Enhancing Mobility of
Access Students Ireland

Foreword

As Minister of State for Higher Education, I welcome this report and congratulate the students and staff at the University of Limerick, the Limerick Institute of Technology and the Irish Universities Association, who have successfully completed this important project, which will have far-reaching benefits that will widen the participation of students who wish to avail of a study abroad opportunity.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of the European Commission, as this project was developed in response to the Commission's call for proposals to support the implementation of EHEA reforms, and is funded under the Erasmus+ programme.

The work presented in this report, as well as in the online toolkit, represents a major milestone in the development of widening participation and international mobility for students in Ireland – linking the key policy themes of ensuring equity of access and enhancing internationalisation in Irish Higher Education.

The findings of the report show that, at system level, we need to address these challenges together, to encourage and support our students to take the opportunities which are available through Irish and European programmes, and which are so important in further improving our students' education pathways, their future employability, and their intercultural competences and global awareness.

This report is timely, given the renewed focus across the European Union on Erasmus+ mobilities. The Erasmus+ programme is an extremely valuable resource and contributes greatly to improving labour market skills and employment opportunities, and to increasing cultural awareness and appreciation. The aims of the programme are very much aligned with our national policies.

Working together with our students, enhanced cooperation at the level of academic schools and departments, higher education institutions and across the higher education system, will enable as many students as possible to take up these important opportunities. The linguistic skills, academic and professional competences, and personal growth which are developed through these opportunities will also benefit Irish society and our country as a whole.

This important project provides a practical link between our national policies for widening access to higher education, enhancing internationalisation and improving employment outcomes, as well as our new Strategy for Foreign Languages in Education, Languages Connect.

I now invite all actors in higher education – students, academics, support and professional staff, institutions, and national agencies, to take forward the important findings of this project and use them to ensure we encourage and support all our students to make the most of the opportunities that are available. These opportunities can add so much to their academic pathways, their careers, and to wider Irish society as a whole.

I am delighted to see this project come to fruition, and look forward to seeing its effects across Irish higher education in the years to come.

Mary Mitchell O'Connor T.D.

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Acronyms

AHEAD – Association for Higher Education Access and Disability

AONTAS – Ireland's National Adult Education Network

APV – Advanced Programme Visit

BETI – Back to Education Initiative

DARE – Disability Access Route to Education

DES – Department of Education and Skills

EC – European Commission

EHEA – European Higher Education Area

EHEF – European Higher Education Framework

EPALE – Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe

EU – European Union

EVS – European Volunteer Service

GSA – Generation Study Abroad

HE – Higher Education

HEA – Higher Education Authority

HEAR – Higher Education Access Route

HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEI – Higher Education Institution

IED – International Education Division (UL)

IIE – Institute for International Education

IoTs – Institutes of Technology

IUA – Irish Universities Association

LIT – Limerick Institute of Technology

NUI – National University of Ireland

PES – Percentage of students who are mobile

SMP – Student on Placement (Erasmus+)

SMS – Student on Study (Erasmus+)

STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths

SUSI – Student Universal Support Ireland

THEA – Technological Higher Education Association (Ireland)

UL – University of Limerick

USI – Union of Students in Ireland

Executive summary

Introduction and Context

Ireland supports the goals of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to strengthen the higher education systems of member states through the Bologna process, and to promote student mobility throughout the region. Student mobility helps to achieve the objectives of the EHEA by developing linguistic skills, cultivating intercultural sensitivities and fostering professional competencies[1]. The EHEA has set the target for graduates of member states to have experienced a period studying abroad by 2020, to 20%.

Ireland's national strategy on International Education (2016-2020)[2] aspires to increase student mobility to above European average by 2020 – a challenging goal, as less than one in five higher education students in Ireland currently study abroad. In tandem, Ireland has set ambitious targets to increase the participation of 'non-traditional' students in higher education.

This report seeks to inform public policy in Ireland around outward mobility and address European higher education modernisation challenges associated with social inclusion, employability, skills and internationalisation.

The report identifies both the benefits of and barriers to participation in study or placement abroad and presents a series of recommendations to widen participation at national and institutional levels. The findings will be utilised to create easily accessed toolkits for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to assist in widening participation in mobility programmes.
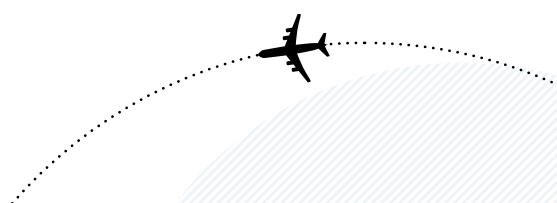
The study employed a number of research methodologies including detailed data analysis, desk research, literature reviews, a survey of two HEIs, student focus groups sessions and stakeholder interviews.

Some issues emerged over the course of the research – particularly in relation to data availability – which have imposed limitations upon this study. Of greatest significance was the unavailability of comprehensive data on outward mobility in Ireland. Only information on Irish domiciled undergraduate students who participated in Erasmus+ programmes was accessible, as Irish HEIs are not required to report outward mobility data (beyond Erasmus+) to the Higher Education Authority or any other body.

The benefits and barriers to international student mobility

International research has conclusively demonstrated the benefits associated with studying or placement abroad. Studies in the U.S. further suggest that this impact is magnified for under-represented groups.

Benefits include:

1. **Improved career and employment opportunities:** several recent studies have highlighted how the skills developed while studying abroad are transferrable to the workplace, such as confidence, communication skills and cultural awareness, and give graduates a competitive advantage when seeking employment. Research conducted by the European Commission (EC)[3] for example found that former Erasmus+ students were less than half as likely to be unemployed than non-mobile students and that mobile students experience significant progression within their careers. In Ireland, 82% of students who participated in Erasmus+ equate their experience with the development of labour market skills.

2. **Higher education performance:** mobile students are more likely to attain enhanced academic results and improved academic performance[4].

3. **Personal development:** students rate study abroad and work placement as having a significant impact on their personal development[1].

4. **The development of language skills:** research from the Eurydice Network[i] indicates that the development of language skills has significant implications for the future employment of students. Teichler et al report that *"former Erasmus+ students felt 3 times as strong in foreign language proficiency than former non-mobile students"*[5].

Barriers to outward mobility

Enrolment in mobility programmes has been described as "socially selective"[1] with students from low socio-economic backgrounds less likely to participate or plan to participate in these programmes. Financial barriers are often cited as the most significant obstacle to studying abroad. Other barriers to mobility include separation concerns, personal background, age, concerns around academic issues and credit transfer, poor language skills, compatibility, motivation and lack of awareness of the availability of programmes.

Specifically, in relation to Ireland, the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme highlights that *"there are aspects of the application processes underpinning the Erasmus+ programme which are creating intrinsic barriers to participation"*[6].

Higher Education Mobility Trends

The research indicates that Ireland's Erasmus+ participation is increasing, but stands just slightly above the EU average at approximately 5%. For students from a disadvantaged background or minority group this reduces to well below 1%[7]. In an analysis of the Eurydice Mobility Scoreboard, Ireland was found to have a weak performance against almost all criteria, it was noted that Ireland is not currently conducting any monitoring of participation of target groups in mobility programmes.

Ireland's higher education grants are portable, and a further 'disability grant' is available for mobility. However there has been a low uptake of this grant with only six students availing of it in 2015/2016. In 2014, the HEA introduced an additional monthly fund of €120 for students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating in outward Erasmus+ programmes. Although the fund is relatively new, 8% (253 students) of participants availed of it for the 2015-2016 academic year.

Results and recommendations from the survey and focus groups

As part of this study, research around mobility was undertaken in two Irish HEIs: The University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology. This involved a survey of the HEIs (exploring the operational aspects of mobility programmes) and focus groups/interviews with previously mobile students (exploring their experiences with mobility).

In consideration of the findings at **institutional level**, this report offers a series of recommendations around promoting participation and ensuring a positive and beneficial experience for students. Crucially, widening participation in mobility programmes is dependent on leadership support and empowering mobility champions within the institution. Empowering these champions requires funding, academic buy in, agility in programme development and effective planning and review of mobility programmes. The close collaboration of relevant departments to ensure a positive mobility experience for students is vital. The study finds that the international office serves as a driving force and anchor for this collaboration and should be resourced adequately to support this role.

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[i] The Eurydice network supports and facilitates European cooperation in the field of lifelong learning by providing information on education systems and policies in 38 countries and by producing studies on issues common to European education systems. http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

Widening participation measures require clear information and effective promotion to be provided to students, best practice guides from other European projects and HEI's can serve as a useful reference point when creating information and engagement strategies. Institutions can also drive mobility across all student demographics by linking successfully to other mobility programmes such as the European Voluntary Service (EVS) scheme, where shorter mobility periods and financial assistance is available to students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds. Students are also encouraged to take ownership of and responsibility for their mobility. Therefore, student involvement in the planning phase of mobility is crucial to effectively assess the student needs.

The focus groups and interviews allowed the **student voice** to emerge and resulted in a number of recommendations to overcome barriers to mobility and improve the student experience. The barriers experienced by all students who wish to participate in a mobility programme are significantly amplified for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups.

The students who overcame these barriers explain that a *"nothing ventured nothing gained"* perspective is necessary. Students with disabilities in particular accept there is a certain level of risk, but planning effectively with the home institution helps mitigate these risks. Students recommend that significant improvements are needed on the information provided across many aspects of mobility. These include timely and accurate information, addressing health, accommodation, and personal concerns, finance and funding, application processes, encouraging language exchange and learning and the timing of alumni information sessions. The focus groups identified shorter mobility programmes as a good alternative for students with family commitments and financial concerns. All students recommend that a support network is vital before during and after a mobility programme to deal with loneliness, isolation and anxiety issues.

Overall students from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups who participated in outward mobility programmes display enormous enthusiasm and positivity towards the experience, stating significant benefits both personally and professionally. Encouragement from family, friends and institutional staff was identified by students as a key driver of mobility.

The national picture on study or placement abroad of students from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority

groups is generally unclear and this report makes a number of recommendations for improvements.

If Ireland is to achieve its own goals and those set out in the Yerevan Communiqué 2015[6], policies and practices need to be informed by reliable data. Recommendations include improved data collection for all levels of higher education mobility, increased funding, tracking around participation and employment post-mobility and monitoring and awareness campaigns. In addition, it is recommended to include specific targets to widen participation at a national level and link mobility to the national access plan.

Within the context of the reforms suggested here, consideration must also be given to resourcing a national organisation, such as the HEA, to deal with the increased demand and to assist with streamlining processes. This will place Ireland in line with other EHEA member states.

Finally, in the evolving context of Brexit particular attention must be paid to the potential reality of the UK – the top choice for work placements for Irish students, no longer being part of the programme.

These improvements, particularly around data and information will lead to informed policy and implementation measures to widen participation in outward mobility across all student demographics.

Encouragement from family, friends and institutional staff was identified by students as a key driver of mobility.

01 Introduction and context for the report

1.1 Introduction

Ireland is one of the 48 member states that comprise the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), whose common goal is to strengthen higher education systems through the Bologna process.

One of the key political goals of Bologna is the promotion of student mobility. This achieves the objectives of the EHEA by allowing students to develop linguistic skills and cultivate intercultural sensitivities and professional competencies[8]. The EHEA has set the target for graduates of member states to have experienced a period studying abroad by 2020 to 20%, and as an EHEA member Ireland supports this position:

> "We will Increase the numbers of those who graduate in 2020 who undertake a study or training period abroad to above the European average by 2020.
> A review of the number of grant holders as a proportion of Erasmus+ students (or the proportion of those who undertake non-compulsory Erasmus+ programmes) will be undertaken to see if disadvantaged students are adequately represented" (International Education Strategy for Ireland, 2016-2020, p.43)[2].

The benefits of outward mobility to students are clear. The Gone International Report (2017) undertaken on behalf of Universities UK, for example identifies that:

> "Graduates who were mobile during their degree were less likely to be unemployed (3.7% compared to 4.9%), and more likely to have earned a first class or upper second-class degree (80.1% compared to 73.6%) and be in further study (15% compared to 14%). Those in work were more likely to be in a graduate level job (76.4% compared to 69.9%) and earn 5% more than their non-mobile peers (p3)."[9]

These benefits are even more pronounced for graduates from disadvantaged or minority ('non-traditional') groups, yet participation remains low within these target groups across Europe, including in the UK and Ireland.

While the aspirations of Ireland's International Education Strategy[2] are strong, achieving the EHEA goal is challenging, as just one in five higher education students in Ireland aspire to study abroad . This challenge is not exclusive to Ireland: The Bologna Implementation report, 2015 identifies the difficulties of increasing outward mobility, particularly for disadvantaged students or minority groups. The EUROSTUDENT IV survey also found that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds demonstrate greater rates of mobility than students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, even in countries where access to higher education appears to be equitable, such as Ireland[11]. The evidence suggests that the socio-economic background of parents can impede student mobility despite the availability of financial support to study in another country.

In Ireland, outward mobility is dominated by traditional students (i.e. students from mid- to high-socio-economic groups). Non-participation in mobility

programmes is attributed to family income and a mother's level of education. In addition to socio-economic factors, age, language proficiency and separation from family and friends are also perceived as obstacles to mobility[12].

Ireland has set ambitious targets to increase the numbers of disadvantaged or minority students accessing higher education, and there is evidence to suggest that progress is being made here[13]. It is important in this context to strive for equity in international access as well as national access, and to work to overcome barriers which restrict mobility[14].

In a recent mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme presented to the European Commission[ii], Ireland concluded that the programme is a significant success and positively impacts participants as well as being *"relevant, adding value, and very much aligned with national priorities(p1)"*[15]. To effectively increase participation in the programme the evaluation recommends addressing four areas: process; policy; utilisation of peer advocates and sustainability for national agencies. Reforming these areas may well increase participation in and demand for Erasmus+ programmes, but widening access to include 'non-traditional' student groups will require greater efforts and the creation of the "right framework for the right student" (*Wächter et al[12]*). The resources required at a national level to deal with the increased demand throughout the system will require careful consideration.

1.2 Context for study

This report seeks to inform public policy in Ireland around outward mobility and address European higher education modernisation challenges associated with social inclusion, employability, skills and internationalisation. Specifically, the report aims to:

- set out the benefits and barriers to international mobility for higher education students;

- improve our understanding of outward mobility in Ireland generally, and specifically for students from disadvantaged or underrepresented backgrounds;

- address how higher education institutions (HEIs) can widen participation to include greater numbers of students from 'non-traditional' backgrounds, and

- assist HEIs in communicating the benefits of mobility and in overcoming identified and perceived barriers to mobility.

The findings of this report will be utilised to create an easy to use toolkit for HEI's who are pursuing widening participation initiatives in mobility programmes.

The report is written in the context of current higher education policy discussions at both national and European levels. It specifically responds to the Yerevan priorities (2015[16]) that call for widening participation in outward mobility, to ensure that employability benefits impact upon the working lives of all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups. The Yerevan priorities advocate for more inclusive systems, and this report aims to address this call by enhancing our understanding of the challenges facing students considering mobility opportunities, and highlighting how HEIs can address their concerns and work to remove existing barriers.

The report focuses for the most part on Erasmus+ mobility in Ireland, as there is no national data set available on mobility outside of the EU for HE students.

The project in Ireland will be complemented by a parallel project from the UK National Authority. An expert from the UK project participated in the Irish Steering Group and assisted with sharing expertise, knowledge, research tools and findings. This report will be disseminated widely across Ireland and within the EHEA.

[ii]Presented by the HEA to the European Commission and feeding into a wider evaluation being undertaken by the Commission (as required under Articles 21.2 and 21.3 of the Erasmus + regulation).

02 | Methodology

In order to to support the objectives as detailed above the study employed a number of research methodologies including detailed data analysis, desk research, literature reviews, a survey of two HEIs, student focus groups sessions and stakeholder interviews.

2.1 Definitions

For the purposes of this report mobility is defined as having spent one week or more on a study abroad programme or placement during a student's higher education experience.

