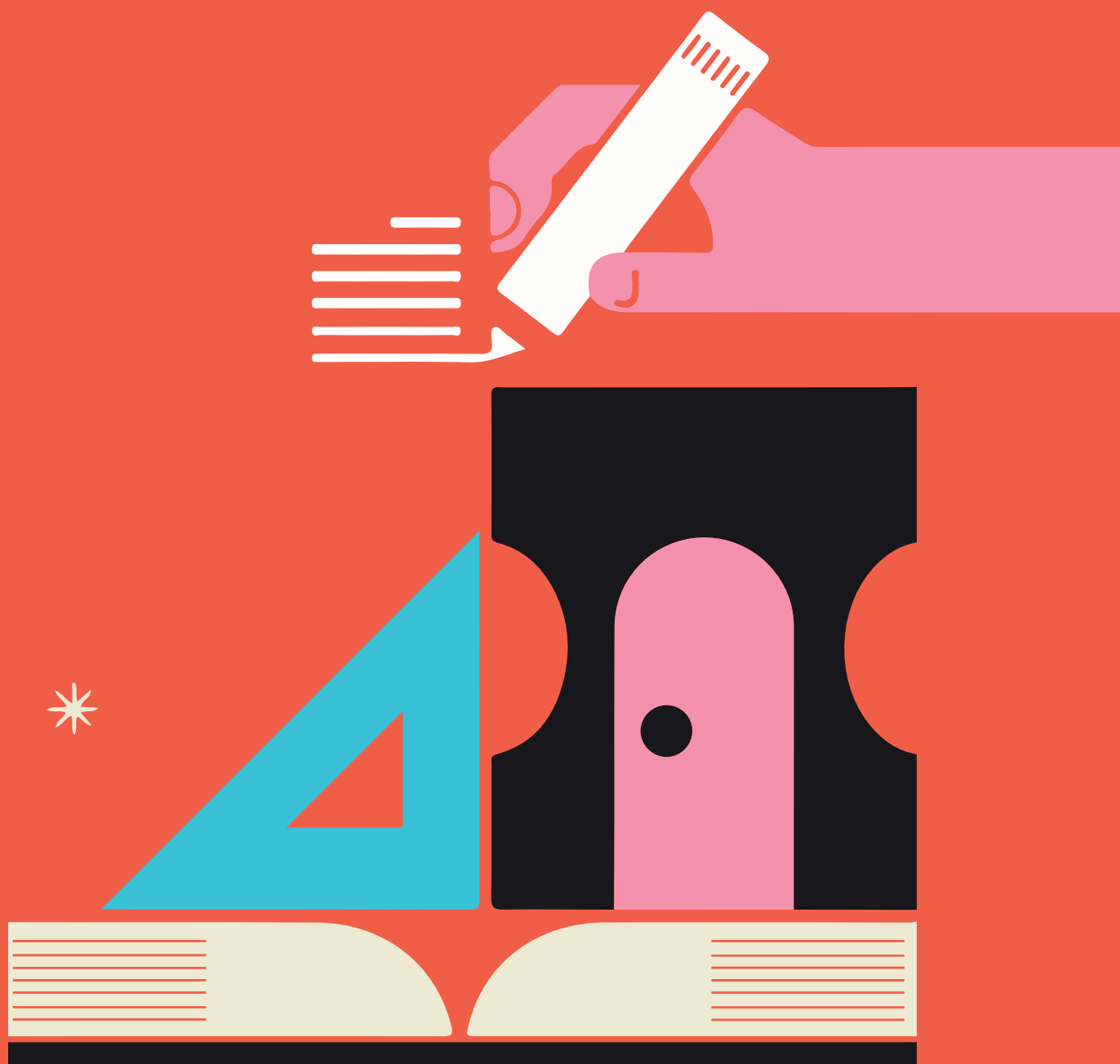


Erasmus+ School Education: The Impact of Mobility Projects on the Professional Development of Staff

Ivanna D'Arcy,
Léargas, 2022





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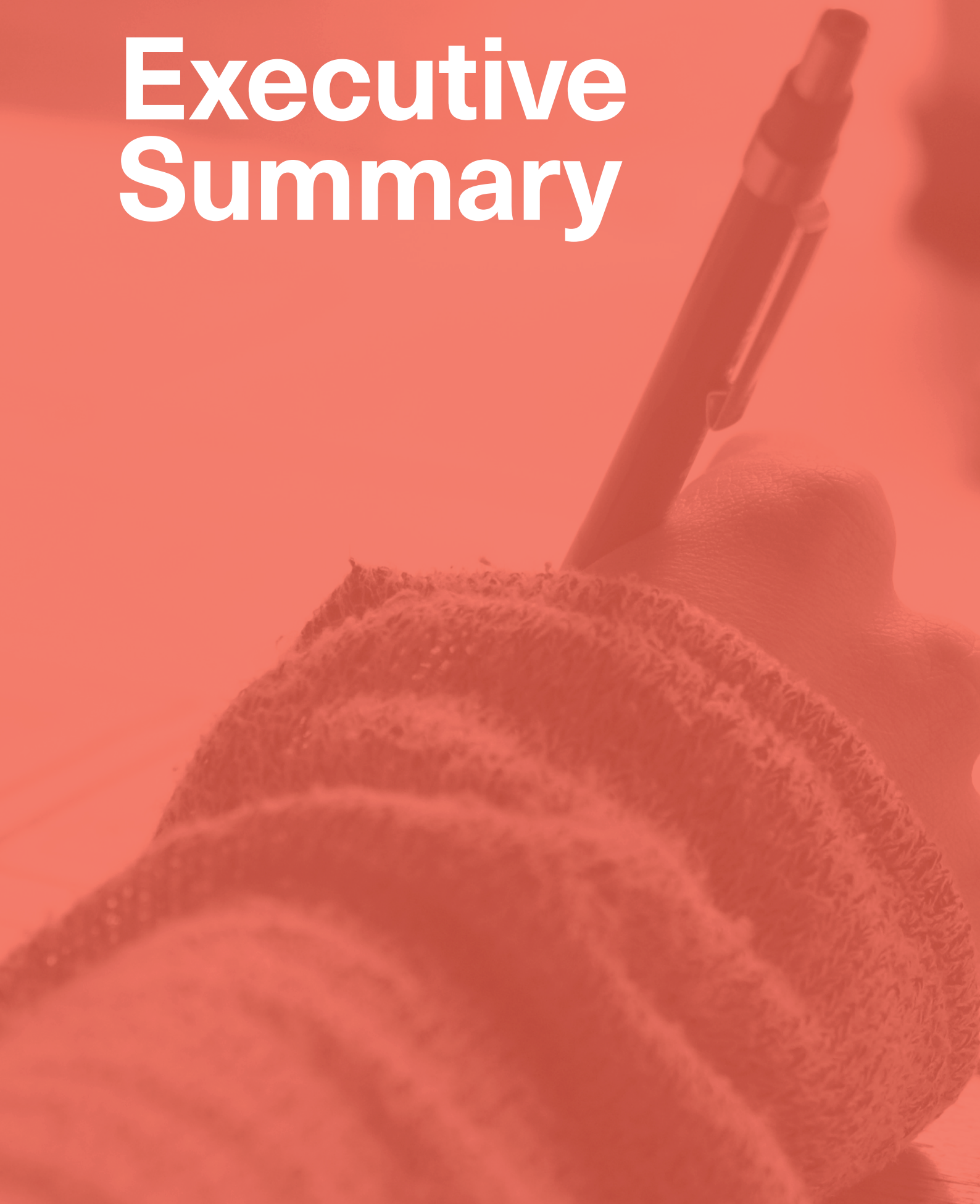
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Abbreviations Used

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CLIL	Content and Language Integrated Learning
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunities in Schools
DE	Department of Education
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EDP	European Development Plan
EU	European Union
EYE	Early Years Education
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MLPSI	Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative
PDST	Professional Development Service for Teachers
SSE	School Self-Evaluation
SNA	Special Needs Assistant

Executive Summary





Executive Summary

Objective of the Report

With the continuation of an organisational approach to Erasmus+, this report explores the rich and diverse experiences of organisations within the field of school education. It sets out to:

- examine how Erasmus+ School Education mobility projects are used by schools and education organisations for the professional development of staff
- identify advice and guidance in the design, delivery and implementation of mobility projects for staff professional development
- consider how Erasmus+ mobility has supported the implementation of key school education policies, at national and European level.

Aim of the Report

All information, advice, tips and guidance in this report come directly from organisations in the field of school education that participated in Erasmus+ mobility. The aim is to produce a report with information, examples and quotes from the field of school education for the field of school education:

- to provide new ideas for organisations who are involved or wish to become involved in Erasmus+ mobility
- to contribute to enhancing and developing quality mobility activities
- to offer new ideas for the design, delivery and sharing of results.

Methodology

We examined and analysed 158 School Education mobility final reports which were closed by 1 June 2021. These projects involved 1,107 staff members and had a declared budget of €2,235,184. We sent surveys to 158 project coordinators and had a 58% response rate. We conducted nine semi-structured interviews with project coordinators, from projects selected as examples of good practice through the desk research. The interviews formed the nine case studies included in this report, expanded on points raised in the survey, and provided additional tips and guidance.



Findings

The main findings are that schools use Erasmus+ mobility for staff to:

- fill a gap within the school which enhances the education offer to their students
- provide learning opportunities which are not available in Ireland
- enhance the knowledge, skills and competences of staff to address current or future challenges; of note is ICT, and the field of inclusion and diversity
- upskill or expand skills or remain up-to-date on the latest developments in teaching and learning in ICT and digital skills and to investigate creative learning and teaching approaches
- connect and create European partnerships and collaborative activities.

Projects have noted that participation led to:

- more awareness of their work in the context of national and European priorities
- the opportunity to learn from countries who are progressive in areas such as ICT, digital literacy, and the use of digital tools; creativity in the classroom; and wellbeing and mental health.
- use of new tools and approaches, increasing confidence in addressing sensitive issues
- enhanced teaching and learning methodologies meeting the objectives of the overall project.

The report is divided into three sections with tips and guidance, supported by project examples and quotes from organisations within the field of school education.

Creating an Erasmus+ or European Development Plan

This section considers how to approach developing an Erasmus+ or European Development Plan, which is new for 80% of first-time applicants.

Guidance and advice offered is that the School Self-Evaluation activities, School Improvement Plan and/or DEIS (if applicable) plan are good starting points to gather evidence and can provide a framework for the development of an Erasmus+ plan. The development of an Erasmus+ plan should be transparent and inclusive, involve all levels of school staff, and be communicated to all. Many organisations establish an Erasmus+ project team or committee, with meetings open for any member of the school community to join.



