



Virtual Exchange Consultancy

Request for Proposals (RFP)

We are seeking an adviser and research partner to support three new ACU 'virtual exchange' events July-August 2020, assessing the formats, methods and best practice for creating inter-cultural and interdisciplinary learning in virtual forums.

Application closing date 1 June 2020
Duration of study 11 June 2020 – 30 September 2020

About the project

The ACU is seeking a consultant(s) to advise the ACU on a series of 'virtual exchange' projects, and to produce a high-quality report and toolkit with practical recommendations for future design. The consultancy will accompany three virtual events that the ACU is piloting between July and August 2020.

'Virtual exchange' is defined as "the engagement of groups of learners in online intercultural interactions and collaboration projects with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programmes." (O'Dowd, 2018)ⁱ

The ACU has long been committed to delivering innovative, experiential, collaborative, cross-curricular intercultural learning experiences through its Summer Schools and student leadership programmes. It is extending this work through online platforms, bringing together students and staff from its broad and diverse Commonwealth network virtually. As with face-to-face equivalents, each virtual event has unique learning objectives, and aims to use innovative programme design to achieve these.

The consultant(s) will guide the design, technology, implementation and efficacy of three new virtual exchange events and evaluation methods. The report will evaluate the trialled approaches and their efficacy, making recommendations for effective methods for future events. A separate toolkit will summarise practical tools and methods for effective virtual exchange activities in other higher education settings.

The report will inform future ACU virtual exchange activities, and the toolkit will be shared with the ACU network of member universities to help inform new ways of working. The report and the toolkit should be delivered by 30 September 2020.

The consultancy

The consultant(s) will be experts in international online pedagogy and will advise the ACU on three live events, advising on methods, structure, technology, implementation and evaluation of three new virtual exchange events. The evaluation will assess the efficacy of these virtual exchange programmes in building digital literacies, intercultural awareness and specific further learning objectives specific to each event. It will appraise the use of technology for access and inclusion in a Commonwealth context. It will make recommendations for future design of virtual exchange activities. The research design and outputs are expected to include:

1. **Advice to ACU Programme leads:** provide practical advice to ACU programme leads on the design of three virtual exchange activities organised by the ACU between July and August 2020.
2. **Desk Research:** a review of published research on virtual exchange (to include collaborative online learning, online intercultural exchange and related definitions).
3. **Action research:** to analyse the design, implementation and efficacy of the three virtual exchange activities.
4. **Analysis and Conclusions Report:** write a report summarising the analysis of the three virtual exchange activities, recommendations for design principles for future ACU events.
5. **Toolkit:** development of a toolkit with practical suggestions for HE professionals seeking to design and run virtual exchange activities.

The researchers will be expected to work alongside ACU staff to develop the methodology required.

Timeline

11-18 June	Development of methodology and scope of works with ACU
June - August	Advice and contribution to the design of virtual exchange activities, including supporting the development of evaluation framework for each event
1 July – 14 August	Observation of three virtual exchange events <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Researcher sandpit (July (July date tbc – 0.5 days)- Virtual Summer School (August (3-5th, 14th)- Student leadership summit (1 day, scheduling tbc)
4 September	Draft analysis and recommendations presented
11 September	Comments received
30 September	Final Report and toolkit submitted

Budget

The budget is £10,000, applicants must provide a breakdown of costings as part of their application.

Qualifications and experience required

The ACU is looking to appoint a research partner with the following qualities:

- Strong educational online pedagogical research portfolio, evidenced by previous projects and consultancies
- Knowledge and expertise of 'virtual exchange' or corollary online intercultural educational activities
- Expertise in conducting action research
- Experience of working in a diverse international context, with evidence of understanding the practical challenges and opportunities this
- Real understanding of the Virtual Exchange Project brief
- Offering good value for money
- Capacity to deliver within an agreed timeframe.

Collaborative research teams representing institutions from two or more countries, would be welcomed. The final methodology used for this research project will be agreed by the appointed researchers in consultation with the ACU.

How to apply

Interested consultants are requested to respond with details of relevant experience and proposed approach. All proposals received should include:

- Evidence of relevant knowledge and experience
- Details of approach and methodology to be used
- Qualifications / experience of the team members who will be involved in this project (CVs)
- Timescale
- Costing plan.

Please submit your response no later than **1700** via e-mail to membership@acu.ac.uk **BST on 1 June 2020** with the title '**RFP - Virtual Exchange Research Project**'.

We will respond to successful applicants by 8 June 2020.

ⁱ O'Dowd, R. (2018). From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: state-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward. *Journal of Virtual Exchange*, 1, 1-23. Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.ive.1>