



# Making a Difference

Study of the Impact of Learning Mobility:  
Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland  
2007-09



National Agency:  
Leonardo da Vinci  
Comenius  
Grundtvig  
Study Visits



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**The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of Léargas, the Department of Education and Skills or the European Commission.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The general objective of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) is: “to contribute to the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations. In particular, it aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the European Union so that they become a world quality reference.”

### *OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY*

The study was commissioned by Léargas the National Agency in Ireland for the Leonardo da Vinci (Leonardo), Comenius, Grundtvig and Study Visits. [Erasmus is not included in this study as the National Agency for Erasmus in Ireland is the Higher Education Authority.]

Léargas wished to establish a clear picture, based primarily on currently available data of the **impact of the learning mobility actions within the core elements of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)** for which it has responsibility. This study examined available evidence of programme outputs, existing data and currently available research. This was augmented by further primary research where important gaps were identified. The aim was to come up with an overall assessment of the impact of the learning mobility actions within the programme on the various stakeholders and in relation to its stated objectives.

The study examined each of the four sub-programmes of the Lifelong Learning Programme separately (Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig and Study Visits). It presents conclusions in relation to each of them (and an assessment of the factors contributing to their impact). In addition the study presents overall conclusions relating to the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland as well as overall recommendations which are summarised here.

### **OVERALL CONCLUSIONS ON THE LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME**

The LLP in Ireland is highly relevant and beneficial to vocational education and training, education in general and adult education in particular. It complements and adds value to existing national policies and initiatives by providing a unique European dimension at each stage in the lifelong learning process.<sup>1</sup>

**Impacts on Learners** at all age levels are significant and measurable and are highlighted in each of the sections dealing with the sub-programmes. The same is true for the **impacts on teachers and trainers** across all disciplines and stages of education and training provision and on the **providers** of all forms of education and on the Vocational Education and Training system and on the general **education system** in Ireland as a whole.

The LLP facilitates a range of trainee work placement and staff development opportunities, some of which are not available in Ireland and might not be possible were it not for the Programme.

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<sup>1</sup> These conclusions are based on Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010.

The LLP also facilitates the European dimension to lifelong learning and adds to quality and innovation in a wide variety of Irish institutions that have taken part. It is also evident that the LLP facilitates the European Community horizontal policies, notably promoting appreciation of the cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe.

The LLP assessment, funding, reporting and evaluating mechanisms also encourage efficiency, effectiveness and lean management practice across a wide range of Irish institutions.

Of special note is the role that the LLP has played during the current period of sharp economic downturn in Ireland where the Programme has been able to facilitate many apprentices, especially in the construction sector, who might otherwise have been unable to gain such experience as an integral part of their training. For example, in a national Call held in the latter half of 2008, Leonardo Mobility was able to offer support to relevant organisations and so contributed in responding to a national crisis.

In a wider context, the LLP concept of the 'exploitation' of best practice--which combines mainstreaming and the so-called 'multiplier' effect<sup>2</sup>--is particularly relevant to study visits and partnerships. There is strong evidence of both these impacts outlined in Sections 2 and 3.

The LLP has succeeded in attracting to European programmes both institutions and people who had never previously been involved in such activities. At the same time it has sustained the commitment and support of substantial numbers who have previously participated. The various interventions are of a consistently high quality, and overall few problems have been reported.

The individuals who have participated have successfully increased and enlarged their personal and professional skills. They have also gained invaluable intercultural experiences and awareness and returned with higher levels of motivation and ambition.

At institutional level the LLP has created a new paradigm for organisational effectiveness, one that incorporates an unrestrained commitment to internationalisation in general and Europeanisation in particular. The long-term benefits for organizations and individuals alike are well understood and highly valued.

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<sup>2</sup> Lifelong Learning Programme, Guide for Applicants, 28 September 2007.

## CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO LEONARDO DA VINCI

The conclusion of this study is entirely consistent with the conclusions of the Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland (2010) as it relates to Leonardo.<sup>3</sup> Items 1 and 2 below repeat the Indecon conclusions while the impacts listed in item 3 arise from the current study.

1. Leonardo is **highly relevant** to Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Ireland. It is a unique initiative that does not complete with other national policies or initiatives.

2. The relevance of Leonardo stems from the fact that the projects are built mainly around the **needs of participants**.

3. Particular **impacts** include:

- Personal, professional and social impact on the participants, including:
  - development of language, ICT and teamwork skills
  - enhanced subsequent academic performance and increased motivation to learn
  - increased intercultural awareness.
- Improved access of participants to the labour market, including:
  - enhanced job hunting skills and tools
  - greater clarity around career choices
  - openness to seeking jobs in other EU countries.
- Impact on providers of VET in Ireland include:
  - exposure to practices in other countries
  - the addition, or strengthening, of a European dimension to their activities
  - improvements in vocational education and training methods, systems and processes
  - higher motivation of trainers
  - a 'multiplier effect' where participants encourage others to pursue mobility which creates a continuing demand and an impetus for new mobility activities.
- Impact on trainers and tutors include:
  - enhanced motivation and inspiration at a personal level
  - new information about curricula, teaching methods and learning materials at a professional level.
- Impact on VET systems and practices include:
  - exchange of best practice
  - introduction of new know-how
  - insights into other EU vocational education and training systems
  - improvements in education and vocational education and training processes and methods.
- Impact on the European Dimension in Irish VET:

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<sup>3</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, p6.

- a high proportion of VET providers now view the development of European networks as an integral, strategic and fixed part of their offering to learners and of their growth as institutions. It is highly unlikely that this could have occurred without the Leonardo programme
  - promoters report that Leonardo has had a direct impact on building awareness of European cultural and linguistic diversity within Ireland.
- Impacts at national Level include:
    - in the current recession Leonardo is providing a valuable--and in many cases the only--alternative option for participants to get work experience in the construction, services and hospitality sectors
    - work placements in the hospitality sector on Leonardo projects have allowed beneficiaries access to work in locations from which they are excluded in Ireland
    - participants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those at risk of being marginalized are encouraged to avail of a transnational work experience placements which would otherwise not be available to them
    - many of the Irish Leonardo projects specifically address equal opportunities by ensuring that participants who have **special needs** are eligible for participation
    - the programme has spawned a number of unanticipated examples of added value to the organisations concerned including additional commercial and revenue-generating opportunities.
  - Impact of Leonardo Partnerships (Section 2.2) include:
    - improved work practices in a local economic development agency
    - plans to develop an Institute for Creative Enterprises (similar to a best practice model experienced on the Partnership) in Meath
    - enhanced visibility and knowledge of the LLP among SMEs in Border region.

## CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO COMENIUS

The conclusion of this study is entirely consistent with the conclusions of the Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland (2010) as it relates to Comenius.<sup>4</sup> Items 1 and 2 below repeat the Indecon conclusions while the impacts listed in item 3 arise from the current study.

1. Comenius is **highly beneficial** and complements and adds value to school education in Ireland rather than duplicating any other policy or initiative. The benefits which flowed from participation in Comenius could not have been achieved but for its unique European partnership dimension.

2. The relevance of Comenius stems from the fact that the partnerships are fully integrated into the school curriculum.

3. Particular **impacts** include:

- Personal development of the pupils, including:
  - increased Intercultural awareness
  - development of language, ICT and performance skills
  - development of creativity, personal motivation and self-reliance.
- Impact on teachers include:
  - enhanced language skills
  - enhanced teaching and in some cases management skills
  - development of new teaching skills and methods
  - greater enthusiasm for teaching
  - increased Intercultural awareness.
- Impact on schools include:
  - introduction of new teaching methods
  - strengthening of the European dimension in the school curriculum
  - improved collaboration among teachers in the school
  - improved collaboration with parents and the community
  - exchange of best practice
  - specific beneficial impact on schools with special needs.
- Impacts of Comenius Assistantships and In-Service Training projects include:
  - enhanced personal and professional development of teachers and trainee teachers
  - enhanced recruitment opportunities for trainee teachers
  - stronger European dimension in participating schools
  - establishment of new partnerships with other EU schools
  - increased interest of staff members in foreign languages.

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<sup>4</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, p8.

## CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO GRUNDTVIG

The conclusion of this review is entirely consistent with the conclusions of the Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland (2010) as it relates to Grundtvig<sup>5</sup>. Items 1 and 2 below repeat the Indecon conclusions while the further impacts arise from the current study.

1. Grundtvig is seen as **relevant and complementary** to the Adult Education Sector in Ireland. The benefits which flowed from participation in Grundtvig could not have been achieved without the programme.
2. Through the opportunities provided by Grundtvig for sharing at European level, Irish adult education providers have found new ways to address the challenges they face and developed new approaches to providing quality adult education for learners with different needs and interests.
3. Particular impacts include:
  - increased **funding** into the adult education sector for innovation and staff development in non-vocational adult learning
  - increased **visibility** and importance of non-vocational adult learning
  - contribution to the **quality of** adult education
  - a strengthened **European dimension** of adult learning
  - supported for the development of adult education **practice**
  - support for the development of **sustainable professional networks**
  - contribution to **informing national and European policy** in adult education.
4. **Professional development of adult learners**, including:
  - greater enthusiasm for education and learning
  - improved adaptability to new situations or new environments
  - enhanced creative skills, and improved ability to work in groups
  - increased intercultural awareness.
5. Impact on **adult education professionals** include:
  - greater enthusiasm for adult education
  - better insight to the adult education environment in the EU
  - improved communication, creativity and core adult education skills
  - development of new teaching skills and methods.
  - increased intercultural awareness.
6. Impacts on **adult education providers** include:
  - exchange of new information on adult education issues
  - adoption of better practices, and changes in current practices
  - development of a European dimension to programmes
  - introduction of new teaching methods
  - specific beneficial impacts on providers of adult education to those with special needs.

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<sup>5</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, p12.



## **CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO STUDY VISITS**

As reported by the Léargas Impact Report referred to in the text, the Study Visits programme is meeting its objectives in Ireland, particularly in the areas of increased understanding of specific aspects of the education and training systems and policies, the exchange of information and networking opportunities.

Participants have made contacts for further research or possible partnerships for future projects. The programme has allowed for reflection and critical analysis of participants' own organisations and areas of work. Participants are sharing the information gained on their visits and transfer aspects back to their own organisations. This is also reflected in the satisfaction levels of participants in the programme.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations arise from the review:

### *1. MEASURING IMPACT*

The issues raised concerning the difference between impacts and outputs in the Introduction to this study (Section 1) logically suggest that some further and more detailed examination be applied to identifying impact objectives for each of the sub-programmes of the LLP.

In addition a longitudinal study of impact is recommended to assess how the programme creates long-term value. Obviously these are matters ultimately for the Commission in partnership with the National Authorities.

This study concurs with the conclusions of the WSF report for the Commission<sup>6</sup> that all participants should fill in an initial (online) questionnaire as a matter of course before their stay abroad, then repeat surveys will be able to gauge subsequent changes and the extent thereof.

It may also be appropriate to begin looking at 'harder' or more quantitative impacts in addition to soft skill and qualitative impacts which will always be relevant. New developments in the field of evaluation now allow for the measurement of monetary values (Return on investment) of training and human resources interventions. While the LLP presents some formidable challenges in this respect there are elements that would lend themselves to at least exploring this avenue.

### *2. DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS*

A striking feature of the dissemination activities reported in project reports was that, for the most part, they were predominantly directed internally, *i.e.* within the promoting institutions. While there are some excellent examples of external dissemination to the wider community at local and national level and particular-interest sectors, these are the exception rather than the rule. For various and obvious reasons a greater emphasis on this area would reap further dividends.

### *3. ENGAGING THE 'MULTIPLIERS'*

There are good grounds to be more proactive in supporting 'multipliers'--teachers, trainers, school leaders *etc.*--who have been mobile and are likely to be enthusiastic motivators for mobility by their students. In addition the concept of **Mobility alumni** is also worthy of further support. The experience of using eTwinning Ambassadors, a similar concept to the alumni, in promoting and supporting teachers to engage in eTwinning has had very positive impacts in the Irish context.

### *4. STRUCTURAL INTEGRATION OF THE EU DIMENSION*

A clear message from this study is that successful participants and partnerships come from institutions that have a clear, strong and formalised internationalisation strategy. These strategies are practical, well developed, widely disseminated and fully agreed by the key stakeholders in the institutions including management, staff, learners, and, where relevant, parents.

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<sup>6</sup> Analysis of the Effects of LEONARDO DA VINCI Mobility Measures on Young Trainees, Employees and the Influence of Socio-economic Factors. Research on behalf of the European Commission Education and Culture Directorate-General, Final report from:WSF Economic and Social Research. Kerpen, 15 May 2007.

## *5. VIRTUAL NETWORKING AND ETWINNING*

The potential for developing school partnerships virtually (*via* the internet) is overwhelming and rapidly gaining momentum through the eTwinning portal. This is moving through a technology progression cycle from initially being merely a contact vehicle, to a partnership preparatory vehicle now to a fully fledged partnership vehicle and beyond. eTwinning has transformed itself from a partnership tool to a virtual community for teachers in Europe. Going beyond school projects, eTwinning has responded to the needs and behaviour of teachers by providing the means for teachers – and pupils - to network, share and develop their educational experience through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

As young people and teachers become totally technology proficient and as technology and broadband access move forward in giant leaps it can be expected that this format for collaboration will be the dominant model within a decade from now. The physical exchange will never be replaced but cost constraints and technology advances will rapidly place the virtual model on a par with it. Many providers are alert to this prospect but no serious, innovative or substantial plans to take account of this shift have been detected by this study. If the LLP is to retain its relevance then it must tackle the opportunities presented by new technology.

## *6. EUROPASS*

The implementation and use of Europass Mobility and CV which facilitates the transfer and validation of the learning outcomes of mobility experiences is clearly a crucial tool in providing access to the labour market for trainees. It is highly appreciated by training providers but there is a need for it to be better promoted, especially among employers.

[Note: Europass is managed in Ireland by the NQAI [www.europass.ie/europass/](http://www.europass.ie/europass/)]

## *7. BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS*

There is very limited direct participation of enterprises in the LLP in Ireland, despite sustained efforts by the National Agency with the support of the National Authorities, and this is one area that might benefit from further attention. Stimulating further awareness and active cooperation and communication between educational institutions and enterprises about the value of mobility will have important long-term benefits in strengthening youth mobility.

## *8. TARGETED PARTICIPANTS*

Because of the obvious and significant benefits accruing from mobility for young trainees, it is important to ensure that those most in need are receiving the best opportunity to access them. Recruitment and selection policies of the promoter organisations indicate a tendency to 'pick the best' rather than encourage those who may need the experience most, even if they do not apply or even express an interest. A limit on resources to support participants--who may require close supervision or structured mentoring while abroad--is the primary reason for this. It may be useful to develop a policy of encouraging participants who have not directly requested placement abroad. It should be noted however, that almost all of the participants, at least in the Leonardo programme, come from areas of economic or geographical disadvantage.

## *9. SUPPORTING MOBILITY*

Two of the greatest challenges faced by Schools participating in learning mobility activities are (a) providing substitution to enable school staff to participate in the process, and (b) providing adequate and appropriate recognition for the essential contribution which teachers make to the process. For the most part the additional work of school staff to facilitate mobility activities is on a purely voluntary basis and while this is a great credit to those involved it is not a satisfactory basis on which to sustain these initiatives in the long term. Examples of best

practice in this regard in other countries, such as the Netherlands and Finland for example, may be worth particular consideration.

#### *10. INTEGRATION WITH NATIONAL POLICY*

There is real and effective integration of learning mobility activities with the curriculum in participating primary and, to a lesser extent, secondary schools. However, this is the result of innovative approaches by local staff rather than the product of national policy. Individual school Inspectors have commented favourably on the integration of learning mobility activities into the curriculum. This is a matter that could be explored more formally by the Department of Education and Skills.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## *CONTEXT*

The European Union's education and training policies have gained impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 which recognised that knowledge, and the innovation it sparks, are the EU's most valuable assets, particularly in light of increasing global competition.