Themes and Topics

Turning to the selection of themes and topics, the influence of the School Self-Evaluation and School Improvement Plan are evident. Final reports from 2014 to 2016 focus on numeracy and literacy, and 2017 introduced more focus on learning outcomes. This supports and provides a whole-school approach to the professional development of staff and meets the needs of students and their learning outcomes. From 2019, there was a marked increase in references to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and 21st century teaching skills. The four most popular themes and topics are ICT in education, language teaching and learning, inclusion, and wellbeing. Each of these themes includes examples of good practice. The popularity and growth of each thematic area aligns with policy development, demonstrating the relevance of the themes to the area of school education. A notable shift is the growing number of projects focused on intercultural and cross-cultural communication and cultural literacy outside the area of language teaching and learning. It is slowly moving beyond being led by language and EAL teachers and for an increasing number of projects it is no longer a sub-activity or a secondary objective of projects. Rather, it is becoming a marked priority.

Project Tips and Guidance

This section provides advice gathered from the final reports, interviews and surveys. Our analysis of final reports demonstrates that the planning of the project impacts on the outcomes for both the staff and school when combined with a transparent, open approach.

First, we focus on advice for project development, with most organisations stating the importance of attending a Léargas information day or application clinic. An added benefit of these is the networking opportunity with peers. Projects reiterate the importance of transparency and inclusion in this phase. They emphasise the importance of developing a selection process and communicating this across the organisation in the event that the organisation is not awarded the number of mobilities requested. The importance of an Erasmus+ project team is clear. Projects with a team and support in place are more successful than are projects where one staff member undertook an activity in isolation, with no school support other than receiving permission to travel. Timing and planning are also important aspects. Ensure there is adequate time between the official project start date and the first date of travel to allow time to plan well. Keep the mobility tool and paperwork up to date. Have clear processes in place for booking travel and selecting courses. All participants should be aware of their roles and responsibilities. Projects that undertake solid preparation tend to run seamlessly and have a higher impact. Careful planning removes project-related decision-making throughout the remainder of the process, allowing participants to focus more on learning and CPD.

Second, we address guidance for selecting courses and activities, from searching for courses or job shadowing to the added value of contacting course providers for clarification, talking to previous course participants and communicating expectations for job shadowing activities.



Impact and Outcomes

We examine the impact on participating staff and on the participating organisation. Eighty-nine per cent of projects agree that Erasmus+ mobility provided support for schools to address educational priorities at national level which would not have been possible without project participation. Erasmus+ mobility complements or offers an opportunity for CPD activities not available at national level. The impact on practical skills rates highly in the context of their role and CPD. However, improvements in employment and career opportunities on average sit at the lower end of the scale. The intercultural dimension is invaluable, with almost all participants enhancing their skills in this area. The activities not only impact on staff in terms of the thematic or topic area, but there is also a high percentage who report increased 21st century skills such as collaboration, leadership, analytical problem-solving and creativity, as well as confidence to experiment with new methodologies and tools. There is active sharing of results with other staff at staff meetings. This, coupled with informal sharing, ensures that other staff benefit from learning gained.

At school level, the more structured and inclusive the project management aspects are – such as shared responsibility in the form of a committee or evident support of senior management within the school – the more successful the perceived impact is on the school. Participation positively affects teamwork and motivation of staff, which in turn affects the overall impact. This includes changes to practices within and outside the classroom – for example, the introduction of the Flipped Classroom to the creation of a specific space for student wellbeing or a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing.

‘There is an overriding consensus that opportunities afforded under Erasmus+ are a lifeline to school leaders and teachers in their pursuit of excellence in their professional development that in turn enhances all activities undertaken in our schools.’ Survey Respondent

Background and Context

A hand holding a pen over a notebook, with a red overlay. The image is a close-up of a hand holding a pen, positioned over an open notebook. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter. The pen is a dark color, and the notebook pages are visible in the foreground. The background is blurred, showing what appears to be a person's face in profile, also under the red overlay.



Background and Context

Erasmus+ is the European Union (EU) programme in education, training, youth and sport. The 2014-2020 cycle of the programme had a budget of €14.7 billion across Europe, and aimed to facilitate the participation of 4 million individuals in projects, training, study and volunteering abroad. The programme was underpinned by policy development at EU level and aimed to meet the objectives of Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. Erasmus+ School Education is managed in Ireland by the National Agency Léargas.

Erasmus+ brought together all programmes that had previously operated under the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). The brand names built up over the previous two programme cycles – such as Comenius, which was synonymous with school education and facilitated individual staff mobility for professional development – were phased out. One of the key changes was the move from an individual approach to an organisational approach for mobility activities, epitomised by the new requirement for organisations to create European Development Plans (EDPs) as part of their applications. This brought a more strategic approach to Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and is the largest change school education has experienced within the field of the European mobility programme requirements.

The whole-school approach to mobility continues in the new Erasmus+ programme 2021 to 2027. As part of the Key Action 1 (KA 1) mobility strand of the programme, school education organisations can apply annually for short-term projects lasting from 6 to 18 months, or seek Erasmus+ Accreditation. Accreditation is akin to a quality mark in terms of the delivery of high-quality mobility activities, and accredited organisations can make use of a more simplified annual application process. The accreditation application requires the development of a long-term EDP. Short-term projects require an Erasmus+ plan addressing the objectives of the mobility from an organisational perspective, and the needs and challenges of staff and teachers which the proposed mobility activities can address. The other option is to join a consortium project, which to date have mainly been managed by education centres.

Potential activities for staff remain the same in the new 2021-2027 programme. Staff have the opportunity to take part in training courses or undertake job shadowing activities for a minimum of two days. There are new Quality standards for courses under Key Action 1 (learning mobility of individuals) for training providers.

The information and experiences relayed by participating schools and organisations to Léargas provide rich and diverse material to explore best practice within the programme, as well as its outcomes and impact. This information can help newcomer schools to make the most of the programme; provide new ideas for those already involved; and contribute to enhancing and developing high-quality mobility activities and ideas for the design, delivery and sharing of results.



Therefore, the objective of this report is to:

- examine how mobility projects are used by schools and education organisations for the professional development of staff
- consider how Erasmus+ mobility has supported the implementation of key school education policies, at national and European level
- identify advice and guidance in the design, delivery and implementation of mobility projects for staff professional development.

This research is based on analysis of project final reports, a survey and interviews. It is in essence an evidence-based report written **by schools for schools**.

Methodology

Desk research

We (Léargas) reviewed and analysed 158 final reports to identify recurring topics and the stated impact of the activities on staff and at school level. These projects were all finalised by 1 June 2021. They involved 1,107 school education staff, and had a declared budget of €2,235,184. We reviewed them in the areas of project management, implementation and sharing of results, and identified successful approaches. We distributed an anonymous survey to project coordinators containing seven questions, with a final question focusing on further comments. This survey had a response rate of 58%.

Field research

We identified and selected 12 project coordinators for interview as their projects were examples of good practice, and nine project coordinators agreed to participate in a 30- to 45-minute interview. Eight of these were coordinators of school projects and one was from a consortium project. We asked all interviewees similar questions, with a deviation in questions in terms of topic or theme, which differed across the projects.

Contract Year	Number of finalised projects	Number of staff mobilities	Total declared budget
2014	19	127	€232,689
2015	18	198	€368,740
2016	23	166	€353,286
2017	34	327	€622,720
2018	32	195	€435,979
2019	32	94	€221,770
Total	158	1,107	€2,235,184

Figure 1: Table of finalised projects, staff mobilities and declared budget



Of the 158 final reports reviewed, 25 schools completed two or more projects. Ten projects were curtailed by the Covid-19 pandemic, with none of the planned mobilities taking place. However, as these projects still completed a final report their input is included. Out of the 158 projects, 60% were operated by primary schools and 34% by post-primary schools. The remaining projects were operated by special schools, hospital schools, statutory education bodies, or consortiums led by education centres.

Number of staff mobilities	Primary school	Post-primary school
0	9%	2%
1 to 3	47%	41%
4 to 6	21%	19%
7 to 9	8%	11%
10 to 12	7%	7%
13 to 15	3%	6%
15 to 43	5%	14%

Figure 2: Number of staff mobilities carried out in primary and post-primary school, by percentage of total projects

In both primary and post-primary schools, just under half the projects involved one to three staff mobilities. The consortium projects involved 12 to 22 mobilities. The number of staff undertaking courses abroad was more than double those undertaking job shadowing or teaching at schools in Europe. Erasmus+ School Education mobility projects can last from 12 to 24 months. Organisations specify their desired duration when they apply. More than half (57%) of all projects had a duration of 12 months. Less than 30% had a duration of 24 months, while 14% lasted between 13 and 16 months.

Structure

The report is divided into three sections. Each section provides advice and guidance from previous projects based on final reports, the survey and interviews. We reference nine good practice examples throughout the report, from the development of the topics to the overall impact of the project. In general, we have anonymised quotes from the final reports and the survey. Schools are identified only where quotes came from the public Erasmus+ Projects Results Platform.

- Creating an Erasmus+ or European Development Plan
 - Tips and guidance when developing an Erasmus+ or European Development Plan based on final reports and interviews
 - Review of the main topics from 2014 to 2020 with examples
- Project Tips and Guidance
 - Project development advice
 - Consideration when selecting activities
- Outcomes and Impact
 - Outcomes for staff mobility projects
 - Conclusions

Creating an Erasmus+ or European Development Plan

The background of the page is a monochromatic, reddish-orange photograph. It shows a close-up of a person's hand holding a black pen, poised to write on a notebook with a textured, woven cover. The lighting is soft, creating a professional and focused atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the left side of the image in a clean, white, sans-serif font.



Creating an Erasmus+ or European Development Plan

The survey results show that the concept of an EDP was new for 80% of the respondents. The benefits of developing a plan include:

- the provision of a structured and focused framework for the implementation of European staff CPD activities
- a statement of intent that can be shared with a range of stakeholders: for example, Christian Brothers College Cork have published their plan on their school website
- complementing National CPD activities, extending the staff development plan beyond Ireland.

Schools varied in their approaches to developing the EDP, but a collaborative approach is most common. There is an emphasis on the CPD needs of staff to meet student requirements. We saw fewer projects where the input only involved school management.

Question: When developing your European Development Plan was it:

Developed alongside planned professional development of staff	60%
Discussed at staff meetings	55%
Embedded into the school strategy	42%
Examined at management meetings	39%
Devised with input from both staff and management	31%
Designed to complement national CPD offered	27%
Reviewed at subject or thematic specific meetings	21%
Created by management only	5%

Figure 3: Approaches to developing an EDP in schools.



Where to Start with an Erasmus+ Plan or EDP

- EDPs are strategic, and organisations can build on them every year through careful planning. Twenty-five organisations have more than one project, and those who focused on the same thematic areas opted for a step-by-step approach to the implementation of the plan, with different targets each year.
- Be transparent and inform everyone in the school of the intention to apply.
- Put together a team of two or three people, including a member of school management. Have a set day and time for meetings, adding them to the school calendar and invite all staff to join, discuss and input.
- Be inclusive of the entire school community. For example, maintenance and garden staff are relevant to topics like environment and sustainability; canteen staff have a link with healthy eating, and so on.
- Gather data and evidence from the School Self-Evaluation (SSE) activity, the School Improvement Plan and the DEIS plan (if applicable).
- The SSE process provides a framework to establish an EDP or an Erasmus+ plan. A summary of the plan has already been published within the school community. The EDP goes a step further, placing the SSE or School Improvement Plan in a European context.
- The plan does not need to focus on areas where the school considers there are weaknesses. Instead, it can try to enhance strengths, seek different methods look at approaches other countries take to a topic, or a combination of these.
- Survey or discuss the needs of school staff and teachers.
- Be ambitious but realistic.
- Conduct Horizon scanning, considering new opportunities or potential future risks. What territories remain unexplored or could be further developed within the school?