Students from disadvantaged backgrounds or under-represented/minority groups ('non-traditional' students) are defined in line with Ireland's National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education (2015-2019):[13]

- People disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers

- First time, mature student entrants

- Students with disabilities

- Part time/flexible learners

- Further education award holders

- Irish Travellers

2.2 Data sources and analysis

The study undertook a detailed examination of Irish undergraduate student mobility flows and patterns, under the definitions provided above, for four academic years (from 2012/2013 to 2015/16). Data was drawn from a number of sources and commenced with an exploration of available datasets from the Higher Education Authority (HEA). It should be noted however that data available from the HEA was found to have limitations (see section 2.3 below), and as a result, a number of recommendations are suggested within this report to improve the quality of outward mobility data in Ireland.

The Erasmus+ Programme provided the most reliable dataset at the national level. This information, along with data from the EUROSTUDENT IV and V reports[1], European Commission reports on the Erasmus+ Programme, academic research reports and organisational good practice guides, were analysed to present the national profile. This has allowed the generation of a reasonably comprehensive picture which encapsulates: the total number of students who went on study or placement abroad; their destination countries; subject choices and additional financial grants available to them.

The report also uses data available in the publication *Toward the development of a new National Equity of Access to Higher Education (2014)[17]* to present current

participation rates and future targets in higher education in Ireland as well as data from the National Access Plan 2016-2020.[13]

The research team undertook surveys of two higher education institutions based in Limerick City (in the mid-west of Ireland): The University of Limerick (UL) and Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT). The institutions were selected because, although physically proximate, they present differing mobility profiles and demographics. UL has consistently demonstrated the highest levels of outward mobility in Ireland (see Table 5 on page 31) while participation levels at LIT are low.

THE HEI surveys covered five areas of outward mobility: mobility programmes; structure; funding; marketing and support. Additionally, focus groups and interviews were conducted with students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds who participated in an outward mobility programme during their undergraduate programme. Data and general information on Erasmus+ and other study/placement abroad programmes were captured in both the institutional survey and the focus groups/interviews with students. In total 15 students participated in the focus groups and five students were interviewed by telephone. All of the focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed with the full permission of each student. An experienced focus group co-ordinator was used to facilitate the focus groups and each student was interviewed by the project officer covering 21 key questions[iii].

In addition to the surveys, focus groups and interviews, a number of meetings were conducted with organisations and practitioners responsible for the promotion and organisation of outward mobility programmes. These included the Irish Wheelchair Association, the Association for Higher Education Access & Disability (AHEAD), the HEI Disability officers group, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), HEI International officers group, Higher Education Authority (HEA), DARE (Disability Access Route to Education) and HEAR (Higher Education Access Route). These interviews provided good practice recommendations and guidelines that will be included in the TOOLKIT with written consent from each of the providers.

2.3 Limitations of the research

A number of issues emerged over the course of the research, particularly in relation to data availability, which have imposed some limitations upon this study:

- It only proved possible to access outward mobility data from the HEA on Irish domiciled students at undergraduate level who undertook Erasmus+ programmes. Outward mobility data outside of Erasmus+ is not reported by the higher education institutions to the HEA.

- The available data offered limited information on categories of disadvantage and/or minority backgrounds;

- The data is analysed over four years and therefore cannot identify significant trends over time;

- Both mobile students and non-mobile students were asked to participate in the student focus groups, however only mobile students self-presented for these focus groups.

[iii]A copy of the questionnaire is available in appendix 1.

03 | The benefits and barriers to international student mobility

3.1 The benefits of outward mobility

International research has conclusively demonstrated the many benefits associated with studying or placement abroad, these benefits range from improved employment opportunities, to higher academic achievement and increased personal confidence.

3.1.1 Improved career and employment opportunities

The development of skills that are transferrable to the workplace such as confidence, communication skills and cultural awareness are attractive to employers, and can give graduates a competitive advantage when seeking employment. The QS Employer Global Study[18], the biggest-ever survey on the subject, found that six out of 10 employers globally give extra credit for an international student experience, and more than 80% said they actively sought graduates who had studied abroad.

"This result … may indicate a shift in hiring practices, as organisations in the U.S. [and elsewhere] become more outward-looking in the face of global competition… Intercultural communication is very important in the recruitment process, and there is general support for internationally educated recruits

outperforming their non-mobile peers… support for international learning mobility should be boosted in the U.S. as there appears to be increased recognition from industry". (P16).

The Institute of International Education's (IIE) 2017 report: Gaining an employment edge: The Impact of Study Abroad on 21st Century Skills & Career Prospects[19] highlights that studying abroad for longer periods of time has a high impact on subsequent job offers and career advancement.

"Among alumni who studied abroad for one academic year, 68 percent reported study abroad contributing to a job offer at some point, compared to just 43 percent of alumni who went abroad for fewer than eight weeks". (ibid, p5)

Teichler et al (2007)[5] in exploring the impact of mobility for European students concluded that students who participate in the Erasmus+ programme are deemed to have considerably higher levels of skills and competencies over students who did not participate, thereby indicating a very clear advantage of participating on a study/work programme abroad.

Research conducted by the European Commission (EC) on the impact of the Erasmus+ Programme[3] (examining more than 70,000 individual responses), found that former Erasmus+ students were less than half as likely to be unemployed (even after 10 years) than non-mobile students. Additionally, the study found that mobile students experience significant progression within their

careers, with more Erasmus+ alumni (64%) than non-mobile alumni (55%) holding a management position.

Research into how Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish employers perceive the skills attained by study abroad and placement students found that the skills they look for in potential employees are the same skills they believe students develop on a work placement or study abroad experience, such as language skills and intercultural awareness[14].

In Ireland 82% of higher education students who participated in Erasmus+ between 2007 and 2013 equate their experience with the development of labour market skills, while 69% state that their skills would not have been developed to the same extent without mobility. Eighty percent of students stated that it had a direct impact on their employment opportunities.[15]

Figure 1 | **HE Students (2007-2013) % Labour Market Responses**
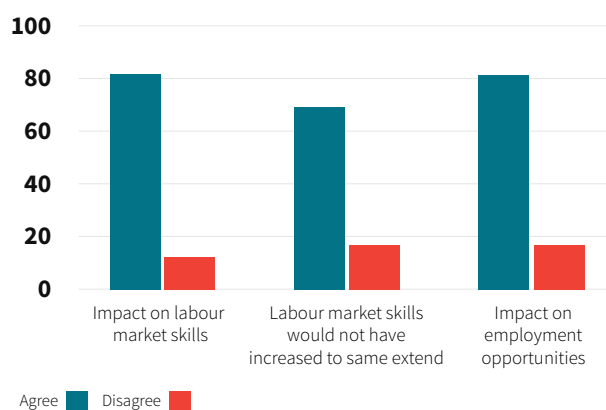
3.1.2 Higher education performance

Mobile students are more likely to attain enhanced academic results and improved academic performance[4]. Recent research by the IIE in the U.S. found the impact of a study abroad period included higher four-year graduation rates and that the correlation between study abroad graduation is significant for minority students (Engel, 2017[20]).

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) claims that:

> "Seventy-five per cent of the Erasmus+ students received a first or an upper second-class degree, compared to 81 per cent for students on other periods of study abroad, 71 per cent of placement students and 60 per cent of other students from four-year courses (p4)"[21].

There is no research currently available on the correlation between academic achievement and mobility for Irish students.

3.1.3 Personal development

Students rate study abroad and work placement as having a significant impact on their personal development[1]. This is important, as known drivers of mobility include personal development and an interest in foreign cultures and countries[23]. An analysis of studies in the U.S. found that a study abroad experience impacted positively on student engagement, confidence and determination all of which have a positive impact on learning outcomes[21]. As noted above, these outcomes lead to skills being developed in students that are attractive to employers.

> "Studying abroad gave interviewees both a broader understanding of career possibilities, and the confidence to pursue these career paths. The survey data and the information gleaned from interviews suggest that studying abroad had unintended benefits in terms of not only developing skills and shifting attitudes, but also opening career pathways and opportunities that had been either previously unknown or simply unconsidered…" (ibid, p5).

3.1.4 The development of language skills

While it is widely acknowledged that English is the international language of communication, especially for business, it is also recognised that the development of foreign languages helps students better understand different cultures and appropriately interpret political and social situations.

Research from the Eurydice Network[iv] indicates that the development of language skills has significant implications for the future employment of students. Teichler et al (2007, ibid) reports that *"former Erasmus+ students felt 3 times as strong in foreign language proficiency as did formerly non-mobile students"*[23]

Students who participated in Erasmus+ undertake an online language test before, during and after their mobility period. Preliminary data from this testing indicates that the mobility period abroad can significantly improve language ability among students. The data for 2015 shows that on departure for Erasmus+ mobility programmes, 78% of students were at level B1 (intermediate) or below. On return, approximately 86% of those who took the second assessment were at B1 or above, with over 63% at B2 (upper intermediate) or above[15].

It is evident from existing research that students who undertake a study/work placement abroad are presented with the opportunity for personal development, to broaden their horizons and international networks. They also develop skills attractive to employers and enhance their cultural understanding. Ireland's mid-term evaluation of Erasmus+ concluded that students are motivated to participate in the programme as they perceive it to improve their language skills, offer new cultural and working experiences and opportunities[15]. However, in common with all other member states, it is students from higher socio-economic backgrounds that are more likely to avail of these opportunities rather than students from disadvantaged or minority groups[24].

Ireland as an English-speaking country does not prioritise the learning of foreign languages, however the Irish Government is about to launch a new strategy to address the learning of foreign languages and aims to make Ireland the best English speaking country at learning languages.

3.2 Barriers to outward mobility

As noted above, despite the well documented benefits of study abroad , uptakes are low internationally, especially within parts of the European Union and North America.

Studies in the U.S. (see for example Kronholz and Osborn, 2016[25] and Engel 2017[21]) corroborate the findings noted above that study abroad has a positive impact on career outcomes and suggest that this is magnified for under-represented groups. The relatively low levels of international exposure have led to concerns at both institutional and government levels in the U.S. and Canada that graduates may be less well prepared for entry into a globalised workforce, and have a weaker understanding of international issues than many of their European or Asian counterparts. In the U.S. this realisation has resulted in the development of a number of key initiatives to promote study abroad including IIE's "Generation Study Abroad[vi]" which proposes an ambitious target to double the number of U.S. college students studying abroad to 600,000 by the end of decade and diversify the demographic, which up to this point has been largely white, middle-class, female and emanating from doctorate and masters-granting universities rather than associate or community colleges. A recent report on outbound mobility in Canada (November 2017)[26] found that overall only 11% of students go overseas (lower than most comparison countries other than the UK). The report argues for the development of a "carefully crafted and

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[iv] The Eurydice network supports and facilitates European cooperation in the field of lifelong learning by providing information on education systems and policies in 38 countries and by producing studies on issues common to European education systems. It consists of: national units based in 38 countries participating in the Erasmus+ programme (28 Member States, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Montenegro, Norway, Serbia, Switzerland and Turkey) and a coordinating unit based in the EU Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels" http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

[v] In addition to research cited above, for a summary of recent reports on the value of study abroad in terms of academic achievement, life skills and future employment opportunities see GSA's summary of eight such studies: https://tinyurl.com/ybpybxlq. Also, key findings from 2012 IES Abroad Recent Graduate Study: "The survey…showed that nearly 90% of IES Abroad study abroad alumni found their first job within six months of graduation, as compared to only 49% of respondents in a recent survey of the general college graduate population …" http://www.iu.qs.com/product/qs-global-employer-survey-report-2011/http://www.prweb.com/releases/2012/5/prweb9541667.htm.

[vi] GSA was established in 2014 to "encourage meaningful, innovative action to drive up the number of U.S. students who have the opportunity to gain international experience through academic study abroad programs, internships, service learning, and non-credit educational experiences". https://www.iie.org/Programs/Generation-Study-Abroad/About

adequately funded" strategy to address this, suggesting that the country's' future depends on students having an international experience to equip Canadians from all walks of life to be successful and create the next generation of leaders.

In Europe, mobility, while uneven, tends to be higher than in North America, largely as a result of initiatives such as the Erasmus+ suite of mobility programmes. Studies[27] suggest for example that approximately 30% of German and French students will undertake some period abroad during their period of academic studies. Comparative figures are not available for Ireland.

Figure 2 below highlights Erasmus+ students as a proportion of graduates for 2012-2013 and demonstrates varying levels of participation, with Luxembourg ahead of all countries by a long distance and the UK having the lowest levels of participation.

Figure 2 | **Erasmus+ students as per proportion of graduates in 2012-13 (in%)**

■ Number of Erasmus+ students in 2012-13, compared to the total numr of graduates of the same year (in %)
— Average: 4.88%
Data from Eurostat 2013 (graduate Population: EDUC_GRAD4)
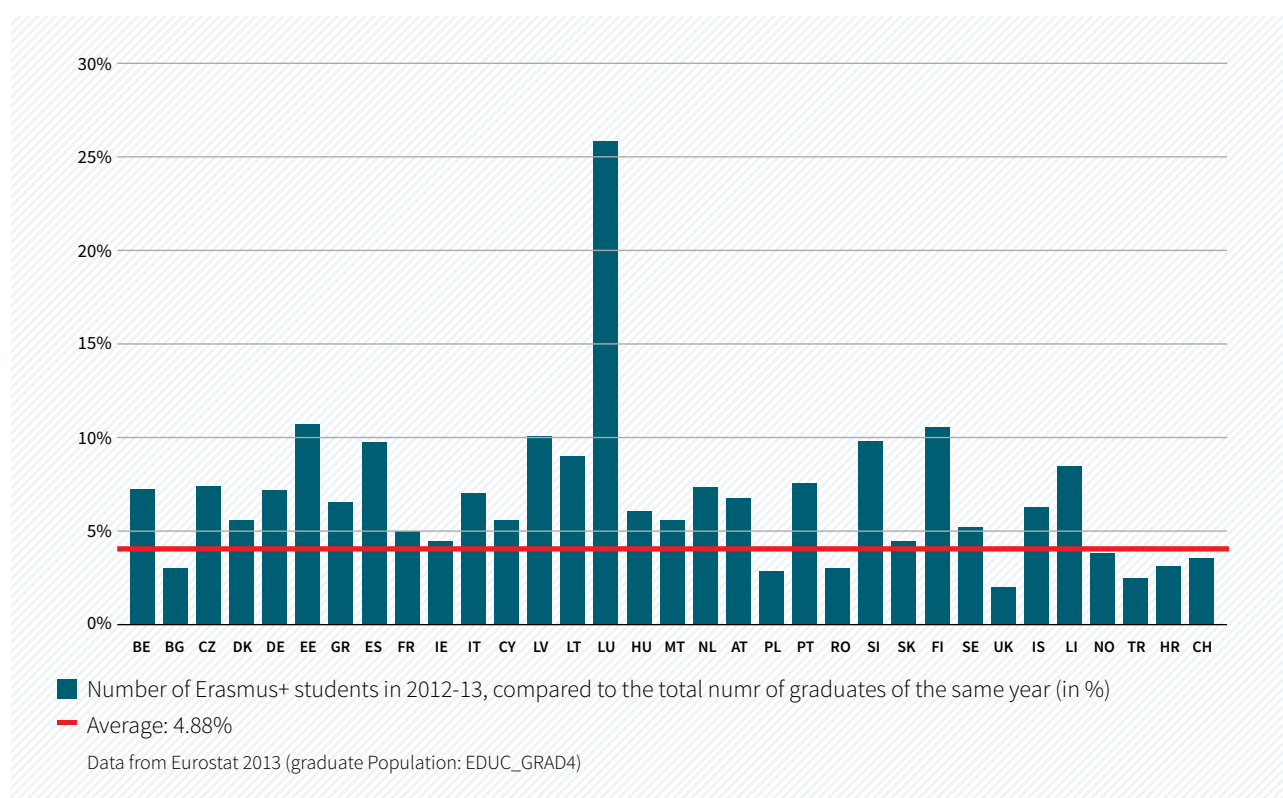
The EUROSTUDENT IV[1] data set describes enrolment in mobility programmes as "socially selective" with students from low socio-economic backgrounds less likely to participate or plan to participate in these programmes. Financial barriers are often cited as one of the key perceived obstacles to studying abroad and are expressed as:

- Financial burden
- Loss of opportunities to earn money
- Loss of social benefits
- Problems with accommodation in the home country

Other barriers to mobility include personal background, concerns around credit transfer, compatibility and lack of awareness of the availability of programmes. The EUROSTUDENT studies suggests that barriers to mobility can be divided into two distinct categories:

- barriers in the decision-making phase
- barriers in the planning phase

The importance of these barriers can change depending on what stage a student is at (in life and/or in their academic career) and whether or not they possess aspirations to study abroad[1].

