Guide:
How to set up a Virtual Exchange

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Why participate in a virtual exchange?

2021 has paused all the wonderful exchanges with target language countries but has opened new opportunities. Virtual exchanges are a great way to start a partnership with a school and these can eventually lead to a physical exchange. With this guide we would like to encourage teachers and students to engage in virtual exchanges and to offer suggestions for activities in support of those already involved.

The document is divided into the following sections:

1. Benefits of a virtual exchange

**These are some of the benefits of a virtual exchange:**

- Increase student motivation and autonomy.

- Improve target language skills.

- Exchange with native speaking peers.

- Experience host country's culture.

- Discover a new country or area.

- Every student can participate.

2. How to get started

Consult with school Management

- You will need to get permission from your Principal and it might be nice to present the idea to the Board of Management. When you have permission to get started on the virtual exchange, you will need to inform parents and get permission for students to take part. There are sample letters and agreements in the appendix.

- You can point out that as with any exchange, a virtual exchange could potentially benefit the whole school by becoming cross-curricular.
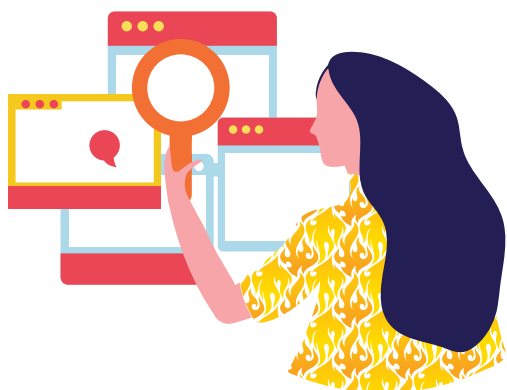
Find a partner school

- If you have an existing exchange partner, keep the momentum going and strengthen your existing relationship.

- Foreign Language Assistants can help to find partners. They might be able to get in touch with their former school or a school in their town. Using their connection will help you save time.

- Reach out to members of the school community, teachers, parents etc.

- Some towns are twinned with a similar town abroad, find out if your town is twinned and if it is, reach out to schools there.

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- The European Commission programme, eTwinning is not specifically intended to find a partner school with which to do an exchange but it works very well for this purpose. Potential partners can be filtered by language, country, area, town, type of school, etc. See below for further details.

- There will be plenty of contact between you and the partner teacher, so finding a like-minded person is a great start.

- The Embassies also receive demands from schools, so they might be a good place to ask.

3. Next steps

When you have identified a partner school, following these steps will help you to make the virtual exchange a successful experience:

- Verify students have signed your relevant school image/video/AUP policy.

- Choose a suitable online platform for shared access. Ask the IT team in your school or the teacher in your partner school.

- Connect with the host teacher and set up a shared, online calendar. This will help you to formulate a clear program from the start.

- Agree on the schedule of meetings for the two of you and for the virtual exchange and establish aims and objectives for each scheduled meeting.

- Brainstorm all possible language and cultural projects with your exchange school.

- Pair-up students. There are different ways of doing this and you should discuss the best option in your context with your partner. There is a form for students to fill in to help with this in the appendix.

- Decide upon appropriate Netiquette for all activities related to the virtual exchange.

- Start the virtual exchange as early as possible to build long-term friendships.

- Plan how you are going to carry out the chosen activities/projects with your students. (See 'Things to think about! In the appendix)

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4. Suggested activities

In this section we have gathered some suggestions for activities that you might find useful. Please note that this section is always evolving as we gather ideas from schools involved in virtual exchanges.

We have organised this section under the following headings:

- Virtual icebreakers
- Introductory videos
- Virtual tours
- Cultural projects
- Group projects
- Shared blogs/Vlogs
- Peer homework help

Virtual Ice-breakers

- **https://www.flippity.net/** is useful for online games, etc.

- **Mystery Skype Guide** (see **https://ppli.ie/mystery-skype-in-the-mfl-classroom-tutorial/**)

- **A letter.** Students either handwrite a letter to describe themselves, and the teacher takes a photo of it, or they type in a Word document. They then take a photo of objects to represent what was described in the letter. The teachers give a number/letter to each letter/photo and put all the letters and photos from both groups up on a virtual noticeboard; students, in groups, have to match them.

