM are vast, even more so in a society that is characterised by its necessary Web-based structures and where virtual and international aspects prevail. Logically, education cannot be removed from these issues, which is why drastic changes are being made and virtual education is being introduced and consolidated in all levels and fields. By developing new learning environments and new educational models based on the potential value of ICT, virtual higher education will be one of the most relevant proposals for higher education in the next ten years. However, virtual training still has a weak side. The following limitations in VM may be indicated:

• Currently, this type of mobility it is not yet recognised in the same way as physical mobility, as it is not always recognised by employers, professional organizations or traditional universities.

• Still, there is not enough information and guidance on the opportunities for distance education, which may complement studies completed at the home university.

• There are acknowledged difficulties in studying in a foreign language, and few introductory courses to overcome this problem.
possibility to be original in the development and implementation of ideas, frequently within the context of research.

- To apply the achieved knowledge and their capacity of problem solving in new or scarcely known environments within the wider (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their study areas.

- To be able to integrate knowledge and to face complexity when formulating judgements from information that, being limited or incomplete, can include reflections on the social and ethical responsibilities, linked to the implementation of their knowledge and judgements.

- Can communicate their conclusions, knowledge and its grounds to specialised and non-specialised audiences, in a clear way and without ambiguities.

- With learning competencies which allow them to continue studying in a self-directed and autonomous way.

- Show a systematic comprehension of a field of study, and the command of habilities and research methods related to that field.

- Show the ability to think, design, implement and assume a substantial process of research, with academic rigour.

- Have contributed through an original research which may wide the boundaries of knowledge, developing a substantial corpus of knowledge that deserve a referenced publication, at a national or international level.

- Are able to carry out a critic analysis, an evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas.

- Know how to communicate with their peers, with the academic community, and with general society about their areas of knowledge.

• Are able to promote, in academia and professional contexts, the technological, social and cultural progress, within a society based on knowledge.

3.2 The offer of postgraduate courses in the EHEA

The NetACTIVE Project suggested the need to carry out a study in order to identity the availability and structure of postgraduate courses that were being
open or distance university, such as Germany, United Kingdom or Spain, cover a wider range of courses.

In relation to Masters programmes, most of these are designed by a single university, only a few are designed as interuniversity, and even less have an international structure.

A careful examination of the components of Masters courses reveals issues such as ECTS, course flexibility, teaching-learning methods, evaluation and languages used. Thus, an analysis of the Postgraduate courses currently available in the European Union reveals that there are already some courses exclusively based on the ECTS, although most continue to be offered with the national credit system. Related to the current credit system (prior to the ECTS), the number allocated to a Masters course indicates a huge heterogeneity. In relation to the number of credit hours, the most common calculation used in the various countries is 10 hours/credit, as in the case of Spain.

In short, the first issue to be taken into account would be the determination of postgraduate course hours, whilst also specifying the value of each credit. These would be the two starting points to determine the length of any Masters course. However, in Europe, a certain number of programmes, mainly those with less than 130 ECTS credits, are expected to undergo modifications further to the Bologna Process, once the new graduate structure is established.

The length of training also differs. When comparing, for example, the French, Dutch and Estonian systems, it appears that the Open University of Holland ranges between thirty and fifty-two months, CNED Masters range between 9, 10, 12 or 24 months, and University of Tallinn Masters are based on a twenty-four month period. However, Masters obtained from the FernUniversität in Germany are generally two years long (four semesters of work for a full-time student) and, in the case of Sweden, courses are of different lengths.

This also raises some difficulties in future accreditations according to the Bologna requirements and, certainly, when establishing bilateral agreements with other universities, whether in a European or international scenario. In general, the analysis conducted indicates that the same Masters degree is offered both to students on a one-year programme (60 ECTS) and to those on a two-year programme (120 ECTS).

Another relevant issue is flexibility (modules, different calendars, different teaching-learning methods involved). Here, the possibility of combining study-
However, as the ECTS is not constantly used to facilitate student mobility in European higher education, European universities find great difficulty in recognising exchange mobility, the validation of courses completed abroad, the translation of the grading system and credit transfer.

Many have already claimed a more «European» application of the ECTS to avoid the inconsistencies caused by a national or institutional approach. It is therefore clear that the issue of recognition should also be considered for inter-continental mobility.

With respect to the issue of accreditation and evaluation of the quality of university studies, what is significant is that it is a relatively recent issue. Work in this field has been encouraged by European policy, due to the EHEA is largely dependent on the quality of the courses offered. The issue is not straightforward because it falls within each country's political sphere. In order to cooperate in its development, work is being carried out on two levels: encouragement and collaboration when developing and consolidating evaluation, and quality agencies in each country. On the other hand, the operation of a supranational agency that strives towards a valid model for all countries, and that collaborates in the analysis and specification of valid quality indicators and standards for the evaluation of any training.

At present, the higher education system and Masters accreditation in European countries is gradually being controlled by national governmental agencies. The complexity of the organisation and accreditation system for higher education varies depending on each one’s governmental structure. Likewise, the offers and accreditation of private educational institutions, as well as public higher education, depend on each country’s system.

Europe still does not have a quality evaluation system for higher education and postgraduate institutions, which is agreed upon and validated by all countries. However, the Bologna Ministers have taken the initiative to develop a system agreed by consensus for standards, procedures and guidelines for quality evaluation. These standards are currently being the object of joint development amongst well-known institutions such as: European University Association (EUA), European Association for Quality Assurance (ENQA), the National Union of Students in Europe (ESIB) or the European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE).

Nevertheless, the specific quality criteria for distance and virtual education are not yet being covered by this European initiative, which is why there is still no
In relation to the academic structure of Masters, from the total number of distance programmes, one hundred and six are offered by a single university, and thirty-one by several universities. Below is a more detailed description of these structures:

- **University Masters:** Of the forty institutions offering distance Masters programmes, thirty-eight have one hundred and six programmes in a single-university structure.

- **Interuniversity Masters:** Of the universities offering Masters programmes, nine do so jointly with other institutions, giving a total of thirty-one interuniversity distance Masters. Seven of these universities are also included in the foregoing section. In the Andes region there are five universities, two of which are located in Ecuador, and offer nineteen interuniversity programmes: UTPL offers a joint programme with Instituto de Estudios Bursátiles, and Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial has eighteen joint programmes with Centro de Estudios de Postgrado de Administración de Empresas (CEPADE) (Madrid Polytechnic University).

In Central America, the Caribbean and Mexico, there are two universities that offer joint programmes with other institutions. In the Southern Cone, there are three universities in Peru and Universidad Católica de la Plata offers a joint Master programme with other foreign institutions.

- **International Masters:** According to the investigation conducted in Latin America and the Caribbean on higher education institutions, there are fifteen programmes available internationally, and the rest are delivered at a national level.

As regards to the credits of these Masters, many Latin American countries do not contemplate a definition of this academic concept, and those that do indicate the number of hours show a considerable level of diversity among institutions. Thus, the range is between a minimum number of credits of twenty-eight in Universidad Nacional Abierta de Venezuela (UNA) to a maximum of one hundred and twenty in Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico (UNAM). With respect to the number of credit hours, this ranges between nine and twenty hours. Despite the variety observed in the number of credits and what each one represents in hours, Masters programmes tend to last two years.

The Masters programmes identified reveal the following academic structure:

— Twenty-four module-based programmes,
In relation to the registration process, criteria for acceptance, student selection and other legal aspects, the institutions follow what is established in their national law and, as is mostly the case, these programmes are offered nationally. The steps taken to certify and approve student degrees from other countries are complex, which is not a positive contribution to student mobility.

Costs greatly differ, ranging from 2,300 and 12,720 US dollars; the difference may be due to courses jointly offered with foreign universities and the length of the programmes.

In terms of accreditation, most Masters are only supported by their own universities, and are not accredited by competent national bodies. This is due to the fact that regulations on evaluation and accreditation in Latin American countries are very new. Evaluation and accreditation bodies preferably focus on the assessment of on-campus education and, in some cases, regulations have still not been drawn up for evaluation and accreditation.

The current trends in open and distance education in Latin America and the Caribbean indicate that there is a flourishing of programmes and degrees in various institutions without quality control, which has greatly damaged the image of the distance education delivered with academic rigour and service. Consequently, recent concern for quality assessment by creating standards for distance education is spurring awareness about the context in which these methods are being developed. The best way of evaluating the significance and effectiveness of any type of educational institution is to select the most appropriate indicators and standards related to quality, innovation and the relevance of the institution in general, and of its programmes in particular.

On the other hand, Masters programmes are generally treated as fourth-level studies (post-graduate level); in order to enter the course, students must have a third-level or professional degree, i.e. a university or engineering degree.

Different terms are used in one country or the other when referring to degree certification, e.g. «revalidación» (revalidation), «equiparación» (equivalence), «convalidación» (validation). There is no mention of whether the degrees obtained in distance education are recognised in the same way as those obtained through on-campus teaching, but this is presumed, notwithstanding the need for the

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10 In Latin America, «fourth-level» refers to those studies completed after a university degree, i.e. postgraduate studies.
• Programmes are preferably offered at a national level. Only Mexico and Chile offer programmes internationally. There is a development of international programmes offered by foreign universities, some of which have signed an agreement with local universities.

• Most Masters programmes have a single-university structure.

• The credit system is not accepted in several countries and, if accepted, there is a great difference in the number of credit hours.

• Most Masters programmes last for two years.

• Most Masters programmes are subject-based.

• Although many institutions use ICT, printed material is still used as a basic resource that is essential to the educational process.

• In relation to the teaching-learning method, there is a general tendency to hold on-campus classes.

• University-student communication has significantly improved thanks to the incorporation of ICT; right now, these resources are the most popular.

• The most common evaluation system is the application of on-campus evaluation, although distance continuous evaluation is emphasized.

• Nearly all Masters programmes are exclusively taught in Spanish.

• The process to accept and certify degrees obtained by students in other countries is difficult, thereby hindering student mobility.

• Nationally, there are various evaluation and accreditation bodies that were recently created. These take care of face-to-face method programmes, and there are few initiatives for distance education.

• Significant progress has been made in the evaluation and accreditation of distance education in Latin America, including the project entitled «Centro Virtual para el Desarrollo de Estándares de Calidad para la Educación Superior a Distancia» [«Virtual Centre for the Development of Quality Standards in Distance Higher Education»], the progress accomplished by this project, and the creation of the «Instituto Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Calidad en Educación Superior a Distancia» (CAL-ED), with a huge future outlook in the field of international evaluation and accreditation.
The second difficulty arises from the huge disparity, in both continents, of references, degrees, structures, etc. at a postgraduate level. The absence of legislation in this field, to a certain extent, explains this diversity and multiplicity which, in turn, makes convergence at this academic level even more difficult by preventing actual mobility between the programmes.

Therefore, a deeper analysis is necessary using experts in each country, as well as a clarification and systematisation of the basic issues discussed. Even if work is carried out in the same field, the meaning of each basic term greatly differs between countries and, even, between the universities of the same country.

Further to an analysis on offer and demand in postgraduate courses, the starting point was to detect which areas of study grouped the largest number of courses, in order to identify the areas in which this mobility would be possible. To do this, the study area code list provided for the Erasmus project in the European Union was used, as a recognised system for student mobility.

The results of this search indicate a logical difference in the postgraduate courses offered. The first three focus on:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Number of courses offered in the European Union</th>
<th>Number of courses offered in Latin America</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04.- Business Studies</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.- Education and Teacher’s Training</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.- Mathematics and Computer Science</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.- Medicine</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.- Social Science</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first outstanding issue is the variety of fields of study in which postgraduate studies are offered in both continents. Of significance is the area of economic and business sciences, followed by education. However, the remaining offers do not follow a clear demand from the professional field due to its scattered nature, and here are therefore no similar interests and needs when defining the
them are still offered according to their own credit system; very few European Union Masters are ECTS-based and there are none in Latin America\textsuperscript{11}.

With respect to the current credit system, not ECTS, there is a surprising diversity in the number of credits included in each Master, as they range between twenty-eight and one hundred and twenty-two credits. No reason is provided for such a huge difference in the same degree, which is why it is essential to clarify the content of a credit, as a basic unit of academic recognition.

As to the credit value in hours, this ranges between nine and twenty hours per credit, although some institutions assign many more hours per value unit. This difference in credit interpretation logically affects the length of the courses and their beginning and end, thereby hindering mobility, together with the diversity in each continent's academic calendars. This explains why the planning of these studies is highly complex between countries, whether in the same or a different continent.

In short, the first component should be the number of credits included in a postgraduate course, and the same measurement should apply to each credit. This would be the starting point to also determine the length of a Masters programme. Without this consensus, it will be very difficult to establish possible exchanges and mobility between universities.

Focussing on the Masters structure, most of the ones located in the European Union are module-based, whereas in Latin America the courses offered are subject-based. However, if we compare this against the flexibility offered on each course, there is always a negative answer because these modules or subjects are structured sequentially, thereby hindering partial mobility. As a result, in many cases, flexibility upon registration is not eventually allowed. Consequently, a student may always study towards a degree but never an independent module or subject.

Regarding the method used, although they all refer to distance-teaching, a fully virtual structure is still a minority. On-campus presence is still required, ranging from three hours to two hundred, particularly as regards to evaluation. In short, the truth is that partly on-campus studies still prevail, which entails a further

\textsuperscript{11} We highly recommend the study carried out by the Project Tuning – América Latina about the use of the different credit systems on this continent, the Project was founded by the European Union. Can be consulted in: http://tuning.unideusto.org/tunigal/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=191&task=view_category&catid=22&order=dmdate_published&asc=DESC
qualifications. Furthermore, all of this contributes to the little flexibility that still exists when registering on any of these courses.

Although all courses enable the access of foreign students, the actual situation is very different.

In relation to the accreditation of the Masters available, the fact is that none of them is certified by recognised assessment and quality agencies in each country and outside the university itself. All countries have very recent experience in the accreditation of postgraduate degrees, which is why it is still a very weak point in all higher education institutions. In turn, the recognition and acceptance of these qualifications in other countries is still very difficult.

Finally, it’s interesting to stand out that, according to the Trends IV Report (Reichert, Tauch; 2005), drawn up by EUA, there is a series of essential aspects that may hinder student mobility, including the complication of admission and registration, the recognition of credits in mobility programmes or academic calendars.

4. VIRTUAL MOBILITY EXPERIENCE: EUROPE AND LATIN AMERICA

4.1. European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU)

4.1.1. The role of higher education institutions that use distance and virtual teaching methods

EADTU represents both open and distance teaching universities in Europe and the national consortium of higher education institutions that covers the entire scope of distance and virtual education. EADTU intends to encourage open, distance and virtual education, both in Europe and throughout the world, by actively supporting the institutional development of its members and European cooperation in strategic areas. Its scope of action focuses on the EHEA itself, as stated in the Bologna Declaration, national and European policies, particularly emphasizing lifelong education, the development of European citizen abilities, and innovation based on virtual education with the introduction of ICT in educational processes.
As a prior condition, inter-institutional cooperation should be achieved, as well as adequate inter-institutional infrastructure with multiple applications. Cooperation is necessary to provide the language in which the courses will be taught, the procedure for ECTS transfer, the development of joint programmes, joint research, and development of course syllabuses and proposals for shared teaching. An inter-institutional infrastructure needs to provide compatible platforms and other industrial products, educational institutions, advertising, governmental agencies, content suppliers, etc. Prior conditions should be aimed at students' needs, taking into account the technological and educational changes behind this flexible, open and lifelong training.

EADTU and its members have been analysing the potential of virtual education and VM in order to develop and offer joint programmes, including brief courses and international learning communities. This means that specific attention should be given to the use of large-scale content management systems and virtual higher education services, enabling better access to higher education and more personalised learning. Consequently, the effectiveness and efficiency of this entire process are key objectives.

4.1.2. Virtual Mobility experience

In 2004, EADTU created a VM Task Force with the aim of exploiting the potential of students without access to classes outside their university, whether distance or on conventional programmes, not contemplated in the Erasmus programme. This target materialised in a work document on VM, followed by specific proposals to request this mobility.

Students participate in mobility programmes for at least two reasons:

- To obtain experience and international abilities, and
- To obtain other opportunities for study, most of which are much more specific.

Virtual Mobility and Physical Mobility are two different forms within the same mobility scheme. Although they were both conceived as different educational concepts and they both have their own future in higher education. However, neither one is less important than the other. Each one has its own characteristics and legitimacy. Furthermore, they both complement and reinforce each other in
to a full academic year. In this case, the tools developed in the Erasmus Programme may be applied (learning agreements, course catalogue, ECTS, transfer and grading documents).

3. **VM as part of joint courses or programmes** with grant joint certificates.

4. **VM as part of continuous professional training**, aimed at personal development for employability.

These four types of VM are enabling the acquisition of international experience and intercultural abilities, backed up by the Bologna Process. In this scenario, VM is considered one of the most important components of the EHEA in the Europe of knowledge and Europe of employability, in an on-line world society.

For these reasons, the EADTU task force has proposed and is developing many forms and models of VM. Students may participate in various higher education institutions if they are unable to travel abroad, through VM. Furthermore, international learning communities that are based on subjects or specific projects may create spaces, for a relatively long period of time, in which their students and staff may learn from each other and share their knowledge.

In some fields, VM provides the opportunity of participating in learning projects, particularly in continuous training. Thus, it contributes to the quality of courses and the syllabus. In order to achieve these objectives, EADTU develops and participates in seven initiatives within the proposed exchange of international courses and VM, including the NetACTIVE Project. All these initiatives are combined with the long-term strategic objective of achieving a European area for distance, open, flexible and lifelong learning. The interest of this proposal is based on an analysis of the key components of VM and of experience related to this development and consolidation in the context of higher education. Each initiative is described below.

**Task Force Academic Cooperation**
http://www.eadtu.nl/default.asp?hld=4&mmld=15

The objective of this task force is to determine the potential academic cooperation between the national consortium and its members. The first advantage is
MORIL. Multilingual Open Resources for Independent Learning. 

Within the framework of EADTU, a proposal is being developed to create a space shared by the member institutions, offering open learning resources.

The main objective of the MORIL project is to develop digitalized material that is provided openly and cost-free to educators, students and persons interested in independent learning, including the use and recycling of material for teaching purposes. The success of this objective is based on three key issues:

- **Learning content**: full courses, multimedia material, content modules, learning objects, volumes and magazines.

- **Tools**: support software to develop, use, reuse and teach the learning content, including content search and organisation, content and learning management systems, content development tools and on-line learning communities, amongst others.

- **Application of resources**: using intellectual property licences that encourage the open publication of material, good practice design and content «localisation».

These resources provide free access and are offered on-line; they are aimed at educational demand in all countries in a multi-lingual format. In this project, courses are offered cost-free, providing the opportunity to carry out educational training within the employment model of the participating universities. The quality and sustainability of these courses are ensured by the long experience of the distance universities that participate and by their renowned quality.

http://www.eadtu.nl/e-excellence/

This project is a Web-based instrument that evaluates the quality of virtual education in higher education. Although there are already certain programmes for quality evaluation, only a few are directed at virtual education and at the quality of higher education institutions that offer these programmes. In order to develop this task, E-excellence is working and elaborating quality indicators to evaluate
4.2. Asociación Iberoamericana de Educación Superior a Distancia (AIESAD) [Latin American Association of Distance Higher Education]

AIESAD is a non-profit organisation born from the resolution adopted during the I Latin American Symposium of Open University Vice-chancellors (Madrid, 1980). Its member institutions believed it was necessary to create a permanent body for information, coordination and cooperation in order to encourage distance higher education to the benefit of Latin American people. Its objectives are:

- To provide information, cooperation and coordinated effort with its member institutions.
- To encourage the research and application of ICT and techniques within the field of distance higher education and to enable their use by member institutions.
- To encourage the training of teachers and technicians in Distance Education methodology.
- To procure a better use of technological, teaching and human services to the benefit of member institutions.
- To encourage the drawing up of courses and teaching material jointly and adjusted to the particular needs of Latin American countries.
- To exchange experience related to the organisation, development and evaluation of distance higher education.
- To encourage the exchange of teachers, researchers, administrators and students amongst Association members.
- To create educational and cultural programmes of common interest to all countries in the area.
- To encourage the drawing up of courses and teaching material jointly and adjusted to the particular needs of Latin American countries.
- To exchange experience related to the organisation, development and evaluation of distance higher education.
- To encourage the exchange of teachers, researchers, administrators and students amongst Association members.
The main objective of this project is to develop the bases for a system of quality standards intended distance higher education programmes in Latin-America and the Caribbean (Virtual Centre), and also to carry out the preliminary validation of those bases through consultation and pilot tests.

The objectives are:

(1) to promote the higher education institution to successfully improve, implement and manage distance education programmes based on ICT.

(2) to contribute to the government's capacity to regulate, evaluate and certificate their distance teaching programmes.

The Virtual Centre, thanks to the implication of the highest possible number of Latin-American institutions, it will be able to promote the development and diffusion of quality standards adjusted to Ibero-America and Caribbean, and culturally coherent for the evaluation and delivery of post-secondary programmes of distance education in the region.

ALFA UE-AIESAD. Postgrados y Doctorados A Distancia en Educación.
[Distance Postgraduate and Doctorate courses in Education]
http://www.uned.es/relaciones-internacionales/alfa_pde/

The main objective of this Project, financed by the ALFA Programme of the European Commission, is to create a postgraduate exchange programme in the field of Education amongst Latin American universities and European universities. Two situations were envisaged: a doctorate student programme where candidates completed a six-month stay, while they completed a doctorate programme in their home university, at one of the institutions belonging to the Project network; and another programme for Master students to carry out an exchange in the same conditions. This initiative intends to encourage collaboration amongst AIESAD institutions, to support existing doctorate and maestría programmes and to allow these postgraduate programmes to be jointly executed between European and Latin American institutions, thereby encouraging the recognition and acceptance of joint European/Latin American qualifications.
CONVINCED:

of the need to create a Latin American Academic Area for University Cooperation, to help in the integration of our region, governed by the principles of university independence, reciprocity, solidarity, multi-lateral policies, joint participation, equal opportunities, flexibility, relevance and quality.

Further to these premises, at the XII Meeting of the AIESAD (La Calidad de la Educación Superior a Distancia en el Ámbito Euro-latinoamericano. Perspectivas, Políticas y Estrategias, -Quality of Distance Higher Education in the Euro-Latin-American Context Political Perspectives and Strategies-) Puerto Plata, 2007) this European/Latin American Area for Knowledge has been developed, aimed at the necessary transformation of distance education, based on joint projects already underway and potential means of cooperation as necessary conditions to improve the quality of distance education. Logically, the construction and consolidation of an area for knowledge of this kind require the strengthening and collaboration of multi-lateral systems for academic cooperation and the interaction between higher education institutions.

As AIESAD has always worked towards the development of quality references in distance education, one of the most urgent challenges is the creation of a Quality Network of Latin American Postgraduates, specifically aimed at the construction of a European/Latin American Area for Knowledge. Through an effective exchange of ideas and experience amongst participating experts, this event is an important forum to consolidate academic capacity, to develop the necessary resources and to reinforce the integrity and credibility of the institutions that share this basic objective: the improvement and constant updating of distance education.

In line with this idea, a Latin American Area for Knowledge («Espacio Iberoamericano del Conocimiento») is gradually materialising in Latin America, with the aim of encouraging the recognition of studies and mobility in the university community. The XVI Latin American Conference for Education (2006) agreed to encourage the EIC, sponsoring the mobility of students, teachers and researchers and the accreditation of quality of institutions and programmes.

Logically, the encouragement of open and distance education will help strengthen accessibility to education and the development of the EIC. To support this, the UNESCO report entitled «Open and Distance Learning» (2002)
to continue making progress towards the EIBES: Quality and relevance, Mobility, Financing and Information.

After these initial statements to develop the EIBES, a proposal was made for a wider and more ambitious common «educational area»: the «Espacio de Educación Superior de América Latina, el Caribe y la Unión Europea» (ALCUE) [The Area for Higher Education in Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union]. ALCUE was born in the Rio de Janeiro Declaration of 1999 and began its work at the Conference of Ministers of Education of Paris (2000); the follow-up committee on the conference developed the 2002-2004 Action Plan to construct this space, and the Plan was approved at the Summit of Heads of State and Government of Madrid (2002).

Further to these first initiatives, higher education institutions worldwide and, naturally, in Latin America, are gradually undertaking more student mobility programmes, whether through networks, scholarship sponsors for mobility or through bilateral and multilateral agreements. Efforts are also being made to create a common area for higher education that encourages the recognition of studies and mobility in the university community.

However, this regular cooperation for student exchange between Europe and Latin America began in 1986, when various programmes and agreements began to be implemented. Since then, in a gradual manner, these initiatives have been materialising and include certain programmes selected according to the international and multinational scope. In this regard, it should be taken into account that this is not an exhaustive list of all the bilateral programmes existing between various countries and institutions in Latin America and Europe.

4.3.1.1. Student Mobility Programmes

- Programa de Movilidad Estudiantil entre Universidades del Sistema CINDA [Student Mobility Programme amongst Universities belonging to the CINDA System]

http://www.cinda.cl/
• Programa de Intercambio y Movilidad Académica – PIMA. Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos para la Educación, la Ciencia y la Cultura (OEI)

http://www.campus-oei.org/pima/

The PIMA, which began in 1999 further to the OEI’s proposal, is a multilateral programme for graduate student mobility, structured in university networks in at least three institutions in different countries. It is focused on subjects and requires the recognition of any studies completed at the host university by the home university. It has entailed a progressive incorporation of universities, mostly public, belonging to eighteen countries in Latin America.

This programme guarantees the completion of studies, recognised by their university, over a period no longer than an academic semester, at a university in another Latin American country.

• Programa de Movilidad Estudiantil. Consejo de Rectores por la Integración de la Subregión y Centro Oeste de Sudamérica – CRISCOS
[Student Mobility Programme. Council of Vice-chancellors for the Integration of the Sub-region and Central-Western area of South America]

http://www.ucsm.edu.pe/criscos/asambleas.html

The Programme for Student Mobility in the Sub-region Central-Western Area of South America wishes to provide university students at universities within the Sub-region with the possibility of completing part of their studies at another Sub-region university, as a specific way of contributing to university internationalisation and cooperation for integration. The programme attempts to establish student mobility between universities belonging to the four countries on the Vice-chancellor Council: Argentina, Bolivia, Chile and Peru.
• **ALFA Programme**

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/alfa/index_es.htm

ALFA is the European Union programme for academic cooperation between higher education institutions and Latin America. ALFA is divided into two sections:

- *Subprogramme A*: directed at joint institutional management projects
- *Subprogramme B*: to assist cooperation projects for scientific and technical training, with activities that include the mobility of university and postgraduate students between institutions in Member States and Latin America, and between Latin American institutions.

• **MAGALLANES: The Latin American ERASMUS**

http://vri8.rec.upm.es:8090/magalhaes/students.aspx,

The Magallanes programme is similar to the European Erasmus programme and contemplates the mobility of engineering and architecture students between the largest European and Latin American technological universities. The Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), through its Vice-Chancellorship for International Relations, coordinates this Network.

• **SMILE: Student Mobility in Latin America, Caribbean and Europe.**

vri8.rec.upm.es:8090/magalhaes/Projects.aspx

At present, UPM (Universidad Politécnica de Madrid) coordinates the SMILE Programme (*Student Mobility In Latin America, Caribbean and Europe*). This mobility programme is aimed at pre-graduate student exchange in Engineering
especially, other types of academic life, the «Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior» (ANUIES) and the institutions belonging to the National Network for Academic Exchange, agreed to establish a National Mobility Programme with the aim of allowing the academic community to exchange academic and institutional administration experience, in all forms.

- **Programa de Movilidad Internacional. Conferencia de Rectores de las Universidades Españolas (CRUE) [International Mobility Programme. Conference of Vice-Chancellors of Spanish Universities] and «Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior» (ANUIES)

  http://www.crue.org/

Both entities decided to launch the programme in which forty-six Mexican universities and twenty-seven Spanish universities are currently participating. Students are the ones who obtain mobility resources and all candidates must have completed at least one year of their degree at their home university; they have to meet the requirements established in the home and host universities, register at the home university and complete at least one semester and no more than one year’s studies at the host university.

4.3.1.2. Actions That Support Student Mobility

- **COLUMBUS** (A bridge between European and Latin American universities)


COLUMBUS is an association of forty-nine European and Latin American universities, created in 1987. Its main objectives are the promotion of institutional development and multilateral cooperation. It is basically aimed at helping univer-
The programme of national students’ mobility has among its objectives the promotion of mobility with undergraduate and postgraduate students, by means of the support for academic stays at the participating higher education institutions.

- **Middle American Programme for Academic Exchange.** Mexico / Central America ANUIES - CSUCA

http://www.csuca.edu.gt/Sistemas/Anuies-CSUCA/anuies.HTM

This programme was created further to the agreement to establish the Mexican-Central American University Network (1997) for exchange and ANUIES-CSUCA cooperation. Since this initiative, the Mexican-Middle American Academic Exchange Programme was put into practice in order to strengthen the area’s interuniversity links. The purpose of this programme is to improve the quality of higher education in Mexico and Central America through projects for scientific cooperation and international technique, in order to strengthen collaboration between Central American universities and encourage integration with the region’s social and productive sectors.

