

How Erasmus+ can contribute to the National Skills Strategy

Léargas, National Agency for Erasmus+

Introduction

This document briefly outlines the role of Léargas as an agency of the Department of Education and Skills. It then provides an overview of Erasmus+ and follows with a description of the ways in which the programme might be used in Ireland in the coming years to contribute to the successful implementation in Ireland of the National Skills Strategy.

Léargas

In 1986, Léargas was established to support international exchange and collaboration in the youth sector, mainly through the medium of European Commission-funded education and training programmes.

In the succeeding years, Léargas broadened its range from the youth sector to include formal and non-formal education and training. Léargas has recently managed the Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action programmes and now manages Erasmus+ in the following fields/sectors:

- Adult Education
- School Education
- Vocational Education and Training
- Youth and Community work.

Erasmus+ in the Higher Education sector is managed by the HEA.

Léargas is a not-for-profit organisation (CHY 8317), wholly owned by the Department of Education and Skills, and its Board is appointed by the Minister. The [National Centre for Guidance in Education](#) operates under the aegis of Léargas.

For more information, see www.leargas.ie

Erasmus+

A 'global' programme

With the introduction of the Erasmus+ programme in 2014, the European Commission integrated seven pre-existing programmes (including the Lifelong Learning Programme and the Youth in Action programme) into one standardised 'global' programme to address intercultural competency in the fields of Education, Training and Youth. Erasmus+ will run until 2020 in all the EU member states

plus the EFTA countries (Liechtenstein, Norway, Iceland), Turkey and Macedonia. The total budget for the programme will be €14.7 billion and it's estimated that four million Europeans will benefit from the programme during its lifecycle. This could be by working, studying, volunteering, training, or job shadowing in another country, or by availing of improvements in education and training brought about through exchange of expertise across Europe.

Programme objectives

The ultimate aims of Erasmus+ are to modernise teaching and learning across Europe, to improve key competences and skills, and to increase cooperation within and between the education and employment sectors, in order to bring about a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy by 2020 for all of Europe's citizens.

To achieve these aims, Erasmus+ provides funding to public or private organisations active in the fields of adult education, higher education, school education, sport, vocational education and training, and youth work to carry out projects that encourage European exchange, co-operation and learning.

In more detail, the objectives of the Erasmus+ programme are:

1. To foster participation in learning mobility to improve the level of key competences and skills.
2. To foster the cross-sectoral dimension of transnational and international co-operation between organisations, the co-operation between the world of education, training and youth sector and the world of work, as well as quality improvement, co-operation, innovation and internationalisation at the level of educational institutions and in youth work.
3. To enhance the international dimension of education, training and youth activities and the role of youth workers and organisations as support structures for young people by encouraging mobility and co-operation projects with Partner Countries.
4. To foster participation of people with special needs or fewer opportunities in the programme.
5. To foster improvement of the teaching and learning of languages, promotion of the Union's broad linguistic diversity and intellectual awareness.
6. To complement policy reforms at local, regional and national level and support the development of knowledge and evidence-based youth policy as well as the recognition of non-formal and informal learning, notably through enhanced policy co-operation.
7. To provide efficient, effective and compliant programme management.

Programme structure

Structurally, Erasmus+ is divided according to two categories; the sector/field that the project will target (adult education, school education, vocational education and training, youth work, etc.), and the type of project proposed. There are three main project types, known in Erasmus+ parlance as ‘Key Actions’:

<p>KA 1: Learning mobility of individuals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ <i>Staff mobility, in particular for teachers, trainers, school leaders and youth workers</i> ⇒ <i>Mobility for students in higher education and in vocational education and training</i> ⇒ <i>Youth volunteering and youth exchanges</i> ⇒ Master degree scheme ⇒ Mobility for higher education for EU and non-EU beneficiaries 	<p>KA2: Cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ <i>Strategic Partnerships between education, training and/or youth organisations and other relevant actors</i> ⇒ IT-Platforms including <i>EYP, eTwinning</i> and <i>EPALE</i> ⇒ Large-scale partnerships between education and training establishments and business: Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills alliances ⇒ Cooperation with Partner Countries 	<p>KA 3: Support for policy reform</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ⇒ Open method of Coordination ⇒ EU tools: <i>dissemination and exploitation</i> ⇒ <i>Policy dialogue with stakeholders</i>, non-EU countries and international organisations ⇒ Large scale prospective initiatives
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Activities highlighted in *red italic* are managed in Ireland by Léargas.