- **"I am not well."** Play this bilingual game online in a group meeting. Create two break out rooms, mix the students up and have a teacher in each room. The teacher mimes a pain and describes it in the target language, then they call on a student and the student mimes and describes the teacher's pain, and adds their own. If there is a mix of students, there will be a mix of target languages and students need to remember the order of the different problems and what language they were described in. Keep going until every student has had a turn.

- **"Treasure Hunt."** Play this bilingual game online in a group meeting. Create two break out rooms, mix the students up and have a teacher in each room. The teacher calls out, "find something yellow/green/square/round/etc" and students have to find an appropriate item, show it to the screen and say what it is in the target language.

- **"Auction."** Ask students to pick an object and to sell it to the other students in the target language. You can spice it up by adding some keywords they must include whatever the object is. Students can prepare and be given a budget to bid for other items, in advance of the online meeting. Select a student to sell their object by describing it in the target language and asking the rest of the group to bid for the object.

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- **A song.** Students could prepare a song to represent them and sing it to their partners.

- **A quiz.** Play a bilingual quiz online in a group meeting. Prepare a quiz on both countries/towns and put students in teams. Each team should have students from both classes.

- **"Two truths and a lie."** Each student tells two truths and one lie and the others have to guess which is the lie.

- **"Tell me a story."** Play this bilingual game online in a group meeting. Create two breakout rooms, mix the students up and have a teacher in each room. The teacher can begin the game by giving the first line of a story. Students take turns to add to the story by adding a sentence or two in the target language. Depending on the level of language of the students, you could give them a prop word they must incorporate in their sentence and give them some time to prepare in advance.

- **"Who is ...?"** Students prepare a board, for example on Padlet, where they describe themselves. Students read each other's boards and teachers prepare questions in both target languages. For example, who is a rugby fan? Students must list all the students who mentioned rugby. You can create a leader board and revisit it every so often.

- **"Twenty Questions."** Play a bilingual game online in a group meeting. Create two break-out rooms, mix the students up and have a teacher in each room. Each student can choose who they would like to be. Select one student at a time and the rest of the group can ask up to 20 questions in the target language to try and work out who it is.

Introductory videos

- Students could make short videos, using Flipgrid (link to guide) for example, where they introduce themselves. Then encourage the students to ask a few questions so they can start exchanging.

Virtual tours

In terms of a virtual visit of a local town, there was a lovely example for **#ThinkLanguages** from Templecarrig School: **http://tcggreystones.weebly.com/** Not quite a virtual visit but worth a look. It's in several different languages and very nicely done.

Search for your local town on YouTube; you might well find amazing drone footage. You might even find historical footage and your local virtual tour could take a step back in time. Students should be capable of putting together a good virtual tour of their local town using a combination of resources such as Google maps and Google Earth.

https://www.genial.ly is a great tool for creating a tour as you can make it interactive with photos, video footage and your own voiceover.

Under normal conditions, trips on school exchanges tend to be restricted to within an hour or two of the school. So, ask your students to find virtual tours of all the places in Ireland to which they would like to take their exchange students. You could do this as a WebQuest where the students present their country by finding footage and preparing a series of questions for the partner class and vice versa. **https://ppli.ie/news/webquest-resources-for-ty/**

https://virtualvacation.us/ is a great website which offers live footage, virtual walking, driving and flying tours from cities around the world, and the opportunity to explore different monuments.

https://www.zeemaps.com/ allows you to create interactive maps.

Cultural projects

Students could work on cultural projects together. When exchange students come to Ireland, they tend to be introduced to a ceili, which is group dancing. Now is a good time to look at sean-nós dancing rather than ceili dancing because you can do it on your own, you don't need a partner. Could one of the Irish teachers host a Zoom type sean-nós dance class for both Irish and exchange students? **https://youtu.be/KADISWonmdM** Could the students create a how-to video for their partners? Perhaps along the lines of some of the **#ThinkLanguages** workshops.

