

1. About Léargas

Léargas is responsible for managing national and international programmes that support and develop international exchange, cooperation and learning. We operate in the areas of school education, vocational education and training, adult education and youth.

We encourage and support international projects across a broad range of themes such as mental health and well-being, digital literacy and media, guidance, environment, childcare, horticulture, sport and health, arts and cultural heritage. We support projects that enable people to embrace diversity by forming relationships and working collaboratively. Skills development is central to our work, with particular emphasis on personal growth and vocational skills. We strive to shape and share solutions to the policy challenges of our times.

We are Ireland's national agency for the EU Programme Erasmus+.

We are a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. We work under the aegis of the Department of Education and Skills.

2. Our Work in Support of National and European Policy

All our work is informed by and supports the implementation of policy, both national and European, within the following contexts:

- Vocational Education and Training
- Adult Education
- Youth
- School Education
- Volunteering
- Early Childhood Education

The Erasmus+ Programme 2014-2020 aims to contribute to the Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth and the EU Strategic Framework for Education and Training (ET2020). Erasmus+ is designed to promote the sustainable development of partnerships in the field of education, and contribute to achieving the objectives of the EU Youth Strategy 2010-18.

The overarching themes of our work are to:

- Promote European values and active citizenship.

- Enhance the quality of education at all levels and cultivate a culture of lifelong learning.
- Encourage learning, especially for participation in education, society and work.
- Support innovation, collaboration, diversity and reform in education, training and youth work.

Our work is congruent with the aims of Erasmus+. We work in tune with the mission of the Department of Education and Skills which is to facilitate individuals, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development. Our work is also in tune with the mission of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and serves the aim of the National Youth Strategy which is to enable all young people to realise their maximum potential.

Policies of Relevance to the Work of Léargas	
<p style="text-align: center;">European Policy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth • Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework (ET2020) • EU Youth Strategy 2010-18 	
Education Policy in Ireland	Youth Policy in Ireland
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Action Plan for Education 2016-2019 • Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages 2017-2026 • Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 • International Education Strategy for Ireland 2016-2020 • New Skills Agenda 2020 (VET) • Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025 (VET) • Further Education and Training Strategy 2014-2019 • Further Education and Training Professional Development Strategy 2017-2019 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better Outcomes Brighter Futures - the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 • National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 • LGBT+ National Youth Strategy • National Traveller & Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021

Our work supports the implementation of policy by:

- activating international collaboration to innovate and strengthen practice in school education, vocational education and training, adult education, and youth.
- enhancing awareness and understanding of other cultures and countries to increase the capacity of organisations to work internationally and respond to common challenges.
- creating international networks that encourage active participation in society, enhance foreign language competence and cultivate European citizenship and solidarity.
- creating synergies between formal education, non-formal education, vocational training, employment and entrepreneurship to encourage peer learning, partnerships and joint problem solving.
- supporting continuous professional development to advance the impact of international work.

3. Our Vision

Our vision is for:

An Ireland that is inclusive, where all can participate in lifelong learning to reach their potential and where the transformational value of international experience is recognised and enjoyed.

4. Our Values

Our Léargas Code of Conduct gives us an agreed set of ethical principles that are woven into our way of working together as an organisation. Education, continuous personal and professional development, and lifelong learning are vital for human growth. We bring the following values to life in our approach to our work:

- **Respect and Integrity**
Honouring diversity is central to all that we do and we believe that our respect for others and the common ground we share brings integrity to our work and deepens the sense of inclusion and solidarity.
- **Encouragement and Support**
We believe that encouragement, underpinned by practical support, is vital to maximising learning from international experiences.

- **Accountability and Transparency**

We endeavour to be open and honest in support of individuals and organisations. Transparency and accountability are particularly important to our programme management activities.

- **Positivity and Vitality**

The programmes that we manage are transformative. We are purposeful in our intention to bring positive and vital energy to empower transformation.

5. Our Purpose

Our purpose is to promote, encourage and fund intercultural, collaborative projects between Ireland and other countries. This enables the development of solid working partnerships that foster an international awareness and appreciation in social, cultural and educational domains.