- **Consejo Universitario Iberoamericano (CUIB) [Latin American University Council]**

http://www.cuib.org/

The CUIB is a non-governmental organisation established upon a network of networks of Latin American universities. Amongst its objectives is the encouragement of teacher and student mobility and shared doctorate programmes to boost the creation and strengthening of research networks.
In general, degree courses consist of additions, aggregates or patches that have many different sources and reflect diverse and conflicting influences. This hinders compatibility, harmonisation and student mobility, not only amongst countries but also within the same country. Trans-national education is also present here, with no adequate regulations or control, and with very different models.

More recently, postgraduate courses reflect a strong influence of the U.S. Masters model, without substantially affecting the degree. Consequently, there is a certain incompatibility and misleading roles between graduate and postgraduate courses, and a growing presence of foreign courses as a result of trans-national education, without being adequately regulated in each country. This reveals the need to reconsider the structure of graduate and postgraduate courses with respect to the scope of degrees, levels of training, professional abilities and whether academic and professional programmes should be distinguished or not.

This diverging evolution, together with the already complex task involved in a harmonisation process in relation to issues such as student mobility, academic recognition and professional abilities, amongst others, render the task inherent to a convergence process in Latin America long and difficult.

This notwithstanding, several initiatives have been put into practice to bring the higher education systems in various Latin American countries closer together, with a view to one or several convergence processes amongst countries.

If we focus on the regional integration processes applicable in Latin America, there is a need to consider the articulation and convergence of educational systems and, particularly, the recognition of degrees and studies, in order to enable mobility amongst people in each region. Some of these initiatives are described below.

- **Convergence and articulation in relation to MERCOSUR: the «Mecanismo Experimental de Acreditación de Carreras» (MEXA) [Experimental Device for the Accreditation of Degrees]**

  http://www.mec.gub.uy/educacion/acredita.htm

  The main regional integration process in Latin America belongs to MERCOSUR, with Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay as its founding members, and the subsequent incorporation of Bolivia and Chile as associates. Recently, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela have applied for membership. The countries in the Andes region have come together in the Andes Treaty, which was more or less successful until
and Doctorate) for the accreditation of the corresponding programmes, both for professional and academic guidance, and those in relation to the accreditation of inter-institutional postgraduate courses.

The most complex and difficult situation arose in relation to the recognition aimed at enabling students to exercise a profession. After many comings and goings, it was decided to instrument a device based on the accreditation of graduate programmes that require a degree in order to exercise a profession. As a result of this initiative, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed for the Implementation of a Experimental Device for the Accreditation of Graduate Courses. This Memorandum proposes general principles, criteria to determine experimental degrees, and the procedures, scope and implications of accreditation.

The respective Accreditation Agencies of the member states actively participate in the evaluation process. The Meeting of Accreditation Agencies in MERCOSUR is the method used to follow up on the accreditation process.

On the other hand, over the last few years, various international, regional or bilateral cooperation bodies have initiated programmes and projects to encourage convergence and articulation amongst higher education systems, e.g. UNESCO (United Nations, Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization), particularly through IESALC (Instituto Internacional para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe); the OEI (Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos); the OUI (Organización Universitaria Interamericana), especially through IGLU (Instituto de Gestión y Liderazgo Universitario); the European Commission (through the Alfa and Alßan projects); cooperation bodies in countries such as Canada, Spain, U.S.A. and France; and the Columbus programme, amongst others.

Interuniversity or inter-agency networks have also organized to contribute to these convergence objectives: the Montevideo Group, the CSUCA, the CINDA, the Latin American Network for University Cooperation, the «Asociación de Universidades de América Latina y el Caribe para la Integración» (AUALCPI), the «Red Iberoamericana para la Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior» (RIACES, Ibero-American Network for Accreditation and Quality in Higher Education), etc. Other projects aimed at the convergence in higher education are:

- Tasks and projects carried out by Organización de Estados Iberoamericanos (OEI),
  http://www.oei.es/
*Instituto Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Calidad en Educación Superior a Distancia* (CAL-ED, *«Latin-American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Higher Distance Education»*)
www.utpl.edu.ec/caled

This Institute is one of the most interesting initiatives in the last few years. It was born in 2005 in relation to distance education and its relationship with various institutions that encourage the quality and accreditation of these programmes, with the aim, amongst others, of enabling student and academic mobility further to quality-based mutual trust.

*The Alfa Programme of the European Commission*
http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/projects/alfa/index_es.htm

This programme was established over the last few years as an important tool for articulation and convergence in education matters amongst countries of the European Commission and of Latin America.

The ALFA projects (América Latina-Formación Académica) [Latin America-Academic Training] are on-line work proposals between European and Latin American universities. These subject-based networks consist, at least, of six universities in different countries: three in Europe and three amongst the eighteen countries of Latin America coordinated by any of them. Amongst the specific projects aimed at encouraging harmonisation in higher education, the following may be highlighted:

— **ALFA: «Acreditación y Reconocimientos Oficiales entre Universidades del MERCOSUR y la Unión Europea (ACRO)» [Accreditation and Official Recognition between MERCOSUR Universities and the European Union].**
http://www.uv.es/alfa-acro/

Its aims have included the development of conceptual accreditation frameworks in the European and Latin American scenarios (particularly in MERCOSUR), establishing common criteria for the recognition of degrees amongst participating universities, and the establishing of regular and general tools for universities in both contexts in order to enable degree accreditation and recognition.
in the management structures of member universities, and encouraging interaction amongst member institutions.

In 1948, the **Consejo Superior Universitario Centroamericano (CSUCA)** [Senior University Council of Central America](http://www.cusuca.org/drupal/index.php) was created, as the forerunner to subregional integration and the operation of interuniversity networks. Over the last fifty years, the CSUCA has sustained its activity in the promotion of university integration in the area and in helping its improvement. The CSUCA consists of sixteen public universities in Central America and Panama. This body created the «Sistema Centroamericano de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior» (SiCEvaES) [Central American System for the Appraisal and Accreditation of Higher Education] which, together with the MEXA of MERCOSUR, are the two most important subregional devices in terms of assurance and accreditation of quality higher education in Latin America.

The **Centro Interuniversitario de Desarrollo (CINDA)** [Interuniversity Centre for Development], cited above, with headquarters in Santiago de Chile, consists of twenty-eight Latin American universities and three European universities (in Spain and Italy). Its objective is to form part of regional development and of each country’s individual development. It has conducted numerous studies and advisory works related to the improvement of management and quality in higher education.

In 1997 the **Red Latinoamericana de Cooperación Universitaria (RLCU)** [Latin American Network for University Cooperation](http://www.rlcu.org.ar/) was established in Buenos Aires, consisting of universities from fourteen countries. This Network promotes regional integration, cooperation and academic excellence, as well as the generation and distribution of thoughts in the area. Its main fields of activity focus on university organisation and management, the mobility and acceptance of studies, institutional and programme accreditation, and ICT for higher education.

The **Asociación de Universidades de América Latina y del Caribe para la Integración (AUALCPI)** was created for a similar purposes in 1993. It consists of universities from twenty countries and encourages exchange and integration in university terms amongst its members, under the slogan «The Latin American Community of Nations is the new motto for integration». 
Furthermore, joint activities between multilateral bodies will be intensified, as well as between university networks and higher education institutions in Latin America and Europe.

For the Latin America–Europe convergence process the support of multilateral, interuniversity and national cooperation bodies in Europe will be very important, particularly the European Commission, through new Alfa projects. The Commission will have a significant role in developing the strategic idea of consolidating the Latin American Area of Higher Education together with the European Area, so as to materialise the strengthening of the new European Union–Latin America Common Area for Higher Education, created by Heads of State in both areas.

4.3.3. Conclusions on the programmes and actions taken to support student mobility

From this view of the situation of the most important programmes carried out in Latin America, we should indicate the points in which most of these student mobility programmes converge, indicating the key characteristics of mobility in the field of higher education in Latin America. This analysis will help to better understand the needs and interests in the continent, and so it may be affirmed that all these student mobility proposals:

- Pursue, amongst other issues, the internationalisation of universities, the strengthening of student interuniversity training and the encouragement of cooperation projects and links between the various universities.
- Are significant due to the participation of all Latin American countries in one or more mobility programmes.
- Most are aimed at pre-graduate students.
- Any students who wish to participate in these programmes must have high academic achievement and should mostly belong to advanced courses.
- The home university should recognise the credits approved in the mobility programme.
PART II
THE ORGANISATION
OF VIRTUAL MOBILITY
5. TARGET GROUPS FOR VIRTUAL MOBILITY

Logically, any virtual mobility project involves various institutional and individual agents: the home and host universities, the student who will carry out and benefit from this mobility experience, and the administrators and teachers who make it possible. It is therefore necessary to define the role of these figures and the tasks they should assume and execute.

5.1. Home university

The starting point of this experience lies at the home university as it is the institution that makes mobility feasible. There are two key figures, one at an administrative level and another at a teaching level.

A description of the figures of tasks is provided below. However, at an administrative level, virtual mobility coordinators must organise this type of mobility at their university and, furthermore, mobility agreements must be established with other universities. The signature of mobility agreements fixing the dates, training credits and their value, subjects or modules to be recognised, etc. are essential components to be foreseen and agreed by the institutions before embarking on an experience of this type.

On the other hand, at a teaching level, an academic coordinator or faculty/department tutor should exist in order to directly assist each student, either as initial guidance before a virtual stay at another university, or during the stay if any unforeseen event arises and affects the home university. The coordinator’s assistance is decisive once the stay is completed and the student is back at the home university, providing assistance not only to complete the necessary bureaucratic steps for the recognition of credits obtained, but also to make the most of the abilities acquired.
— The language in which the modules and evaluation are carried out. In general, module content will not be translated and exams will be completed in the host university’s language.

In general, higher education institutions offering distance teaching have well defined criteria to assist and guide distance students, which is particularly important in the case of students eligible for virtual mobility. As an example, the Welcoming Plan for new UNED students 12

6. VIRTUAL MOBILITY (VM) ORGANISATION

Mobility organisation involves three basic issues:

• Any agreement must be drawn up and signed by the institutions participating in the VM programme.

• The institutions must provide the timetable of available courses allowing a VM exchange.

• It should be aimed at students according to their options, and these must be approved by the institutions.

The study on the offer of courses has revealed differences in higher education systems, institutional and departmental structure, programme objectives and teaching approaches, not only between Latin America and Europe but also amongst individual regions. In particular, this is revealed by the fact that:

• Some universities may offer the courses in virtual environments, but other institutions are less equipped to do so. Many of these apply a dual-learning approach (combining on-campus and distance teaching), which may become an obstacle for virtual mobility.

• The teaching and learning language is usually the country’s language, and this may represent a significant barrier to exchange possibilities if this language is not known.

12 the Welcoming Plan for new UNED students may be consulted at http://portal.uned.es/portal/page?_pageid=93,553308&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL
ECTS, the European Credit Transfer System, will provide a common credit system to ensure a full transfer of credits on the programme. It will allow the measurement and comparison of academic achievements and the possibility of transferring them from one institution to another, in order to be recognised in the final grades in the home country.

The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) will be used to enable the exchange. The level and amount of credits for each module should be calculated and published in advance, and each institution will accept these credits towards the completion of a certain degree. If a university does not use the ECTS credits, this should not represent a limitation. Nevertheless, the institutions will be encouraged to use this system, thereby strengthening capacity and equal conditions within and between countries. Each institution will accept a module for credit transfer purposes will use the ECTS system and will provide qualitative information on the content programme, structure and evaluation applied to each module. The calculation method will be established as an ECTS credit of 25-30 reading hours. As ECTS credits do not represent a level, they will be assigned ensuring that the modules constitute part of a Masters programme at the home university.

From this experience and the lessons learnt from other European-Latin American projects, such as the EU-AIESAD project mentioned before, it was clear that, at a strictly administrative and planning level, the needs of students involved in a virtual mobility programmes are very similar to those that carry out a physical transfer, i.e. a need for prior information, advice from the institutions, recognition of studies and comparison of the outcomes obtained. All these items are gathered and structured in the exchange tools that are being used in the Erasmus programme: ECTS, information catalogue, learning agreement, academic certification, etc.

Based on this premise, the proposal described below intends to follow this model, as it is understood and accepted by many institutions, albeit adapting it to the particularities and demands of Distance and Virtual Education.

The members of a virtual mobility programme will draw up an agreement amongst the institutions. Participation in the VM programme will help member universities better understand all global and virtual learning, and the nature of
of credits between institutions, enabling the recognition of studies completed abroad. In this regard, what are the benefits of applying the ECTS model?

— It is a commonly agreed model whereby exchange and communication is possible in the academic field;

— It is a transfer model allowing the translation of certain systems; it helps study programmes to be easily understandable and comparable for all students, whether local or foreign; it also helps mobility and academic recognition, allowing universities to arrange and review their study programmes.

ECTS credits may only be obtained upon completion of the required work and after the relevant assessments. On the other hand, a credit is also a way of quantifying the outcomes of learning. These outcomes represent the overall abilities that the student will put into practice throughout the learning process, covering what the student will be able to do after the process, in the short or long term.

Credits are assigned to all the educational components of a study programme (modules, courses, traineeship, and theses). In this way, the credits reflect the volume of work required by each component in relation to the total volume of work required to complete a full course.

The outcomes obtained by the students in their learning processes will be accredited and documented by assigning a local or national grade, according to the criteria used in each case. In the grading scale of the ECTS model, student outcomes are classified according to statistics. Consequently, statistics on student outcomes are a prior requirement to apply this grading system. Grades are assigned as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>the best 10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>the next 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>the next 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>the next 25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>the remaining 10%.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*With respect to the % of students who have passed

A distinction is made between «FX» and «F» grades assigned to students who do not pass the evaluation tests. «FX» means Fail: more effort is necessary in order
6.2. Stay at the host university

Participation in the virtual mobility processes will enable member universities to more thoroughly understand virtual and global learning, as well as the nature of education in foreign Masters. It will also provide a forum for discussion in relation to articulation amongst virtual universities.

The development of a virtual mobility process may provide opportunities for academic development, such as a better alignment of study plans, through the collaboration inherent to student assistance and the drawing up of joint courses and programmes. Finally, the VM processes may offer opportunities for development for university staff, including academic and administrative exchange processes.

With respect to the practicalities of the exchange, from the point of view of both the home and host institution, a series of conditions must be met in order to enable virtual mobility.

- The framework agreement should be signed by the institutions participating in the exchange project, establishing the terms of acceptance, the courses available to foreign students, the ECTS credits and the mutual recognition of ECTS credits and grades.
- The bilateral agreements signed by the home and host institutions should guarantee free student mobility as part of the VM project conditions.
- Each institution must designate several individuals to coordinate, supervise and guide all VM programme participants.

6.3. Institutional interlocution

Although the specific separation of roles amongst institutional and academic and departmental coordinators may vary in each institution, the general responsibilities they hold are as follows:

- **Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor (institutional responsible person):** this responsibility is generally held by the university vice-chancellor or by the person designated by the latter. This person is the one who signs the framework agreement and bilateral agreements that guarantee its terms.
• **Institutional and Administrative Coordinator/s:** these figures assure the institutions’ commitment and the implementation of VM principles and devices; coordinate institutional information; ratify the necessary documents; distribute the exchange programme in their institutions; encourage the participation of teachers and students; supervise the signature of the bilateral agreement; and sign all learning agreements. The Coordinator must also safeguard the development of VM as part of the accumulation and transfer of credits and will supervise all mechanisms used to adequately apply the ECTS tools. The administrative coordinator, together with the academic coordinators in each Department or Faculty, are in charge of ensuring the articulation, reparation, production and distribution of institutional information through the Course Catalogue, and also they ensure that any credit accumulated is consistent in all departments and faculties through the University.

• **Academic Coordinator/s:** they are the personal and academic contact persons for students in each department or faculty (according to each University’s structure and size) and they are in charge of the academic aspects of VM and the ECTS together with the teacher(s) of the module(s) or subject matters to be taught to the students. This is a key figure of VM. The academic coordinators select the courses that will be offered, inform teachers, evaluate both potential students and those already registered; encourage the participation of teachers and students; acts as mediators in possible recognition difficulties. These coordinators interact with the Institutional Coordinator in practical matters. Together, they guarantee that all potential mobility students have access to the Course Catalogue of the participating institutions, adequate completion of the Student Application and Learning Agreement, and achieve awareness of the procedures for academic recognition. The academic coordinator also acts as a **virtual tutor**, insofar as s/he will direct the students during any difficulty that may arise during their stay, even if not strictly related to the development of the study module or the issue raised between the module teacher and the student.

Another task involves the adequate transcription of the qualifications obtained by travelling students (before their study period abroad) and after they have completed their studies at the other institution.

All resources, forums, links and support units available to local students will also be accessible to VM students, who will also benefit from specific VM units to ensure that their stay is as smooth and pleasant as possible.
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ACTIVE – AIESAD-EADTU Credit Transfer In Virtual and Distance Education

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technological proposals of learning and communication, and these new forms are challenging traditional educational models so well rooted in a still high number of universities and higher education institutions. The building of innovative proposals on virtual learning environments to address higher education institutions has been the key element of this study.

The authors of this work of research, come from the university context, and all of them are well reputed professionals on virtual and distance education methodologies. This group of experts has assumed the challenge to demolish, with the arguments of experience and good practices in virtual and distance education, the still existing prejudices around the identification of physical attendance as the unique way to achieve excellence in education, while the use of technology applied to education continues being regarded as a «complementary resource» to keep up forms of education that, very often are obsolete and surpassed since a very a long time.

The partner investigators and experts offer, with their experiences, studies and proposals of cooperation, a model of exchange and academic recognition innovative, inclusive and oriented, where appropriate, to impel and to improve communication and interaction between higher education institutions, whichever their methodological teaching and learning profiles may be.

Europe has echoed concerns on the need to give this qualitative jump in higher education, and consequently, it has started ambitious projects as the Program ERASMUS MUNDUS. Nevertheless, while educational policies in the European context, continue anchored to models aimed at maintaining and reproducing the exclusive features and the tradition, which has been their signs of identity until today, they will carry the risk that other educational offers, with greater conviction in their answer to the demands of the knowledge society, definitively will nullify efforts heretofore invested by universities, institutions and organisms. These are the reasons why we try to impulse, through this book the proposals of technology, innovation and quality break through in university management, which constitute the key factors that allow us to reach what we considered our authentic goal as educators: to develop wider, and more inclusive educational processes within cooperation environments aimed at the construction of knowledge.

LORENZO GARCÍA ARETIO

Academic director of the NETACTIVE research Project
also establish the grounds for an exchange beyond the borders of the European Community.

Further to the foregoing, the NetACTIVE (AIÉSAD-EADTU: Credit Transfer in Virtual and Distance Education) project, coordinated by UNED through the UNESCO Chair of Distance Education (Dr. Lorenzo García Aretio) as part of the Erasmus-Mundus programme, was born with the aim of making a proposal to increase the mobility of Master students, receiving distance teaching in whole or in part, through the virtual mobility of third countries towards Europe. The focus was on Latin America, as it is one of the most attractive areas within EHEA expansion, due to the high number of potential students and its great interest in encouraging the certification and academic recognition of its university degrees.

In order to achieve these proposals, two of the most important distance higher education associations are involved: the Asociación Iberoamericana de Educación Superior a Distancia (AIÉSAD) and the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) which, at its meeting held in Paris in 2000, agreed to help in creating the EHEA, highlighting the achievement of lifelong education. Both associations have joined efforts in the implementation of this project. They both represent over 70 higher education institutions in more than thirty countries. Besides, all the European and Latin American partners count on a long experience in mobility programmes, providing complementary perspectives to plan and schedule it.

NetACTIVE's first objective is to develop the necessary tools for the mobility of Latin American studies together with European higher education institutions. This area has been selected due to our mutual interest, the high number of potential students and its progress in academic recognition and in the creation of a common higher education in that continent.

The second objective of NetACTIVE is to broadcast the European Masters available in fields of study of particular interest to third countries. Whereas the first objective is focused on Latin America, the second has a worldwide perspective.

This is the goal that has led the design of this Guide, it is aimed to achieve good practices, as a guide intended for professionals, from both home
NETACTIVE: BASES AND PROPOSALS FOR GOOD PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY

— To offer the information and knowledge accumulated during European experience in mobility, exchange and recognition in order to use the best practice to construct a proposal for effective virtual academic exchange between European and Latin American institutions, allowing them to grow in this field and avoiding, from the start, any dysfunctional actions and processes that could give rise to problems in the process.

— To encourage virtual mobility as an alternative and complementary resource, encouraging training experiences in the university field amongst institutions of various nationalities; in order to achieve better training in basic and technological professional skills and to help strengthen cultural and linguistic diversity.
Thereafter, a new institution was encouraged, aimed at the job market, at boosting the Union's economy within a society of knowledge, achieving high levels of international competitiveness, mobility and employability. To do this, it was necessary to provide common structures to ensure transparency, compatibility and comparison, the only way in which to promote a highly competitive system able to act as a social and economic leader. After this meeting, the so-called Bologna Process was consolidated as an answer to this demand for change that had begun many years earlier in international terms. Most European countries have integrated in this Process step by step, as it is shown in the following table:

| Since 1999: | Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Holland, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Republic of Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, The United Kingdom |
| Since 2001: | The Croatia, Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Turkey; |
| Since 2003: | Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Holy See, Russia, Serbia, former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia |
| Since 2005: | Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova y Ukraine; |
| Since May 2007: | Montenegro |

On the other, a second key moment of international impact should be emphasized: the celebration in Paris of the first World Summit for Higher Education in 1998, by UNESCO. This event is of particular interest because:

— Of the change involved in replacing «university» with the term «higher education».
— The introduction of higher education as another step in the training of any person throughout life, covering the education taught at university whether at a beginner's or permanent level.
— The need for university to respond to society's needs and interests.
— The need for traditional university to break its barriers as a key instrument for mobility, the only way in which to provide authentic training
NETACTIVE: BASES AND PROPOSALS FOR GOOD PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY

Over the years, reports and communications have been issued regarding permanent education, professional training, research, virtual learning, etc. In short, it is explained how space and time have changed where knowledge is generated and how the various sectors and agents involved should participate. In this entire phenomenon, the engine has been, still is and continues to be the economy. It should not be forgotten that the European Union's objective for 2010 is for Europe to become the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy, able to achieve sustainable development that generates the best work posts and guarantees social cohesion. And, precisely, 2010 is also the year in which the entire university reform for Europe should be approved and implemented. However, in turn, it becomes clear that without the collaboration and interaction of third countries all these objectives and plans will not be adequately achieved. It is gradually more necessary to have a world network or higher education institutions, with mobility becoming the main promoter.

A key document to achieve this target was the communication entitled «The role of universities in the Europe of knowledge» (2003b). It directly discussed the role expected from higher education, based on four mutually dependent blocks:

- The production of knowledge,
- The transfer of knowledge through education,
- The broadcasting of knowledge through ICT,
- The exploitation of knowledge thanks to technological innovations.

University continues to be the key in all these factors, as it is the basis of all research, education and innovation, thereby becoming the heart of any society and contributing to economic development, leadership and social cohesion.

Consequently, the ability to lead any society depends, first of all, on achieving a competitive university that is able to play the role entrusted. To do this, an unprecedented reform is necessary in order for university to respond to the growing demand of higher education, the internationalisation of education and research, effective development and cooperation between universities and industry, and the reorganisation of knowledge to multiply knowledge production sectors.

However, this project could not become a reality if the various countries first do not achieve a comparable, legible and transparent system for all. This process has not been easy and Europe has been a clear example of this laborious path; initially it was a matter of «convergence», but soon this term was changed to now
In Bergen meeting (2005) priority was again given to three-cycle qualifications (Graduate, Masters and Doctorate), stressing the following:

- National quality assurance, in close coordination with European and international quality networks.
- Mutual recognition of qualifications and study programmes amongst all countries.

In London meeting (2007), the emphasis is placed on the continued boost given to the structure of these studies and their recognition, the progress achieved in quality certification and the priority issues to be encouraged, qualifications as an essential instrument for comparison and transparency: all this to achieve more mobility between students, professors, administrative and services staff.

Summarising, by 2010 there should be a highly competitive and attractive higher education area worldwide; to do this, academic mobility should be encouraged both amongst students and professors through a common qualifications system that ensures the recognition and compatibility of studies. This will be achieved thanks to a structure and definition of qualification according to professional profiles, a credit system and the common recognition and accreditation of qualifications and study programmes. In this way, flexibility and transparency will enable the various university systems to be read and compared. This will clearly lead to improved quality and the consolidation of higher education standards, making the EHEA more attractive in close dependency with all continents. In short, the aim is to achieve a higher education area worldwide, based on:

- A common qualifications system, based on professional profiles, ensuring the recognition and compatibility of any studies conducted abroad.
- A change in the structure, qualifications, content, methodology and evaluation of the university system.
- A change in the outlook of education, treating it as learning-based teaching.
- Transparent systems and qualifications.

---

* The Declaration of this last meeting has been already subscribed by 46 European countries.
b) To clearly achieve an identifiable European path, involving the coordination amongst all countries of coherent and complete information on European higher education.

c) To achieve levels of quality in all areas of higher education. This requires quality in the courses offered, flexible programmes in various languages and adjusted to student diversity, situations, methodologies, etc. (COM, 2006).

1.2. Erasmus Mundus

The *Erasmus Mundus* (EM) programme, a logical consequence of all the foregoing, is based on the ERASMUS European programme. It is aimed at the cooperation and promotion of mobility at a Postgraduate level within the European Union. It includes European Masters of the highest quality that highlight the visibility and attractiveness of European higher education for third countries.

It also offers scholarships both to third country students who participate in these Masters and to Europeans who are studying in member universities abroad. Also, in this way, it becomes an invaluable framework for the exchange and dialogue of cultures.

This programme has received support both from European governments and also from other non-European universities, as it fully responds to the challenges faced by higher education: specifically, the need to stimulate the harmonisation process of qualification structures and student mobility, whilst also making European higher education attractive worldwide.

Furthermore, *Erasmus Mundus* coincides with the Bologna Process and the Lisbon Strategy in giving response to the responsibility of creating a competitive Europe based on the economy of knowledge. This programme confirms the European Commission's interest in opening European higher education to the rest of the world, by complementing regional actions already existing with third countries, such as the Tempus, ALFA or Asia-Link programmes.

The specific objectives proposed by *Erasmus Mundus* are:

- To select high-quality Masters to be offered by a consortium of at least three higher education institutions in at least three participating countries (Action 1).
- To provide scholarships to qualified students from third countries, in order to be able to participate in the Masters selected (Action 2).
tions in both continents, i.e. the Asociación Iberoamericana de Educación Superior a Distancia (AIESAD), chaired by UNED in Spain, and the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU), which, when organising lifelong learning, represents all European distance and open universities that totally or partly implement the methodology of flexible and lifelong open teaching/learning.

NetACTIVE’s objectives are developed in three key steps:

1) Basic information: Provided through the range of Masters offered by AIESAD and EADTU universities, fields of study and exchange experience, and the recognition of fully distance or blended Masters.

2) Development of material: A proposed Virtual Mobility Programme (VMP) and Report aimed at «Good Practice in Mobility and Academic Recognition», together with a Virtual Course to manage the mobility of distance postgraduate students, an on-line Catalogue of Distance European Masters and an electronic newsletter presenting any novelties, as well as new Masters offered by the universities.

3) Training and distribution: On-campus seminars and a virtual course aimed at networks of educators and distance education managers, in order to train the professionals involved in the joint process for exchange and development of a higher education programme. Another relevant point is the distribution of all this information on available programmes and courses in all student networks. All information on NETACTIVE may be found at http://www.net-active.info/.

Through these steps, NetACTIVE hopes to obtain:

- An increase in the potential number of students wishing to enter a European postgraduate programme, through VM, receiving fully distance or blended Masters Courses.

- The development and improvement of VM management in postgraduate programmes offered by AIESAD and EADTU.

- The dissemination of good practices amongst the technicians in charge of student VM, both in home and host institutions.

- The distribution of ECTS in third countries.
in quantitative and, above all, in qualitative terms (Jofre, 2005), whereby mobility in higher education will become the key to competitiveness between the world's large scientific areas and basic for the development of universities. In summary, an essential indicator that reflects the institutions level of quality and international outlook.

In order to achieve this objective, a discussion should be encouraged on course-content structures, performance indicators, the quality of content and procedures, and consensus in the calculation of credits obtained in supranational studies. The decision to participate in these actions for progress towards a common higher education area belongs, in the first place, to higher education institutions; consequently, it is essential to disseminate good practices to help transform the current situation. In this sense, European universities have travelled a long way in the construction of the EHEA and have accumulated rich and valuable experience to share with other institutions that are also currently moving towards this target.

1.4. From distance education to education without distances:

Technologies used to provide new learning environments

A proposal for VM is not a suggestion that universities take a blind jump, but is a consequence of a methodology, distance education, that has been performing very satisfactorily for years and the gradual disappearance of space and time. «The consolidation and expansion of the Web has allowed us to transfer and remove the time limitations of these sources of information and generation of knowledge. As a supplier of information, training and communication resources, Internet is being used as the grounds for a closer distance education, by enabling it to be present in any scenario. The Web has become the point of convergence of various educational stakeholders.» (García Aretio, Ruiz Corbella, Domínguez Figaredo, 2007, 53).