'Our project was built largely around DEIS themes: 1. School attendance/retention 2. Parental/community engagement and participation 3. Improvement of numeracy/literacy 4. Multilingualism 5. Engagement with diverse communities and those marginalised and at risk of early school leaving 6. Working with asylum seekers and refugees 7. Inclusion of students with Additional/Special Educational Needs 8. Increasing citizenship and European engagement.' Final Report

Project in Action: Mount Sion CBS – Meeting the Needs of All

Meeting the Needs of All was a 24-month project taking place from February 2019 to February 2021. The pandemic affected the project when travel stopped in March 2020. While the project did not complete all approved mobilities, robust planning ensured that 18 were completed before travel ceased. The project addressed the overall topics of new learning and teaching methods and approaches, inclusion and early school leaving.



Plan

Mount Sion CBS is an inclusive post-primary school with students across the full ability spectrum from a wide range of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, including newcomers to Ireland over the age of 12. The school identified inclusion as a priority in its school evaluation plan as well as in the DEIS plan. The school vision is of a caring learning environment where every student is welcomed, respected, cherished and facilitated in reaching their full potential. It sought to create a school environment which is inclusive of all and respects and celebrates diversity, not just in atmosphere, but through teaching and learning strategies and methods. The school is constantly seeking to improve its teaching methods to support every student in their individual learning processes. Participation in mobility was intended to provide an insight into European practice and thinking about inclusion.

Activity

Eighteen staff participated in five-day training courses across Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The school gave all staff a choice of carefully pre-selected courses. The courses were not subject specific, focusing on methods and approaches to addressing the needs of a broad spectrum of students. The contracts between the school and the staff members travelling included accountability over the activity and awareness of their responsibility to feed back to the school on their return.

Results

All staff gained practical skills enabling them to meaningfully differentiate and include all learners. More than 90% gained practical skills relevant to their role and CPD, as well as exposure to models of good practice in Europe, which promoted new thinking and discussion. These skills can and are being embedded, regardless of the subject being taught, due to the emphasis on gaining practical skills rather than curriculum specific content.

The project motivated and inspired staff to take ownership and responsibility for their learning and empowered staff to make changes. Staff are happier and better equipped to include all learners, leading to a more inclusive school.

In December 2020, the school was recognised as the first School of Sanctuary in the Republic of Ireland. The school opened its first Autism Spectrum Disorder classroom in September 2020. The project informed the school curriculum, policy and practice and nurtured teachers' willingness to share and collaborate with colleagues on a national and international level.

The school established a Teaching Learning Committee as an idea- and knowledge-sharing platform within the school. This contributed to leadership skills, where staff gave workshops and shared their learning. New staff and staff who did not travel could learn from their peers and contribute their own ideas. The school made all learning material available on an accessible drive. It ran training sessions for parents, creating awareness of the project among the entire school community and beyond. The success of the project inspired other local schools to apply for Erasmus+. The modern foreign languages department of the school became involved in two Erasmus+ Key Action 2 collaborative partnership projects because of activity with Spain. The school has established a new committee for the next mobility project.

Themes and Topics





Themes and Topics

Projects cover a range of topics and themes, with most projects having multiple topics within an overall theme that links with national policies and developments, the SSE and – in the case of DEIS schools – the DEIS plan. The focus on SSE is evident with references to literacy and numeracy in the school improvement plan from 2014 to 2016, and more of a focus on learner outcomes from 2017 onwards. This supports and provides a whole-school approach to the professional development of staff as well as meeting the needs of students and their learning outcomes. In the last two years, there have been more references to the UN Sustainable Development Goals in terms of inclusion and the environment and increased reference to teachers gaining 21st century skills as well as knowledge, skills and competencies within a particular thematic area.

'Take time to plan the themes of the project. When addressing several themes, be clear what you hope to achieve and develop a set of clear criteria and expected outcomes for each thematic area.' Survey Respondent

Survey respondents were asked to indicate the most impacted themes and topics of their projects. The answers correlate with the final reports.

Question: Your project may have focussed on a number of themes. Considering the outcomes of the project as a whole, please list the thematic or subject areas, you consider were most impacted as a result of participation.

Language teaching and learning	ICT in education, teaching and learning	Citizenship, EU citizenship and global citizenship	School management and leadership
Intercultural competences and intercultural education	Health and wellbeing including teacher wellbeing	New and innovative curricula and pedagogical approaches	Creativity and art
Environment and outdoor education	Literacy and numeracy	STEM and STEAM	Special education needs
Digital skills and competences	Inclusion and diversity	Multicultural and intercultural classroom	Early school leaving

Figure 4: The most impacted themes and topics 2014 to 2020

'Teaching and learning is enhanced through incorporating the use of digital technology and ensuring teachers are digitally proficient, thus being effective in embracing the new normal of online learning. Teaching and learning has been enhanced [along with] staff and student wellbeing because of participants returning from mobilities in Croatia, Italy and Malta. Participants returned to schools with an action plan to promote wellbeing through the enhancement of teaching skills. The mobilities provided the opportunity to improve competences but also to gain a broader understanding of the provision of education in European countries. It provided a platform to establish links with international educational



institutions and to compare best practices, evaluate, feedback and implement. Participants reported back to management on mobility outcomes and evaluated what would and would not work.' Survey Respondent

'Participants are more "change ready", open to trying new approaches/methods, more ready to embrace the challenge of change. This was a seismic shift in culture and attitude by our staff. [We have] increased organisational confidence that our model can stand up to European scrutiny ..., have lots to offer our European educational partners [and] nothing to fear from engagement in Erasmus+ projects. [We have] improved professional motivation, increased competencies skills [and] raised levels of enthusiasm for engaging with other peer professionals at a national and international level.' Survey Respondent

'This project was part of the school's wider stated goal to improve critical thinking and higher order language processing skills within the school with particular regard to science, maths, ethics and the arts. The project successfully achieved the goal of sending selected staff members on professional development opportunities in the areas of critical thinking; using art to develop deep thinking; and inquiry-led learning in science and ethics. The staff members came from a range of management levels (principal and in-school management team, as well as teachers). They also represented different levels of teaching experience, with one having 0–3 years of experience, two having 5–10 years, one having 10–20 years and one having 20+ years. The participants came from a range of contexts within the school, including mainstream teachers, learning support teachers, SEN (special education needs) teachers and non-teaching roles. The teachers participated in a range of structured training courses across five different European countries (Italy, Spain, Slovenia, Greece, and the Czech Republic). The courses themselves covered topics like developing critical and creative thinking, philosophical inquiry, understanding and enjoying art, positive education for wellbeing and life-skills development, and innovative approaches for 21st century teaching and learning.' Balbriggan Educate Together National School

Review of the Four Most Popular Areas: ICT, Language, Inclusion and Wellbeing

'This mobility project was an invaluable asset to our school community. It helped us to ensure that we were equipped to help our students and staff during the stressful and challenging lockdown times that followed our mobility. The communication with our European colleagues during the lockdown in Europe helped us to share ideas on remote learning and how best to teach our students remotely and to ensure we could promote positive mental health among our staff and students.' Survey Respondent



ICT in Education

Projects in ICT looking at teaching and learning, digital competences of teachers, digital literacy, and integration of ICT into the school grew rapidly from 2016. In 2014 and 2015, it was mainly primary schools that addressed this topic, seeking to become Digital Schools of Distinction. There was a significant increase from 2016 across all school levels. At policy level, the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020: Enhancing Teaching, Learning and Assessment¹ was published in 2015. This aimed to embed ICT across the school education system to enhance the quality of education. It committed to €210 million investment in technology in schools and centred around four key thematic areas: Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT; Teacher Professional Learning; Leadership, Research and Policy; and ICT Infrastructure.

In 2017, the Digital Learning Framework for primary and post-primary schools was published and piloted in 50 schools (20 post-primary and 30 primary schools). Digital Learning Planning Guidelines for both primary and post-primary schools were also published in 2017. The Digital Learning Framework was rolled out across all schools in 2018/2019 and is supported by extensive CPD to assist and support schools with embedding ICT in teaching and learning. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) – Technology in Education oversees and delivers this. 2015 also saw the publication of the plan for Junior Cycle reform, with reference to the increased use of ICT for learning and communication as well as working collaboratively and creatively.

Project in Action: Killorglin Community College – Whole-School Improvement Focusing on Improving Student Engagement & Achievement by Utilising ICT, Social Media and Team Teaching in the STEM Subjects

This was a 24-month project taking place from October 2017 to October 2019. It provides a clear example of multiple topics within the thematic area of ICT – new technologies, digital competences, inclusion, equity, and digital skills.

The school took a strategic approach in its use of training courses and job shadowing activities. Training courses took place first, followed by job shadowing. This allowed teachers to see learning in action and further develop team teaching, and allowed co-teaching for the job shadowing activities.

Plan

Killorglin Community College is a co-educational post-primary school governed by Kerry Education and Training Board and participates in the Delivering Equal Opportunities in School (DEIS) action plan for educational inclusion. The school population has grown rapidly, more than doubling in the space of ten years. There are 26 staff members and 240 students. The school has participated in many pilot projects and initiatives in ICT and can be considered a leader in the area. The school sought to integrate ICT more into the curriculum. While early school leaving is not currently an issue within the school, it identified that the engagement of learners at risk of early school leaving could be enhanced.

¹ Department of Education (2015). Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020. <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/69fb88-digital-strategy-for-schools/>. (Accessed October 2021)



The project aimed to address this by improving the learning experience of these students through using ICT and social media to enhance teaching and learning at school. The school carried out a poll, showing that 80% of students have no or limited internet connectivity at home. Team teaching had also been introduced at a basic level, with positive indicators from staff and students.

The plan set key outcome indicators, including:

- All staff will participate in the project and try out, experiment and adapt new methods and techniques and share the outcomes.
- 25% of staff will use social media to create a student-led learning environment extending beyond the classroom.
- 60% of staff in the STEM subjects will be involved in team teaching.
- 75% of staff will have undertaken quality CPD in ICT.

Activity

Courses were identified through the School Education Gateway. Job shadowing host schools were identified through research, the school's European network and contacts, and eTwinning. Seventeen teachers took part in structured courses in the Czech Republic, Italy, Portugal and the UK, and nine participated in job shadowing activities in schools in Croatia and the Netherlands.

