

# International Advisory Committee – Report of Third Meeting



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## International Advisory Committee

### Minutes of third meeting

Date: 23 May 2012

Location: Sheffield, UK

#### 1 Attendance

Attendee name	Organisation	Country
Paul Bacsich	Sero	N/A - VISCED Partner
Nikki Cortoos	ATiT	N/A - VISCED Partner
Fernando Albuquerque Costa	Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa	<b>Portugal</b>
Jacqueline Daniell	InterHigh	<b>UK/Wales</b>
Rob Darrow	iNACOL	<b>USA</b>
Nicola Fox	Loughborough College (CONNECT)	<b>UK/England</b>
Els Janssens	Bednet	<b>Belgium</b>
Ronny Karlsson	Sofia Distans	<b>Sweden</b>
Joasia van Kooten	ATiT	N/A - VISCED Partner
Veera Korelskaja-Novikova	Audentes Gymnasium	<b>Estonia</b>
Åke Lindgren	Värmdo Distans	<b>Sweden</b>
Maggie McPherson	University of Leeds	N/A - VISCED Partner
Helle Mathiasen	Aarhus	<b>Denmark</b>
Jeanine Nieuwenhuis	Wereldschool	<b>Netherlands</b>
Susan Patrick	iNACOL	<b>USA</b>

Giles Pepler	Sero	N/A - VISCED Partner
Barry Phillips	Sero	N/A - VISCED Partner
Daniela Proli	MENON/Scienter	N/A - VISCED Partner
Sally Reynolds	ATiT	N/A - VISCED Partner
David Rose	iScoil	<b>Ireland</b>
Merja Sjöblom	TIEKE	N/A - VISCED Partner
Elsebeth Sorensen	Aarhus	N/A - VISCED Partner
Matteo Uggeri	METID	<b>Italy</b>
Matthew Wicks	iNACOL	<b>USA</b>
Nikos Zygouritsas	Lambrakis	N/A - VISCED Partner

## 2 Apologies, introduction and background

### 2.1 Apologies

Apologies have been received from Michelle Selinger (CISCO / **UK**) and Vanessa Pittard (DfE / **UK - England**).

### 2.2 Introduction and background

- **Paul Bacsich** introduced the meeting and welcomed the attendees. He explained to new IAC members the purpose and modus operandi of the group and noted that VISCED was particularly pleased to have so many Virtual Schools and Colleges represented – this will give us real value in triangulating theory-practice-policy.
- **Paul Bacsich** noted that we have identified that the IAC has struggled to recruit sufficient representatives from either industry or Ministries (or their agencies).
- Instability amongst Ministries (Governments have changed regularly in Europe over the last 4 years and there have been major reshuffles and reductions of Ministry staff) has quite possibly added significant value to a well-functioning IAC – it has a stability which can take a longitudinal view and add significant value.
- **Paul Bacsich** asked all IAC members (but particularly the new ones) to suggest additional members who they consider will broaden and deepen the understanding of the group.
- **Paul Bacsich** gave a résumé of the Minutes of the previous IAC.
- The final IAC meeting (to which all present were invited) would take place in Berlin at the end of November.

## 3 Critical Success Factors

**Paul Bacsich** led a discussion based on selected Critical Success Factors from the Re.ViCa scheme with the wording adjusted to the virtual schools context.

### 3.1 Usability

- **Matthew Wicks:** In the early days of setting up Virtual Schools, usability is sometimes not quite so crucial since the ‘early adopters’ are often willing to work around problems – these students are often excited by the novelty factor and their enthusiasm (and sometimes a more sophisticated understanding of technology) carries them through.
- This view was supported by **Jacqueline Daniell, Veera Korelskaja-Novikova** and **Nicola Fox**. **Nicola Fox** stated that students adapted to the new technologies and **Jacqueline Daniell** added that when their second school opened there were heightened expectations and usability became more important.