Key Action 1

Key Action 1, or KA1, is for projects that focus on ‘Learning mobility of individuals’. ‘Mobility’ here simply means the act of physically moving from one country to another, so this action is for any project where the principal activity is learners or staff travelling to another country for a period of learning or professional experience.

Key Action 2

Key Action 2 (KA2) is for projects where the main activity is ‘Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices’. Léargas manages the ‘Strategic Partnerships’ element of this action, which involves organisations in different counties working together on projects in areas of joint interest. These projects can be small or large scale, and involve organisations from the same or different sectors. However all projects should support the ‘development, transfer and/or implementation of innovative practices as well as the implementation of joint initiatives promoting cooperation, peer learning and exchanges of experience at European level’¹.

Note that under Key Action 2, there are also large-scale partnerships—Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances—which are managed centrally in Brussels by the Executive Agency.

Key Action 3

The relevant activity that’s managed by Léargas under Key Action 3 (KA3), ‘Support for policy reform’, is open only to the youth sector and is for projects that support dialogue between young

¹ See the [Erasmus+ Programme Guide](#)

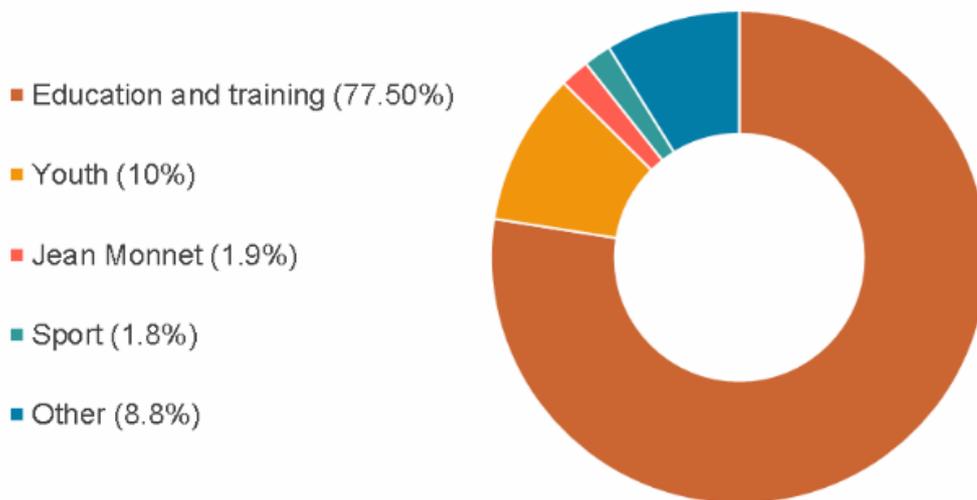
people and policy makers. Unlike the other Key Actions, which require the participation of partners from other countries, KA3 projects can take place at national as well as transnational level.

In addition, large-scale initiatives, managed centrally in Brussels, are open to organisations interested in supporting policy reform targeted at the achievement of the goals of the European policy agendas, for example, Europe 2020 and ET2020.

Programme funding

Erasmus+ will provide **€14.7b** funding over the seven years it runs, from 2014 to 2020; over 77% of this funding will be allocated to education and training:

Erasmus+ budget 14.7 billion euros



In all, it's expected that close to **€170 million** can come into Ireland over the lifetime of the programme. There is potential also for further funding to be awarded to those who participate in Knowledge Alliances and Sector Skills Alliances.

In 2014, Léargas funded 164 projects under Erasmus+, and distributed close to €10 million in project finance. In 2015, with the final round of funding –in the Youth sector— not awarded yet and with close to 50 applications received, Léargas has already funded 132 projects and expects that over €10 million will be awarded in total.

Contribution of Erasmus+ to the National Skills Strategy

Who can benefit

In terms of those who are the focus of the National Skills Strategy (either as the implementers of the strategy or the beneficiaries of it), the following are examples of those who can take part in and benefit from Erasmus+:

- Trainees, apprentices, learners
- Trainers and educators
- ETB key staff
- Local employers
- Apprenticeship Council
- Regional skills fora
- SOLAS
- youth and community groups

How can they benefit

Here are some examples of how the different Key Actions of Erasmus+ might be exploited by those involved in the VET, FET and youth and community sectors.