EU Member States and the European Commission strengthened Co-operation in 2009 with the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ("ET 2020") a follow-up to the earlier Education and Training 2010 work programme launched in 2001.

The approach recognises that high-quality pre-primary, primary, secondary, higher and vocational education and training are fundamental to Europe's success. However, in a rapidly changing world, lifelong learning needs to be a priority – it is the key to employment, economic success and allowing people to participate fully in society.

With each EU Member State responsible for its own education and training systems, EU- level policies are designed to support national actions and help address common challenges such as: ageing societies, skills deficits among the workforce, and global competition. These areas demand joint responses and countries can benefit from sharing experiences.

## *LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES*

The objective of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), as set out in Article 1.2 of the programme Decision<sup>7</sup> is:

“to contribute through lifelong learning to the development of the European Union as an advanced knowledge-based society, with sustainable economic development, more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, while ensuring good protection of the environment for future generations. In particular, it aims to foster interchange, cooperation and mobility between education and training systems within the European Union so that they become a world quality reference.”

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<sup>7</sup> Decision No 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 November 2006

The specific objectives, as set out in Article 1.3 of the EU Programme Decision, are to:

- (a) contribute to the development of quality lifelong learning, and to promote high performance, innovation and a European dimension in systems and practices in the field;
- (b) support the realisation of a European area for lifelong learning;
- (c) help improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for lifelong learning available within Member States;
- (d) reinforce the contribution of lifelong learning to social cohesion, active citizenship, intercultural dialogue, gender equality and personal fulfilment;
- (e) help promote creativity, competitiveness, employability and the growth of an entrepreneurial spirit;
- (f) contribute to increased participation in lifelong learning by people of all ages, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups, regardless of their socio-economic background;
- (g) promote language learning and linguistic diversity;
- (h) support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning;
- (i) reinforce the role of lifelong learning in creating a sense of European citizenship based on understanding and respect for human rights and democracy, and encouraging tolerance and respect for other peoples and cultures;
- (j) promote cooperation in quality assurance in all sectors of education and training in Europe;
- (k) encourage the best use of results, innovative products and processes and to exchange good practice in the fields covered by the Lifelong Learning Programme, in order to improve the quality of education and training.

The Lifelong Learning Programme enables people at all stages of their lives to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as helping to develop the education and training sector across Europe.

With a budget of nearly €7 billion covering the period 2007 to 2013, the programme funds a range of actions including exchanges, study visits and networking activities. Projects are intended not only for individual students and learners, but also for teachers, trainers and all others involved in education and training.

There are four sub-programmes which fund projects at different levels of education and training:

- Leonardo da Vinci (Leonardo) for vocational education and training
- Comenius for schools
- Erasmus for higher education
- Grundtvig for adult education

In addition the Lifelong Learning Programme contains a Transversal Programme made up of four pillars. This study also includes analysis of impact on the Study Visits pillar for which Léargas has responsibility in Ireland.

## *OBJECTIVES OF THIS STUDY*

The study was commissioned by Léargas the National Agency in Ireland for the Leonardo da Vinci, Comenius, Grundtvig and Study Visit programmes. The National Agency for Erasmus in Ireland is the Higher Education Authority. Erasmus is not included in this study.

Léargas wished to establish a clear picture, based primarily on currently available data, of the **impact of the mobility actions within the core elements of the Lifelong Learning Programme** for which it has responsibility. This study examined available evidence of programme outputs, existing data and currently available research. This was augmented by further primary research where important gaps were identified. The aim was to come up with an overall assessment of the impact of the programme on the various stakeholders and in relation to its stated objectives.

## *WHAT IS MOBILITY?*

“Mobility” is defined as the movement of people between nations to facilitate cross-cultural learning, cooperation and development. Specifically in the context of the European Union Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) and its sub-programmes, mobility is about sharing ideas and exploring and establishing good practice in education and training.

Opportunities for mobility in the LLP embrace a wide range of activities – exchanges, partnerships, study visits, job shadowing, in-service training, work placements, and so forth. They can extend from one week to 12 months. They cover a wide range of beneficiaries: students, young people, trainees, volunteers, teachers, trainers, community workers, business people and so forth.

While the technical definition of a ‘mobility’ is considered as one person travelling on one trip to a partner institution in this study we look also at activities that do not require physical travel between countries or institutions in, for example, eTwinning.

## *WHAT CONSTITUTES ‘IMPACT’?*

The first task was to clarify what was meant by ‘impact.’ There is a tendency to confuse outputs and impact. Outputs are results which have been intended and achieved by a project. Impact is the effects which those results have on individuals, organizations, systems or policies. For example, an output of a training course is what a person learns while on the course, while the impact is what the person does subsequently with that new learning. A trainee may undergo a successful work placement which is an output, but the impact is only gained when that trainee gets a job because of the work placement experience. Thousands of students from Ireland may visit a variety of European countries. The numbers involved and the visits made are outputs but the impact is to be found in the increased intercultural awareness of the students or in their collective awareness of the heritage and culture of Europe.

Impact may go beyond the immediate level of the project. Dr. Wil Van Esch has explored the distinction between outputs and impact as it applies to the Leonardo programme.<sup>8</sup> He gives the example of a series of modules developed for use in one sector which is also used for training in other sectors. “Often this refers to a specific body of thought (insights, approach, method) which is used in circumstances outside the scope of the project. Impact may also mean that the scope has been extended to other projects or that the market and competitive position of the

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<sup>8</sup> Dr Will Van Esch of CINOP (Centre for the Innovation of Education and Training) 's-Hertogenbosch, The Netherlands, in a Paper at the ECER, Edinburgh, 20-23 September, 2000.

organisation where the project is being carried out has been strengthened. Finally, there can also be impact via the network of the project partnership. Through contacts within the network possibilities arise which would not otherwise exist.”

Impact may appear at various levels: within the participant's own organisation, locally, regionally, by sector, nationally or at European level. The level of the impact of course depends on the level at which the project objectives are defined.

In the Lifelong Learning Programme the objectives are drawn in broad brush strokes to reflect the wide diversity of the European Union and to allow for the essential flexibility required to implement such an extensive and wide ranging series of actions. The same is true for the various sub-programmes.

When it comes to defining ‘impact’ in the context of the LLP, the European Commission states that *“Impact is the effect that the project and its results have on various systems and practices. A project with impact contributes to the objectives of programmes and to the development of different European Union policies.”*<sup>9</sup>

This leads to the main **research objectives of this study** which are to:

1. Determine the general and specific impacts of each of the three sub-programmes of the LLP and the Study Visits programme in so far as they relate to their objectives, and in terms of the following impact indices:
  - (a) personal and professional competencies of learners (pupils, students or trainees);
  - (b) personal and professional competencies of trainers (teachers, adult education and vocational and education professionals);
  - (c) education and training institutions (schools, colleges, and providers of vocational and education training, and adult education);
  - (d) the wider community in which the institutions are situated;
  - (e) national vocational and education training policy and practice
2. Determine which factors contributed to the varying degrees of impact.

### *APPROACH ADOPTED*

The methodology of the study involved a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in two phases:

Phase 1 entailed –

- Analysis of final reports submitted to Léargas by projects under Leonardo, Comenius and Grundtvig, to discern impact indicators.
- Review of current relevant research into any of the sub-programmes.
- Review of the Indecon International Economic Consultants (Indecon) Interim Evaluation of the Implementation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland 2010. As Indecon has undertaken an extensive survey and conducted focus groups with representative sample of participants it was considered unnecessary to further survey participants for this study.

Phase 2 entailed visits to a sample of projects to further elaborate, expand, validate or clarify issues raised in phase 1.

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<sup>9</sup> Lifelong Learning Programme, Guide for Applicants, 28 September 2007.



## 2. LEONARDO DA VINCI PROGRAMME

The European Commission pursues several goals within the Leonardo programme which is one of the central supporting instruments of the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Union to promote and enhance the development of vocational education and training (VET).

The general objectives of the Leonardo programme are:

- to support participants in VET and further training activities, in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European Labour Market
- to support improvements in quality and innovation in VET systems, institutions and practices
- to enhance the attractiveness of VET and mobility for employers and individuals and to
- facilitate the mobility of working participants

The operational objectives are:

- to improve the quality and to increase the volume of mobility throughout Europe of people involved in initial VET and in continuing training
- to improve the quality and to increase the volume of cooperation between institutions or organisations providing learning opportunities, enterprises, social partners and other relevant bodies throughout Europe
- to facilitate the development of innovative practices in the VET field other than at tertiary level, and their transfer, including from one participating country to others
- to improve the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning
- to encourage the learning of modern foreign languages
- to support the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning.

### **Anticipated Impacts**

Arising from these objectives it is possible to suggest some key impacts and outputs which they imply. It should be noted that the European Commission does not specify impacts as such but defines them as the effect which the programme has on systems and practices, and on EU policies.

#### Impacts

1. Enhanced personal development and improved employability of participants, leading to their effective participation in the labour market.
2. Specific impact on VET Professionals in Ireland/  
Improvements in quality and innovation in (a) VET institutions, and (b) in VET systems and practices at provider and at national level .
3. Contribution to European Union Lifelong Learning and related policies.

#### Outputs

1. Enhanced attractiveness of VET and mobility for (a) employers and (b) individuals;
2. Increased numbers of working trainees participating in mobility;

3. Improved quality and increased volume of cooperation between all the actors in the VET field;
4. Improved transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences;
5. Increased numbers learning modern foreign languages;
6. Production of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning.

In Ireland, Léargas provides support for the following mobility actions under Leonardo: Mobility Projects, Partnerships and Preparatory Visits.

Since the Preparatory Visits are carried out to find partners and prepare future project applications they have not been included in the further assessment of impacts in this report.

In this section we are concerned to assess both the impact *within* and *across* the main elements of Leonardo in Ireland: Leonardo Mobility and Partnership projects.

## 2.1. IMPACTS OF LEONARDO MOBILITY

The Leonardo Mobility programme offers participants the chance to gain vocational education and training and work experience in another European country. They can acquire new vocational, language and other skills, adapt to new situations, and gain insight into how vocational education and training and workplace environments operate in other countries. For those who manage, deliver or design VET, the action offers an opportunity to visit European partners to exchange expertise, experience and good.

The programme is sub-divided into three categories:

**Initial Vocational Education and Training (IVT)**—those undergoing initial vocational education and training; this category is divided into two sub-groups:

- mobility of apprentices
- mobility of persons in school-based IVT.

**People in the Labour Market (PLM)**—those undertaking work-based vocational education and training, those who have graduated from college or university, or those not currently employed. The action aims at the support of transnational mobility of workers, self-employed or people available for employment (including graduates) undergoing a training period abroad in a vocational training context.

The general objectives of this action are to:

- support participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European Labour Market.
- enhance the attractiveness of vocational education and training and mobility for individuals and to facilitate the mobility of working trainees and to facilitate the mobility of working trainees.

A transnational mobility for People in the Labour Market consists in a training placement for a period of vocational training and/or work experience undertaken by an individual participant in an enterprise or a training institution in another participating country.

**Vocational Education and Training Professionals (VETPro)**—transnational mobility of people who work in the field of vocational education and training and/or human resources.

The general objectives of this action are to:

- support participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European Labour Market.
- support improvements in quality and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices.

A Mobility project for Professionals in VET focuses on the transfer, improvement and update of competences and/or of innovative methods and practices in the field of vocational training. Individual trainers, teachers or other persons responsible for Vocational training issues will exchange experiences with their counterparts in other countries with the aim of mutual learning.

Mobility actions are intended to contribute both to the modernisation of initial vocational education and training (IVT) and support the adaptation of continuing vocational education and training systems (CVET) to reflect the challenges of continued European integration.

The Programme aims to enhance the competitiveness of the European labour market by helping European citizens to acquire new skills, knowledge and qualifications and have them recognised across borders.

Mobility projects are an important means for VET providers in the member states to improve the scope and quality of vocational education and training provision. At the same time the mobility of trainees is designed to improve their personal and professional competencies while contributing to the ongoing European unification process by supporting inter-cultural understanding and integration.

## OVERVIEW

The impacts identified in this section are common across the IVT, PLM and VETPro strands of Leonardo Mobility. *The common impacts identified below also represent the general impacts arising from Leonardo Partnerships and LLP Study Visits.* Impacts that are specific or unique to those sub-programmes are highlighted in individual sections dealing with them (Section 2.2. and Section 3.).

The impact of the Leonardo programme in Ireland across all these various strands is extremely diverse and can be assessed at many different levels: from the perspective of the participant, from the perspective of the vocational education and training provider, from the perspective of the wider community, from the perspective of the Irish vocational education and training system, and from a European integration perspective.

Various types of impact are highlighted by this study:

- impact on the **professional and personal skills and social development** of the participants.
- impact on **tutors/trainers** in terms of personal and professional development.

- impact on **VET institutions** such as schools and vocational education and training centres.
- impacts on the scope and **quality of Irish vocational education** (teaching methods, procedures, acquiring vocational practice vocational education and training and product innovation).
- impacts on the **accreditation and qualification** systems for VET in Ireland.
- opportunities for **disadvantaged and special needs** participants.
- impacts on the **access to the labour market** for participants.
- impacts on the **wider community** at local level.
- impacts on **European integration** and the creation of a European dimension in the Irish VET system.

The impacts of Leonardo in Ireland are tangible in terms of professional and business skills (including language proficiency) obtained by participants and tutors, and intangible in terms of a greater intercultural awareness and self-confidence among the participants and improved environment for European integration. The development of new quality, teaching and qualification processes and projects between partners are also tangible impacts, as is improved labour market access of participants.

The interim evaluation of Leonardo in Ireland carried out in 2010 by Indecon Consultants concluded that Leonardo is hugely relevant to VET in Ireland and, given its unique aims, objectives and operation, does not compete with, or is non-duplicative of, other policies or initiatives. It also concluded that Leonardo is especially relevant owing to scarcity of resources in the VET sector in Ireland, the island status of Ireland (where exchanges with European partners could be difficult without Leonardo) and the severity of the current recession, where skills acquisition and a broad-based CV are at a premium for young job seekers.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.1.1. IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL, PERSONAL AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF PARTICIPANTS

#### *PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

The primary impact of mobility on participants in the Leonardo programme is a direct and measureable improvement in their professional competencies and work related skills. By offering work-based vocational education and training in another EU state, the programme is mirroring the reality of working life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is a highly effective preparation for participants to understand and prepare for their participation in the future workforce in the best possible manner.

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<sup>10</sup> Section 2: Relevance of the LLP in Ireland, Indecon Report, June 2010, page 7.

The impact is aptly described by a male participant from Moate Business College, Co. Westmeath who went on placement in Italy and who says that “I now have a better attitude to the world of work. I learned that at all times I must conduct myself in a professional manner. I learned that I must be patient, helpful and friendly at all times and try to help others in every possible situation to the best of my ability. This will stand to me in both my personal and professional life.”

In the period under review a wide range of skills have been facilitated under the programme including:

### **Advanced Technologies**

Biotechnology

### **Art and Design**

Interior Design

Dance

Drama Studies

### **Business Studies**

Advertising

Public Relations

International sales

Marketing

### **Childcare**

Childcare management

Montessori teaching

Social Care and Early Education

### **Construction Skills**

Architectural Technology

Bricklaying

Carpentry

Electrical

Energy efficiency

Engineering

Furniture Restoration

Joinery

Plumbing

### **Film Industry**

Cinematography

Animation

Film production

Sound Engineering

Video Production

### **Health**

Health Science

Pharmacy

Pre-Nursing

## **Hospitality/Tourism**

Chef  
Waiter  
Receptionist  
Tourism studies  
Travel services

## **ICT Skills**

Audio Technology and Multimedia  
Commercial Computing  
Computer Studies  
eBusiness

## **Lifestyle**

Beauty Therapy  
Hairdressing

## **Veterinary Health**

Veterinary Nursing  
Animal Care

In addition a number of participants have obtained work experience in Motor Maintenance, Security, Social Studies, Agricultural Training, and European Studies.