3.2.1 Barriers at the decision-making stage

The two most cited reasons for not considering studying abroad in 20 of the 27 EUROSTUDENT countries are financial concerns and separation from family. The additional financial burden impacts between 32% and 83% of those who plan to study abroad, in Ireland this affects over 70% students[1]. Ireland also consistently cites "loss of a paid job" as a reason not to consider mobility[27].

A study on mobility in Austria found that underrepresented groups such as older students with delayed transition into higher education; students with lower socio-economic backgrounds and students with impairments were much less likely to study abroad[28]. This study also highlighted the financial constraints lower socio-economic students face, many of whom choose shorter stays and internships and tend to remain in Europe, as compared with students from higher socio-economic groups who stay abroad for longer and go further afield.

Research in Finland, Norway and Sweden found that non-mobile students tend not to have moved to another place in their home country to study. The research also concluded that no single reason existed for non-mobility, but the main barriers could be broken down into three broad categories: personal relationships; academic reasons (particularly for those studying for professional or science-based degrees) and subject choices. This study identified encouragement from parents, peers, and teachers as a key driver of mobility. Low levels of encouragement were linked to immobility, especially with respect to students who cited academic reasons for non-mobility[14].

Other barriers include insufficient language skills, lack of motivation and lack of knowledge around recognition of results attained abroad.

Interestingly, research suggests that students first consider their personal situation before considering the financial implications of Erasmus+. It can be argued that the student's own perceptions and characteristics determine participation in mobility rather that the conditions of the Erasmus+ programme.

Personality traits are also important: the Erasmus+ Impact Study[3] explored six personality traits ('memo factors') that are closely associated with employability:

- Tolerance of Ambiguity (acceptance of other people's culture and attitudes and adaptability)
- Curiosity (openness to new experiences)
- Confidence (trust in own competence)
- Serenity (awareness of own strengths and weaknesses)
- Decisiveness (ability to make decisions)
- Vigour (ability to solve problems) (p1).

The study revealed that even before going abroad, Erasmus+ students from all European regions showed higher values for these traits than non-mobile students. The mobility experience itself brings a further positive impact and increases the already existing advantage of Erasmus+ students over non-mobiles by about 40% (p3).

Research undertaken by Trinity College Dublin on students who choose not to participate in mobility programmes identifies family income and a mother's level of education as salient factors affecting mobility[12]. In addition to these socio-economic factors, age, language proficiency and separation from family and

friends are also perceived as obstacles to mobility. The research concluded that student immobility was more evident in IoTs than Universities.

Finally, the push and pull factors of mobility assume that mobility is a rational choice and is based on *"a weighing up of the benefits and drawbacks; considering all options and incorporating specific motivations"* (ibid). However, it is often the case that students are not aware of the benefits of mobility or how they might overcome any barriers that exist.

3.2.2 Barriers at the planning stage

Students who are planning to study abroad cite a range of further obstacles. While the barriers within the decision phase can still exist for these students (such as financial and separation concerns), other challenges become more prominent at this time. EUROSTUDENT IV found that students who are in the planning phase of studying abroad face impediments related to the study abroad programmes themselves including: lack of information provided by the home institution; concerns about integration into a new study programme; concerns about recognition of results and issues around limited entry to mobility programmes.

Specifically, in relation to Ireland, the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme highlights that *"there are aspects of the application processes underpinning the Erasmus+ programme which are creating intrinsic barriers to participation"*[15]. The evaluation recommends that these are addressed nationally.

It is important to note that HEI's in Ireland have different application processes to select Erasmus+ students. Once selected the student completes a learning agreement and an agreement between the HEI and the student. All of these are essential documents to underpin accountability and quality mobility periods but can cause confusion for students. The national agency in Ireland, the HEA has gone some way to guide students through the various forms on its portal http://eurireland.ie, where useful videos and tips are available.

In summary, while research demonstrates the benefits of study and work placements abroad in terms of career enhancement, academic performance and personal development, students face a range of mitigating factors which act as barriers to their mobility. The "additional financial burden" is the most significant barrier, but separation concerns, linguistic skills, motivation, personality traits, lack of easy access to information programmes and integration are also factors.

04 | Higher Education Mobility Trends across Europe

This section examines mobility trends across Europe. The main data source here is the "EUROSTUDENT survey"[1] – a study of European Higher Education which aims to collect comparable data on numerous variables including the socio-economic backgrounds of students in higher education across Europe, in order to allow meaningful cross-country comparisons.

4.1 Trends

Figure 2 on page 15 highlighted the *proportion of Erasmus+ students as graduates in 2012/2013*, Figure 3 on page 19 shows the percentage of students who are mobile (PES) by country and suggests that Northern European students are more mobile during their studies than their Southern and Eastern European counterparts. The PES in countries such as Finland and the Netherlands is high at 14%, while the PES for Poland and Croatia is low at 2%. The uptake of mobility programmes in all countries remains well below the 20% target set by the EHEA. Interestingly Ireland's PES is more in line with the Southern European countries at 5%, and for students from a disadvantaged background or minority group this reduces to well below 1% (ibid).

Figure 3 | **Percentage of enrolled Students (PES) by coutry**

Enrolment abroad   Intership abroad

Sorted by PES
Source E: IV database
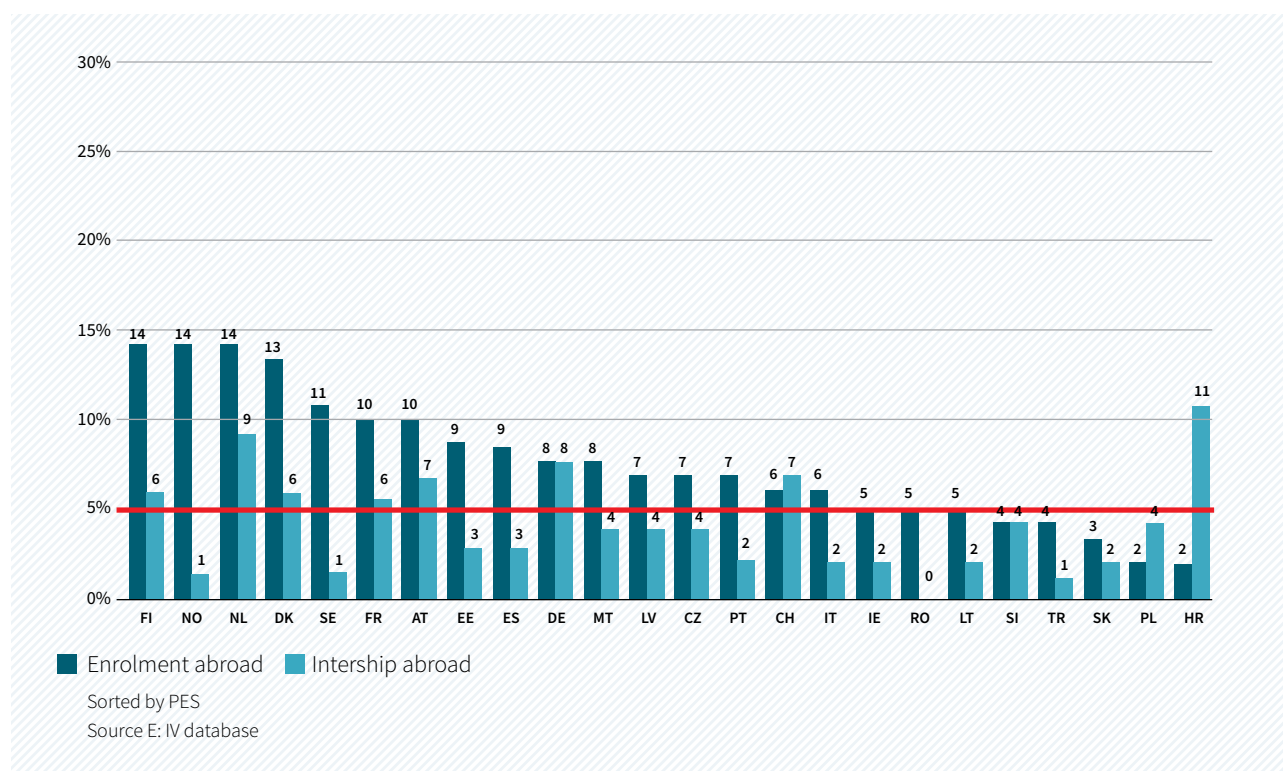
4.2 Gender

In study abroad programmes globally, female students outnumber male students significantly. In the U.S. for example, over 70% of those who study abroad are female[37]. In Erasmus+ programmes around 60% of students are female, although there is a greater balance on work placement programmes (see also Figures 9 and 10 on page 34).

4.3 Student groups

Three distinct student groups have been identified by the EUROSTUDENT surveys as underrepresented in mobility programmes:

- Students with a lower education background
- Students with delayed transitions into higher education
- Mature students

There are strong cross-overs within these categories of students: i.e. students from lower education backgrounds often progress onto higher education later in life, as they tend to move into the workplace following completion of second level education. These students are then faced with higher levels of financial and family-responsibility obstacles associated with non-participation in mobility.

4.4 The Eurydice Mobility Scoreboard[vii]

As noted in the introductory section, EHEA member states have established an ambitious target for 20% of students to have studied or interned abroad by 2020 – this is proving challenging to achieve for most countries. The Eurydice mobility scoreboard was published in 2016 to provide a framework for EHEA countries to monitor the progress of effective participation in outward mobility programmes.

The scoreboard addresses the call for "structural systemic reform to ease participation in, and access to mobility"[29].

The Eurydice mobility report provides useful insights into how Europe as a whole is performing and how Ireland compares. To allow for comparison between countries, the scoreboard used the most common demographic target in 27 out of 38 education systems, students with low socio-economic backgrounds, and focused on this as an indicator of support to disadvantaged higher education students.

The three main indicators of support are:

- National targets
- Monitoring participation
- Financial support

4.5 National targets

In common with many member states Ireland, in its international education strategy has expressly committed to widening participation in outward mobility programmes for students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds, however there is no specific percentage target referenced nationally to date [viii]. The Flemish speaking area of Belgium is the only system in the EHEA region that has specifically stated a target (33%) of mobile students are to originate from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds[30].

4.6 Monitoring participation

It is critical that EHEF members monitor mobility patterns and trends in their respective regions to comprehensively understand the demographic of students that participate in mobility programmes. Effective monitoring helps to identify gaps in participation and allows for realistic planning to widen participation nationally. The Eurydice report indicates that Ireland is not currently conducting any monitoring of participation of target groups in mobility programmes. Countries such as the UK, Germany and Italy undertake comprehensive monitoring of participation by disadvantaged or minority students in all mobility programmes, yielding a complete and informed picture of mobility in those countries[1].

Figure 4 | **Monitoring the participation of students with low socio-economic background in mobility programmes 2014/2016.**

Comprehensive monitoring

Monitoring of beneficiaries of targeted mobility grants

No monitoring

Not available

Source: Eurydice
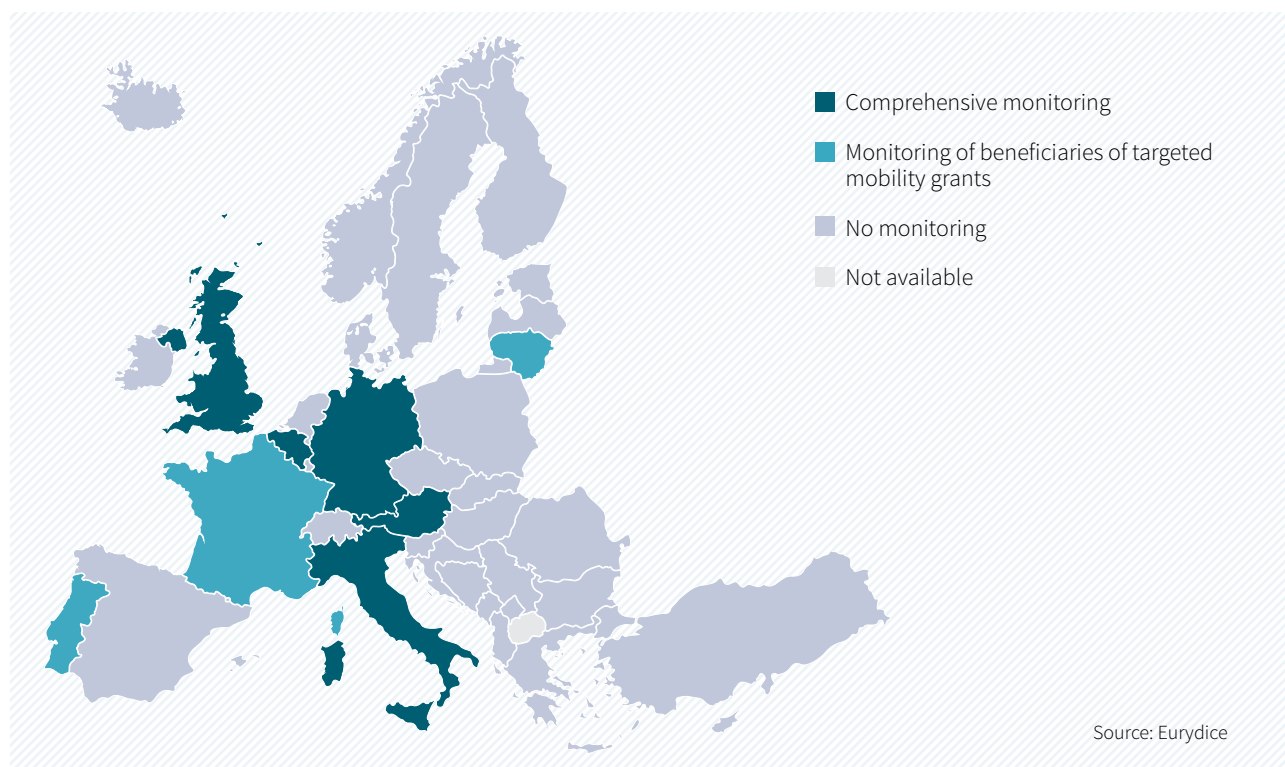
[viii] The Irish government focus on targeting disadvantage at the national level remains firmly on the agenda. At the start of College Awareness Week (20th November 2017), the HEA stated that higher education institutions need to continue to be active both in engaging with disadvantaged communities and in attracting students from disadvantaged backgrounds "Colleges have made some progress in widening participation rates in all communities but among the least advantaged, it remains limited. There is also a need for higher education institutions to partner more actively with local authorities and with civic society to engage those who feel excluded…" http://hea.ie/2017/11/20/hea-chief-executive-says-colleges-need-to-keep-focus-on-targeting-disadvantage/

4.7 Financial support

As discussed above, funding and finance are repeatedly cited as barriers to participation in outward mobility programmes and this is amplified considerably for students from lower socio-economic groups. The Eurydice surveys capture government support grants, and has categorised Ireland as providing needs-based portable grants in the analysis, but remains one of the few countries which does not offer loans (see section 4.8 on page 22)[30].

Figure 5 | **Financial support in the form of public grants provided to students with low socio-economic background for mobility purposes, 2015/16.**

Legend:
- Targeted mobility grants
- Need-based portable grants
- Mainstream portable grants
- No targeted or mainstream financial support in the form of grants
- Not available

Source: Eurydice

Country-specific note

Netherlands: From 1 September 2015, only the need-based supplementary grants are available to new students. Students who started their studies before 1 September 2015 received mainstream grants, with supplementary grants given to those with low parental income.

4.8 Ireland's performance in the Eurydice mobility scoreboard

There are six indicators under five thematic areas within the Eurydice mobility scoreboard, these are:

- Information and guidance;

- Foreign language preparation;

- Portability of grants and loans;

- Support provided to students with low socio-economic background and

- Recognition of learning outcomes and qualifications.

