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Erasmus+

Vocational Education & Training

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Erasmus+ International Work Placements for Vocational Learners from Ireland

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Impact Research
Léargas

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Research Questions

1. What is the impact of Erasmus+ work placements on vocational learners from Ireland?

2. What is the impact on the organisations that send learners?

3. Is Erasmus+ achieving its aims for vocational learners from Ireland?
Research Scale

2014-2016; 21 Vocational Organisations

KA102 Projects

- Staff: 8
- Learners: 36

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Data Sources

- 29 Final Reports
- 1,275 Participant Reports
- 5 Coordinator Interviews
Participant Profile

NFQ Level 5 or 6
73% of learners in Year 1
92% of placements < one month duration

QQI data on Level 5 & 6 learners:
59% under 29 years old
60% female, 40% male
Why do learners go on international placements?

- Enhance my technical/professional skills/competences: 68%
- Opportunity to live abroad: 17%
- Other: 5%
- Opportunity to learn foreign language: 4%
- Opportunity to develop personal skills: 3%
- Enhance future employability at home: 2%
- Enhance future employability abroad: 1%
Professional Skills

93% believe that their chances to get a new or better job have increased

90% have a clearer idea of professional aspirations and goals

89% have enhanced their technical and professional skills
Professional Skills

- Plan and carry out my learning independently: 95%
- Cooperate in teams: 91%
- Find solutions in difficult or challenging contexts (problem-solving skills): 91%
- Think logically and draw conclusions (analytical skills): 89%
- I have improved my technical/professional skills: 89%
- Plan and organise tasks and activities: 86%
- Use internet, social media and PCs, e.g. for my studies, work and personal activities: 74%
Increased connection to vocational area
- first real-world experience
- confirmation of career choice
- Learners gain employment with host or local employer
- stimulates entrepreneurial skills
“I got a job in a 5-star hotel in Ireland which I love all because of my work placement in Malta. Best experience of my LIFE!” (2014, GTI participant)

“(My mentor) made me believe more in my idea and now with his help I can start my own business!” (2014 participant)
“I did not have any experience in a Montessori setting before going to Lulea (Sweden). I found it to be extremely interesting and it has prompted me to research further into this area of childcare. I feel this will benefit me in my future professional career.” (2014 participant, Inchicore CFE)
Offers placements unavailable in Ireland:
- Insurance concerns
- Recession
- No relevant employer in local area

“Many of the veterinary students in Slovenia commented on the high degree of hands-on experience they were given, (this is) often impossible here due to insurance considerations.” (2016, St John’s College)
Enables those who would not otherwise travel due to:
- economic reasons
- family concerns
- anxieties

“It is a great opportunity for people like me who otherwise would never get such a chance to live and work abroad any time soon.” (2014 participant, Inchicore CFE)
Personal Skills

Plan and carry out my learning independently: 95%
I am more able to adapt and act in new situations: 97%
I am more confident and convinced of my abilities: 96%
I am more open-minded and curious: 95%
I am more able to reach decisions: 86%
Personal Skills

Self-confidence and independence
- first experience away from home
- living in another country
- managing own responsibilities
- awareness of opportunities outside Ireland

“Prior to this mobility, they did not have any experience of the countries listed nor will many of them have travelled independently of family.” (2014 participant, Inchicore CFE)
“By managing away from home for 3 weeks and meeting and working alongside many new people, participants have gained increased self-confidence and self-esteem.

They have come to realise that they are capable of more than they might have thought, and this will motivate and encourage them to progress in their career/studies. In this way, the benefits of the project will extend far beyond the technical and other skills acquired.” (2015 Monaghan CFE)
“(The participant) had applied to Athlone IT because she felt she would be too nervous moving any further away from her family. (...) However she blossomed so much during the mobility that on her return she decided to change her CAO application and switch to Galway-Mayo IT.” (2016, Moate Business College)
Intercultural Skills

- See the value of different cultures: 95%
- I am more able to cooperate with people from other backgrounds and cultures: 95%
- I am more open-minded and curious: 95%
- I am more tolerant towards other persons’ values and behaviour: 93%
Intercultural Skills

Intercultural awareness
- exposure to new attitudes and norms
- more tolerant of others
- aware of opportunities outside Ireland
- use of different languages

“Many of the participants come from rural backgrounds in the border region and may have been less aware of the cultural diversity that exists in the Netherlands.” (2014, Monaghan Institute)
“Participants shared their cultural observations which gave whole class groups an insight into other cultures. (...) It allowed (them) to become more aware of being a foreigner when they are abroad, giving them an opportunity to be empathetic to foreigners here in Ireland. It led to greater interaction between Irish and international students and planted the seed to running an international culture day.” (2014, Coláiste Dhúlaigh)
“(What) I will take away from this experience is that it is possible to work abroad and I do not have to be afraid of trying new things and experiencing the different cultures around the world. I would now like to study a new language.”

