

Léargas Strategic Statement

2021 —
2023

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Introduction

This is an exciting time for everyone at Léargas as it outlines its priorities for the next three years.

Over the past 35 years, the work of Léargas has grown from strength to strength but its work over the next period may be its most important. Covid-19 and Brexit will have long-lasting impacts for each of us, our economies and societies. Léargas and its programmes will be needed more than ever.

We will need to learn from our peers in the rest of Europe. We will also need to look at what innovations and experiences we could share with them. How could studying, or training, or volunteering in another European country help our learners and young people to blossom and grow?

The new Erasmus+ programme provides opportunities for so many different kinds of people from all walks of life. It provides our citizens with the chance to participate in study periods abroad, traineeships, apprenticeships, and staff exchanges in all fields of education, training, youth and sport. It is open to school pupils, higher education and vocational education and training students, adult learners, youth exchanges and youth workers.

The importance of mobility cannot be underestimated. Mobility periods afford participants the chance to improve language skills, gain self-confidence and independence and immerse themselves in a new culture. Mobility has also been shown to improve job prospects.

In 2021 for the first-time adult learners will be funded and supported to travel to other countries for peer- or work-based learning. This is a great development, because even short-term periods abroad can be transformational.

Your own research has shown that 95% of mobility participants say they came back feeling better able to cooperate with people of different backgrounds and cultures; and more open-minded and curious.

It's really important that we understand these opportunities are for everyone.

The Erasmus+ programme is an extremely valuable resource and contributes greatly to improving labour market skills and employment opportunities, and to increasing cultural awareness and appreciation. The aims of the programme are very much aligned with our national policies.

The priorities you are outlining – inclusion and diversity, encouraging participation in democratic life, fighting climate change, and supporting the digital transitions in society – are shared by my Department in our Statement of Strategy.

These priorities complement the commitments set out in the Programme for Government to increase Irish participation in Erasmus+ and other European programmes, and to position Ireland at the heart of Europe and enhance 'the spirit of solidarity that inspired the formation of the EU'. They also align with my own Department's mission to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society.

Policy and programmes go hand in hand. Taking part in programmes like Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps empowers Irish people to connect with other people and really engage with these issues.

The pandemic has shown us all how much we rely on and value human connections; now that we can consider – safely! – re-affirming them in person, I'd encourage you all to consider harnessing their power.



Simon Harris
Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

Foreword

We are pleased to present our Strategic Statement 2021–2023. This follows naturally from our previous Statement 2018–2020 bringing the themes of inclusion, diversity, digitalisation and sustainability further forward.

In developing this Strategic Statement, we are grateful for the support and engagement received from our staff and our board; the European Commission; the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; the Department of Education; and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; and from our external stakeholders and colleagues representing organisations across the school education, vocational education and training, adult education, lifelong learning and youth sectors. We appreciate all contributions to the development of this Strategic Statement.

Our work as a National Agency, mandated by the European Commission, has become even more compelling and necessary to empower people and organisations to experience the transformational value of international experiences. We empower organisations and individuals to create opportunities for developing new skills and knowledge, personal and professional growth through a lived experience of connection with people of other cultures. Together, with our Board, management and staff, we are committed to the strategic priorities set out in this document.

This statement holds our organisational vision, purpose and the values that guide us. It comes at a time of transition as we enter the next stage of our evolution as an organisation. This coincides with the beginning of the new and expanded Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps programmes and at a time of great change. Our outlook is imaginatively pragmatic, knowing that our transnational work must evolve to meet the challenges and support the opportunities of a post-Covid environment. Our ambitions are supported by good governance and adaptive and collaborative ways of working. Our operational plan will cascade from this statement, to guide our work and the execution of our strategic priorities.

Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) 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 programmes bring balance through transformative intercultural experiences for people and organisations. ESC aims to animate participation, learning and active citizenship through volunteering. Intercultural competence is an enabler of this and as the programmes expand and deepen in their importance, this will bring opportunities for Ireland and added impetus to our work.

Covid-19 brought serious challenges rocking the core of our work, which is grounded in mobility and supporting participation in international experiences. We, like most other organisations, experienced upheaval and disruption. However, we responded to the opportunities by introducing new dimensions to the way we work in the digital environment and flexing our practice around online mobility.

About Léargas

We acknowledge, with deep gratitude, our competent and committed team and all those with whom we work within the fields of education, training and youth who have responded with resilience to address both the issues of social divide and the significant impact of Covid-19 on our young people. To this end, we will leverage the power of our expanded programmes to support organisations and young people to acquire employability skills, nurture the resilience needed to navigate the world of work, and build better societies.