The parameters to be taken into account nowadays to design an action for training, involve educational standards that answer to the constant evolution of technology, the globalisation of the economy or the transformation of knowledge. This entails a permanent need to learn throughout one's life, both individually and by every group and institution. The demands of current society require any educational proposal to be flexible, in order to respond to different situations
### Parameters for distance and virtual education

| Interaction                                      | • Multi-directional communication (teacher–students; students–students).  
|                                                | • Trans-culture, including all the issues related to the «noise» provoked by communication.  
|                                                | • Learning communities (networks), generating the necessary teamwork (learning based on collaboration and cooperation).  
| Learning                                       | • Focused on students, on their own activity as a determining factor in learning.  
|                                                | • The teacher as a guide, mediator, tutor…  
|                                                | • The need to consolidate multi-professional teams in any educational proposal.  
| Resources                                      | • Hugely extended and rendered more flexible. Adjusted to the needs of each beneficiary. Never provided as an end-solution, but largely depend on each student’s actions.  
| Evaluation                                     | • Consolidation of evaluation and quality policies.  
|                                                | • Evaluation encouraged throughout the training process, highlighting the learning outcomes.  

Further to the foregoing, the classical parameters of teaching/learning in standard distance education environments are being boosted and consolidated thanks to the entrance of ICT, giving rise to virtual training adjusted to every need. These new supports and communication channels are the ones that have enabled, sooner or later, with more or less strength, the diverse political institutions to turn towards distance education as a wide methodology for access to lifelong learning (Assié-Lumumba, 2004). That is not to say that distance education was previously ignored: it was restricted to smaller educational measures and to specific areas and educational levels.

There is no doubt that the growth and consolidation of ICT has allowed Distance Education to take off. It has particularly identified itself with virtual education proposals, opening the path to internationalisation and globalisation, and consolidating the idea of a global village which, in short, will eventually become a huge global classroom, where networks help solve and support the education of every citizen independently from their space or time context, as well as encouraging true human solidarity. In this regard, distance and virtual education becomes independent and a complementary or an alternative method on the same level as on-campus education to provide training to any population without access to standard classrooms for different reasons (UNESCO, 2002).
education. There is therefore no doubt that by developing new environments for learning and new ICT-based models, virtual higher education will be one of the most important offers in the coming years.

2. VIRTUAL MOBILITY

2.1. Background to a «mobility» proposal

Mobility in the academic field is a reality that has always existed. The possibility of studying in other universities and countries has been a constant concern of higher education. However, this type of mobility exclusively focused on an on-campus stay at another institution where an entire degree or a large amount of studies were completed, consequently ignoring the academic recognition of completed studies by the home university.

Gradually, this initial idea of mobility gave way to another concept thanks to social, economic and political change in society. The European Union, an active participant in this process, has been working for more than 30 years and constantly examining the mobility structure and system of teachers, students and researchers in universities, as one of the keys to strengthen its educational policy. Proof of this is that, since the 70's, it has relentlessly worked towards the achievement for common lines that provide the free circulation of professionals and, in the field of education, of students and teachers.

Since the initial years of the EHEA, mobility is the basic principle of university education and it is assumed by the Bologna Declaration (1999), which expressly states that «the mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff should be encouraged, evaluating and recognising all training and work periods completed within the general context of Europe». Thus, it is an essential component of this new EHEA. Proof of this is that subsequent Declarations (Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005 and London 2007) again refer to the mobility factor as part of the quality and innovation of these institutions, as well as ensuring mutual awareness of different cultures, the consolidation of linguistic and technological skills, etc. Without a doubt, the outlook and attractiveness of European higher education depends on the internationalisation of its universities. Europe should form part of higher education in other world regions, and should therefore encourage the exchange, cooperation and mobility of its students, teachers and researchers. This is the reason why the main aims are:
Logically, this recognition may only be executed if mobility is based on:

- **Trust between institutions**: mutual awareness amongst the institutions involved and the reliability of quality education.

- **Transparent information**: signatory institutions of the agreements should be well informed of the syllabus, academic calendars, and handouts of the subjects taught, organisation of teaching, qualification systems and possible equivalences, and the work plans of counterpart universities.

- **Reciprocity**: there should be a symmetrical agreement between the institutions, contemplating the same rights and duties for the students of each side, as well as the same obligations of both universities towards their students.

- **Flexibility**: there are still huge organisational differences as to syllabuses, grading systems, methods for completing the courses delivered to the students, etc., even amongst universities in the same country. The situation is even more complicated in the case of universities in different countries where, even, the academic calendar is different. Consequently, the maximum flexibility should be applied, notwithstanding the necessary rigour, to any academic recognition carried out between different universities (Jaén; Madarro, 2004).

On the other hand, within the current modernisation of higher education worldwide, this mobility process is also essential to the relevant quality assurance processes, as it needs to cover situations that are currently present in society, such as:

- The greater demand for higher education, not only at the beginning but particularly lifelong learning and professional qualifications.

- The greater diversity of education suppliers.

- Innovative methods that facilitate learning, by incorporation ICT into the educational scenario.

- The need to accredit the quality of all university institutions and of the education provided.
as specification as to how their stay will be recognised and its contribution to the student’s course.

— *Reinstatement and evaluation*: once at the host university, students will be instructed as to how to best use the competences and abilities acquired during their stay in their daily environments.

— *Evaluation*: both, home and host institutions must implement methods of evaluation to systematically follow up on all exchange and recognition processes and, consequently, adjust and improve them.

All these commitments and responsibilities should be clearly defined and notified to all participants of mobility programmes from the very start, and should be reflected and confirmed in writing. In short, anticipated preparatory work for mobility between both institutions involved, assistance during the student’s stay and the recognition of learning require this entire process to be accurately planned and assessed.

This said, together with the need and opportunities for student mobility, there are two factors that encourage studies and the implementation of other types of mobility, like virtual mobility, due to

- The irruption of ICT into every area of human interaction, which is also radically transforming education processes.

- The equity for all citizens, not everyone wish or can, due to family, geographical, professional or personal reasons, join an on-campus mobility programme.

If student mobility is interpreted as the possibility of completing part of one’s studies towards a certain degree, during a semester or academic year, at another higher education centre in the same country or abroad, this may be carried out both on-campus, by travelling the student to the host university, and virtually, providing a transfer through virtual scenarios. This new emerging environment is an added value to mobility:

- Individual accessibility, regardless of the geographical location, financial situation, personal circumstances, etc.
ication through ICT. This is clearly an educational experience for students, who acquire intercultural and technological abilities, apart from the specific content of the course, as a result of interaction. At the same time, it is also really effective and efficient in terms of time and cost.

Another factor that will affect all these terms related to learning and independently of any geographical location is the fact that the line between traditional and open or distance education is gradually becoming more blurred. E-learning is gradually becoming part of the educational system, thereby making student location more and more irrelevant.

In the European context, VM complements already existing mobility programmes, such as Erasmus, where students physically transfer to another university in order to complete part of their studies. In this way, VM is compatible with physical mobility, e.g. virtual preparatory work or the follow-up on studies carried out at the host university, or provided as an alternative.

In relation to the length and type of studies, VM may either cover a brief course, an academic year, or specific periods of professional updating. It may even provide informal or non-accredited learning, as the university may provide international experience to students through on-line discussion groups or specific seminars.

The means through which virtual courses and seminars are provided include real-time, synchronous or asynchronous technologies. Generally, this is being implemented either through proprietary-code platforms, such as Blackboard or WebCT, or through free software, such as the well-known Moodle, or through virtual environments developed by the institution itself. On the other hand, the possibilities offered by Web 2.0 applications, such as wikis, blogs, free software and wireless technology, which increase possibilities for mobility, are providing new alternatives for individual abilities in ideal networks for VM, including social and teaching implications yet to be exploited.

All these possibilities greatly increase the range of alternative proposals offered by VM anywhere in the world. For example, a university may offer a course to other higher education institutions, or an alternative whereby several universities offer joint programmes.

In short, VM in the field of higher education is understood as a learning method backed up by virtual tools through ICT, providing a learning environ-
NETACTIVE: BASES AND PROPOSALS FOR GOOD PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical Mobility</th>
<th>Virtual Mobility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• In a different physical location: travel and stay in another country</td>
<td>• Study is carried out from home, university, at work. No stay abroad is necessary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For a limited period of time</td>
<td>• No restrictions as to the time invested in the course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A considerable effort in time</td>
<td>• Balanced time and cost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Extra economic cost</td>
<td>• Access to the courses and programmes of the host country; communications with teachers and fellow students through ICT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Based on on-campus activities and meetings, face-to-face teaching and an immersion in the country’s daily life</td>
<td>• Acquisition of educational, intercultural and technological skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Social, cultural and educational enrichment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table adapted from the eMove Project

On the other hand, there is no doubt that each of these models has its strengths and weaknesses. In relation to physical mobility, the following situation arises:⁶

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
<th>Strengths</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• A break-off from daily responsibilities</td>
<td>• Learning of academic, social and intercultural skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Limited period of time</td>
<td>• Learning with an international perspective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• High cost (registration, accommodation, etc.)</td>
<td>• A stay in another country</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Many steps to be completed as foreign residents (visa, insurance, resident permit, etc.)</td>
<td>• Direct intercultural experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Required adjustment to the group’s activity</td>
<td>• Social and cultural enrichment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Accessed by a small number of students</td>
<td>• Experience in other learning styles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Access restricted to educational offer</td>
<td>• Access to other fields of learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Initial training proposals only</td>
<td>• Synchronous education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


The encouragement of student mobility is one of EHEA's initial foundations. Although physical student mobility in the European Union is a current practice, it is still quite a minority action. As mentioned above, the percentage of higher education students involved in some type of European mobility is under 10% of the total. According to the European University Association (EUA) this low student mobility is due to two basic obstacles: (i) financial difficulties; and (ii) the problems inherent to academic recognition (Reichert, Tauch; 2005).

In addition, there are many students who, for various reasons, cannot or do not wish to get involved in a long-term physical mobility programme, subject to all its advantages and disadvantages. Therefore, VM may be a valid and feasible option to obtain the benefits derived from academic exchanges with third countries, with more flexible studying conditions and a significant decrease in the economic and personal costs involved in any physical mobility. Clearly, VM by itself or together with on-campus stays, is a useful tool to increase the number of potential higher education students, to improve the syllabus, to offer a multicultural experiences and to increase the quality of the training received.

2.4. Potential of Virtual Mobility

When we face the integration of ICT into the educational process, conflicting ideas immediately arise. On the one hand, the experience obtained in on-line learning, which has clearly failed due to a lack of pedagogical support, and on the other, many innovative technologies, have proven to be less useful for education. However, this notwithstanding, on-line learning has been very warmly welcomed both by students and institutions, as it has increased flexibility and has achieved high student participation. As the number of students who must work part-time to finance their studies is constantly increasing, flexibility is essential. The ability to study asynchronously is one of the main reasons why virtual learning is popular, even if students are taught at a distance or reside on the campus.

This is not the only potential offered by VM. As indicated by various European projects, VM enriches the educational environments of every institution. Teachers and students benefit in linguistic, cultural and educational terms thanks to the experience of joining other European countries in their academic field. Virtual mobility reduces the social and economic barriers that are present in physical mobility; it integrates students with disabilities and those who are limited by
the field of education is growing, a wide range of technological tools are likewise rapidly growing. In relation to the VM model applied in several universities, the inter-operation of various learning platforms becomes an issue. Some examples are provided by market leaders, such as Blackboard or WebCT, which are being used in many institutions; however, more and more universities are choosing different environments and open-source platforms. In a pan-European context, both students and teachers must face different spaces of on-line learning. Sometimes, course content needs to be redesigned. However, the main problem lies in the access to these different learning environments. Whenever students wish to join a mobility of this type, they need access to a learning platform in the host university, rapid and effective training that helps them live in this new environment, and access to all the sites and resources offered by the institution. The logically restricted access of this type of platform should not be an obstacle to students registered on a VM programme.

— Educational system

One of the key features of distance education is the design based on the student’s autonomy and self-learning. Therefore, the methodological plan develops around initiative and autonomous learning. This is why this model adjusts to virtual environments and is mostly used by them, as they focus on contextualised learning, problem-based learning and simulation and practice.

Virtual teaching also proposes various forms of collaboration. Research indicates that there is greater achievement in cooperation situations than in competitive or individual situations, and that cooperation provides a greater amount of reasoning strategy, group achievement, etc.

To take the step from a teacher-based methodology to a collaboration and student-based model is one of the most important steps for many academics and universities, as the teacher’s role significantly changes by becoming a guide and learning support. Students take on responsibility for their own learning, without ignoring the significance of learning background and the social construction of knowledge.

• Evaluation

As in every educational process, VM also requires an approach to the issue of evaluation. Regardless of the method followed on the course, evaluation is always the touchstone of learning. Students learn according to how they perceive the assessment of their course programme.
Netactive: bases and proposals for good practices in virtual academic mobility

➢ The possibility of assigning to students the task of examining other student's work is an excellent chance for them to apply their ideas and knowledge on the matter.

➢ Internet may also be used to provide response models and thus help students see other alternatives to their written work.

➢ On-line interaction with a tutor helps students to handle evaluation criteria and the outcomes of their work.

• Quality assurance

The issue of a quality guarantee may be essential to VM. An examination of the type of system followed in each country to ensure quality reveals that there are still huge differences in this field. In the first place, a common model needs to be constructed in order to assure and evaluate quality in the virtual education offered. In turn, this demands the existence of agencies to carry this out, whether public or university-related.

Closely related to the issue of quality is the credit transfer process, as it may be that certain institutions do not recognise the credits obtained at other universities simply because they believe that minimum quality standards are not fulfilled. The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) is working along these lines, allowing an institution to recognise student's learning achievements through common credits and grades. However, this also requires many universities to adjust their syllabus to the ECTS requirements. On the other hand, the ECTS was not designed for VM and will consequently need to be adapted, e.g. to give more weight to learning results that reading hours as a criteria for credit accumulation.

• Cultural identity

Any educational system is imbued with the cultural identity into which it is inserted, to which it responds and shapes. Consequently, VM is sometimes seen as an educational scenario where this identity is not perceived or absent and finally, it may even be threatening.

To support these ideas, educational literature provide three reasons to justify this identity: first, the consideration of English as a global language, together with the problems involved for all those with English as their second language; second, interaction with globalisation, technology and socialisation, particularly in matters related to culture services, such as educational courses on global markets. In
ties and, consequently provide a more or less adequate virtual teaching. However, what every teacher should have are, at least, three fields of literacy, essential in any virtual environment and which are clearly valued in today’s society:

- Technological literacy or the ability to use these means.
- Literacy for information, or the ability to find, analyse, use and reuse information.
- Educational literacy or the ability to work in an intercultural and collaborative manner.

2.5. Problems and limitations of VM

The problems that may arise cannot be ignored in any proposal for training. Consequently, a realistic response should be provided to these problems. When analysing VM, there are a series of issues that require the specialist attention, of which the following are the most important:

- Accessibility
- ICT abilities
- Privacy and secure access
- Access to technical, academic and professional support for learning
- Access to materials
- Access to teachers and tutors
- Cost
- Access requirements
- Evaluation

However, the advantages and disadvantages of this model may also be compared, insofar as VM is flexible and adaptable to all types of circumstances. Some of these advantages are:
There are still no inter-institutional structures to assist VM students.
There are no benefits from living in a new physical environment.

Most of these limitations or weaknesses in VM will be counteracted with the following favourable conditions:

- Channels providing supportive information and guidance.
- Constant support for the preparation of VM.
- Support services and resources.
- Proposals providing intercultural and socializing experience.
- Acceptance and recognition of any courses completed at other institutions.

3. MOBILITY PROPOSALS FOR POSTGRADUATES

3.1. Postgraduates and their learning outcomes

According to the different norms from the EHEA, Postgraduate studies have the mission to consolidate and develop the competencias and knowledge achieved in the Grade studies. The Descriptors of Dublin\(^7\) where elaborated to identify the specific objectives of this level of learning, among these we find those that define the minimum required criteria in every stage of education, and they represent a compendium of the skills and achievements that are demanded in an specific educational level. So, those generally indicated are the expectations on the achieved skills. Consequently, in every master title, according to these descriptors, they will be recognised in students who prove:

- Knowledge and comprensión, based on contents typically associated to first cycle, but also they are able to wide and improve them, as this favours the

\(^7\) This information can be completed in the following webpage:
http://jointquality.nl/content/descriptors/CompletesetDublinDescriptors.doc
offered on a distance-education basis in Europe and Latin America, so that the information provided could be used to specify the possibilities and difficulties of encouraging student virtual mobility. As a first step to detect the current supply of postgraduate courses in the European Union and Latin America, the coordinating team of the NetActive network drew up a protocol to gather the most important data on the academic and administrative structure of distance Masters in both continents; this information would help ascertain the real possibilities for VM, first of all among each continent's universities and, secondly, to analyse this mobility between the European Union and Latin America. A series of conclusions were reached from these studies and subsequent comparative analysis, of which the following are significant.

In the study of the European Union and when comparing the number of Postgraduate courses delivered in each country, the offer is not related to the size of the countries, but is more associated to the policy of the institutions offering distance Masters courses. With respect to the languages in which the classes are taught, teaching in the native language logically prevails, although there is a trend for many of these courses to be available in a «lingua franca», mainly English.

In order to analyse how postgraduate courses are arranged by fields of study, the diversity provided by distance Masters is relevant. Nevertheless, the following fields clearly prevail:

- Business Studies
- Education and Teacher's Training
- Mathematics, Computation Science
- Medicine
- Social Sciences

At the same time, there are significant gaps in new fields of study demanded by progress in society. Furthermore, the vocabulary used to describe each Masters programme is not always the same, despite identical fields of abilities. A more homogenous description of the courses would provide a better analysis of the current offer.

Although in Europe there is in fact a total coverage of the main fields of study, this is clearly lacking at a national level. However, most countries that have an

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8 Both reports can be consulted in annex 1
ing modes is important. For example, some courses are fully on-line or use more traditional distance methods, whereas other combines both methods. This is the case of UNED Masters (Spain) which are taught through distance methodology, but they all include certain on-campus resources.

Masters programmes are often structured into modules. However, when these data are compared against course flexibility, the response is negative because these modules tend to be sequential. As a result, student mobility is rendered more difficult because there is no flexible registration in a certain module. In this way, a student may register on any full course but never on a single Masters module.

Another issue that reveals the differences in Europe concerns the teaching-learning methods used, indicating differences of opinion in the meaning of distance education in terms of flexibility and accessibility. Most courses do not require on-campus classes, although some courses require specific student attendance, the length of which ranges from three to two hundred hours or more. This entails an added difficulty to encourage student VM.

In relation to communication and tutorial systems, e-mail prevails. It seems to be the most rapid and effective means of communication between teacher and student, although the telephone is still very present as a reliable means of communication.

With respect to certifications, academic certifications prevail in all Masters. However, there seems to be no «common» way of describing «academic certifications» (different degree names, recognition of official or professional degrees) amongst the various European countries.

Academic university degrees are known as «own university degrees», without being officially supported by the government. These degrees are valued to the extent that they are recognised in each professional scenario, not by the degree in itself. Although all universities apparently refer to these degrees as a Masters, there are no complete data on the names given in each case to these studies.

On the other hand, European ministers highlight the significance of the role played by the ECTS when facilitating student mobility and developing an international syllabus. Consequently, the ministers wish to increase awareness amongst those working in the field of higher education grading and accreditation of the need to adequately use ECTS credits in order to be included in the wide range of flexible learning programmes.
specific framework of operational criteria for this type of training. In this regard, EADTU has taken the initiative to develop a quality framework for distance and virtual education through the E-xcellence project, which implements a tool for quality evaluation in these virtual learning environments in order to provide a consistent educational model.

3.3. Postgraduate studies available in Latin America

If one looks towards Latin America, after the report conducted on postgraduate courses available within the scope of NetACTIVE, the distance Masters ("maestría") programmes detected in this area amounted to one hundred and twenty-five, distributed as follows:

— Education and Teacher’s Training (39);
— Business Studies (31);
— Social Science (14);
— Law (9);
— Geography and Geology, Medicine and Media and Information Science (5 each);
— Mathematics and Computer Science (4);
— Humanities (3);
— Engineering/Technology (2);
— Agricultural Science, Art and Design and other subjects, 1 programme each.

Distribution by country is not homogenous; Ecuador is the country that provides a greater offer on distance education, with thirty programmes amongst seven universities, followed by Mexico with twenty programmes amongst five institutions, Costa Rica with eighteen in a single university, Argentina with seventeen Masters taught at twelve universities, and Peru with sixteen programmes amongst six universities. All these data were obtained from a thorough investigation of each country.

* www.eadtu.nl/e-xcellence
— Twenty-nine that include courses,
— Forty that include subjects, and
— Twenty seven that do not indicate any structure.

In the Latin American scenario, there are very few Masters programmes fully based on a virtual system; however, most of the programmes use printed material, Web resources and, in general, mixed methods.

With respect to the teaching-learning method, there is no clear definition and it is not easily identifiable in academic programmes. However, most Masters include on-campus classes, distance tutorials, material handed out to the students and various activities carried out through a virtual environment.

Of the review conducted, a total of seventy programmes require on-campus classes, whereas forty-five do not require them. Furthermore, for the final evaluation, most students attend in person, and twenty-two programmes do not indicate anything on the matter.

As most Masters programmes have a virtual component, ICT is mostly used; in fact, eighty programmes exclusively use these methods, whereas the rest also uses the post and telephone; some programmes do not indicate whether any other resource is used. With respect to the tutorial system, most do not specify the system used, and only a few indicate how the course is specifically planned.

Learning evaluation strategies are difficult to identify in distance programmes; only some indicate distance assessment, and most sources demand on-campus evaluation. Only two of these mention continuous evaluation through the network.

As to the language in which these programmes are taught, most are taught in Spain as is to be expected (one hundred and thirty-five Masters programmes), and only two are taught in English.

With respect to the administrative structure, the denominations used in each Masters certificate are the following: in thirty-six programmes, «Master» is the title granted; nineteen use the word «Magister»; and thirty-five refer to «Maestro». This last term is only used in Mexico; the two others are used in other Latin American countries. Both references may even be simultaneously used in the same country. Of interest is the fact that forty-seven programmes do not indicate the type of degree granted.
relevant study. In Colombia, the institution offering a distance programme must ascertain the existence of due recognition, whereas in Mexico distance Masters programmes at foreign institutions are not accepted by the Secretariat for Public Education, despite international agreements.

Also of interest are the agreements on education that exist in Latin America: three general agreements that are common to most countries, together with an endless number of bilateral agreements between the various countries for certain degrees. The first three are:

- **Andrés Bello Agreement**: Based on the unlimited creative potential of the Latin American people, with the aim of encouraging the comprehensive development of its people, the Andrés Bello Agreement establishes a joint task of education, scientific, technological and cultural integration between Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela, leaving the door open to the integration of any other countries that so request.


- **Regional Acceptance Agreement** for studies, degrees and diplomas obtained in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, approved in Mexico on 19 July 1974. By virtue of this agreement, all the signatory states agreed to give effect to the recognition of diplomas, degrees or academic qualifications obtained in higher education, granted by the competent authorities of other signatory states, in order to exercise the relevant profession, following each country’s internal procedures (the agreement has been ratified by Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Slovenia, El Salvador and Guatemala).

As a summary of all these issues that define the distance postgraduate courses offered in Latin America, the following is of interest:

- The institutions carry out a scarce advertising of their Masters programmes, mainly through their web pages. It is assumed that this advertising is conducted through the local media.

- There are very diverse Masters programmes and costs.

- The highest number of programmes is found in Education and Teacher’s Training and Business Studies.
• There is a need to standardise the grading and credit system in Latin America to enable the acceptance of degrees from various Latin American, Caribbean and European countries.

• Although the report does not reflect the whole situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, due to the difficulties encountered, it is a representative sample used to identify what is happening in Latin America and the Caribbean; ten of the fifteen countries investigated offer distance education programmes.

3.4. Comparative study between the European Union and Latin America on the offer of Postgraduate distance courses

The aim of the study carried out during the NetACTIVE project was to locate the offer and structure of the postgraduate courses offered under the distance education method, so that the information obtained could help specify what possibilities and difficulties could be encountered by virtual student mobility. As a first step to detect the actual postgraduate courses available in the European Union and Latin America, the coordinating team of the NetActive network, as mentioned above, drew up a protocol that reflected the most relevant data on the academic and administrative structure of Masters programmes. This information helped to ascertain the actual possibilities of virtual mobility, first of all between the universities in each continent, and then between the EU and Latin America.

An initial analysis of the current situation in both continents revealed that there is a flourishing of courses available based on the distance education methodology. This is positive in it and led to the need to analyse this offer and ascertain its virtual character.

The first difficulty encountered both in the European Union and in Latin America arises from the location of specific and full data on each Master, both in the university’s own web pages and from the information provided by other university information channels. This has hugely hindered access by foreign students to the necessary information and the mobility facilities available. It is clear that institutional pages still provide very little significant information on the components of each course’s organisation and syllabus and, on the other hand, broadcasting by other channels is still insufficient.
demand for training. In both continents, the offers are very conservative and there are significant gaps in the huge needs of current society. This weakens the courses offered, as they are no longer a clear answer to demand but follow the particular interests and academic situations of universities and, specifically, of a group of teachers. In this sense, the universities do not provide guidance towards specific Master courses, supported by demand on the job market.

In both continents, there is an explicit difficulty in channelling these Masters courses through the Erasmus fields of study, which clearly does not reflect the postgraduate situation in both continents. This consequently hinders the flexibility and transparency required to encourage mobility, as there are no common terms and definitions that are easily understandable and accessible to all the players involved.

With respect to the type of Masters offered, whether the course is based on academic or professional grounds, the fact is that the great majority has an academic focus in the European Union, but none of the Masters in Latin America reflects these differences, suggesting that they are all academic, with no professional accreditation.

Of significance in both continents is that most programmes are organised and taught by a single university. There are very few interuniversity proposals, even if they are based in the same country or continent. International or intercontinental postgraduate courses are an exception.

With respect to the criteria and requirements demanded for access to these courses, they are the same as those required from any national student wishing to enter a Masters programme, without providing any more information to help participate in a mobility programme. But what is particularly significant is the lack of awareness of each country’s regulations, the different requirements imposed for the acceptance of qualifications, etc., which hinders postgraduate student mobility. It is again worth stressing that each university uses different terminology, which does not clarify or provide a real understanding of what is offered.

In relation to the academic structure of these courses, there is an alarming difference in the length of the Masters programmes, entailing other recognition and accreditation problems. This is one of the main issues that need to be handled in order to enable student mobility.

The course credits are another debatable issue included in this analysis, as they are also very different. First of all, not all programmes are credit-based. Many of
difficulty to encourage virtual student mobility, as it is impossible to accurately specify what type of distance education we are actually talking about.

Related to the materials, printed resources still prevail, although documentation is gradually being offered on the website, using both means to provide the student with content. But it should be stressed that Masters full online are still a minority.

In all the Masters programmes examined, and as is to be expected, the material is drawn up in the language of the university's country and are very rarely also offered in English. It should be remarked that the language in which the course is taught is mainly that of the country in which a course is registered.

The section regarding teaching-learning methods is very misleading, as there is no definition of each one of the teaching-learning methods in distance education. This thus increases the number of proposals without providing any explanation of what is understood in each case. Reference is made to collaborative learning, e-learning, tutorial assistance, distance education system, mixed learning, etc. entailing the need to examine this point further.

E-mail prevails in communication and tutorials as the fastest and most effective means of student communication, although the telephone and the post are still used as a secure means of communication.

The evaluation system also indicates diversity, ranging from individual work, exams, final project, questionnaires, etc. There is no uniformity in how the evaluation is interpreted, nor have the various persons in charge of the courses provided all the information required for this assessment. The same applies to the grading system.

The administrative structure of these courses is based on degree-certification; they all refer to academic qualifications with no direct effect on employment. The degrees are granted by each specific university, with no official recognition, and are relevant to the extent that they are valued in specific professional environments. The definition of degrees is another great difference between both continents.

On the other hand, the registration requirements, criteria for acceptance, student selection, other requirements, etc., are strictly determined by each country. This is another barrier to mobility due to the differences between some countries and others and the actual difficulty that still exists to certify and accept academic
EADTU and its members have developed a wide and strategic concept, entailing a European area based on open, flexible and lifelong learning (LOF). All efforts and research should lead to the development of this learning area in several stages, including the achievement of other factors to help provide greater flexibility to students in a permanent learning scenario. There are many implications, such as technical implications related to interoperation; educational, in relation to a learning structure; organisational, by combining certifiable learning units; economics, based on responsibility, the sharing of materials and services; guidance and appraisal, etc.

The research and development strategies are arranged in three fields. The first focuses on the imminent need for standard harmonisation and the development of virtual education models, as a result of more sustainable models.

The second field refers to the way in which universities may improve their relations and establish learning communities, as a basic component of a truly beneficial VM, in order to achieve innovative cooperation in education. The third refers to individualisation, by linking the content, methods and services to student needs.