Sometimes teachers do a traditional Irish music class with exchange students. Again you need to think outside the box. The exchange students won't have tin whistles, etc., so maybe singing would be better than musical instruments. Maybe something in Irish? **https://youtu.be/Hz63M3v11nE** Amhrán na gCupán is a nice example. Then record it and edit all the pieces together. It might not look quite as professional as this but along these lines: **https://www.timeout.com/news/you-can-now-sing-along-with-strangers-in-these-virtual-choirs-032420**

There are lots of virtual cookery classes out there, and schools sometimes do a home economics class with soda bread, scones, or their local speciality for exchange students, so maybe the home economics teacher could do something along these lines: **https://www.healthyeverafter.ie/kids**

If you have a "famous" parent in the school, invite them for an online interview which both classes can attend. Students could prepare a presentation of the person and translate any questions from the partner school.

Students could create "How to play hurling/Gaelic football" videos in the target language. This is great cross curricular activity. You could even organise a virtual sports day with challenges. Ask your partner school to come up with something similar, so that everyone learns a new sport.

Using a variety of different media is probably the key here, so face to face on video chat, videos, photos, music recordings and don't restrict yourselves to PowerPoint.

Seeing how people live in other countries is a huge part of a regular exchange. Use this video on "How the Germans live" **https://youtu.be/yUSLuVVxS3o** to try and explain to students how people in Ireland/your area live. Irish students could create a project or a short video, and their partner students could do the same.

Students could give their partner student a tour of their house.

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Group Projects

You could organise a debate on Zoom, either between the Irish and the exchange students, or between partnered students. Topics are endless, and a great opportunity to open students up to new ideas. See Spotlight on Schools: **https://ppli.ie/debating-and-spoken-language-skills/**

If students are doing a project on cultural events, don't just focus on the big events – Easter, Christmas, etc. focus on the smaller ones too, e.g. St Brigid's Day, Valentine's Day, St Patrick's Day, Summer Solstice, Hallowe'en, Winter Solstice, etc.

If students are working on a group project, they can be partnered with exchange students as well as Irish students, so for example 2 Irish students and their 2 exchange students could work together on a group project.

You could ask each class to come up with different activities for both classes to do together.

Check our **'Things to think about!'** in the appendix

Shared blog/Vlog

Student could collaborate to create a blog or vlog of the virtual exchange.

They could include amongst many others:

- written pieces
- Interviews
- reviews of films/TV series they both watched
- Presentations
- Quiz
- Recipe demonstrations
- Games etc.

Peer-Homework help

Students could be paired so they could meet on a regular basis to help each other with homework in TL and English. This might require some guidelines to be written out on how feedback should be given etc.

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5. Digital Etiquette

A virtual exchange is new territory for a lot of us. Digital etiquette may vary from one school to the next and will almost certainly vary from one country to the next. Discuss this with your partner teacher early on. Remember that if you are spending quite a bit of time online to incorporate breaks. Cover digital etiquette, including the summary points below, with your students.

- Be inclusive   • Be respectful   • Be tolerant   • Be polite and friendly

For more information, talk to your colleague who teaches digital literacy or consult: **https://www.webwise.ie/**

6. Showcases

Presentation De La Salle, Co Carlow.

Virtual Exchanges in P.D.L.S.

The intention was to form a connection with students living in a country where the target language is spoken, hoping that it would provide our students with perhaps the only direct cultural exposure possible in the current climate. The obvious impact on the students' language skills was indeed also a factor.

I chose my fifth-year classes, based on their language level and interest. We made contact with our Partnerschule in November of 2020 and forged a plan. The initiative was not given a specific timeframe, so as to allow for freedom to liaise with the class in Germany on an ongoing basis and hopefully beyond fifth and into sixth year.

Initially, I began corresponding with a teacher of English in a secondary school in the south of Germany. We developed the idea for our initiative and linked up our students based on interests and levels. We planned to begin with hand-written letters and to progress to online-contact, once a connection had been established. We also discussed hosting virtual 'meet-ups', sending video messages enquiring about specific aspects of the culture and sharing work which was completed by the group.

The students were instantly excited by the prospect of having a contact in a foreign country and finding out about their partners' lives, interests and experience of learning English etc. There was some apprehension about the live 'meet-ups', however beginning with pre-recorded messages, allowed the students to become more confident speaking in the target language.

The students asked specific questions about aspects of life in Germany, which they wanted to gain a better understanding of. Our videos were exchanged through email. Receiving the replies was a highlight and whet the appetite for future recordings.