While ICT skills are a particular focus for some participants the use of **ICT skills** is an important feature of all Leonardo projects and is of course integral to the preparation and implementation of the mobility activities. This is evidenced by the number of emails sent by participants from internet cafes or partner colleges. In the world of work participants learnt about different computer applications in some cases and this is documented in individual Europass documents where appropriate.

A broad range of ICT skills are used such as Excel, Word, and a range of internet-based applications, as well as specific types of computerised programmes for particular business environments such as hotel reservations systems, processing statistical information, and stock taking.

The establishment of an MS-Sharepoint website which is used on some projects challenges participants to engage in the project by using ICT skills. They are also encouraged to engage in initial research into the culture, geography, climate and education systems of the host countries via the internet.

A particular high-end example of the use of ICT skills in Leonardo is in the field of Tourism and Aviation Studies. ROC van Amsterdam in the Netherlands has a small dedicated simulated airport, which they use as part of their VET programme. They also have interactive retail travel software, where participants can make reservations online up to and including 'mock purchase'. These are supported by the national airline, KLM and the majority of work placements take place with the airline. A number of Irish projects have engaged in fruitful partnerships with this organisation.

The range of **new skills and upskilling** of existing skill-sets on offer under Leonardo in Ireland is extensive as evidenced by the list above. For example, a female Cork participant on mobility in Belgium worked in a purchasing department and was shown the full range of skill-sets required across the department in her six-week placement.

Working on different administrative and technology systems, operating new and varied processes, learning new methods of doing things, working under different types and levels of supervision, and making presentations, all contribute to a significant broadening of the professional skills of the participants.

Participants from Coláiste Íde, Dublin were enabled to experience internationally renowned tourism destinations such as Hungary and Malta. The experience of working in five star hotels and spas gave them a broader perspective and fresh ideas. Working at the airport and in travel businesses developed their customer-facing skills and business acumen and helped foster an entrepreneurial spirit by inspiring them to consider the possibility of setting up their own businesses later.

A crucial non-technical professional skill in modern business is the capacity to engage effectively in the **teamwork** environment. Building teamwork skills and providing team working opportunities is integral to all Leonardo mobilities. Like all project sponsors, St John's Central College, Cork, actively seeks to develop teamwork skills within the group prior to and during the overseas placement. The need for teamwork is encouraged and impressed on the participants so that they gain the best possible experience from their time in the partner country.

The **development of Language Skills** is both a specific aim and a by-product of all mobilities and a vital element in the professional development of all participants. It is obtained through a combination of language classes, which take place before participants depart, and practical language use while they are on the mobility. There was a more noticeable improvement in language skills in countries where English is not widely used such as France and Spain.

A Cork-based participant who spent his time in France had not only applied French, but also German, Italian, Irish and Japanese while on placement. Participants from Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Dublin, used not only Hungarian and English, but German as well while on placement. Hungarian language lessons were taken prior to departure and the beneficiaries had a basic command of the Hungarian language.

For Irish participants and trainers the placements give them an opportunity to try out many of the lesser used European languages such as Estonian, Hungarian, Bulgarian, Polish, Swedish and Dutch.

One point that emerges from the Indecon survey of participants (Table 2.1. below) and trainers (Table 2.3. below) is that both groups rate their improvement in language skills as being the lowest impact of the transnational exchange. On the face of it this appears surprising since improved linguistic competencies would seem to be an obvious aim and benefit of a transnational programme. It appears to be explained by interpreting the survey question as attaining a high level of linguistic *competence as a result* of participation in the programme.

While some language proficiency was undoubtedly attained this did not equate to a level of proficiency which either participants or tutors would regard as sufficiently high by their standards. This reveals an interesting cultural issue in Ireland with regard to foreign languages.

The relative language deficiency of Irish participants (primarily language use is confined to English and Irish) means that they have to overcome a reluctance linked to embarrassment of trying out even snippets of the different languages that they have, and therefore tend to undervalue even small levels of second-third language attainment.

Another drawback was stated quite well in a project report from Coláiste Dhúlaigh: “Coming from an island participants are always amazed about the influences of other cultures and the medley of languages they hear on the Continent and the ease with which people switch from one language to another.”

### *PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL SKILLS*

The greatest benefit reported by projects in relation to participants is the level of independence, confidence and open mindedness that involvement in such a programme gives them. Participants learned to depend on themselves. This leads to self development and has given participants greater self-reliance.

For instance participants of Cork College of Commerce reported significant impact on their level of confidence and independence by having to get to work on time every morning by foot, by bus or by metro (and having no one to give them a 6.30am morning call as they would at home). Those who stayed in hostels learned to shop as a team and to prepare meals together.

While abroad, participants appreciated the value of taking personal responsibility for their own actions, such as making sure that they were always suitably dressed and kept high standards of personal hygiene.

A Limerick Senior College female participant reported: “At first I found working in another country was hard as we didn’t know our way around and weren’t familiar with the language. But after a few days we settled in and I started to enjoy it. I think living on our own was also another challenge as I had never experienced it before and I think it made us all more responsible.”

A young female participant from Inchicore College of Commerce in Dublin on a work experience placement in Norrköping, Sweden summed up her experience as follows: “I had the most amazing experience of my life and for that I am truly grateful for the opportunity! I am way more confident than before. I have a much broader overview of what childcare is about. The information I have learnt in Sweden will stay with me forever and I will practice some of their beliefs in my crèche.”

A key feature of the overseas experience is the sense that the participants are representing their organization, community and country while abroad. Therefore, appropriate behaviour is expected and the participants themselves put their best foot forward. In most cases participants sign a contract prior to departure, which outlines acceptable/unacceptable behaviour and this creates a sense of personal accountability and responsibility.

Participants also develop their **social skills** being away with a group of fellow participants and sharing accommodation. A female participant from Moate Business College, Co. Westmeath reported that “I matured as a person and developed my confidence greatly. I also have become more independent. ...I communicate with people more. My confidence has improved. I can talk to people with ease and I can depend on myself to get things done.”



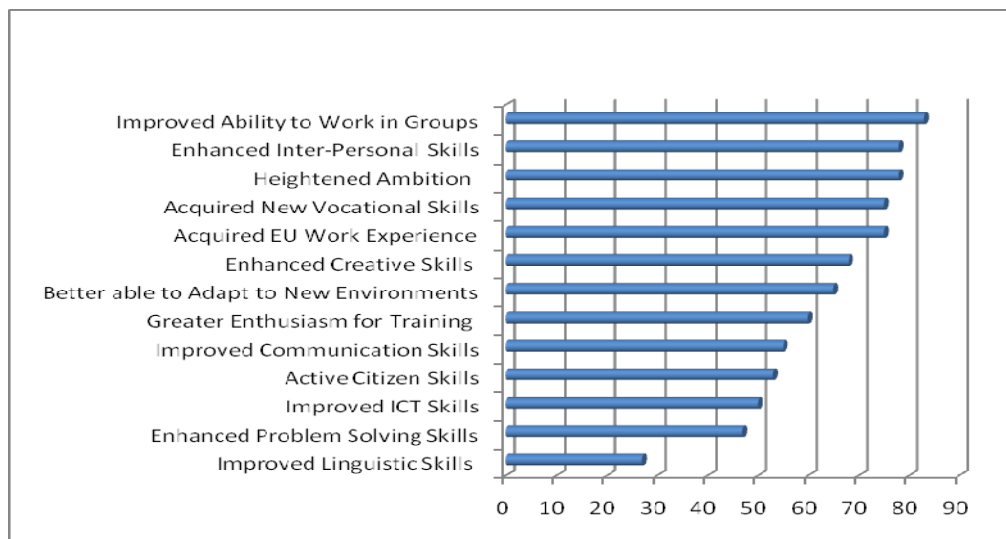
Another said that: “I have gained invaluable experience which I may never have got the chance to do otherwise. It will have a great impact on my profession when I go looking for work. It has made me feel more confident when talking and interacting with people which will help with my personal life.”

And finally a third participant reports that: “My work placement abroad has renewed my self confidence which will hopefully have a positive effect on my professional life. This renewed self confidence has in turn made me a more understanding person to others needs.”

Research shows that the motives given by participants in advance of participation in a mobility project (involving a stay abroad) reveal that they are hoping for improvements in social, inter-cultural and language skills in particular, as well as better opportunities in the labour market. They are often brave young people seeking a challenge and wanting to gain new experiences, learn about their limits and prove themselves.<sup>11</sup>

These strong positive outcomes for participants are borne out in Ireland in the Indecon Consultants Interim Review of the Leonardo Programme. In Table 2.1. (below), there is evidence of a high level of satisfaction among participants with their mobility experience.

**TABLE 2.1. IMPACT OF LEONARDO ON PARTICIPANTS**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n21).

The impacts are concentrated in ‘soft skills’ or areas of personal development such as group working, interpersonal skills, heightened ambition and new vocational skills. Adaptability and creativity skills are also rated highly.

This study also found an almost universally positive response by participants to their mobility experience. Reports identify the fact of going abroad in general, many for the first time,

<sup>11</sup> WSF study for the EU Commission: Analysis of the Effects of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme on participants, page 78.

gathering new experiences such as transport and shopping, self-reliance, gaining insights into other ways of life, and inter-cultural exchange.

Criticism of the mobility experience was very limited and confined to issues such as the stay being in some cases too short, which could also be interpreted as a positive. The evidence suggests that the longer the overseas placement, the greater the impact on the skills of the participant.

Given the greater mobility of Irish people generally it is interesting to note that a number of projects report that Leonardo provides the first opportunity for many participants to leave the country. This may be accounted for by the fact that some participants come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds and remote rural areas.

### *Adaptability*

All participants need to adapt to situations as they arise while abroad and use problem solving techniques. For participants who stay with host families they have to learn how to fit in to a culturally different lifestyle.

Often participants worked in pairs, so they learn to give each other support working in a strange environment.

Obviously for many the language barrier was the biggest challenge they faced. But as one participant of Cork College of Commerce reports, she was able to interact with children in a Montessori school with limited language skills. "I have learned new methods of teaching and interaction with children. I have also gained more confidence in myself and that even if there is a language barrier, you can still interact with the children."

Another participant of the same College reported that "you can communicate with people who speak a different language by having a few words but body language also helps!"

### *Motivation*

The Indecon Evaluation (Table 2.1. above) points to heightened ambition and greater enthusiasm for VET as two areas reported by participants. The current review also noted similar references in project reports.

The Head of the School of Computing and Engineering at Cavan Institute reported that computer studies participants were far more focused on the potential for further study as a result of their overseas placement. A number of participants enrolled on the next level of FETAC qualification and have since continued to universities and institutes of technology.

The scope of the overseas placement is also an important driver of subsequent participant motivation. Placements that are well organized, and offer a variety of vocationally focused, interesting and challenging tasks yield a high impact.

A participant on a mobility for Information Technology Participants from County Monaghan VEC said that he "...gained more confidence in my abilities to learn new subjects and developed my interests with this further. I know I will relate to my course better and it helped me want to learn further for my future"

### *Improved Academic Performance*

Many projects use the overseas placement as part of the requirement for graduating in subjects delivered in the educational institution in Ireland. This adds a sharper focus to the overseas placement and creates a stronger motivation to do well.

For example, Moate Business College reports that all the participants from a placement in Barcelona who subsequently completed their MBC courses, were successful in their FETAC work placement module. The sojourn in Barcelona represented the practical element of the work placement module.

#### *Intercultural Awareness*

All projects include a cultural programme which allows participants to learn more about the history and culture of the country they are visiting and engage with the people who live there. This is an important part of every programme. Those who stay with families also learn to adapt to different ways of being “family” and of course different food.

Trainer respondents to the Indecon survey (Table 2.3. below) rated intercultural awareness as their second highest programme impact. This is also true for participants who report being impressed by the mix of cultural influences in Continental Europe.

A Cork College of Commerce participant reports: “I feel more confident speaking Spanish now and I’m more culturally aware of the differences between Ireland and Spain. I also learned new work practices. I’m now considering working abroad for the summer in Spain.”

Awareness of the diverse and sometimes troubled history of some European countries emerges in different ways. Coláiste Íde from Finglas, Dublin report that their successful project in Estonia showed that it can be difficult to break down cultural barriers. “Attempts were made to embrace the culture but unfortunately the culture itself is too conservative and the people are not willing to express themselves perhaps due to shyness. We did notice that the locals were not overly friendly with one of our beneficiaries as she was originally from Russia (and had come to settle in Ireland). The history of the community was the reason for that.”

#### *Progression to Further Education*

One clear follow-on benefit from developing enhanced language skills is a desire to pursue this option at third-level, which many participants would not have previously considered. A number of participants from Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock, Dublin have taken this route through a link programme with Dublin City University.

Moate Business College reports that a work placement for art students has directly contributed to all seven participants going on to a variety of different third-level art schools in Ireland. The placement of a participant from Coláiste Íde, Finglas, Dublin was a decisive factor in his pursuing and obtaining a place on the Culinary Arts programme of Dublin Institute of Technology.

There is good evidence that mature participants in particular benefit from overseas work placements in confirming and enhancing their motivation and prospects of proceeding to third level. As a result of her placement on a programme in France, a 60-year-old woman participant of Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock, Dublin decided to pursue a course in French at Dublin City University.

## 2.1.2. ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

A number of important impacts have been recorded in project reports relative to the access of **People in the Labour Market (PLM)**—those undertaking work-based vocational education and training, those who have graduated from college or university, or those not currently employed.

Obviously of particular relevance are those participants who have either found employment or are now self-employed, and those who were already in the labour market and have obtained greater responsibility or promotion or been confirmed in post, and who attribute their success in part to their participation in the Leonardo programme.

No specific data is collected by the programme in this respect but there is no reason to assume that the experience across Europe in this respect is not mirrored in Ireland at least up to 2009. A WSF Economic and Social Research Study for the European Commission<sup>12</sup> found that approximately half of all participants in the PLM category, who were unemployed before their participation, found a job or subsequently became self-employed within a short time after the programme. About a third of participants in initial vocational education and training subsequently found work or were more successful in their training or more intensively involved in their training.

According to the reports examined for this review, all players (participants, trainers and vocational education and training providers) reported that the professional development experienced by participants taking part in a placement abroad is extremely valuable. An international placement adds something extra to vocational education and training and in particular to the participant's C.V. The chances of finding a job increased as a result of the overseas placement although it is difficult to assess what additional benefit accrues from an overseas placement compared to an Irish-based work experience placement.

Some individual case examples are instructive:

A mobility organised by the Tipperary Rural and Business Development Institute is a good case of PLM participants learning new theoretical and practical knowledge in energy efficiency in buildings as well as developing an understanding of European methods of efficient building. The placement and training experience for 77 unemployed construction professionals in Biberach, Germany was designed to help them up-skill to a new and expanding area of work with better prospects for employment. The mobility had a positive impact on their knowledge base, their core skills and competences and their attitudes to both the concept of sustainable building and living/working in other member states of the Union.

FÁS South West Region Apprentice Mobility Programme led to fulltime jobs for two apprentices in Cologne who were taken on after their work placement there. A total of 37 participants from FÁS studying as apprentices in the construction trades of Plumbing, Bricklaying, Carpentry, Joinery and Electrical participated in the mobility over a 12-week period in Germany.

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<sup>12</sup> Analysis of the Effects of Leonardo Mobility Measures on Young Trainees, Employees and the Influence of Socio-economic Factors. Research on behalf of the EU Commission Education and Culture Directorate-General. WSF Economic and Social Research, Kerpen, 15 May 2007.

The German partner Handwerkskammer Koln—a non-profit trade association with legal remit for awarding skills certificates in the Cologne area and a compulsory umbrella group for all skilled craft businesses—was well placed to secure appropriate work experience placements in construction firms in the area. The apprentices carried out supervised on-the-job assessments prescribed by FÁS during their work placements. The placement qualified for the Standards based Apprenticeship, FÁS accredited, FETAC Level 6 Advanced Craft Certificate.