Results

More than 95% of staff who participated in mobilities gained skills relevant for their role and CPD. Staff benefited from web 2.0 tools and explored and developed their ICT skills, integrating the learning into their teaching. Staff became champions of learning tools and became the 'go-to' person for advanced information on a particular tool. Many staff are using the Flipped Classroom model along with other methods to extend learning outside the classroom and make learning more engaging for students. The project successfully engaged the targeted learners and placed them more in control of their learning, using tools that they are familiar with, thereby extending learning activities beyond the classroom. The school expanded team teaching beyond the STEM classes too. It achieved all outcomes it set out. In addition, however, the project had great unintended or unplanned impact. While positive staff working relationships already existed, teachers were further motivated by the topic and collaborated with colleagues they would not usually work or mix with in the staffroom, contributing to the collaborative school.



Language Teaching and Learning

'The key objective of our project is the maintenance of this language learning tradition in [Galway]. Without EU initiatives it would not be possible to maintain our well-established ethos of language learning and linguistic diversity. Our school has already shown a strong commitment to language teaching, and the participants being enabled to embrace a total immersion course will ensure their continued upskilling in an authentic cultural and language setting. We believe the most vital tools of communication to be languages. They facilitate the building of bridges between people, enabling us to understand each other and our cultures better.' **Clydagh National School**

Language teaching and learning was a key feature of 2014 and 2015 projects, particularly within primary schools. The rationale was to upskill teachers, mainly in French, German or Spanish, filling the gap left by the completion of the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (MLPSI). The MLPSI ran from 1998 to 2012, and 56% of the 546 MLPSI-participating schools had a member of their own staff delivering the programme.² In 2017, the Department of Education and Skills published Languages Connect, Ireland's Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education 2017–2026, along with an implementation plan for 2017 to 2022. It features in the Department's Statement of Strategy 2021–2023.³ In May 2021, the Department of Education announced the roll-out of a six-week initiative providing an opportunity for senior primary school students to learn a new language, including Irish Sign Language. Over 500 schools will be involved during the 2021/2022 academic year.⁴ There were more language-focused projects in primary schools than in post-primary schools from 2014 to 2020. At both primary and post-primary level, these projects tended to involve one or two teachers who wished to improve language skills and gain an insight into new teaching and learning methods to use in their subject area and classroom by attending a language course. Job shadowing did not feature to a notable extent within these projects.

Project in Action: Maynooth Post-Primary School 'Supporting Speakers of Russian in Schools' and 'Supporting Learners of Russian'

Maynooth Post-Primary School completed two projects focusing on the Russian language. The first project, 'Supporting Speakers of Russian in Schools', aimed to provide support to Russian-speaking students through the upskilling of a language teacher in Russian language skills. The second project, built on the first, was 'Supporting Learners of Russian'. Each project ran for 12 months between June 2018 and May 2019 and June 2019 and May 2020 respectively. Russian is one of the many languages the school's Language Club has supported since 2017. The club encourages plurilingual language proficiency in an informal after-school learning environment. In 2018, the Language Club won the European Language Label award. This project demonstrates how an EDP can be expanded year on year to achieve its goals. While many projects focused on language learning within the classroom, few

² Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative (2012). Final Report on the Modern Languages in Primary Schools Initiative, 1998–2012. http://www.onevoiceforlanguages.com/uploads/2/4/6/7/24671559/mlpsi_final_report_july_2012.pdf. (Accessed October 2021)

³ Department of Education (2021). Statement of Strategy 2021–2023. <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/136245/0f16238d-ce2e-4da9-8511-a871327b4e2d.pdf#page=null>. (Accessed October 2021)

⁴ Languages Connect (2021). Primary School Languages Sampler – Say 'Yes' to Languages! <https://languagesconnect.ie/primary/>. (Accessed October 2021)



focused on supporting heritage languages of migrant students – something that is outlined in Languages Connect 2017 to 2026.

Plan

A teacher of German, French, and English as an Additional Language (EAL) drove the project, with the full support and backing of school management. The project identified the need to have a high standard of Russian language skills to support Russian-speaking students with varying degrees of language competence, who required support with reading, writing and grammar. The school wanted to better support the heritage/home languages of students from migrant backgrounds and effectively address this gap. The project demonstrates the school's commitment to support students and enhance both multilingualism and plurilingualism at school level. The project aims to increase the visibility of Russian-speaking students in school, to improve language skills and to lead students to value the rich cultural heritage of their home countries. The teacher aimed to gain the support and involvement of the Russian-speaking community. The second plan, while still focused on Russian, concentrated more on the need to improve learning outcomes for migrant students. By the time the second project commenced, non-Russian speaking students had joined the Language Club.

Activity

One teacher travelled during each project to take a 20-day structured training course in Germany in the first project and a 12-day training course on a higher-level language course in the second project.

Results

The teacher enhanced their language skills and cultural awareness, observed methods and gained a deeper understanding of the legacy and impact of historical events. Visibility of Russian within the school increased through International Languages and Cultures Day, Erasmus+ Schools Week and certificates at the end of school year prize-giving ceremony. After the first project, Russian was offered at beginners, improvers and advanced levels at the Language Club. Students with no prior knowledge of the Russian language joined, expanding the project to new learners. A native Russian speaker provides support to the teacher in the Language Club on a voluntary basis. Three students supported in the Language Club sat Russian in the Leaving Certificate exam in June 2019. The teacher is the only Irish participant in a European Centre for Modern Languages project 'Learning Environments where Languages Flourish'. The success of the Language Club was a significant factor in accessing resources to allow for the timetabling of Russian in the main school curriculum for 4th year students 2020–2021. The school expects to build on these projects, with future projects expanding to encompass other topics and thematic areas.



Inclusion

Projects focusing on inclusion have been a key feature of Erasmus+ throughout its lifecycle. They have covered special education needs through the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities; DEIS; combating disadvantage; and intercultural education embedded in the education system through the Education Act 1998, which aims to provide young people with an education that respects 'the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society'.⁵ The Department of Education Statement of Strategy 2021–2023 is focused on inclusion. The appointment of the first Minister of State for Special Education and Inclusion underlines the importance of this topic. The pandemic has increased the questioning of equitable access to education, and studies have demonstrated the widening of educational inequalities.

Project in Action: St. Nicholas National School (Claddagh National School) – SCLEIP: Schools Creating Leadership, Electronic and Inclusive Practice

This was a 12-month project taking place from February 2018 to January 2019. The project focused on inclusion, equity, early school leaving, combating failure in education, and migrant issues. The project is a good example of addressing different students at risk of exclusion, taking a holistic approach.

The EAL teacher coordinated the project, and presented the project concept and the topics at a staff meeting. Interested staff completed a survey. The principal matched the school's needs with the training needs of interested staff.

Plan

The school is a large Urban Band 1 DEIS school. It is linguistically and culturally diverse, with over 40 different languages spoken. The school has a large population of children with diagnosed special and additional needs in special needs classrooms as well as many children with complex special needs in the mainstream classroom. The project is based on the SSE process and the DEIS plan. The school identified the necessity to constantly upskill to ensure staff are prepared and up to date with the latest trends and approaches when working with the most vulnerable and disadvantaged students. The key priority areas were matched with the European priorities and sought to improve outcomes for students.

The main areas of focus were:

- prevention of early school leaving and school completion to include: approaches to school management in a disadvantaged school; attendance; anti-bullying; cooperation between home and school; building self-esteem in children; empowering students and parents
- intercultural education to include: working with migrant, refugee and asylum seeking students; developing multilingual students and promoting multilingualism at school as well as teaching English; promoting home language maintenance and literacy; improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged migrant students who can be at high risk of early school leaving

⁵ Education Act 1998. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/html>. (Accessed October 2021)



- inclusion of children with special needs to include both children in special classes and children with special needs in the mainstream class
- developing strong digital literacy competences in teachers and students.

Activity

The project created a TwinSpace on the eTwinning Platform and the project coordinator provided group and individual tutorials on how to upload photos, videos and documents to the project TwinSpace to share the project activities.

The project coordinator assisted staff in identifying courses. After careful planning, the school selected four course topics that met the needs of the project. Travelling teachers were responsible for communicating with the host organisation prior to their visit to ensure all necessary preparation was done prior to their arrival.

Eleven staff, including the principal and special needs assistants (SNAs), attended a range of identified courses across Italy, Portugal, Slovenia and Spain on topics of early school leaving, digital literacy, multiculturalism in the classroom, and the inclusion of SEN students. Staff had the opportunity to share their work on the courses with European colleagues.

Results

All staff reported gaining skills relevant to their role and CPD. Ideas were adapted and implemented within the classes and the school. This larger scale training within a European context is not available in Ireland. As individuals and as a whole school, participants found the training experiences abroad to be highly beneficial to CPD. The overall objective of the project was met, with staff remaining up to date on key areas. They learned about new ideas such as the Future Classroom, which is the idea of setting the classroom into different areas and getting students into groups to work. This prepares students to cooperate with each other and work together on assignments. During the Erasmus+ Schools Week, staff members delivered workshops to colleagues on the learning and information gained. The coordinator supported other schools in applying for projects and provided guidance and advice, sharing the skills and knowledge gained through participation in several Erasmus+ activities and projects.



Project in Action: St. Ita's Special School – Fostering Positive Practical Lifelong Outcomes for SEN Students, Enhancing Social, Emotional, Community and Economic Mobility within Society

St. Ita's is a co-educational school for students aged 5 to 18 years who have a mild general learning need. Referrals are made to the school through the National Educational Psychological Service or the HSE Early Intervention team. The school is purpose built and currently has 14 classes. The school offers the Primary Curriculum and Aistear (Learning through Play); Level 2 Learning Programme Junior Certificate; Level 2 Curriculum; Level 3 Junior Certificate in chosen subjects; and Quality and Qualifications Ireland levels 1 to 3. This allows the school to engage pupils in both academic study and in learning for life skills that will equip them for life after school. This project ran from February 2018 to November 2019 and focused on inclusion and equity.

Plan

The emphasis of the project was on professional development of staff, aiming to:

- enhance the school's capacity to deliver positive, practical lifelong outcomes for their students
- increase social, emotional, community and economic mobility for students within society
- support the development of active citizenship, with greater participation for the students in their community
- establish contacts with European partners to collaboratively explore new methods that will help open the gateway to better participation in the labour market
- improve transitions from school to the working environment using models of best practice
- pilot new schemes based on practices already in place in other European schools
- increase the wellbeing of students through active engagement in all elements of citizenship so that they feel connected, respected and valued in their world
- foster an innovative school environment allowing teachers, SNAs and senior management to expand their horizons by undertaking job shadowing and professional development activities beyond Ireland; this in turn will increase their knowledge in key areas (teaching methods, strategies for assisting teenagers with social and emotional difficulties) which challenge all school stakeholders.

Activity

The project brought together management and staff to create an Erasmus+ Committee. The entire school was free to join the project. Management, teachers and SNAs met weekly and allocated responsibilities, creating shared accountability for the project. There were sub-committees with allocated roles for the project.

