

## **Learning without borders**

**Virtual exchange is a useful addition to students' stays abroad. The higher education representatives meeting at a conference on 11 December 2019 in Berlin agreed on this. They had been invited by the German Academic Exchange Service (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst - DAAD).**

The number of students going abroad is still too small in many countries of the European Union. Professor Dominic Orr from the university of Nova Gorica in Slovenia mentioned reasons why this is the case. Some students don't have the money. "Others fear to lose their jobs in their home countries. Others again have duties in their families."

So, what should the future be like - considering also that mobility contributes to climate change? The conference participants think that Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) is the answer to this question. It was introduced more than ten years ago and since then an ever-growing number of universities have been using it: students living in different places participate in interactive forms of learning. They discuss online contents and collaborate in scientific projects. Teachers moderate the exchange and provide material on an online-platform.

The programme Erasmus+ supports the virtual exchange. This exchange enables European educational facilities to connect with their partners worldwide. "Thus, it is possible to reach also people who would otherwise hardly have a chance to leave their country to study in Europe" says Dominic Orr. The virtual exchange is not meant to replace the stay abroad but to complement it.

Since 2014 ever more students of the Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences have joined the virtual exchange with partner universities all over the world. COIL is fully integrated in the curriculum of the faculty of economics. Multicultural competence teacher Eva Haug reports, for instance, that the Amsterdam students had used the virtual classroom together with foreign students to develop an export plan for a Chilean wine merchant.

Sarah Guth is president of UNICollaboration, an organisation that wants to advance the virtual exchange in higher education. She demands sustainable funding for COIL and its integration in the internationalisation strategies of the educational facilities. The virtual exchange would strengthen the participants' intercultural competences as well as their media competence and team working abilities - all these are skills in demand on the labour market of the 21st century.

[Text: Josefine Janert; Translation from the German language by Regina Baumert]