The construction slowdown had resulted in redundancy for these apprentices who were no longer able to complete their on-the-job employer-based training, phase 7 in Ireland. Through this project the apprentices were facilitated to progress to the next stage of their apprenticeship and qualify for the FETAC Level 6 Advanced Craft Certificate. The prospect of employment is greatly enhanced when qualified with the FETAC Advanced Craft Certificate which is internationally recognised. The participants were given the opportunity to gain valuable technical skills in a structured environment and have their competencies validated. They also benefited from working and living in another country, experiencing different language, and culture and work norms.

At an individual level the participants have benefited through increased awareness of their skills, competencies and experience and greater self-confidence. Their skills are enhanced in a professional, linguistic and personal development context and they have an internationally recognised qualification.

Some participants comments from this FÁS mobility include: ‘The benefits I gained from the work placement are that I learned new methods of work and how to become part of a team.’ (apprentice plumber). ‘I got good experience of working in another country. Saw different techniques and forms of plumbing. Will definitely travel abroad to work again in the future.’ Another reported that the placement gave him the confidence to work anywhere in the world. ‘The world is a smaller place for me’

The Digital Audio Mobility Project (DAMM), run by Pulse College, Dublin, delivered FETAC and other accredited courses in audio and digital sound and image production for the music, TV and film industry. In 2008-09, 19 out of the 30 participants secured full-time employment as a direct result of the Leonardo placements.

The benefits are obvious in jobs that themselves involve mobility. For instance, a participant of Coláiste Íde, Finglas, Dublin, reported that her work experience in a Hotel and Spa in Hungary directly contributed to her success in obtaining employment as an air hostess with an Irish airline. Another participant of the same College was told that a decisive factor in her obtaining a job in an Irish hotel was her placement in the 5-Star Meridien Hotel in Malta.

A participant from Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Coolock, Dublin who had studied German in the college went on a placement in France and subsequently went on to study French and Spanish at Dublin City University. He reports that this broad based experience was an important factor in obtaining full-time employment with BMW in Germany.

A number of participants from Moate Business College and Cork College of Commerce have been able to access employment with multi-national companies based in Ireland especially in the information technology and pharmaceutical sectors which might have been more difficult to achieve with Irish-based work experience alone.

The nature of the work experience on offer in some European Countries is broader and deeper in some cases than that on offer in Ireland. This is especially the case with the Travel and Tourism sector, Childcare and Nursing. The level of work-based VET is more intensive and participants are allowed greater responsibility than might be the case in Ireland.

Participants are alert to these benefits. For instance a female participant from Cork on a placement in Italy stated that: “By working in a preschool abroad, I experienced a completely different approach to teaching children and disciplining them...by having this experience I will have an advantage over other childcare workers which may prove helpful in getting a job.”

Another female participant from Moate Business College, County Westmeath, said that: “By doing my work experience in a foreign country it has opened up my employment opportunities to a lot more places. Working in a different country and speaking a different language there is a big thing when it comes to showing what you have experience in. It would be the one that will stand out on your C.V. under your work experience part.”

Job-related expertise acquired during the mobility project not only makes a positive difference in the job hunting phase but is also beneficial in the later progression during employment. The better educated or trained the participants are, the more likely they are to be promoted, earn a higher salary and acquire personal, social and cultural qualifications. This means that, although Leonardo cannot fully compensate for prior differences between participants, it greatly benefits less-qualified and more disadvantaged participants—potentially enabling them to narrow the gap between themselves and other, better-off, groups.

Some participants were confirmed in their career choice through participation in the transnational project. For instance, a participant of St John’s Central College, Cork reports: “The impact of this experience has been good on both my professional and personal life. This experience has encouraged me even more to continue my studies to become a veterinary nurse.”

A participant on the County Monaghan VEC Mobility for Information Technology Students confirmed that: “It has greatly helped my decision in this field of IT/Technician for the future. Glad to have had the opportunity at this stage of my life”

Not only have many participants been confirmed in their career choices but they have also been attracted to a certain area of expertise within their choice.

Mobility it seems breeds mobility. By gaining work and living experience abroad participants have become aware of the opportunities of mobility as an option in terms of their own future employment. Cork College of Commerce points out that “the training and skills base of our participants was enhanced by having a European dimension. The world is a smaller place and it is probable that some of our participants will travel as part of their job e.g. childcare, business, tourism, beauty therapy etc.”

Coláiste Dhúlaigh in Dublin reports that some participants have become open to the idea of living and working abroad not having considered it before, while others who were thinking about it have been confirmed in their decisions, while still more were being encouraged by their experience to go abroad again after completing their studies.

A participant of Limerick Senior College says: “I now understand how hard it can be working in a different lifestyle but I also learned how I can do it. I found it prepares you well especially if

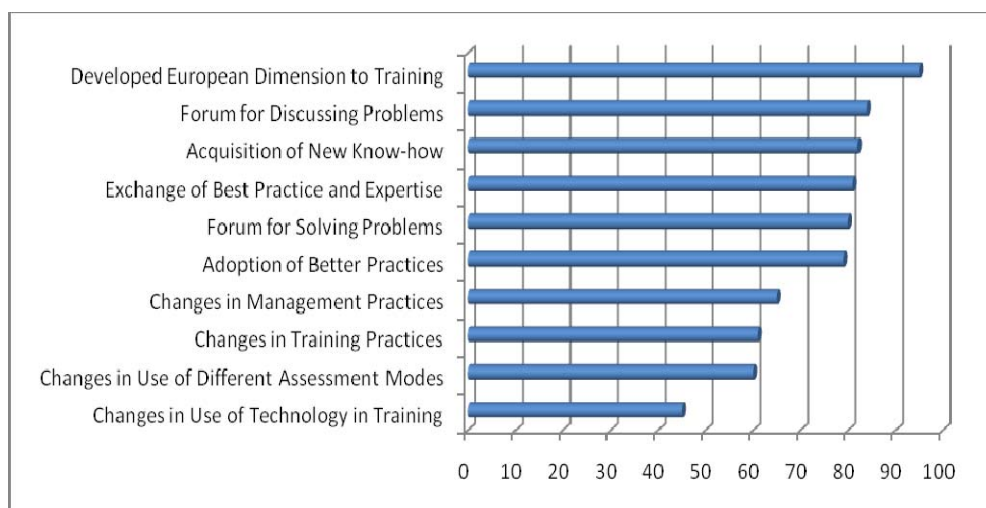
you are thinking of going away to work in a different country and what you have to be prepared for.” A Cork participant reports: “Work experience abroad has made a big impact on my personal and professional life. It helped me decide I want to work abroad and in the hotel industry.”

Not only does the PLM programme support those seeking employment but it is also available to those in employment wishing to upskill and those who are self-employed. The Galway Executive Skillnet organised a mobility to Scotland for a small business owner with 17 years experience as a public relations consultant and sole trader. The participant worked with teams in the host organisation on PR strategies for clients developing creative inputs. Specific tasks included researching and analysing media fragmentation within the UK and the impact of social media. The mobility provided up-skilling and exposure to innovative practices in a large market. The participant has gone on to apply their learning and training to their own practice and diversify into other market sectors.

### 2.1.3. IMPACT ON PROVIDERS OF VET

The impact on VET providers (as outlined in Table 2.2.) is to be found mainly in the addition, or strengthening, of a European dimension to their activities allied to improvements in VET methods and higher motivation of trainers. This in turn allows them to make a more attractive offering to participants thus enhancing their position in the local or regional VET market.

**TABLE 2.2. IMPACT OF LEONARDO ON PROVIDERS OF VET**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n22).

The transnational exchanges provide a forum for discussing and solving common problems with providers from other EU countries who bring new perspectives to bear. This in turn leads to the adoption of better practices and the acquisition of new know-how.

Where providers have not previously engaged in international programmes, their participation has convinced them of the value of providing a European dimension to their curriculum. In most cases they commit to further participation in the programme.

Cork College of Commerce describes the Leonardo programme as a key part of their strategy to constantly enhance the experience the participants: “The Leonardo DaVinci Programme is a

valuable and unique learning experience for those participants who are selected to travel, and an important part of the general offering of the College.”

A one-week mobility to Sweden involving 15 Tutors from the ICTU Congress Centres Network (Resource Centres for the Unemployed) identified possible innovations in the area of service provision and delivery in community services relevant to unemployed people in Ireland. Good practice considered for adoption by Congress Centres was the web based career tool for learners and the in-company days organised with employers to assist with recruitment.

The strengthening of Ballsbridge College’s transnational capacity base through Leonardo, the enhancement of its work placement programme, the development of a sustained strategic link with Dutch colleagues with reciprocal knowledge transfer, and the professional development of staff are seen as crucial aspects of the professional ethos of Ballsbridge College.

“The project has resulted in the development of a trainee exchange programme between Ballsbridge College and its Dutch counterpart and has led to increased cooperation, deeper understanding and knowledge of the Dutch VET system.

Projects are not just seen as once-off exchanges by Irish VET providers but part of the ongoing development and enhancement of a strategic sustainable link between Irish and EU providers with the objective of increased numbers of participants from partner colleges participating in trainee exchange programmes, promotion of staff exchanges and joint development of educational programmes and appropriate teaching methodologies.

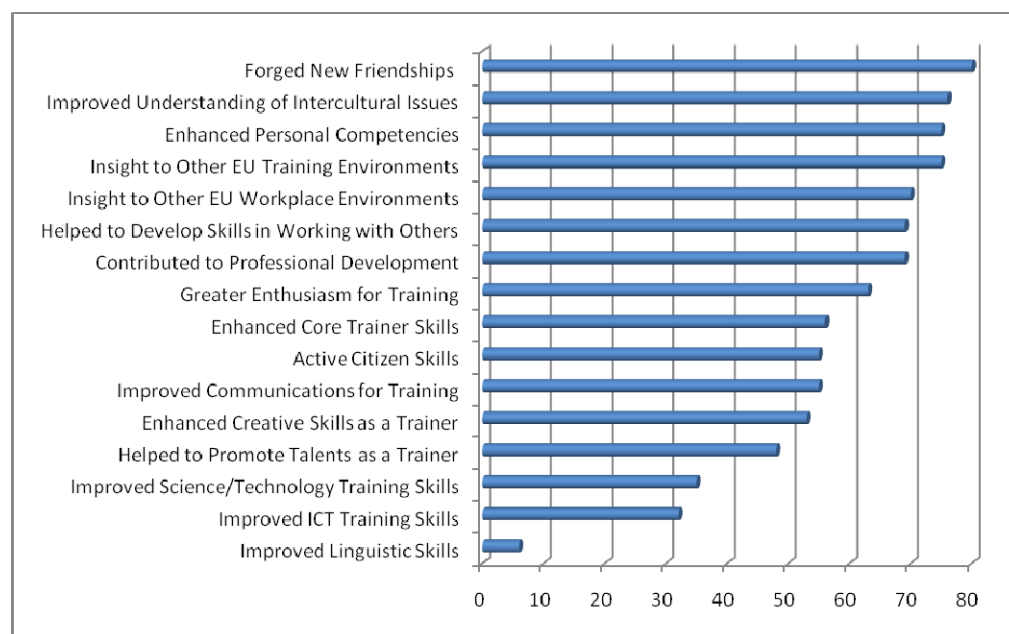
Other types of impact identified in project reports include: the learning experience for senior and middle management staff in establishing networks and creating partnerships, in organisation, project management and balancing priorities and workload, and the development of new VET methods. Of particular note is the learning which accrues when things don’t go according to plan or occasionally when projects get things wrong. Finding out how to fix something that does not work can often be more powerful than when everything runs smoothly.

#### *IMPACT ON TUTORS AND TRAINERS*

Tutors and trainers are as enthusiastic as trainees about their participation in the Leonardo programme. As shown in Table 2.3., they state that it provides motivation and inspiration at a personal level, provides information about curricula, teaching methods and learning materials at a professional level and is valuable in terms of the overall development of the educational institutions in which they work. All this positive experience enhances their work in the classroom.



**TABLE 2.3. IMPACT OF LEONARDO ON TUTORS AND TRAINERS**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n22).

Personal development factors such as new friendships, improved intercultural understanding, enhanced personal competencies and insight into other EU vocational education and training environments were rated highest by the respondents to the Indecon survey.

This was followed by an acknowledgement of the contribution of the programme to the trainers’ personal development arising from insights into EU workplace environments and improved skills working with others. A number of trainer reports, for instance, highlighted the development of management skills in setting up and successfully running the projects.

Of particular note is the 60%-plus rating by respondents of the greater level of enthusiasm for vocational education and training arising from their participation.

About one-third of respondents to the Indecon survey (Table 2.3.) felt that their participation in Leonardo promoted their talents or enhanced core skills as trainers in a significant way, suggesting that the main impacts are in the development of softer skills, although the development of tangible outcomes/tools and products and the development of harder skills are also apparent, albeit in a relatively small number of Transfer of Innovation and Partnership projects.

A review of the project reports reveal a number of specific areas where impact has occurred:

- vocational skills and professional development
- increase of interest of trainer colleagues to take part in similar activities
- better cooperation among colleagues facilitated and necessitated by the complex and demanding nature of the transnational project
- development/use of new teaching material/curricula
- introduction of new teaching and learning methods
- introduction of new management strategies/ideas/practices

- increased interest of staff members in foreign languages.

In a small number of cases, anecdotal evidence suggests that promotions, partly accompanied by a higher salary, as well as more qualitative changes such as a greater involvement in school management and coordination of international activities, or more responsibility at work have been reported.

These results are borne out by an EU-wide study for the European Commission<sup>13</sup> which shows that more than 80% of mobile professionals in VET (tutors, trainers, human resource managers, guidance specialists *etc.*) greatly benefited from the mobility. Promotion, higher income, as well as more responsibility at work, were observed. Tandem partnerships and working as a tutor during the stay abroad bring especially significant benefits for the practice of VET professionals. After their stay abroad, tutors and trainers seek to improve existing vocational education and training courses through new curricula and teaching methods (56%) and to initiate new courses (46%). The specific impacts reported in relation to VETPro projects in Section 2.1.7. are also relevant here.

### *COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT*

The involvement of the community and subsequent impact on local communities of the Leonardo programme is not pronounced. VET providers tend to be relatively self-sufficient and are not in need of community support for transnational projects.

Considerable effort however is made to disseminate project results within the community. This is mostly done through local and regional newspapers and local radio programmes as part of promoting the benefits of exchanges to prospective participants.

### *MULTIPLIER EFFECT*

Many projects identify a 'snowball effect' or 'multiplier effect' in that participants engage in a cross-fertilisation of their learning and experience with others. This in turn leads to a continuing demand for participation in mobility activities and creates an impetus for new transnational exchanges. There are numerous examples of this in progress reports. New projects often emerge from study visits by VET staff but a surprising trend is where mobility projects lead to study visits and higher level cooperation between agencies.

For instance, an important and extensive study visit arose from a mobility project to Denmark involving young farmers with disabilities. The agency, Teagasc, later organised a study visit for professional staff to see the Agricultural, Horticultural and Forestry Training systems in Denmark at close quarters. Significant change is occurring in both countries at present, especially in the area of environmental and sustainable farming, and the continuing cooperation allow for discussion of the best options to pursue. A new project for VETPro participants has already been developed.

Arising from the placement of participants from Cork in a Montessori school in Sweden, a new application emerged from the same school to work in Co.-operation with a Montessori school in Ireland. Partnerships have already been established between schools in County Wicklow and

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<sup>13</sup> Study of VET teachers and trainers: Key actors to make lifelong learning a reality in Europe, 13 November 2009. Institut Technik+Bildung, University of Bremen. Prepared by Simone Kirpal, Pekka Kämäräinen, Wolfgang Wittig, Graham Attwell and Jenny Hughes.

the Municipality of Helsingborg in Sweden following a study visit organised by County Wicklow VEC.

Many projects report that the mobility ethos is spreading throughout the participating schools and new departments are working to develop placement and exchange projects. At Moate Business College, participants who participate in a mobility commit to brief their classmates on the experience so that a 'ripple effect' takes place throughout every class in the school making the experience a shared or participatory endeavour of the entire school.