Further to the significance of lifelong, open and flexible learning proposed in the Lisbon and Bologna Process, universities should collaborate with education networks or alliances in order to offer large-scale permanent learning in all vital stages in an economically viable way. This, without a doubt, also includes the potential of VM in higher education.

EADTU, in its «Madrid Communication on virtual higher education and the Bologna Process» (2003) thoroughly handles the issue of VM and specifies actions to carry it out. VM is seen as the way in which to increase the possibility of an international syllabus, able to integrate those students who, for work, family or other reasons do not wish or cannot choose mobility, and who have actual access to this international experience.

Distance and virtual universities will function as cogs in a huge EHEA network, and will become key components of this training space. As this development must begin from below, national governments must create work frameworks aimed at this target. In Europe, the necessary conditions are aimed at stimulating and integrating national and institutional policies in a coherent and operational area for higher education.
different ways. Nevertheless, VM is very often the easiest or only way to achieve international mobility.

- **Physical mobility** is one of the sides to the coin and is characterised by entailing a necessary travel and physical stay in another country for a certain period of time. Logically, this model requires effort in terms of time and cost for the student. Physical mobility involves experience in on-campus activities, meetings and everything related to daily life in another country. All this contributes to a truly significant social, cultural and educational enrichment.

- On the other hand, **virtual mobility** does not require a stay elsewhere or on-campus classes; neither are there restrictions as to the length of the courses. In this case, students remain at their home university, at home or at work. Virtual Mobility provides access to courses and other learning systems in other countries and allows teachers and fellow students to communicate thanks to ICT. Students obtain a full educational experience, as they interact and acquire other intercultural abilities, which is also very effective in terms of time and cost.

There is a constant demand in higher education to adopt learning measures that are student-based and to propose various learning models, open to VM and that allow an international scope and socialization. Furthermore, VM helps reach the economic and social objective of a higher education area, as an essential component in future higher education.

Therefore, from an EADTU point of view, the key issues of VM may be summarised into four basic types:

1. **VM as a framework for international learning experience**, through communication and intercultural exchange, based on a relationship between two or more universities, to be carried out through discussion groups on specific issues, virtual seminars, learning communities, etc. All the staff and students at the various institutions are permanently involved. A virtual learning experience may vary in time and may be combined with stays prior to physical mobility.

2. **Student VM further to the choice of one or more courses at the host university**. This refers to the possibility that ranges from the choice of a single course
the possibility of including a European or international scope to student’s learning experience. As EADTU consists of bi-modal institutions, it is aimed both at on-campus students in their own university and to distance programmes for part-time students. Both groups should have the chance to be able to complete their studies in another institution, whether through physical mobility programmes, Erasmus or VM.

**E-MOVE. An operational conception of virtual mobility.**
http://www.eadtu.nl/e-move

The E-MOVE project intends to explore the reality of various types of VM and its implementation in current open and distance training. The project’s main aims are:

- To develop new learning methods and mobility for students who are not eligible for physical mobility, whether in their own university or at another.
- To draw up a coherent and operational model to apply VM in Higher Education.
- To help develop Virtual European Campuses, encouraging VM as an option for students, employers, etc.
- To demonstrate the significant impact that VM will have on future educational organisations.
- To explore and ascertain the effective use of ICT as interactive learning environment that contemplates students’ specific educational needs, as the centre for educational action, decreasing traditional teaching in on-campus education.
- To cover the needs of those student groups who, for various reasons, do not have access to physical mobility for a long period of time but who, nevertheless, are open to mobility in order to acquire international experience.

**NetACTIVE. (AIESAD-EADTU): Credit Transfer In Virtual and distance Education**
http://www.net-active.info/

Please refer to sub-section 1.3 where the NetACTIVE project is described.
these parameters. In this way, E-xcellence will complement the current systems for quality evaluation, covering specific issues in virtual education. These indicators are offered independently from any specific institution or national evaluation system, together with guidance for educational development.


The aim of CSVM is to provide distance education students with the possibility of working on-line, thereby stimulating their employability and helping the distance education system to connect to an emerging business area. Thus, the project’s specific objective is to establish a sustainable device for interaction between a company and the distance education sector, in such a way as to strengthen access to knowledge in distance education and the employability of its students on the job market.


EPICS is an EADTU Task Force that attempts to collect all the outcomes and findings of current VM projects in order to transfer and gather them into an international content and services data base. EPICS provides an opportunity, at the beginning, to EADTU members to share the range of courses offered, thereby opening possibilities for international cooperation to their students.

The central objective of EPICS is to currently integrate knowledge and be used as a platform for the offer of ongoing programmes and of new initiatives in this field. In short, EPICS is a tool that supports and provides technical assistance to the various initiatives being developed. Logically, all programmes will keep their own identity, albeit with the technical support and knowledge of other programmes participating in EPICS.
— To create educational and cultural programmes of common interest to all countries in the area.

— To encourage and participate in institutional evaluation and certification processes, at the request of any members or their corresponding governments, always in a subsidiary manner and without exceeding their scope of competence.

— To know and have contact with other associations which pursue similar objectives.

AIESAD has become the largest Latin American network for Distance Education. Its headquarters, Presidency and Permanent Secretariat are located in UNED, Spain. This Association involves all those open, distance or dual universities or higher education institutions in Latin America, which encourage the study and research of a higher education within this teaching-learning methodology. Furthermore, it covers those Latin American on-campus universities that offer courses under this methodology, towards the award of professional qualifications or academic degrees or their legal equivalent. This Association also includes the Latin American institutions that wish to study and research this methodology in order to implement it to the benefit of education and culture in Latin America.

4.2.1 Projects and actions carried out by AIESAD

As in the case of EADTU, AIESAD is also promoting and participating in projects based on one of its main points of interest, i.e. the development and progress of distance teaching-learning. The projects being carried out together with European Universities are described first.

VIRTUAL CENTRE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DISTANCE HIGHER EDUCATION IN LATIN-AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN
http://www.utpl.edu.ec/centrovirtual/internas/acerca.html
4.3. Towards a Common Higher Education Area in Latin America

For many years now, Latin America and Europe have been working on common spaces for higher education that encourage the recognition of studies and mobility in the university community, in order to increase productivity, quality, accessibility and the complementariness of higher education between both contexts. In turn, this Latin American Area for Higher Education is used to develop and improve education in the continent, towards the convergence of various educational policies in all these countries.

The aim of the «Espacio Iberoamericano de Educación Superior» («Ibero-American Area of Higher Education» EIBES) is based on Europe's experience and its challenge is to converge with this system. A mutual interest in a strategic alliance amongst universities in both regions has often been declared in international meetings, such as: the Declarations of the Latin American Summits of Heads of State and Government, Declarations of Ministers of Education and recent Meetings of Latin American Vice-chancellors. The V Summit of Heads of State and Government of Bariloche (1995) referred to education as a key to Latin American cooperation, and the need was upheld of universities encouraging and consolidating mutual links. Likewise, student and teacher mobility was raised in order to bring positions closer and to develop educational syllabuses. Of interest too is the Declaration of Salamanca (2000), which explicitly refers to the significance of a Latin American Area for Knowledge, already discussed at various Latin American Summits. As an example of this interest below is the Lima Declaration made at the II Latin American Meeting of Vice-chancellors (2001):

"We, the undersigned, vice-chancellors of public and private universities in Latin American countries, as representatives of university associations acting in Latin America, gathered in Lima on 12-13 September 2001 at the headquarters of Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, in order to discuss the nature and scope of university cooperation amongst countries in the area, hereby address the Heads of State and Government scheduled to meet in this city on 23-24 November this year at the XI Latin American Summit, and the Secretariat for Latin American Cooperation, in order to present the Lima Declaration, which we hope will become a reference for the creation of a Latin American university cooperation programme."
affirmed that distance education is becoming indispensable to educational systems, particularly in developing countries, as a means of guaranteeing the basic right to education. UNESCO therefore, coincides with the National Plan for Scientific Research, Development and Technological Innovation («Plan Nacional de Investigación Científica, Desarrollo e Innovación Tecnológica» (PNICDT)) 2004–2007.

Latin America hopefully looks towards the student mobility project being executed in the European Union for some years. It is also aware of the problems facing European students, including the obstacles arising from academic and financial recognition, preventing many of them from completing studies at other universities. Nevertheless, in the context of Latin America, with the support of ICT, virtual mobility will gradually become a feasible option to increase exchange accessibility, by facilitating conditions for study and reducing mobility costs, with the added advantage of avoiding the feeling of being uprooted from one’s environments and reducing the negative effect of «brain drain» associated to physical mobility. However, this mobility, whether physical or virtual, will not be possible if we do not work towards achieving course quality, the recognition of studies and a management model, the key to success of a student exchange system.

4.3.1. Mobility programmes and experience in Latin America

European/Latin American mobility is born as one of the lines of development of Espacio Iberoamericano de Educación Superior (EIBES) [Ibero-American Area for Higher Education]. Since its inception, a lot of references have been made although, only partial and specific initiatives and developments have been carried out in this field, with little impact in its context.

An important landmark in the process was the creation of the «Consejo Universitario Iberoamericano» (CUIB) [Latin American University Council] in Cartagena de Indias in 2002. Its aim as a macro network is to unify in the same convergence area all existing Latin American university networks. This initiative was warmly welcomed and soon gathered the twenty-four national or supranational networks of Latin American universities. Its main objective is «to promote the creation and consolidation of a Latin American Area for Higher Education and Research» and, secondly, to «encourage cooperation between Latin American universities». In 2004, the CUIB established four committees in Madrid in order
The interuniversity centre for development, CINDA, is an international academic institution formed by Latin American and European universities. Its main purpose is to mutually bind universities, to encourage internationalisation, and to encourage joint efforts and permanent cooperation in relation to main issues. CINDA gathers thirty universities from Latin America, Spain, Belgium and Italy.

Each university may offer at least three posts each year, either based on face-to-face or virtual classes and for a short or long period of time. The Programme wishes to achieve fairness in the number of students exchanged. Mobilised students are incorporated into the host university as exchange students; they receive a grade certificate and are entitled to have all the courses they pass recognised by the home university.

- Programa Académico de Movilidad Estudiantil - Unión de Universidades de América Latina. PAME-UDUAL
  [Academic Programme for Student Mobility - Latin American University Union]

http://www.udual.org/PAME/Pame.htm

The Union of Latin American and Caribbean Universities (UDUAL) encourages Latin American integration through the joint effort of the Union universities and strengthens the integration of graduate and postgraduate training, research and distribution. The Executive Council of UDUAL approved in 2003 the Academic Programme for Student Mobility in the Union (PAME-UDUAL) in order to strengthen pre-graduate student exchange. The programme enables and encourages the reciprocal mobility of students with outstanding academic achievements, who have completed at least half the course programme, between two higher education institutions within the Union, with the full recognition of all studies completed.
The Latin American University Posgrado Association (LAUP)

Program: Academic mobility between Andalusia and Latin America. It offers two mobility programs: postgraduate and doctoral studies in Latin America, aimed at encouraging meaningful international mobility supported by UNESCO, aimed at encouraging meaningful international mobility supported by UNESCO.

The Project entitled “Support to the MERCOSUR Mobility Programms,”

Regarding higher education, the European Union and Latin America, covered by the Master’s Higher Education cooperation program, promotes the space not only for students, but also for research. It is an opportunity for teachers to collaborate and exchange knowledge.

This program includes projects and actions for academic and institutional development.

MERCOSUR Mobility Programms for Higher Education

Programa de Movilidad MERCOSUR en Educación Superior
and Architecture and counts on the participation of leading European and Latin American polytechnic universities.

This programme, also known as the «Latin American Erasmus», it has just started and still no information is available.

- **Programa de Movilidad Internacional de Estudiantes Latinoamericanos – [Programme for the International Mobility of Latin American Students]** Asociación Latinoamericana de Facultades y Escuelas de Contaduría (ALAFEC)

  ![ALAFEC](http://www.alafec.unam.mx/)

The «Asociación Latinoamericana de Facultades y Escuelas de Contaduría» (ALAFEC) [Latin American Association of Accounting Faculties and Schools] summons its member institutions to present candidate students to participate in the Programme for the International Mobility of Latin American Students. This project is aimed at encouraging exchange and academic cooperation amongst students from member universities, providing the possibility of all participating students living a short academic experience, with international immersion, in a multicultural academic environment.

- **Red Nacional de Movilidad e Intercambio Académico** Programa de la Red de Movilidad Nacional. **ANUIES – Mexico**

  ![ANUIES](http://www.anuies.mx/)

Due to the importance of establishing, developing and consolidating relations amongst national universities, offering students, teachers and administrative managers the opportunity to become familiar with other people and cultures and,
sities to meet to the challenges that arise from a lack of resources, overcrowding, and the demands of diversification and internationalisation.

- Alßan Programme. European Union Scholarships for Superior Training for Latin America

http://www.programalban.org/

In 2002 the European Commission adopted the Scholarship Alßan Programme for Superior Studies, aimed at postgraduate Latin American citizens. It also offers specialised training for professionals and future executive staff. This training is provided in European Union institutions or centres and is expected to last until 2010. As a result of the five yearly announcements to embark on studies between 2003 and 2007, more than three thousand candidates were selected from eighteen Latin American countries to receive an Alßan scholarship to complete studies in Teaching, Doctorates or Advanced Specialisation. The students completed their course at universities located in seventeen European Union Member States.

Espacio Común de Educación Superior
ECOES
Movilidad Nacional
SEP – México
www.ecoes.unam.mx

The Espacio Común de Educación Superior (ECOES, Common Space of Higher Education) was created in Mexico in September, 2004, and it settled the mission to strengthen the educational spaces, national, Latin-American and Caribbean, allowing the institutional joint efforts, to transform and innovate higher education models of académica training, within the context of the society of knowledge.

The main tasks of ECOES are: students and teachers mobility, the harmonisation of plans and study programmes, the strengthen of strategical areas, achieving this way a promoting core to extend the benefits to other public higher education institutions in the country.
• OEA Scholarships


The aim of the Programme for Scholarships and Participation of the OEA is to help member states to achieve their comprehensive development objectives by supporting their human resources in priority areas indicated by the Summit of the Americas, the Strategic Plan for Joint Cooperation (Comprehensive Development of the «Consejo Interamericano para el Desarrollo Integral» (CIDI)) and the General Assembly of the OEA. In order to achieve these objectives, there are four different types of scholarships.

• MAEC-AECI Scholarships

http://www.becasmae.es/

MAEC-AECI Scholarships reflect the training, generally for postgraduates, that is offered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation for Spain-MAEC, for young university graduates, and, in some programmes, for final-year university students, both in Spain and abroad. They are announced each year, in a unilateral and open manner for any country in the world.

4.3.2. Higher education convergence experience and models in Latin America

Higher education systems in Latin American countries have been developed over the last decades in a relatively disorganised manner. In many cases, this disorder has led to the co-existence of many educational models in the same country.

In part, this is due to a phenomenon that began in the 80’s, when the courses available were extended and diversified using different and sometimes contradictory academic criteria, e.g. the survival of traditional degrees, as opposed to shorter and less professional degrees. The definition of degree qualifications in a far from traditional manner, leading to their exaggerated increase, also contributed to adding confusion to an already complex scenario.
the end of the 70’s and beginning of the 80’s. Of interest in these countries is the organisation and operation of the Andrés Bello Agreement to handle articulation issues in education and culture.

From the beginning, MERCOSUR included the Area of Education as one of its priority issues and established the Meeting of Ministers of Education («Reunión de Ministros de Educación» (RME)) as an area for decision-making in this field. Since its initial Three-Year Education Plan, the recognition and accreditation of studies and degrees were included amongst its main objectives in order to enable the mobility of persons within the region.

Progress was more rapidly made in relation to the recognition of degrees or studies for primary and basic education and for general and technical middle-level teaching, as the recognition process was easier.

However, difficulties for the recognition of degrees and higher studies arise from the close and complex relationship between the validation of professional degrees and the exercise of a profession. These respond to different policies that are very often opposed to the open-mindedness of the education sector and that involve many different national stakeholders, with varying representations and interests.

After long discussions, it was accepted that the recognition of degrees and university studies had two main objectives: an academic goal to enable the student to continue the course, register on a postgraduate programme and carry out academic activities; and another one consisting of providing professional training in a country other than the one granting the degree. The first objective was simpler and could be specifically developed; the second is more complex, as it is related to the role of the State and its obligation to guarantee the training provided to ensure professional qualifications, especially in the case of critical professions.

Recognition for the execution of academic activities made rapid progress and two protocols were signed: one for Educational Integration, enabling the completion of postgraduate studies at universities belonging to MERCOSUR member states, approved in Montevideo in November 1995; and another for the Acceptance of degrees and university studies to exercise academic activities in MERCOSUR countries, signed in Asunción in June 1997. Also in November 1995, an Educational Integration Protocol was approved for human resources training at postgraduate level, towards a comparable and equivalent training and the adjustment of existing courses in MERCOSUR countries. This Protocol established the criteria to define postgraduate degrees (specialisation, Masters
The OEI also contributes to the convergence and articulation of education systems and higher education within Latin America. The sponsorship offers publications and tasks that enable a mutual awareness amongst countries and their educational systems, encouraging the development of shared policies and projects.

In the field of higher education, OEI, through its programmes, is encouraging interuniversity cooperation strategies amongst countries in the area, contributing to their articulation. Included amongst these programmes is the PIMA (Proyecto de Intercambio y Movilidad Académica) for the exchange of university students in the area.

- **Programmes and actions taken by Organización Universitaria Interamericana (OUI, «Inter-American University Organisation»),**
  http://www.oui-iohe.qc.ca/index/index_es.aspx

  The OUI is an international organisation aimed at the cooperation amongst university institutions and the development of higher education throughout America, from Canada in the north to Argentina and Chile in the south. It consists of more than four hundred members: public and private universities, research centres, national or regional university associations, vice-chancellorship councils, etc.

  It carries out its activities through IGLU and the Colegio de las Américas (COLAM). The activity of both bodies is directed at consolidating the convergence and articulation of higher education in Latin America. One of its main tools for this purpose is the courses it offers and other training and cooperation activities.

- **Red Iberoamericana para la Acreditación de la Calidad de la Educación Superior (RIACES) [Latin American Network for the Accreditation of Quality in Higher Education]**
  http://www.riaces.net/home.aspx

  This Network was established in May 2003 by quality evaluation and accreditation agencies in various Latin American countries, by the Ministries of Education in the area, with the support of international bodies such as the OEI. Its aims are oriented to the convergence and articulation of higher education in Latin America, as it proposes the development of projects and actions for exchange, mutual awareness and joint efforts.
— The ALFA-RUEDA Project,
http://www.javeriana.edu.co/cua/rueda/

Focused on the «Evaluation of Distance Education Programmes», attempts to jointly create a proposal that includes conceptual guidelines and methodological criteria to improve the evaluation of university distance education programmes, based on the concepts and experience acquired by three European universities and three Latin American universities. In order to carry out this project, the «Red de Universidades de Educación a Distancia» (RED RUEDA) [Network of Distance Education Universities] was created, sponsored by the European Community as part of the ALFA programme («América Latina-Formación Académica»).

— ALFA Distance Education Postgraduates and Doctorates (European Union-AIESAD).


The main object of this Project was to create a physical mobility programme for the exchange of postgraduate and Doctorate students in education between Latin American and European universities. Overall, the Project intends to support existing Doctorate and Masters programmes and to encourage joint Doctorate and Masters programmes in Europe and Latin America, allowing the recognition and certification of joint quality European-Latin American degrees.

In this regard, university networks have been established over the last few decades, both amongst Latin American universities and between these and European universities. These networks are factors that contribute to the joint effort of universities in both areas and in different countries.

The Asociación de Universidades del Grupo Montevideo [Association of Universities of the Montevideo Group] (http://www.grupomontevideo.edu.uy/) was created in 1991 and consists of public and private universities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay. Its objectives include the joint development of a superior level critical mass amongst its members, the promotion of scientific and technological research and continuous training, an improvement
• IESALC studies in UNESCO, (http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/)

Finally, the Instituto Internacional para la Educación Superior en América Latina y el Caribe (IESALC) in UNESCO, with headquarters in Caracas, has been developing over the last few years a series of projects and national/regional studies on higher education, which strongly support the convergence of national systems and the articulation of their policies.

All together, the previous sections describe the various efforts and difficulties encountered when trying to follow the complex path towards achieving the consolidation of a common area for higher education in Latin America.

The complexity of the current situation regarding scattering, heterogeneity and overlapping is in any case not greater than the one existing in Europe at the beginning of the Bologna Harmonisation process. In Europe, centuries of isolated development in universities of European Union member states, together with cultural, idiomatic and political differences, have not prevented sustained progress towards the EHEA.

This reality also triggers expectations for progress in the creation of a common area in Latin America, the characteristics of which could be similar to the European area to a certain extent. However, the huge differences existing between both areas, related to economic development, will force the Latin American area to follow an independent and singular path to achieve its objective.

The accreditation and quality assurance agencies seem directed at fulfilling an important role in the development of the common area. In the case of MEXA, these agencies are entrusted with a large part of the homogenisation of certain aspects required to enable the harmonisation process. These agencies, mainly created for the accreditation and assurance of quality in each country, now have a leading role in convergence matters. Eventually, for the MERCOSUR Minister, they were the way of overcoming an apparently insurmountable obstacle, by facing issues regarding the validation of university degrees for the exercise of professions amongst member states.

It is important to point out that the consolidation of a Latin American Area should not lose sight of the European harmonisation process, both due to the experience contributed and the natural convergence between both contexts in the longer term. This will require concerted effort with joint projects between existing multilateral cooperation bodies and interuniversity networks.
• Most of these mobility programmes will last about one semester.
• In general, the students are the ones who must bear all travelling costs, administrative expenses, accommodation and maintenance during their stay. In general, the universities cover the academic costs, although, as it has already seen, apart from the mobility programmes there are scholarship programmes sponsored by various institutions and bodies: COLUMBUS, ALBAN, OEA, OEI, AECI, ANUIES-CSUCA.
5.2. Host university

The destination or host university, the second key to this experience, should also be involved with both administrative and teaching coordinating figures. The administrative figure agrees with the home university on the key components of mobility: the subjects or modules implied in mobility, dates, credits and value, organisational components to be taken into account to execute mobility, specific methodological criteria adopted by the university, etc. All of these components affect VM organisation in some way or another. Clear and complete information, from the start, on all of these components is one of the keys to ensure the success of this experience.

The VM teaching coordinator or tutor is another significant component, as these professionals will be the ones welcoming students upon arrival at the host university, regardless of the teacher of their subject or module; the coordinators will guide the students towards a better immersion at the university, and they will coordinate all subjects taught at a tutorial level, they will even act as guides in the event of difficulties, and will provide the necessary documents, together with the administrative coordinator. The students must present these documents to their coordinator at the home university once the stay is completed.

It is obvious that fluent communication must exist between both universities and the persons involved should be defined from the beginning, as well as the tasks each one assumes and who should be addressed in each specific case, in order to ensure a transparent and effective cooperation. On the other hand, all student information must be established and agreed upon, offering guidance on the VM subjects and the way in which to complete them.

5.3. Students

The third key component of mobility is the student, who must be aware of the virtual mobility structure and be sufficiently informed about:

— The institution issuing the degree.
— The beginning and end of the studies.
— Registration at the host university according to ordinary codes and structures, i.e. with the same entrance requirements, rates, services, academic and disciplinary regulations as local students.
• Not any Master title accredited by a higher education institution will represent an adequate level of abilities and university skills. In any case, the institutions must carefully select the counterparties when signing any mobility agreements.

• The credit and grading system differs according to each country’s approach. As a consequence, it is particularly important to reach an agreement on the use of a common system to enable comparisons. In the Net-Active project described herein, the ECTS is clearly the most adequate tool to achieve this aim.

• The students results, including their academic level and other abilities or knowledge acquired, they will differ depending on the programme, scope of studies and institution profile in both contexts. The joint use of the ECTS is also considered very useful to obtain a successful interchange.

• Courses with the same subject matter will differ as to content, structure, approach, level and type.

• The balance between teaching hours per week, course or module and individual learning, the nature of exams, the evaluation and support structures available to students, will differ according to the country.

Consequently, these differences have determined the parameters of the virtual mobility programme proposed (described below), and the following is an essential starting point:

• The programme exclusively allows certain university students to complete some subjects or modules\(^{13}\) at another institution, receiving a single degree from their home university.

• Each institution will select a limited number of Masters modules that specifically adjust to a virtual teaching-learning environment.

\(^{13}\) All bilateral agreements must establish the maximum number of credits that may be obtained in a VM stay.
educational Masters in other countries. It will also provide a forum for discussion in relation to the coordination of virtual universities.

6.1. The ECTS credit model

This model defines a system of university credits that is equally applied by the forty-six countries who have signed the Treaty of Bologna for European harmonisation. The innovation provided by these credits with respect to the calculation being made in various countries is based on the fact that the national reference is no longer used, and a credit is now accepted that is approximately equivalent to 25-30 student reading hours, including classes, practical work, individual study time, preparation and execution of tasks and the corresponding exams. As a result, academic courses usually consist of 60 ECTS credits, entailing between 1,500 and 1,800 student reading hours per course. The aim is to develop the idea of «knowing», exclusively resting with the teacher, to the idea of «knowing what to do», focused on the student.

A lot has been written on the ECTS credit model and it is often examined in great detail. In the Net Active Project, the ECTS model has been examined from an approach related to our objective.\textsuperscript{14}

6.1.1. Essential characteristics (ECTS)

A credit system is a way of describing an education programme through the calculation of the work assumed by the student under this programme. The credit definition in higher education systems may be based on different parameters, generally related to the student’s workload, theoretical issues, practical work, courses and training objectives, learning resultss and the hours spent on the subject matter. All these parameters are basically reflected as the outcomes of the learning and abilities to be acquired.

The ECTS system was adopted in 1989, as part of the Erasmus student exchange programme, now included in the Socrates programme. Due to the programme’s long experience, this is the only credit system that has been tried and successfully used throughout Europe. It was initially established for the transfer

\textsuperscript{14} The reader may find more information at this address: http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/socrates/ects/index_es.html
to pass. «F» means Fail: in this case a lot of effort is necessary in order to pass. Fail rates may be included in the academic records as an option.

6.1.2. Essential documents to implement Virtual Mobility

First of all, it is necessary to stand out the information catalogue or course guide provided by the institutions participating in the exchange programme. These catalogues or guides must be published in two languages (or only in English if the programmes are only taught in English). The catalogues must also be accessible on the web page and in print, and may represent one or more documents. The information catalogue or course guide must also include information addressed to foreign students hosted by the university.

The studies agreement contains a list of subjects or topics covered by the programme's exchange, specifying the ECTS credits of each course. The studies agreement must be established between the student and the two institutions involved, always before the beginning of the course at the host institution; likewise, the contract must always be updated if any change is made to the document initially signed.

The academic records provide information on the student's results, indicating the subjects or topics studied, the credits obtained and local grades and the equivalent ECTS credits. In the case of a credit transfer, the home institution will issue an academic certificate for any students who have completed their exchange, and this certificate should be provided before they return to their home institutions. In turn, the host institution will do the same with any students it has hosted.

6.1.3. Diploma Supplement

The Diploma Supplement (DS) is a document attached to a higher education degree that provides a standard description of the nature, level, context, content and range of studies taught and successfully completed by the graduate. The supplement adds transparency and enables the academic and professional recognition of qualifications (diplomas, degrees, certificates, etc.).

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According to the size of the institutions, more than one academic coordinator is advisable. Following the example provided by the Erasmus programme, it is common practice to designate an Academic Coordinator by faculty or area of study.

6.4. Welcoming Plan for virtual exchange students

Apart from on-line language and culture courses, a special welcoming plan for virtual students should exist, consisting of virtual visits to the host country and city, maps, historic and cultural information of interest, and the possibility of meeting up with local students through virtual resources.

Students should be aware of the rules and regulations specified by the host institution in relation to conflicts and, furthermore, they should consult the institutional and academic coordinators on the details of the exchange.

The institutions participating in a VM process must provide the students with effective communication channels that provide information on the role, tasks and responsibilities of the managers of such mobility, basically focused on student assistance when making decisions in their study plan and specific guidelines. Apart from the VM support unit and the institutional coordinator, the most suitable person for this post is the academic coordinator or tutor.

The host university shall provide on-line culture and language courses in order to improve the students’ communication abilities and to encourage opportunities to broaden their VM experience. On this welcoming course, information will also be provided on all the resources available to the students during their virtual stay at the host university: library and documentary resources, university services, virtual seminars, etc.

In turn, this welcoming course should inform the students of the institution’s specific teaching methods, what is expected from them during the study processes: the methodologies implemented, the resources used, the type of work expected from the students, communication with the teacher and academic coordinator, evaluation method, the calendar followed, etc. Thus, the students obtain background information for their stay at the university, which is probably very different in style and teaching-learning method from their own universities.

Finally, it is advisable to provide the students more than one contact at the host institution. Although the weight of student assistance is borne by the aca-
6.6. Course Catalogue and Postgraduate Courses selected for WM

with a WM programme should cover may be considered in Annex 3 (VMS). After its effective date and will agree to recognise any exemption. The main ideas for the VMS will be reviewed in two years. Any agreement will initially remain in force for the next three years. As of the initial review agreement, it will be considered in the VMS agreement the members of the WM programme.