Figure 6 | **Ireland's performance in the Eurydice mobility scoreboard.**

| Information and guidance | Foreign language preparation | Portability of student support | Disadvantaged learners | Recognition of learning outcomes | Recognition of qualifications |

For each indicator, categories are colour coded as follows:

- all criteria are fully met
- most aspects appear in the system
- only some aspects are implemented
- systems fulfil only a limited part of the criteria analysed
- none of the elements exists

Source: Eurydice.

As Figure 6 above depicts, there is significant room for improvement for Ireland across all indicators, particularly in foreign language preparation, disadvantaged learners and recognition of learning outcome and qualifications. Some aspects have been implemented for information and guidance at the national level as well as support provided to disadvantaged learners, but overall Ireland ranks poorly within the Eurydice scoreboard.

In study abroad programmes globally, female students outnumber male students significantly.

05 | Higher Education Mobility Trends in Ireland

The Department of Education and Skills (DES), the HEA and the HEI's have responsibility for promoting access to and participation in higher education by under-represented groups, including students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, those with disabilities and mature students. The HEA has recorded and analysed participation in higher education at the national level for these groups in its National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education[13]. The National Plan also references sub-groups within the target groups who need to be supported to participate in higher education such as minority groups, lone parents and teen parents.

5.1 Access rates for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups to higher education in Ireland

Ireland's national access policy is in line with European policy and the Europe 2020 strategy on poverty reduction and social inclusion[30]. It recognises the role of the Bologna process to strengthen social inclusion and ensure access to higher education is equitable across all societies in Ireland. The National Plan identifies six target groups as needing support to access higher education. These are:

1. People disadvantaged by socio-economic barriers

2. First time, mature student entrants

3. Students with disabilities

4. Part time/flexible learners

5. Further education award holders

6. Irish Travellers

While Ireland has been successful in creating alternative entry routes to higher education for students whose parents did not attend higher education, it has been less successful at widening participation for students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. The latest national statistical data available, set out in the consultation paper: *Toward the Development of a new National Equity of Access to Higher Education (2014)*[17] reveals that students from higher and professional socio-economic groups have achieved almost full participation, while participation is significantly lower for semi-skilled or unskilled socio-economic groups (26%). Participation rates vary regionally: by county, and within the capital city Dublin. In Dublin, there are considerable differences between postal codes, with some affluent areas experiencing over 99% participation in higher education, while other, more disadvantaged areas are seeing participation rates as low as 15% (the data here refers to first-time undergraduate new entrants aged 18-20 in the 2011/12 academic year as a percentage of the total number in that age cohort).

Table 1 | **Participation in Higher Education by target group.**

Target group	Rate
Estimated national participation rate (new entrants aged 18–20)	52%
Estimated participation rates of target groups	
Non-manual worker group (new entrants aged 18–20) as a percentage of the population	23%
Semi/unskilled manual and agricultural worker group (18-20 year old new entrants) as a percentage of the population	26%
Mature students (full time) as a percentage of new entrants	13%
Mature students (full and part-time) as a percentage of new entrants	19%
Students with a disability as a percentage of new entrants	6%
Flexible and part-time students as a percentage of all enrolments (undergraduate and postgraduate)	19%
Entrants admitted on the basis of a further education award as a percentage of new entrants	6.6%
Irish Travellers as a percentage of new entrants	0.1%

Source: HEA (2014): Toward the Development of a New National Equity of Access to Higher Education[17, ix]

[ix] The estimated national participation rate is arrived at by dividing the number of first-year undergraduate new entrants (aged 18–20) by the average of the relevant (17–19 year olds) age cohort in the national population from Census 2011. This is also the method used to calculate national participation by socio-economic group. Participation rates by other target groups are calculated as a percentage of new entrants. Taken from Fig A.1 (National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-201) Table p.42). HEA, 2014.

5.2 Students with disabilities

As Figure 7 below highlights, Ireland has registered significant increases in the number of students with disabilities attending higher education: from 1,363 in 2003 to 7,413 in 2013 – an impressive increase of 444%. However, as noted in Table 1 on page 25, there are differences between categories of disability. For example, students with sensory disabilities are less likely to participate in higher education than students with other types of disabilities[17].

Figure 7 | **Students with disabilities. Total number of higher education students supported by the Fund for Students with Disabilities 2003-2013.**

Source: XXX
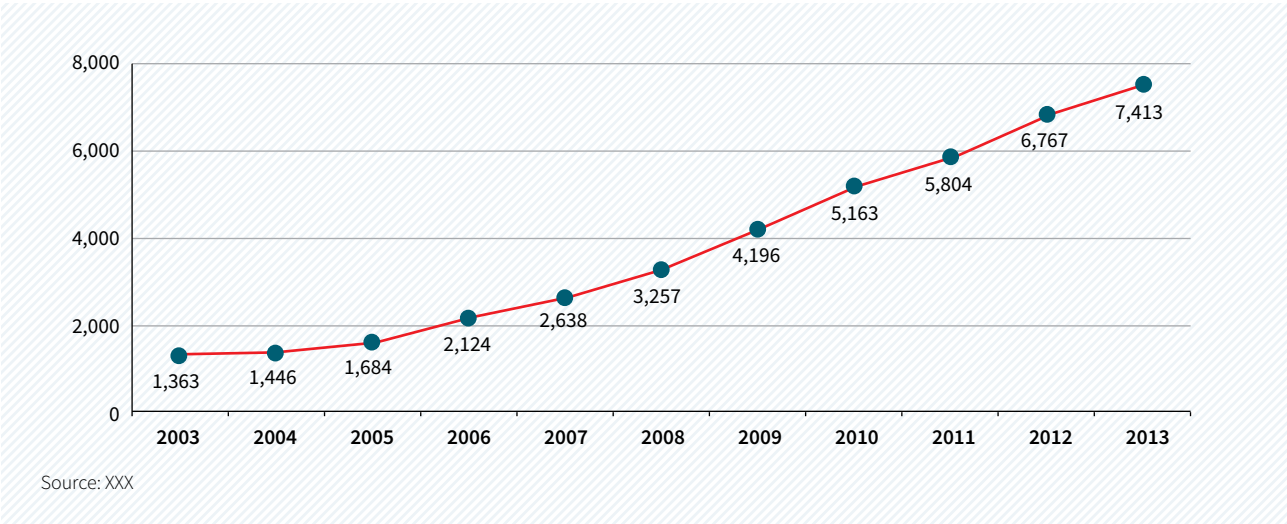
Table 2 | **H.E. Students supported by the Fund for Students with Disabilities by category of disability (2003-2013).**

Number of Students					
Category of disability	**2003**	**2006**	**2009**	**2012**	**2013**
Specific learning difficulties	831	1482	2729	3814	3929
Significant ongoing illness	93	114	303	588	681
Multiple disability	48	85	144	548	703
Physical/mobility	175	190	235	398	416
Deaf/hard of hearing	94	126	173	212	201
Blind/vision impairment	76	65	116	140	160
Other disabilities (including ADD/ADHD, ASD (Autistic Spectrum Disorder) Mental Health Conditions)	46	62	496	1067	1323
Total	**1363**	**2124**	**4196**	**6767**	**7413**

Source: National Plan for Equity of Access to higher Education 2015-2019 (HEA 2014).

Unfortunately, there is no data available on the mobility of these categories of student, however the increasing numbers of 'non-traditional' students need to be offered access to mobility programmes (where feasible), and solid information is a vital starting point in order to support the development of strategies around this requirement for Irish HEIs.

5.3 Part time and flexible learners

Ireland has also seen strong increases in mature student participation in higher education as Figure 8 shows. This is largely accounted for by part-time and flexible offerings.

Figure 8 | **Part-time and flexible learners. Estimated percentage of all higher education students participating on a part-time/flexible basis, 2006-2012.**
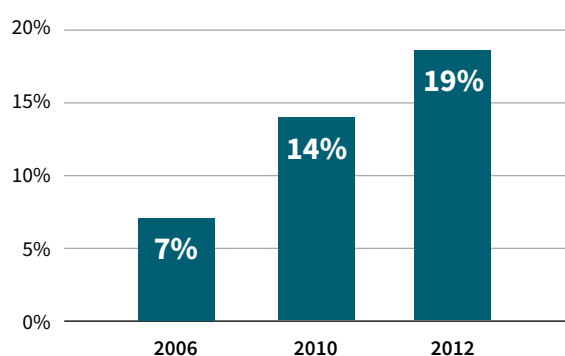
Source: National Plan for Equity of Access to higher Education 2015-2019 (HEA 2014, p47)

5.4 Mobility targets for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups

While the Irish Government recognises the importance of participation in outward mobility programmes and is committed to the European policy on widening participation underpinned by the Bologna process, there is no specific national outward mobility target for students from disadvantaged or underrepresented groups[x].

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019[13] does set out participation targets for disadvantaged and underrepresented groups HE generally in Ireland. The following table indicates the percentage of each group participating in higher education programmes in 2012 and the target participation rates for 2020 (DES, 2014).

Table 3 | **Participation Rates (actual and target 2012-2020).**

Category	Actual 2012	Target 2020
Non manual worker group (percentage 18-20 cohort)	23%	30%
Semi/unskilled manual worker group (percentage 18-20 cohort)	26%	35%
Non manual worker group (percentage of all new entrants)	13%	16%
Semi/unskilled manual worker group (percentage of all new entrants)	19%	24%
Student with disabilities as a percentage of all new entrants to higher education	6%	8%
Number of students with a physical/mobility disability	390	570
Number of students who are deaf/hard of hearing	210	280
Number of students who are blind/have a vision impairment	140	200
Percentage of students studying on part-time/flexible basis (all undergraduates & postgraduates)	19%	22%
Percentage of new entrants to higher education whose basis for admission is a further education qualification	6.6%	10%
Number of Irish Travellers in higher education (full & part-time undergraduate new entrants)	35	80

Source: 13

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[x] "In support of national targets to widen participation in higher education, there is a particular imperative to support outbound mobility for disadvantaged students." (ibid, p32)

5.5 Study choices of the target groups

The study choices of these student groups largely mirror the general student population with Humanities and the Arts, Social Sciences, Business, Law, Science, Health & Welfare and Mathematics & Computing being the most popular fields of study (*ibid*). See also Tables 6 and 7 below on subject choices for mobile students, which are not dis-similar.

Table 4 | **Study Choices of the higher education students by category.**

Category	Socio-economic target groups	Mature students	Students with disabilities	General student population
Agriculture and Veterinary	1%	1%	3%	2%
Education	3%	2%	2%	3%
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	11%	9%	11%	11%
General Programmes*	1%	0%	0%	0%
Health and Welfare	14%	25%	13%	14%
Humanities and Arts	19%	20%	24%	19%
Science, Mathematics and Computing	18%	17%	19%	18%
Services	10%	7%	7%	7%
Social Sciences, Business and Law	25%	19%	21%	24%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education, 2015-2019 (HEA 2014), p47.

*General Programmes are courses in literacy, numeracy and personal development. Note: The figures in this table are taken from HEA SRS data and relate to new entrant full-time undergraduates (all ages) for 2012/2013 and 2013/2014. Double counting may occur in some cases because of the inclusion of mature students, so the percentages given should be taken as indicative of trends.

5.6 Successful access schemes in Ireland

Since 2009 two national schemes were launched which have successfully widened participation at third level in Ireland for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and for students with disabilities. Over 20,000 students have entered higher education in Ireland through these schemes.

a) The Higher Education Access Route (HEAR)

HEAR is based on the understanding that socio-economic disadvantage can have a negative effect on how well a student does at school and whether they go on to college. In order to ameliorate these disadvantages, HEAR offers college and university places at reduced entry levels and provides extra academic and other support to school leavers from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who are resident in the Republic of Ireland. HEAR has been successfully established within a number of colleges and universities. Applicants must meet a range of financial, social and cultural indicators to be considered for 'reduced points entry' (academic entry level) place and extra college support.

b) The Disability Access Route to Education (DARE)

DARE is a third level alternative admissions scheme for school leavers whose disabilities have had a negative impact on their second level education. DARE offers reduced entry level places to school leavers who, as a result of having a disability, have experienced additional educational challenges in second level education.

Neither scheme currently presents outward mobility as an option to this cohort of students considering attending a college or university, however the promotion of outward mobility would be an appropriate part of, or natural fit for, the schemes current outreach activities.

In summary, access to and participation in higher education amongst non-traditional cohorts is lower than in the general population. However, access to higher education has widened significantly over the last 15 years through various access schemes such as HEAR and DARE, and the Irish government continue to demonstrate their commitment to such programmes.

The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education 2015-2019 does not however offer any recommendations around outward mobility.

5.7 Participation in outward mobility programmes

In Ireland, there is no single data repository where the outward mobility of higher education students is recorded, therefore beyond the Erasmus+ programme, mobility is not captured nationally. Anecdotal evidence suggests that students at higher education institutions in Ireland are actively mobile, attending programmes in many countries including China, Japan, South Korea, the USA and Canada, but there is no statistical evidence other than the national data of receiving countries. This highlights significant gaps in data and information in this area for Ireland. Recent proposals by the Irish Research Council seek to address this through the funding of a comprehensive internationalisation project at University College Dublin for the period 2015-2017[22].

The provision of consistent and reliable data is also recognised as a priority by Ireland's High Level Expert Group on international education. The availability of such data will enable government and institutions to set realistic goals, monitor progress towards these goals and benchmark the achievement of these goals institutionally and internationally. In the absence of comprehensive data at this juncture, the national picture for this report is presented solely using Erasmus+ data from the HEA.

5.8 Erasmus+

In 1987, Ireland despatched 112 higher education students on its first Erasmus+ programme. Since that time the Erasmus+ programme has expanded to include student traineeships or placements, staff visits, joint projects and capacity building projects. Ireland's outgoing numbers have increased steadily with a significant increase in internships and new destinations in Northern and Eastern Europe. To date over 60,000 students and staff from Ireland have participated in Erasmus+ mobility, while over 100,000 learners have come to study at Irish higher education institutions.

All Irish HEIs are involved in Erasmus+ programmes, but as can be seen from Table 5, for several years the University of Limerick and University College Dublin have been the leading sending institutions. Dublin Institute of Technology has also featured strongly, but has lost its 'top 3' designation over the last two years to Trinity College Dublin and to NUI Galway.

Table 5 | **Top Five Sending Institutions in Ireland (2012/2013 – 2015/2016).**

Top	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
1	University of Limerick	University of Limerick	University of Limerick	University of Limerick
2	University College Dublin	University College Dublin	University College Dublin	University College Dublin
3	Dublin Inst. Technology	Dublin Inst. Technology	Trinity College Dublin	Trinity College Dublin
4	Trinity College Dublin	NUI Galway	University College Cork	NUI Galway
5	University College Cork	Trinity College Dublin	Dublin Inst. Technology	Dublin Inst. Technology

Source: HEA, 2017

During the period 2013-2016 a total of 12,007 Irish students went on placement or study through the Erasmus+ programme. Student mobility for studies increased by 9.8% and student mobility for placement increased by 14.9%. The growth of student mobility for placement is indicative of its growing popularity across member states as a mobility option, particularly for students who are looking to add work experience to their résumés prior to graduating. Work placements were introduced into the Erasmus+ programme in 2007 and since then have grown rapidly: in 2016, the annual number of placements was more than three times higher than the number of placements in 2007-08.

In 2015 the Erasmus+ programme further expanded its borders outside the EU for student and staff mobility all over the world subject to certain conditions being met.

5.9 Student on Study – SMS

Table 6 shows the growing importance of business and administration subjects over the last two/three years which have overtaken foreign languages as the most important fields of study for Irish mobile students. It is interesting to note that arts and humanities subjects have become more popular in the same period, with social and behavioural sciences dropping from third to fourth place. Figures on mobility from the U.S. show a similar preference for business and related subjects, but a decline in arts and humanities studies. STEM subjects are becoming increasingly important to U.S. students[31], but do not feature in the top five choices for Irish students, possibly because of perceived language difficulties within these areas.

