

Live, Share, Inspire

A joint Lifelong Learning and Youth in Action conference on the benefits of European exchange and cooperation.

10 December 2013

Conference Summary Report

There's no doubt that the Lifelong Learning (LLP) and Youth in Action (YIA) programmes had an impressive impact in Ireland during their seven years of operation from 2007 to 2013. The figures show the huge scope of the programme: thousands of people and organisations took part in partnerships and became mobile across Europe.

In the non-formal education field, the YIA Programme supported close to 10,000 young Irish residents to participate in transnational exchange, volunteering and democracy initiatives through more than 1,000 funded projects.

In the formal field, over 5,500 VET trainees and professionals benefitted from work placements or study visits. Almost 800 schools and over 150 adult education organisations were involved in European partnerships and almost 2,000 teachers and adult educators developed their expertise and experienced new approaches to education in Europe.

What these figures don't show are the stories behind the numbers, and this was the purpose of the 'Live, Share, Inspire' conference held in Marino Institute, Dublin, on 10 December 2013. The event drew its name from a video commissioned by Léargas and launched on the day, which highlighted the achievements of diverse education organisations, community groups and individuals within the programme. Available to view online on youtube (Leargas Video channel), the video captures the transforming potential of transnational involvement at personal and professional levels. The projects themselves vary greatly but are united by the significance of their impact. For example, staff of St. Joseph's School for the Visually Impaired observed



Fergus Finlay, the keynote speaker at the conference

2007-2013 Summary Lifelong Learning Programme Youth in Action Programme

Field Number of participants

Youth 9,819 young Irish people took part
1,102 funded projects

Education 1,125 teachers and future teachers participated in Comenius
785 schools in partnerships
672 adult educators and senior professionals took part in study visit and exchange programmes
158 adult education organisations involved

VET 2,400 trainees took part
1,700 VET professionals exchanged best practice
1,500 workers upskilled

a system of special floor markings in use in Sweden, which helped students to navigate the school corridors more easily. They have now adapted the system for use in their own school, transferring their Swedish counterparts' experience to the immediate advantage of their students. Brendan O'Dwyer, co-ordinator of the Comenius "Landmarks and Monuments" project at St. Michael's BNS in Galway which features in the video, offered a kind of motto for the LLP and YIA programmes by quoting President Higgins' words to pupils at their project launch: "Enjoy it all, have fun doing it, be endlessly curious and may it last you all your lives".

This theme was echoed by keynote speaker Fergus Finlay, CEO of Barnardos Children's Charity, who emphasised the possibilities created when people are offered the chance of growth and development. He noted that historically in Ireland this opportunity was denied to children, who were expected to be "seen and not heard" – an approach which could have disastrous consequences when the system of care failed. In contrast, the showcased projects demonstrated the difference made when young people's voices are listened to and their rights recognised. In those circumstances, simple stories may grow into life changing experiences which offer everyone "a chance to really live, share and inspire".

Those attending the conference were able to hear more of these stories first hand, by talking and exchanging experience with project co-ordinators and participants at an exhibition of Youth, Education and VET projects. Twenty-four organisations were invited to exhibit their work and its results, all of which were testament to the attitude-, career- and even life-changing nature of transnational projects. We outline just three representative stories here.

Two young people who had their outlook changed are Martin McCormack and Laura O'Riordan, members of Co. Limerick Youth Theatre. They represented their most recent production, "PunkGuerillas", which had been performed at the HoneyFitz Theatre in Lough Gur. The Youth Theatre members worked with a professional writer to establish a structure for the play, and a Youth Initiative grant from Léargas enabled them to liaise with Loiman Youth



*Martin McCormack
and Laura O'Riordan
of Co. Limerick
Youth Theatre*

Conference Attendance	No. of attendees
Keynote and Video Launch	129
Workshop 1: Maximising Impact	25
Workshop 2: Improving Quality	26
Workshop 3: Youth in Action Tool Fair	25



*Angela Higgins (right),
Fast Track to IT Ltd,
takes part in the
Quality in Lifelong Learning
projects workshops*

Theatre in Finland to develop its themes. This interaction led to the idea of an agit-prop piece which looked to the roots of dissent in the 70s to explore how young people today feel about “issues in their society that concern them.” The Finnish theatre group explored the same themes in their own play. Both Martin and Laura commented that the two groups had really clicked, which surprised them - “Before I came to Youth Theatre I would’ve never expected to go to another country and make friends there”. The positive reception of the play – including a letter of congratulation from journalist Fiona Looney – was a great boost, and the group are enthused to work on more productions.

Among those demonstrating the impact on careers and professional development were Emma Beatty and Angela Higgins from the SMART VET Project, a collaborative project co-ordinated by Fast Track to IT Ltd with partners in Ireland, the Netherlands, Lithuania, and the UK. The project identified, codified and transferred good practice in using interactive white boards effectively in the VET sector. A training programme—including learning manuals, CPD materials and teacher boot camps—was developed to enable VET tutors design education resources suitable for use with interactive white boards and integrate them in everyday teaching activities. Each European partner brought a different strength to the project, from experience in IT to testing the results – “Everyone’s best resources were used to create the project”. Wicklow ETB has recently delivered this SMART VET training to upskill its staff over a five-week evening course, to great success.

