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About the VALIANT project:

VALIANT is a European Policy Experiment under Erasmus+ KA3 (EACEA/38/2019): Priority 3 - Strengthening teacher training and education by using the opportunities of new technologies (School education). The policy measure in this experimentation, Virtual Innovation and Support Networks, are defined as **Virtual Exchange programmes which bring together teachers, student teachers and experts in facilitated online collaboration around real-world educational issues**. VALIANT's first objective is to test the efficiency of Virtual Innovation and Support Networks as an approach which will contribute to overcoming teachers' sense of isolation and low motivation in rural areas and isolated contexts and also to developing teachers' ability to operate effectively in online international networks of professional collaboration. The second objective of the experimentation is to test the efficiency of this form of Virtual Exchange for providing students of Initial Teacher Education with access to the realities of the teaching profession through regular interaction with in-service teachers integrated into their study programme.

About this publication:

This report presents the findings of a survey aiming at collecting insights from various stakeholders about the international virtual exchanges designed by the VALIANT research group. The survey was administered to primary and secondary education teachers, school managers, administrators, and university teacher trainers. The analysis of almost 2000 responses provided an understanding of the stakeholders' interest in the VALIANT virtual exchange projects as well as their preferences and needs for the projects' configurations and modalities. Key aspects presented in this report pertain to the respondents' profiles and their experiences with working in rural or isolated areas. The information yielded from this survey was useful for VALIANT's researchers who aspire to design beneficial virtual exchanges for in-service teachers, student teachers and educational experts.



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Introduction

This report presents the findings of a survey aimed at collecting educators' interest in a new Virtual Exchange programme for school teachers and students of education. VALIANT (Virtual Innovation and Support Networks for Teachers) is an Erasmus+ KA3 project which will engage school teachers in international Virtual Exchange (VE) projects with other teachers across Europe as well as with student teachers and educational experts, giving them the opportunity to develop their digital and intercultural skills, share experiences with colleagues in other European contexts and develop their knowledge about themes related to teaching and learning.

VALIANT is being specifically designed for teachers and student teachers working or studying in rural areas or contexts where they have limited access to specialised experts and trainers or are facing difficulties attending workshops due to, for example, long driving distances and/or difficulties to participate in in-house professional development activities.

The survey was designed in order to help the researchers from the VALIANT group to adapt the design of the different modules of the Virtual Exchange programme to the specific needs and interests of the respondents (i.e. potential participants). Consequently, a set of 17 closed and open questions, which aimed at getting a deeper understanding of the teachers' profiles, contexts, needs and preferences, was proposed. The findings, based on the answers of 1818 respondents, are presented in the following pages divided into respondents' profile, closed questions findings and open questions findings.

Findings

Respondents' profile

The survey participants came from twenty-four (24) different countries. The vast majority of the respondents came from Portugal (1376 respondents), followed by Spain (232) and Slovenia (112). Responses were also received from participants in Germany (17), Sweden (15), and Norway (15) as well as from many other countries in Europe and in other continents. The large imbalance observed in terms of the respondents' origin is mainly due to the diverse survey dissemination strategies adopted in different contexts. In Portugal, for example, the survey was methodically administered to a very large sample through the ministry of education, and in Slovenia, the survey was translated in the local language. These strategies led to a much higher response rate than in the other countries. Figure 1 demonstrates the respondents' country of origin.