Key Action 1

Staff/trainers can use KA1 funding to explore practice, develop skills, be introduced to new methodologies, and exchange practice. Trainees/apprentices can get the opportunity to practice skills in a realistic work setting in another country while also developing language skills etc. Funding under this action can support developments in **Theme 01 – Developing Relevant Skills**, particularly in the areas of Lifelong Learning; Real world experiences for learners; and developing Skills Infrastructures.

Key Action 2

Strategic Partnerships

Agencies such as SOLAS, the ETBs, training providers, Regional Skills Fora, and enterprises can take part in Strategic Partnerships to share experience or policy perspectives or to develop new approaches or methodologies in training. The projects can be of one-, two-, or three-years duration with funding of up to €450,000 depending on scope and duration. Strategic Partnerships can be (and are encouraged to be) cross-sectoral and there is potential within this key action to enable developments under **Theme 02 Activating Skills Supply** and **Theme 03 Effective Use of Skills**.

Sector Skills Alliances

These aim to tackle vocational skills gaps, by:

- identifying sector-specific labour market needs and demand for new skills with regard to one or more occupational profiles (demand side)
- enhancing the responsiveness of initial and continuing VET systems to sector-specific labour market needs (supply side).

Up to €0.5m in funding is available for two- to three-year demand-oriented projects. Up to €1.5m funding is available for three-year supply-oriented projects. These projects, which are managed by

the Commission's Executive Agency in Brussels, are oriented at a minimum of two partner institutions and must operate across at least 12 programme countries. In Ireland, the following are examples of organisations that could take part in these alliances: ETBs, Regional Skills Fora, third-level institutions undertaking VET, enterprises with >250 employees, professional associations *etc.* Funding of these high-level alliances could ensure that Irish participants are enabled to innovate in the areas of **Theme 02 Activating Skills Supply** and **Theme 03 Effective Use of Skills**.

Key Action 3

Support for Policy Reform

Managed by the Commission's Executive Agency in Brussels, these are large-scale projects bringing together strategic organisations in support of policy reform targeted at the achievement of the goals of the European policy agendas, in particular the Europe 2020 Strategy, and of the Strategic Framework for European Cooperation in Education and Training (ET 2020). Again, funding in this area could ensure that Irish participants are enabled look at policy reform in the areas of **Theme 02 Activating Skills Supply** and **Theme 03 Effective Use of Skills**.

Transnational Co-operation Activities (TCAs)

In addition to the Key Actions outlined above, Erasmus+ provides opportunities for actors from a number of participating countries to come together around specific themes or areas of concern to explore a topic, identify common concerns, undertake a study to visit and potentially to develop ideas for further collaboration through Erasmus+ activities. TCAs offer great potential to bodies such as the Apprenticeship Council, Regional Skills Fora and others to create seminars/conferences/study visits enabling colleagues from Ireland and other European countries to come together on **all three themes** in the National Skills Strategy.

Related tools and initiatives

As well as the Erasmus+ funding directly available through the three Key Actions and TCAs, the following tools and initiatives could also be used to support the implementation of the National Skills Strategy:

- ECVET (managed by Léargas) - www.leargas.ie/programmes/ecvet/
- Euroguidance (managed by NCGE) www.euroguidance.ie/
- Work-Based Learning Toolkit www.wbl-toolkit.eu/site/home
- EQF
- EQAVET
- ECTS
- europass

Specific Priorities of Erasmus+

In addition to the aims of Erasmus+ as listed earlier in this document, the programme has overarching priorities that are relevant to *e.g.* **Theme 02, Activating Skills Supply**, regarding equity of treatment and inclusion of those with disadvantaged backgrounds and fewer opportunities such as disability, educational disadvantage, cultural differences *etc.* In the field of youth, an Inclusion and Diversity Strategy has been designed as a common framework to support the participation and inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities in Erasmus+.

Conclusion

Erasmus+ is not an end in itself but is a strategic tool to enable organisations working with trainees and learners in VET, FET and the youth and community sectors to improve outcomes through transnational collaboration to:

- develop new policies
- respond to changing skills needs
- develop training interventions and practice in an inclusive way
- enable trainees and apprentices to practice skills, experience working life and develop their confidence and language skills.

For more information:

www.leargas.ie

www.leargas.ie/programmes/erasmusplus/

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