In light of Brexit, we commit to progressing in the context of north-south via the Peace IV – CASE Project as well as supporting relevant endeavours to continue collaboration work on an east-west basis between Ireland and Britain. All opportunities to support collaboration, to maintain and deepen that understanding between our two islands which has been achieved since the Good Friday Agreement, will be an important element of our work.

We seek out and embrace new possibilities. We will work with our Government Departments to expand the role of Léargas around international education within Erasmus+ or beyond into other programmes. We have a role to play in supporting our Departments to achieve our shared objective 'to support people in reaching their full potential' and to take their place in a 'cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society'. We intend to work purposefully and transition to the next iteration of our organisation over the next three years to become a more adaptive and sustainable organisation.

We believe in reflective practice and we will review our progress at the end of each year to inform how best to advance forward. This Strategic Statement is a living document enabling review and recalibration in readiness for the increasing demands of a growing programme in a changing Europe.

Now, more than ever, we see Ireland at the heart of Europe and Europe in the heart of Ireland.



Hugh MacConville
Chair of Board, Léargas



Lorraine Gilligan
Executive Director, Léargas

Erasmus+

European
Solidarity Corps

Strategic
Initiatives:

- [EPALE](#)
- [eTwinning](#)
- [Eurodesk](#)
- [European Centre for Modern Languages](#)
- [European Day of Languages](#)
- [European Language Label](#)
- [Peace IV - CASE Project](#)
- [Youth Wiki](#)

We are mandated to manage European Union funds in Ireland, to support individuals and organisations to animate and support inclusion, solidarity and personal transformation. We manage national and international programmes that support and develop international exchange, mobility, cooperation and learning. Our work reaches into school education, vocational education and training, adult education, youth work and volunteering. We foster cooperation and build bridges between these different sectors to facilitate mutual learning.

We fund international projects, virtual and physical, across a broad range of themes including mental health and well-being, digital literacy and media, guidance, environment, childcare, horticulture, sport and health, arts, and cultural heritage. Skills development is central to our work, with particular emphasis on personal growth and life skills. We support projects that enable people to embrace diversity by forming relationships and working collaboratively in new and exciting ways. Our intention is to support and strengthen organisations, enriching through cooperation and mutual learning, to shape and share solutions to the policy challenges of our times.

We are a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. We work under the aegis of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science (DFHERIS) and in partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

We have over thirty years' experience, moving with and embracing the times and challenges that arise. Our work is about transition, development and transformation by supporting individuals and organisations through international learning experiences.

Our Purpose

Our purpose is to enable international collaboration and exchange. We promote and fund intercultural, collaborative projects between Ireland and other countries. All our work serves to advance national and European policy. We facilitate good working relationships that spark awareness and appreciation of inclusion, diversity, digital transformation and environmental sustainability across social, cultural and educational domains. We **promote** the value of international collaboration and exchange in education, training, 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, volunteering and youth work. We **provide** opportunities for the development of new skills for active participation in society and education. We **support** the strategic development of organisations and the personal and skills development of individuals.

Our Work

in support of National & European Policy

Our work is integral to the implementation of national and European policy. The scope for partnership and collaboration is wide open with shared potential to advance the priority themes of inclusion, solidarity, digital advancement and an environmentally sustainable world. The international, experiential and lifelong learning emphasis of our remit positions us to advance policy across a range of settings including schools, further education and youth work.

The EU Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps are powerful programmes that drive our work bringing their value to Ireland - placing Ireland at the heart of Europe and bringing Europe to the heart of Ireland.

Our work supports the implementation of both national and EU policy by:

- advancing the cross-cutting policy themes of inclusion, equality, diversity, digital, participation, solidarity, sustainability and environmental sustainability.
- activating and supporting international collaboration to innovate and strengthen practice in education, training, youth work and volunteering.
- deepening understanding of other cultures and countries.
- increasing the capacity of organisations to become involved in international projects and share responses to the common challenges.
- creating synergies to encourage partnerships, continuous professional development and shared solution seeking.
- maximising bilateral relationships and international networks to encourage active participation in society, improve the quality of educational practice and systems across the sectors we support, enhance foreign language competence and cultivate European citizenship and solidarity.

We work closely with the International Section of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and align with the Department's strategic priorities: talent, innovation, inclusion and setting Ireland on the international stage in terms of skills and innovation. We also work in tune with the mission of the Department of Education to facilitate individuals, through learning, to achieve their full potential and contribute to Ireland's social, cultural and economic development. We align with the mission of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and support the aim of the National Youth Strategy 2015–2020 to enable all young people to realise their maximum potential, and the vision of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018–2020 to ensure that all LGBTI+ young people are visible, valued and included.