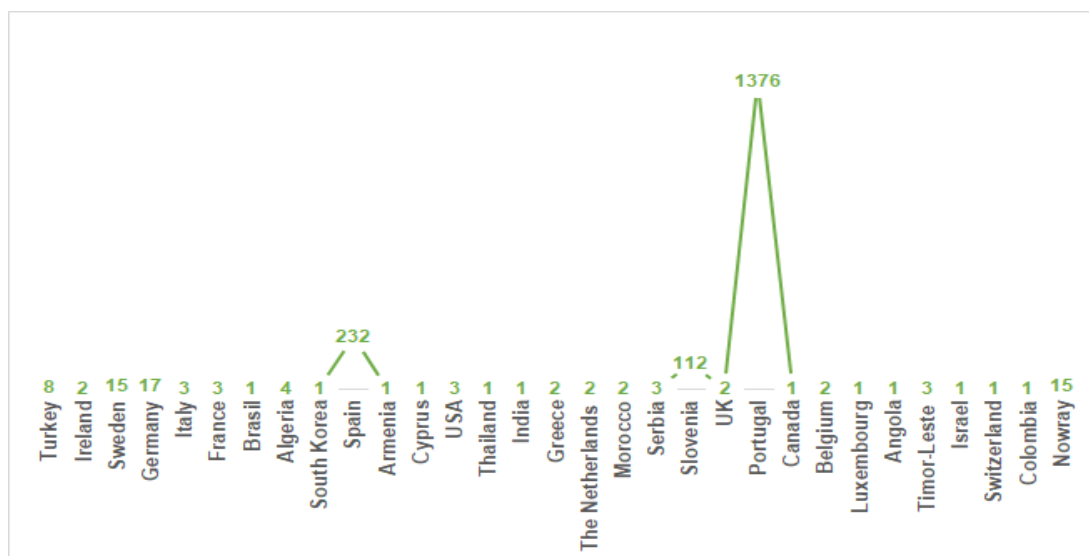


Figure 1. Respondents' country of origin



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The main professional positions of the respondents were secondary (61,8%) and primary (26,7%) education teachers which were the audience to which both the survey and the programme were mainly aimed at. Some school managers or administrators (5,5%) and university teacher trainers (4,6%) also participated in the survey although to a considerably lesser extent. Figure 2 demonstrates the main professional positions of the respondents.

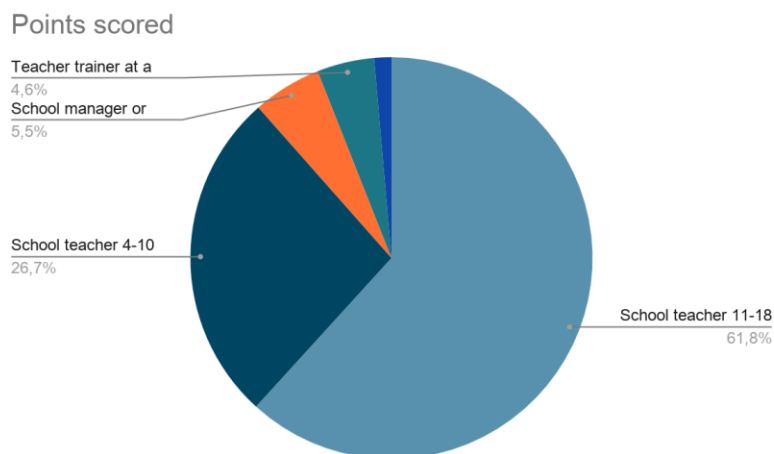


Figure 2. Respondents' professional positions

As for the respondents' professional experience, the sample seems to be mainly composed of well-experienced teachers or teacher trainers with experience ranging from 11 to 30 years. Early career professionals with 1-10 years in service as well as very experienced educators with over 30 years in service also participated in the survey. This balance in the sample's professional experience was very useful for the researchers of the VALIANT group working on the design of the project's programmes as these are targeted to both experienced in-service teachers and early career professionals or student teachers in education. Figure 3 shows the respondents' years of experience.

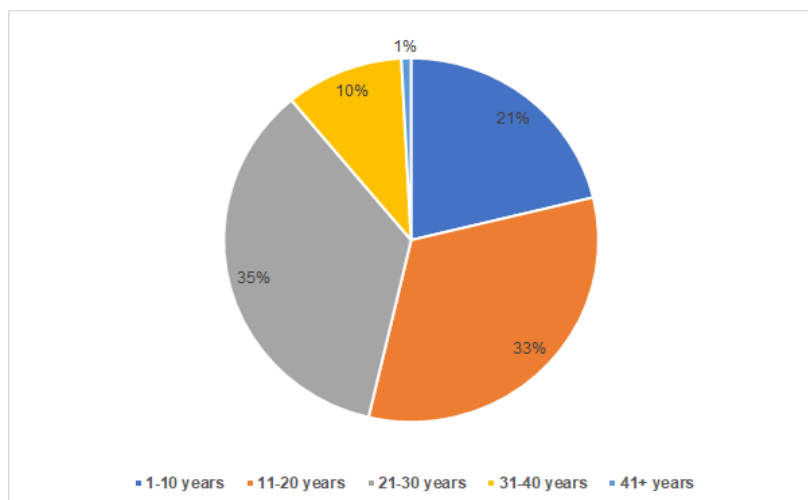


Figure 3. Respondents' years of experience



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Closed questions

This section presents the results of the survey closed questions. These questions were proposed by the researchers in order to get a deeper understanding of the interests and needs of potential program participants so that they could design the modules of the Virtual Exchange Programme accordingly.