### 3.2 Relationship Management - upwards

- **David Rose:** iScoil had identified key Government stakeholders and others and established a Governing Body to advise and support the development of the school – this had proved valuable.
- **Jeanine Nieuwenhuis:** There are different relationships which need to be managed – private Schools also have to manage the relationships with investors and between investors and educators, governments, parents etc. Thus there is a need to find a balance between ‘Quality’ and ‘Profit’ .
- **Els Janssens:** For Bednet it was valuable that they establish a national partnership of ‘hospital schools’ to act as an advisory/pressure group on the Flanders Government. This has been successful and the next step is to organise ‘hospital schools’ across Europe to act as an advisory/ pressure group for regional, national Governments and the EC.
- **Veera Korelskaja-Novikova:** It was necessary to form an association of Private Schools in Estonia ‘just to be heard’.
- **Matthew Wicks:** It remains necessary to identify and build relationships with sympathetic and knowledgeable individuals in ministries and their agencies.

### 3.3 Training

- **Matteo Uggeri:** Teachers are asking for training and help but it is increasingly difficult for the government (and others) to provide this so there is a need for organisations to develop and nurture peer support amongst teaching staff.
- **Fernando Costa** supported this view but added that teachers needed the time to learn on the job. All of the institutions teachers now work all from the same room and can learn from/support each other; “how do you do that?”, “with which materials?”, “what are the platforms?”, “how do you solve the problems?”
- It was generally agreed that ‘good teachers’ are more important than ‘good technologists’. These teachers can then lead and support other staff.
- **Maggie McPherson:** Teachers need to learn to ‘evolve with the technology’ because of the constant need for upskilling and updating of skills as new technologies and pedagogies surface.
- **Veera Korelskaja-Novikova:** The school hired a Learning Technology specialist who supported the teachers on an individual basis. But it is essential that teachers understand what it is like to be a virtual learner.
- **Matteo Uggeri:** A technical support help-desk has been important in supporting teachers.
- **Merja Sjöblom:** Good pedagogical support is more important than technical support – institutions should encourage peer learning, identify innovative teachers who can support colleagues.
- **Veera Korelskaja-Novikova:** 2 or 3 innovative teachers can be sufficient to lead a school.

- **Jacqueline Daniell:** When the school is tendering for local government contracts the local authority always want to see ‘live lessons’.
- **Susan Patrick:** Some iNACOL schools have 1,000 teachers and the best hire good teachers first and foremost – they then give these the skills to teach online. Refer to the iNACOL National Quality Standards. Kerry Rice and Lisa Dawley from Boise State University have done some useful work in this field (Going Virtual <http://edtech.boisestate.edu/goingvirtual/goingvirtual3.pdf>). Average years of experience of online teachers is 8 years.
- **Barry Phillips:** The example of the BSDE would imply that good (or at least efficient) teachers can be ‘made’ since they do not get to recruit the best so they have to work with those who are allocated to them by the state. They seem to use a combination of pressure and support.
- **Jeanine Nieuwenhuis:** Why can’t Higher Education Institutions put pressure on teachers to improve the way that schools do?
- **Matteo Uggeri:** Teachers in HEIs have a great deal of power.
- **Paul Bacsich:** Talent is mobile. There is a possible escape into research.
- **Jeanine Nieuwenhuis:** The school coerced teachers to use the new system by locating all important information there. The only way teachers could access it was to use the system.

### 3.4 Leadership

**Paul Bacsich:** Are the schools who ‘get it’ led by a Head who also understands? There was general agreement amongst the IAC that ‘leadership’ is a crucial Critical Success Factor.

### 3.5 Student help

- **Jacqueline Daniell:** It is important. When a school starts it has no idea what technologies the students will bring with them for their studies – Apple, Microsoft, OS etc. This was problematic but now they can log in remotely and demonstrate what the students need to do. Generally they now have to ‘support everything’.
- **Jeanine Nieuwenhuis:** The school recommends that all students have Microsoft – and, if not, they will work-around. There were problems with proprietary and other materials which only work with Microsoft.
- The meeting noted the growth on Bring Your Own Devices and the possibilities and challenges this brings. Increasingly this will encompass mobile and handheld devices – although there is a need to draw the line somewhere at any point in time.
- **Paul Bacsich:** The difference between Virtual and Blended learning is that it is much more problematic if the technology fails – where is the fall-back?
- **Matthew Wicks:** Good teachers at Virtual Schools need to be flexible (and not panic).