Work is also underway between Irish and other European partners to expand mobility programmes outside of the EU to India and other countries and thereby create a broader international base for Co-operation.

### *DISSEMINATION*

Obviously such extended impacts are linked to dissemination. There is a strong emphasis on dissemination in most of the projects reviewed where the knowledge gained and the experiences of participants are exchanged and distributed within the participating institutions and to some extent in the wider community.

However, this is primarily limited to writing a report about the project, posting information on the organisations' websites and occasionally issuing information to local media. Information is also disseminated during open days or to help recruit participants both for the institution's standard programmes as well as mobility activities.

Dissemination content is mainly confined to factual accounts of the placement though there are some excellent examples of the use of story-telling by participants to bring life and colour to their experience. Most projects use photographs and some have created multi-media records of the mobility.

The wider context of dissemination as envisaged by the EU Commission<sup>14</sup> includes 'exploitation' which consists of mainstreaming and multiplication. This is defined as the planned process of transferring the successful results of programmes and initiatives to appropriate decision-makers in national and European systems. Multiplication is the planned process of convincing individual end-users to adopt and/or apply the results of programmes and initiatives.

In terms of Leonardo in Ireland, these mainstreaming or multiplication impacts are primarily relevant to study visits involving VET professionals, and partnerships. There is strong evidence of both these impacts as outlined in Sections 2.1.4., 2.1.5., 2.1.6., 2.1.7. and in particular in Section 2.2. and Section 3.

#### **2.1.4. IMPACT ON VET SYSTEMS AND PRACTICES**

Exchange of best practice, introduction to new know-how (Table 2.2.) and insights into other EU vocational education and training systems (Table 2.3.) were highlighted by vocational education and training providers and trainers respectively in their responses to the Indecon survey.

The review of project reports shows that, to a certain degree, a contribution has been made in terms of improvements in education and training processes among individual vocational education and training providers. However, it is difficult to show that the quality of vocational

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<sup>14</sup> Lifelong Learning Programme, Guide for Applicants, 28 September 2007.

education and training courses has been improved although it is accepted that overall quality can be improved by getting to know other views and approaches.<sup>15</sup>

The impact of VETPro-mobility on VET systems was the subject of a particular study for the EU Commission<sup>16</sup> which identified the following impacts: contribution to awareness of international competences; the creation of international networks; the impetus for qualitative improvements in VET systems; and the multiplier effect. Vocational institutions with VETPro-mobility participants are more likely to develop internationalisation strategies and more willing to send tutors and trainers abroad.

There are a number of factors at play here. On the one hand when participants and trainers are abroad they recognise and experience best practice in their vocational area which in some cases may not necessarily be available in Ireland. As a result they create an expectation, and even in some cases a demand, for a similar level of vocational education and training provision in Ireland. This also works in reverse where participants recognise that the vocational education and training they are receiving in Ireland is of a superior quality in some respects to what is available in other EU countries.

The Academia mobility project involves a European Exchange of Guidance Counsellors which encourages the acquisition of skills ranging from personal to professional competencies. The Irish partner is the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). The benefits of this extensive exchange and development process are reflected in the reports of the beneficiaries:

- Gaining an appreciation of the importance of intercultural approaches to guidance practice - 'All European states have been forced to address the same issues concerning unemployment and retraining. However, each state has applied practices which will address their unique concerns.'
- Acquiring awareness of different approaches and interventions for working with minority groups - 'Young people and adults with disability do not seem to have the same opportunities to take part in an integrated education system as in Ireland.'
- 'One suggestion made by the group was cultural awareness training for guidance counsellors. Jill from England mentioned a Muslim awareness training day which she found very useful. A similar approach could be taken in Ireland as a way of reaching out to and supporting marginalised communities e.g. travellers, foreign nationals etc.'
- Mutual exchange of information on guidance practice by practitioners participating in each of the programmes - 'Our group of visiting guidance practitioners bonded very well, with a willingness to share practice and learn from each other's experiences. We managed to communicate well despite some language difficulties.'
- Forming ideas and experiences of the exchange to inform practice in Ireland - 'The exchange afforded me the opportunity to do some research and present my thoughts on Career Management Skills to a European audience including our host who is Co-ordinating this theme for the European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network.'
- Affirmation of the work of guidance practitioners and of guidance in Ireland - 'I met ten other guidance practitioners from around Europe and heard about their work and

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<sup>15</sup> EU experience in this regard is highlighted in the 2010 WSF study for the EU Commission: Analysis of the Effects of the Leonardo da Vinci Programme on participants.

<sup>16</sup> Study of VET teachers and trainers: Key actors to make lifelong learning a reality in Europe, 13 November 2009. Institut Technik+Bildung, University of Bremen. Prepared by Simone Kirpal, Pekka Kämäräinen, Wolfgang Wittig, Graham Attwell and Jenny Hughes

learned how Guidance Counselling is viewed in their countries. In turn they learnt about my work as an Adult Educational Guidance Counsellor in Ireland and asked me questions which gave me a chance to reflect on my work.'

- Appreciation of the importance of guidance in an EU context and the need to establish links in order to develop best practice - 'Not only did I learn about the Czech system but I also learned a lot from the systems in the other participants' countries. I had the opportunity of discussing the pros and cons of all of our methods and organisational structures. The system of training Guidance Counsellors is quite different in each country.'

Participants from Pearse College in Dublin on a study visit to the Netherlands were surprised that in terms of equality of access, the Irish system was one which their Dutch colleagues could learn from. They felt that the Dutch system whereby students decide after primary school at a much younger age to pursue either academic study or vocational education and training did not offer the equality of access that the Irish system offered. Ireland's second-chance education system whereby students are permitted for a variety of reasons to repeat years of study already undertaken had much to offer Dutch colleagues.

Staff from Coláiste Dhúlaigh, Dublin, participating in a mobility project in Sweden, were impressed by an Open Learning Centre in the college they were visiting and have been working on introducing something similar in Finglas.

Skills in the organisation and teaching of film education programmes were transferred to staff of Ballyfermot College of Further Education during a study visit to the Filmakademie, Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany and film schools in Poland and Bulgaria. These are recognized as leading international film schools. Ballyfermot College has a strong reputation in the field of animation. Participants learned how the different schools organised their programmes and the use they made of technologies. The observation of the technologies in action was extremely beneficial and in some cases the active participation with participants enhanced the learning and experience for the participants. The visit is already yielding new approaches and teaching methodologies which will have a positive effect on quality and standards.

As a result of a study visit by County Wicklow VEC personnel to Helsingborg in Sweden a number of continuing developments have emerged:

- a website been set up as part of the project to share information and to guarantee ongoing dialogue between the various professional partners and to ensure sustainability in relation to European linkages
- it is intended that this will ensure that Co.. Wicklow VEC will improve its research infrastructure through the expansion of the website for subject specific groupings
- an advisory group has been established in the VEC to further ensure the sustainability of European projects; this is a high-level group consisting of the Chief Executive Officer, the Education Officer, the Adult Education Officer, and two Assistant Principal Officers
- Participant Support Guidelines have been issued to all schools, based largely on the promoters' experiences in Helsingborg.

The experience of Teagasc staff on a project in Denmark revealed that Danish participants have an individual learning plan which takes their social, economic and academic circumstances into account. The concept of such an individual participant plan, which is a feature of VET in Denmark, is being considered with a view to providing improved vocational education and training to those with special needs.

Teagasc has produced a new Farm Planning Video based on videos seen in Denmark. On the reverse side, Danish VET agriculture has adapted a central quality assurance system based on similar verification procedures used in Teagasc and approved by FETAC.

Systems of best practice were identified by Pearse College, Dublin in terms of language training. The participants visited a centre in the Netherlands and observed the delivery of Dutch language lessons for immigrants. All the participants there (550) worked on individual programmes delivered through computers overseen by tutors. The weaker participants received more than 60% additional tuition from tutors—but the brighter participants had 60% self-learning. Participants stated that “this is an area that would really help in our situation but would require further investigation.”

The Irish Vocational Education Association (IVEA) represents the interests at national level of Ireland’s thirty-three Vocational Education Committees (VECs). While IVEA’s member VECs are independent statutory bodies, most developmental work in relation to the design and delivery of vocational education and training is undertaken via IVEA through some 60 active task groups. In 2009 members of the IVEA participated in a Leonardo study visit to assess how the Irish vocational education system might be improved by adopting some of the best practice evident in Norway.

A comprehensive report and list of recommendations, observed best practice and significant differences between Irish and Norwegian systems of VET has been compiled. Best practice in both Norway and Ireland was identified and documented. Although the Norwegian system is ahead of Ireland in terms of reform and systematic approaches to VET including integration in education and apprenticeship systems, there is much to learn between the two countries. The project appears to have prompted a good working relationship between the two organisations that will lead to further study visit activity and dialogue.

Staff from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) Congress Centres for the Unemployed Network took part in a study visit to Sweden in 2010 to identify possible innovations in vocational education training service provision and delivery in community services relevant to unemployed people in Ireland. Participants were very impressed by the methods used in relation to assisting the unemployed in their employment search. In particular the concept of an ‘in-company’ day to invite an employer into the organisation and assist them with their interviewing and selection of staff is now being tested in Ireland. Career/education tracking software used in Sweden is also being piloted in Ireland to enhance the service being provided.

As a result of a study visit by staff from County Wexford VEC to Sweden a number of changes to the vocational education and training system are being considered:

- improved links to local companies; this builds on the Swedish example where some schools are actually sponsored by local industry.
- a much greater integration between the services involved with immigrants such as crèches, social services, housing authorities and education; one service visited in Sweden had crèche facilities for mothers and toddlers with regular opportunities to visit local shops and amenities; under the same roof, the adults could engage in language and culture lessons while their young children engaged in education next door
- a greater emphasis on the individual participant’s needs; in Sweden the emphasis is on the individual process of acquisition and build-up of knowledge: a tutor is a facilitator and a reference; the emphasis is on dialogue between the pupil and the tutor, the driving

force for this dialogue being heavily determined by prospects of social and occupational integration; the dominant teaching style is that of example

- the introduction of digital content and teaching materials, as well as the use of e-learning frameworks
- the growing significance of innovative forms of partnership *e.g.* public/private partnership, educational cross-sector collaboration, local and regional community partnerships, and innovative partnerships in e-learning.

The use of information and communication technologies in Denmark and Sweden has awakened the possibilities of using IT among the staff of Inchicore College of Further Education, Dublin. In terms of improving the quality of vocational education and training in Inchicore, the exchange has been responsible for a range of new systems being piloted. A good example of this is a mentoring system for participants struggling with course work. In Denmark, tutors saw a system of support being offered to participants by tutors which has had a remarkable effect on the participants' progress. Each tutor on a course is responsible for two to three participants, monitors their progress and is a sounding board for problems. It is hoped that such support will reduce drop out and increase retention of participants.

### *ACCREDITATION AND RECOGNITION*

A factor that contributes significantly to accessing the labour market is validation, certification and accreditation of learning. It is important for participants to have independent validation of their skills and competencies. In many Leonardo mobility projects, the placements are certified as part of the practical module in the FETAC certification for the trainees' chosen courses.

The **Further Education and Training Awards Council (FETAC)** is the statutory awarding body for further education and training in Ireland. FETAC makes quality assured awards that are part of the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) from levels 1-6. VET providers in Ireland are to the fore in utilising the FETAC awards system. The validation of programmes leading to awards has been extended with notable success to work experience gained during mobilities.

In addition, the exposure to the FETAC system experienced by other European partners has generated a high regard for FETAC awards and indeed a demand to replicate the process. A case in point relates to FÁS South West Region. As a result of their mobility project they entered into an agreement with the Handwerkskammer (Chamber of Trade responsible for vocational education and training in Germany) to carry out assessment of apprentices using FETAC standards for criteria to award Advanced Craft Certificates (FETAC Level 6).

The **Europass** is a single portfolio enabling participants to provide proof of their qualifications and skills clearly and easily anywhere in Europe. It comprises five documents designed at European level to improve the transparency of qualifications. Its aim is to facilitate mobility for all those wishing to work or receive vocational education and training anywhere in Europe. It provides a flexible method of registering ongoing attainment of skills and experience, is cross-European and is rapidly gaining recognition and acceptance. The National Europass Centre in Ireland is the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

Europass CV and Mobility certificates are now widely used on Irish-based Leonardo mobility projects, in addition to national certification where applied. This is a record of the mobility experience—usually a work placement or vocational education and training course.

The mobility experience is monitored by two partner organisations, the first in the country of origin and the second in the host country. Both partners agree on the purpose, content and

duration of the experience and a mentor is identified in the host country. The partners may be universities, schools, VET centres, companies, *etc.*

Many projects are keen to highlight and promote Europass among participants and prospective employers. In Cork College of Commerce, participants who receive Europass certification (Europass CV and mobility) are annually presented with them at a formal ceremony usually presided over by the Lord Mayor of Cork.

### 2.1.5. IMPACT ON THE EUROPEAN DIMENSION

Strengthening of the European dimension in Irish VET providers is a core objective of the Leonardo programme and this is highlighted by all projects as the greatest and most significant dimension of their participation in Leonardo in the Indecon survey (92% in Table 2.2. above) and emphasised in project reports.

The “European Dimension” describes a process where individuals and institutions move from a national to a wider reference point through exchange, cooperation and mobility between vocational education and training institutions and their staff and participants.

This is particularly important given Ireland’s relative geographic isolation in Europe, a point made by a number of project reports. It also noteworthy that Leonardo has allowed for a wider learning opportunity for participants, which has shifted their perspective of mobility to one that includes the wider EU as opposed to the historic view of mobility among many in Ireland as limited to the UK, USA, Canada and Australia.

What is clear from project reports is the high proportion of providers who now view the development of European networks as an integral, strategic and fixed part of their offering to participants and of their growth as institutions. It is highly unlikely that this could have occurred without the Leonardo programme.

#### *EU HORIZONTAL POLICIES*

In the decision of the European Union establishing the Lifelong Learning Programme<sup>17</sup> a number of “horizontal policies” of the Union were identified to which the programme was intended to contribute. These were:

(a) promoting an awareness of the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe, as well as of the need to combat racism, prejudice and xenophobia; (b) making provision for participants with special needs, and in particular by helping to promote their integration into mainstream education and vocational education and training; (c) promoting equality between men and women and contributing to combating all forms of discrimination.

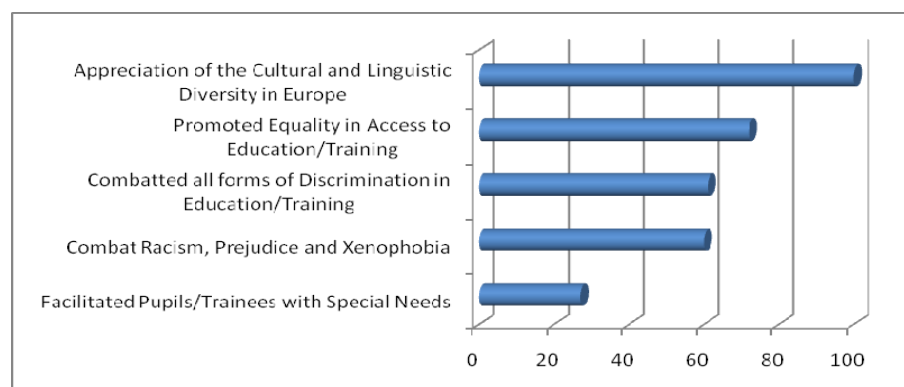
As highlighted in Table 2.4. Leonardo in Ireland is seen by promoters to have a direct impact on building awareness of European cultural and linguistic diversity within Ireland.

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<sup>17</sup> Article 12 of Decision 1720/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the European Council of 15 November 2006.



**TABLE 2.4. IMPACT OF LEONARDO ON EU HORIZONTAL POLICIES**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n20).

Respondents to the Indecon Consultants survey rated the promotion of access to vocational education and training as the second most important impact of Leonardo with almost 60% indicating that they believed that participation in the programme helped to combat educational discrimination, combat racism, prejudice and xenophobia.