One of the aspects researchers and VE practitioners need to consider when designing a VE program are the tools that are going to be used for interaction and collaboration. In order to find out respondents' preferences in this regard, the following question was posed: 'Considering your digital skills, how comfortable would you feel using the following tools? (1 means 'not comfortable at all', 5 means 'very comfortable'.)'. See Figure 4 for respondents' preferences.

The option respondents indicated that they were most comfortable with was videoconferencing tools. This may be influenced by the fact that a large number of teachers at all educational levels are or have been teaching online using such tools due to the global pandemic of Covid-19 during the last months. This option was followed by word processing tools (e.g. Google Docs) and virtual learning environments (e.g. Moodle) with similar figures. Again, this is not surprising as these are tools that teachers are familiar with and therefore to some extent more comfortable with than other tools such as video editing tools. In fact, the latter were the tools with which teachers were least comfortable. Figure 4 presents respondents' tools preferences.

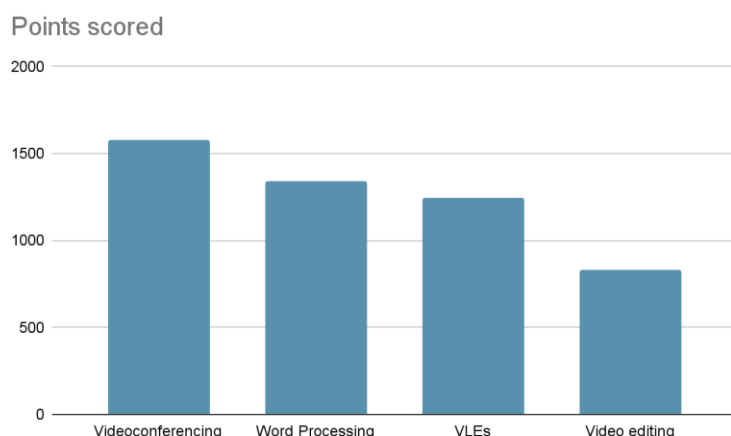


Figure 4. Respondents' tools preferences

Another aspect the researchers were interested in was getting a deeper understanding of respondents' topics of interest so that they could design Virtual Exchanges that would engage and motivate them. To this end, the following question was posed to the respondents: 'If you (or teachers or student teachers at your institution) were going to participate in an online collaborative project with other teachers and student teachers from around Europe, how interesting or useful would you find these topics? (1 means 'not interesting at all', 5 means 'very interesting')'.

From an extensive list of different topics proposed, the most interesting for the respondents were those related to education and technology. See Figure 5 for the main respondents' topics of interest. Taking this into consideration, the designers of the VEs considered these topics when developing the Virtual Exchanges.



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virtual exchange, stakeholders survey