Table 6 | **Subject Choices for 'Students on Study' (SMS).**

Top	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
1	Foreign Languages	Foreign Languages	Business & Administration	Business & Administration
2	Business & Administration	Business & Administration	Foreign Languages	Foreign Languages
3	Social & Behavioural science	Social & Behavioural science	Arts	Humanities
4	Law	Arts	Social & Behavioural Science	Social & Behavioural Science
5	Arts	Law	Humanities	Law

Source: HEA, 2017

Students on placement (SMP) as Table 7 shows, chose very differently and focus primarily on practical and service-related subjects, with business and foreign languages a lower priority than for SMS. It is interesting to note the subject-choice shift from 2012/13. At that time engineering and biology/biochemistry featured quite strongly, however from 2013/14 these fields have not featured at all, the reasons behind these shifts are not clear.

Table 7 | **Subject Choices for 'Students on Placement' (SMP).**

Top	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
1	Business and Administration	Travel, Tourism, Sports	Services	Services
2	Engineering & Engineering trades	Arts	Arts	Business & Administration
3	Biology & Biochemistry	Business & Administration	Business & Administration	Arts
4	Arts	Health	Health	Health
5	Social & Behavioural science	Humanities	Foreign Languages	Foreign Languages

Source: HEA, 2017

Tables 9 and 10 show the top destinations for Irish students on Erasmus+ programmes. For SMS, the preferences have not changed within the period under review, with France, Spain and Germany the most popular destinations (in that order), reflecting the main language choices available at second level in Ireland. The Netherlands offers many programmes through English and consistently features as the fourth choice for Irish students.

While the UK is the fifth destination choice for SMS, it is the first destination choice for SMP. Given the practical nature of this offering, the UK is the logical destination for most students. However, there are implications here in the context of Brexit, with uncertainty around how long these UK-based programmes will be on offer to other EU member states. This could have serious implications for Irish student participation in placement programmes, in particular for students from under-represented groups and minority groups who may not have strong or confident language skills.

Table 8 | **Student on Study, Destination – SMS.**

Top	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
1	France	France	France	France
2	Spain	Spain	Spain	Spain
3	Germany	Germany	Germany	Germany
4	Netherlands	Netherlands	Netherlands	Netherlands
5	Sweden/UK	UK	UK	UK

Source: HEA, 2017

Table 9 | **Student on Placement, Destination – SMP**

Top	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
1	UK	UK	UK	UK
2	Spain	Spain	Spain	Spain
3	France	France	France	France
4	Germany	Germany	Germany	Germany
5	Netherlands	Luxembourg	Netherlands	Luxembourg

Source: HEA, 2017

Figures 9 and 10 illustrate that Ireland conforms to European and international norms, in that females are more mobile than their male counterparts. This is particularly striking with respect to SMS where male participation is declining (from 39% in 2013/14 to 35% on 2015/16). Figure 9 shows a greater balance between males and females on SMP, however male participation has dropped form 46% in 2013/14 to 43% in 2015/16.

Figure 9 | **SMS by gender 2012-2016**

■ Male SMS   ■ Female SMS
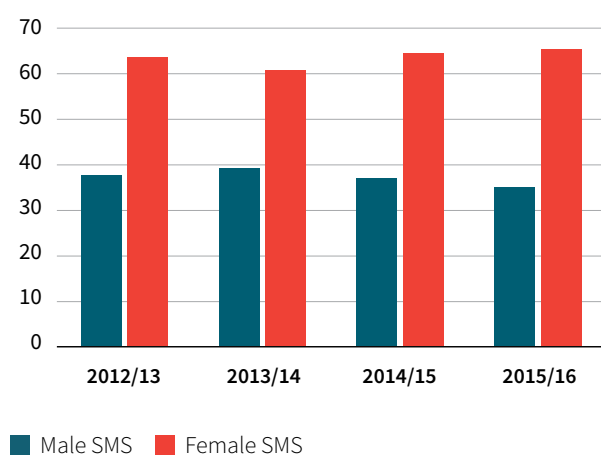
Figure 10 | **SMP by gender 2012-2016**

■ Male SMP   ■ Female SMP
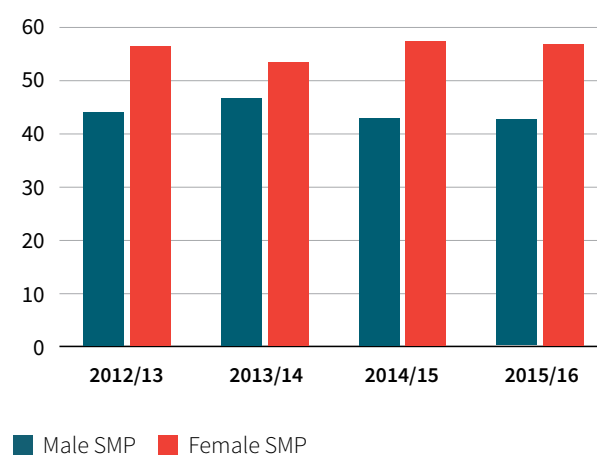
In line with higher education mobility trends across the globe, Irish Students are increasingly opting for shorter Erasmus+ periods. As illustrated by Tables 10 and 11, in 2012/13, 53% of SMS studied abroad for 9-12 months, by 2015/16 this had reduced to 39%. SMP percentages are stable for programmes between 6-12 months, but there is a very strong increase in the numbers on programmes of 0-2 months (growing from 1 to 100 over the period under review).

Table 10 | **Students on Study (SMS) by Duration**

Top	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
0-2 months	7	5	96	4
3-5 months	842	739	891	984
6-8 months	71	253	334	308
9-12 months	1,056	1,032	868	839

Source: HEA, 2017

Table 11 | **Students on Placement (SMP) by Duration SMP**

Top	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016
0-2 months	1	6	202	100
3-5 months	422	460	398	438
6-8 months	284	305	232	355
9-12 months	79	80	24	99

Source: HEA, 2017

5.10 Students with disabilities

In 2014 the HEA introduced an additional monthly fund of €120 for students from disadvantaged backgrounds participating in outward Erasmus+ programmes. Although the fund is relatively new, 8% (253 students) of participants availed of it for the 2015-2016 academic year. HEIs apply for the fund on behalf of their students receiving the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) maintenance grants.

A low uptake of the additional disability grant is evident from Table 12 below, with only six students availing of the grant in 2015/2016. A similar picture is evident across Europe with only 401 students with special needs availing of the grant in 2013-2014 to participate in Erasmus+. In the UK for example, only 10 students availed of the grant in 2015/16.

The supplementary disability support is available to those on study visits and traineeships. What is not available to trainees is a supplementary grant provided for those on the Higher Education Grant (SUSI) since trainees (interns) already get €100 more per month than those who go on study visits. In 2016, the HEA attempted to also introduce the fund for students on placement. Students are only entitled to one of the additional funds (either the placement top-up (€100) or the disadvantaged background fund (€120). Considering the limitations of this fund, the HEA decided to keep the fund for students on study only.

Table 12 | **Total Erasmus+ Participation (2012/2016)[xi]**

Year	SMS	SMP	Total	SMS Disability	SMS Disadvantage background	SMP Disability	SMP Dis-advantage background
2015-2016	2,169	1,004	**3,173**	6	253	0	0
2014-2015	2,189	911	**3,100**	6	213	0	0
2013-2014	2,121	851	**2,972**	2	0	1	0
2012-2013	1,976	786	**2,762**	3	0	0	0

Source: HEA, 2017

[xi] Please note that the students with disability included in Table 12 are those who undertook Erasmus+ programmes and received supplementary support from the programme for their mobility.

Crucially, widening participation in mobility programmes is dependant on leadership support and empowering mobility champions within the institution.

06 | Institutional analysis

As part of this study an in-depth examination of Erasmus+ mobility within two higher education institutions was undertaken. The institutions selected are both based in Limerick City (in the mid-west of Ireland): University of Limerick (UL) and Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT). While the institutions are physically proximate, they each offer a unique educational focus and attract a different student demographic allowing for an interesting comparison, and the capture of information on different approaches to mobility.

The research approach included the administration of a survey to both institutions, student focus groups and student interviews. The survey covered five key areas of outward mobility: mobility programmes; structure; funding; marketing and support. The focus groups and interviews were conducted with students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds who had participated in an outward mobility programme during their undergraduate programme. In total, 15 students participated in the focus groups and five students were interviewed by telephone [xii]. Both these sources allowed for the capture of comprehensive information on Erasmus+ and other study/placement programmes within the institutions.

The funding model for mobility is common to all institutions and is described below.

Figure 11 | **Funding for mobility**

Mobile students In Ireland can apply for four major grants, all of which are portable:

1 | **Student Assistance Fund**

A government assistance fund which provides limited support for full-time registered students who experience on-going financial difficulties and meet all application eligibility criteria. Each student who applies for this fund is assessed on an individual and confidential basis.

2 | **Mature Student Book Lending Scheme**

The Student Assistance Fund also funds the Mature Student Book Lending Scheme which is available to full time mature students. Students can apply to the scheme to receive up to two books on loan from the scheme's available stock.

3 | **Fund for Students with Disabilities**

This grant is available to all students who present at the institutions with a disability and are in full time higher education, to support the provision of

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[xii] Please note that the students with disability included in Table 12 are those who undertook Erasmus+ programmes and received supplementary support from the programme for their mobility.

services that meet their needs.

4 | SUSI Student Grant

The student grant is a state aid grant for Irish students in full time higher education. The grant exists to assist students with the various costs of participating in higher education pending eligibility.

Under the Erasmus+ programme there is agreement that the grants received by students will be maintained for the duration of their studies, and that the receipt of an Erasmus+ grant will not affect national grants. As required by both Erasmus+ and other exchange programmes, all students are registered within their home HEI while undertaking their academic mobility, and the Erasmus+ grant is allocated in accordance with the rules of the programme (i.e. there is a set amount depending on distance and the country of study). All students apply for the Erasmus+ grant funding through their international office using the relevant paper-based Erasmus+ scheme documents. The grant allocation is monitored and audited by the HEA.

UL and LIT note that students in receipt of SUSI funding and the Back to Education Initiative[xiii] grant frequently encounter problems when they inform the relevant office that they will be participating in a period of academic study abroad. Some students are told that their grants will be halted until their return. This causes frustration for all students concerned and creates unnecessary additional stress. The international office provides supporting letters and additional documentation required by these offices to assist these students as much as possible.

Under-represented groups may also receive funding for supports through the HEA European Social Fund. There is a small allocation of €100 to some students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds who on a case by case basis may receive additional monies through the Student Assistance Fund[xiv]. There is also a case by case basis funding opportunity from the Students Union for cooperative education (co-op) and study abroad students. A joined up information and communication plan between the National Agency, IUA

and THEA will SUSI would resolve this.

The Erasmus+ programme covers funding of flights for international travel to the host university, but the student must bear their own relocation costs such as rent deposits or hotel stays in first days or weeks abroad.

The sections which follow combine information generated by the survey tools to describe mobility within UL and LIT.

[xiii] The Back To Education Initiative (BTEI) provides part-time further education courses mainly for people with less than upper second-level education. It gives individuals the opportunity to combine learning with family, work and other responsibilities. Anyone who has left full-time education can take part in a course, but priority will be given to those with less than upper second-level education. http://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/education/returning_to_education/back_to_education_initiative.html

[xiv] http://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/student-assistance-fund/

6.1 University of Limerick

6.1.1 Background

Acknowledged as one of the 'Top under-50 universities[xv] in the world, the University of Limerick is a young, enterprising university with a proud record of innovation in education and scholarship.

UL offers more than 70 undergraduate programmes across Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences; Education & Health Sciences, Science & Engineering and Business. UL pioneered the concept of Cooperative Education in Ireland, and places more than 2,000 students in paid and semi-paid internships annually, 30% of which are international placements. UL has a network of 1,700+ employers spanning twenty five countries, making it one of the largest work-placement schemes in Europe[32]. These valuable work experiences and study abroad programmes make UL graduates more employable, which is why the UL graduate employment rate in 2015 was 22% higher than the national average[33].

During the 2016-17 academic year, University of Limerick mobilised 53 socially disadvantaged students into academic mobility programmes, an increase from 38 in 2015-16. Additionally, 20 mature students were mobilised and two students with a disability went abroad in 2016-17.

6.1.2 Mobility programmes

As Table 5 on page 31 indicates, UL boasts the highest levels of Erasmus+ outward mobility in Ireland (and has held this position for the last five years). According to the Erasmus+ Annual Report in 2015, UL also ranks highly for inbound students (second in Ireland in 2014).

UL's outbound student mobility opportunities are continually expanding and at present are offered under the following programmes:

- Erasmus+ EU Mobility programme
- Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility
- International Exchange
- Summer Schools
- Study Abroad

UL's International Education Division (IED) is a member of the EPALE[xvi] National Steering Committee and a member of the project advisory group for 'Learning Today for a Better Tomorrow' programme managed by AONTAS[xvii], which enables a connection with the adult learner voice at the national level

6.1.3 Structure

There is a deeply structured approach to internationalisation at the highest levels within UL, and outward mobility participation from all student categories is encouraged and supported. The IED is the UL department responsible for the organisation and coordination of all student and academic mobility between UL and partner universities globally.

While UL has specific targets for the domestic participation of students from the designated under-represented groups (28% of total full-time undergraduate entrants), there are no specific targets set to engage these student groups in outward mobility participation.

Three staff at the university are specifically allocated to the administration of mobility programmes for underrepresented groups across various offices, they liaise closely with representatives in both the disability office and the IED. Students with significant disabilities require high levels of support and these systems are well developed within UL, and have proved highly successful. In order to assess risks, alleviate stresses and carry out the necessary protocols, UL staff commence preparations one year in advance of the study abroad start date to ensure the students' needs are met. The IED communicate regularly with academic coordinators, course directors, parents and guardians. Before they travel, students have face-to-face preparatory meetings with both the home and host HEI, providing clear guidance on the needs and requirements of the student. Through this approach the student is less likely to encounter unforeseen obstacles during their stay. Accommodation is vetted by the IED to ensure it complies with the students' needs. Practicalities such as access to the university, classes, any required equipment or technology will be taken into account. In addition, the counselling services and student welfare officers are regularly consulted by the IED.

[xv] QS Top Universities 2018, 50 under 50 https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings/top-50-under-50/2018

[xvi] EAPLE, Electronic platform for Adult Learning in Europe – https://ec.europa.eu/epale/

[xvii] AONTAS, Ireland's National Adult Learning Association – https://www.aontas.com/

Due to UL's policy of self-identification at registration stage, it can be the case that students do not classify themselves within an under-represented category, and therefore do not get accounted for by the system. As a result, while the IED is well equipped to deal with a varied student cohort, they cannot predict the needs of a student who has not self-presented prior to studying abroad. This can result in challenges which the IED seek to counterbalance through maintaining clear and open communication channels which afford students the opportunity to present with a particular challenge at any stage in their mobility programme. UL have found that in fact some students do not recognise that they may have a significant issue until they undertake an academic period abroad:

> "Due to the diversity of the student cohort, a range of students who are not identified or counted within the scope of under-represented groups can present with a range of challenges in areas such as mental health, chronic illness, recent bereavements or family issues which may impact the student."

This multi-layered approach which incorporates all stakeholders and a dedication to meet specific student requirements as they arise has facilitated academic mobility for students with high level of disabilities who otherwise may not have had this learning opportunity.

The international office is open on a daily basis, and students can call in at any time to discuss their international mobility options. The access office, disability support service and mature-students' office also handle student queries. A plan to address each student's individual needs is agreed upon and developed by the relevant offices on a case by case basis.

6.1.4 Marketing

UL's outward mobility programmes are advertised to students through a number of channels including campus-wide campaigns, email and social media as indicated by Figure 12 and detailed below:

Figure 12 | **Marking of mobility programmes, UL**

The social media channels used for the UL student cohort include Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. Facebook has proven to be the most successful and popular social media channel. Case studies, photos, travel tips and submission deadlines are among the most common content published on social media. All relevant student information is also emailed directly to student accounts. IED have found that face to face communication continues to be the most successful form of engagement with students.

An annual study abroad fair is held on campus to target students who may be interested in outbound student mobility. At the fair, prospective students can meet with representatives from the international division and also speak with students who have undertaken an academic placement at one of UL's 50+ partner universities. This peer learning activity allows students ask questions which they may not feel comfortable asking staff about the host country and university. At the fair, there is a stand for each country in which UL have a partner university agreement. Attendance at the fair is recorded each year and there is a steady increase in participation year on year of approximately 6%.