This is the sense of the bilateral agreement the members of the WM programme

more than 50% of the credits required for a Masters Programme may be

up to 50% of the credits required for a Masters Programme may be

Guaranteeing student rights.

smoothly transfer between academic qualifications from one institution to another.

This agreement articulates the process in such a way as to allow students to

exchange programmes signed by the maximum authority of person in charge.

There will be a formal agreement between the institutions that offer the

6.5. Institutional Agreement

unprotected.

support unit in order to fill in these gaps and avoid the student possibility receiving a second counts or recognition, whether academic or through the mobility and meaningful to meet the criteria, for example, that may render the cooperation agreements. In this context, there are various factors not easily controlled (from tips...
The Net-Active project has drawn up this catalogue (http://www.net-active.info) and provides basic information on the various Masters available in virtual environments. Further to this information, Postgraduate courses may be selected by both institutions and students according to their training objectives.

The Web application of the Catalogue is divided into two main windows. The first one gathers key data on the Postgraduate course and the second one provides basic information on the Modules and subjects of the Postgraduate course.

With respect to the virtual environments in which the courses will be taught, logically, not all university institutions will be working with the same software platforms. Each one will create virtual environments adjusted to the university’s own philosophy, way of understanding and handling the courses and its technological experience. Consequently, there are huge differences between some universities and others, therefore it is necessary for any universities participating in VM to arrange special courses in order to prepare and inform the students of the virtual environments and tools, thereby guaranteeing the full success of the VM process. Any student who already has basic technological skills will not find it difficult to get used to a new virtual environment. To the contrary, this training will be enriching and will provide new technological abilities.

6.7. The role of the virtual teacher

In a virtual learning environment, the role of the teacher does not focus as much on the teacher’s direct instruction but on its potential provider. A key task of the virtual teacher, who generally acts as a distance teacher, is to guide and help students develop their abilities in order to handle their own learning process.

A virtual teacher also teaches students about the content of the course; clarifies specific aspects of this content; gives individual assistance that enables them to become aware of their own abilities, gain self-confidence, locate the best study methods and assess their own learning. This type of teachers also eases discussions and acts as advisors, and they are in charge of encouraging collaborative learning processes. Furthermore, they will also select students from the home university that are involved in virtual mobility and will be in charge of the recognition of study periods completed abroad. One of the main tasks of virtual teachers will be to act as moderators and directors in a teaching/learning scenario that is student-focused. However, their role may vary: from the definition of course content
standards to administrative and organisational roles in the creation of the course, drawing up registration rules; from establishing when and what the students must carry out, adjusting the pre-reading requirements and student evaluation; from preparing the student welcoming plan to the moderation of debates and the edition and even control of communication.

Besides, the virtual teacher is also responsible for the selection of students, who will be involved in the VM, at the home institution, as well as the academic recognition of the study periods accomplished abroad.

With respect to communication amongst the persons in charge of VM processes, the virtual teacher must be in contact with the academic coordinator, who will be informed of any issue that may affect the student's learning results and who will receive the outcomes obtained in order to complete the necessary certificate.

6.8. Planning of the Exchange Calendar

One of the issues that arises when implementing any type of academic mobility is the huge disparity amongst each country's academic calendars and, even, between institutions in the same country. This is one of the obstacles that initially hinders any mobility proposal. However, flexibility of calendars and timetables is one of the strong points of distance and virtual education, if information is provided in a full and clear manner; this need not hinder mobility, especially if the modules offered are of great interest to students.

On the other hand, students in virtual environments are used to organising their studies according to their personal circumstances, rather than according to deadlines. Consequently, if they are aware beforehand of administrative and academic calendars, these differences between institutions will not be a negative factor. However, the calendars of both institutions should be clearly presented, of both the home and host university, highlighting the dates or times when both universities may overlap. In other words, students may not have finished a Module at the home university but already need to begin a new one at the host university (or vice versa). Or registration at the host university must be carried out during a vacation period. These circumstances, and others that may arise, must be previously defined by both institutions by comparing their respective calendars and be thus included in the information provided to the students, providing a solution if any problem should arise.
In particular, clear information should be provided on the calendar as follows:

| Administrative | Date to present an application for acceptance  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Registration date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Academic      | Beginning and end of the Module  
|               | Specific Module planning |

6.9. **Selection of Postgraduate Students**

Graduate students will be selected by the institutions themselves, based on the applications. These applications will follow a model that may be similar to the European curriculum vitae, confirming a level of knowledge and foreign languages.

The home university must distribute the modules subject to VM, according to the configuration of the Postgraduate courses offered. In turn, it will carry out a student pre-selection, based on basic acceptance criteria used by the host university. For example, if a candidate does not have a basic knowledge of the course language, this student will not be entered into the list of possible ones selected, to be sent to the host university.

Once this initial list is drawn up, the host university will carry out the final selection of students who will complete the Module(s) according to the criteria established.

6.10. **Introductory language course and background of the syllabus and methodology**

As the networks promoted by the NetActive project are born in a European-Latin American scenario, most institutions that incorporate these networks teach their Doctorate or Masters programmes in Spanish; this is the language most often used in exchange programmes and the most requested, probably followed by Portuguese. However, Higher Education institution networks will gradually extend their exchange circles and incorporate institutions from other language
environments. In these cases, it will be necessary to examine how these exchanges will be handled when the language required is not the student's mother-tongue (as is the case of the traditional European Exchange Programme, ERASMUS). In this regard, two situations may arise, for example:

1. The scholarship candidates do not have certain language as their mother-tongue and need to improve and perfect the language before the exchange.

2. The scholarship candidates are transferred to an institution where, e.g. Spanish is not spoken and needs to perfect a foreign language (English, French, Italian...).

In European exchange programmes, mainly ERASMUS, which has been used as a model for this NetActive project, these minimum levels are usually guaranteed through free courses, which in turn are also usually recognised and offer a number of credits treated as an optional course. In any case, scholarship students should be given the possibility of studying a language and culture course of the host country before embarking on the mobility programme.

6.11. Virtual Mobility Support Unit

Institutions will support VM, as already indicated, by appointing Academic Coordinators both in the home and host university. They should both collaborate in order to guarantee mobility success. To do this, the matters covered by each one should be determined.

In technical subjects, support units should be appointed in order to resolve any problems that may arise in relation to the connection and operation of mobility technical supports. In order to create these units and assign the relevant tasks, the VM courses that may be provided by a university should be taken into account, according to its size and number of programmes.

In the case of universities that need these services due to their size and offer, mobility support units are usually created as part of the International Relations Department. These units may provide significant support to the students and teachers involved in mobility programmes, such as:
• Advice on the exchange programme’s technical and administrative issues (exchange documents and tools, credit system, etc.).

• Additional information and the resolution of any doubts.

• To serve as a link between visiting students and other institution units.

• Support provided to the Institutional Coordinator in relations with other institutions.

• To follow up on any mobility actions in order to be later analysed and evaluated.

• To identify any needs and possible solutions.

• Control of the economic management of mobility programmes.

• Search for external funding.

• Search for mobility partners.

• Coordination of international mobility and the location of synergies between various actions.

6.12. Registration costs for Virtual Mobility courses

The credit cost and administrative fees or any other costs will be covered by each host institution’s regulations. The institution should make clear and inform the home university in the initial VM agreement of what essential items should be paid by VM students and the amount of each. At this initial stage between both institutions, agreements should be reached on the basic items to be paid by the student, what the home university will bear and what is specific to the host university. In this way, the registration details provided to the student will already specify the total amount to be paid, broken down by items. Detailed information on mobility costs should be provided sufficiently in advance and in a clear manner in the information catalogue, so that students may be aware of this issue when assessing their mobility options.
6.13. Call for Scholarships

Amongst the various university institutions there are huge differences in registration costs. These economic differences are an added difficulty in promoting mobility. Also, the cost of Internet connection in the various countries should be taken into account, particularly in third countries, and the basic technological resources that enable this type of mobility. It is consequently important to encourage scholarships and aid to strengthen VM. Logically, scholarships should be applied for through the relevant channels in each country, or should be granted by international organisations, such as the Erasmus Mundus Programme, for example. Language, culture and technological training scholarships should also be encouraged. Along these lines, the institutions participating in VM should make an effort to obtain specific aid intended for VM.

6.14. Information and support centres

The library and resource centres are essential in any university institution. A prestigious university must have a good documentation centre that provides the entire educational community with the necessary resources for training and research. Logically, distance universities should also consider this need and should offer their teachers and students, wherever they may be, a possible access to all types of bibliographies and documentation required for studies and research.

If the aim is to strengthen VM, the necessary support must also be logically provided to enable free access to bibliographical and documentary resources. This issue should be foreseen and agreed by the institutions participating in VM, enabling students free access to the virtual library of the host university during their stay. Thus, as soon as students formalise their registration, they will receive access codes authorising them to use the library and documentation centre. In turn, students will still be authorised to access documentation services at the home university. Thus, students will have all the necessary resources to successfully complete the subject matters or modules chosen.

However, although specific material may be necessary for these subjects or modules, inherent to the course, the home university should provide this to the student as soon as possible, upon payment of the relevant cost, after the student
has registered. Or the student should be indicated how this material may be obtained in the documentary and bibliographical resources centre\textsuperscript{16}.

6.15. Evaluation of Virtual Mobility experience

Any trans-national programme should be reviewed each year, including a review of the administration system, facilities, academic programme management and staff and student surveys, in order to control student satisfaction, indicating the best practice and making the necessary improvements.

From virtual students' point of view, mobility experience can only enrich the achievements of the entire postgraduate programme, adding new perspectives to the field of studies. This enrichment will be provided in areas that the student never experienced previously with other methods, except for involvement in physical mobility programmes.

Although the standard quality of all courses offered at a postgraduate level (Masters) is expected to be similar, the diversity of offers is considered to be an advantage for the students, due to its potential learning and training and the extra depth and scope added to the student's knowledge.

From the point of view of VM students, one of the most important issues is the possibility of interacting with their peers in the language and culture of the host country. There is a lot to be gained from this experience and from the new perspectives opened to these students, including the job market.

Interaction, carried out through discussion groups, seminars, learning communities, blogs, etc., contribute to the quality of learning processes, and the level of learning outcomes. When this is carried out internationally the results are even clearer, as students learn from different contexts and approaches. They acquire intercultural communication skills and learn to handle complex problems with many participants involved. In summary, some of the potential benefits of Virtual Mobility are provided below:

- \textit{For students:} the increase of course options, a cultural and linguistic immersion, technological abilities, preparation or complementary benefits for physical mobility, etc.

\textsuperscript{16} Within the e-Move project there is a specific task force precisely in charge of this matter. See http://www.eadtu.nl/e-move/
NETACTIVE: BASES AND PROPOSALS FOR GOOD PRACTICES IN VIRTUAL ACADEMIC MOBILITY

- *For teachers*: course recognition and accreditation, development of joint courses, methodological innovation, etc.

- *For administrative and services staff*: strengthening of mobility support resources, improved abilities for collaboration in an international environment, etc.

- *For government teams*: greater institutional presence in international networks, greater number of potential students.

7. VIRTUAL MOBILITY REQUIREMENTS

7.1. Entrance requirements

Although it is obvious that students may choose to carry out a virtual stay at another institution as part of their training, the conditioning factors or requirements should be specified on which the success of VM depends. It is not a matter of encouraging VM at any price, but of being aware of what are the key components to be taken into account in order for these virtual stays to be truly educational.

Amongst the requirements imposed on any student applying for a VM stay, the following may be indicated:

- Completion of 30% of the degree credits.

- Evidence of the prior knowledge required to study the subjects or modules to which access is requested.

- Evidence of basic technological skills.

- Evidence of basic reading and writing abilities in the language of the host university.

- Internet access.

7.2. Framework for the degree recognition

Any studies that are successfully completed at the host institution should be invariably recognised by the home institution, as accredited in the final VM cer-
tificate and specified in the Diploma Supplement, which will also be issued by the home institution at the end of the Postgraduate programme.

7.3 Student assessment

Evaluation of each subject or module will be carried out according to the criteria established in the corresponding Masters programmes. No exception will be made, unless the on-campus presence of the student is necessary. To accomplish this, technological means will be adequately used (video conference, chat areas, etc.) in order to conduct tests or scheduled exams. If the host university so requests, the VM tutor at the home university will also be present at the student's exams in order to guarantee the student's identity and the successful execution of the test.

Another possibility is to hold this test at the home university, following the indications given by the team teaching the subject or module being examined. In this case, the tutors of both institutions will be involved in order to ensure adequate execution of the test. The person in charge of conducting this test at the home university is the VM tutor, who will promise to return the results of the test, through the electronic means agreed and as soon as possible, to the teaching team at the host university. The procedure will be supervised in order to guarantee the quality of the process. In any case, this situation should be clarified and the process agreed upon by both institutions before the student transfers to the host university.

8. METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF VIRTUAL POSTGRADUATE COURSES

8.1. Learning outcomes

As mentioned above, learning outcomes are sets of abilities that indicate the knowledge to be acquired by the students, which they should understand or be able to put into practice after completing the short or long-term learning process. Each subject or module should explicitly state the learning results that will be eventually acquired. These learning results must be itemised according to knowledge, skills and attitudes.
8.2. Programme design

Each institution will be in charge of the design and content of its Masters programmes and modules.

Apart from these general characteristics, common to all Masters programmes, virtual courses at this level should cover the specific needs of virtual teaching-learning processes, such as the number of contact hours between teacher and student per course or module; the estimated number of hours needed to pass a specific course which was not adequately completed; the volume of tasks assigned; student interaction hours; evaluation methods; the various strategies used to construct content; types of communication via ICT, etc.

8.3. Learning resources

Teachers of virtual courses must determine the type of interaction they wish to have or the one they wish to hold with their students: synchronous or asynchronous, the learning platform used, the type of CMC (Computer Mediated Media) that is generally used (e-mail, computer conference, CD-ROMs, Web resources such as forums, blogs, wikis, podcasting, etc.).

Course access should be provided through a password, to be given to the students upon registration.

Likewise, the necessary study materials should be specified, whether printed or electronic, and the way in which to access them. The student should be guaranteed easy access to all the documentation required to study the subject or module, through the university's own platform, or enabling the student to purchase materials through a virtual library at the university or other distribution centre.

8.4. Virtual Classroom Methodology

There are various methods associated to a virtual classroom:

One only: on-line resources model – the student is treated as a self-learning individual who frequently interacts with on-line resources, such as data bases, on-line publications, on-line interest groups, interviews, etc.
One-to-one: the e-mail model — characterised by individual and personalised teaching and learning.

One with several: the council or conference model — students participate in the activities of one or more experts in a specific field, e.g. conferences, symposium, etc.

Several with several techniques: This is the most common: all participants are able to participate in the interaction, e.g. discussion groups, simulations, case studies, dramatization, brainstorming, group projects.

Various methods are adapted to various teaching materials and students, so that the teacher is able to implement them according to these characteristics. However, the collaborative aspects of on-line teaching and the allocation of tasks amongst tutors and students are constant in this type of teaching-learning. Textual records of on-line exchanges between tutors and students are also one of the main sources of material for study purposes.

The transfer of responsibility and individual action from the teacher to the student in the distribution and production of knowledge, as well as a change in independence, in the management of awareness of the materials and resources, are also specific characteristics of virtual programmes.

The adjustment of tasks, the programme and objectives will be established for on-line forums, conferences, student chats, the Web, facilities to pass failed content, etc. A file will be kept including a full record of all debates for future reference and review. In general terms, students play a more central role than teachers when constructing the academic content and transferring the knowledge acquired.

8.5. Virtual classroom interaction: teacher-student, student-student

Interaction between students and teachers is one of the main characteristics of any type of educational situation and is particularly relevant in virtual education. On the one hand, active methodologies should be encouraged where the teacher helps the student's activity and participation throughout the learning processes and, on the other, synchronous and asynchronous means should be established for teacher-student interaction.

On the other hand, interaction is encouraged amongst students in forums and chats and in other collaboration resources incorporated in the new Web 2.0,
as a material component of common knowledge. Collaborative activities are also encouraged where student work teams should be established in order to encourage student interaction.

8.6. Timetable and supervision by the virtual tutor

Before forecasting the supervision hours to be conducted by the virtual teacher, the type of teaching and evaluation should be defined, e.g. whether they are synchronous or asynchronous, whether there will be assignment of tasks or exams for evaluation purposes, the number of students per course, etc.

Once the course is proposed, the calendar of each module or subject matter should be established and the length of each, as well as the methodological organisation, specifying the calendar of each module or subject (beginning and end), announcements, tests, delivery of activities, etc.

8.7. Evaluation

Evaluation may be carried out in several ways, e.g. by establishing an appropriate set of tasks in the system, the presentation of reports or trials, the completion of tests, exams, etc.

In general, the ICT offer has many advantages in evaluation terms, as the institutions may provide speedier services with a greater capacity for response, such as trials that may be sent in electronic form. On-line tests and questionnaires, problem-solving, case studies, user supervision and the drafting of portfolios seem to be the evaluation methods that are most often used by virtual education institutions.

One of the benefits of these methods is that feedback may be distributed amongst student groups through notice boards and computer conferences, thereby reducing the time elapsed between the execution of the tasks, evaluation and the publication of results. Peer evaluation may also contribute to the student’s overall assessment.

In short, ICT may develop new abilities that can be transferred beyond the knowledge of the subject itself, e.g. critical thought, teamwork, problem-solving, communication, cultural awareness, etc.
If on-campus evaluation is necessary, this should be specified, i.e. the way in which it will take place: at the host university, entailing the student's transfer, or at the home university based on the agreements between both institutions, which will back up the validity of the test.

9. DISTRIBUTION AND DISSEMINATION OF PROPOSALS

The general aim of the Net-Active Project is to increase the number of graduate students from third countries in virtual mobility, towards European Masters provided through distance methodologies. Thus, the distribution of VM courses and of the experience conducted is essential to guarantee their success. With this objective in mind, a series of tools are proposed below for the communication of VM proposals.

9.1. Communication tools

Net-Active website on the Internet, in English and Spanish

The starting point is the Net-Active project web page, where the main outcomes are centralised and arranged in relation to the Guide of Good Practices in Virtual Mobility and Mobility Programme, including useful information for addressee groups (e.g. European and Latin American reports) and the ACTIVE Catalogue. All these products may be found and downloaded from this site, and the persons in charge of the project may be contacted for any consultation.

Good Practice Manual (GPM) and Virtual Mobility Programme (VMP)

Although the full version of this document and the Virtual Mobility Programme will eventually be available on the web site, these resources will also be published in CD-ROM support in order to be initially distributed amongst the institutions of the networks involved (EADTU and AIESAD). A printed version will also be forwarded to the Ministry of Education, the Conference of Vice-Chancellors and University Vice-Chancellors in countries belonging to the EADTU and AIESAD (over seventy countries). As this manual will gather the key guidelines for VM, its distribution is essential between institutions and international or national bodies that are significant in the university field, as this will be the key to encourage VM amongst their students.
ACTIVE Catalogue

The specifications of the data base structure have been developed according to the Virtual Mobility Programme, indicating for each course: language, number of credits and teaching method.

Once the structure is operating, all members are notified in order to register on the on-line courses of the ACTIVE Catalogue. This Catalogue will allow specific courses and modules for VM to be disseminated.

Active Newsletter in English

An on-line Newsletter has been developed to present the Net-Active project and to offer a platform where open universities may advertise their courses. This Newsletter:

- Is initially aimed at EADTU and AIESAD students and teachers and is distributed through the networks in which all members participate.
- The Newsletter content consists of an extract of the latest courses registered on the ACTIVE Catalogue, to include brief presentations of the selected courses that are taught by the participating institutions.
- It will describe the experience of Masters students (i.e. experience in job access, ...).
- News on legislation, different university regulations, etc.

9.2 Target Parties for distribution

There are various addressee groups involved in the exchange and academic recognition processes. Logically, each one of these groups will have different interests and needs, which must be taken into account when designing the distribution method and timetable, the channels used, etc. It should also be stressed that this timetable may vary from country to country according to the various models and policies that prevail in each case.

Pre and postgraduate students: The main group, to whom periodic newsletters will be addressed, including course data bases and other educational offers, will be the potential students from third countries included in the Network.
Masters teachers and Postgraduate courses: The course catalogue will be addressed to the teachers involved and to researchers with a potential interest in participating in joint, European and third party Masters courses. The effects foreseen: increased interest and involvement of teachers, contributing to the development of academic cooperation between Europe and third countries, as regard content, models and grades.

University managers and administrative staff: The Virtual Mobility Programme, Good Practice Manual and Virtual Course will be addressed to the university staff in charge of managing the international mobility of graduate students, including the home and host institutions. Effects foreseen: to provide the university managers involved in student exchange with knowledge on the philosophy, tools, procedures and ECTS model in this field. Obviously, it may be also of interest for authorities in public administration, researchers, educational institutions of diferente levels, etc.

10. FINANCING CRITERIA FOR ACADEMIC EXCHANGE IN VIRTUAL MOBILITY

First of all and in order to contemplate the possible financing of a virtual mobility programme, the costs involved must be determined. Also, it must be taken into account all factors to establish the economical resources. Among these, it has to be emphasized, obviously, that costs need to be related to the object of the interinstitutional agreement, and they may be foreseen in the budgets of the participant institutions within the mobility programme.

Amongst the types of costs that can be considered, there are the following:

• Personal Costs
  o Teachers (teaching, autorisation and guide, preparation of documents, etc.)
  o Co-ordination (academic and techynical)
  o Managers /administrative staff /support to the VM

• Travel Costs
  o Co-ordination meetings
• VM scholarships
  o Didactic Material
  o Internet connection

• Other costs
  o Video-conference, or other ICT means (if necessary)
  o Advertisement and diffusion

11. SEQUENCE OF THE VIRTUAL MOBILITY PROCEDURE

Summarising, this would be the sequence proposed for VM procedures:

1. Determination of the technological and pedagogical resources available and the cost of the process. Evaluation of the opportunity to participate in virtual mobility programmes.

2. Agreements between institutions (See Annex 2, Virtual Mobility Schema).

3. Appointment of institutional coordinators, responsible for the follow-up of the exchange process in each institution.

4. Institutional coordinators contact with academic coordinators and with the interested teachers.

5. The coordinators determine the institutional agreements and they are signed.

6. Academic coordinators determine the real offer of virtual courses in the catalogue: courses with no presence requirements and approved by their responsible teachers.

7. Coordinators and teachers involved sign the bilateral agreements.

8. Publicity: The information about VM opportunities is disseminated in the participant institutions.

9. Student selection. Grant allocation if available.

10. Signature of the Learning Agreements (coordinators, teachers and student).
11. VM study period.
12. Student evaluation at the host institution.
13. The Host institution sends the Academic Certification to the Home institution.
14. Home university recognizes the study period abroad.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EXCHANGE SCENARIOS BETWEEN DIFFERENT HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS

This section gathers the recommendations derived from experience and thoughts reflected herein. Consequently, they are described according to the various issues addressed:

12.1. Differences in academic concepts used

The experience of the various projects that support the proposals herein indicate, first, the difficulties that may arise whenever an agreement is necessary over the main academic concept involved, particularly when bilateral agreements are signed between European and Latin American institutions. For example, the concept of Postgraduate studies: this has been defined as the studies completed after obtaining a degree or higher education university degree.

Masters courses are mainly aimed at the student’s professional training, i.e. the main objective is for the student to acquire the necessary abilities to become an expert in professional terms.

At the same time, even more differences arise in the various educational scenarios when analysing the level of components of the exchange programmes, i.e. what is understood by «module» or «matter».

12.2. Closing the gap between the offer and demand of European–Latin American studies

Another main issue that may determine the greater or lesser degree of acceptance obtained by academic exchange programmes between European and Latin
American institutions is precisely the capacity to define an academic offer based on the most significant interests in the target scenarios.

In this respect, one of the keys to success will be the relevance of demand in training programmes, first identifying the needs of the group to whom the programmes are addressed. This is precisely the component that will guarantee the quality and relevance of the courses offered.

Nevertheless, although this would be the ideal objective of any academic exchange programme, frequently the background interests will prevail in the academic offer over the interests of potential clients. In relation to these possible «conflicts», the experience acquired in the projects described herein indicate that the relevance and interaction of cooperation networks between higher education institutions, help evaluate and adjust these needs to enable the benefits to be shared, and to thereby guarantee experience success and continuity.

In this regard, there is a huge demand for postgraduate studies in Latin America, which may be specified as follows:

- Progress in the Latin American labour market indicates a trend to request more specialised training in the various fields of knowledge, although the areas with most interest vary from one country to another according to specific economic and social characteristics.

- In many of these countries, higher education is being standardised and, consequently, higher qualifications are demanded when applying for a job; it is no longer sufficient to obtain graduate studies.

- In some educational scenarios, certain needs and lack of quality in pregraduate programmes has been revealed; consequently, students often enter postgraduate courses to acquire experience and skills that effectively cover the demands of the labour market.

12.3. Higher Education public policies

A determining factor in the progress and objectives of higher education clearly derives from the public policies applied by each country. In this regard, the experience described herein also gradually creates the necessary critical mass to affect how these public policies are defined. Consequently, they will gradually answer to progress and to the needs that may arise in higher education.
As an example, the Bologna Treaty in Europe was the answer to a growing need for comparability amongst the various educational systems, also derived from the progress made in the unification of Europe. Consequently, an educational policy document was drawn up whereby the EHEA had to establish a common two-tier structure: graduate studies, to provide access to the labour market; and postgraduate studies which, in turn, offered two well-distinguished alternatives: postgraduate courses aimed at specialized professional training (Masters) and doctorate studies (after a Masters) to train researchers. This document was initially signed by twenty-nine countries in 1999. At the date hereof, forty-six countries have subscribed to it, indicating the importance of drawing up educational policy documents that offer solidity and continuity in higher education initiatives.

12.4. Cooperation networks between higher education institutions in Europe and Latin America

As already mentioned in the section on educational policies, cooperation networks are the key component that allows higher education to fulfil certain minimum requirements for its success. First, a clear example is the Net-Active project itself, now incorporating two of the world’s largest Distance Education networks, AIESAD and EADTU, already collaborating for some time. This cooperation has materialised in the «Instituto Latinoamericano y del Caribe de Calidad en Educación Superior a Distancia» (CAL-ED) [Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education]. The main task of this Institute is to help promote quality in distance higher education in all Latin American and Caribbean institutes that offer this type of course. In order to accomplish this objective, this Institute counts on the participation of Latin American universities, accreditation agencies and international organisations, as well as advice from other networks and European associations that provide their experience to achieve a quality higher education taught by virtual and distance methodologies.

An example of a personal network, consisting of university students in Spain, Portugal and Latin America, interested and concerned about all issues relates to distance education, is the one linked to the UNESCO Chair of Distance Education (CUED) in UNED, Spain. This network, through its Distribution List, promotes the debate and contrasts informations and opinions on the most relevant and innovative distance education topics, becoming a reference net within this study field in spanish.
This CUED network, through its Cuedistancia Distribution List, with more than 3,000 Ibero-American university students who discuss and compare information and opinions on the most relevant and innovating topics in distance education, has become the reference network in this field of study in Spanish. Likewise, the CUED issues: the «Boletín Electrónico de Noticias de Educación a Distancia» (BENED) [Electronic Distance Education Newsletter]. http://www.uned.es/bened. Apart from its web site, it guarantees a weekly e-mail delivery to all its subscribers (over 3,000 Latin American university professionals). This newsletter keeps all subscribers up to date on all information and documentation published weekly on distance education and technologies applied to education, in various electronic means of communication.

The UNESCO Chair in charge of coordinating this Net-Active project is a support network for emerging virtual mobility.

12.5. Financing of exchange programmes in higher education

The issue of financing may become one of the main obstacles to the execution of academic exchange agreements between institutions. In this regard, the traditional European ERASMUS programme has been referred to throughout this work. The greatest difficulty in this programme has been precisely the costs involved in transferring students all over Europe during extended periods of time (three months minimum). This has limited the achievements of ERASMUS, over its twenty years' existence, to 10% of the total number of European university students. The average student profile is as follows: students who are 23 years old on average, usually in the last years of their course (4th and 5th years), and a trend to complete full academic courses (Erasmus National Agency, 2002).

These results, together with the current demands of higher education, highlight the need to develop innovating teaching-learning models that enable this education to reach a greater number of potential students, as well as population groups who have been traditionally excluded from these resources. These models include virtual mobility, which contributes by opening the possibilities for higher education.

In fact, one of the horizons open is the possibility of financing frameworks which, due to the characteristics of virtual and distance models, may benefit a larger number of potential students.
DOCUMENTARY REFERENCES


INSTITUTO LATINOAMERICANOY DEL CARIBE DE CALIDAD EN EDUCACION SUPERIOR A DISTANCIA (CALED) http://www.utpl.edu.ec/caled


MANING, L.; MAYOR, B. (1999) Open and Distance Learning in a cross-cultural context. *International Conference on Distance Education.* Vienna.