Our Vision

An **inclusive Ireland** where we all can **participate** in and enjoy the **transformational value** of national and international **lifelong learning experiences** and be **supported** to reach **our potential**.



Our Values

Our Léargas Code of Conduct gives us an agreed set of ethical principles that are woven into our way of working together. This reflects the shared European values of all EU countries in a society in which inclusion, tolerance, justice, solidarity and diversity prevail. These values are integral to the vision for a peaceful and harmonious European way of life which is inclusive of all, and particularly, those with fewer opportunities.

We bring the following values to life in our way of working together as a team:



Inclusion & Respect

Honouring diversity is central to all that we do. We respect and celebrate the diversity of people and organisations that we engage with. We strive to enhance their experience of inclusion, equity, equality and solidarity through the programmes that we manage.



Empowerment & Support

We believe in encouraging and supporting the people and organisations that we engage with. This spirit of encouragement, underpinned by practical support and competency development, vitalises people's sense of personal agency and empowerment by their learning from international collaboration.



Collaboration & Partnership

The programmes that we manage can be transformative at individual, organisational and community levels. We believe in working in partnership, based on trust and reciprocity, to inspire and empower personal growth and development, through lifelong learning.

Our Strategic Priorities

This Strategic Statement was informed by a review of our structures and our way of working and a process of consultation with people involved in and interested in our work.

We consulted with our funders, the European Commission, the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science and the Department of Education, and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

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 listened internally to the Léargas team and Board. We appreciate all contributions to the development of this Strategic Statement. We value all feedback received as it affirms and informs our future work. The main pointers that will guide our strategy are:

- Cultivate relationships with our funders and those we support and position Léargas as a National Agency mandated to disburse funding for national and international programmes, collaboration and exchange.
- Communicate the value of our work and how it contributes to the advancement of EU and government policy and societal priorities of inclusion, equality, diversity and environmental sustainability.
- Generate greater connectivity and collegiality with people and organisations to progress our work under shared themes of solidarity, mobility, digital advancement, language enrichment, continuous professional development, employability and environmental sustainability.
- Show and share how our work contributes to the achievement of policy implementation and formation particularly across the education, lifelong learning and youth spheres.

Our background research, review and reflection points to three strategic priorities to guide us over the next three years: **People, Partnerships and Programmes.**

These priorities represent continuance and deepening of our work. They will inform our organisational plan and our annual work plans and be supported by the firm foundation of our organisational governance, competence and commitment.

Our Foundation — Organisational Competence & Commitment

As Ireland's National Agency for international exchange and collaboration in the fields of education, training and youth, Léargas has a thirty-five year track record as a reliable and accessible organisation that supports lifelong learning. Best practice governance is central to our work and good reputation. This is our foundation stone on which all of our programme-based activity is based and built. To continue to be responsive, reliable and resilient we will:

- Work in partnership with our National Authority – Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation, and Science – and with Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth and the Department of Education to deliver our Performance Delivery Agreements (PDA) and drive the international education and youth agendas.
- Refine our organisational structure and systems to meet the shifts and changes we are preparing for.
- Strengthen our digital capacity so that the blended arrangements that are necessary to support our international work become embedded through state-of-the-art technology, digital systems and careful use of social media platforms.
- Care for our staff and provide the necessary systems to support their work and wellbeing as we transition into new ways of working better together.

- Continuously enrich our organisational competence through recruitment, continuous professional development, collaboration, reflective practice and shared learning.
- Create an evidence base of useful data and stories to document and showcase the impact of our work and the positive difference that we make in supporting transformation and empowerment through lived experience of international connections and exchanges.
- Be a flexible, responsive and adaptive organisation, evolving our structures, systems and work practice to deliver the priorities and honour the values of the European Union.

01

Strategic Priority One: People Matter

Our research shows that national and international learning experiences can be transformative for people from all walks of life. We will continue to raise awareness of the opportunities that international programmes offer to enhance inclusion and solidarity. We will gather and share evidence of the impact of our work to support people towards personal empowerment.

Main Objective:

Our objective is to increase participation by promoting Léargas and conveying the power, for individuals and organisations, of national and international learning experiences and their wider societal impact.