The IED does not specifically target groups of under-represented students to attend these information events, however, the various support offices work together to highlight courses with compulsory mobility activity, course requirements and existing country partnerships. This enables students to focus and plan in the long term for their mobility experience in order to be financially and personally prepared. Financial assistance information is also provided in the outreach programmes.

6.1.5 Support

UL deliver an extensive pre-departure programme to students outlining the distinct requirements for each programme. The division of duties per home and host institution is outlined in the Erasmus+ Charter for Higher Education[xviii] or the bilateral agreement between the institutions and this is explained to the students. The host university issues letters of acceptance for visas and will assist with accommodation. Students book their own flights but may coordinate airport collections with the host university, if applicable.

UL generally operates under an equality policy, where all students receive the same support. On a case by case basis, additional support is also available to students. The student is central to all decision making regarding host institution selection, course selection, accommodation selection and the selection of personal assistants and carers where applicable.

Pre-departure, UL offer optional evening plenary sessions for students to voice their questions and concerns. A core module – *'CU4013 Preparation for External Study and Work Placement'* is also available which takes the form of two lectures per week, and was specifically created to support students in their preparation for external placements. UL have found that proactive and practical support at an early stage helps to minimise feelings of disorientation and leads to effective participation. Through the module, students learn how to develop intercultural competence and culturally sensitive behaviour.

During their period of study abroad, students have a designated contact point within UL and at the host HEI, who is available for face-to-face discussion and/or email/phone correspondence. However, due to the large number of students travelling abroad annually, UL note that it is increasingly difficult to check in with every student as regularly as desired. Therefore, it is considered vital that students engage with the pre-departure briefings to ensure they are prepared for their trip and so that the IED can identify any students who would particularly benefit from regular check-in correspondence while abroad. The host university will also flag concerns regarding students with UL where necessary. Students from under-represented groups will have automatic check-in sessions to ensure their needs are being met in their new environment.

In the case of a natural disaster, act of terrorism or other event which may affect the safety of an area, the IED will make contact with all students present in the affected area to ensure their safety.

[xviii] https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/erasmus-charter-for-higher-education-2014-2020_en

6.2 Limerick Institute of Technology

6.2.1 Background

Limerick Institute of Technology (LIT) is one of 14 Institutes of the Technological Higher Education Association Ireland (THEA). It is the fourth largest Institute of Technology and has more than 6,000 full and part-time students and 500 staff. LIT offers courses ranging from Level 6 (certificate) through to Level 10 (PhD) and has five campuses spread across Limerick City and counties Tipperary and Clare. In 2017, LIT was granted permission to develop a new campus in Limerick, to focus on teaching and research in engineering.

The Institute has twice been named as The Sunday Times Institute of Technology of the Year (in 2008 and again in 2013)[xix]. LIT is to the forefront in ensuring that the region's economy continues to have the requisite array of leading-edge skills demanded by knowledge-based industries.

6.2.2 Mobility programmes

Up until this academic year outward mobility opportunities within LIT had been restricted to Erasmus+ Programmes of varying lengths (from 12 and 52 weeks). This year, the first of a new set of international credit mobility opportunities became available and the LIT International Office aim to continue to expand outward mobility opportunities through the development of exchange programmes resulting from the deepening of academic partnerships with similar institutions in China, Brazil, Malaysia, Canada and the Middle East.

In contrast to UL, LIT's outbound academic mobility cohort is low (with typically 5 to 10 mobile students per academic year). Almost 70% of the institution's full-time students are categorised as socio-economically disadvantaged, which may explain the low academic participation levels, and the correspondingly high figures for outbound placement/traineeship programmes which can be up to 10-fold higher (between 40 and 50 students per academic year).

Work Placement

The work placement opportunity is generally perceived as the more attractive option for students in Institutes of Technology, due to the fact that the majority of courses offered to students have a practical application after college and as noted above, this is reflected within LIT. Hence students are eager to get work experience in their chosen field of study before graduation[xx]. Other attractive attributes of work experience are the remuneration packages for students, the opportunity to build specific skillsets towards qualification, develop soft skills such as confidence and a work ethic. LIT suggest that his short and sharp immersion opportunity often proves more suitable for students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Students from disadvantaged or under-represented groups within this mobile group have not been specifically tracked by the institution to date however, LIT hope to track this cohort from the next academic year (2018/2019).

LIT's international office also attributes low numbers of international mobility to the absence of Arts & Humanities subject within the institution, which reduces the general appetite for language learning or inter-cultural development. Furthermore, as noted above, concerns about financial burdens and family separation come into play here, as the length of time required away from home – a minimum of 12 weeks – may appear unattractive to an otherwise non-mobile student from a socio-economically disadvantaged background.

6.2.3 Structure

Outward mobility is part of LIT's over-arching internationalisation strategy, with a team of international officers dedicated to the outward mobility of student groups.

LIT do not have clearly defined outbound mobility targets with respect to disadvantaged and under-represented groups within the institution, or outreach officers/dedicated staff resources in place to deal with issues relating to the mobilisation of underrepresented groups specifically. At present, the international office works with other specialist departments such as the disability office, student support office and the access office on a frequent basis, but only as specifically

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[xix] www.lit.ie

[xx] Practical application courses such as Digital Animation Production, Construction Management, Fashion Knitwear and Textiles, Social Work are all available to the student cohort at LIT.

identified individual student needs arise. There is no formal multi-department international committee in place currently at LIT.

The institution does however aspire to address outward mobility participation rates amongst both underrepresented groups and the general student population as part of their strategic plan 2015-2019.

As is the case with UL, all LIT students self-identify when registering, so some students with a disability or those who are members of underrepresented groups may choose not to disclose this, leading to an inaccurate picture of the under-represented cohort attending the institution[xxi].

6.2.4 Marketing

Outward mobility programmes are advertised to LIT students through a number of channels including campus-wide campaigns, email and social media as indicated by Figure 13 and detailed below:

LIT primarily use Facebook as their main social media channel to connect with students regarding outward mobility opportunities. Marketing expenditure and the promotion of programmes is not currently tracked by the international team at LIT. In 2016/17, LIT did not target specific cohorts of outbound students directly, or track student engagement through any of their social media channels. Similarly, to UL, LIT report that direct face to face engagement with students is the most effective marketing channel. Occasionally, other departments within LIT assist the international office with outward mobility marketing, as the need arises.

Figure 13 | **Marking of mobility programmes, LIT.**

Email Campaigns

Social Media

Orientation

LIT Marketing Opportunities

Printed Materials

Student Facing Office

Website

[xxi] This method of student elective disclosure is believed to be in line with best practice within the sector.

6.2.5 Support

All students at LIT are fully supported before and during their period of international mobility. Within the Erasmus+ programme, the typical reciprocal arrangement is that institutes support the pre-departure briefing and arrangements to settle the student, assist them to access services, to make them welcome and to bring them into wider student community. LIT takes this responsibility seriously in relation to its inbound students and relies on its Erasmus+ partners to do the same in respect of its outbound students.

LIT international officers counsel students through each part of the paper-based application process.

LIT do not produce tailored information or guidance for students from underrepresented groups specifically as the institution works to promote equal opportunities and standards for students. Other departments within the institution share information and provide support on a specific identified individual needs basis.

6.3 The student voice

Focus group sessions and interviews were held with students at both UL and LIT. A copy of the Focus group session plan and questions is available in Appendix 2. The students – all of whom had participated in outward mobility programmes and were from under-represented or minority groups, identified a number of barriers in both the decision-making phase and the planning-phase of the mobility process.

The benefits of mobility:

When students were asked what attracted them to going on Erasmus+ programmes many of the responses reflected the perceived benefits of mobility outlined in earlier sections of this report. The students reflected that Erasmus+ provided an opportunity to travel, make new friends and networks as well as increase their social skills. The development of personal and professional skills such as confidence, freedom, intercultural skills and lifelong learning skills were regularly cited. Students believed that an Erasmus+ experience changes employers' perceptions of their abilities in a positive manner.

Barriers to mobility:

The following table summarises these barriers and the students' suggested approaches to overcoming them. In line with the research which has been described in Section 3 above the barriers discussed focus around funding and finances, communication around the explanation and promotion of mobility and personal concerns ranging from language and accommodation issues to loneliness. There is considerable overlap between these categories and communication is at the core of both the barriers identified and the solutions proposed.

Table 13 | **The student perspective – barriers identified and solutions offered.**

Barrier/ Challenge Identified	Potential solutions from a student perspective
Funding and finance **Study abroad is expensive** ■ It was agreed by all students that they could not engage in mobility programmes without the support of the Erasmus+ funding, SUSI and other supporting grants. These grants are often not paid on time ■ Accommodation costs are often not covered by grants ■ Sometimes the cost of living in a country is much higher than anticipated ■ Some students had to give up jobs to undertake mobility programmes ■ Family financial support is also often required	Clear and full information on all available funding, including SUSI/ Erasmus+/ student assistance grants and information on any available funds in host county Provide extra grants (especially to support longer term mobility) Offer support with completing funding (and other) forms Ensure grants are paid earlier/on time Support students to find part-time jobs Encourage students to do research on the relative costs of living in the choice countries (and have this information available)

Barrier/ Challenge Identified	Potential solutions from a student perspective
	Ensure students are aware of the socio-economic climate of colleges they are entering (students spoke of difficulty of "rich kid's college"/ privileged environment…)
	Provide details of how to set up bank accounts and other practical financial information
	Make Erasmus+ optional (Erasmus+ is compulsory across language programmes in UL and some other areas)

Communications	Potential solutions from a student perspective
Lack of knowledge about programmes and structure ■ Lack of knowledge/information about availability of mobility programmes. There is an assumption that Erasmus+ is just for language students ■ Confusion compounded by limited or no response to queries from home and receiving institution causes a lot of extra anxiety in applying and in situ ■ Academic concerns: new and different structures create anxiety and stress for students (lack of knowledge about options and choices…What happens if you fail?) ■ When in-country, lack of response can result in serious anxiety adding to the stress of adapting to a new culture/environment. This is a key factor especially during first few weeks ■ Weak preparation or pre-departure training can have negative consequences	Strong and effective promotion of the available programmes and the benefits of mobility (especially to non-language students) Clear and full information on academic requirements, programmes, how to obtain results/ academic transcript modules (what they entail), systems – the difference and similarities, the expectations… Facilitate students to undertake their own guided research. Ensure students are aware of the differences between locations Connect outgoing students to students who have gone before Support a Buddy Programme that offers one to one support Regularly check in on students while they are away Consistency – always have one person (or small team) who can be available to respond to queries while students are away Develop strong pre-departure training which includes academic and country information and a checklist of what to bring and what not to bring, and accommodation information

| Accommodation	Potential solutions from a student perspective
■ Difficulty in securing accommodation ■ Concerns around safety ■ Accommodation contract being different to the module dates in private accommodation	Support students to find accommodation well in advance and advise on where to find suitable, affordable accommodation Ensure receiving partner makes appropriate accommodation available to students Be made aware of property scams in relevant country and how to avoid them

Personal Issues	Potential solutions from a student perspective
■ Health / Disability Anxiety was highlighted as the biggest health issue affecting students on Erasmus+ programmes **■ Loneliness** Students agreed that this was down to the individual and that some people were more resilient than others. The response indicates that family offer the most support in response to this issue. However, the college has a role to play in helping overcome this challenge. Going with a friend was also a significant factor in overcoming this challenge **■ Homesickness / culture shock** Although students reflected that this is part of the journey of living in a new culture, it was considered that the college can play a supportive role in addressing homesickness, culture shock Reverse culture shock was named as an issue quite a number of times **■ Crime/ Safety** Concerns about crime and personal safety were strong and frequently related to the location of accommodation	Comprehensive pre-departure sessions to cover all these areas How to access an English-speaking doctor and provide information around health insurance and what is covered Facilitate social networking i.e. group chats/Facebook groups Support the development of an effective 'Buddy System" More consistent support from home college – lack of contact increases anxiety. Always have one person who can be accessible and available to respond to queries while students are away Provide information on health care center information/ supports in host university/ city and Erasmus+ counselling service/network Regular reconnaissance trips should be arranged and funded for students with disabilities in particular Ensure free Wi-Fi is available and provide a free sim card Arrange meetings with students who have been to that college or city before and who can tell you about customs/ traditions etc. Facilitate debriefing sessions upon return Ring-fence student accommodation Develop Erasmus+ buddy system Access good information in advance of departing, especially through students who have been to the same place

Language	Potential solutions from a student perspective
Lack of familiarity with the local language can increase anxiety, especially at the outset and in relation to emergency situations, or practical 'settling in' issues	Compulsory language course in advance of departing Offer more study options in English-speaking countries The existing online language course is not practical – make it into an app Facilitate voluntary language exchange on campus Offer extra credits for language exchange Support students to arrive earlier to take a language course

The pie chart below indicates the ranking of these barriers, please note that where students name 'health' as a barrier, it is very closely linked to stress, anxiety-related illness and to culture shock and loneliness when extreme. Communication features strongly and is also related to preparation.

Figure 14 | **Ranking of barriers to mobility**

Barriers to Mobility %
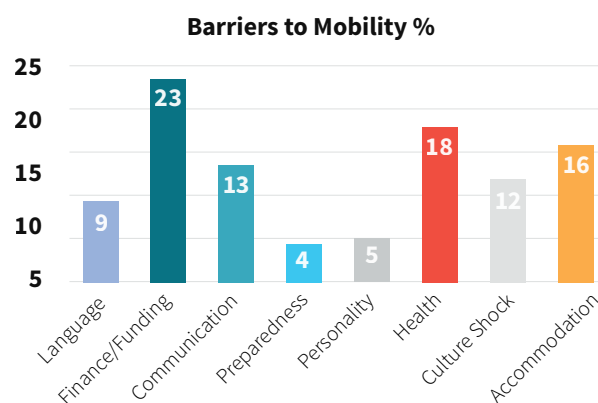
Source: EMASI Report student focus group results 2017

6.3.1 Feedback from students on practical matters

In general, students engaged in the consultation process well. The methodologies were effective and the students contributed strongly, and very much valued the opportunity to provide feedback, which in turn validates their proposal for the opportunity to engage in debriefing sessions upon return from Erasmus+.