**Official websites of Higher Education**

**European Union**

Within the framework of the European Union, the actions developed in the context of the higher education appear in a diversified way. Among them, it is interesting to stand out the following websites which gather the significative documents on this topic:

Higher Education in the EU: http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/higher/higher_en.html

The *Bologna Process in the European Commission*:

Official page of the *Bologna Process*:
http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/

This web gathers the actions aimed to promote the student mobility

This website present the actions developed within the Programme *Erasmus*:

This website present the actions developed within the Postgraduate Programme *Erasmus-Mundus*:

*Ploteus*, European portal to present oportunities of learning to ease mobility
www.ploteus.net.
Network for the educational information in Europe
http://www.eurydice.org/portal/page/portal/Eurydice

European Association for Distance Teaching Universities
http://www.eadtu.nl

Council of Europe

Higher education in the Council of Europe:
http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/highereducation/default_EN.asp?

UNESCO

Higher education in UNESCO:

UNESCO resources to impulse distance higher educatio:

Specific Centre intended for the the analysis of higher education
European Centre for Higher Education: CEPES
http://www.cephes.ro/

UNESCO – Latin - América
http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/

World Bank


This page is dedicated to tertiary education
To this organism, Latin-America is a priority in its interventions. This is the reason to start the Project: Mejorar el aprendizaje de los estudiantes de América latina: el desafío del siglo XXI, dirigido a todos los niveles educativos (Improving the Latin-American student’s learning: the XXI challenge intended for all educational levels)
http://go.worldbank.org/MJ5F9ZK030

OECD

This web page is dedicated to higher education:
http://www.oecd.org/topic/0,3373,en_2649_39263238_1_1_1_1_37455,00.html

European Documents for the recognition of students mobility

ECTS

Diploma Suplement

Links and Documents of interest on mobility

This page of the EU gathers the initiatives and documents on students mobility: Learning abroad
http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/abroad/lear_abroad_en.html

ENIC – NARIC Code of good practice in the provision on transnational education
http://www.enic-naric.net/documents/REVISED_CODE_OF_GOOD_PRACTICE_TNE.pdf


Virtual Mobility Experiences

ERASMUS
EU Programme for the mobility of higher education students

REVE
Real Virtual Erasmus http://reve.europace.org/
Handbook of Virtual Mobility: http://reve.europace.org/drupal/

Being Mobile
Being Mobile Project http://www.being-mobile.net/

CEVU
Collaborative European Virtual University
http://www.cevu.org

CSVM
Cross Sector Virtual Mobility: http://www.eadtu.nl/csvm/

VM-Base
Virtual Mobility before and after student exchanges: http://vm-base.europace.org/

Esmos
Enhancing student mobility through online support: http://www.esmos.eu/

UNIVE
Creating a network based e-university model fro the small countries in the context of
e-learning in Europe
http://www.e-uni.ee/Minerva/

MASSIVE
Modelling advice and support services to integrate the virtual component in higher
education
http://www.masse-vi-project.org/

Victorious
Student mobility in a digital world
http://www.coimbra-group.eu/victorious/
1. **Latin-American Organisms**

Asociación Iberoamericana de Educación Superior a Distancia (AIIESAD)
http://www.aiesad.org/

Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and Caribbean (IELSAC)
http://www.iesalc.unesco.org.ve/

Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo (BID)
http://www.iadb.org/index.cfm?language=spanish

Page dedicated to higher education
http://www.iadb.org/topics/subtopics.cfm?subtopicID=SUP&topicID=ED&language=Spanish

Latin-American and Caribbean Institute of Quality in Distance Higher Education (CALED)
http://www.utpl.edu.ec/caled
ANNEXES
1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Aim of the report

In relation to the Bologna process and the promotion of the European dimension in higher education, the Net-Active project is focussing on European Master level courses available beyond Europe and especially the Latin-American countries. Net-Active's aim is therefore to collect Master programmes specifically offered by distance education that are easily and broadly accessible, even to other continents by Virtual Mobility.

Virtual Mobility (VM) may be understood as a complement to physical mobility or educational concept of its own. It may prepare and extend physical mobility and/or offer new opportunities for students who cannot benefit from physical mobility. VM can provide unlimited access to courses in all phases of lifelong learning and training. VM can be used to enrich programmes on content by inter-institutional academic cooperation as well as offering students an international experience.

The aim of this report is to analyse current postgraduate courses offered by distance education, to further specify the possibilities and difficulties for the promotion of student's virtual mobility.

In order to detect the real offer of postgraduates in the EU, as a first step, a protocol has been designed by the Net-Active group. This document intends to collect the most significant information about the academic and administrative structure of this kind of courses. Beginning with this information, a comparative analysis of the fulfilled protocols will be carried out, evaluating the homogeneity of these studies and verifying the real possibilities of VM offered by the universities of the EU.
This European report on post-graduate courses is a supplement to the full overview of currently available Master courses offered by distance education in Europe. The report further wants to give a review and comparative analyses of these offerings between the European countries.

1.2. Approach

For collecting the Master courses offered by distance education, EADTU members were approached at several formal meetings and by mail. This was necessary as in general there is a lack of information in the web pages of the institutions. Actually, in none of the cases the information provided was adapted to foreign students.

The aims of the Net-Active project as well as the essence of being part of this EU-report were explained to the Rectors of the Open Universities and the Directors of consortia member organisations. Knowing that universities are overwhelmed by numerous questionnaires, the institutions were approached at the Rector’s and Director’s level to make sure to receive sufficient replies.

1.3. Results

Twenty two organisations of twenty different countries have been approached in total. We have send a template for information request consisting of:

— Protocol GT European Distance Postgraduate Courses on course related data

— Annex to the Protocol asking for information on practical experiences related to the academic interchange of students and academic recognition in distance postgraduate courses.

Sixteen institutions of twelve different European countries in total have send in their Master offerings by distance education. Other institutions that have not replied yet indicated to have no offerings of such kind or still need time for completing the protocols.
EU-REPORT SCOPE

Open Universities

— United Kingdom: the Open University (UK OU)
— Turkey: Anadolu University
— Spain: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)
      CEPADE, Madrid
      Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC)
      IAEU, Barcelona
— Russia: Moscow State University of Economics, Statistics
         and Informatics (MESI)
— France: Centre National d’Enseignement à Distance
         (CNED)
— Germany: FernUniversität in Hagen
— Italy: Network per l’Universita Ovunque (Nettuno /
         UniNettuno)
— the Netherlands: Open Universiteit Nederland (OU)
— Portugal: Universidade Aberta
         National consortia and associations in Lifelong
         Open and Flexible Learning
— Estonia: Estonian Information Technology Foundation
         (EITF)
— Sweden: Swedish Agency for Networks and Cooperation in
         Higher Education
         Lund University
— United Kingdom: the Open Learning Foundation (OLF)
1.4. Analyses

The EU-report contains next to the overview of Masters, a review on the current offerings per country and a comparative analyses. This analyses can however only be a comparative observation as the countries and the offerings included are very different.

It should also be said that there appears to be a huge disparity in denominations, terms, structures, etc. It has been detected that, even though working in the same fields, the meaning of each basic term differs significantly among countries and even among universities in the same country. The web pages of the universities concerned did also not give further clarifications on the terms used. This may require a deeper analysis by the experts of each country.

Also, the institutional representatives usually did not complete all questions in the protocols. Nonetheless, the information we received covers a wide European area in the field of academic offerings on the Master level.

Our comparative observation now focuses on:
- Offer and demand of the European postgraduate courses
- Academic structure of the Masters
- Administrative structure of the Masters
- Accreditation of the Masters
- The legislation of the Postgraduates courses

2. ANALYSIS OF THE OFFER AND DEMAND OF THE EUROPEAN POSTGRADUATE COURSES

2.1. Offer and demand of the European postgraduate courses

2.1.1. Compared by country

The offerings gathered so far can be included in a table subdivided per country. In the importance of having a worldwide offering and especially for the target group of Latin American students, the languages English, Spanish, French and Portuguese are included in the comparison.
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lund University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>Anadolu University</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Open University OLF</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing the number of offerings per country it is not so much related to the size of the countries but rather the policy if the institutions involved to offer Master courses by distance education.

Looking at the languages covered by the Masters it looks promising that already many courses are available in a «world-« language.

### 2.1.2. Compared by study areas

In order to analyse the distribution of the postgraduate courses by study areas, we have systematised the data gathered from the universities, using the code list of study areas used in the Socrates-Erasmus programme for student mobility.
The results can be seen in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Study area</th>
<th>N° of courses offered</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>04.- Business Sciences</td>
<td>Accounting, Financial Management (4); Business Science (15);</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Spain (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Union Associations and Staff Management (10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business with technologies (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marketing and sale management (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Netherlands (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Marketing (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Public administration (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>France (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Russia (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.- Education Sciences and Teacher</td>
<td>Educational Psychology (1)</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Spain (7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Teacher Training (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Adult education (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>France (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Science and Research (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Netherlands (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pedagogy (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Portugal (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.- Engineering, Technology</td>
<td>Industrial engineering (2)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technology management and strategy (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.- Geography and Geology</td>
<td>Environmental Sciences, Ecology (6)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Geographical information systems (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Netherlands (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sweden (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08.- Humanities</td>
<td>Humanities (4)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Italy (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Philosophy (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (3)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>History (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.- Linguistics and Philology</td>
<td>Modern Languages (4)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>France (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>Study area</td>
<td>No(^a) of courses offered</td>
<td>Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.– Law</td>
<td>European Law (1)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civil Law (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Law (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Netherlands (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.– Mathematics, Computer Science</td>
<td>Mathematics and Computing (6)</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Computer science (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Informatics (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>System engineering (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Netherlands (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Portugal (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.– Medical Sciences</td>
<td>Medical Sciences (5)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Spain (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Clinical Psychiatry and Psychology (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organisational psychology (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Netherlands (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.– Social Sciences</td>
<td>Sociology (8)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Political Sciences (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Intercultural relations (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Germany (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural sciences (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Netherlands (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Portugal (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.– Information and Communications Sciences</td>
<td>Other Information and Communication Sciences (5)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Spain (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Estonia (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>France (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.– Other fields of study</td>
<td>Physical Education, Sport Sciences (1)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spain (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recreation and Leisure Studies (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Music (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Turkey (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first item that we can stress is the heterogeneity of the study areas that are offered in distance postgraduate courses. There is however clearly a higher offer in the following study areas:

- Business Sciences
- Education Sciences and Teacher Training
- Mathematics, Computer Science
- Medical Sciences
- Social Sciences
When analysing the Master offerings by distance education (DE) for the whole of Europe we can see that offerings are covering all main academic areas of studies.

At the same time, we should stress the difficulties to attend all these courses within the Erasmus code study area. There are significant absences in new study area demanded according to the evolution of our society. Also, the vocabulary used to describe each master programme is not always the same, despite the area of competence is. A common way to describe the courses should help to analyse better the offer.

Although, on the European level it shows a full coverage of the main study areas, on the national level this is clearly missing. From the table above we can see that some countries have only 1 or 2 academic areas covered by DE. However, most countries that are hosting an open university, as well as Germany, are covering a broader spectrum of offerings.

The programmes are in most cases outlined by one university. Only few masters are planned as an interuniversity offer and just one course has an international structure.

3. ACADEMIC STRUCTURE OF THE MASTERS

3.1. Country comparisons

Looking closer into the elements of the Master courses we can distinguish, among others, subjects like ECTS, flexibility of courses, teaching learning methods, assessment and languages used.

ECTS

From analysing the filled out protocols of courses it shows that there are already some courses offered by using only the ECTS system. The majority is apparently offering still the national credit system as well as ECTS.

Examples:

European countries like Sweden and Germany are adapting former MA structures to the new demands. Sweden for example has a national creditation
system (poäng) in which a week workload (full time student) is equivalent to 1 Swedish credit (1.5 ECTS) / one semester: 20 Swedish credits (30 ECTS) / one year: 40 credits (60 ECTS). (Cf: www.lu.se/masters)

Within the UK, ECTS credits are not yet widely used. The current arrangements used predominantly within UK higher education is for one credit to represent the learning associated with 10 notional learning hours; a full time equivalent undergraduate study year is represented by 120 credits; a full time equivalent postgraduate study year is represented by 180 credits. Detail of the level of learning is indicated by a credit level – levels are not currently associated with ECTS.

Also the length of the formations are differing. When comparing for example the French, Dutch and Estonian systems you see that the Dutch Open University is counting from 30 months to 52, the CNED's Master are counting with 9 to 10, 12, 24 months and for the Master of Tallinn university the number of months is 24. While MA courses at the FernUni in Germany usually take two years (4 semesters of workload for a full time student), in the Swedish example, courses have very different duration.

This will also pose some problems in further accreditation according to Bologna demands. In general the same Master degree is offered both to students that follow a 1 year course (60 ECTS) and 2 years course (120 ECTS).

Recapturing the actual credit system, the number of credits that a Master course includes varies between 7.5 to 122 ECTS. Regarding the number of hours of each credit, the most common count is 10 hours per credit, as is the case in Spain.

In summary, the first issue to take into account would be the setting up of the number of hours a postgraduate course consists of, and at the same time to specify the same value for that credit. That would be the starting point to determine also the duration of the master courses. It is foreseen however that a number of programmes, mainly those encompassing fewer than 120 ECTS, will be subject to change in accordance with the Bologna Process when the new degree structure is established.
Flexibility

Aspects of flexibility that we analysed are modular systems, calendar, diverse T-L methodologies implied, facilities to overcome failed subjects or credits, etc.

An important aspect in relation to this is also the option of mixing modalities of study. For instance, some courses are developed completely on-line or by distance methodology, some other may mix strategies. Like UNED’s masters are mostly developed for distance education, but all of them include certain face-to-face elements, all this within the framework of a highly flexible programme in length, time and place.

The Master programmes frequently have a modular structure. Nevertheless, when contrasting this data with the flexibility of the studies, the answer is negative, since these modules are expected to be sequential. This makes the partial mobility of students more difficult as it implies that in many cases enrolment flexibility is not allowed. Therefore, a student can enrol in any entire course but never in an isolated module of this course.

Teaching-learning method

The diversity of answers to the section of «teaching-learning methods» is very high, also without providing an explanation of what is meant in each case. Collaborative learning, e-learning, tutorial assistance, distance education system, blended learning, etc. are all mentioned.

Relating to the materials used, all masters use web, complemented with printed materials. Printed material predominates although documentation is also widely available on the related websites.

Most courses do not require face-to-face sessions, although some courses demand the student presence ranging from 3 to 200 hours or more. These cases imply an added difficulty to promote the virtual mobility of the students. Definitely there is a difference in perception to what distance education means in terms of flexibility and accessibility.

Regarding communication and tutorial systems, e-mail prevails. It is the fastest and most effective communication alternative between teacher and student, though telephone is still present as a safe communication media.
Examples:

All the Masters of the Dutch Open University have a teaching method of «monitored self-study», with communication methods and tutorial system based on web, mail and phone. For the Masters in Accounting, Natural science,, Cultural Sciences and, Education a web based electronic environment is used.

Concerning the Talinn. University, the communication system is based on a learning management system with Skype facilities, and the tutorial system is based on the LMS IVA in the group or individual work area and via skype via one-to-one call or conference facilities.

Cned’s Master teaching-learning method is an e-learning method with tutorial and communication system by mail and web.

Assessment

We can find a variety of assessment methods used like individual assignments, exams, projects, questionnaires, etc.

Languages

The language in which the course is given is for the most part the language of the organising institution. Some institutions also offer their Masters in a second language.

Some courses are given in Spanish, English as well as in Portuguese. A bigger part however is available only in the local languages. This seriously impedes the exchange possibilities without mastering the language.

3.3. Concluding remarks

European Ministers stress the important role played by ECTS in facilitating student mobility and international curriculum development. Ministers furthermore call those working on qualifications frameworks for the European Higher Education Area to encompass the wide range of flexible learning paths, opportunities and techniques and to make appropriate use of the ECTS credits.

From the overview of Master offerings we see that the ECTS system is used by the majority of the Master programmes. Although the ECTS system is used all
over Europe, it differs however very much depending on the country you would be studying in.

As long as the ECTS system is not used as a consistent method for facilitating student mobility in European higher education, European universities will encounter major difficulties in the recognition of exchange mobility, the validation of courses taken abroad, the translation of marks and transfer of credits.

Many already called for a more «European» implementation of ECTS that would preclude inconsistencies caused by national or institutional approaches. Clearly, this issue of recognition should also be addressed in inter-continental mobility.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF THE MASTERS

4.1. Comparative analyses on certification and registration procedures

The prerequisite for admission in some Master programmes is bachelor's degree or corresponding level of education. For the Tallinn University work experience counts of at least three years in the field of information management as in the Netherlands a «bachelor» in the same field of competence or at other recognised institution bridging programme is required. For France to accede to Master (240), the requirement is a Licence 3 (180), and to accede to a Master 2 (300) is a Master 1 (180).

In the UK, candidates for a Master’s degree are required to prepare a thesis for presentation to examiners, (which may involve oral examination), or take written examinations; they may be required to do both. Most institutions expect a good academic background for entry to a Master's degree with requirements varying according to the popularity of the course. Some Masters’ degrees in science and all Masters in Engineering (MEng) are awarded after extended integrated undergraduate programmes that last, typically, a year longer than Honours degree programmes. Longer research programmes often lead to the Master of Philosophy (MPhil), which normally requires higher entry qualifications.

All these programmes have the same academic value as other Masters programmes.

In Russia the «Magister» degree is awarded after successful completion of a further one or two years study following the «Bakalavr» degree. The two-year
programmes are research-oriented in sciences and advanced studies. Graduates of Magister degrees are eligible for entry on to doctoral studies.

Admission to European Masters is therefore strongly depending on the institution that is offering the Master in question. We can always expect a special request for admittance by foreign students.

The process of registration and related admission criteria, selection of students, requirements, etc. is followed in each country strictly to the established norms. This does not contribute to ease mobility, due to the heterogeneity of situations among countries, and also the real difficulty we experience for the recognition and adaptation of degrees. This adds to the scarce flexibility that still occurs at the registration for courses that can in most cases only be done by registration for the full module or even the complete degree.

Although all courses claim the possibility of access to foreign students, the real situation is quite different, when requirements are analysed to make it effective. The costs of these courses in Europe also differ. Every course has a different prize rating from 900 euros to the 8,200 euros.

The certification is academic for all the masters. However, there seems to be no «common» way to describe an «academic certification» (different name of titles, recognition of the titles, official, professional...) between the European countries.

All of them are academic titles and are what we know as «university own titles», without the endorsement. These titles are valued as far as they are valued in certain professional contexts, not by the Master title in itself. They do not offer data on the names given to this level of titles, tough it seems that all of them are called —Masters—.

5. ACCREDITATION OF MASTERS

The higher education system and related accreditation of Masters within European countries is regulated by state governments. So, on the national level only.

The system of organising higher education and accreditation can vary in complexity depending on the country’s governmental structure. Also, the offe-
rings and accreditation of private educational institutions in addition to public higher education is depending on the country's system.

**Two European examples from the UK and Russia:**

**UK higher education system**

Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland fit into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). In Scotland, there is the Scottish Qualifications Framework (SQF).

In England qualifications in the framework are regulated by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA); in Wales they are regulated by the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (Awdurdod Cymwysterau, Cwricwlwm ac Aseu Cymru - ACCAC); and in Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA). The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) for higher education, shares responsibility academic qualifications and manages the framework for higher education qualification levels (FHEQ). The SQF is maintained by the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA).

The frameworks provide quality assurance for different qualifications and show how academic, vocational and general qualifications relate to each other. Qualifications in the framework have been assessed by awarding bodies and are designed to be understood by qualification holders, employers,

**Russian higher education system**

Higher education is provided by public and non-public accredited higher education institutions. The main types of higher education institutions include universities, academies, institutes, technical universities and colleges. Universities, academies and conservatories have the highest prestige.

The main distinction between universities, academies and institutes lies in the range of subject areas and scientific fields they offer. Universities are characterised by a wide range of scientific disciplines, which are offered only at university higher education level. Universities are divided into Universities for Humanities and Sciences; Pedagogical Universities; Medical Universities; Agricultural Universities and Technical Universities.
Academies are major research centres in one specific scientific field (e.g. Arts, Science, Technology, Economics or Law).

Institutes are characterised by a wide range of disciplines offered at all levels of higher education.

A proportion of places in public institutions are still free of charge. However, an increasing number of applicants enter universities as self-funded students. In 1998 the State Committee for Higher Education of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation were combined to create the Ministry of Education of the Russian Federation. The Ministry is responsible for the licensing and accreditation of all higher education institutions (both public and non-public).

The system of higher education has, since 1989, been developed along the lines of the Bologna undergraduate and postgraduate model in co-operation with the Council of Europe, and Russia became signatories of the Bologna Declaration in 2003. New degrees will be awarded with the Diploma Supplement and ECTS credits and some Russian Universities have begun working with other European partners on pilot stages with full implementation complete before 2010.

Currently there is no European agreed quality assessment system of higher education institutions and their Master courses. The Bologna Ministers have however taken the initiative to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance in European higher education. This is now being developed in cooperation by EUA, ENQA, ESIB and EURASHE.

E-learning specific quality criteria are however not covered by this European initiative and there is still not an e-learning specific criteria framework operational at the national level either. EADTU has taken the initiative of developing a framework of benchmarking quality in e-learning. This E-xcellence project will deliver a quality assessment tool for e-learning by the end of 2006. This offers a country-related approach within a European consistent model. (www.eadtu.nl/e-xcellence)
6. THE LEGISLATION OF THE POSTGRADUATES COURSES

In Spain there is not a specific legislation that regulates the design and offer of the Master titles, the way they are delivered by the Spanish universities. Facing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), it was approved a norm in 2005 which regulates postgraduate titles that will be delivered in future in our universities, though we still don’t have any Master being developed under this norm. The objective is that, in future, official Master titles, accredited by the National Agency of Evaluation and Accreditation (ANECA), with the official requirements to be delivered, will coexist with the Masters of each university («own titles»), which does not have to follow this legislation.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The call on EADTU members for inclusion in the overview of Masters by DE has already delivered an impressive overview of available post-graduate courses in Europe. Still, the list is not complete as not all European countries have submitted their offerings yet.

From the analyses made in this EU-report we conclude that possibilities for foreign students are clearly there. The major problem is however the diversity between the various European higher education providers as well as their core focus on local students. For the promotion of student’s virtual mobility we therefore encountered several difficulties on language, admission, credit transfer and programme adjustability.

Language is considered to be probably the biggest difficulty for foreign students in entering European programmes. Although the Master courses of our overview cover all main academic areas, most of them are in the original language. Only some are offered in a second (world-)language. Although it is a basic requirement in all these Master courses, only in some cases emphasize was given to the required country language skills. The difficulty of the teaching language is really important and seems to be one of the main points to be discussed in order to make a worldwide offer.

Also, the vocabulary employed to describe the content and programmes of the courses is not yet standardised on a European level. This point is very important in the development of virtual mobility courses as a learning method. Also a «com-
mon» way to describe an «academic certification» between the European countries is missing. Agreement on common definitions should reduce the differences between the different Masters and facilitate student mobility.

We consider that there is clearly a lack of information in the institutional web pages especially concerning possibilities for foreign students. Several institutions' web pages should be screened and revised for information specific to foreign students.

Recognition of courses is very much supported by the ECTS-System. Although the ECTS is now widely spread in Europe it differs very much depending on the country's approach. As long as there is not a more «European» implementation of ECTS, we could face problems of recognition. Especially when working with inter-continental student mobility.

When looking at the possibility for student mobility and possibilities for admission, each country and/or Master programme has its own specific requirements. Although, most courses will be available for foreign students, it can be expected that a request for admission will, in most cases, be rather complex and time-consuming. Especially, when there is a certain lack of flexibility to register in specific subjects or modules from the offered titles.

Already from the EUA Trends IV report we can read that several main aspects are referred to as impediments to student mobility. Over-complicated application procedures, recognition of credit points for mobility programmes and conflicting academic calendars are the main issues to be addressed.

In order to raise the interest of the foreign students in European higher education, much more effort must be taken in organising VM activities by the institutions. Appropriate measures should be taken like:

RECOMMENDATIONS

- provision of comprehensive information on Master programme offers by DE
- offering Master programmes in a second (world-) language
- increased flexibility and accessibility of Master courses
- facilitating admission and examination
- improve recognition of courses
1. WORK METHODOLOGY

During the first meeting of the Net Active Project in Madrid, celebrated from December 12 to 14, 2005, information was provided on the project and on the activities of each partner. The first activity entrusted to Latin American partners was a survey of the interest of potential Latin American students in European Masters studies. For this, a protocol model was issued, as a method for gathering data on the masters offered through distance education in Latin America and the Caribbean. The Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja - UTPL was named leader of the Latin American group, and was made responsible for presenting the report containing the research carried out by all Latin American partners.

In the course of this meeting, the Latin American partners studied the method of working and gathering relevant details. The geographical area of Latin America was divided into three sub areas: Central America and the Caribbean, led by the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM); the Andean area, led by the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja-Ecuador (UTPL) and the Austral area, led by the Universidad Mar del Plata (Argentina). The distribution of countries and tasks was determined in accordance with the following proposal:

The aim was to identify the indicators that enable virtual mobility in distance post-graduate programmes. In the December meeting in Madrid, the group divided the tasks to be carried out into regions or sectors, within a framework of mutual collaboration, in order to obtain the details of Latin American Distance Masters students (academic interests, advantages and disadvantages of the recognition of distance masters studies: Southern Cone Region (Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Brazil and Bolivia) – led by U. Mar del Plata. Andean Region (Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela and Colombia) – led by U.T.P.L. Central America Region (Caribbean and Mexico) - led by U.N.A.M. The AIESAD is responsible for the member institutions.
Suggestions were provided regarding sources for gathering information, such as: Official bodies, Education portals, websites of educational institutions, collaborations with renowned institutions. The timeline suggested for the execution of the project can be found in Annex 1.

The main aim of the assigned tasks was to identify the offer of masters in the higher education institutions of Latin America. To fulfill this commitment, the first thing that was done was to identify the universities of each country and their website addresses with the aim of accessing them and finding the required information. Other pages visited were those of the official Higher Education bodies.

Not every website contained the necessary details of the masters they offered, so an email was sent to the addresses found in the websites and to known workers with whom there has been contact previously, containing information regarding the project and its aims, and attaching the relevant file. In most cases, this did not provide positive results. Due to this, the details of the ‘Protocolo GT Postgrados Latinoamericanos a Distancia’ (Protocol of the Latin American Distance Postgraduate Courses Workgroup) were only filled in with the information gathered from the websites of every body researched.

It is worth pointing out that, due to the low response and the scarce information found in the pages, it was not possible to fill in all the data required.

As a general trend across Latin America, there are different types of postgraduate courses: Diploma (6 months), Specialisation (12 months), and Masters degree «Maestría» (24 months). The research has centred on gathering information on the offer of distance Masters Degrees, though there are other details regarding classroom learning or semi-distance learning which can provide us with some information regarding trends.

2. ANALYSIS OF THE DEMAND AND SUPPLY OF LATIN AMERICAN MASTERS DEGREES

A total of 291 universities have been researched, of which 37 offer distance masters degrees, 61 universities offer semi-distance courses (of these, there are 7 institutions that are also included in the 37 universities offering distance programmes, as they have programmes in both categories) and 200 offer on-campus masters degrees or other post-graduate programmes, or do not offer this type of studies.
These universities offer a total of 120 distance masters degrees and a total of 583 semi-distance courses. The number of on-campus masters degrees has not been researched, as this was not the aim of this project.

It is worth mentioning that the highest number of universities corresponds to the Andean region, which is where the research was more thorough. As reference we point to Brunner in 2002 where he indicates the existence of over 5,000 higher education institutions in LAC; of which 900 are universities\(^{17}\).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Universities researched</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With Distance Masters Degrees</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With Semi-distance</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With on-campus courses or no offer</td>
<td>200</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Masters Degrees identified</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distance</td>
<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td>Traditional distance courses with or without virtual element</td>
<td>87</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-distance</td>
<td>583</td>
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</table>

We have classified the universities we have researched in three groups:

- List of Distance Masters Degrees in researched Latin American universities (annex 2)
- List of researched Latin American Universities offering semi-distance postgraduate studies (annex 3)
- List by countries of other universities researched (annex 4)

\(^{17}\) BRUNNER, JOSÉ JOAQUÍN 2002 «Asegaramiento de la calidad y nuevas demandas sobre la educación superior en América Latina». «Quality Assurance and new demands on higher education in Latin America» Cartagena, Consejo Nacional de Acreditación de Colombia (National Accreditation Council of Colombia).