Jessica Gough is one of those who feels her whole life was changed through international involvement – “Only for Léargas I wouldn’t be where I am today. Léargas gave me the start, they put my feet on the ladder.” Jessica’s first step on that ladder was as a participant in the Comenius Assistantship programme, where she worked as an English Language Assistant in a primary school in France. After an Erasmus placement in Spain and being awarded European Language Label - Language Learner of the Year Award in 2011, Jessica was selected to represent Ireland as the Erasmus Student Ambassador for Ireland. She travelled Ireland presenting to school-leavers the benefits of living and working abroad, and is now doing so herself as Thematic Collections Fellow at the European Centre for Modern Languages in Graz, Austria.



*Jessica Gough,
now working at
the European
Centre for Modern
Languages in Graz,
Austria*

Exhibitors	Projects
Aqua TT	Aqua-RET 2
Castletroy College	Voices from the Sea
Cavan Institute	European Placement Programme
Clare Family Trust	Roma Families Learning (RoFal) - The importance of parental involvement in their children's education
County Limerick Youth Theatre	Create and Activate
Davis College	Teaching Methods on the Move
DePaul Ireland	European Voluntary Service Host Organisation
Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Enterprise Board	VETBA
Early Childhood Ireland	Engaging with the Outdoors

In the afternoon, three thematic workshops offered participants the chance to explore aspects of transnational projects more fully, and really engage with other participants on a shared relative topic of interest.

Workshop 1, "Maximising the Impact of Lifelong Learning Projects", concentrated on dissemination of the learning outcomes, results and project of transnational projects. With increasing emphasis being placed on mainstreaming of results, the workshop examined what challenges and obstacles projects face and how solutions can be found. The 28 participants exchanged views in a Walking Debate, and then used Edward de Bono's "Six thinking hats" to examine the issue from different angles. The key points which emerged from the workshop were the importance of considering dissemination as a continuous process spanning the entire project cycle, rather than as the issuing of information after the project has concluded. The importance of a clear plan and constant communication between all project stakeholders were re-iterated by all participants. Suggestions for effective dissemination included sharing the duty with the project partner to ensure transnational reach; recruiting past participants of projects to act as multipliers, spreading the message to new organisations; and cultivating a relationship with a 'champion' at organisation or national level. It was also proposed that effective dissemination is not only targeted but monitored, to ensure that the intended audiences are receiving the message.

Workshop 2 examined the role of learning mobility projects in an organisation's transnational strategy. "Improving the Quality of Lifelong Learning Projects" asked how schools and education/training bodies could deliver quality projects and begin to form a European Development Plan based on identified needs. 26 participants, largely drawn from the education field, discussed and exchanged their own practice with peers and identified several key factors in the process. Cultivating champions and achieving "buy-in" and support at an organisational and national level was seen as crucial in embedding transnational projects into the wider scheme. Other identified factors were maintaining clarity of purpose throughout a project, engaging the community through direct involvement, having a two-way

Exhibitors	Projects
Eco Unesco	Various projects including "Exploring Cultural Diversity", "Coastline Clean up on the Move", "Building our future: Youth Empowerment, awareness and action"
Educational Disadvantage Centre	RiSE
Eurodesk	Various projects including "Work Winners Seminar", "Activation: Active Citizens as Future Leaders"
Fishbowl Youth	Various projects including "The Making of a Communal Recording Studio", "The Reality of Sexuality", "Youth Work on the Crossroads of Culture"
FIT Ltd	Smart VET / ePathways
Friars Gate Theatre	Travelling Theatre
Gaelscoil Mhuscraí	3,2,1,go! / Christmas Around Europe
Galway Technical Institute	Mobility Abroad for Knowledge & Experience (MAKE)
HiRez	Be Well Bray
Inchicore CFE	Learning by Doing
Mayfield Arts Centre	Artists on the Move
National Federation of Voluntary Bodies	Various projects
St. Brendan's N.S.	Creating around Music
St. Mark's SNS/An Chroi Ro Naofa	In Children's Hands
St. Michael's School	Parliamentary Monuments and Citizenship

transfer of information between participants and organisations, and using projects to help organisations understand cultural differences and accept diversity. After short presentations from two project co-ordinators on how they had improved their own projects, participants drew up plans for the future which emphasised the importance of involving and consulting all players and always being open to change.

The final Workshop available was the Youth in Action Tool Fair, which showcased examples of strategic planning for youth exchange and mobility, and provided networking space for youth and community organisations. Twenty-five participants from a wide range of community and youth groups joined; some were participants in exchange or initiative projects themselves, while others were co-ordinators or decision makers at organisational or national level. The Tool Fair thus offered an opportunity to get young people and decision makers together, to discuss what happens next at national and European level. It also offered a chance to meet, network, exchange ideas and learn more about the changes likely under Erasmus+. The facilitator aptly described this as an opportunity to “Celebrate the achievements of the past, while carrying that energy forward into the future”.