- We **promote** the value of international collaboration and exchange in education, training, adult education and youth work.
- We **make** international cooperation and learning **accessible** to a wide range of people and organisations.
- We **contribute** to the implementation of policy and practice in education, training, adult education and youth work.

6. Context

At Léargas we are alert to the context in which we operate, European, national and local. The world is constantly developing and Europe is evolving in socially and politically significant ways. Brexit presents new and unprecedented challenges to EU structures, co-operation and principles. Given the current challenges that European society is experiencing, programmes such as Erasmus+ play a big part in affirming core values of democracy, inclusion, citizenship and solidarity. Erasmus+ promotes active citizenship, participation and engagement in civic society for the greatest good. The programme brings balance through transformative, intercultural experiences for people and organisations. The importance of this is affirmed further through the European Solidarity Corps - a new EU initiative managed in Ireland by Léargas. The pressing theme is to animate participation and active citizenship through volunteering and appreciating the positive energies of inclusion and solidarity.

7. Our Strategic Priorities

This Strategic Statement was composed over the period June to December 2017. The process was informed by background research and consultation with people involved in and interested in our work.

We consulted with our funders, the European Commission, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. We consulted with our external stakeholders and colleagues representing organisations across school education, vocational education and training, adult education, lifelong learning and youth sectors. We consulted internally with our **Léargas** team and Board. We appreciate all contributions to the development of this Strategic Statement and value all feedback received.

We received the following pointers to inform our work over the next three years:

- Position and promote Léargas so as to maximise our presence as the national agency for international programmes, collaboration and exchange.
- Look beyond 2020 and consider the full range of international programme opportunities that will benefit Ireland.
- Generate greater connectivity and collegiality with other like-minded organisations so as to progress our work under shared themes, such as solidarity, mobility, digital advancement, language enrichment, CPD, youth, skills development and employability.
- Proactively prepare for the challenges and opportunities that Brexit will bring.
- Connect our work clearly and usefully to policy implementation and formation.
- Attune to advancements in digital technologies and social media and use these effectively to promote programmes, international collaboration and lifelong learning possibilities.
- Collect track and share robust data to showcase the impact of our work and the positive difference that we make in transforming lives through lifelong learning.

We have reflected on the above pointers and the background research that has informed this Strategic Statement. As a result we have chosen four strategic priorities to contain and guide our work over the next three years. These four priorities are:

Strategic Priority One	Programmes and their Power
Strategic Priority Two:	Relationships and their Influence
Strategic Priority Three:	People and their Stories
Strategic Priority Four	Our Organisation and Competence

**Strategic Priority One:
Programmes and their Power**

We know that programmes of international exchange and collaboration have the power to transform lives in positive and lasting ways. The lived experience of learning, collaborating and volunteering in an international context helps to generate solutions to common challenges. This happens through the sharing of ideas and experiences and learning how to collaborate across cultural and linguistic borders. With our thirty years experience we continue to refine our expertise in support of people who seek to learn through international activity. Over the next three years we will continue to strengthen our programme delivery. Our intention is to reach out further, extending the opportunity to learn and grow through shared international experiences.

Main Objective:

Our objective is to maximise the transformational power of our programmes and our work.

To advance this objective we will:

- Promote our work to raise awareness, attract participants and maximise the reach and power of programmes in Ireland.
- Place our attention firmly on inclusion by promoting programmes in less advantaged communities and to people who are not yet aware of the value of international exchange and collaboration.
- Continue to manage programmes efficiently and effectively.
- Support organisations to meet programme objectives and connect their work closely to policy.
- Listen to feedback from participants and use this to inform continuous improvement of our programmes.
- Seek synergy across programmes and initiatives and position our work purposefully within the national and EU policy framework.
- Monitor participation and evaluate the difference made by our work.
- Bring ideas and innovation to the fore, look beyond 2020, and seek solutions to emerging challenges.

We will know that we are making progress on this objective when we see:

- Increase in participation in programmes.
- Deeper diversity and quality of participation in programmes.
- Evidence of the effects of participation.
- Formation of ideas for future programmes and initiatives.

**Strategic Priority Two:
Relationships and their Influence**

Our work is about creating and cultivating good relationships with people involved in international collaboration and exchange. This includes our relationships with the European Commission, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and many other relevant organisations.