Comparison by Areas of Study

We carried out the analysis of the masters degrees offered in distance learning by following the areas of study of the European classification. As it was not easy to adjust to the classification according to the «List of codes of study areas», Option 9 was used to a great extent, and the following masters degree programmes were identified:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Area of Study</th>
<th>N.º Courses Offered</th>
<th>Countries</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01 Agricultural Science</td>
<td>01.1 Agriculture (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agricultural Extension</td>
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<tr>
<td>03 Arts and Design</td>
<td>03.2 Music and Musicology (1)</td>
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<td>Argentina (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Musical Interpretation of 20th Century Latin American Music</td>
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<tr>
<td>04 Business Studies</td>
<td>04.4 Tourism and Hostelry (1)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Argentina (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tourism Consultancy</td>
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<td>Ecuador (18)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>04.7 Marketing and sales management (1)</td>
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<td>Peru (3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Business Management and Marketing</td>
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<td>Chile (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>04.9 Other studies integrated in Business Studies (29)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strategy</td>
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<td>Communication Design and Business Development</td>
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<td>Business Administration</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Business Administration via Internet and Email</td>
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<td>International Negotiations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>International Business Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>Area of Study</td>
<td>N.° Courses Offered</td>
<td>Countries</td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business Management and Financial Auditing</td>
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<td>Organisation and Management of Human Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operations, quality and innovation management</td>
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<td>Consultancy and tax and investment management</td>
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<td>Company Energy Management and Auditing</td>
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<td>Information Technologies applied to companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Integrated knowledge, intellectual capital and human resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business Administration in the digital economy</td>
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<td>Business Administration in Tourism and Leisure Companies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Operational research, major in management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Administration e-Commerce</td>
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<td>Quality and productivity system</td>
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<td>Field</td>
<td>Area of Study</td>
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<td>Administration of Educational Institutions</td>
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<td>Education with focus on educational Advice and Development</td>
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<td>06.9 Other subjects integrated in engineering and technology (1)</td>
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<td>Countries</td>
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<td>08.2 Theology (1)</td>
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<td>Labour and Social Security Law</td>
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<td>10.4 Criminal Law and Criminology (1)</td>
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<td>10.9 Other types of law (6)</td>
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<td>Legal Consultancy for Companies</td>
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<td>Law, with major in Jurisdictional Policy</td>
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<td><strong>11 Maths and IT</strong></td>
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<td>11.9 Other subjects integrated Maths and IT (2)</td>
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<td>Information Technology applied to Education</td>
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<td>Higher Education of Physics or Maths and IT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Field</td>
<td>Area of Study</td>
<td>N.° Courses Offered</td>
<td>Countries</td>
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<td>Health Management for Local Development (2)</td>
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<td>14 Social Science</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>14.3 Economics (1)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Analysis and Assessment of Projects</td>
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<td>Costa Rica (3)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>14.4 Psychology and Behavioural Studies (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Studies of Social and Family Violence</td>
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<td>14.6 International relations, European studies and regional studies (2)</td>
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<td>European relations and regional integration</td>
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<td>14.8 Development (1)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Public Administration and Public Policy</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Most masters programmes are developed in the area of Education Science and Teacher Training (39), followed by Business Studies (31), and Social Science (14); other areas of interest are Law (9), Geography and Geology, Medical Science and Communication and Information Science (5 each), Maths and IT (4), Humanities (3), Engineering – Technology (2) and, lastly, the rest of the fields identified are Agricultural Science, Arts and Design and other study areas (1 programme) each.

According to our perspective, the higher number of masters degrees in the field of Education is due to the current legislation which requires university teachers to have at least one masters qualification, and the offers have tended to favour training toward university teaching.
Comparison by Country

We believe the high number of masters in Business Studies is explained by the growing interest that business professionals have in improving their training or in the idea of creating personal companies in the future.

The research carried out in the different countries showed that 61 universities offer masters degrees or blended postgraduate courses. It must be noted that the search was more thorough in the Andean area, and that, thanks to the details contained in Ecuador’s National Council of Higher Education (Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior) we were able to find extensive information regarding the offer of postgraduate degrees in this country, where it was noted that 495 semi-distance masters degrees are offered. In the other researched countries, we have been able to detect 88 semi-distance masters degrees.

The studied universities which offer distance learning education are, by countries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>UNIVERSITY</th>
<th>Masters Programmes Offered</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECUADOR (30 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (6)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Business Management and Administration, Masters Degree in Distance Education, Masters Degree in Health Management for Local Development, Masters Degree in Educational Management and Leadership, Masters Degree in the Development of Intelligence and Education, Masters Degree in Psycho-Pedagogy: Talent and Creativity).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Católica Santiago de Guayaquil (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Health Services Management</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Técnica de Ambato (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Distance Education</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Escuela Politécnica Nacional (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Operational Research, with major in Management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECUADOR (30 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Universidad Central del Ecuador (2)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Business Administration, Masters Degree in Environmental Management and Auditing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
<td>UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>Masters Programmes Offered</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Universidad Regional Autónoma de los Andes (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Distance and Open Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial (18) (These programmes are offered in conjunction with a university abroad)</td>
<td>Business Administration via Internet and Email; Business Administration (MBA); International Management of Companies; Management and Financial Auditing of Companies; Business Management and Marketing; Human Resources Organisation and Management; Planning and Management of the Environment and Natural Resources; Management of Operations; Quality and Innovation; Tax and Investment Advice and Management; Energy Management and Auditing of Companies; Accounts Auditing; Management of Technological and Industrial Innovation; Information Technologies applied to companies; Integrated Knowledge, Intellectual Capital and Human Resources Management; Business Administration in the Digital Economy; Business Administration for Tourism and Leisure Companies; Development and Territorial Administration; Legal Advice for Businesses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERU: (16 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Universidad Marcelino Champagnat (4)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Education, major in Educational Innovation; Masters Degree in Biblical Pastoral; Masters Degree in Special Education; Masters Degree in Hearing and Language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Peruana Unión (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Education, with Major in Research in Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
<td>UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>Masters Programmes Offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad de Piura (7)</td>
<td>International Masters Degree in Nutrition and Dietetics, Masters Degree in Tourism Consultancy, Masters Degree in Information Technology Consultancy, Masters Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language, Masters Degree in Environmental Management and Auditing, Masters Degree in Environmental Engineering and Technology, Masters Degree in Distance Education with major in Educational Theories and Practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Virtual San Martín de Porres (2)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Hotel Tourism Marketing, Masters Degree in Business Management and Administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Law with major in Jurisdictional Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENEZUELA (1 masters degree)</td>
<td>Universidad Nacional Abierta (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Distance Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEXICO (20 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores Monterrey (12)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Administration, Masters Degree in e-Commerce, Masters Degree in Applied Public Management, Masters Degree in Quality and Productivity Systems, Masters Degree in Information Technologies Administration, Masters Degree in Educational Institution Administration, Masters Degree in Information Science and Administration of Knowledge, Masters Degree in Education with focus on Educational Advice and Development, Masters Degree in Education with focus on Teaching and Learning Processes, Masters Degree in Educational Technology, Masters in Humanistic Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (3)</td>
<td>Masters in Teaching in Higher Secondary Schools (free); Masters in Library Science and Information Studies; Civil Engineering, Ground Routes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Veracruzana (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Virtual Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Inst. Latinoamericano de la Comunicación Educativa ILCE (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Educational Communication and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
<td>UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>Masters Programmes Offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSTA RICA: (18 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED) (18)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in International Business, Masters Degree in Business Administration, Masters in Health Administration Services, Masters Degree in Educational Administration, Masters Degree in Criminology, Masters Degree in Economic Law, Masters Degree in Constitutional Law, Masters Degree in Workplace and Social Security Law, Professional Masters Degree in Human Rights, Masters Degree in Communication Media Administration, Academic Masters Degree in Management of Natural Resources, Masters Degree in European Studies and Regional Integration, Masters Degree in Intellectual Property, Masters Degree in Psycho-Pedagogy, Masters Degree in Educational Technology, Masters Degree in Social and Family Violence, International Masters Degree in Drug Addictions, Masters in Agricultural Extension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILE (7 masters degrees)</td>
<td>UTEM Virtual (7)</td>
<td>Masters (Magister) in Distance Education, Masters (Magíster) in Educational IT, Masters (Magíster) in Educational Administration, Masters (Magíster) in Educational Curriculum, Masters (Magíster) in Electronic Government, Masters (Magíster) in Political Science, Masters (Magíster) in Communication Design and Company Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANAMA (7 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Universidad Abierta y a Distancia de Panamá (UNADP) (7)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Higher Teaching with focus on Adult Education, Masters Degree in Environmental Science with focus on Management of Natural Resources, Masters Degree in Human Resources Administration and Management, Masters Degree in Project Analysis and Assessment, Masters Degree in Psycho-Pedagogy, Masters Degree Social Adaptation, Masters Degree in Social Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARGENTINA (17 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Univ. Católica de la Plata (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Higher Education of Physics or Maths and IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Univ. Católica de Salta (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Ophthalmology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
<td>UNIVERSITY</td>
<td>Masters Programmes Offered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Champagnat (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Management IT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Maimórides (5)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Public Administration and Public Policy, Masters Degree in Political Science, Masters Degree in Strategy, Masters Degree in Geopolitics, Masters Degree in International Relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instituto Tecnológico de Buenos Aires (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Software Engineering</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Univ. Nacional de Cuyo (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Musical Interpretation of 20th Century Latin American Music</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Univ. Nacional de Entre Ríos (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Methodology of Scientific Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Univ. Nacional de Lanús (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Methodology of Scientific Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Univ. Nacional de Mar de Plata (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Contemporary Practical Philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Univ. Nacional de Quilmes (2)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Science, Technology and Society, Masters Degree in Social Sciences and Humanities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Nacional de la Plata (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Information Technology applied to Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad de Morón (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Distance Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOLIVIA: (3 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Universidad Autónoma Saracho (2)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Higher Education Sciences, Masters Degree in Virtual Pedagogy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar (1)</td>
<td>Masters Degree in Virtual Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPÚBLICA DOMINICANA: (5 masters degrees)</td>
<td>Universidad Abierta para Adultos</td>
<td>Masters Degree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Latin America, the classification of types of masters into academic, professional and research masters does not exist.
**ECUADOR:** The country's 69 universities were researched, of which 44 offer a total of 495 semi-distance masters degrees, and only 7 offer distance masters programmes, with a total of 30 masters degrees in the areas of Business Studies, Education Science and Teacher Training, Geography and Geology, Law, Medical Science and Social Science.

According to a report of the National Council of Higher Education (Consejo Nacional de Educación Superior or CONESUP) as at March 2006, a total of 31,268 post graduates have graduated in Ecuador, distributed as follows: Diploma: 8,184; Specialists: 7,361; Magister (Masters): 15,723; of the total number of graduates, 3,891 correspond to distance learning. Most post-graduate courses are in the field of Administration and Trade with a total of 14,055, followed by the field of Education, with a total of 8,391 graduates; in third place, we find 3,594 postgraduates in Health Science, closely followed by Social Science, with 3,511 graduates. (annex 5)

**PERU:** A total of 81 universities were researched, of which 6 offer distance masters degrees with a total of 16 programmes in the fields of Business Studies, Education Science and Teacher Training, Engineering and Technology, Geography and Geology, Humanities, Law, Medical Science and Communication and Information Science.

**COLOMBIA:** A total of 58 universities were researched, of which most offer on-campus masters and only 7 offer semi-distance masters. No distance masters courses were found, but there is an offer of Diplomas and Specialisations in this type of courses.

**VENezUELA:** A total of 43 universities were researched, 4 of them offering semi-distance masters courses, and only one of them offering a distance masters course in the field of Education Science and Teacher training.

**MEXICO:** According to the National Association of Higher Education Universities and Institutions (Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior or ANUIES), and specifically to the Catalogue of Post-graduate Studies in Universities and Polytechnics of the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City, for 2005, in this region, counting the central units and the non-centralised campuses, there are 176 higher education institutions, of which 32 are public and 144 are private, which jointly offer a total of 1,454 programmes, distributed as follows: 546 (38%) are specialisation courses; 714 (49%) are masters degrees and 194 (13%) are doctorates. Only 4 institutions of the total number visited were seen to offer distance or virtual masters degrees in the fields of Business Studies, Education
Science and Teacher Training, Engineering and Technology, Humanities, Law and Communication and Information Science.

COSTA RICA: We have only been able to establish that one university offers 18 distance masters degrees in the fields of Agricultural Science, Business Studies, Education Science and Teacher Training, Geography and Geology, Law, Medical Science, Social Science and Communication and Information Science.

CUBA: We have established that one university offers a distance masters degree in the field of Education Science and Teacher Training.

PANAMA: One university in this country offers 7 distance masters degrees in the fields of Business Sciences, Education Science and Teacher Training, Geography and Geology and Social Science.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: There are five distance masters degrees offered.

ARGENTINA: Of the researched institutions, 12 of them offer 17 distance masters degrees in the fields of Arts and Design, Business Studies, Education Science and Teacher Training, Humanities, Maths and IT, Medical Science and Social Science.

BOLIVIA: 2 universities offer 3 distance masters degrees in the fields of Education Science and Teacher Training.

CHILE: 1 institution offers 7 distance masters degrees in the fields of Business Studies, Education Science and Teacher Training, Social Science and other fields of study.

3. ACADEMIC STRUCTURE OF MASTERS DEGREES

3.1. Comparison of countries in Latin America

The Structure of the masters programmes is divided as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>No. Masters Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interuniversity</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
• **University:** Of the 37 institutions offering distance masters programmes, 35 have 89 programmes with a structure based on one sole university.

• **Interuniversity:** 9 universities offer masters degrees jointly with other institutions, offering of 31 distance interuniversity masters degrees. It is worth noting that 7 of these universities are also included in the earlier section.

There are 5 universities in the Andean Area: 2 universities in Ecuador offer 19 interuniversity programmes (UTPL 1 programme with the Instituto de Estudios Bursátiles and Universidad Tecnológica Equinoccial 18 programmes with the CEPADE Universidad Politécnica de Madrid)

3 universities in Peru offer 7 interuniversity programmes (The Universidad Marcelino Champagnat has 3 programmes with the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Escuela Universitaria de Magisterio «Luis Vives», integrated in the Universidad Pontificia de Salamanca. The Universidad de Piura has 3 programmes with Universidad de Vic (Barcelona), Universidad de Barcelona, Universidad Mayor San Simón de Bolivia, Universidad de Las Islas Baleares (Spain), Universidad de León (Spain), Universidad de Guadalajara (Mexico), Universidad Veracruzana (Mexico), Universidad Federal de Santa Caterina (Brazil), Universidad Mayor de San Simón (Bolivia), Universidad Laica Eloy Alfaro de Manabí (Ecuador), Universidad Santa María (Ecuador), Universidad del Mar (Chile), Fundación Universitaria Iberoamericana, The Australian Institute, Universidad del País Vasco, Universidad de Vigo, Universidad de Granada and the Universidad Virtual San Martín de Porras with 1 programme with Escuela Europea de Negocios, Spain)

In the region of Central America, Caribbean and Mexico, 2 universities offer programmes jointly with other institutions: the Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores Monterrey de México offers a masters programme with the University of British Columbia and the Universidad Estatal a Distancia de Costa Rica offers 2 programmes with Paul Nitze School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University (USA), Brandeis University, Lemberg Programme), International University of Japan, United Nations University (Japan), Harvard International School of Business (USA), The School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), in Johns Hopkins University, Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University (Canada), Leonard N. Stern School of Business, N.York University (USA), Thammasat University (Thailand), Bocconi University
of Milan (Italy), University of Sheffield (UK), Ohio State University (USA), University of Adelaide (Australia), Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University (USA), Yonsei University (Korea), Fundación Universitaria Luis Amigó (Colombia), Universidad Miguel Hernandez – IID, Universidad de Deusto – Spain, Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (Spain), Universidad Nacional Federico Villarreal (Peru), Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia (Peru), Universidad Nacional Experimental Simón Rodríguez (Venezuela).

In the Southern Cone, the Universidad Católica de la Plata offers a masters degree in collaboration with the Università degli Studi di Verona, Università degli Studi di Padova, Università Ca Foscarì - Venice, Universidad Católica de la Plata and the Centro de Investigaciones en Antropología Filosófica y Cultural (Research Centre for Philosophical and Cultural Anthropology); and the Instituto Tecnológico de Buenos Aires offers a masters degree in collaboration with the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid.

• International: According to the research carried out in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding higher education institutions, 15 programmes are offered internationally and the rest of the programmes are offered on a national level.

Flexibility

In many countries of Latin America universities do not use the concept of credits, and, where used, the number of hours per credit varies greatly.

The minimum number of credits for a masters degree is 28, at the Universidad Nacional Abierta of Venezuela and the maximum number is 120 at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma of México. Generally, the higher or lower number of credits is related with the number of hours per credit.

In terms of the number of hours a credit represents, this varies between 9 hours and 20 hours.

Despite the differences observed in the number of credits and what each represents in terms of hours, masters degrees tend to last from one and a half years to two years (most masters degrees last for two years.)
The academic structure of the masters degrees examined is as follows: 24 programmes have a modular system, 29 have courses, 40 have subjects and 27 do not indicate the structure they use.

Fully virtual masters degrees are quite rare; most programmes use printed materials, Internet resources and, generally speaking, combined strategies.

Teaching-Learning Method

With regard the teacher-learning method, there is no clear definition and not all programmes specify anything regarding this aspect. However, we can point out that most programmes refer to classroom sessions, distance tutorials, the material provided to the students and virtual activities.

A total of 67 programmes require classroom sessions, while 33 do not have classroom sessions. For final assessments, students must attend in person and, in 20 programmes this is not specified.

Given that most masters programmes have a virtual element, telematics is the most widely used communication system; a total of 68 programmes use this means exclusively and the rest of post graduates also use postal and telephone means and some programmes do not specify the means used. In terms of the tutorials system, in most cases it is not specified, and in some cases, it is specified that it there are virtual or distance tutorials.

Assessment

With regard to the assessment system used in most programmes, it is often not specified; few indicate that there are distance and classroom assessments, and only two of them offer continuous assessments via the Internet.

Language

Among the distance masters degrees we have seen in Latin America and the Caribbean, 118 of them are offered in Spanish language and only 2 are offered in English language.
3.2. Some ideas to conclude

- Most of the masters programmes offered have a structure based on one university only.
- The credits system is not used in several countries, and, in some countries where it is used, the number of credit hours differs significantly.
- The duration of masters degrees is generally two years.
- Masters degrees are structured mostly with subjects.
- Although many institutions make use of NICTs, printed materials are still used as a basic resource.
- With reference to the teaching-learning process, we can conclude that the general trend is to carry out classroom sessions.
- University-student communication has notably improved thanks to the incorporation of the NICTs, telematics is currently the most widely used system.
- The most frequent assessment system is to carry out distance and classroom assessments.
- The masters degrees are mostly offered in Spanish.

4. ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE OF MASTERS DEGREES

4.1. Comparative analysis regarding certification and registration procedures

The title used on the certificate issued for each masters degree, is that of «Master» in 36 programmes, «Magister» in 19 programmes and «Maestro» in 18 programmes; the latter is only used in Mexico, while the other two are used in the rest of countries, and even in the same country both titles are used. A total of 47 programmes do not indicate the title they award.

Aspects related to the registration process, admission criteria, selection of students and other legal aspects, are in accordance with what is established in the law of their respective countries, and as most programmes are offered on a nationally, the validation and official certification of titles of students from other
countries is somewhat difficult, a factor which does not contribute in any way to the mobility of students.

The costs are very varied and range from $2,300 and $12,720 American dollars; though the difference of costs is difficult to explain, we feel it is due to the joint offer with universities from abroad and the different duration of the programmes.

**Accreditation of the Masters Degrees**

In terms of Accreditation, most masters degrees are only backed by their own universities and are not accredited by the competent national bodies. According to our criteria, this is due to the law regarding assessment and accreditation in Latin American countries being very recent.

Below is a table of the countries, together with the year of creation of the assessment and accreditation bodies; it should be noted that these belong to the Iberoamerican Network for the Accreditation of Higher Education Quality (RIACES):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
<th>ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION BODY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ARGENTINA</td>
<td>(1996) CONEAU. Comisión Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación Universitaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOLIVIA</td>
<td>(2001) CONAES. Consejo Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior (Decree approved by the National Congress, not yet enacted by the Ejecutivo Nacional)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>(2004) SINAES. Sistema Nacional de Avaliação da Educação Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILE</td>
<td>(1999) CNAP. Comisión Nacional de Acreditación de Pregrado</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLOMBIA</td>
<td>(1992) CNA. Consejo Nacional de Acreditación</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSTA RICA</td>
<td>(1999) SINAES. Sistema Nacional de Acreditación de la Educación Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUBA</td>
<td>(2005) JAN. Junta de Acreditación Nacional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL SALVADOR</td>
<td>(2000) CDA. Comisión de Acreditación – Ministry of Education of El Salvador</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECUADOR</td>
<td>(1998) CONEA. Consejo Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación de la Educación Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEXICO</td>
<td>(2000) COPAES. Consejo para la Acreditación de la Educación Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICARAGUA</td>
<td>CNU. Consejo Nacional de Universidades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
<td>ASSESSMENT AND ACCREDITATION BODY</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANAMA</td>
<td>(1997) CNA Consejo Nacional de Acreditación</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARAGUAY</td>
<td>(2003) ANEAES. Agencia Nacional de Evaluación y Acreditación de la</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Educación Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERU</td>
<td>(2002) ANR. Comisión Nacional de Rectores para la Acreditación</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universitaria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMINICAN</td>
<td>SEESCYT. Secretaría de Estado de Educ. Superior, Ciencia y Tecnología</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REPUBLIC</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENEZUELA</td>
<td>SEA. Sistema de Evaluación Académica</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Assessment and accreditation bodies are usually geared to assessing classroom teaching; in some cases there are still no regulations regarding assessment and accreditation.

There are few official initiatives that deal with Distance Education, including:

- Breve Adendum, Costa Rica
- Preliminary guide of the National Council of Accreditation of Colombia,
- The work which is being carried out by CONEA in Ecuador and
- Quality references for Distance Education courses in Brazil

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Distance Education Regulations</th>
<th>Assessment and Accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARGENTINA</td>
<td>X*</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOLIVIA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRAZIL</td>
<td>X*</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHILE</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COLOMBIA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COSTA RICA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUBA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table: Distance Education Regulations and Assessment and Accreditation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Distance Education Regulations</th>
<th>Assessment and Accreditation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECUADOR</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EL SALVADOR</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEXICO</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NICARAGUA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANAMA</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARAGUAY</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PERU</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DOMINICAN REPUBLIC</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URUGUAY</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VENEZUELA</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Country has a decree regarding distance education*

All other countries which refer to Distance Education in their laws, only dedicate an article to it in the laws on Higher Education.

The **current trends in open and distance education** in Latin America and the Caribbean, reflect that there is a proliferation of programmes and titles in several institutions that are not controlled in terms of quality, which has greatly harmed Distance Education offered from the point of view of academic and service rigour. This is why the recent concern for quality assessment creating standards for Distance Learning is a right move towards knowing what we are dealing with. The best way of assessing the importance and effectiveness of any type of education institution is to select the most appropriate indicators and standards regarding quality, innovation and relevance of the institution in general and the programmes in particular.

The quick processes of internationalisation, together with a joint offer of distance programmes in strategic alliances, and the mobility of the student and teacher population are all factors that create a certain degree of uncertainty, leading to the need for the Assessment and Accreditation of distance education.
Regarding all of the above, all countries where distance education programmes are offered should be duly regulated and their programmes should be duly accredited.

Among the most important milestones in LAC in terms of assessment and accreditation in Distance Education, we can highlight:

• **Virtual Centre for the Development of Quality Standards for Distance Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean**

This project was financed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB) with the participation of the Inter-American Distance Education Consortium (CREAD), the Ibero-American Association for Distance Education (AIESAD) and the Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL) as executor body.

Takes as reference the «Ibero-American Excellence Model for Management». Interpretation for Education

Full instrument for self-assessment with distance education measurement instruments.

Possibility of checking the opinion of standards with the database

• **Alfa Rueda «Assessment of Distance Learning Education**

Takes as reference the «Malcolm Baldrige» Model and the earlier model

The European Community within the programme ALFA – Latin America Academic Training – backed the formation of the Red de Universidades de Educación a Distancia (Network of Distance Learning Universities) – RED RUEDA– with the aim of developing the Proyecto Evaluación de los Programas de Educación a Distancia (Distance Education Programmes Assessment Project).

The six partner institutions of this project are the Latin American universities: Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL), Ecuador, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana (PUJ), Colombia and Universidad Nacional Abierta (UNA), Venezuela and the European universities: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED), Spain, Universiteit Gent (UG), Belgium and Università Telematica Guglielmo Marconi (UTGM), Italy.
• Conference on Quality in Distance Education

The main topic was the Virtual Centre project. 50 main speakers took part and there were approximately 500 participants. The most important achievement of the conference was the creation of the (CAL-ED)

• Latin American and Caribbean Institute of Quality in Distance Higher Education (CAL-ED) www.utpl.edu.ec/caled

The main mission of the CAL-ED is to contribute to the improvement in quality of the higher education in all the institutions of Latin America and the Caribbean offering this type of study.

It provides advice in the process of creation of distance education programmes and in the self-assessment process of programmes requiring it.

As a future outlook we see that the promotion of this institute can be considered as serious assessment and accreditation for Latin America and the Caribbean, thus consolidating the processes of internationalisation and mobility.

5. LEGISLATION REGARDING POSTGRADUATE COURSES

The education system is structured in the following 4 levels in the legislation of most Latin American countries' legislations:

Level One = Primary Education
Level Two = Secondary or High School
Level Three = University (undergraduate)
Level Four = Post graduate

Masters degrees in general are considered as level four studies and in order to qualify for them, students must have a level three title or professional title, i.e.: bachelor's degree, engineer, lawyer, etc.

There are differences in term usage in different countries with regard to the official certification of titles, and we come across terms such as revalidación (revalidation), equiparación (recognised equivalence), convalidación (validation). There is no indication of whether titles that are obtained with distance programmes have the same recognition as those awarded with classroom pro-
grammes, but it is understood that they do. In Colombia they warn that students must check whether the institution offering the distance programme is duly recognised in Colombia.

It is interesting to note the agreements regarding education existing in the region: three general projects common to most countries and many bilateral agreements between the different countries for certain qualifications.

The three general agreements/projects are:

**Andrés Bello Project:** Inspired in the unlimited creative potential of Ibero-American peoples, and with the overriding aim of promoting the development of their peoples, the Andrés Bello Project groups Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Cuba, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Venezuela, in the joint mission of integrating these countries from an educational, scientific, technological and cultural point of view, keeping their doors open to the integration of countries that wish to be a part of the project. http://www.cab.int.co/

**Hague Agreement of 1961, on the Elimination of the Requirement of Legalisation of Foreign Public Documents**

In addition to the European Economic Space, these countries are the following: Andorra, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Byelorussia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Colombia, Croatia, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Slovenia, United States of America, Estonia, Russian Federation, Fiji, Grenada, Honduras, Hong Kong, Hungary, Marshall Islands, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lesotho, Liberia, Macao, Monaco, Antigua, Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia, Malawi, Malta, Mauritius, Cook Islands, Mexico, Namibia, New Zealand, Niue Island, Panama, Puerto Rico, Czech Republic, Romania, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Western Samoa, Saint Kitts and Nevis, San Marino, Saint Lucia, Seychelles, Switzerland, South Africa, Surinam, Swaziland, Tonga, Trinidad & Tobago, Turkey, Ukraine, Venezuela, Serbia & Montenegro. Extensions: Holland (Dutch Antilles, Aruba); United Kingdom (Anguilla, Jersey, Bailiwick of Guernsey, Isle of Man, Bermuda, British Antarctic Territory, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Saint Helena, Turks and Caicos Islands, Virgin Islands).

http://www.mec.es/mecd/jsp/plantilla.jsp?id=31&area=titulos
Regional Agreement of Official Certification of Higher Education academic qualifications, titles or diplomas in Latin America and the Caribbean, approved in Mexico in July 19, 1974. By means of this agreement, all States committed to make effective the recognition of higher education diplomas, titles or academic qualifications, awarded by competent authorities of other contracting States for the effects of the exercise of the profession in question, following the internal procedures for each country. (the agreement has been ratified by the following countries: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Slovenia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Holland, Honduras, Haiti, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, Surinam, Venezuela, The Holy See, Surinam, and Yugoslavia).

Though this agreement allows for a wide and varied range of actions, all of them tending toward the creation of what could now be termed the «Latin American and Caribbean region for higher education», according to a recent proposal of IESALC-UNESCO, it was difficult to be fully implemented effectively. Its most complex point lay in the clause that authorises the exercise of different professions in a member country when the titles or degrees have been obtained in a higher institution of another country. Likewise, there are observations regarding the agreement inasmuch as they compare the titles and degrees without establishing terms that allowed their effective comparison, except by means of the generic declarations related to the study plans, skills developed outside the university or higher education institutions. In addition, the agreement lacks mechanisms and criteria to establish or at least declare the equivalences. This has made several countries protest against the agreement and they are currently proposing measures and changes to make it more operative in accordance with the developments observed in world higher education during the 30 years elapsed from the signing of the agreement, while maintaining the terms which inspired it. http://text.unesco.org/tt/.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- The information provided by institutions mainly through their websites on masters degrees is very scarce. It is understood that it is made through local communication media.

- We have seen that there is not much on offer for full distance learning masters degrees, most of them are semi-distance.
The offer of distance education is mostly centred on providing specific skills or continuous education or post-graduate courses, albeit short in duration, such as Diplomas (6 months).

The offers of the masters degrees are very different, as are the costs. The areas offering the largest number of programmes are: Education Science and Teacher Training and Business Studies.

The trend, judging by the number of graduates, is to choose the areas of Administration and Trade, Education and Health Science.