### 2.1.6. IMPACT AT NATIONAL LEVEL

#### *OPPORTUNITIES NOT AVAILABLE IN IRELAND*

As already pointed out, the Indecon Evaluation highlighted the fact that the severity of the current recession has made it extremely difficult for vocational trainees to get work experience to augment their vocational education and training and skills acquisition. The situation is particularly acute in the construction and hospitality sectors.

In the construction sector the recession has actually resulted in redundancy for many apprentices who are no longer able to complete their on-the-job employer-based vocational education and training, phase 7, in Ireland. Through Leonardo, apprentices have been able to progress to the next stage of their apprenticeship and qualify for the FETAC Level 6 Advanced Craft Certificate.

Work placements in the hospitality and tourism sector on Leonardo projects have allowed beneficiaries access to work in locations from which they are excluded in Ireland. For example participants from Coláiste Íde, Dublin, were able to work at Tallinn Airport in Estonia. On this same project other participants were placed in two five-star spa treatment hotels—namely Saaremaa Spa Hotel and Spa Hotel Ruutli—and two foreign travel agencies where they were exposed to the computerised reservations system Amadeus. Access to such learning opportunities is extremely limited in Ireland.

### *OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED AND SPECIAL NEEDS PARTICIPANTS*

Leonardo plays an important part in addressing the problem of social inclusion in Ireland, a priority area for Irish Government policy, as it affords young people from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds and those at risk of being marginalized to avail of a transnational work experience placement which would otherwise not be available to them. Over 70% of projects identify this as a key part of their work.<sup>18</sup>

As the national agency for Leonardo in Ireland, Léargas has been keen to maximise the geographic spread of grantees and give an opportunity to participants from disadvantaged parts of the country. This includes areas of high unemployment and also areas of rural isolation where participants may not be in a position to find work placements. This is consistent with national policy objectives of fostering balanced regional development.

Participants from disadvantaged areas often seek or have tended to seek work experience in the construction, services and hospitality sectors and these are priority areas for many of the Irish Leonardo projects. These are traditional sectors providing high seasonal employment and work placement in Ireland which used to absorb many participants for summer jobs. The recession has hit these sectors badly in Ireland. Leonardo is providing a valuable—and in many cases the only—alternative option for participants to get work experience in these sectors.

Many of the Irish Leonardo projects specifically address equal opportunities by ensuring that participants who have **special needs** are eligible for participation.<sup>19</sup> The Teagasc project with Lundbaek Agricultural College in Denmark is a case in point. All the participants had intellectual and or physical disabilities and came from “home farms” where they worked under the close supervision of a parent or sibling. In addition all the participants were male and they had an opportunity to mix with female participants in Denmark. Shyness was evident in their approach as was their ability to communicate due to language differences. However, many began to learn how to function with a limited degree of independence as a result of their participation.

Another such example is the fact that of the twenty four participants selected for participation in an exchange in the Catalan region of Spain by Moate Business College, two had dyslexia.

Participants from Pearse College Dublin on a study visit to the Netherlands identified a number of best practices with regard to integration of immigrants, equality of access and participation in VET for participants facing difficulties for socio-economic reasons.

### *ADDED VALUE*

The mobility actions under the Leonardo programme have given rise to a number of unanticipated though welcome examples of added value to the organisations concerned and to the country as a whole.

The contacts developed with their Danish partner through Leonardo has opened the way for Teagasc to invite participants from Denmark to come to Ireland to complete their placement on Irish farms as part of their vocational education and training. Many of them at present go to the

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<sup>18</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of Lifelong Learning Programme 2010, pg 141.

<sup>19</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of Lifelong Learning Programme 2010, pg 141.

United States and to New Zealand. This will provide a new income stream for Teagasc and build new relationships between Irish and Danish farming families.

Teagasc has also identified economies that can be achieved via transnational Co.-operation with centres of excellence in Denmark. The agency spends €1 million per year on the development and publishing of learning support materials for its participants. Currently only 20% is recouped from participant fees. Some of this cost can be recouped by providing materials for Danish colleges.

Observation of a client data management system in the region of Finland by a professional from the National Centre for Guidance in Education contributed to an Irish national research study (quantitative and qualitative) on cost-effective employment/education oriented counselling.

Another guidance practitioner took a caseload model which was highlighted on her exchange and has started to introduce this into her guidance service for immediate use. One participant was impressed with the file management of participant files in a school he visited and introduced this method of record keeping into his own practice.

The initial project between Pulse College, Dublin (specializing in creative media education) and Futureworks School of Media in Manchester, UK in 2008 has led to significant ongoing collaboration on a number of projects.

The childcare sector in Ireland has benefited from overseas placements of participants under Leonardo. In 2007-09, pre-school Early Childhood Education was in a period of rapid growth and in urgent need of qualified staff. Placements were in short supply in Ireland and Leonardo provided access to a wide range of placements in well established schools and childcare facilities across Europe. This played an important role in developing qualified participants with extra experience of international childcare practices and has facilitated the development of excellent childcare provision in Ireland.

Tourism was, and remains, a key growth sector that has been a cornerstone of national policy for many years. Even before the current recession, overseas work placements in the tourism sector were seen as highly relevant for the future career of participants, whether in understanding tourists' needs, developing language skills, or being able to adapt to another environment should beneficiaries choose to continue their career abroad.

An important though unrecorded benefit of many transnational projects is the contact made and subsequent links developed with other Irish participants, trainers and vocational education and training providers. This is often facilitated by Léargas in promotion, preparatory and review sessions which are held both nationally and regionally and attract significant numbers of Irish project personnel.

### 2.1.7. SPECIFIC IMPACT ON VET PROFESSIONALS

This section deals with projects and visits in which the primary participants were VET Professionals (VETPro). The general impact on trainers and tutors is identified in Section 2.1.3. and the examples given of study visits in Section 3 are also relevant here.

A number of features emerge from a review of the project reports and European research in respect of this group especially the *Study on the impact of the Leonardo da Vinci programme on the quality of vocational education and training systems* by Werner Friedrich, Markus Korbel and Klaus Muller of WSF, for the EU Commission, 2010 (the "FKM Study").

According to the FKM study, VET institutions that participate in Leonardo mobility activities seem to be seeking or already embody a positive climate of innovation and have, or are seeking, a strategy for adding a European dimension to their educational activity. Senior managers, as well as trainers and tutors, predominantly support these efforts. The environment is described as being encouraging rather than inhibiting.

The impact of the VETPro mobilities are long term and are often in intangible or attitudinal changes within VET providers and the staff who have participated, as well as in tangible changes to methodologies and systems as referred to above in Section 2.1.4.

Changes that can be identified from a review of Irish project reports suggest that impacts have arisen in respect of:

- changes to curricula in specific existing vocational education and training courses in individual colleges
- new teaching and learning strategies that have been implemented by individual trainers/tutors
- new positive climate towards international actions and innovation in VET providers participating in Leonardo for the first time
- sustainability of long-term partnership arrangements
- piloting of new ideas and approaches discovered in exchanges and study visits that may, or may not, be later mainstreamed
- establishment of new transnational networks
- transfer of the knowledge and experiences acquired into networks existing within their institutions and external networks.

The conclusion in the FKM study is also borne out by the Irish experience, namely that VETPro mobility makes a critical contribution to innovation in the Irish vocational education and training environment.

The Academia mobility project (also referred to in Section 2.1.4.) involves a European Exchange of Guidance Counsellors which encourages the acquisition of skills ranging from personal to professional competences. The Irish partner is the National Centre for Guidance in Education (NCGE). The benefits of this extensive exchange and development process on VET Professionals are reflected in their reports:

- Acquiring first hand experience of guidance practice in the country hosting the placement – ‘I was intrigued to hear about France, Spain and the Czech Republic and how they contrast with Ireland as regards qualifications and work practices.’
- Establishment of links with guidance practitioners participating in the exchange – ‘I now have a new network of colleagues as a result of my Academia visit.’
- ‘I not only gained knowledge from the experience but also gained a greater appreciation for the Irish system. A second benefit was that of networking. I have begun the early stages of establishing an exchange programme with one particular centre in Zaragoza.’
- Personal skills of motivation, self confidence and encouragement. One beneficiary described her exchange to Iceland as ‘liberating in terms of personal development’. She had not travelled without her spouse for many years and felt this opportunity to attend a study visit with guidance peers a ‘wonderful experience’

Further examples of the impact of vocational education professionals are shown in Section 2.1.4 and Section 3.

## 2.2. SPECIFIC IMPACT OF PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships provide a framework for small-scale cooperation activities between VET organisations enabling them to cooperate on themes of mutual interest. Partners can cooperate at national, regional, local or sectoral level and both within Ireland and throughout Europe.

Of the 18 partnerships approved for funding in 2008-09 (this project measure did not exist in 2007), seven had completed final reports at the time of this study.

A number of specific **impacts** can be identified as follows:

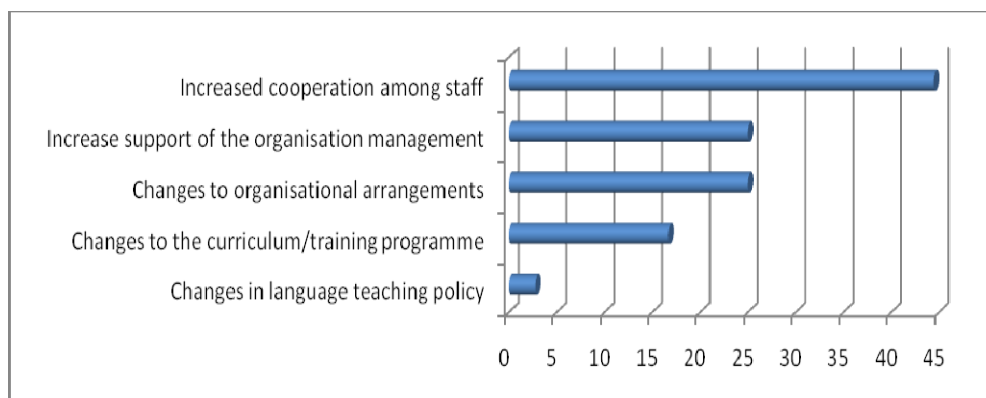
- improved work practices in local development agency
- plans to develop an Institute for Creative Enterprises (similar to a best practice model experienced on the Partnership) in Meath
- enhanced visibility and knowledge of the Lifelong Learning Programme among SMEs in Border region.

In addition a far greater number of **outputs** have been delivered by the partnerships:

- Best Practice Guide for SME Training
- best practice transferred to Ireland from Germany in developing an Institute for Creative Enterprises
- Tips and Tricks Booklet for Work Placements
- Best Practice Framework for Feedback on Career Guidance Assessments including best practice guidelines for the delivery of feedback, and design for a one-day workshop for practitioners on best practice in feedback
- developing learning, educational and development of a vocational education and training programme for career guidance practitioners
- development of a VET programme to provide music in healthcare settings, transferred to Ireland from France
- European Toolkit of vocational education and training materials for professionals involved in delivering Supported Employment services to people with disabilities and potential employers
- hosting a Transnational Conference on “The Challenge of European Mobility—Know-how Transfer”
- hosting a Transnational Conference on “Equality and Diversity in Healthcare,” leading to a “Declaration on Challenges, Trends and Solutions in Diversity Management in Healthcare in Europe,” and the development of quality criteria relating to diversity and equality in the healthcare work environment.

In Table 2.5., the results of the analysis of project reports is tabulated to represent the responses of projects stated on the Common European Quality Assessment Form. It shows that by far the greatest impact of Partnerships was on increased cooperation among staff.

**TABLE 2.5. IMPACT OF LEONARDO PARTNERSHIPS ON PROMOTING ORGANISATIONS**



Source: Analysis of Leonardo EU Standard Final Report Forms (n7).

## 2.3. CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO LEONARDO DA VINCI

### ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT

The conclusion of this study is entirely consistent with the conclusions of the Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland (2010) as it relates to Leonardo.<sup>20</sup> Items 1 and 2 below repeat the Indecon conclusions while the impacts listed in item 3 arise from the current study.

1. Leonardo is **highly relevant** to Vocational Education and Training in Ireland. It is a unique initiative that does not complete with other National policies or initiatives.

2. The relevance of Leonardo stems from the fact that the projects are built mainly around the **needs of participants**.

3. Particular **impacts** include:

- Personal, professional and social impact on the participants, including:
  - development of language, ICT and teamwork skills
  - enhanced subsequent academic performance and increased motivation to learn
  - increased intercultural awareness.
- Improved access of participants to the labour market, including:
  - enhanced job hunting skills and tools
  - greater clarity around career choices
  - openness to seeking jobs in other EU countries.
- Impact on VET providers in Ireland include:
  - exposure to practices in other countries
  - the addition, or strengthening, of a European dimension to their activities
  - improvements in vocational education and training methods, systems and processes

<sup>20</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, p6.

- higher motivation of trainers
- a ‘multiplier effect’ where participants encourage others to pursue mobility which creates a continuing demand and an impetus for new mobility activities.
- Impact on trainers and tutors include:
  - enhanced motivation and inspiration at a personal level
  - new information about curricula, teaching methods and learning materials at a professional level.
- Impact on VET systems and practices include:
  - exchange of best practice
  - introduction of new know-how
  - insights into other EU vocational education and training systems
  - improvements in education and vocational education and training processes and methods.
- Impact on the European dimension in Irish VET:
  - a high proportion of VET providers now view the development of European networks as an integral, strategic and fixed part of their offering to learners and of their growth as institutions; it is highly unlikely that this could have occurred without the Leonardo programme
  - promoters report that Leonardo has had a direct impact on building awareness of European cultural and linguistic diversity within Ireland.
- Impacts at national Level include:
  - in the current recession Leonardo is providing a valuable, and in many cases the only, alternative option for participants to get work experience in the construction, services and hospitality sectors
  - work placements in the hospitality sector on Leonardo projects have allowed beneficiaries access to work in locations from which they are excluded in Ireland
  - participants from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds and those at risk of being marginalized are encouraged to avail of a transnational work experience placements which would otherwise not be available to them
  - many of the Irish Leonardo projects specifically address equal opportunities by ensuring that participants who have **special needs** are eligible for participation
  - the programme has given rise to a number of unanticipated examples of added value to the organizations concerned including additional commercial and revenue-generating opportunities.
- Impact of Leonardo Partnerships (Section 2.2) include:
  - improved work practices in a local economic development agency
  - plans to develop an Institute for Creative Enterprises (similar to a best practice model experienced on the Partnership) in Meath
  - enhanced visibility and knowledge of the Lifelong Learning Programme among SMEs in Border region.

### *FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE IMPACT OF LEONARDO*

Which factors contributed to the varying degrees of impact?

1. The nature and scope for job placement and overseas work experience provided by Leonardo (some of which is not available in Ireland) is highly valued by VET providers and participants alike.
2. At a time of severe economic recession, the opportunities provided by Leonardo for work-based vocational education and training are partly filling a serious gap in the Irish VET system.
3. Participants are alert to the significant advantages accruing from overseas work experience in terms of securing employment in Ireland and elsewhere.
4. VET providers have highlighted this factor which in turn has strengthened their commitment to a strong European dimension in the programme.
5. The opportunities that the programme affords to disadvantaged and special needs participants has lent it respect and credibility and heightened its attractiveness with all stakeholders in the Irish VET system.
6. The transfer of best practice—through study visits in particular—has led to important innovations in vocational education and training in Ireland and further enhanced the commitment of policy makers to the programme.
7. The wide network of stakeholders in Leonardo in Ireland, allied to their extended European network, has generated a high level of motivation for the programme, a deepening sense of ownership in its actions and a powerful and sustained commitment to its aims and objectives.