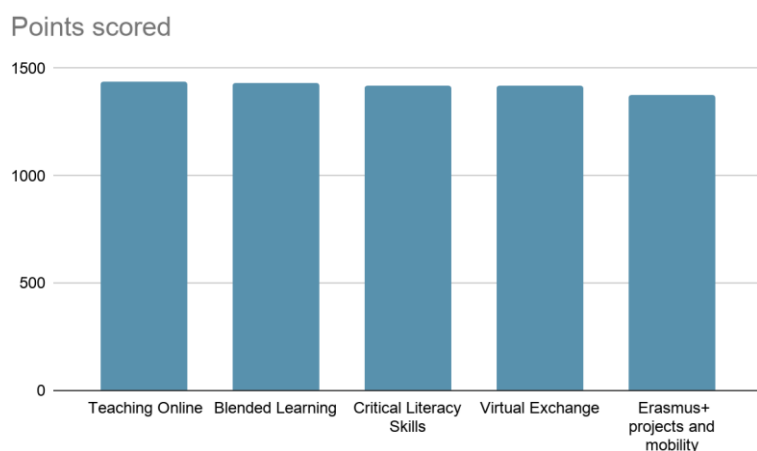


Figure 5. Most popular topics for the respondents

In addition to knowing the respondents' preferred tools and topics, researchers also needed to know the type of partnerships in which respondents would be most interested in participating. To this end, the following question was proposed: 'Who would you like to collaborate with in your Virtual Exchange programmes? Please keep in mind that all these collaborations will be organised by a facilitator who will lead the activities and help to resolve problems if they emerge. (1 means 'does not interest me at all', 5 means 'interests me a lot'.)'.

The most popular partnership modalities were those of collaborating with other teachers and student teachers from other European countries and participating in collaborative workshops with experts on educational issues. In contrast, respondents showed less interest in collaborations involving speaking to groups of student-teachers about their experiences of teaching. See Figure 6 for respondents' interest in partnership modalities.

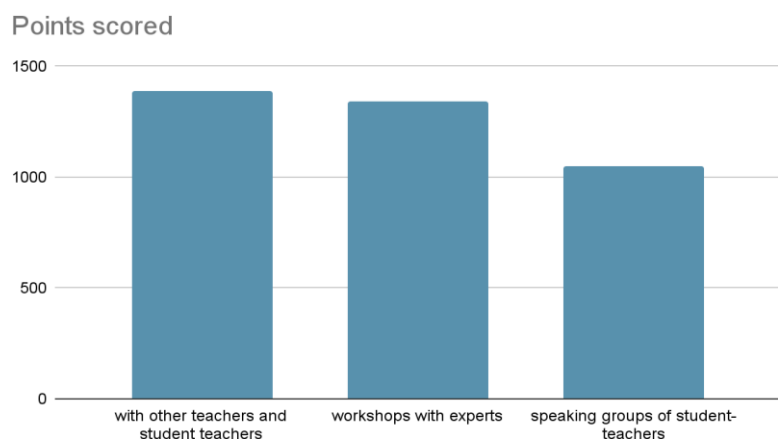


Figure 6. Respondents' interest in different partnership modalities



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Respondents were also asked about their availability so that the weekly tasks could be adjusted to the time available to them: '(11) How much time would you approximately be able to dedicate to the Virtual Exchange? (Consider that the projects would last between 6-8 weeks.)'. Most respondents indicated that they could devote between 1 and 2 hours per week to their participation in the programme. See Figure 7 for respondents' weekly availability.

How much time would you approximately be able to dedicate to the Virtual Exchange?
(Consider that the projects would last between 6-8 weeks.)

1.630 respuestas

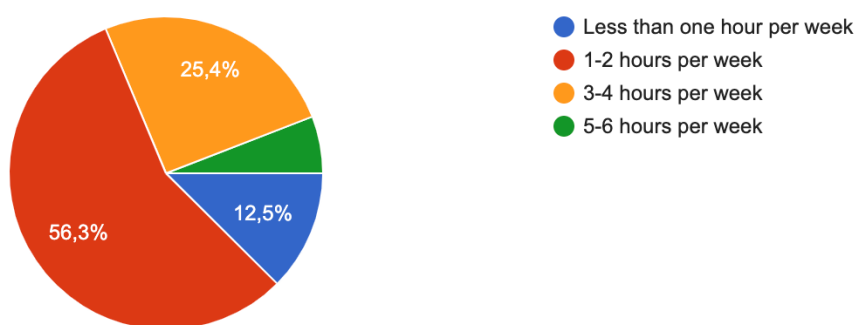


Figure 7. Respondents' weekly availability

Open questions

This section presents the results emerging from the survey open questions. These questions were included in the survey in order to get a richer, contextual understanding of the respondents' profile and attitudes towards their participation in the Virtual Exchanges. The open questions revolved around two major topics: teachers' feelings about working in rural areas, and teachers' working in isolation. The survey also included one open question pertaining to the respondents' preferred form of recognition for participating in the Virtual Exchanges, and one question that invited respondents' ideas and suggestions for their participation in the VEs.