There is a notable improvement in the level of confidence the students feel about engaging with others in the target language. Without doubt, by filming and editing, students have also developed their I.T. skills throughout the initiative. A 'real-life' experience in the classroom has made learning the language more enticing and without doubt more fun.

Emma Bolger,
German teacher in Presentation De La Salle, Co Carlow

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Stepaside Educate Together Secondary School, Co Dublin

We started this project with 5th Year students but it is hoped that it will become a whole school exchange in the future. The aims of the virtual exchange are to motivate students, to bring the country of the target language into the classroom, to share cultural perspectives and gain linguistic improvement.

Initially, in September we had a call through Teams with the Spanish Department in our chosen partner school.

We exchanged emails with their lead teacher regarding with which group we would start. Unfortunately, he became ill in December but we still managed to have everything arranged before Christmas. We used Wakelet after consulting with Gloria Enrique. It proved to be too complicated to open files, seek permissions etc. but the students did make introductory videos and attempted to upload them.

After Christmas, we had email exchanges with a new lead teacher and set up a Google classroom. We had a Zoom call organised for last Monday but disaster struck as we got the hours mixed up!

As mentioned, we used Wakelet but experienced some difficulties. We also used Google Classroom but this is complicated because we are an MS Office school. It was, however a useful experience and we have learnt the importance of discussing and trialling the technology before getting the students started to avoid similar problems.

We discovered that the administration aspect was quite time-consuming: seeking permissions; organising class time; finding a partner etc. So, we decided that we would prefer to do the exchanges outside of timetabled hours – either before or after school.

Despite all this, we remain enthusiastic about the project and assume it will get easier every year as we develop it.

Catherine McAuliffe,
Spanish teacher, Stepaside Educate Together Secondary School
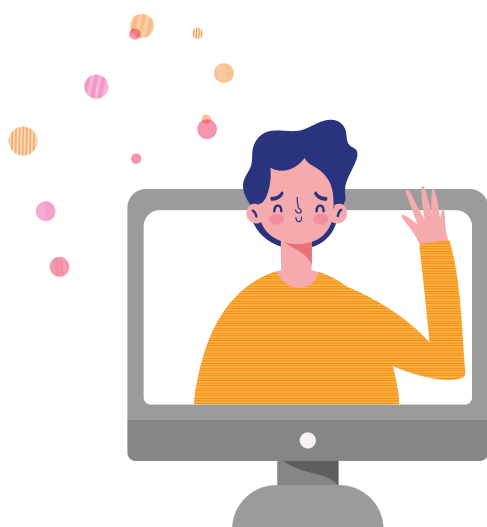
Good Luck!
Viel Glück!
Bonne chance !
Buena suerte!
In bocca al lupo!
がんばろう

If you would like to share your journey, please contact us at i**nfo@ppli.ie** or tag us on social media

Appendix

The following is a list documents to support you in planning and engaging in a virtual exchange.

- Sample email to Board of Management

- Sample email to parents/guardians

- Sample student's form – to assist teachers with partnering students

- Sample code of behaviour for photos and use of mobile devices for students

- Sample permission form for photos and videos for parents

- Things to think about!

- To do list

Sample email to Board of Management

[Date]
Virtual [Language] exchange with [name of school] in [country]

Dear Members of the Board,
[I am/We are] writing to seek formal approval for the above virtual language exchange with [name of partner school, town] in [country].

The aim of the exchange is to support our students' learning of [language],
and increase their cultural awareness.

Students will be partnered with students from [name of partner school, town].
The following members of staff are involved in this exchange:

[List members of staff involved in the exchange]

Please do not hesitate to contact [me/us] if you need further information.
Kind regards,
[Signature]
[Staff name]
[Job title]