### 3. STUDY VISITS

Study Visits for Education and Vocational Training Specialists and Decision makers form part of the Transversal Programme of the EU Lifelong Learning Programme 2007-2013 (LLP). The Transversal Programme crosses the four pillars (Comenius, Grundtvig, Leonardo Da Vinci and Erasmus) of the LLP. The Transversal Programme consists of four Key Activities and the Study Visits Programme falls under Key Activity 1 (KA1) which is Policy Cooperation and Innovation in Lifelong Learning.

The objective of the Study Visits Programme is to support policy development and cooperation, notably in the context of the Lisbon, Bologna and Copenhagen processes and their successors, and the Education and Training 2010 work programme. The thematic structure has recently been revised to ensure a closer link between the programme and the priorities of the updated strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training, 'ET 2020' (launched in 2009). Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2008, the programme has been managed at European level by CEDEFOP (the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training) on behalf of the European Commission.

The Study Visits Programme addresses those who are responsible for the development of education and vocational training policies at local, regional and national levels. The priorities of the Study Visits Programme are based on the priorities of education and training policy at both European and national levels within participating countries.

Participants generally fit in one or more of the following categories:

- company training managers
- directors of education and vocational training institutions, centres or providers
- directors of guidance centres
- directors of validation or accreditation centres
- educational and vocational training inspectors
- head teachers, teacher trainers
- heads of departments
- human resource managers
- owners/managers of Small to Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs)
- pedagogical or guidance advisers
- researchers

and representatives of

- chamber of commerce/industry/crafts
- education and training networks and associations
- educational services, labour offices or guidance centres
- employers' organisations
- local, regional and national authorities
- trade unions

Study Visits provide a forum for discussion, exchange and mutual learning on themes of common interest at EU level, linking to the priorities of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. The programme provides a forum for discussion,

exchange and mutual learning on themes of common interest at EU level and serves the following objectives:

- enabling those exercising important responsibilities at local, regional or national levels to better understand specific aspects of education and vocational training policies and themes of common interest in other countries
- continuing exchange of advice, ideas and information between all those who take part in the programme
- enriching the flow of information between the participating countries and at European level, including the policy making level.

An Impact Report of the Study Visits Programme, undertaken by Léargas in 2010<sup>21</sup> showed that the top four themes chosen by Irish participants from 2008 to 2010 were:

- equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups
- developing entrepreneurship
- language teaching and learning
- quality assurance in schools and training institutions.

These reflect themes that are high on the agenda at national level, a fact that is further reflected in the participants' final reports where 65% of respondents state that they chose their visits as a result of national policy developments.

According to the Léargas Impact report, participants' personal objectives for taking part in the programme were to:

- increase their understanding of the topic
- explore ideas that may impact on policy
- exchange and gain best practice
- up-skill in a topic
- re-evaluate their own practice.

#### *Continuous Professional Development*

With regard to the impact of the programme on the continuous professional development (CPD) of participants, 100% of participants report a positive impact. The impact includes knowledge gained as well as invaluable soft skills such as communication skills, interpersonal skills and the ability to critically reflect on their own practice.

98% of respondents gained increased understanding of policy areas in other European countries and increased understanding of national and/or European policy. In addition, 95% gained an understanding of practices in other European countries as well as networking with other European colleagues.

#### *Transferability*

The Léargas Impact Report examined the top four thematic areas in detail and the ideas and initiatives that could be transferred to participants' own work and organisation:

- 94% of all participants reported a positive impact of the programme on their own work and organisation

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<sup>21</sup> This report is available on the Léargas website [http://www.leargas.ie/media/StudyVisitsIreland\\_2008-10\\_ImpactReport.pdf](http://www.leargas.ie/media/StudyVisitsIreland_2008-10_ImpactReport.pdf)

- 89% indicated that they will implement methodologies, projects and examples of good practice into their own work
- at final report stage, a month after the visit, 42% of participants had begun to implement aspects of their visit into their organisations.

The implementation of ideas and methodologies demonstrates the sustainable and transferable aspects of the programme for participants. Common ideas found through all four thematic areas in the Léargas Impact Report are the need for a holistic approach to all problems, collaborative learning approaches, student involvement, partnerships in education and training and evaluation plans. These topics are a high priority at European level and are reflected in the descriptions of the themes of the visits.

#### *Networking and Dissemination*

98% of participants intend to keep in contact with other participants and 63% of participants have set up a web platform to keep in contact. This shows that networking with European colleagues is working well and further strengthened by the fact that 78% of participants indicated the possibility of participating in another Lifelong Learning Programme opportunity as a result of a study visit. All participants share information within their own organisation and 92% of participants have shared the information gained outside their own organisations at regional and national levels

Impacts identified in this review of project final reports include:

- One participant from Athenry Development Company took part in 'Education for Sustainability through Organic Food and Farming' with a view to introducing a new course to address the unemployment needs in the local community. As a result of the visit the participant is now developing modules on horticulture and education for sustainability taking on board some of the methodologies used in the host countries and some of the participating countries. All partners on this study decided that they will apply for a Lifelong Learning project on developing education for sustainable development potential hidden in organic farms. The outputs from the project could be used by both farmers and agriculture advisors and by teachers and educators.
- A participant from Donegal County Enterprise Board participated in "Entrepreneurship Across Borders" in Fauske, Norway which looked at the Norwegian people's determination to be at the forefront of enterprising education. Examples of best practice in teaching entrepreneurial skills are being incorporated in Donegal County Enterprise Board's 'Lets Do Business' Enterprise Education programme.
- A Support Officer with the FESS (Further Education Support Service) participated in a Study Visit on Intercultural Education and Social Inclusion at the New European House, in Taranto, Italy. The aim was to complement a resource development process that FESS had undertaken to support Further Education Providers in implementing Equality requirements for Quality Assurance. Insights from the visit will inform future activities of FESS in areas such as Language Integration, Social Inclusion and Special Education.

## CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO STUDY VISITS

As reported by the Léargas Impact Report referred to above, the Study Visits programme is meeting its objectives in Ireland, particularly in the areas of increased understanding of specific aspects of the education and training systems and policies, the exchange of information and

networking opportunities. Participants have made contacts for further research or possible partnerships for future projects. The programme has allowed for reflection and critical analysis of participants' own organisations and areas of work. Participants are sharing the information gained on their visits and transfer aspects back to their own organisations. This is also reflected in the satisfaction levels of participants in the programme.

### *FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE IMPACT OF STUDY VISITS*

Which factors contributed to the varying degrees of impact?

1. The opportunities that Study Visits provide to the Irish education and training sector for cross-European learning are highly attractive and meaningful and make a real contribution to the growth of individual providers and the sector in Ireland as a whole.
2. Participants report high levels of satisfaction with the targeted promotion efforts and support of Léargas.

## 4. COMENIUS

The Comenius programme supports young people and educational staff to better understand European cultures, languages and values. Comenius activities also help young people to acquire the basic life skills and competencies necessary for personal development, future employment and active citizenship. Comenius focuses on the first phase of education: nursery, primary and post-primary schooling, including technical and vocational education.

Comenius aims to:

- improve and increase the mobility of pupils and educational staff across the EU
- enhance and increase partnerships between schools in different EU Member States
- encourage language learning, innovative ICT-based content, services and better teaching techniques and practices
- enhance the quality and European dimension of teacher training
- improve pedagogical approaches and school management.

Priorities of the programme are:

- motivation for learning and learning-to-learn skills
- key competences: improving language learning; greater literacy; making science more attractive; supporting entrepreneurship; and reinforcing creativity and innovation
- digital educational content and services
- school management
- addressing socio-economic disadvantages and reducing early school leaving
- participation in sports
- teaching diverse groups of pupils
- early and pre-primary learning.

### *ANTICIPATED IMPACTS*

Arising from these objectives it is possible to suggest some key impacts and outputs which they imply. It should be noted that the European Commission does not specify impacts as such but defines them as the effect that the programme has on systems and practices, and on EU policies.

Impacts

1. Improved teaching techniques and practices.
2. Improved quality of teacher training.
3. Enhanced European dimension in teacher training.
4. Improved pedagogical approaches and improved school management.
5. Reduced levels of socio-economic disadvantage among pupils.
6. Reduced rates of early school leaving.

Outputs

1. Increased numbers of pupils and teachers participating in mobility.
2. Improved quality and number of partnerships between schools in EU member states.
3. Improved modern foreign language learning and innovative ICT-based content and services.
4. Improved key competencies of pupils in languages, literacy; take-up of science subjects; entrepreneurship; and creativity and innovation.
5. Improved numbers participating in sports.

6. Teaching diverse groups of pupils.
7. Early and pre-primary learning.

The Comenius actions covered by this study are Comenius School Partnerships, Comenius Assistantships, Comenius In-service Training and eTwinning. Not included in the report are: Comenius Contact Seminars, Comenius Preparatory Visits, Comenius Networks, Comenius Multilateral Projects and Comenius Regio Partnerships. The impacts are examined under two general headings – Impact of Comenius Project Actions and Comenius Mobility for Professional Development.

## 4.1. IMPACT OF COMENIUS ACTIONS

Comenius Actions enable Irish schools to create partnerships with other European schools to work on projects which are pedagogically relevant and encourage intercultural exchange. Partnerships help students and teachers to acquire and improve skills not only in the subject area on which the project is focussed, but also in teamwork, social relations, planning and undertaking project activities and using information and communication technologies.

A range of important and tangible impacts emerge from the review of Comenius reports undertaken for this study and the Indecon Consultants report<sup>22</sup> regarding the effectiveness of Comenius during 2007-2009. We will review these under thematic headings as they relate to pupils, teachers, schools and the community.

### INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

Intercultural awareness involves “the development of greater openness towards other cultures, the appreciation of cultural diversity, the overcoming of cultural bias and of ethno-centricism. Intercultural learning is necessary in situations where people of different cultural backgrounds and languages live together.”<sup>23</sup>

The development of intercultural learning takes place if a person seeks to understand the orientation system of perception, thinking, valuing and acting of another culture by interacting with its members.<sup>24</sup> The objective of helping young people and educational staff to better understand European cultures, languages and values—intercultural awareness—is central to all Comenius projects.

This aim was expressed succinctly in a Comenius partnership project report: “The main outcome of our project is that teachers and pupils have learned about cultural differences and similarities between our own country and that of another EU country.” This awareness extends beyond pupils and teachers involved to the entire school, to parents and the community. The potential long-term benefits for pupils (and young children especially) of such direct and positive exposure to different cultures may be very significant.

In a 2008 study of the impact of Comenius School Partnerships on Multilingualism in Irish Primary schools, Lisa Fox reported that most of the respondents (89.7%) indicated a high

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<sup>22</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, Annex Table 124.

<sup>23</sup> Fennes & Hapgood Cassell (1997, p. 37) cited by Fox, Lisa (2008). *The Impact of Comenius Assistantships on Irish Host Institutions*. Dublin: Unpublished Research Study.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander Thomas cited by Fox *ibid*.

impact in terms of cultural awareness. Her report gathered useful qualitative data to support this finding, including the following statements:

- cultural differences were explored and highlighted in a very positive way
- through sharing stories, folklore and traditions, through viewing photographs and school made DVDs and through meeting teachers from other countries, the children have developed a growing understanding and curiosity about other European cultures
- children listened with interest to the teachers from Europe and questioned them about their food, their schools and their countries
- with regard to customs and traditions surrounding such areas as religion, children learn how customs vary from country to country around Christmas, for example, and how each country celebrates it
- great benefits – especially when comparing their cultural folk tales, environment, school system, home lives, diets etc with ours.
- a major theme and objective of our project is developing an understanding of our own culture and the cultures of our partner countries. We have used myths and legends to help us understand and respect these cultures.
- our pupils come from a very disadvantaged background and may not otherwise have the opportunity to learn about the culture in other countries and how this is similar/different to their own culture; they can experience language, food, basic phrases, games, songs, poems, stories, and traditions in a very child friendly manner. As a result, the foundations have been laid for future learning, cultural appreciation and tolerance of different attitudes.
- most definitely, children are now more interested in the cultures of others and teachers, especially those who have availed of mobilities, are able to enlighten children far more about the language and cultures of other countries. It is fair to say that teachers have returned from these mobilities with a completely changed attitude to the countries visited.
- the more we look at our differences the more we see our similarities.

In survey responses and commentary,<sup>25</sup> the unique challenge of development a Euro-centric intercultural awareness for Ireland was highlighted. One partnership reported that “Irish people do not have a real sense of being European. English and American influences dominate most aspects of our lives. This project has given us the opportunity to show that here is a European alternative and has given us the chance to look inwardly at our own cultural heritage.”

A project report expands on this theme: “There are no words that could adequately describe the richness of the experience for everyone (parents, teachers, pupils, local community) when the school has the advantage of having children from many cultures and nationalities in the school. Everybody’s life experience is enhanced, broadened and challenged by this dynamic and it has been our experience that everyone involved has benefited enormously – even just around an experience of discovering that everyone has the same concerns in life etc. a greater understanding of world events and gaining a lot more tolerance for people who are different from themselves.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Fox, Lisa (2008). *The Impact of Comenius School Partnerships on Multilingualism in Irish Primary Schools*. Dublin: Unpublished Dissertation.

<sup>26</sup> Fox (2008), *ibid*.

Some specific project examples that illustrate the impact of Comenius actions on intercultural awareness among pupils, teachers and schools include:

- See You/C.U. Cultural Understanding in a Europe of Migration and Inter-Cultural Relationships (Loreto College, Cavan)
- BABEL: to tell, to share our cultural and linguistic diversity (Scoil Chaitriona Cailini, Dublin)
- Let's Eat where the Cultures Meet, (Scoil Íde, Dublin)
- Food: In Picture, Word, Song and Story (Scoil Chaitríona Infants, Dublin)
- Something Old, Something New: a cross-cultural study of new and traditional values of festivals and celebrations in Europe (Arklow Community College)
- Common Heritage of Individual Regions (Saint Mochulla's National School, Co. Clare)
- Keep and Live Your Culture! (Gaelscoil an Ghoirt Álainn, Cork)
- Cultural Identity through Dance and Music (Gaelscoil Chloch na gCoillte, Co. Cork)
- as a result of their participation in Comenius, Castleknock College has included verses from the Koran within their acts of (Christian) worship
- St Peter Apostle Senior National School in Neilstown, Clondalkin, Dublin, formed partnerships with two schools from Wales and one from Denmark. The idea of a 'computer-based project' seemed daunting at first, but teachers and pupils alike undertook the challenge with great vigour. As the Co-ordinating school, St Peter Apostle hosted the first mobility meeting. In the preparatory weeks leading up to the visit, the school became a hive of activity. The school corridors were decked out from floor to ceiling in our students' beautiful project work on various cultural, historical and geographical themes associated with Ireland and the partner countries. The guests visited each of the 13 classes and were present for an International Day which consisted of a celebration of Irish culture through song and dance, a feast of foods from around the world and also tributes to the numerous nationalities present in the Irish school. The event concluded with the swapping of respective mascots. 'Dai the Dragon' from Wales came to Ireland. 'Reading Twixter' and 'Freddie the Frog' from Denmark ventured to the two rural schools in Wales and finally the Irish mascot 'Peadar the Leprechaun' prepared for his trip to Denmark. Each mascot made regular entries to an 'e-diary' to tell all at home of their adventures. During the year the pupils were also involved in various mini-projects which were a great way of keeping the project focused. The Irish school attested to the powerful impact of Comenius. "The Comenius experience has helped our pupils learn about the cultures in our partner countries and simultaneously instilled a sense of pride in our own uniqueness and culture on the European stage".
- The Keys to the Past Open Doors to the Future was the theme of the partnership of Star of the Sea Boys National School, Sandymount, Dublin 4. Its impact on pupils is aptly expressed in this speech written by an 11 year old participant:

"So we ask the question – Why is the Comenius Project important for us? It gives us a great opportunity to become aware of different countries and cultures, it opens our eyes to new ways of living and thinking and allows us to become much more tolerant and appreciative of other peoples' customs and beliefs. We can find out new things about other countries in the EU and see the similarities of how they live as well. We can find out about the lives of children across Europe – what they do in their spare time, their hobbies, interests and pastimes. This week having had our Turkish and German visitors I for one have realised that there is very little difference between us all. I think it is an honour for this school to participate in the Project. We have learned to communicate regardless of language, appreciate and respect regardless of custom and belief. We hope that the friends we have made this week will remain with us long into the future."