One of the aims of the Virtual Exchanges to be designed and implemented in the VALIANT project is to contribute towards overcoming teachers' sense of isolation and low motivation in rural areas and isolated contexts. Another important aim is to develop teachers' ability to operate effectively in online international networks of professional collaboration. The VALIANT Virtual Exchanges will bring together teachers in rural or isolated schools in virtual collaboration and exchange with fellow teachers from other countries, educational experts and students of Initial Teacher Education to support and learn from each other in collaborative digital spaces. Therefore, it was deemed important to explore the respondents' feelings of working in rural areas and their experiences with working in isolated contexts.



Working in rural areas

With regard to the respondents' experience with working in rural contexts, the following open question was included in the survey: '(6) Would you describe yourself as working in a rural area? (If yes, please explain briefly how this affects you professionally)'.

More than one thousand respondents described themselves as working in rural areas. Even though some respondents stated that this is an enriching experience that allows for the creation of closer relationships with colleagues and pupils and a strong sense of community where educators feel valued, many delineated the various ways in which working in a rural area affects them professionally. Among the several challenges mentioned by respondents, teachers' limited opportunities to collaborate was highlighted. A teacher mentions: *"...there is only one other English teacher at my school and because of this, I am constantly looking for others to collaborate with outside my school. My community does not promote collaboration with teachers of my subject within the schools in the same community."* Respondents referred to the small number of colleagues at their schools and the difficulties in finding peers to share ideas, experiences, pedagogical methods, practices, strategies, and materials. A teacher mentions: *"...we don't have many colleagues working in the same areas of study, teachers who willingly share their ideas and experiences."*

A different challenge pertains to the limited availability of (digital) resources and materials. As mentioned by a respondent, teachers in rural schools *"... have some resources but they are not enough to improve quality learning"*. Another respondent reflects on working in a rural area: *"...the only disadvantage is access to new technologies, which are very important for 21st century education"* emphasising the need to access quality training initiatives and new ICT experiences. Overall, educators in rural areas seem to *"...need support and help as well as materials and resources to improve their teaching skills"*. Due to long driving distances, educators working in these areas have difficulties in accessing training and professional development opportunities. A respondent summarises this challenge as follows: *"...it is difficult to access specialized experts, attend workshops due to long driving distances, and participate in in-house professional development activities"*.

Working in isolation

With regard to the respondents' experiences with working in isolation, the following open question was included in the survey: '(6) Would you describe yourself as working in isolation in some way? (If yes, please explain briefly why you feel this is the case)'.

Over 800 participants in the survey described themselves as working in isolation. Many respondents described working in isolation due to limited opportunities for collaboration with peers. A respondent says: *"I'm isolated from everyone without the possibility of collaborating with peer colleagues"*, and another one mentions that *"sometimes there are few teachers with whom to share experiences"*. Feelings of isolation seem to have become more pronounced during the Covid-19 lockdown. It was interesting to observe that regardless of working in urban or rural schools, educators felt that due to the restrictions imposed due to the pandemic, everyone experienced isolation: *"Due to covid we all work in isolation. Do not have interaction with others"*. Isolation was also described by the participants in terms of geographical distance and limited access to resources, tools and training opportunities. A teacher mentions: *"I want more tools to work in isolation"* while another one says: *"Given the distance that our school is from the large centers, it is difficult to have access to training with trainers of enormous quality"*. However, a lot of respondents highlighted the fact that during the Covid-19 pandemic, the situation of isolation was improved due to the online interaction and training: *"In terms of training and updating and pedagogical innovation, I would say yes [I work in isolation]. Although,*



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this situation improved a lot in this pandemic situation, because a lot of training was carried out online, and made available to everyone via the internet". This and other similar comments by respondents underline the importance of opportunities for participation in online communities of learning which the VALIANT project aspires to create through the implementation of Virtual Exchanges.