(2016 participant, Moate Business College)
Language Skills

- English: 49%
- Spanish: 14%
- Others: 12%
- French: 10%
- Swedish: 5.6%
- German: 3.4%
- Italian: 3.1%
- Dutch: 2.9%
English widely used on placements, even when not native language of destination.

Excluding those already fluent, 86% stated language skills had improved.

*Degree* of improvement is difficult to assess.

Base knowledge/preparation is key.
“My knowledge of the French language has improved greatly. (...) I had to use what we learned and put it into action. My confidence grew every day and I was soon able to communicate with people without feeling nervous and embarrassed.”
(2014 participant, Galway Technical Institute)
“(There was) a language issue in Spain as some of the participants had not been studying Spanish. (...they commented) ‘It is essential to be able to speak the language of the country you are attending the Erasmus+’ and ‘Ensure a course in whichever language is applicable before leaving’.”

(2015, Cavan Institute)
Identity & Engagement

- I am more interested in knowing what happens in the world daily: 78%
- I intend to participate more actively in social and political life of my community: 76%
- I am more interested in European topics: 76%
- I feel more European: 68%
- I am more aware of social and political concepts like democracy, justice, equality, citizenship, civil rights: 64%
European Identity

Notable difference between:

95% strongly/rather agree more able to cooperate with people of different backgrounds and cultures

68% strongly/rather agree that they feel more European
European Identity

29 times more likely to use ‘foreign’ than ‘European’ when describing experiences

7 of 1,275 participants mentioned a sense of “Becoming more European” in feedback

Significant gap in current European context
“I just found the whole experience amazing(...) I explored Seville and the surrounding areas of Andalusia and met lots of interesting people. I broadened my outlook on life generally and feel a real commitment to the whole European project. I think these experiences should be available to everyone in Europe which I think will help in uniting Europe.” (2016 participant, Capacity Ireland)
“The loss of cultural preparation before departure probably has affected the feeling of EU citizenship. What Europe wanted was as many students as possible taking part, which I understand, but I think there was a bit of a loss there. We do the best we can but the resources are limited.”

(Project Coordinator Interview)
## Areas to explore further

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<th>Progression to third-level education</th>
<th>Increased academic attainment for class group</th>
<th>Social inclusion through participation</th>
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### Impact on Vocational Organisations

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<th>Increased connection with local employers</th>
<th>Development of international networks</th>
<th>Influence changes to VET course curricula and systems</th>
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<td>Increased motivation for staff</td>
<td>Makes colleges more attractive for learners</td>
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Impact on Vocational Organisations

Connection with employers
- through reciprocal placements
- awareness of vocational learner ‘pool’

Establishment of international networks
- informal exchange of practice
- integration of international learners
Impact on Vocational Organisations

Changes in vocational systems
- influence on course content
- influence on structure of Irish-based work placements

Attraction of new learners
- mentioned in prospectuses, open days
- significant enrolment boost in some courses e.g. tourism and travel
Impact on Vocational Organisations

European involvement
- creates interest in staff mobility and projects in other sectors

Staff motivation increased
- seeing positive results for learners
- exposure to different systems, methods
## Characteristics of Good Quality Projects

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<th>Clear communication and mutual exchange between partners</th>
<th>Authentic feedback from participants</th>
<th>Customised work placements</th>
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<td>Community/family involvement</td>
<td>Integration with QQI Work Experience module</td>
<td>Peer-to-peer promotion</td>
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## Conclusions

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<th>Increased professional opportunities and competences</th>
<th>Increased intercultural skills</th>
<th>Developed personal skills</th>
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<td>Less emphatic impact on language skills and sense of European citizenship</td>
<td>Benefits for wider vocational system in Ireland</td>
<td>Organisational involvement attractive to learners</td>
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<td>Recommendations</td>
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<td><strong>Fund language preparation in successor programme</strong></td>
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<td>Support cultural preparation, with emphasis on European values</td>
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<td>Establish a network for participating vocational organisations in Ireland</td>
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<td>Carry out follow-up studies to trace paths of progression and longer-term impact</td>
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Further steps

Study available from www.leargas.ie

Language Impact Study 2018-2019

VET Tracer Study 2018-2019