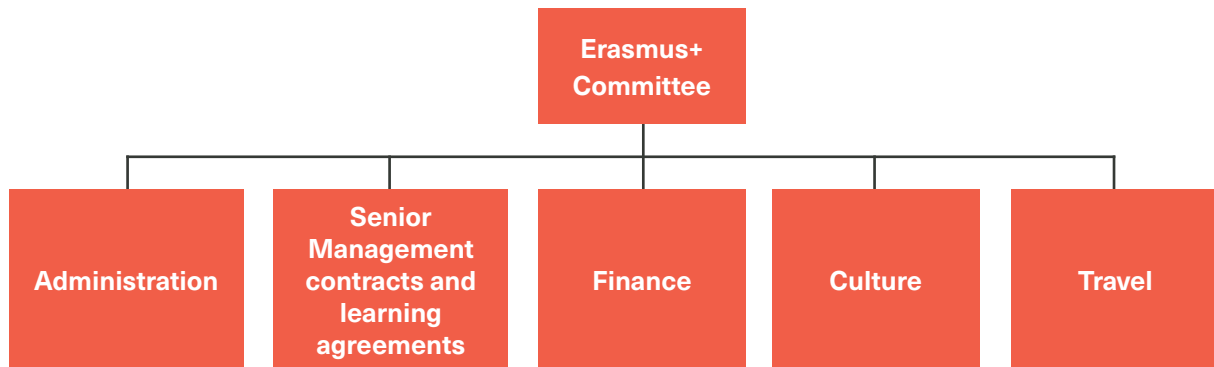


Figure 5: A diagram of the Erasmus+ Committee structure at St. Ita's Special School

Thirteen job shadowing activities took place with Germany and Spain. Sixteen participants took part in training courses in Finland, Croatia, Greece and Italy. Staff engaged in evaluation of each mobility through post-mobility questionnaires. They delivered presentations to all staff, sharing good practices. They took part in Erasmus+ Schools Week and shared their experiences and learning with other educational professionals in the community.

Results

Knowledge, skills, competences and motivation increased. Other results included changes in individual practices and practical steps such as the creation of a wellbeing area where students can go to listen to music and take time out should they need. This project has promoted good mental health by enhancing independence. Key areas delivered by the project during its lifespan included work experience, travel training, emotional wellbeing, social group inclusion, and development and awareness of supportive technologies and apps. The creation of achievable targets and outcomes has increased the wellbeing of students through active engagement in all elements of citizenship so that they feel connected, respected and valued.



Wellbeing

While the Department of Education website lists wellbeing under inclusive education, the publication of the wellbeing guidelines in 2017 increased the number of projects focusing on this area. Most projects focused on wellbeing of students, with limited projects addressing wellbeing of both staff and students, introducing a whole-school approach to wellbeing.

Project in Action: Davis College – Improving Wellbeing Through Sport and Exercise

The project started in September 2017, coinciding with the publication of the wellbeing guidelines for schools, and finished in August 2019. The project took place over 24 months, with more focus on job shadowing activities. The school selected partners based on their location within a country matching the rural location of the school in Ireland. This approach enhanced the learning within the project, with the school able to compare like with like location wise.

Plan

The project was driven by the national healthy eating programme. The school ran sports weeks and active weeks and found that the same people were participating in the sports activities. They wished to broaden their approach and link it more with lifestyle issues to impact on the school and staff. The project sought to improve wellbeing through sport, developing staff and student wellbeing and improving achievement through exercise.

Activity

The school selected partners through the eTwinning Platform. It was important that the partners reflected the setting of the Irish school in terms of type of location. In this instance, rural schools were selected. This brought more authenticity to the activity, with some students from rural backgrounds coming from farming, like the students within the Irish school.

The school built relationships through communication. Each school appointed a contact person from each partner school and this person was responsible for checking emails and responding within a few days to ensure responsive communication and the smooth running of the project.

The coordinator met with each participant and developed a checklist of tasks for each participant covering pre-, during and post-mobility tasks. For example, during the job shadowing activities, tasks included:

- carrying out active research with a cross section of students and staff in relation to wellbeing and teaching physical activity
- observing physical education classes and facilities within the school and canteen facilities and food provided



- discussing with the wider community in relation to exercise taken and its impact on positive mental health and wellbeing
- participating in physical activity, including outdoor pursuits and hiking
- reflecting on themes arising from research carried out
- discussing the applicability of positive findings from research to the school setting.

In total, nine teachers took part in job shadowing activities in Norway and Denmark and three teachers took part in training courses in Italy.

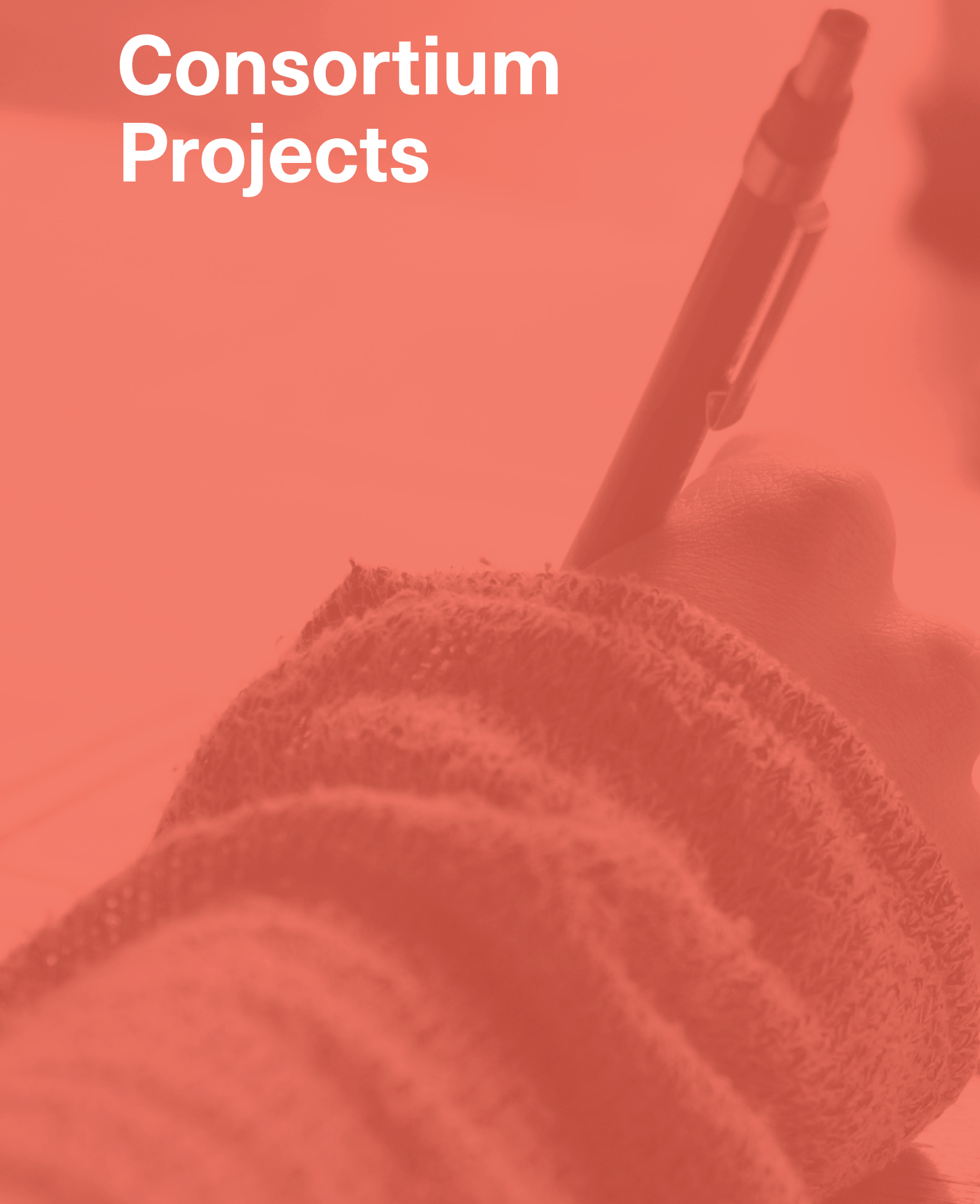
Results

The school increased its sporting activities. It put in place a policy to increase the range of activities offered, introducing more inclusive and diverse sports such as handball and taekwondo. Teachers met as a walking club for 30 minutes during break. The school introduced yoga, and anyone could take part. More wholesome food is available in the canteen. Teachers brought their own lunches and they took stock of their own wellbeing. The school addressed areas causing stress, such as high volumes of paperwork, with systems changed within the school to decrease this and increase efficiency. Physical education introduced a loop walk built into the classes, which has been well received by students. The school has noted an impact on the retention of students, who are better equipped to adapt to everyday stresses.

The school embarked on an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 strategic partnership project. It has hosted 40 Norwegian senior school management staff. The coordinator supported two local schools in becoming involved in Erasmus+ mobility projects.

The coordinator is an eTwinning Ambassador. They shared results of the project through these networks and presented at conferences and events.

Consortium Projects





Project in Action: Clare Education Centre – Early Years Education

Clare Education Centre has many years' experience in projects and has led two consortium projects. This project ran from June 2018 to May 2020. It involved 32 staff travelling from a consortium of 13 local schools to undertake structured training courses in Greece and Croatia. Consortium Projects led by education centres made up approximately 2% of all finalised projects.

Plan

Clare Education Centre is responsible for in-service training for all 140 schools in Co. Clare at both primary and post-primary level. The schools involved in this project have a particular interest in Early Years Education and have been involved in several school improvement projects in conjunction with Clare Education Centre. The participating schools recognised Early Years Education as a topic and need. Many schools developed a common EDP with a focus on school improvement in conjunction with the education centre.