Overall students offered extremely positive feedback when talking about the programme and cited some of the benefits of mobility highlighted in Section 3. Many of the students believe that they are more attractive to employers as they developed skills such as intercultural awareness and competence. They used various phrases to describe their experience such as: "as broadening my horizons"; "life experience" and "new opportunities''. They cited a number of programme strengths, including opportunities for personal development, increased employability and the opportunity to travel. The development of language skills was highlighted to a lesser degree especially by students on placement. It is worth noting that a number of the students undertook placements in the UK whereby language skills would not be developed. Again this highlights another barrier for these groups of students, as UK-based work placement programmes may no longer be available in the context of Brexit.
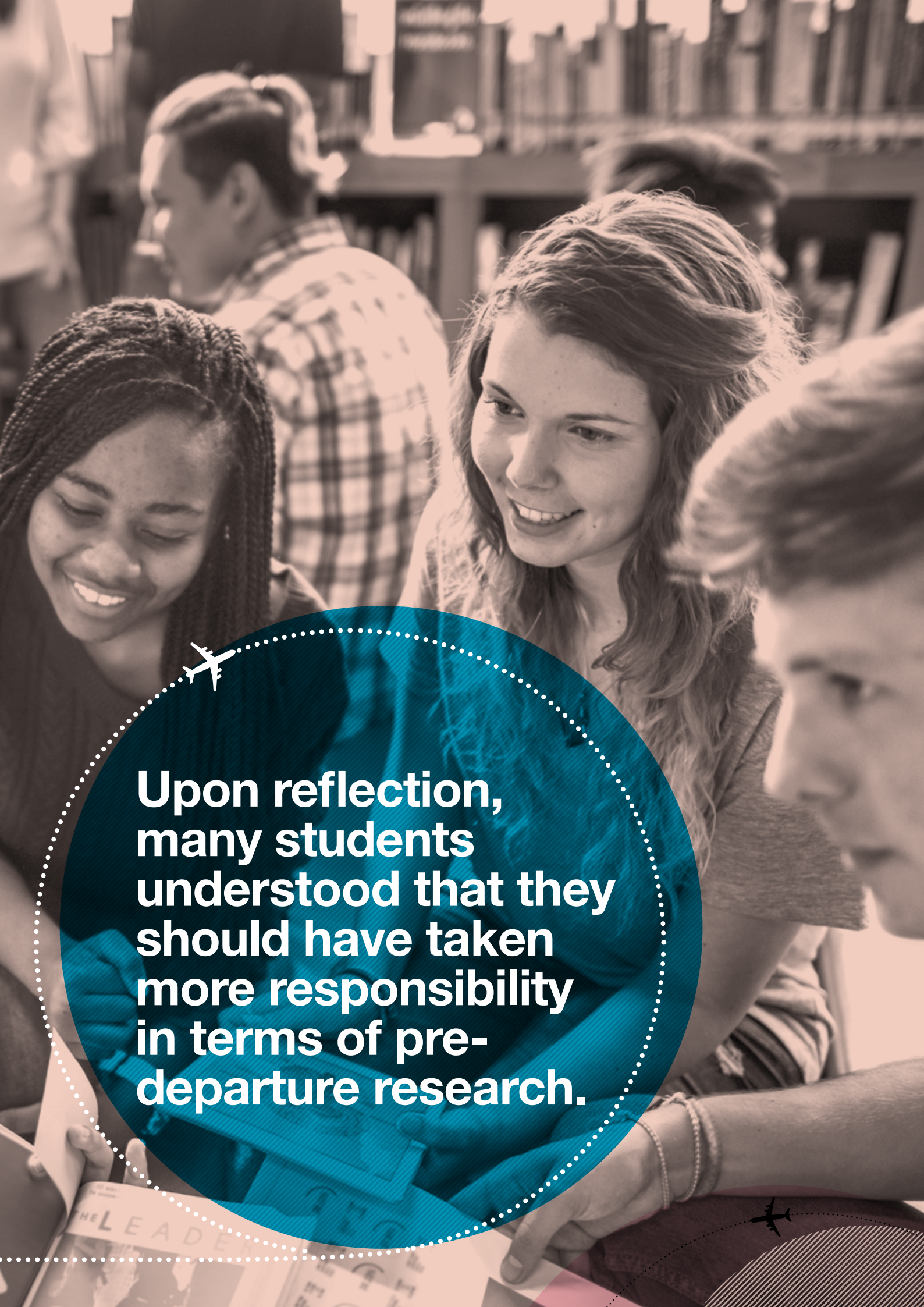
In terms of areas to improve, communications (across all areas) and accommodation and were ranked as key areas to address. It was also felt necessary to clearly identify the roles and responsibilities of both the sending institute, the hosting institute and the students themselves. Upon reflection, many students understood that they should have taken more responsibility in terms of pre-departure research, especially in relation to cost of living and practical issues such as suitable electrical adaptors etc. Interestingly, the feedback indicated that they did recall returning Erasmus+ students sharing their experience and offering tips, but at the time they did not engage with the information.

6.3.2 Feedback from students on academic matters

The student feedback from an academic perspective was mixed. Some respondents thoroughly enjoyed the discovery of new teaching strategies and the opportunity to study new subjects, and returned motivated and determined to continue with their studies. Others found it academically challenging, had difficulty coming to grips with different systems, were stressed over assessments and additionally, found it difficult to re-adjust to their normal routine upon return. Students attributed positive academic progress to effective working relationships and processes between the host and home institutions academic and international staff. Learning agreements that students can easily implement were cited an important feature when settling in from an academic perspective.

It was interesting to note that a sense of global citizenship emerged through the discussions with the focus groups, suggesting that the impact – as such mobility programmes – goes far beyond the student and extends to the college campus and into society at large. Students reflected on the development of "increased empathy", and the gaining of "new perspectives" and indicated that they were more willing to support visiting students on campus in Limerick and less likely to stereotype others as a result of the experience. In this respect, there are clear links between the outcomes of the student focus groups and interviews and the four common EU objectives outlined in the ET 2020 :

- Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship
- Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training

Upon reflection, many students understood that they should have taken more responsibility in terms of pre-departure research.

07 | Conclusions and recommendations

This report sought to inform public policy in Ireland around outward mobility and address higher education challenges associated with social inclusion, employability, skills and internationalisation. The study has arisen in the context of current higher education policy discussions at both national and European levels. It specifically responds to the Yerevan priorities (2015[35]) that call for widening participation in outward mobility through more inclusive systems to ensure that employability benefits impact upon the working lives of all students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds or minority groups.

 Ireland has set ambitious targets to increase the numbers of disadvantaged or minority students accessing higher education, and there is evidence to suggest that progress is being made here. Through the DARE and HEAR schemes the number of disabled students participating in HE has increased by an impressive 450% over the last decade. There has been less success however in attracting participation in HE of students from lower socio-economic groups (26%

compared to average participation of 52%, and 99% within the highest socio-economic groups).

In striving for equity in international access as well as national access, Ireland has also committed to working towards the achievement of the EHEA targets for graduates of member states to have experienced a period studying or working abroad by 2020, to 20%. However specific targets have not been set.

This report was unable to comment on the broad profile of higher education mobility in Ireland due to significant gaps in the data at the national level. Available data on Erasmus+ mobility for Irish undergraduates shows that Ireland hovers just slightly above the EU average at 5%, with participation of disadvantaged and minority groups less than 1%. Overall, Ireland's performance in streamlining, managing and monitoring Erasmus+ participation generates a weak Eurydice International Mobility Ranking score under all criteria, except for the portability of national grants.

International research has conclusively demonstrated the benefits associated with studying or placement abroad. Studies in the U.S. further suggest that this impact is magnified for under-represented groups. This report has detailed the benefits which include:

- Improved career and employment opportunities
- Higher education performance

- Personal development
- The development of language skills

Students face a number of significant obstacles to mobility, most particularly, as this report describes, socio-economic background, parental education levels and financial concerns. Additional barriers to mobility include separation concerns, personality, age, concerns around academic issues and credit transfer, poor language skills, compatibility, motivation and lack of awareness of the availability of programmes. Specifically, in relation to Ireland, the mid-term evaluation of the Erasmus+ programme highlights that the application process itself acts as a barrier.

Based on the international and national research described above, and on the findings from the HEI's and student interactions, the following recommendations are suggested to support the development of student mobility in Ireland, particularly in relation to the participation of disadvantaged and minority groups. The section proposes recommendations at both the national and the HEI level, although there is necessarily significant overlap between the two.

A. **At the national level:**

1. **Given the importance placed upon equality in higher education, by the Irish government, it is necessary to generate targets for the mobility of non-traditional students.**

It is important to ensure equality of access to international mobility opportunities for all students and in particular, create pathways for students from lower socio-economic groups and minority backgrounds to engage such offerings. To address this and ensure equitable access to mobility in Ireland and its higher education institutions need to explore obstacles to mobility within national study frameworks and support systems.

Ireland's internationalisation strategy references increasing mobility for students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds but no national outward mobility targets are in place for these students. The 2016 Strategy states that *"a review of the number of grant holders as a proportion of Erasmus+ students will be undertaken to see if disadvantaged students are adequately represented"* ([2], p43), but this study has not taken place. The National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher

Education 2015-2019 does not make any reference to widening participation in outward mobility programmes for these groups.

Equality of access and widening participation in mobility targets should be included in the strategic dialogue process between HEIs and the HEA to track the progress of widening participation initiatives. A national target should be set and aligned with participation targets in the national access plan. Achievement of these targets should be reflected in Ireland's Internationalisation strategy and its associated working groups.

Within the context of the reforms suggested here, consideration must also be given to resourcing a national organisation to deal with the increased demand and to assist with streamlining processes. This will place Ireland in line with other EHEA member states.

2. **It is imperative that quality comprehensive data is available on outbound mobility of Irish students in higher education (including and beyond Erasmus+).**

A key gap observed throughout this research was the dearth of adequate data at the national level. At present, there are no national reporting requirements for HEIs around outward mobility and no agreed definitions exist. Data on student mobility flows is limited and conflicting data is presented from the two main sources of statistical information currently available. Specifically the need for quality, reliable and consistent data on Erasmus+ participants and non-participants is required as well as participants in non-Erasmus+ study abroad programmes. At a system level there is a requirement to agree on a set of relevant variables and method of collecting data for tracking purposes and future longitudinal studies.

Comprehensive and rigorous monitoring and tracking is essential to understand the participation of all HE students in mobility programmes, but is especially important for students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds. For example, tracking students who are mobile and in receipt of the SUSI grant nationally would both help to understand participation patterns and inform the development of policy and practice. Tracking post-mobility is also important and it is recommended that the employment trends of students and graduates who participate in mobility programmes be tracked. Evidence from other countries indicates that mobility has a very positive impact on career progression and such data for Ireland will help reinforce the benefits of studying or placement abroad for both students and higher education institutions.

Improvements in data collection will also lead to improved scores on international mobility rankings such as Eurydice. Ireland's performance on the Eurydice mobility scoreboard is generally poor and does not fully meet any of the criteria for each indicator (with the exception of portability of grants). There is significant room for improvement across all indicators particularly in foreign language preparation and recognition of learning outcome and qualifications. Some aspects have been implemented for information and guidance at a national level as well as support provided to disadvantaged learners.

3. Funding

Finance remains a key concern for students considering participation in mobility programmes. This report fully supports the Government commitment to exploring increased financial support for students in the Higher Education System Performance First Report[36], which identifies 'student finance (including reluctance to forego part-time employment)' as a barrier to international mobility. There has been a low uptake of Erasmus+ top-up grants available to students from disadvantaged or minority backgrounds. This report recommends further investigation into the reasons for this, giving particular attention to situations where other financial supports are suspended while students are on mobility. This report fully supports the Government's intentions to explore engagement with the European Social Fund (ESF) as a mechanism to support the participation of socioeconomically disadvantaged students in Erasmus+.

4. Awareness and Outreach

To promote equity within mobility, a national campaign around the benefits of and options associated with outward mobility should be considered by the Irish Government and the higher education institutions collectively. Additionally, information on international mobility opportunities should be included in national outreach and access programmes such as the DARE/ HEAR schemes and SUSI grant scheme to raise awareness of mobility opportunities and benefits before students enter third level.

5. Challenges and risks

Successful reform will increase costs

If widening participation initiatives are to be successfully introduced at the national level, there will be associated costs for government and for HEIs, firstly in establishing robust systems and a delegated agency and secondly, because the reforms will increase demand. However, the benefits to the individual and ultimately to the country will counterbalance these initial costs, and comprehensive data systems will assist in highlighting these benefits at both macro and micro levels.

Brexit

Brexit uncertainties must be considered in the context of Erasmus+. The UK is one of the top five destinations for Irish students undertaking Erasmus+ programmes, and first place for students on placements. While the National Agency for Erasmus+ in the UK supports continued full membership of the programme for the UK through to 2020 and Universities UK is requesting government to secure continued participation in the programme post-Brexit, Irish HEIs must be encouraged and supported to find alternative partners to minimise the risks associated with the UK not being part of Erasmus+ post 2020. Ireland's national agency for Erasmus+, the HEA has successfully co-ordinated a number of potential partner networking events for higher education institutions and should be enabled to support more.

B. **At the HEI level**

Enabling and encouraging outward mobility requires HEIs to adopt or implement a number of strategies. The strategies recommended here have been identified from the institutional analysis of the two higher education institutions who participated in this project, the University of Limerick and Limerick Institute of Technology. These recommendations closely mirror findings in the Universities UK report, *Widening Participation* in UK Outward Student Mobility: A picture of participation , and will be utilised to create a toolkit of best practice for European higher education institutions seeking to widen participation in outward mobility programmes.

1. A whole of institution approach is required

Outward mobility is supported and encouraged across both institutions and across all levels of management, support and administration.

Outward mobility is explicitly referenced in the strategic plans of both institutions mirroring the emphasis on outward mobility at government levels. Both institutions actively support and encourage integrated outward study or placement programmes, within certain programmes offering students a range of study/placement opportunities from the beginning of their course.

The importance of outward mobility is explicitly supported by senior management in both institutions and this is reflected in the targets institutions set for outward mobility.

Academic buy in is crucial to successfully embed and widen participation in outward mobility programmes. This is reflected in the institutions structured approach to embedding internationalisation across the institutions via Head of Faculty responsibility, as well as academic representation on internationalisation committees.

Co-ordination of outward mobility is supported by senior management and includes an effective, well-resourced body – generally the **international office** to ensure quality and appropriate outward mobility programmes for students. The International office also acts as a vehicle for effective collaboration with other key stakeholders of mobility such as the access office, disability office, co-operative education office and academic departments. It also acts as a catalyst for effective promotion of outward mobility such as social media campaigns and outward mobility events. These activities are broad and resource-consuming and it is recommended that international offices be adequately resourced to undertake these roles effectively.

Comprehensive internationalisation across institutions requires meaningful outward mobility. Senior leadership within institutions should support staff and students who put themselves forward as **mobility champions** and empower these champions to integrate and promote outward mobility programmes across institutional plans, strategies, initiatives and activities. Encouragement from academic staff helps prevent immobility.

The findings reveal that institutions should recognise that **one size does not fit all** and a diverse range of offerings is necessary. Both long-term and short-term study and placement opportunities exist as options for students in these two HEIs and this is valued by

students. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds value a work placement option as it offers valuable work experience as well as remuneration to offset the costs associated with mobility. Placement also offers a short and sharp immersion opportunity that is attractive to students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Higher education institutions need to be agile in responding to varying student needs.

2. Information, promotion and support

Encouraging mobility among students requires an awareness of the benefits of mobility. Student respondents believed this awareness, along with encouragement from the institution was paramount for decision making.

Both institutions provide clear and comprehensive information on the outward mobility options available to students. Clarity and transparency is crucial for students and parents to fully understand the benefits of outward mobility, what it will involve and its potential impact.

Both institutions utilise a number of promotional channels to promote outward mobility, from on-campus events to social media campaigns. It is important for institutions to track and review the success of such campaigns and events and measure their effectiveness in widening participation. Both institutions reference the effectiveness of face to face meetings through initiatives such as annual study abroad fairs on campus. Social media is regarded as highly effective at raising awareness and sharing success stories. The power of alumni cannot be underestimated in helping promote the benefits of mobility. The student voice of outward mobility alumni is a key ingredient for raising awareness of the benefits of outward mobility.

A positive mobility experience is more likely when the student is actively involved in all aspects of the mobility programme and takes ownership of it. Expectations are also managed when students become more invested in all aspects of organisation and planning. It is especially effective at the organisational stage to help identify specific practical and academic needs, particularly for students with disabilities.

Structured pre-departure training is essential to successful mobility. Student respondents indicated that such training should take candidates through the application process and offer full preparation for study or placement abroad, including personal checklists, practical tips on safety, accommodation, cultural issues, phones and communications, bank accounts, public transport etc.

For students with a disability the influence and support of parents, friends and the institution are vital for a successful study abroad period and they need to be included in all aspects of the process.

> *"It is harder with a disability, so sometimes people might not even consider it. My parents were always very supportive of me going and we went over to check out the campus and city a few months before I went on Erasmus+ which helped ease the fear a lot."* (Disability Student at the University of Limerick)

Pre-departure training should also seek to de-mystify the academic processes of other institutions and explain other academic issues which arise abroad. UL's study abroad module *(Preparation for External Work Placement and Study)* is an effective model here.

Students also focused on the following areas where they would like to see changes and/or greater support offered:

Language/Cultural barriers: A competent knowledge of the local language and local culture is necessary to navigate the practical aspects of living in a new country. The online mandatory language course to prepare for Erasmus+ should be available on mobile phones via an app. Other useful recommendations include, pre-departure language exchange programmes on campus, financial support to arrive early at host institutions to undertake a language course and offering extra credits for language exchange programmes.

Students felt that a greater choice of English speaking courses and placements would widen mobility to students who do not possess the necessary linguistic skills. Equally a greater number of modules would encourage participation, as some students reported a limited choice of modules that they could study at the host institution.