### 3.5 Market research

- **Sally Reynolds:** iScoil and Bednet have both made their own projections of pupils’ numbers and demographics. There is often too little tracking of these students.
- **Susan Patrick:** Recommends that virtual schools keep records of waiting lists and oversubscriptions so that this evidence can be used in discussions with funders.
- **Jacqueline Daniell:** If we could do more market research we are sure that we could expand quite significantly since the demand appears to be there.

- **Jeanine Nieuwenhuis:** Wereldschool is not allowed in Holland – so some pupils are registered with ‘host’ schools and take supplementary studies from Wereldschool.
- **Veera Korelskaja-Novikova:** In Estonia children have to be of a certain age before they are legally permitted to enrol at a virtual school.
- **Paul Bacsich:** It appears that countries’ attitudes towards virtual schooling may be classified as those where the focus is almost solely on ‘needy’ or in need of alternative provision (i.e. all who may be excluded or disadvantaged through the nature of ‘fixed schooling’ – this could include travellers, expatriates and children of diplomats, the sick, teenage mothers etc – but not exclusively those suffering some kind of deprivation) and those countries (such as Finland) where in theory any student could enrol at a virtual school.
- **Susan Patrick:** The US is a useful example of the heterogeneity which develops in a relatively unconstrained market. The 50 states featured on the iNACOL map represent 50 different models – although with some shared characteristics.

## 4 Reaching out to policy makers

- **Paul Bacsich** re-emphasised that we need IAC members to put forward policymaker suggestions.
- **Barry Phillips** introduced the work which has taken place thus far – namely the Interim Policy Recommendations. BP explained that the intention is not to create more regulations but to work towards a position whereby virtual school students and virtual schools are not disadvantaged by comparison with bricks and mortar schools. Where possible the hope is that this can be achieved through the removal of legislative or administrative barriers.
- **Barry Phillips** explained that the policy recommendations are being made on two levels: Firstly on an EU wide level (to the Commission) and secondly on an individual national level (to national Governments and/or their agencies). The way we have been doing this is to collect and develop policy recommendations firstly at the national level and then see which apply across the EU. And also to identify the tensions between national policies and interests and EU wide policies and interests. It was also noted that national policy priorities change regularly and in recent years national Governments and their policies have changed with increasing frequency.
- **Barry Phillips** asked each IAC member for a suggestion of how virtual schooling in particular might support any single Government policy in their home country.
- **Susan Patrick:** In the US Pres. Obama outlined 4 priorities that they have clearly outlined which all relate to ‘world class knowledge and skills ‘ and improved academic standards; highly effective teachers for every student, performance based assessments, college and career readiness. Virtual schooling has the potential to support all of these but ‘very clearly, access to highly effective teachers is directly related’.
- **David Rose:** In Ireland there are perhaps two relevant key policy objectives: One is to embed ICT more deeply into the schools curriculum (this is related to Ireland’s aspiration to build on its foundation as an IT Hub) and the other is the roll-out of high speed 100 Mb broadband to every school. So virtual schooling can support both of these.
- **David Rose:** Virtual schooling can also support the push towards more ‘blended learning’ in bricks and mortar schools.