Forms of recognition and suggestions

The last two open questions in the survey required respondents to indicate their preferred form of recognition of participation in the Virtual Exchanges and also to put forward some suggestions. As far as recognition is concerned, it was interesting to observe that many respondents believe that no specific form of recognition is needed as participation in the programme would be a reward in itself. A respondent mentions: *"Honestly, I don't care all that much about recognition or certification. I'm in it for the knowledge and experience I would gain."* Some participants suggested a certificate of participation or open badges, while others suggested that the programme remains accessible upon completion of it so as to be *"...able to read and post in an online environment with other teachers even after the end of the exchange"*. Other suggestions put forward include the possibility to involve students, parents and local communities in the Virtual Exchanges, as well as adopting a blended mobility approach combining virtual work and visits to the schools involved in the programme.

Conclusion

This survey aimed at gathering useful insights about potential Virtual Exchange participants' preferences and needs. Information was collected by 1818 respondents working as teachers in primary and secondary education, educational administrators, and university teacher trainers across Europe. Both teachers with extensive and teachers with limited professional experience provided information about their preferences for the VE modalities. In summary, respondents seem to be more comfortable with using videoconferencing and word processing tools and are more interested in interacting with other teachers and student teachers. Respondents expressed interest in all proposed topics of the Virtual Exchanges with technology and education being the most popular topic. In addition, the survey's respondents delineated the challenges they are faced with due to working in rural or isolated contexts. These can be summarized in limited opportunities for peer collaboration and professional development as well as lack of available resources. Finally, many participants expressed their feelings of professional isolation due the Covid-19 pandemic, which were mitigated through their participation in online training activities.

The information provided by respondents in this survey was of great value in the design of the VALIANT Virtual Exchanges as it allowed the researchers to better understand the preferences and needs of potential participants. It is expected that this will help the proposed Virtual Exchanges to engage and motivate their participants and promote the achievement of the intended learning outcomes.



Appendix

VALIANT stakeholder survey

The VALIANT Virtual Exchange programme: Connecting education practitioners in rural and isolated contexts through Virtual Exchange

This short survey aimed to collect educators' interest in a new Virtual Exchange programme for school teachers and students of education. This survey is GDPR compliant. Please see below for details. *

VALIANT is an Erasmus+ KA3 project which will engage school teachers in international Virtual Exchange projects with other teachers across Europe as well as with student teachers and educational experts. These exchanges will take place in English and will require approximately a B2 communicative level.

The VALIANT Virtual Exchange programme will give participants the opportunity to develop their digital and intercultural skills, share experiences with colleagues in other European contexts and develop their knowledge about themes related to teaching and learning.

VALIANT is being specifically designed for teachers and student teachers working or studying in rural areas or contexts where they have:

- Limited access to specialised experts and trainers.
- Difficulties attending workshops due to, for example, long driving distances.
- Difficulties to participate in in-house professional development activities

Does this sound of interest to you or to your institution? If so, please take two minutes to complete this survey in order to help us adapt the Virtual Exchange programme to your needs and interests.

1. Name *

2. Email *



3. Country where you reside: *

4. What is your main professional position or role (multiple answers are possible): *

School teacher for pupils aged between 4-10

School teacher for pupils aged between 11-18

School manager or administrator

Teacher trainer at a university

Student teacher

Otro: _____

5. Approximately how many years have you been working in your current position?

6. Would you describe yourself as working in a rural area? (If yes, please explain briefly how this affects you professionally.) *

7. Would you describe yourself as working in isolation in some way? (If yes, please explain briefly why you feel this is the case.) *



8. Considering your digital skills, how comfortable would you feel using the following tools? (1 means 'not comfortable at all', 5 means 'very comfortable'.)

	1	2	3	4	5
Videoconferencing tools such as Zoom,, Microsoft Teams,, Google meet etc.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Virtual Learning Environments such as Moodle, Google classroom, Canvas.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Online word processing tools such as Google Docs.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Tools for creating and sharing videos.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. If you (or teachers or student teachers at your institution) were going to participate in an online collaborative project with other teachers and student teachers from around Europe, how interesting or useful would you find these topics? (1 means 'not interesting at all', 5 means 'very interesting'.)