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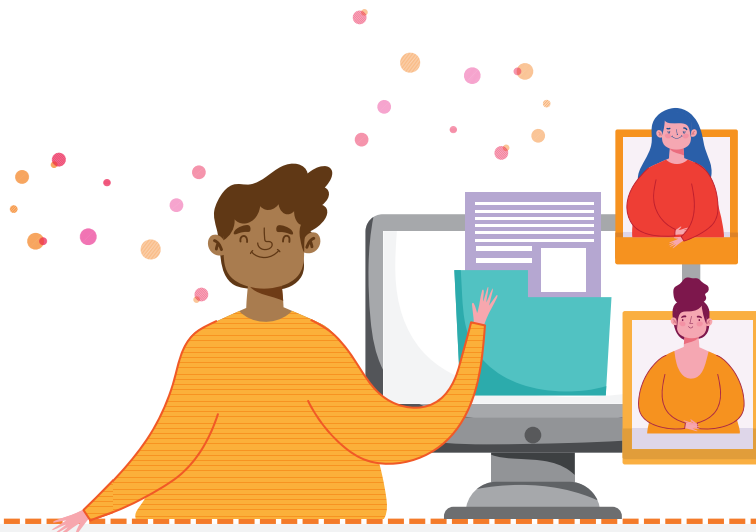
Sample email to parents/guardians

[Date]
Virtual [Language] exchange with [name of school] in [country]

Dear Parents/Guardians,
As you may be aware, the [language] Department in [name of school] is planning to run a virtual language exchange during the 2020/2021 academic year with our partner school: [name of partner school]. This virtual exchange is open to all students studying [language] in [year].

For the virtual exchange, students are assigned a [nationality] exchange student who they will contact by [email/letter/Zoom].

Please note that the exchange student might be a boy or a girl and pairing is done based on likes and dislikes. You cannot choose one or the other.

If you would like your son/daughter to take part in the virtual exchange, please confirm by replying to this email by [time] on [date]. Please include:
1. your son/daughter's name
2. your son/daughter's class
3. your name (Parent/Guardian)

Yours sincerely,
[Signature]
[Name]
[Job title]

Sample student's form (to be adapted in target language)

Surname: ....

First name: ....

Class: ....

Birthday and age: ....

Address: ....

....

....

Email address: ....

Social media: ....

Brothers and sisters: ....

Other people living with you: ....

....

....

Pets: ....

Music you like: ....

....

....

Pastimes: ....

....

....

School subject(s) you like and why: ....

....

....

....

....

Films/series you like: ....

....

....

How do you travel to school? ....

Any allergies/dietary requirements: ....

....

What do you do on a typical weekend? ....

....

....

Three things your friends say about you: ....

....

....

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Sample code of behaviour for photos/videos and use of mobile devices for students

Taking photos/videos and using a mobile device on the virtual [language] exchange
While on the virtual exchange, I [full student name] agree:

- To seek permission from one of the teachers before taking photos/videos.

- Not to take photos/videos of any other students without their consent.

- To delete a photo/video with another student(s) if they ask me to do so.

- To make other students aware if I want to use a photo/video on social media or share it with others. If they refuse, I must not put it up, or share it.

Signature of student

....

Date ....

Below is a form you could have online and share with the teacher working with you

Name of project: ....

Students involved:

Irish side   Target language side

....

....

Tasks to be done...

Assigned to ....

Deadlines ....

How the project will be presented: ....

....

Teachers' notes..

....

....

Project work: Things to think about!

When planning one plus one project:
- Pair the students based on their interest
- Make sure both students understand their role and tasks
- Agree dates and ways to check in with the pair to make sure progress happens
- Agree how the project will be presented

When planning group project:
- Group students based in their interest
- Distribute roles to each member of the group and students should ahve a double in the other team.
- Make sure both students understand their role and tasks
- Agree dates and ways to check in with the pair to make sure progress happens
- Agree how the project will be presented

To do list

- ☐ • Permission from principal
- ☐ • Find a partner school
- ☐ • Set up a common space where teachers can plan together remotely
- ☐ • Permission from or presentation to Board of Management
- ☐ • Presentation to parents
- ☐ • Check the photo/video has been signed
- ☐ • Partner Irish students with exchange students
- ☐ • Plan time frame
- ☐ • Plan introduction
- ☐ • Plan ice breakers
- ☐ • Plan potential joint classes
- ☐ • Plan activities
- ☐ • Plan projects
- ☐ • Plan any family involvement
- ☐ • Create a calendar which both teachers can edit online
- ☐ • Set targets for your exchange
- ☐ • Let PPLI/other schools know how you're getting on via social media
- ☐ • Share your experience with colleagues via our Spotlight on Schools section
  https://ppli.ie/spotlight-on-schools/
- ☐ • Get feedback

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