- **Susan Patrick:** In the US also the push for broadband is often paired with the drive towards ICT enabled schools and learners. Telemedicine, e-Learning and e-Government are seen as the drivers of broadband uptake and wider use of technology for both societal good and economic development.
- Several IAC members noted that Governments have supported, promoted, exploited online education in their attempts to promote broadband uptake across the population. The situation is similar to that for telemedicine.
- **Fernando Costa:** Based on the experience of Escola Móvel, the Ministry of Education is supporting the expansion to support other target groups through this model. The research being carried out by VISCED could be 'crucial' to advise this development. Escola Movel started as a project to support a small group of traveller students but was then expanded. The idea now is to expand again to use this kind of 'distance learning' as another offer for students. New legislation is currently being drawn up to make this possible so input from VISCED would help the Portuguese MoE.
- **Fernando Costa:** In Portugal there have also been other big initiatives at secondary school level which are now ceased due to funding restrictions. One idea is to bring this together with Escola Movel to develop a platform for armed forces (naval) professionals around the world.
- **Veera Korelskaja-Novikova:** Estonia is trying to develop/find its own Nokia. Estonia is a very e-enabled society with a very supportive Government. Virtual schooling can help push the e-agenda in support of many government policy priorities in the development of Estonia's Information Society.
- **Åke Lindgren:** In rural areas the schools find it difficult to find teachers particularly of 'niche' subjects such as Italian. The authorities have now realised that in order to supply teachers of foreign languages to students, virtual schooling is the only answer.
- **Helle Mathiasen:** The Danish Government has recently invested a large sum of money into deploying ICT to support the Primary School curriculum and there are a number of projects currently being undertaken – virtual schooling would add to the knowledge gained. The phrase 'virtual school' would not be used – in Denmark they would speak of 'schools where they mix different kinds of learning'.
- **Susan Patrick:** iNACOL have already commissioned research into the issue of communications with the population at large in the US. "The results are pretty startling. The term Virtual School is toxic with people. They felt like their kid was being isolated". People were much more comfortable with the term 'online learning' as long as it was described as 'a teacher' with 'personalisation' with students using 'digital tools and resources'. The term 'blended' was also perceived positively when set against the context of the three qualifying phrases above. The term 'hybrid learning' was unpopular.
- **Barry Phillips:** Are there any examples of 'virtual schooling' for young people in prison?
- **Susan Patrick:** There are examples in the US (see [http://virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Cook\\_County\\_Sheriff%27s\\_Department\\_Virtual\\_High\\_School](http://virtualcampuses.eu/index.php/Cook_County_Sheriff%27s_Department_Virtual_High_School)).
- **Daniela Proli:** There is also an example in Italy. Alessandra (Tomasini of METID?) has been involved with this.
- **Sally Reynolds:** There may also be a radio school for offenders (in Italy).
- **Veera Korelskaja-Novikova:** There was a case where an Estonian national in prison (in Belgium?) joined the Audentes virtual school programme but could not continue because of problems getting Internet access in prison. Audentes is hoping that in the future there can be some agreement across the EU.
- **Barry Phillips:** This is a common problem although clearly not insurmountable since some prisons do allow access – it seems to be at the Prison Governors discretion and not directly related to the security category of the prison.
- **Barry Phillips:** One of the problems is that this often falls between Ministries of Education and Justice. VISCED needs to consider Justice Ministries etc.