	1	2	3	4	5
Strategies for teaching online	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Strategies for developing students'' critical literacy skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Developing teaching materials for

learners coming from rural/isolated
areas

Innovative methodologies for blended

learning

Using gamification/ online games to

teach different subjects

Developing Virtual Exchange projects

between classes around Europe

Developing international partnerships

for Erasmus+ projects and mobility
programmes

Working with the impact of poverty in

the classroom

Welcoming refugees into the

classroom

Strategies for dealing with

cyberbullying and online harassment



10. Who would you like to collaborate with in your Virtual Exchange programmes? Please keep in mind that all these collaborations will be organised by a facilitator who will lead the activities and help to resolve problems if they emerge. (1 means 'does not interest me at all', 5 means 'interests me a lot'.)

Marca solo un óvalo por fila.

	1	2	3	4	5
Collaborations with other teachers and student teachers from other European countries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborative workshops with experts on educational issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Collaborations involving speaking to groups of student-teachers about your experiences of teaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. How much time would you approximately be able to dedicate to the Virtual Exchange? (Consider that the projects would last between 6-8 weeks.)

Less than one hour per week

1-2 hours per week

3-4 hours per week

5-6 hours per week

12. We are working to develop forms of recognition or certification which would be of use to participants and/or their institutions upon completion of the Virtual Exchange. Do you have any suggestions as to what kind of recognition/certification would encourage you to participate in the virtual exchange? You can write your answers in English or in your local language.



13. How confident do you feel about collaborating online in English? (1 means 'not confident at all', 5 means 'very confident'.)

1

2

3

4

5

14. What other languages would you be able to collaborate in?

15. Do you have any other suggestions or comments about this initiative? You can write your answers in English or in your local language.

16. The VALIANT Virtual Exchange programmes will run over two rounds in autumn 2021 (approx. October - December 2021) and spring 2022 (approx Feb- June 2022). Would you like to receive information about the programme when registration opens? If so, we will contact you at the email address you provided above. (Your email address will not be shared with third parties or used for other purposes other than to inform you of upcoming VALIANT courses.)

Yes, please let me know.

No thank you.



17. By marking the box below, you agree to participate in the survey. You agree that you have read and agree to the Terms and Conditions and approve that University of León process personal data in accordance with the current data protection regulation and information provided.

 I have read and agree to the Terms and Conditions and I agree.

*GDPR information

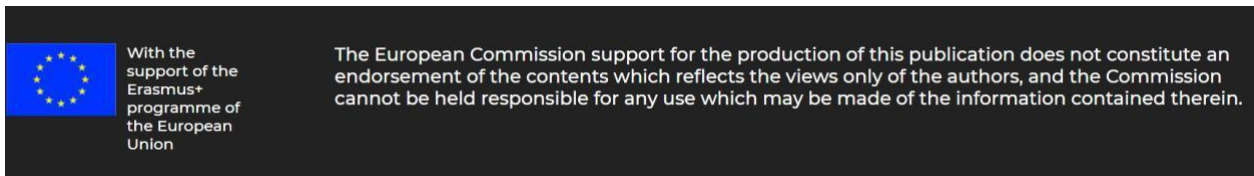
The purpose of this survey is to collect the opinions and interests of educators and students of education in order to develop a Virtual Exchange programme as part of an Erasmus+ KA3 project. Your personal data will be processed according to your informed consent. To participate is completely voluntary and you can revoke your consent at any time without giving any reason. Though, it will not affect the data processing before your revoke. All the information we receive will be processed in such a way that no unauthorized person can access it. The personal data will be stored for three years in the data storage facility provided by the University of León.

The University of León is the controller for the personal data. According to the General Data Protection Regulation, GDPR, you have the right to request from the controller access to and rectification or erasure of personal data or restriction of processing concerning the data subject to or object to processing.

Contact information to the responsible researcher: Robert O'Dowd, Universidad de León, Spain.

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Logo













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 <p>MALMÖ UNIVERSITY</p>	<p>Malmö University, Sweden</p>	<p>Sweden</p>
 <p>XUNTA DE GALICIA CONSELLERÍA DE EDUCACIÓN, UNIVERSIDADE E FORMACIÓN PROFESIONAL</p>	<p>Consellería de Educación, Universidade e FP, Galicia</p>	<p>Spain</p>



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	Pädagogische Hochschule Schwäbisch Gmünd University of Education		Pädagogische Hochschule Schwäbisch Gmünd
	ual: university of the arts london	University of the Arts London	UK