Activity

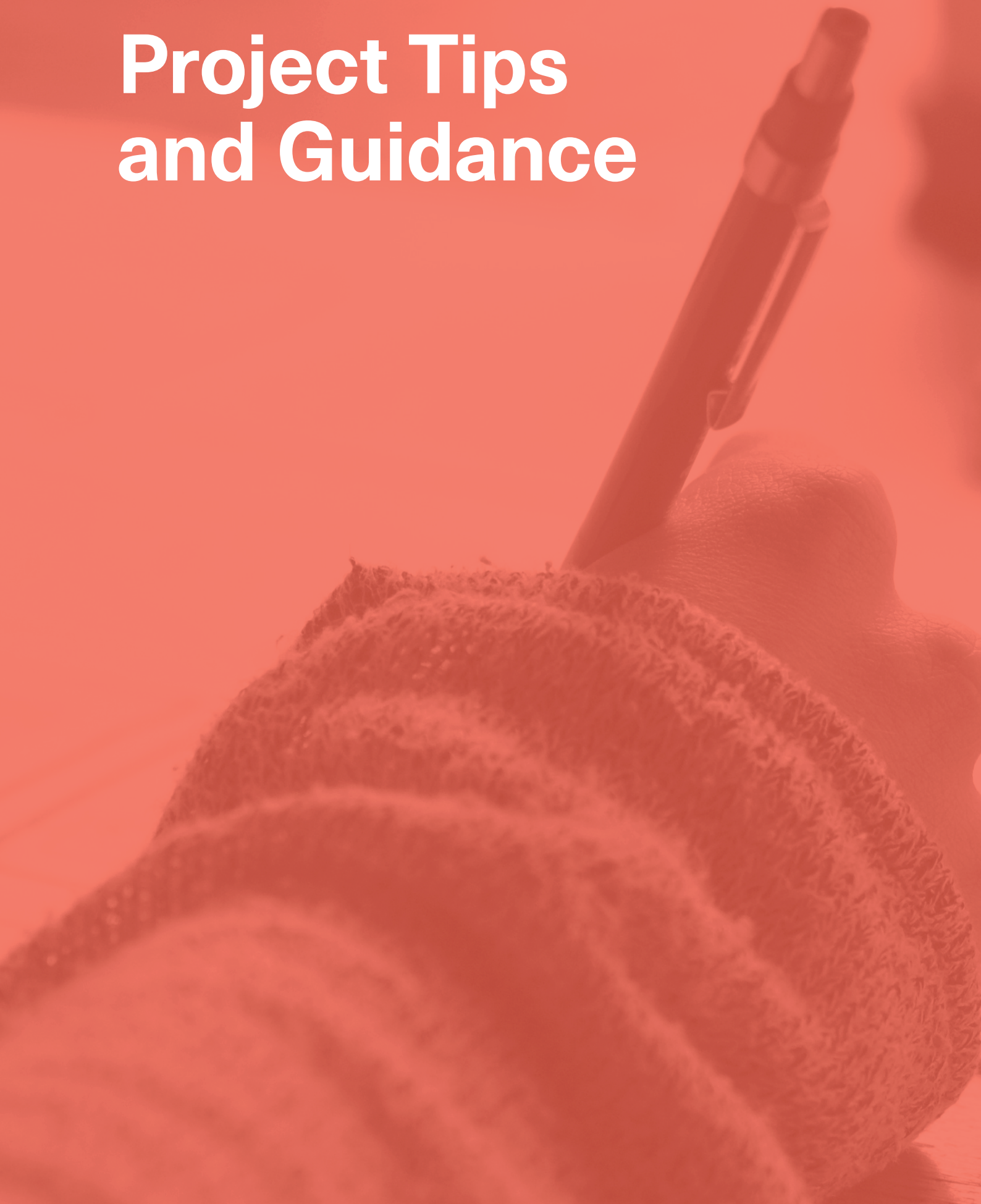
In addition to the project training courses, Clare Education Centre provided further training opportunities for teachers around supporting transition to primary school. Training opportunities were also provided to school leaders through focused meetings with School Principals on the topic of transition. The hosting organisations in Croatia and Greece have previously worked with Clare Education Centre on Erasmus+ partnership projects. Clare Education Centre managed logistical, practical and administrative aspects and held preparatory meetings with the participants. While on mobility, participants had the opportunity to share their own experiences of the Aistear programme with European colleagues, which enhanced awareness of the strengths of the programmes. Clare Education Centre supported participants in reviewing their educational and cultural learning experiences. The education centre undertook a full evaluation of each mobility event and shared and discussed the findings with all consortium members.

Results

All participants gained skills relevant to their role and CPD. The most sustainable impact was awareness of the transition from pre-primary to primary school and the importance of creating connections with incoming parents. During the pandemic, schools could not host the usual meetings with parents. A local effort was made for virtual walk-throughs of schools and for parents to meet key people online. Staff awareness and understanding of other cultures and countries increased, offering staff the opportunity to build networks of international contacts.

'Our Erasmus+ project improved staff morale and team building, the whole school benefited as a result and we have undertaken a second project.' Survey Respondent

Project Tips and Guidance





Project Tips and Guidance

According to project coordinators, it is essential to attend information days and application clinics organised by Léargas.

'I can't praise the Erasmus+ experience highly enough. We are very fortunate to have excellent leadership and support from Léargas also, who guide us through certain tricky aspects of form filling, etc. We are fortunate they are so knowledgeable in their field.'

Survey Respondent

Project Development Phase Advice

Attend information days and application clinics organised by Léargas. According to project coordinators, this is essential. The feedback on the support and guidance provided by Léargas is overwhelmingly positive. These sessions also facilitate networking, where people can meet previous participants, learn from their experiences and gain feedback on courses they have previously attended.

'A word of gratitude must also go to the Léargas staff in Dublin who were very accommodating to a first timer. The help, advice and patience shown to our school was excellent and made the process so much easier and less intimidating. Secondly, the opportunity to travel and learn does take you out of your own education 'comfort bubble' and forces one to think a little outside the box, which can only improve your own systems. Finally, I would like to say, the Mobility Training Exercise was well worth the time and effort put in across the board.' Final report

'We found the [Léargas] application clinics to be exceptional – the level of support provided was excellent. The same goes for the clinics provided after our application was approved.'

Final report

- **Engage the school.** Ensure all staff are aware of the opportunities available to them. Provide the information on the proposed project and activities at staff meetings, circulars and noticeboards within the school.
- **Be transparent and inclusive.** Thematic area and topics can encompass a broad subset of subjects, skills and staff. Projects are not confined to one thematic area or topic when developing plans. Ensure information and opportunities are available to all staff and that there is a transparent selection process in place. This avoids problems should there be a small number of grants available. Some projects apply for mobilities based on the interest and input of staff prior to submitting the application; others have a selection process. However, at application stage it is advisable to develop a transparent selection process should you not be awarded the number of mobilities requested.



'Prospective participants completed an application form which had been compiled by the Erasmus+ committee. They were required to reply to the following: • Outline your reasons for applying to participate in the mobility. • How do you feel you can implement the European Development Plan? • Outline how the mobility will facilitate you in meeting the aims of the project. • What are the most relevant competences you can bring to the project? • Which competences do you feel you can improve by participation in the mobility? • Please explain how you will apply the competences and experiences you hope to acquire. • How will you disseminate your findings on your return from the mobility activity? The Erasmus+ committee considered the merits of all applicants. It aimed to have a mix of competences, ages and genders.' Final Report

- **Establish a project team.** A large proportion of projects had an Erasmus+ project team in place made up of teachers and staff across the school. While mobility numbers varied, projects with a team and support in place were more successful than the projects where one staff member undertook an activity in isolation. Projects with larger mobility numbers divided tasks among the team, sharing the administration and accountability for project management and reporting. Having a team in place also ensures that there is still a group of people who continue to move the project forward should a staff member leave.

'We had in place a member of staff with responsibility for international projects. To assist them in their role a team was set up consisting of teaching and teaching support staff who were each assigned specific roles: 1. Training – responsibility for organising and coordinating training events, 2. Funding-auditing and keeping account of finances, 3. Communications – responsibility for keeping in regular touch with partner schools, community links and parents to inform on developments and check on work progress, 4. Travel responsibility for organising flights, insurance, etc. and with whom staff travelling coordinate if for any reason flights are delayed, 5. School Council – pupils will have input [into the School Council] through the student council.' Final Report

- **Become familiar with the process for obtaining the signature of the legal representative.** Organisations cite difficulty in getting forms signed by the legal representative. They are advised to contact them to find out the process for having the project signed off in advance of the application. Schools advised that the procurement and processes for booking flights and accommodation be researched in advance to avoid any delays when a project is approved.
- **Be aware of timing and planning.** When applying, check the start date and eligibility period of the project. Courses selected may have changed or be no longer available. Have a reserve list of courses. Many schools travel in the summer or during breaks. Travel options can be expensive during this time; early booking is necessary. Ensure there is adequate time between the official project start date and the first date of travel to allow time to plan well. Complete the mobility tool as your project progresses and ensure that paperwork is consistently up to date. Gather feedback as staff return from the mobilities, as this will assist in writing final reports.
- **Clarify processes and responsibilities.** Have a clear process in place for the paperwork, and ensure that all participants know the requirements (and the commitment required) in advance of the activity. From the outset, ensure participants are aware of the approach that will be used – for example, how travel will be booked; how the grant works and will be distributed; what paperwork needs to be completed, by whom and when; what additional activities will need to be completed, such as preparatory meetings; how participants will share their learning on return – will participants need to present at staff meetings, write a report, keep a reflective diary or provide workshops to colleagues? Many of these questions are addressed in the application form. Projects recommend having a one-page overview or a flow diagram of the process to ensure clarity on roles and responsibilities available for all staff to review.



'1. A coordinator was appointed to ensure that all participants are fully informed of their roles and responsibilities. The coordinator discussed every aspect of the arrangements with the principal before any decisions were made. 2. The school development plan was distributed to all staff members. 3. All participants involved in the mobilities met to discuss arrangements before any courses were booked. 4. All travel and accommodation were booked in consultation with the principal and coordinator. 5. All monies were spent according to the rules of the programme and monitored by the coordinator and school principal. 6. The school principal took responsibility for the final sign-off. 7. Each participant was responsible for keeping receipts. 8. Each participant was responsible for organising their travel insurance. 9. All members who attended courses reported back after the course was complete to other members of the team. 10. Teachers met before and after the course to discuss the aims, objectives, progress, and achievements.'

Final Report

- **Solid preparation is key.** Final reports and interviews highlighted that the benefits of good preparation were reaped during implementation of the activities. When preparation is thorough, the project tends to run seamlessly and is more likely to make an impact. Solid preparation lessens the need for ad hoc decision-making throughout the remainder of the process, as all participants are clear on their roles and responsibilities. This allows more focus to be placed on learning and CPD.

'Use the new tools from the start and get used to the platforms, especially the Mobility Tool. This makes the work a lot easier, as it is all logged as you go along instead of the old mode of storing all your information and then getting ready for a final report.' Final Report

- **Manage expectations.** Be transparent and clear about the intended results. Set benchmarks looking at the current situation and what is expected when the project is complete. Be ambitious but realistic, and ensure that expectations are shared and agreed.
- **Good communication is key.** Communication is multi-layered, internally within the school, externally with the host organisations, and in sharing project results. If this is organised well, it avoids confusion and everyone is kept well informed.
- **Evaluate the learning.** Develop a plan to measure the learning gained by participants. Some projects use pre- and post-mobility questionnaires, reflective journals, discussions and reports. This captures the learning at staff level, feeding into the overall outcomes of the project activities and the impact on the school.



Project in Action: Christ the King Girls' School – Towards a Future Classroom – Promoting Equity, Wellbeing and Creativity of Thought

This project ran for 12 months from January 2019 to December 2019 with the topics of inclusion, equity, health and wellbeing and new innovative curricula, educational methods, and development of training courses.

Plan

The objective of the plan was to gain an international perspective of best practice to create a Future Classroom space in the school.

The objectives were to:

- develop relevant, high-level skills (creativity, critical thinking, innovative problem solving, mindfulness, conflict resolution)
- meet colleagues of different nationalities within the EU, engage in cross-cultural learning experience, exchange ideas and build a network for future international cooperation
- gain broader understanding of practices, policies and systems of education of different countries, cultivate mutual respect and intercultural awareness and embed common educational and training values
- develop personal and professional competences and build confidence in promoting innovative and active pedagogies
- enrich communication skills, improve foreign language competencies, broaden professional vocabulary and promote the EU's broad linguistic diversity
- enhance understanding of advanced conflict resolution strategies to further become a restorative community.