- **Jeanine Nieuwenhuis** has examples of where prisoners attend ‘schools’ in prison and are allowed to access the virtual school programme. VISCED will follow this up with JM.
- **Barry Phillips** asked the IAC members for suggestions of one agency, body, company or individual in their own country which has influence on policy.
- **Nikos Zygoritsas**: In Greece things are still very centralised and everything goes through the Ministry. However, recent turmoil means that the situation is less than clear. There is though a new Institute of Educational Policy although it is still settling down after wholesale change of staff. VISCED should make contact directly with the Universities which have responsibility for educational technology and teacher training. These have the responsibility for implementing new technologies and teacher training in schools.
- **Sally Reynolds**: We already have a number of suggestions with regards to Ministries.
- **Els Janssens**: Bednet and other hospital schools in Belgium formed an alliance. Finding and building a relationship with the ‘right’ person in the Ministries is crucial.
- Generally it was felt that there is value in virtual schools and colleges looking to virtual schooling providers which have shared/common interests – even down to the granularity of those supporting students with specific illnesses.
- **Sally Reynolds**: VISCED should draft a check-list of ‘influencers’ and circulate this.
- **Merja Sjöblom**: Pasi Sahlberg Finnish education expert and advisor to the Ministry of education and Culture. MS will contact him (<http://www.pasisahlberg.com/>).
- **Nicola Fox**: Connections provide referrals and support etc. Also the English Institute of Sport.
- **Paul Bacsich**: What about regional NHS bodies?
- The Swedish members noted that E-learning is very restricted in Sweden – limited by legislation to those who are studying abroad. This is through the mission of the National Board of Education. Things are changing though and there is hope that students living in Sweden will soon be able to access such online learning.
- **Veera Korelskaja-Novikova**: There may be some people in Universities and could possibly identify and share the names. It is difficult because of the lack of legislation to permit ‘virtual schools’. The lack of legislation may be a good thing because it gives the school a free-hand as long as the students are doing well. Legislation *may* be restrictive. There may be more support for ‘distance learning’.
- **Helle Mathiasen** has names of contacts in Min of Education and Ministry Of Science and Higher Education and will be happy to share them.
- **Daniela Proli** added that MENON/Scienter already had some names but **Claudio Dondi** has more contacts. There is a project working actively to combat drop-out and these may be relevant – basically departments within the agencies. Individuals in the Agency for School Autonomy may be most relevant.
- **Els Janssens** recommends the same contact we already have.
- **Jacqueline Daniell** suggested Local Authority Directors Of Education in both England and Wales – she has a database of these and could perhaps share. She also has a database of Head Teachers of all Independent Schools.
- **Jeanine Nieuwenhuis** has contacts with the Dept of Education and has a very good contact within the agency for Inspection – in Holland there is a ‘foreign section’ (with responsibility for Dutch education overseas – to include virtual schools). These people have been very supportive but there is a fear of anything which isn’t a ‘normal school’.
- **David Rose** suggested Dr Peter Archer (Director of Education Research Centre in Dublin – the Government’s think-tank) who has been very supportive of iScoil and John Walsh (Ministers Special

Advisor) – David can share contacts with us. There may be some others involved in ICT policies who may be of use.

- **Sally Reynolds:** Jerome Morrissey?
- **Giles Pepler** and the plenary discussed the issue of the toxicity of the term ‘virtual schools’ and the need for a better description.
- **Jacqueline Daniell:** The organisers of the Westminster Forum.
- **Paul Bacsich:** The Foreign School Regulatory Agency in Germany – VISCED should look to these and for analogous agencies in other countries. We need to ask foreign schools.

## 5 Details of the 4th and final IAC meeting

- **Paul Bacsich:** This would normally be at/before EDUCA in Berlin. However, we should be aware that there will (as ever) be competition for IAC members’ times at such an event. VISCED is determined that actual Virtual Schools representatives will be at this meeting. PB: asked for views of all present IAC members with regards where and when would be most appropriate for the face-to-face meeting and opinions on the IAC working ‘virtually’ to review draft reports (this would not be instead of the face-to-face meeting).
- **Maggie McPherson:** Does VISCED still want ‘new’ virtual schools to be put forward?
- **Paul Bacsich:** PB: Definitely. VISCED encourages all new schools and all comments on existing text. VISCED would also like more video and audio to make the text ‘come alive’. This may be of interest as student related projects/input.
- **Giles Pepler:** We are looking at the Autumn – mid Oct to end Nov – as the time window for the face-to-face IAC.
- **Sally Reynolds** asked which conferences IAC members present would be attending? Would anyone be at EDUCA, European Schoolnet, EDEN Open Classroom? No definite responses. The Hospital Schooling Conference? There were no definite responses.
- **Els Janssens:** The content of the Hospital School Conference does not look appropriate for the VISCED IAC.
- **Sally Reynolds:** VISCED is keen on the face-to-face element not least because it gives virtual school practitioners to come together and network.
- **Paul Bacsich:** The date will be fixed and circulated soon. **(Post-meeting note: It is Wednesday 28 November – all morning, with the IAC dinner the evening before. The location will be notified shortly, but will be near Online Educa in Berlin, which starts on the evening of Wednesday 28 November and runs until Friday.)**

## 6 Any other business

There was no other business. **Paul Bacsich** thanked all of the IAC members – particularly those from schools and colleges. VISCED partners look forward to continuing this very rewarding collaboration.