



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



UNIVERSITY OF  
CANTERBURY

*Te Whare Wānanga o Waitaha*  
CHRISTCHURCH NEW ZEALAND

***The (different) news from VISCED:  
Virtual Schooling for all ages  
And what universities can learn from that***

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## Paul Bacsich - projects

- *Former Research Director, Re.ViCa – virtual campuses (tertiary)*
- Project Manager, VISCED – Virtual Schools and Colleges (pre-tertiary)
- Benchmarking Consultant, Higher Education Academy, Wales and Sweden
- Project Manager, POERUP – national policies for OER uptake – and LUOERL
- Other projects on retention, funding etc
- Canterbury Fellow, College of Education

# *VISCED – Virtual Schools and Colleges for Teenagers and Young Adults*



- **Funded under EU LLP KA3 ICT**
- January 2011 to December 2012 inclusive
- Lambrakis, [Sero](#), ATiT, MENON, EFQUEL etc
- Leverages on Re.ViCa, and a basis for POERUP

# *What is a virtual school?*

- An institution that teaches courses entirely or primarily through distance online methods
- With courses which are similar (in purpose and outcome) to those normally taken by school-age children: ISCED 2 and 3
  - lower/upper secondary – junior/senior high
- *Our age focus (in funding terms) is 14-21*
- Making it real: [So that's Interhigh](#) – video

## *World tour on virtual schools (in progress – 6 months to go)*

- Virtual schools - and virtual schooling - exist in profusion in US (500?) and Canada (50?)
- Also in **Australia** and **New Zealand** (Te Kura)
- **“Thought” to be few and/or to have died out in Europe – NOT TRUE (50 or more)**
  - **And a network of nearly 50 in Finland**
- Also in Latin America; but less visible in Caribbean and Oceania
- Asia much less clear to us. **Help wanted now!**

# *Three virtual schools to ponder*



- Sofia Distans – Sweden (more asynch)
  - [http://www.virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Sofia\\_Distans\\_undervisning](http://www.virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Sofia_Distans_undervisning) - started for diplomats' kids
  - Only 2 more in Sweden
- Interhigh – Wales (more synch) (10 in UK)
  - <http://www.virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/InterHigh>
- Escola MoveI – Portugal
  - [http://virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Escola\\_MoveI](http://virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Escola_MoveI) (being updated)
  - Any more in Portugal? Why not?

## *Virtual schools for adults*

- Many virtual schools in US and some in Europe also cater for adults (e.g. UK, Finland)
- This is so that adults can get school-leaving qualifications to make them suitable to enter professions or study at university
- In the UK there are around 10 providers of online "GCSE" (school leaving) and "A levels" (uni entrance), mainly but not wholly for 21+

# *Cost-effectiveness*

- A study for Sero by George Watley of University of Northampton claims, that for England:
  - “people earning a [university entrance] qualification exclusively through distance learning could do so at a cost between 9 and 38 percent of school-based learning, a potential saving of 62 to 91 percent in comparison to current funding given to traditional schools!”
- This caused substantial discussion at the European Virtual Schools Colloquium in Sheffield!
- Some backing for the general thrust of these figures from other countries (US, Scotland, India, etc)



# *Recommendations – for school-age children*

- Virtual schools have been shown to be effective and no more costly than f2f schools
- Yet in most EU countries virtual schools are rare
  - Most common in countries with lighter regulation
- So... Governments should ensure that their regulations for schools do not explicitly or implicitly discriminate against virtual schools
  - In particular, consider their restrictive approach to “home education” (e.g. Germany, Netherlands, ...)
  - Virtual schools are NOT home education, they are schools (just as open universities are universities)

## *More interesting – recommendations for adults*

- Universities and their researchers (us/you) should consider long and hard why virtual schools in EU have been set up easily and cheaply in technopedagogic terms, yet universities in EU mostly struggle to deliver substantial distance learning and insist on doing large numbers of pilots and studies before making choices
- Governments should reverse their neglect of non-university education for adults and in particular foster the development of adult-focused online teaching of school-leaving qualifications

# *Implications for universities and governments*

- The various “fudges” to allow older adults to enter university without adequate qualifications could then be swept away
- All students could then enter university with relevant and up to date school-leaving qualifications
- Drop-out would be reduced, thus retention improved
- Quality of graduates would increase (e.g higher skill for “critical thinking”) – NB [Academically Adrift](#)
- Perhaps in some countries overall course length at university could then be reduced?

## *Conclusions as slogans*

- “Return to study” gives you a tradeable qualification for the first time
- *Virtual college first, then to virtual university*
- Many other advantages, but one usually does not mention “system costs” and “non-statal providers” to an EU academic audience...
- *Maybe I had better leave the room now!*

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