Homesickness and Culture Shock: Many students reported the impact of homesickness, loneliness and culture shock as significant issues, with some feeling they didn't fit in or belong to the new institution. Connecting with past students before arrival and engaging with buddy systems as well as orientation programmes are crucial to overcome these barriers. A consistent contact point with the home institution at all times helps alleviate anxiety and stress associated with the settling in period of studying abroad. Students also reported a sense of being out of place upon returning to the home institution and suggested a de-briefing support session would be of value to help re-acclimatise to life at the home university.

Reconnaissance trip: Students citied reconnaissance trips as an effective way to overcome anxiety and significantly help preparations to study abroad, however the cost may be prohibitive if funding is not available.

For students from disadvantaged backgrounds pre-departure visits may be necessary if 'inclusion' is to be fully embraced. An advanced planning visit, (APV) allows the student and support person to visit the new campus/city for a couple of days in advance of the placement and provides an opportunity to map their way around the city, meet their new mentor/support person, explore accommodation options and so on. Other Erasmus+ programmes have an already well established APV option that is promoted as good practice in supporting students with few opportunities to engage. There are opportunities here for cross–sectoral sharing of practice and resources.

Occasionally, even with the best information, and support systems in place, students may not always engage in advance of departure. Upon reflection, some of the student respondents in this study agreed that they could have taken more responsibility during the planning phase of their mobility programme, especially on practical matters such as cost of living and accommodation. While an information session was arranged by their institution and delivered by Erasmus+ alumni, the outgoing students did not always engage with the information indicating the timing of the session might be an issue as well as the follow up.

3. Effective planning and review is necessary

Institutions must help the student plan effectively when they are considering an outward mobility programme and need to ensure that a comprehensive needs analysis is conducted with each student planning a study/placement abroad. It is particularly important to capture the student experience and ensure it is listened to and reflected upon. To assist this, existing and new mobility partnerships should undergo rigorous risk analysis particularly for students from disadvantaged or minority groups. This enables a positive experience for the student and helps remove barriers to mobility. Any new partner visits conducted by higher education institutions must take into consideration the needs of all students so they can integrate and participate fully at the university or placement institution. It is also critical that there is a clarity of roles and responsibilities between the home and the host institution.

4. Funding of mobility programmes

Students agreed that they would not be able to participate in the Erasmus+ programme without the Erasmus+ and SUSI grants. The prompt, timely and early payment of these grants is important for students to be able to deal with the high costs of settling into a new higher education institution.

Loss of a part time job is cited as a barrier to mobility and therefore the option of part time work is very important to students. Supporting students to find suitable part-time work should be prioritised as this may encourage mobility. It is recommended that HEIs provide clear information on all the grants and other financial support available to students at the institutional and national level. This could involve the development of information guides on the cost of living in the different countries. It is also recommended that HEIs ensure the timely payment of upfront funding to cover settling in costs such as accommodation deposits and travel cards. Students also indicated that funding towards the end of the study/placement abroad was an issue and additional funding would be welcome at this juncture.

Both institutions provide support to help students retain any existing grants they are receiving while on an outward mobility programme.

Institutions need to provide clear advice to students on what their funding options are. The cessation of a funding grant while on mobility is a serious barrier to mobility and must be addressed by institutions to help widen participation.

5. Other

Cross sectoral sharing of practice and resources.

It is recommended that HEIs in Ireland engage with each other and with best practice from other European projects and HEIs for example, *'Going to the Edge: a toolkit for international officers'* to improve access for students with disabilities on study abroad programmes. The European Commission has a number of recommendations on inclusion of HE students with physical, mental or health related conditions, in Erasmus +, that could be utilised by HEIs.

Erasmus+ programmes such as the EVS – European Voluntary Service (EVS) allow an early (and short) overseas exposure for students. UL is currently piloting this approach, giving credit to students who participate

in these programmes. This may help to overcome the lack of representation and diversity in the cohort of students who engage in the mobility process.

A structured space on campus for reflection and feedback, focusing on themes of citizenship and social cohesion would be useful for returning students. This could also be fed back to the HEI as a whole and further encapsulated into pre-departure training.

APPENDIX 1
Institutional Questionnaire

Introduction

Across the EHEA Governments and higher education institutions are striving towards a collective student mobility target of 20% by 2020. To meet this ambitious goal, many countries have already begun to shift their focus from the numbers of students participating to the accessibility of mobility opportunities, exploring who participated and how students from under-represented groups can be supported to access these opportunities.

This EHEA Widening Participation in Outward Mobility Project will develop a toolkit to support higher education institutions to build capacity to develop and implement effective strategies to increase participation in mobility programmes by students from disadvantaged and under-represented backgrounds in Ireland. The project has defined our target groups as below:

- Socio-economically disadvantaged young people
- Mature students
- Students with disabilities
- Part-time/Flexible learners
- Students progressing to higher education from further education and training
- Members of the Irish Traveller Community

We invited 2 institutions to participate in this project based on the number of students from under represented backgrounds engaging in outward mobility opportunities. This survey has been designed to gather evidence of what works at your own institutions and will feed into an internationally transferable toolkit on effective practice. Your participation in this project is the key to its success.

If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact Sinead Lucey (SineadLucey@iua.ie / 01 676 4948)

Thank you for your support in this project!

Outward Mobility Team, IUA, June 2017.

Questions

Please provide answers in **BLACK**.

Section A: **Mobility Programmes: Erasmus+ & Non-Erasmus+**

In this section we are aiming to find out about all outward mobility programmes on offer at the institution and the total number of under-represented students who have taken part in each programme.

For the purposes of this survey descriptions of student mobility are taken from Bernd Wächter, 'Mobility and Internationalisation in the European Higher Education Area' in *Beyond 2010: Priorities and Challenges for Higher Education in the Next Decade*, Maria Kelo (ed.), (Bonn: Lemmens, 2008), 13–42 (14) as suggested by the Higher Education Authority in Ireland.

In student mobility, it is useful to differentiate, first, into degree and non-degree mobility ('credit' mobility, 'short-term' mobility, 'exchange' mobility) and, second, into mobility between countries with similarly developed higher education systems ('horizontal' mobility), and mobility from countries with a quantitatively or qualitatively less developed higher education system into developed systems ('vertical' mobility). An example of 'horizontal' mobility is the Erasmus+ Programme. An example of 'vertical' mobility is the movement of students from the developing world to universities in OECD-type countries.

In both cases, the 'international' nature is made up by the fact that a student moves from country A to country B for purposes of study, and thus crosses a national boundary, and – more implicitly – that the 'international (meaning: foreign) education' he or she gets is different from the one to be had in the home country, in terms of language, teaching and learning styles, cultural setting, etc., – and – in the case of 'vertical' mobility – also in terms of quality.

1. **What type of Outward Mobility Programmes do you offer?**

   - Study abroad
   - Work placement
   - Erasmus+
   - Internship
   - Summer School
   - Event Attendance
   - Training
   - Volunteer
   - Other (please provide details)
   [Multiple Response]

For each of the Programmes you offer, please complete the following questions (Q1- 4):*

2. **What is the name of the programme?**
   [Open Ended Response]

3. **What is the duration of the programme?**

   - 1 to 4 weeks
   - 4 to 8 weeks
   - 8 to 12 weeks
   - 12 to 20 weeks
   - 20 to 40 weeks
   - 40 to 52 weeks
   [Multiple Response]

4. **Is the programme:**

   - Institutional programme
   - National scheme
   - Erasmus+ programme
   - Erasmus+ programme
   - Other (give details)
   [Single or Multiple Choice Response]

5. **How does your institution identify students from the categories stated below?**

   - Socio-economically disadvantaged young people
   - Mature students
   - Students with disabilities
   - Part-time/Flexible learners
   - Students progressing to higher education from further education and training
   - Members of the Irish Traveller Community

6. **Are there examples where students from the above categories are not identifiable/captured? If so, please give details. [Open Ended Response]**

7. **In which academic years have your programmes run since 2013:**

   - 2016-2017
   - 2015-2016
   - 2014-2015
   - 2013-2014
   [Multiple Response]

8. **What countries have your students visited as part of the programmes on offer at your institution?** *[Multiple Response]*

9. **If you offer a study programme, is the programme: (Give details)**

    • Credit bearing
    • Non-credit bearing
    • N/A

    [Open Ended Response]

10. **Outside of academic credit, is there any other formal recognition for participation of programmes? e.g. President's Award etc.**
    [Open Ended Response]

11. **Is this programme a compulsory part of any of your academic courses?**
    [Open Ended Response]

12. **Is this programme available to all students at the institution?**
    [Open Ended Response]

13. **How many students from disadvantaged or under-represented groups have taken part in this programme during the following academic years?**

    • 2016-2017
    • 2014-2015
    • 2014-2015
    • 2013-2014

    [Open Ended Response]

14. **Please use this space to provide any additional information on outward mobility programmes at the institution that is relevant to the project**
    [Open Ended Response]

Section B: **Administration**

In this section, we are aiming to find out about how outward mobility is co-ordinated and delivered by the institution.

15. **How is outward mobility coordinated at the institution?**

    • Central office
    • Faculty or school office
    • Department based
    • International Office
    • Other (please provide details)

    [Single Response]

16. **Does outward mobility have senior leadership support at the institution? e.g. Vice-Chancellor, PVC International, PVC for Widening Participation etc.** *[Open Ended Response]*

17. **Is Outward Mobility included in the institution's strategic plan or internationalisation strategy, and does this include any specific reference to widening participation?** *[Open Ended Response]*

18. **Does your institution target any specific countries for outward mobility?** *[Open Ended Response]*

19. **Are any specific institutions targeted for outward mobility?** *[Open Ended Response]*

20. **Do you have outward mobility student targets, particularly with regards to disadvantaged or under-represented groups? How did you set out to achieve these targets?** *[Open Ended Response]*

21. **Do the Outward Mobility and Outreach/ Widening Participation teams work together on programmes?** *[Open Ended Response]*

22. **Does the Outward Mobility team work with any other specialist departments when delivering mobility programmes? e.g. International Office, Disability/Access Office, HEAR DARE office, Health and Safety Office, Health and Counselling Services, Student Services, Student's Union, etc.** *[Open Ended Response]*

23. **How many staff are allocated to the administration of mobility programmes for underrepresented groups?**

   - One
   - Less than three
   - More than three
   - More than five
   - More than ten
   - None (if none, please provide details of why not)

24. **How do you risk assess new and existing institutional partners, or work or volunteering placements?** *[Open Ended Response]*

25. **Are there specific procedures, protocols, or insurance requirements you follow for our underrepresented groups in ensuring the environment is safe for them in their host country? Do these procedures differ from standards in place for the main student cohort?** *[Open Ended Response]*

26. **Please use this space to provide any additional information on outward mobility administration at the institution that is relevant to the project. [Open Ended Response]**

Section C: **Marketing**

In this section we are aiming to find out about how outward mobility is marketed to students.

27. **How are outward mobility programmes advertised to students?**

   - Email campaigns
   - Social Media
   - Printed Materials
   - Website
   - Departmental Correspondence
   - Text Service
   - Stands at Fresher's Fair
   - Student's Union
   - Student Facing Office
   - Institutional Intranet
   - Moodle
   - Orientation
   - Other (please provide details)

[Multiple Response]

28. **Please state the social media channels used to connect with students on the topic of outward mobility. Which of these had the most successful levels of engagement?** *[Open Ended Response]*

29. **Please provide details on specific campaigns used to market the programmes. E.g. Facebook campaign/On-campus Promotions** *[Open Ended Response]*

30. **Do you have any marketing campaigns or marketing channels which target specific groups of Widening Participation students? If so, please give details.** *[Open Ended Response]*

31. **Does the institution track the success of their marketing campaigns for outward mobility? If so, how successful have they been?** *[Open Ended Response]*

32. **Do any other departments assist in any cross-promotion for programmes (e.g. Student's Union, Student Services, Academic Departments etc.)?** *[Open Ended Response]*

33. **Please use this space to provide any additional information on outward mobility marketing at the institution that is relevant to the project.** *[Open Ended Response]*

Section D: **Funding**

In this section we are aiming to find out about how outward mobility is funded at the institution.

34. How is Outward mobility funded at the institution?

- Erasmus+ or other grant
- Home institution financial support
- Host institution financial support
- Employers
- Students self-fund
- Other

[Multiple Response]

35. How is funding allocated to students? *[Open Ended Response]*

36. How do students apply for funding (if available)? *[Open Ended Response]*

37. How do you fund the marketing & promotion of programmes? How much of your spend is allocated to this each year (if any)? *[Open Ended Response]*

38. Are there any specific scholarships or funding packages that target Widening Participation students and what are the conditions for this? *[Open Ended Response]*

39. Does the institution offer funding for mobility programmes outside of tuition fees? e.g. flights, accommodation, visa or passport fees, other fees associated with the programme etc. *[Open Ended Response]*

40. Please use this space to provide any additional information on outward mobility funding at the institution that is relevant to the project. *[Open Ended Response]*

Section E: **Support**

In this section we are aiming to find out about what support is offered to students interested in and engaged with outward mobility opportunities.

41. What preparation/information or activities are provided to students prior to their trip? Is there a pre-departure briefing? *[Open Ended Response]*

42. Does the institution offer support to students who are preparing for outward mobility such as when submitting applications for visa, applying for passports, booking flights or sourcing accommodation? *[Open Ended Response]*

43. Does the institution offer any pre or post mobility academic modules in order to prepare for/reflect on study or placement?

44. Is there any tailored information, advice or guidance offered to students from our underrepresented groups?

45. How does the institution support students whilst they are on placement? e.g. key contact, check in sessions, programme networks, alumni links, other mobile student links etc. Is any extra support offered to students from our underrepresented groups? *[Open Ended Response]*

46. Do any other departments assist in providing support for students when applying for places on outward mobility programmes? e.g. Student's Union Advisory Service, Student Services team, Disability Team etc. *[Open Ended Response]*

47. Please use this space to provide any additional information on outward mobility support at the institution that is relevant to the project. *[Open Ended Response]*

Section F: **Further Questions**

48. How is credit transfer supported at the institution? *[Open Ended Response]*

49. Is any complimentary or additional language learning offered by the institution to outwardly mobile students:

- Digital sources
- Online
- On-campus programme
- Additional module
- Core module
- Other (please provide details)

[Multiple Response]

50. If language learning is offered, how is this delivered to the student? (e.g. in-house, partner institution, host country institution, host country institution partner etc.) *[Open Ended Response]*

51. Do the Outward Mobility team draft Memorandums of Understanding/Agreements, Learning Agreements or other documentation with partner institutions? – please do share any templates you might have. *[Open Ended Response]*

52. Please use this space to provide any additional information on outward mobility at the institution that is relevant to the project.
[Open Ended Response]

APPENDIX 2
Focus Group Session Plan- Delivered by Nora Furlong, Youth Facilitator

Time	Methodology	Purpose
Introductions 5 mins	Introduce….. • Names • Purpose of session • Plan of session	To welcome participants and make them feel comfortable
Ice Breaker 5 mins	If you could anywhere in the Europe – where would you go & why?	To warm participants up and to establish if there is an interest in travel in the group
Walking debate • Students move to specific areas of the room based on whether they agree or disagree with a statement 15 mins	Statements: • Studying abroad is a waste of time • An experience of living abroad increases your chance of employment in Ireland • An international opportunity should be compulsory for all students • Mobility Programmes only work for certain programmes e.g. medicine • All students could take part in a mobility programme if they wanted to	To engage participants in: • the concept of mobility • how mobility activities could potentially enhance the college learning experience • Can complement personal development • How mobility activities might improve employability prospects • Can complement personal development
Round Table Key Questions 15 mins	How would you feel about travelling abroad as part of your studies? What supports might encourage you to do this? How might an experience like this enhance your college experience? How might it improve your employability?	To engage participants in group discussion and to harvest response
5 mins	How many students so you think are engaging in mobility activities… 5%/10%/ 15%	Present statistics that demonstrate number of students engaged in mobility activities.

Time	Methodology	Purpose
5 mins	Why are students not engaging? Respond by post-it individuals Pair & share!	Identify barriers
Action Ranking End Questions 10 mins	Action Ranking : Summarize the barriers identified and rank them in order of priority	To identify existing barriers and rank them in order of priority
Overcoming Barrier 10mins	How might we overcome these barriers	To brainstorm some Proposed solutions
Final Questions	Any advice for going forward Thank you and goodbye	

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