Despite the fact that survey does not include the entire situation in Latin America and the Caribbean, given the difficulties encountered, we consider that the sample is sufficiently representative to identify what is happening in Latin America and the Caribbean, as, of the 15 countries researched, there are distance education programmes being offered in 10 of them.

The offer of programmes is carried out mostly on a national level, only certain institutions in Mexico and Chile offer programmes on an international level. What is observed is the development of international programmes offered by foreign universities, some in conjunction with local universities.

The credit system is not implemented in all institutions and where it is, it differs significantly from one university to another.

The use of the New Information and Communication Technologies is increasingly frequent, and is providing great advantages to distance education.

The process of validation and official certification of titles of students from other countries is difficult. This does not contribute to the mobility of students, an aspect that could improve through a body such as the CAL-ED (Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education).

Officially, various assessment and accreditation bodies have been created recently, which are more concerned with the on-campus programmes, there are only a few initiatives in distance education.

There are important advances in terms of assessment and accreditation in distance education in LAC, especially with the project «Virtual Centre for the development of quality standards for distance higher education», the
advances it has made and the creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education (CAL-ED), which looks promising in the context of international assessment and accreditation.

• The process of validation and official certification of titles of students from other countries is difficult. This does not contribute to the mobility of students, an aspect that could improve through a body such as the CAL-ED (Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Quality in Distance Higher Education).

• We see a need to homogenise the system of qualifications and credits in Latin America in order to establish equivalences and validations among the different Latin American, Caribbean and European countries.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the difficulties we find for the exchanges, in addition to what has been previously mentioned, there is the language issue, which is why we consider it is important to encourage grants for training in this field, as it would be more interesting than translating the courses.

Another aspect which would help the interest for European masters would be the offer of independent short-lasting modules which allow the easy insertion in Latin American masters.

For exchanges and mobility it would be interesting to obtain the international accreditation of the programmes offered.
ANNEX 2
VIRTUAL MOBILITY SCHEME

1) The **objective** of the ACTIVE-VMS is to allow postgraduate students to study a part of a Masters in a host institution by virtual means. This will be a credit transfer scheme in which students are given the opportunity to study for credit from a pool of courses nominated by the participating universities, whilst remaining in their home country. It should not require an adjustment to any institution's regulations, systems or fees.

2) This kind of mobility may be complementary with programmes of physical mobility.

3) Modules to be included in the virtual mobility scheme will be selected by the professors of the Universities involved, and agreed by the Faculty or Examination Board concerned, prior to University approval. The nominated modules will be especially suited to being taught and studied in a virtual environment, and will already contribute towards a Masters programme in their own institutions — they will not be versioned for the virtual mobility scheme students.

4) The European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) will be used in order to make the exchange easier. The credit volume and level for each module will need to be calculated and published in advance, with each institution giving an undertaking to accept these credits towards specified awards. If ECTS points are not used by a University, this should not be a prohibiting factor. Rather, institutions will be encouraged to use ECTS, thereby building up capacity and equality within and across countries. To accept a module for credit transfer purposes using ECTS, qualitative information about the content, structure and assessment scheme of each module will need to be provided by the home institution. The method of calculation will be agreed at 1 ECTS point for 25–30 hours of study. Because ECTS ratings do not imply a level, this will be ascribed by ensuring that the modules form part of a Masters programme in the home institution, taking into account the year of study that is recommended or is mandatory for
students to study the module in the home institution, and scrutinising the module content information.

5) There will be a formal agreement between any providers of exchange programmes, signed by the Head of each institution, or equivalent. This agreement will set out the articulation arrangements, will enable the learner to transfer seamlessly between one provider and another, and will guarantee the rights of the students.

6) Normally, a limit of 50% of the credits required to gain a Masters can be taken virtually with another institution or institutions, but this will be subject to any limitations placed on particular awards by the home institution. Further, none of the modules studied virtually should overlap with home institution modules studied by more than 50%.

7) The institutions will support the exchange through the identification of specific representatives such as Institutional and Academic coordinators, and named mobility support units.

8) The home institution is responsible for:

   a. Carrying out the selection of the students using the European CV, guaranteeing their level of previous knowledge and command of the working language and country culture of the proposed host institution.

   b. The evaluation of host institution modules for inclusion in their own awards, including structured samples of student work such as assignments, project reports, and final theses.

   c. Ensuring the recognition of the period of studies abroad, including acceptability for entry to employment, and recognition by professional organisations and other universities.

   d. Drawing up the Masters certificate of studies, including the information concerning the period of studies abroad.

   e. Publishing a list of the eligible modules and its features on its website.

   f. Providing staff development as required.
9) The host institution is responsible for:

a. Publishing a list of the eligible modules and its features on its website.

b. Determining the limit to the number of students on any scheme.

c. Ensuring that it has the capacity to support the virtual students.

d. Setting and publishing the admittance requirements, in order to retain institutional autonomy as well as ensure that applicants to the scheme have the background knowledge to participate successfully in the scheme.

e. Agreeing and publishing the registration procedures.

f. Overseeing the collection of fees.

g. Determining the point at which students could withdraw from the course should they so wish, with a full fee refund.

h. Ensuring that the incoming students are subject to the same conditions as their own students in relation to:

— Counselling and academic support

— Academic teaching and regulations

— Academic assessment

— Curriculum

— Student policies and regulations such as Grievance, Discipline and Appeals procedures

i. Assessing the student and providing his/her results to the home institution, including the module title, level, grade and ECTS points.

j. Providing an exit strategy for students in order to protect them in the event of partnership arrangements being terminated.

k. Appointing the counselling and tuition staff.

l. Providing staff development as required.
m. The development of systems to support enquiries, applications, offer/acceptance and enrolments.

n. Ensuring that any professional, statutory or regulatory body that has approved or recognised a programme that is the subject of a possible or actual collaboration is informed of the collaboration.

10) Students on the virtual mobility scheme should:
   a. start and finish their masters with, and receive their award from, their home institution.
   b. be enrolled as students of the University, and will be subject to the relevant codes and benchmarks, the same entry standards, fees, academic regulations and discipline as students in the home country.
   c. study the modules and take all assessment and examinations in the language of the host institution. Module content will not be translated.
   d. undertake the compulsory research, dissertation or research module of their Masters at their home institution.

11) There should be an annual review of any trans-national programme, including a review of the administration systems, facilities, academic programme management and staff and student surveys, in order to monitor student satisfaction, benchmark best practices and improve where necessary.

12) Student assessment methods should be under the control or quality assurance of the provider institution, thereby ensuring that the academic standard is the same as that provided in the home same country.

13) Institutions taking part in the virtual mobility scheme will use the same transcripts of records as required for the European Diploma Supplement.

14) Home and host institutions should determine their own regulations relating to concurrent study, and should ensure that students are aware of those regulations.

15) Any intellectual property used as a part of any virtual collaboration must remain with the host institution.
16) Effective communication channels will need to be established between parties, alongside appropriate roles and responsibilities.

Each proposal must advance at least one of the host University's core functions of teaching, research and community service.
1. PREFACE

This document reflects the agreement of the (Home Institution) and the (Host Institution) to collaborate to extend the range of courses available to the students of each institution.

2. THE TRANSFER OF STUDENTS

(a) The (Host Institution) agrees to make places available to selected students of the (Home Institution) wishing to pursue approved courses by a period of virtual study.

(b) The courses to be made available initially at the (Host Institution) are listed in the schedule to this agreement. The schedule specifies the (Home Institution) award towards which the listed courses will count for credit. For each course, the schedule shows the level and credit-rating, the course credits normally required as a condition of entry, the method of assessment and the marking scale to be used.

(c) None of the courses listed in the schedule has been varied or introduced specifically for the benefit of the (Home Institution) students; courses have been selected from the Calendar of the (Host Institution) by arrangement with the (appropriate officer) of the (Host Institution).

(d) No course listed in the schedule from the (Host Institution) overlaps substantially in content with any current or planned (Home Institution) course.

(e) From time to time the (appropriate officers) of both Institutions, acting in consultation with staff of their appropriate central academic unit, may propose additional schedules of courses to be made available at the (Host
Institution) under this agreement. Any courses included in such schedules will meet conditions 2(c) and 2(d) above. Each schedule of courses will be subject to approval, before the courses are offered to students under this agreement, by the appropriate Board or Committees of both Institutions.

(f) Admission to the (Host Institution) will be by the (appropriate officer) of the (Host Institution). Students will be selected for admission after consultation as appropriate between the student, his or her (academic advisors) in the (Home Institution) and the (appropriate officer) of the (Host Institution). Students will be admitted to the (Host Institution) as (appropriate category – ie collaborative credit) students and they will conform to the relevant Regulations that govern their selected courses. Course fees and registration fees will be paid by the student directly to the (Host Institution), in accordance with the normal procedures. The course fee will be that normally charged to the (Host Institution) overseas students.

(g) The (Host Institution) reserves the right to decline any proposed admission if the institution is unable for any reason to guarantee the proper levels of teaching, supervision and support.

(h) The student will normally be expected to have successfully completed certain specified (Home Institution) courses before beginning study at the (Host Institution).

(i) The (appropriate officer) of the (Home Institution) will, in consultation with the student, staff of the appropriate (Home Institution) central academic unit, and the (appropriate officer) of the (Host Institution), propose for each student a suitable selection of courses, drawn from those listed in the schedules to this agreement, to be followed during the period of study at the (Host Institution). The student’s proposed programme of study will not include any course which overlaps substantially in content with any (Home Institution) course for which the student has been awarded credit.

(j) At least three months before the start of the period of study at the (Host Institution), the (appropriate officer) of the (Home Institution) will submit each student’s proposed programme of study to its (appropriate) Committee for confirmation of the award of credit which the student will receive on successful completion of the programme.
(k) The (Home Institution) students selected for admission will be offered advice and guidance by appropriate staff of the (Host Institution) concerning preparatory work they should undertake before commencing courses.

(l) Students wishing to undertake courses at their home institution while following courses at the (Host Institution) must discuss their plans with academic advisers in both their home institution and in the (Host Institution) in case it is not possible or advisable.

(m) The student will for the period of study be a registered student of the (Host Institution) and will be required to comply fully with its requirements, including the payment of the appropriate fees, as determined by the (Host Institution). Remission or partial remission of fees in the event of a discontinuation will not normally be possible.

(n) The (Host Institution) will conduct examinations or other assessment in its normal manner according to the courses selected, and will provide the (appropriate officer) of the (Home Institution) with a transcript for each student, giving a final numerical mark for each course, in accordance with the agreed marking scale, using ECTS.

(o) The (Home Institution) will, subject to its regulations on credit requirements for the award specified in the relevant schedule, award credit at an appropriate level for courses or combinations of courses successfully completed at the (Host Institution) under this agreement. Credit awarded for successful completion of courses at the (Host Institution) will be known as (appropriate category - ie collaborative) credit. The student will be subject to the (Home Institution) regulations concerning such credit and the associated requirements for completion of the

(p) Credit awarded for successful completion of courses at the (Host Institution) will be known as (appropriate category - ie collaborative) credit. The student will be subject to the (Home Institution) regulations concerning such credit and the associated requirements for completion of the specified (Home Institution) award.

Any agreement will be initially in force for a period of three years with effect from the first admission of students to either institution. Both institutions will jointly review it after two years of operation, and agree to recommend any extension.
ANNEX 4
ECTS - EUROPEAN CREDIT TRANSFER
AND ACCUMULATION SYSTEM
LEARNING AGREEMENT

ACADEMIC YEAR 20..../20.... - FIELD OF STUDY: ......................

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DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED STUDY PROGRAMME ABROAD/
LEARNING AGREEMENT

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CHANGES TO ORIGINAL PROPOSED STUDY PROGRAMME/LEARNING AGREEMENT

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ANNEX 5
FIELD OF STUDY CODES

01 AGRICULTURE SCIENCES

01.0 Agriculture Sciences
01.1 Agriculture
01.2 Agrarian Economy
01.3 Food Science and Technology
01.4 Horticulture
01.5 Fishing
01.6 Forestry
01.7 Livestock Industry
01.8 Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture
01.9 Other Agriculture Sciences

02 ARCHITECTURE, URBANISM AND REGIONAL PLANNING

02.0 Architecture, Urbanism and Regional Planning
02.1 Architecture
02.2 Interior Design
02.3 Urbanism
02.4 Regional Planning
02.5 Landscape Architecture
02.6 Transport and Traffic
02.9 Other sciences integrated in Architecture, Urbanism and Regional Planning
03 ARTS AND DESIGN

03.0 Arts and Design
03.1 Fine Artes (painting, sculpture, engraving)
03.2 Music and Musicology
03.3 Spectacle Arts
03.4 Photography and Cinematography
03.5 Design (graphic design, industrial design, textile fashion)
03.6 Art History
3.9 Other disciplines related to art and design

04 BUSINESS SCIENCES

04.0 Business Sciences
04.1 Business Sciences with Languages
04.2 Business with Technologies
04.3 Accounting, Financial Management
04.4 Turism and Hostelry
04.5 Union Associations and Staff Management
04.6 Secretarial Course
04.7 Marketing and Sale Management
04.9 Other Studies integrated in Business Sciences

05 EDUCATION SCIENCES AND TEACHER TRAINING

05.0 Education Sciences and Teacher Training
05.1 Teacher Training
05.2 Primary Education
05.3 Secondary Education
05.4 Vocational and Technical Training
05.5 Adult Education
05.6 Special Needs Education
05.7 Pedagogy, comparative pedagogy
05.8 Educational Psychology
05.9 Other subjects related to Education Sciences and Teacher Training

06 ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY

06.0 Engineering, Technology
06.1 Industrial Engineering
06.2 Electrical Engineering
06.3 Chemical Engineering
06.4 Civil Engineering
06.5 Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering
06.6 Production Sciences (CAD, CAM, CAE)
06.7 Material Sciences
06.8 Aeronautics Engineering
06.9 Other subjects related to Engineering and Technology

07 GEOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

07.0 Geography, Geology
07.1 Geography
07.2 Environmental Sciences, Ecology
07.3 Geology
07.4 Pedology and Hydrology
07.6 Geodesy, Cartography, Remote Detection
07.7 Meteorology
07.9 Other subjects related to Geography and Geology

08 HUMANITIES

08.0 Humanities
08.1 Philosophy
08.2 Theology
08.3 History
08.4 Archaeology
08.9 Other humanities

09 LINGUISTICS AND PHILOLOGY

09.0 Linguistics and Philology
09.1 Modern Languages in the CE
09.2 General and Comparative Literature
09.3 Linguistics
09.4 Translation, Interpretation
09.5 Classic Philology
09.6 Non-Community Languages
09.8 Less Commonly Taught Languages
09.9 Other Languages and Sciences of Philology
10 LAW

10.0 Law
10.1 Comparative Law, Law with Languages
10.2 International Law
10.3 Civil Law
10.4 Penal Law, Criminology
10.5 Constitutional /Public Law
10.6 Administrative Law
10.7 Community Law
10.9 Other Types of Law

11 MATHEMATICS, COMPUTER SCIENCE

11.0 Mathematics, Computer Science
11.1 Mathematics
11.2 Statistics
11.3 Computer Science
11.4 Artificial Intelligence
11.5 Actuarial Science
11.9 Other Mathematics and Computer Science

12 MEDICAL SCIENCES

12.0 Medical Sciences
12.1 Clinical Psychiatry and Psychology
12.3 Odontology
12.4 Veterinary science
12.5 Pharmacy
12.6 Nursery, Obstetrics, Physiotherapy
12.7 Public Health
12.8 Technology Applied to Medicine
12.9 Other Medical Sciences

13 NATURAL SCIENCES

13.0 Natural Sciences
13.1 Biology
13.2 Physics
13.3 Chemistry
13.4 Microbiology, biotechnology
13.5 Nuclear and High Energy Physics
13.6 Biochemistry
13.7 Astronomy, Astrophysics
13.8 Oceanography
13.9 Other Natural Sciences

14 SOCIAL SCIENCES

14.0 Social Sciences
14.1 Political Sciences
14.2 Sociology
14.3 Economic Sciences
14.4 Psychology and Behavioural Sciences
14.5 Social Work
14.6 International Relations, European Studies
14.7 Anthropology
14.8 Development
14.9 Other Social Sciences

15 INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION SCIENCES

15.0 Information and Communication Sciences
15.1 Journalism
15.2 Radio and Television
15.3 Public Relations, Advertising
15.4 Libraries
15.5 Documentalism, Archives
15.6 Museum Studies, Conservation
15.9 Other Information and Communication Sciences

16 OTHER FIELDS OF STUDY

16.0 Other Fields of Study
16.1 Physical Education, Sport Sciences
16.2 Recreation and Leisure Studies
16.3 Home Economy, Nutrition
16.4 Navigation
16.9 Other
ANNEX 6
DECLARATION OF PUERTO PLATA
"VIRTUAL MOBILITY FOR THE CONSOLIDATION OF THE EUROPEAN
AND IBERO AMERICAN AREA OF HIGHER EDUCATION"
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC, 13-15TH, JUNE, 2007

XII Ibero-American Meeting of Distance Higher Education, AIESAD
"Quality of Distance Higher Education in the Euro-Latin-American scope:
Perspectives, Policies and strategies"

Within the framework of the XII Ibero-American Meeting of Distance
Higher Education, of the Ibero-American Association of Distance Higher
Education (AIESAD), organised by the Universidad Abierta para Adultos (Open
University for Adults), Dominican Republic (UAPA), AIESAD and the Spanish
National University of Distance Education (UNED). This meeting gathered
University Presidents and the top representatives from institutions of Higher
Education, Associations of Universities and Collaborative Networks.

RECOGNISING:

1. That the European Area of Higher Education and the Ibero-American
   Area of Knowledge are under constant development.
2. That the will of a joint European Area of Education and the Ibero-American
   and Caribbean Area of Knowledge, has been enhanced in the last meetings of the
   Ibero-American Summits, particularly in the Process of Rio;
3. The basic role assigned to the academic mobility, as indicator of quality in
   the transnational areas of Higher Education;
4. The possibilities opened by the Information and Communication
   Technologies (ICT) to the extension of the educational offer, and the improve-
   ment of quality in Higher Education;
5. The development of AIESAD together with its members institutions
   through the participation: in projects and programs of cooperation between
   Europe and Latin America - such as Erasmus Mundus «NetACTIVE: AIESAD-
   EADTU Credit Transfer In Virtual and Distance Education» and ALFA «UE-AIESAD:
   Distance Postgraduates and Doctorates in Education»;
6. The constant creation of educational spaces through distance and online Education;

7. The existence of a wide demand for access to enriching formative experiences;

8. The responsibility, as stakeholders, towards those higher education institutions which offer distance Education;

CONSIDERING:

1. That within an educational system without borders, actions of academic cooperation constitute the most effective way to achieve the goals of the transnational spaces of education;

2. That Virtual Mobility is considered as an indicator of excellence in relation to the processes of quality assessment in higher education.

3. That Virtual Mobility is a valid tool to provide students:
   • Extension of curricular options,
   • Cultural and linguistic immersion,
   • Preparation and complementariness with physical mobility,
   • Acquisition of new technological competences,
   • Participation in the new learning scenarios,
   • Access to mobility to traditionally excluded groups of students,

Also to provide teaching staffs and educational institutions:

• Renovation and methodological innovation,

• Constant update of the educational offer, and permanent supervision of didactic materials,

• Strengthen of activities and interuniversity proposals,

• Increase of the potential number of students

• Promotion of scale economies in the educational scope.
Thus, assuming that virtual mobility constitutes a powerful instrument to contribute to cooperation and training of the new generations, needed for the development of our countries, surpassing centralist and excluding models.

**WE DECIDE:**

1. To urge national governments and international agencies to the recognition of virtual mobility as a way to extend the universal right to education, and its consequent support through scholarships and sponsorships;

2. To promote cooperation between institutions, with the purpose to consolidate a Common Space of Higher Education between Europe and Latin-America and the Caribbean;

3. To promote the necessary actions to impulse Virtual Mobility among institutions, in equity and confidence, assuring quality in education;
UNIVERSITIES MEMBERS OF EADTU

*Germany*
  — Open Universitet (Hagen)

*Austria*
  — Centre of Distance Studies, Linz University – AFUL

*Belgium*
  — Open Studies Centre Hoger Onderwijs – StOHO

*Denmark*
  — Danish Association of Open Universities – DAOU

*Slovenia*
  — Slovenian Institute of Distance Education

*Spain*
  — Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia – UNED
  — Universitat Oberta de Catalunya – UOC

*Estonia*
  — Estonian Foundation of Technological Information – EIFT

*Finland*
  — Finnish Association of Distance Education – FADE

*France*
  — Centre National d’Enseignement à Distance (CNED)
Hungary

— Open Foundation

Ireland

— National Centre of Distance Education - OSCAIL

Italy

— Università Internacional Telemática - UNINETTUNO

Latvia

— Centro de Educación a Distancia de Letonia

Lithuania

— Lithuania Centre of Distance Education

Holland

— Open Universiteit Nederland - OU

Poland

— Górniozo Academy - Hutnicza - AGH
— Polish Virtual University

Portugal

— Universidade Aberta

United Kingdom

— Open Learning Foundation
— Open University - OUUK
— London University - External System

Czech Republic

— Czech Association of Distance Teaching Universities - CADUV

Russia

— Economics State University, Moscow Statistics and ICT - MEDI
Sweden
— Swedish Agency of Networks and Co-operation in Higher Education

Turkey
— Anadolu University

Canada (associated member))
— Atabasca University
— Tele – Université TELUQ

Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (Ecuador) (associated member)

UNIVERSITIES MEMBERS OF AIESAD

ARGENTINA
— Asociación CODESEDH
— Instituto Universitario Aeronáutico. Fac. Educación a Distancia.
— Universidad del Norte Santo Tomás de Aquino
— Universidad Nacional Mar del Plata

BRASIL
— Centro Universitario de Ensino a Distancia do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (CEDERJ)
— Universidad Salgado de Oliveira (UNIVERSO)
— Universidad do Vale do Río dos Sinos (UNISINOS)
— Universidad de Alfenas (UNIFENAS)

CHILE
— Universidad Arturo Prat
— Universidad Católica del Norte de Chile
COLOMBIA

— Instituto Tecnológico Pascual Braco (ITPB)
— Fundación Universitaria Manuela Beltrán (UMB)
— Universidad de La Sabana
— Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia (UNAD)
— Universidad de Santo Tomás
— Universidad de Tolima
— Universidad del Valle

COSTA RICA

— Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED)

CUBA

— Universidad de La Habana (Facultad de Educación a Distancia)

ECUADOR

— Escuela Politécnica del Ejército (ESPE)
— Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja (UTPL)
— Universidad Politécnica Salesiana
— Universidad tecnológica Equinoccial (UTEQ)
— Universidad Internacional del Educador (UINE)

ESPÁNA

— Instituto Internacional de Teología a Distancia
— Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED)

MÉXICO

— Centro Interamericano de Estudios de Seguridad Social (CIESS)
— Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). Coordinación de Universidad Abierta y Educación a Distancia (CUAED)
— Universidad pedagógica Nacional (UPN)
— Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León

PÁNAMA
— Universidad Nacional Abierta y a Distancia de Panamá (UNADP)

PERÚ
— Escuela de Periodismo Jaime Bausate y Mesa
— Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú
— Universidad Nacional Federico Villarreal
— Universidad Privada San Ignacio de Loyola
— Universidad Garcilaso de la Vega
— Universidad Alas Peruanas

PARAGUAY
— Universidad Autónoma de Asunción

PORTUGAL
— Instituto Politécnico de Leiría

REPÚBLICA DOMINICANA
— Centros APEC de Enseñanza a Distancia
— Universidad Abierta para Adultos

VENEZUELA
— Universidad Nacional Abierta (UNA)
GLOSSARY

ACADEMIC RECOGNITION refers to the recognition of courses, qualifications or diplomas from one higher education institution by another.

ACCESS TO HIGHER EDUCATION refers to the right of qualified candidates to apply and be considered for admission to higher education.

ACCESSIBILITY a characteristic of technology that enables people with disabilities to use it. Also benefits people with older or slower software or hardware.

ACCREDITATION is the process by which one higher education institution gains authority to award, and /or gains recognition of, its qualifications from another senior competent authority. This might be the State, a government agency or another domestic or foreign higher education institution.

ADMISSION the act pf, or system, for, allowing qualified applicants to pursue studies in higher education al a given institution and/or a given programme.

ASSESSMENT of institutions or programmes: the process for establishing the educational quality of a higher education institution or programme; of individual qualifications: the written appraisal or evaluation of an individual's foreign qualifications by a competent authority; of individual students: the actual testing of a student's ability and skills within a programme.

AWARD this us used synonymously with qualification

BLENDED LEARNING learning events that combine aspects of online and face to face instruction.

COMPETENT RECOGNITION AUTHORITY a body officially charged with making binding decisions on the recognition of foreign qualifications.

CONTENT information captured digitally and imparted to learners. Formats foe e-learning content include text, audio, video, animations, simulation and more.
CONTINUOUS ASSESSMENT regular evaluation of coursework done during the course, where the marks achieved count towards the final result which may or may not include an examination. Also formative assessment.

COURSE a part of a programme of studies that is normally self-contained and assessed separately. Complete study programmes are normally composed of several courses.

COURSE DESIGN setting learning objectives, choosing media applications, planning evaluation and preparing instructional strategies in advance of students recruitment and development of course materials.

CREDENTIAL a term sometimes used to refer to a qualifications

CREDIT the currency providing a measure of learning outcomes achieved in a notional time at a given level.

- DIPLOMA any qualification or credential.

DIPLOMA SUPPLEMENT a document attached to a higher education degree or diploma that provides a detailed description of the studies undertaken and successfully completed by the individual named on the original qualification.

DISTANCE EDUCATION educational situation in which the instructor and students are separated by time, location, or both.

DISTANCE EDUCATION SYSTEM all the component processes that result in distance educations, including learning, teaching, communication, design and management.

E-BOLOGNA the development of an European Learning Space by supporting the enhancement of learning though the use of technology (e.g. e-learning) and by promoting state-of-art educational networks in the field of lifelong and flexible learning, virtual mobility and quality assurance and accreditation.

E-LEARNING term covering a wide set of applications and pedagogical processes supporting on ICT learning, such as web-based learning, computer-based learning, virtual classrooms, and digital collaboration.

ECTS the European Credit Transfer System. This is a system based on ECTS credits (workload), designed to facilitate mobility, credit transfer and the international recognition of periods of study completed abroad.
FIELD OF STUDY the main disciplines or subject areas of a qualification.

GRADES marks given for coursework or examination.

HIGHER EDUCATION all types of courses of study, or sets of courses (programmes), training, or training for research at the post secondary level which are recognised by the relevant authorities as belonging to its higher education system.

HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION an establishment providing higher education and recognised by the competent authorities as belonging to its system of higher education.

LEARNING OUTCOMES the specific intellectual and practical skills gained and tested by the successful completion of a unit, course or whole programme of study.

LEARNING PLATFORMS internal or external sites often organized around tightly focused topics, which contain technologies that enable users to submit and retrieve information.

LEVEL the place of a qualifications in the higher educations system. Normally, a national hierarchy of qualifications exist.

LEVEL INDICATORS these can range from any general information on the role of the qualification to highly detailed specific statements about the nature, skills and competencies associated with the successful completion of parts or all of a qualification.

LIFELONG LEARNING all learning activity undertaken through out life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective.

LIFELONG OPEN FLEXIBLE LEARNING all learning activity undertaken through out life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, civic, social and/or employment related perspective that embraces the characteristics of open learning, distance learning, e-learning, online learning, open accessibility, multimedia support, virtual mobility, learning communities, dual mode (earn &learn) approaches, and the like.

MASTER LEVEL first part of postgraduates studies. The length of study programmes leading the master's degree in Europe still varies considerably from
country to country. However, there seems to be a trend towards a one to two year master's degree requiring between 90 and 120 ECTS credits with a minimum requirement of 60 ECTS credit.

MODULE a separate and coherent block of learning. Part of a modular programme of studies where the curriculum is divided into a range of similar sized segments.

ONLINE LEARNING learning delivered by web-based or internet-based technologies.

POSTGRADUATE STUDIES beyond first degree level. It include Master and Doctorate studies.

PROGRAMME OF STUDY a set of courses, the various components of which complement and build on each other in order to provide the student with a higher educations qualification.

QUALIFICATION higher education qualification: any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completions of a higher education programme; qualification given access to postgraduate studies: any diploma or other certificate issued by a competent authority attesting the successful completion of an education programme and given the holder of the qualification the right to be considered for admission to postgraduate courses.

RECOGNITION a formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access to educational and/or employment activities.

SEMESTER a block of teaching time of around 14 – 15 week.

STRUCTURE the organized framework of the distance learning course consisting of information and teaching strategies, including support of course or programme.

STUDY GUIDE framework to support a course

SUMMATIVE EVALUATION a concluding evaluation determining the success of the project

TRANSCRIPT an official record of a student’s progress and achievements.

VALIDATION the process by which a recognised awarding institution judges
that a programme of study leading to qualifications is of appropriate quality and standard.

VIRTUAL MOBILITY Possibility to study at a local, national or international Master programme, through distance and e-learning methodologies, a shorthand term or course elements (e.g. modules) in another postgraduate studies related with the study area from the student. The recognition of these ECTS will be assumed by home university.