Activity

The school sourced all the courses through the School Education Gateway and selected courses based on:

- ability to fulfil the objectives of the EDP
- the location and timing of the courses
- reviews by previous participants
- quick confirmation of course and communication and follow-up.

Seven teachers participated in training courses across the Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Italy and Spain. The project took a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Timebound) approach to evaluation and setting objectives from the learning gained through the course participation.



Results

Noted outcomes include increased awareness of and engagement with: competences in maths, science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative; entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression.

The project enhances teaching in line with 21st century skills, encouraging an interdisciplinary and inclusive approach. Participants piloted methods and approaches such as a visual thinking strategy approach to critical awareness, with ongoing monitoring of the new approaches. The school expects to have a Future Classroom space in place by the end of this year.

The coordinator joined a European Community of Practice, and they are also involved in an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 partnership project.



Selecting Courses and Activities

Become familiar with the Quality Guidelines for course providers. These set out the roles and responsibilities of the providers.

'The organisations providing the structured training courses advertised their courses on their websites and on platforms such as School Education Gateway. Initial communication was through email from the participating organisations who were providing structured training courses. Course descriptions and timetables were provided. Local information, including accommodation possibilities, were included in information packs sent to us.'

Final Report

Conduct research on eTwinning and the School Education Gateway. Talk to colleagues and contacts, including other schools who may have participated in the courses. Seek guidance from other organisations, who may have a large European Network.

'We searched through the EU School Education Gateway database to try to find out which courses would be available and to conduct research on the different organisations providing suitable courses. We also tried to find suitable courses and teachers' recommendations and opinions on courses from the eTwinning forums. Prior to submitting our initial application, we conducted a staff survey and review of our ICT needs. We matched up the different requirements that we had in our school with different courses that were available in each organisation. We also chose the receiving organisations based on the quality of tutors, teachers and facilities that they had and recommendations that we received from other schools and teachers who had travelled to those courses previously. As the coordinator, I had met a number of other Irish teachers at the initial Léargas workshop in Dublin and I received recommendations and feedback on some of the courses that they had attended. We also looked for organisations who had teachers from a wide variety of European countries in attendance, as this would help us to form contacts and partnerships to help us develop an Erasmus+ Key Action 2 school-to-school partnership some time in the future.' Final Report

'We chose our mobilities in conjunction with our local education centre. The director of the education centre has many international contacts and was able to direct us to a project that addressed the majority of our needs.' Final Report

'We chose the hosting organisations by firstly using the School Education Gateway catalogue. Then we researched the hosting organisations and read the online postings about their mobility courses. We found them to be reputable organisations, and we also felt they suited the aims of our project best of all. We also chose them as their geographical spread gave us a greater access to ideas and systems from all over Europe.' Final Report

Don't be afraid to ask the course provider questions. It is important to clarify the profile and range of countries attending the course, as well as the required level of language skills to participate. There is added value of attending with a mix of participants across Europe. However, it is also important that the courses meet the objectives of the project and that course participants are working with students of a similar age group, particularly if relevant to the curriculum or if seeking to gain information on tools and methods. Ensure the course is pitched at the right level for the participants.

'We chose the hosting organisations based on the availability of courses to suit our individual timetables. Our mobilities were planned to take place during official holiday time as, being a small school and with the lack of substitute cover, term time mobilities are not feasible.'



Thankfully, we were able to source excellent courses through the hosting organisations used which fulfilled our objectives. Initial communication with the organisations gave a good indication that the courses would expedite the objectives of our European Development Plan.’ Final Report

‘We consulted a person in our locality who has participated in and organised many mobilities and they guided us on issues that might arise, and we were able to present these issues to the host organisation via email. All queries/issues were settled very quickly, again via email, and two members of the group informed the group of the results at meetings. The learning agreements with participants were as a result of a group consultation with the staff as a whole, fine-tuned by the group participants and then finalised by the school principal.’ Final Report

Consider how to select courses. Some projects leave participants free to select their own courses within a school; others are selected by management or a committee. For schools where participants are free to select their own courses, projects recommend that schools set out clear criteria and show staff where to research and look for their courses.

‘A committee comprising senior management, middle management and subject teachers was formed to devise a proposal and a method of staff selection to maximise the benefits of the staff mobility for the school. The school principal forwarded a variety of course providers to the committee. Courses relating to our school needs were identified as follows: ICT and teaching methods (4 courses), school management (3 courses), supporting students with special needs (2 courses). Staff were briefed regarding the mobility proposal at a staff meeting and members interested in participating were asked to submit an application to the principal outlining their relevant experience, the benefits and impact of the project for their work and how they would disseminate the new skills gained within the school. Candidates were selected for mobility activities on the basis of these applications, particularly in relation to their understanding of the need to disseminate the skills learned and also on the basis that the relevant departments of the school were represented.’ Final Report

Be clear on the objectives of job shadowing. When selecting schools, create a list of criteria and identify schools where comparisons can be made between the sending school in ages taught, demographics and the work on the topic. Be very clear if you wish to teach, observe and interact with students and staff. Set a realistic duration: the school may only be able to facilitate two- or three-day visits. Be very clear with potential partner schools from the outset with the number of people travelling, along with your expectations. It is not advisable to add to or change your requirements during the preparation. Final reports indicate that open and frequent communication from the outset provides a good indication of the proposed activity. It should be noted that the school may be expected to host a return visit. Several projects set up eTwinning activities between the students and staff at the potential host school, developing good working relationships prior to the physical visit.

‘We thoroughly enjoyed our Erasmus+ experience. Not only did we benefit educationally, but we also made friends from other countries, experienced new cultures and bonded together as a group.’ Survey Respondent



Project in Action: Castleconnell National School – Special Education: Looking at the Whole Child

This project ran for 24 months from January 2018 to December 2019. It focused on the topic of special needs. The school took an imaginative approach in creating awareness of the project, and of Erasmus+, among parents and students. The approach to the composition of the staff travelling ensured learning at all levels, maximising potential outcomes.

Plan

The rationale for this project was to develop new teaching competencies and skills among the staff to enrich the educational experiences of the school's special education students. The core objective was that staff, through attending courses and engaging in job shadowing in a broader European setting, would be empowered to implement more innovative teaching methods in pursuit of a broader and more holistic education for special education pupils.

Activity

Central to this project is shared ownership and shared responsibility. A mix of teachers in management, special education teachers and class teachers participated in each mobility. This allowed all staff an equal opportunity to participate, while also ensuring that the work of the project would permeate to all levels of the school.

Six staff attended job shadowing in Spain and Sweden and six staff participated in training courses in Spain and Italy.

Results

New learning has influenced teaching through use of new methods, and has influenced school policy in special education. It has helped school management to look beyond the school and take a broader and more European outlook to school management. The project has helped parents from different cultures connect more positively with the school, as the school has reached out to Europe and beyond. The project has helped pupils become aware of our shared European culture and identity.

The school organised a soccer competition for the students to help create an awareness of the Erasmus+ programme while providing a fun activity. Students were divided into 16 teams representing diverse European origins and cultures and they competed for the Erasmus+ Cup. The competition was successful in helping students associate and link Erasmus+ with Europe. The school's social media platforms promoted the competition and others shared this.

The school organised an art exhibition in celebration of Erasmus+ Schools Week and to showcase the work of the project. The event was formally opened by Sean Kelly MEP. The event was attended by 300 people, mostly residents of the local school community. The event allowed students to showcase their artistic abilities around Erasmus+, focusing on the countries that the school visited.

Outcomes and Impact





Outcomes and Impact

'We will apply for accreditation and look forward to working on courses and job shadowing. We have seen the benefits of these two types of experiences on staff and the whole school community.' Survey Respondent

Outcomes for Participating Staff

There are high satisfaction rates across the programme, as indicated by participating staff in their mobility reports. In the survey for this report, 89% agreed that Erasmus+ Mobility provided support for schools to address educational priorities at national level which would not have been possible without project participation. The remaining 11% somewhat agreed. This clearly demonstrates that the programme addresses a gap. The interviews also supported this. The activities available complement CPD or offer an opportunity for CPD activities not available at national level, allowing schools and staff to focus on thematic areas and topics related to their needs. It offers a chance for staff to self-reflect on their own CPD needs.

Within the final reports, participating staff rate the practical skills gained relevant to their current job and CPD highly, followed by gaining knowledge in the subject or professional field. However, improvements in employment and career opportunities on average rated at the lower end of the scale. This points to the motivation of participating staff, showing interest in the development of their own knowledge, skills and competencies for the benefit of their current students and schools. The willingness of many teachers to travel during school holidays because of substitution issues, particularly for schools where a group might travel at once, demonstrates an added motivation to carry out the CPD activity in their own time.

The intercultural dimension is considered invaluable, with almost all participants enhancing their skills in this area. They cited the added value of meeting European colleagues, gaining new perspectives and discussing challenges among peers. The opportunity to share their own work and approaches as well as information about the Irish system plays an important role in motivation, with validation from peers across Europe re-affirming the strengths of the Irish system. It also gives an added sense of pride in their daily work.

The activities increased staff knowledge of the topic areas, and a high percentage reported an increase in their 21st century skills such as collaboration, leadership, analytical problem-solving and creativity. Participants observed a marked increase in their own confidence, in trying new approaches and experimenting with new methods and tools. The activity allowed time to reflect and think about things in a different way. Many reports note that staff are happier, more accepting of change and open to new perspectives, increasing morale and working relationships.

'We became more sensitised to issues such as racism, xenophobia, discrimination, segregation, conflict, interculturalism, exclusion, and the experiences of migrants. We reflected more on the issues concerning minorities and considered our school climate, our school culture, and our practices. We improved our own intercultural competences as a



result of participating in the training. We learned how to create trusting and safe learning environments for those most at risk, by witnessing the approach in two high schools. We examined issues that arose from differences and how to deal with these issues. We saw examples of how other traditions and cultures were appreciated and how they added to the richness of the school community. Our competences in relation to the following greatly improved: teamwork – not merely working as a team but also helping other members of the team to achieve a common goal quickly and effectively; empowering others by encouraging other participants whose mother tongue was not English to express themselves; our interpersonal awareness in noticing, interpreting, and anticipating concerns of fellow-participants; building collaborative relationships; analytical thinking, carefully prioritising the things that had to be done; and effective networking for the purpose of building a more international school. Technical skills were improved in the materials and the sharing of online resources, emailing materials.’ Final Report

‘Our primary school has made improvements to the teaching and learning of our second language, Irish. We have expanded teaching methods to include stimulating and dynamic ways of learning Irish. We have equipped 14 teachers with the skills to implement new language teaching methodologies, in particular CLIL – Content and Language Integrated Learning. Those teachers have shared their knowledge with other colleagues so that every teacher at every class level has been encouraged to plan for and implement CLIL lessons in their classroom. We have observed the teaching of second languages in a Spanish bilingual school and have applied elements of what we learned there to the teaching of Irish in our school.

‘We believe that we have enhanced the quality of teaching, while at the same time we have improved learning outcomes in Irish language proficiency for our students. This was achieved in two main ways – through staff participation in structured CLIL and language methodology training and through observation and shadowing of good practice in a European school that uses these methods with success. Our teacher participants have disseminated their knowledge and skills to peers, parents and other interested parties through workshops, professional conversations, and social media activities.

