

Virtual Exchange and Blended Mobility for Sustainability:

A Blended Mobility course for cross-disciplinary collaboration in the Utrecht Network

This workshop brings together teachers from across the Utrecht Network to explore how Virtual Exchange (VE/COIL) and Blended Mobility can serve as tools for addressing global sustainability challenges. Participants will learn to design and implement cross-disciplinary collaborative projects that engage students in meaningful dialogue about sustainable development while building essential intercultural and digital competences.

Recognising that sustainability challenges—from climate change to social inequality—require interdisciplinary solutions, this training programme will enable educators from all academic fields to create transformative learning experiences. Whether you teach engineering, humanities, social sciences, business, or natural sciences, you will discover how to integrate sustainability themes into your international collaborations, preparing students to become globally-minded agents of change. You will also have the opportunity to meet colleagues from other countries and plan your online international exchange projects together.

Online sessions: 5, 7 and 12 May: 16.00-17.30 CET

On-site Workshop in Brussels, Belgium: 21 and 22 May 2026: 09.00-16.00

Contact information for more details:

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Registration form: <https://forms.gle/M75HhsooMASQXsJo8>.

The registration deadline is **March 23, 2026**.

Aims of our Course

This interactive course has the following aims:

- 1) Equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to design Virtual Exchange and Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) projects centred on the global theme of sustainability
- 2) Foster cross-disciplinary partnerships among Utrecht Network educators to develop innovative approaches to sustainability education that transcend traditional academic boundaries
- 3) Provide participants with the basic knowledge and strategies necessary to set up, run and evaluate a VE or BIP project which can be integrated into their course syllabus and bring an international element to their classes.

- 4) Create a community of practice for sustainability-focused Virtual Exchange, enabling ongoing collaboration and knowledge sharing beyond the training

The structure of the course will be blended in nature:

Phase 1: Participants engage in **3 online interactive sessions** focusing on the key elements of VE and BIP methodologies and their intersection with sustainability education. These sessions will explore how to design projects that address real-world sustainability challenges while fostering meaningful cross-cultural dialogue.

Phase 2: A two-day **on-location workshop** in Brussels where participants will:

- Learn about how to organise an international collaborative project with partner teachers
- Work intensively with potential partners to design cross-disciplinary projects addressing specific SDGs relevant to their combined expertise
- Develop assessment strategies that measure both sustainability learning outcomes and intercultural competence development

Programme

Online Session 1	5 May 2026 16.00-17.30 CET	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Introduction to Virtual Exchange, COIL, and Blended Mobility 2) Exploring the UN SDGs as a framework for cross-disciplinary collaboration 3) Case studies: Successful VE projects across disciplines
Online Session 2	7 May 2026 16.00-17.30 CET	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Designing sustainability-focused tasks for VEs that leverage diverse disciplinary perspectives 2) Digital tools for collaborative sustainability projects and data sharing
Online Session 3	12 May 2026 16.00-17.30 CET	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Assessment strategies for sustainability competencies and intercultural learning 2) Developing rubrics for cross-disciplinary sustainability projects 3) Managing intercultural and organisational challenges in VE and BIP collaborations
On-site Workshop	21-22 May 2026 09.00-16.00 each day	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Cross-disciplinary team formation and sustainability challenge identification 2) Collaborative project design using ESD principles and methodologies 3) Funding opportunities for VE and BM initiatives 4) Project pitch presentations and peer feedback sessions

What is Virtual Exchange?

Virtual Exchange (VE), also commonly referred to as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), is a term used to describe different approaches to engaging students in online intercultural collaboration projects with partners from different countries within their programmes of study and under the guidance of teachers. In the context of sustainability education, Virtual Exchange becomes a powerful tool for students to explore how environmental and social challenges manifest differently across cultures and regions, fostering both global awareness and local action. Through VE, students from diverse disciplinary backgrounds can collaborate on sustainability projects, sharing perspectives and co-creating solutions that reflect multiple worldviews and knowledge systems.

What is Blended Mobility?

Blended mobility combines structured online collaboration with short-term physical mobility, creating a more sustainable and inclusive approach to international education. The Erasmus+ programme (2021-2027) promotes "Blended Intensive Programmes" (BIPs) that minimise the carbon footprint of international education while maximizing learning impact. In our sustainability-focused approach, the virtual component allows students to collaborate on sustainability challenges over extended periods, while the physical mobility component enables intensive workshops, field studies, or hands-on sustainability projects that require in-person collaboration.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, participants will be able to:

- Design and present a comprehensive Virtual Exchange or BIP project that addresses specific UN Sustainable Development Goals through cross-disciplinary collaboration
- Identify and establish partnerships with educators from different disciplines within the Utrecht Network to create innovative sustainability education initiatives
- Develop learning activities that integrate sustainability content with intercultural competence development, preparing students for global sustainability leadership
- Create assessment frameworks that evaluate students' understanding of sustainability issues, their ability to work across disciplines, and their intercultural communication skills
- Apply principles of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) to VE and BIP design, fostering critical thinking, systems thinking, and transformative learning
- Navigate the practical, logistical, and intercultural challenges of implementing sustainability-focused international collaborations

Course Methodology

The workshop employs an experiential, collaborative approach that models the very practices participants will implement in their own teaching. During the online phase, participants will learn about the basics of VE and BIP methodologies, explore case

studies of successful cross-disciplinary VE projects addressing SDGs, and begin developing their own project ideas. They will experience first-hand the digital tools and collaborative methods their students will use, while considering how different disciplines can contribute unique perspectives to sustainability challenges.

The on-site workshop intensifies this collaborative process, bringing together educators from diverse fields to form interdisciplinary teams. Participants will engage in design thinking exercises to identify sustainability challenges that benefit from multiple disciplinary perspectives, develop concrete project plans that integrate their respective expertise, and create implementation timelines that align with their institutional contexts. Those with existing international partners are encouraged to involve them virtually in the planning process, demonstrating the hybrid collaboration model in action.

Participant Profile

This course welcomes educators from all academic disciplines who recognise that sustainability challenges require interdisciplinary solutions and are committed to preparing students for global citizenship. Whether you teach engineering, business, social sciences, humanities, natural sciences, or professional studies, this training will help you discover how your discipline can contribute to sustainability education through international collaboration. Participants should be interested in exploring how their field connects to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and be open to collaborating with colleagues from different academic backgrounds. No prior experience with Virtual Exchange is required, but participants should be motivated to integrate sustainability themes into their teaching and to engage students in addressing real-world challenges through cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Trainer's Biodata

Robert O'Dowd is full professor for English Studies at the Universidad de León, Spain. He has taught at universities in Ireland, Germany and Spain. He has published extensively on the application of Virtual Exchange in Higher Education and has coordinated 3 Erasmus+ projects, including the European Policy Experiment 'Virtual Innovation and Support Networks for Teachers' (VALIANT) (2021-2024). He collaborates with organisations on the promotion and integration of Virtual Exchange in higher education and his most recent book is *Internationalising Higher Education and the Role of Virtual Exchange* (2023, Routledge). He has been listed in Stanford University's 'Ranking of the World Scientists: World's Top 2% Scientists' for the past 3 years.

Robert's publications are available here: <http://unileon.academia.edu/RobertODowd> and you can connect with him on linkedIN: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robodowd/>