To advance this objective we will:

- Tell the story of our work, through a range of methods, documenting and affirming the benefits of international collaboration especially for inclusion, integration, volunteering, solidarity and enhancing linguistic skills.
- Reach out in targeted ways to engage people, especially those who are less advantaged, and organisations that work in support of people with less or no access to opportunities.
- Show evidence of the impact that our work has on people and how this ripples out into wider community, society, Ireland, Europe and the world.
- Drive a clear, lively and purposeful digital and social media presence and reach out wider and deeper through this.
- Celebrate and share the positivity of Erasmus+ and all our programmes.

We will track our progress on this objective by monitoring:

- Increased awareness of Léargas and how the work supports the implementation of policy and practice.
- Data to show and share the story of our work and its impact on personal development and transformation.

02

Strategic Priority Two: Partnerships Work

We cultivate meaningful partnerships with a diverse range of people in different organisations, across Ireland and Europe, to meet policy and programme objectives. We work in cooperation with government and the European Commission, colleagues in educational and youth organisations and people seeking to embrace international experiences. We continue to prioritise partnership, networking and relationships.

Main Objective:

Our main objective is to continue to nurture and strengthen our relationships, at EU, national and local levels. Our intention is to work in various forms of partnership, to increase participation in international exchange and collaboration and meet the priorities of policy and programmes.

To advance this objective we will:

- Support and encourage people and organisations to participate in international activity, physically and virtually, and apply the learning to develop and respond to challenges and co-create solutions to the challenges of inclusion, diversity, environmental sustainability and digital advancement.
- Seek strategic partners to share the solution-focused nature of our work around the policy priorities of citizenship, solidarity, inclusion, mobility, environmental sustainability and lifelong learning.
- Connect and collaborate to extend our reach, areas and people who have yet to access and enjoy an international experience.
- Deepen our bi-lateral relationships with other National Agencies, across Europe, to create synergy, share learning and inform policy and practice in meaningful ways.
- Develop inclusive and supportive models to strengthen engagement, drawing in people and organisations to participate in and experience learning through international programmes.

We will track our progress on this objective by monitoring:

- Purposeful collaborative networks formed and working to generate solutions to contemporary challenges such as inclusion, digitalisation, solidarity and environmental sustainability.
- Increase in the number and diversity of organisations and people engaging and participating in programmes.

03

Strategic Priority Three: Programmes Transform

We know that programmes of international cooperation can transform lives in positive and lasting ways. With over thirty-five years' experience managing programmes our expertise supports people, organisations and communities to avail of funding and become involved in national and international projects. We will continue to strengthen our quality programme delivery, funding management, auditing and compliance.

Main Objective:

Our objective is to maximise the transformational power of programmes and our work, through vigilant funding administration and support to a diverse range of people and organisations. We will reach out further, listen carefully, extending the opportunity to learn and grow through shared international experiences.

To advance this objective we will:

- 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.
- Promote our work to continue raising awareness, attracting participants and maximising the reach and power of EU programmes in Ireland.
- Support organisations to meet programme objectives and connect their work closely to policy with priority emphasis on inclusion, diversity and environmental sustainability.
- Continue to be vigilant in supporting the financial requirements and transactional arrangements necessary for successful fund administration across Ireland.
- Provide responsive support to guide organisations through the detail of the administrative processes and help them be ready and confident to deliver good quality projects.
- Monitor participation and evaluate the impact of our work.

We will track our progress on this objective by monitoring:

- Increased awareness of Léargas and how the work supports the implementation of policy and practice.
- Data to show and share the story of our work and its impact on personal development and transformation.

Relevant Policies

European

[New Skills Agenda 2020](#)

[Europe 2020 Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth](#)

[Education and Training 2020 Strategic Framework \(ET2020\)](#)

[The European Pillar of Social Rights](#)

[EU Digital Education Action Plan](#)

[EU Green Deal](#)

[EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027](#)

Youth Policy in Ireland

[National Youth Strategy 2015–2020](#)

[LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018–2020](#)

[Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020](#)

[National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making](#)

Other Relevant Policies

[National Traveller & Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017–2021](#)

[National Volunteering Strategy 2021–2025](#)

[Sustainable, inclusive and empowered communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019–2024](#)

[National Strategy for Women and Girls 2017–2020](#)

[The Climate Action Plan 2019](#)

Education Policy in Ireland

[Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2019–2021](#)

[The Action Plan for Education](#)

[Future FET Transforming Learning: SOLAS Further Education and Training Strategy 2020–2024](#)

[Apprenticeship Action Plan 2021–2025](#)

[Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages 2017–2026](#)




[STEM Education Policy 2017–2026](#)

[Ireland's National Skills Strategy 2025](#)

[Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020](#)

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