

UNICollaboration:
**A Cross-Disciplinary Organisation for Telecollaboration and
Virtual Exchange in Higher Education**

What do we mean by 'telecollaboration' and 'virtual exchange'?

In today's networked and globalized world, the ability to collaborate and communicate online across cultural, national and regional divides is becoming an increasingly important aspect of the global workplace. Graduates of today need to be able to operate in culturally diverse, digitally mediated environments, working both face to face and online with members of other cultures. In this light, it is important that educational institutions offer students online, intercultural collaborative experiences as part of their education, leading them to develop 21st century attitudes and skills such as empathy and tolerance, critical thinking, intercultural awareness and foreign language competences and digital literacy.

A scalable and durable way to offer participative, digitally-enabled collaborative learning to graduates is through telecollaboration or 'Virtual Exchange'. This is an innovative form of online learning which involves engaging learners in interaction and collaboration with classes in distant locations through online communication technologies under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators. In contrast to many forms of online learning which are based on the transfer of information through video lectures and shared files, telecollaboration is based on student-centered, collaborative approaches to learning where knowledge and understanding are constructed through learner-interaction and negotiation.

Background to the Organisation

The members of the [INTENT consortium](#) in collaboration with colleagues working in different disciplines in Higher Education around the globe have come together to launch a cross-disciplinary academic organisation to support telecollaborative practitioners and to promote telecollaboration and virtual exchange in higher education. The organisation was launched at the Second Conference on [Telecollaboration in Higher Education](#) at Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland on 22 April 2016.

Goals of the Organisation

1. To promote the development and integration of telecollaborative research and practice across all disciplines and subject areas in higher education by:
 - holding a bi-annual conference on telecollaborative research and practice
 - establishing a regular publication on telecollaborative research across academic disciplines
 - organising regional training workshops and online training events on telecollaboration and virtual exchange
 - providing training and support for doctoral and post-doctoral research in telecollaboration

- maintaining and promoting the Organisation's online platform (www.unicollaboration.org) as a central hub for telecollaborative practice.
2. To actively engage in awareness raising of Telecollaboration and Virtual Exchange at institutional and policy making level by:
- supporting members interested in preparing project proposals and starting telecollaborative initiatives
 - collaborating with other academic organisations related to mobility, education etc.
 - coordinating with different telecollaborative networks across the globe common policies and approaches to developing telecollaboration and virtual exchange
 - taking up contact with policy making bodies at national and international level.

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