Main Objective:

Our objective is to cultivate and strengthen relationships, EU, national and local, so as to advance our work, generate solutions to real life problems, and achieve the best outcomes from international exchange and collaboration.

To advance this objective we will:

- Deepen our relationships with other National Agencies to create synergy, share learning and inform policy and practice in meaningful ways.
- Support and encourage people and organisations to participate in international activity and use the learning to grow, develop, solve problems and respond to challenges.
- Seek strategic partners to purposefully share and advance the solution-focused nature of our work around carefully chosen themes and policy priorities, such as citizenship, solidarity, inclusion, mobility, continuous professional development (CPD) and skills development, including science, technology engineering and maths (STEM) and foreign language skills.
- Connect and collaborate with like-minded organisations so as to extend our reach, particularly to areas and people who have yet to have an international experience.
- Develop inclusive and supportive models to strengthen engagement, draw in people and organisations to participate and enjoy learning through international programmes.
- Look further afield to create and cultivate partnerships and collaborations to move with the way Europe and the world is evolving.

We will know that we are making progress on this objective when we see:

- Enhanced engagement leading to increased participation.
- Purposeful collaborative networks formed and working to generate solutions to contemporary challenges such as inclusion and solidarity.
- Increase in the number and diversity of organisations and people participating in programmes.

**Strategic Priority Three:
People and their Stories**

We know from our research that good communication, particularly peer to peer, is the key to raising awareness of the value of international connections and collaboration. We appreciate the positive difference made to lives and to society through exciting international learning experiences. We will continue to raise awareness and to gather robust data to convey the relevance and power of our work to change lives for the better and strengthen people's transferable skills, their personal empowerment and sense of inclusion and solidarity.

Main Objective:

Our objective is to increase participation by promoting Léargas and our work to convey the value and power of international learning experiences and their wider societal impact.

To advance this objective we will:

- Tell the story of our work, through a range of innovative methods, affirming the benefits of international collaboration especially for inclusion, integration, volunteering, solidarity and enhancing linguistic skills.
- Inform policy and practice by demonstrating the relevance and use of our work in supporting the implementation of policy locally, nationally and at European levels.
- Show evidence of the positive impact that our work has on people and how this ripples out into wider community, society, Ireland, Europe and the world.
- Maintain a clear, lively and purposeful web and social media presence and reach out wider and deeper through this and, where appropriate, traditional media.
- Target and engage people, especially those who are less advantaged, and organisations who work in support of vulnerable groups.
- Be joyful and celebratory about the positivity of Erasmus+ and all our programmes.

We will know that we are making progress on this objective when we see:

- Increase in number of mentions in various media of Léargas and the work.
- Increased awareness of Léargas and the work and this being used to implement policy and practice.
- Production of clear evidence to show and share the story of the work and its impact.
- Increased participation.

Strategic Priority Four
Our Organisation and Competence

Léargas is Ireland's national agency for international exchange and collaboration. We celebrated thirty years in 2016 and have a track record as a strong and reliable organisation that supports all that is good about lifelong learning. We are committed to best practice governance. We are a learning organisation, learning how to be in our ever changing world and in turn encouraging organisations and people to learn and grow towards their potential as active citizens in Ireland and Europe.

Main Objective:

Our objective is to run our organisation in line with good practice governance and continue to learn and strengthen our competence and capacity to deliver on our strategic objectives.

To advance this objective we will:

- Honour our Performance Delivery Agreements (PDA) with the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the EU Commission Terms of Reference for National Agency Programme of Work.
- Track, measure and share the contribution and effectiveness of our work through robust impact analysis and research.
- Draw on the power of social media, digital developments, online resources and IT advancements for all aspects of our work including listening to clients, tracking, measuring and monitoring our work.
- Develop our organisational competence through recruitment, succession planning, continuous professional development, collaboration, reflection and learning.
- Be a learning organisation that continually strives to refine and refresh our way of working in tune with best practice and the evolution of policy.
- Maintain financial and organisational sustainability.

We will know that we are making progress on this objective when we see:

- Staff performance and work satisfaction.
- Robust evidence of our effectiveness and contribution.
- Continued compliance with best practice governance.