‘Teachers have gained from positive professional developments through this project. They have expanded their repertoire of teaching skills and have assisted their pupils in improving levels of spoken Irish. Teachers are more likely to use higher order cognition skills and tasks in their teaching of Irish than before. Students have benefited from the creation of a stimulating and dynamic learning environment and have received opportunities to self-assess and recognise improvements in their proficiency in the Irish language. Students find lessons to be more engaging. A more positive learning environment has been created for the teaching and learning of Irish. Good practice using CLIL has been embedded into school policy through the Whole School Plan for Irish (Plean Scoile), and through teachers’ long- and short-term planning. Participants have added to their professional development and our school has benefited greatly from the project as a whole.’ St Mary’s Parish Primary School



Sharing Results with Non-Travelling Staff

The survey showed that the most popular way of sharing results with non-travelling staff is at staff meetings, followed by informal sharing and peer learning. Management meetings and circulation of reports rate lower. The formal and informal activities ensure that there is a planned approach to keep non-travelling staff informed. Many schools share the material gained at courses on a mutually accessible computer drive for other staff to review, promoting an open and sharing environment. The staff member takes ownership in sharing their learning and experiences, contributing to leadership skills. For example, within Killorglin Community College, staff became champions of learning tools, and in Mount Sion in leading learning through the Teaching Learning Committee.

Question: How did your project ensure staff who did not travel were aware of and impacted by the project outcomes?

Staff meetings	83%
Peer learning	62%
Management meetings	41%
Circulation of reports	40%
Updates from an Erasmus+ Committee	53%
Formal sharing of new resources and approaches	55%
Informal sharing of results	78%

Figure 6: Survey results for sharing information with staff who did not travel

'Primary education can be very insular; Erasmus+ allows us to look at outside influences and see positive practice in action.' Survey Respondent

Impact on the School

The impact on the school varies across projects and is closely linked with the nature of the mobility activity and the rationale for the activity in the first instance. There is strong evidence of connection between well-structured project management – such as shared responsibility in the form of a committee, or evident support of senior management within the school – and impact. Outcomes and impact discussed in Final Reports include changes in atmosphere, with many stating that teaching staff are happier or more motivated as a result of participation, and that increased team working and collaborative skills contribute to an overall improvement in the school environment. This is also a link with the number of staff who participate in the activity. Projects where three or more staff reported greater impact.

The survey asked project coordinators to rank the areas most affected by the project, from greatest to least impact. Their responses indicates that the area most impacted by staff participation in mobility is enhancement of skills, followed by enriching the curriculum for students.



Question: As a result of your mobility project, please rank the areas most impacted from highest to lowest, only including the most relevant to your project. You need not rank all 7 choices.

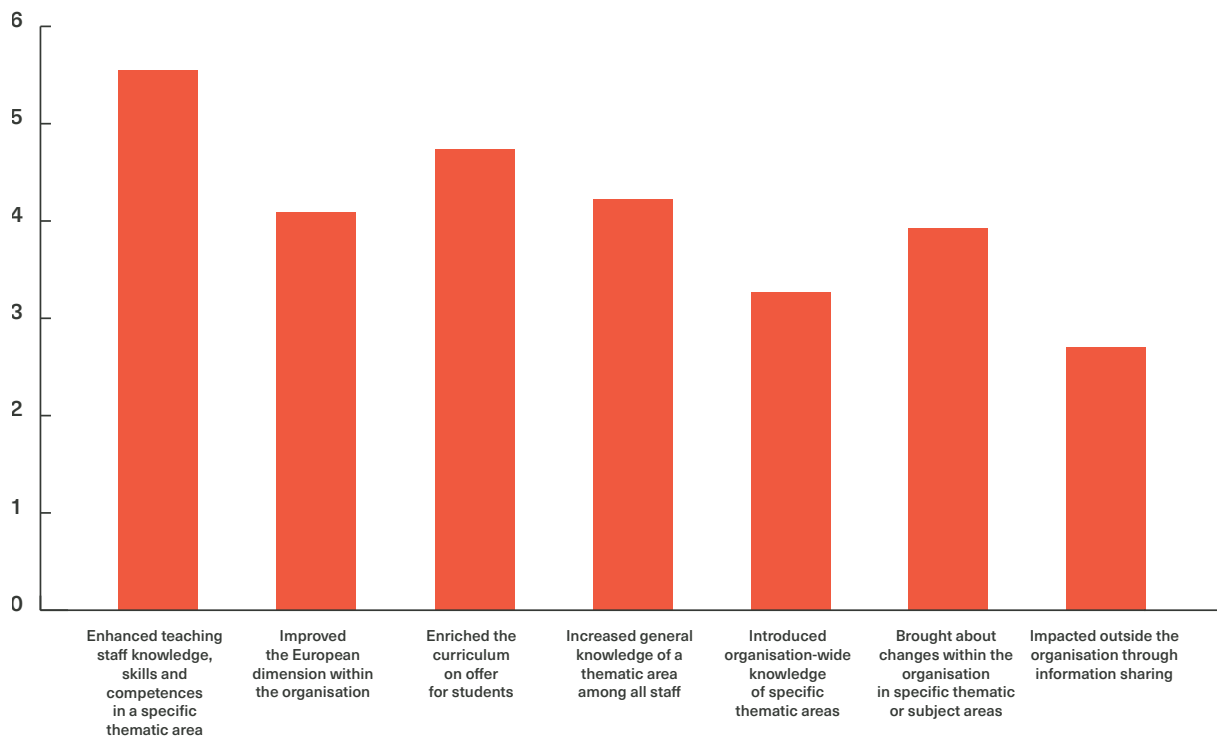


Figure 7: Impact in the thematic area

Participating organisations made commitments to maintaining contacts, with approximately 38% participating in further Erasmus+ activities such as eTwinning, Erasmus+ Key Action 2 or hosting schools from other countries.

Impacts reported ranged from changes to practices within and outside the classroom, such as the introduction of the Flipped Classroom, to the creation of a specific space for student wellbeing or introducing a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing.

Sharing Results Outside the School

One of the provisions of receiving Erasmus+ project funding is to share and create awareness of the project results and Erasmus+ itself. Many schools that create awareness of the project and place it in context for students, parents and the wider community opt to participate in Erasmus+ Schools Week events. Projects on the topic of languages and inclusion were most successful at creating awareness of the activities within and outside the school, marking international festivals and European Day of Languages, to name a few.

'The Erasmus+ Schools Week events were an excellent way for our staff to participate in our projects. They attended sessions before and after school for the week for two separate Erasmus+ Schools Week years. We had very high engagement.' Survey Respondent.



The main areas of sharing results are through social media, school newsletters and websites. A smaller proportion of projects write blog posts or articles published externally, and deliver presentations at relevant events or to education centres and associations. The extent to which participants share outside the school seems connected to their own level of contacts and involvement with other professional networks.

'It is difficult to quantify the positive effects of a school's participation in a successful Erasmus + project, but it addresses all areas of 21st century learning and supports all staff.'
Survey Respondent

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

A close-up, low-angle shot of a person's hand holding a pen over an open notebook. The image is heavily overlaid with a warm, orange-red color, creating a soft, artistic atmosphere. The pen is positioned diagonally across the frame, pointing towards the top right. The notebook's pages are visible in the foreground, showing some texture and faint lines. The background is blurred, suggesting a desk or workspace.



Conclusion

This report set out to examine how Erasmus+ mobility is used for the professional development of school staff. The report provides a range of examples and thematic areas and topics undertaken by schools. The main findings are that schools use mobility professional development for staff to:

- fill a gap within the school, which enhances the education offer to their students
- provide learning opportunities that are not available in Ireland
- enhance the knowledge, skills and competences of staff to address current or future challenges; of note are ICT, and the field of inclusion and diversity
- upskill or expand skills or remain up-to-date on the latest developments in teaching and learning in ICT and digital skills
- investigate creative learning and teaching approaches
- connect and create European partnerships and collaborative activities.

There are clear positive outcomes for participating staff. Participation increases motivation and job satisfaction, and increases participants': confidence; leadership; communication skills; intercultural skills; and 21st century skills, such as problem-solving, creativity, analytical skills and collaboration, digital literacy and ICT skills. These outcomes contributed to the desired impact of improving education across schools, as participants brought new ideas, teaching methods, tools and approaches to the classroom and the school.

To a good extent, Erasmus+ mobility has supported the implementation of key school education policies, at national and European level, through the focus of the EDP, which in most cases has been linked to the SSE process and/or the DEIS plan. While it is difficult to quantify without further research, the project topics and themes correlate with national developments and European developments. The change and evolution in topics and themes can be mapped against these: for example, the increase in projects focused on wellbeing can be traced back to the introduction of the wellbeing framework in 2017, with a significant increase in projects in this area from 2018 onwards.

Projects have noted that participation led to:

- more awareness of their work in the context of national and European priorities
- the opportunity to learn from countries who are progressive in areas such as ICT, digital literacy, and the use of digital tools, creativity in the classroom, and wellbeing and mental health
- use of new tools and approaches, increasing confidence in addressing sensitive issues
- enhanced teaching and learning methods meeting the objectives of the overall project.

Throughout the programme, the move towards intercultural and cross-cultural communication and cultural literacy outside the area of language teaching and learning is growing each year. These topics are slowly moving beyond being led by language and EAL teachers, and are no longer a sub-activity or



a secondary objective of projects. Rather, they have become a marked priority. This can be traced against the background of the migrant crisis, a changing Europe, increases in racism and the changing demographics of society. Given that there is comparatively little diversity within the teaching profession⁶, and in this respect the profession is not a true reflection of Irish society today, the programme could be seen as a proactive approach by schools to try to address the gap. Several projects have cited examining and self-reflecting on unconscious bias. This is progressive and demonstrates a holistic approach to the topic. There is a strong sense of learning from Europe in this area.

There is a clear connection between the approach to the project within a school, and the subsequent impact. Analysis of final reports shows that projects which have evident organisational support, such as a dedicated committee in the school, are more likely to achieve whole-school impact than projects where the only organisational input is permission for teachers to take part. To achieve wider impact, projects need to be well planned, have clear objectives, and use these to inform the type of learning gained. Projects that had clear evaluation mechanisms, either formal or informal, were also more likely to achieve their desired impact.

Some projects actively plan participation in further activities with European partners, while for others this is an unanticipated outcome. In either case, involvement in other projects provides further opportunities for the school, staff and students.

In many cases, one clear and feasible idea was implemented and further developed in the school along with smaller changes within the classroom. This kind of sustainable impact was summed up by St. Ita's Special School, which saw 'changes in individual practices and practical steps'. The school's teachers made changes to their practices and parallel changes happened at school level – in this case, establishing a wellbeing area for students.

⁶ See for example <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/education/why-are-there-so-few-migrant-teachers-in-ireland-1.4666389>



Acknowledgements

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Léargas
King's Inns House
Parnell Street
D01 A3Y8
Ireland

www.leargas.ie
info@leargas.ie



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