- A case of the specific impact on teachers comes from the experience of Patrick Ryan who was doing his Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration and decided to explore a different way of life by taking up a Comenius Assistantship in a General Secondary School in the Czech Republic. Having virtually no teaching experience on his departure from Ireland, everything was a learning curve. He was both teacher and student throughout his assistantship. Patrick was involved in all areas of school life. Not only did he appropriately respond to the academic needs of the students, but he also became involved in other aspects of school life. The Irish dimension was stressed throughout Patrick's time in the Czech Republic. The 7th class staged their own interpretation of the Irish dance show 'Riverdance' and Irish games (*e.g.* hurling) were a great novelty amongst the students. Exposing the students to an accent and dialect which was quite different to that to which they were accustomed left a lasting impression on the pupils. The assistantship had a huge impact on Patrick. His knowledge of European culture, history and traditions was greatly broadened by living in a county quite different to his own. Any sense of scepticism was diminished by an overwhelming sense of wonder and enjoyment of living in a place that embodied the notion of a European melting pot. The Comenius Assistantship had such a profound effect on both Patrick and the host school, that he was invited to return to teach at the school upon completion of his degree.

## MULTILINGUALISM

Intercultural awareness and language learning go hand in hand. Introducing pupils and teachers to new languages can enhance not only their linguistic skills but also their intercultural capacities. The importance of language learning and language awareness as objectives of the Comenius programme stems from a broader, overarching attitude towards language learning in Europe. In 2006, the European Parliament and Council cited language learning as a key competence for lifelong learning. Pupils and teachers grew in confidence and competence through speaking modern European languages and interacting with native speakers.

In most Comenius partnerships, language awareness is often a beneficial bonus or by-product of the project rather than a specific objective. Pupils and teachers become more aware of languages when they hear visiting participants speaking. Also, some Christmas/Easter/Greeting cards exchanged are written in a number of different languages. Foreign languages spoken by visiting teachers can be a source of great interest especially among young pupils. All projects report that during mobilities and communication with other students Irish students realised the importance of being able to communicate in various languages.

Participants report an appreciation of the broad use of English and an admiration for the competence of the Norwegians, Finns and Germans in their language capacity. Of particular relevance in Ireland is the impact that mobility has on appreciation for Irish and an enhanced motivation to learn and use it among pupils. They enjoy speaking some Irish and some schools use their projects to work bilingually in English and Irish creating a greater awareness and appreciation for the Irish language. This fosters an interest in the language and therefore an incentive to learn.

While language awareness has improved, actual new language acquisition is harder to quantify. In most cases short-term language acquisitions are made by staff visiting participating countries and a few phrases are learnt by pupils from teachers coming to visit this country. Through mobilities, participating teachers are increasingly aware of the need to upskill and develop linguistic competence, not only for their own development but also to benefit their pupils. However, considering that the majority of mobilities to partner countries are carried out by

school staff they are well placed to interact in the host language as compared to pupils who generally engage in classroom project activities and rarely undertake mobilities.

Some teachers have taken lessons in the language of the countries they have visited during their projects. Teachers who participate in transnational meetings and teacher exchanges have undoubtedly acquired additional language skills. Often the Comenius programme encourages them to re-engage with languages learned during their own schooling.

There are some notable examples of creative solutions when language fails—the use of sign language is not uncommon.

Learning mobilities are two-way streets and most transnational teachers are keen to learn or improve their capacity in English. In addition since English is usually the main project language there is less incentive for Irish participants to learn other languages and a greater incentive on non-Irish participants to use English. In many European schools English is seen as an important language for global communication and teachers and pupils actively want to learn English so as to be able to communicate in that language.

In her 2008 study Lisa Fox<sup>27</sup> showed that English is clearly the *lingua franca* for almost all Comenius School Partnerships undertaken by Irish schools. One partnership report expressed the case succinctly: “As English was the communication language, there wasn't a strong incentive to learn other languages. However some phrases were taught and learned and used on the programme.”

In her study Fox broached the notion of the negative effects of an over-reliance on English as a *lingua franca* but concluded that the outlook is positive. Her study identified a “burgeoning awareness of the importance of multilingualism beyond the scope of the Comenius School Partnerships. As a result of taking part in mobilities, teachers and school managers are paying particular attention to the need to amplify the linguistic skills base of the pupils and to increase awareness in the wider school community, particularly with regard to the languages of newcomer children. Overall, the findings are conclusively optimistic. School staff and pupils seem to be engaging reasonably well with multilingual aspects of their projects and, despite the lack of linguistic infrastructure at national level, participants generally acknowledge the positive impact of Comenius School Partnerships on multilingualism in Irish primary schools.”

A good example is Gurraneasig National School in County Cork where participation in the Comenius programme prompted them to begin Spanish classes in junior infants because of the natural ability young children have to absorb language.

One area where language awareness is clearly strengthened and enhanced is by the presence of a Comenius Assistant in the host institution. Communication in foreign languages and communication in the mother tongue are key areas where the Assistants have a direct and immediate impact on students and staff. One report concluded that “*Comenius assistants provide living language learning opportunities especially in oral and aural areas. Their input into cultural aspects of language learning is invaluable. They may be the only real encounter in the target language for some learners.*”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Fox, Lisa (2008). The Impact of Comenius School Partnerships on Multilingualism in Irish Primary Schools. Dublin: Unpublished Dissertation

<sup>28</sup> Fox, Lisa (2008). The Impact of Comenius Assistantships on Irish Host Institutions. Dublin: Unpublished Research Study.

## LIFE SKILLS

The range of new skills which pupils learn as part of Comenius actions is quite extensive as is the opportunity to promote and use special talents. The Indecon Economic Consultants report<sup>29</sup> regarding the effectiveness of Comenius during 2007-2009, showed the main impact on pupils to have been in respect of enhanced life skills in five areas (Table 4.1):

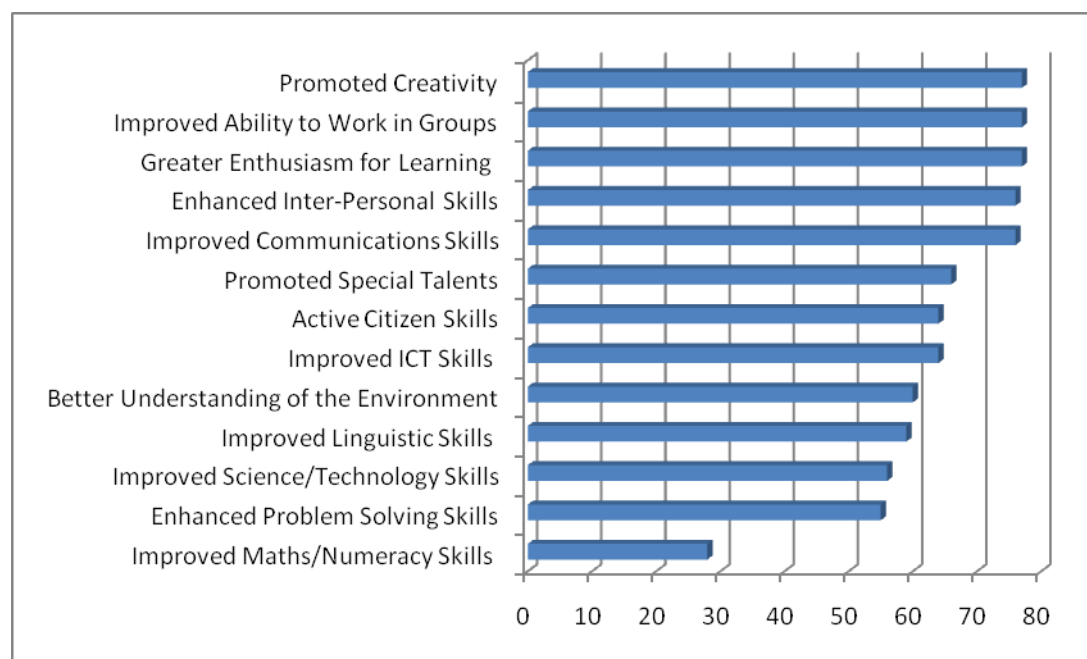
- promotion of creativity
- greater enthusiasm for learning
- improved communications skills
- enhanced inter-personal skills
- improved ability to work in groups.

It is evident that all aspects of a partnership are beneficial for pupils from a range of perspectives, such as: participating in advance preparation; research into the other partner countries and regions; travelling, hosting, meeting and interacting in a new cultural setting; hosting others in their own area; communicating with peers and adults; internet communications; making new friends; and recording and celebrating the success of the partnership. For those who travel abroad as part of a Comenius schools partnership the impact on their personal development of such a potentially life-changing experience is likely to be significant.

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<sup>29</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, Annex Table 124.

TABLE 4.1. IMPACT OF COMENIUS ON PUPILS



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n120).

We will explore the key skill areas in some further detail with illustrative examples:

**ICT skills** were enhanced as pupils used computers to complete project tasks and engage in a range of internet-related activities, such as:

- how to post information to a web-site
- design and layout and prepare content for websites
- contribute to and set up a blog
- use Skype for conference calling
- set up Gmail groups.

St Joseph's Centre for the Visually Impaired, Dublin 9, developed a project specifically around using ICT as a communication tool for learners with multiple disabilities and a visual impairment (MDVI).

St. Brendan's National School, Newmarket, Co. Kilkenny--a small and isolated school--used collaborative blogs, mp3 recordings, *etc.* At the beginning the teacher recorded the pupils singing a Christmas carol using Audacity and uploaded the mp3 file on to a collaborative blog called "Carolling in Europe", while other schools in Europe did the same. They also researched traditions and customs about Christmas in their country and uploaded them to the blog.

Students learned how to do online research into the partner countries and regions and this created a new focus. One school noticed a marked decrease in the use of computer games as pupils migrated to internet searches, online social networking and email communication.

Pupils were engaged in a wide range of **multimedia skills** including, digital photography, video, photostory for video, help with filming, editing, presenting and producing DVDs and Multimedia presentations. Scoil an Cheathrair Alainn, Dublin 15, focused on Digital Story Telling and Ard

Scoil Mhiure, FCJ Bruff, Co. Limerick, engaged pupils in use of Podcasting for educational purposes.

**Performance skills** were enhanced through music, poetry and dance as part of presenting their own culture to their counterparts. Pupils become more self-confident in making presentations before large groups of people. They learned how to focus on topics and present ideas clearly.

An example of the use of **organisational skills** is found in pupils of St Aidan's Community College, Dublin Hill, Cork, planned and implemented a whole set of activities for the seven evenings the visitors spent with the school. This was completely without the involvement of teachers and included making contact with cinemas, bowling alleys, bus companies, etc.

Pupils gained **increased motivation** through working in project tasks and in preparing for overseas visits. The fact that the work which they produced in the pre-project phase and during the overseas visits would be seen and discussed by children in partner schools had a very positive effect on confidence and motivation.

The information the pupils were receiving was coming from other children and this impacted very positively on their learning. "When learning contexts are meaningful for students, positive attitudes result, work is completed with energy and enthusiasm, and this has a lasting effect on pupils' attitudes to school and education." Denis Lynch, Principal, Ovens NS, Co. Cork.

Every child in St. Baithin's National School, St. Johnston, Co. Donegal, was given a special role during the partners' Irish visit and teachers and parents noted the positive impact this had on the children's **self-confidence and social skills**.

Staying with host families on partner visits and the development of friendships in partner schools played a useful role in building the pupils' **self-reliance**. Ovens National School, Cork made this the theme of its partnership: "Good behaviour- a rainbow that colours our life." Claregalway National School, Co. Galway focused their project specifically on pupils developing imagination, responsibility, respect and community.

Going to Work in Europe was the theme of a project by Coláiste Cholmcille, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. The objective was to **prepare students for work** in different European countries, to compare local cultures, economies and employment opportunities and to develop a European dictionary. Pupil mobility was a transformative aspect of this project with visiting students to Ireland gaining work experience in hotels and kindergartens in Ireland as well as attending classes with their Irish counterparts. Irish students explored myriad apprenticeship training opportunities during their visit to Germany. Home hosting of students proved to be very beneficial and it increased the intercultural and linguistic awareness of both the students and local communities. As a result of participating in this project, the students were able to compile Career Portfolios with a distinct European dimension

Traditionally, **learning mathematics** does not have the most alluring image. However, St. Flannan's National School, Co. Clare formed a partnership with four other countries with one aim: to make maths fun. During the first year, each school held a 'Shopping Day' to show pupils the need for mathematical competence beyond the classroom. Shopping 'stations' were set up in the school and children could earn money for each task completed. They could then use the money collected to pay for various educational games. A mathematical 'marathon' was held and the use of brainteasers and problem-solving tasks ensured a whole school approached that involved all students, including special needs pupils. The evaluation noted a discernable

increase in motivation and interest in learning maths among pupils. So too, was a renewed appreciation and enthusiasm amongst staff in cooperative teaching methods involving innovative materials.

Pupils of Moneystown National School, Roundwood, Co. Wicklow were encouraged to use **teamwork and problem-solving skills** by producing investigation project boxes (materials and instructions to carry out an investigation) within a design and technology context. Activities within the boxes were taken from a range of European cultures. Pupils studied how a Dutch barrel organ works and learned to compose tunes in a unique way. Finnish pupils made their own instruments: an ocarina from a small plastic ball, pan pipes made from plastic tubing and a stringed instrument using a crisp tube box and a stick.

## CREATIVITY

The promotion of creativity is seen by some schools as the most important impact for their pupils. This is reflected in the range of partnerships that chose this as the theme of their project. Scoil Mhuire Banríon, Cork made creativity the focus of their partnership: "Improving creativity and social competence through games." Rathduane National School, Co. Kerry, developed a project around Communicating Cultural Creativity. St Colman's Boys National School, Cork, focused on Learning through drama, sport and music while Gaelscoil Chloch na gCoillte, Clonakilty, Co. Cork, had a similar theme to their partnership: Cultural Identity through Dance and Music. The Mater Dei Primary School in Dublin 8 organised a partnership around Arts and Creativity in European Schools.

## SPORT

A number of partnerships were specifically concerned to promote the involvement of pupils in sporting activities. Gaelscoil Bharra, Dublin, identified sport as the International Language. Scoil Iósaif Naofa, Galway, combined Sport, Physical Education, Environment and Cultural Heritage in their project. Gaelcholáiste na Mara in Wicklow engaged pupils around achieving a sustainable lifestyle through sport and environmental awareness, while Ballinode Community College, Co. Sligo focused on the "Games Connection - Learning to Play and Playing to Learn." Using sport and language learning to develop intercultural competence and promote intercultural dialogue was the aim of a bilateral partnership organised by Scoil Uí Mhuiri, Co. Louth. A number of pupils who took part in mobilities were only able to do so as a result of Comenius funding.

## ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

A major feature of Irish Comenius schools partnerships is the active promotion of environmental awareness. Among the issues explored are: Effects of Climate change on our regions, the Influence of Local Environment on Food Culture, and "RRR Reduce-Reuse-Recycle to become EEE Economical-Environmental-Efficient" the project of Deansrath Community College, Dublin.

There are numerous cases of best practice and high impact among projects including the following:

- students at Gaelcholáiste na Mara, An tInbhear Mór, became involved in the Green Schools committee and achieved a Green Flag for the school as part of their project.
- pupils from St Columba's Girls National School with Facilities for Deaf Children in Douglas, Co. Cork, became involved in assessing local water quality.
- the aim of the partnership Euro Plant Project - Plants in Our Lives, Mary Immaculate Secondary School, Co. Clare was to make students more aware of the environment

around them and to highlight the importance of plants in the lives of students in the partner countries. The Comenius project in this school formed the basis for Young Scientist competition award, winning entries in both Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

- in their project “Learning Through the Senses,” St. Saviour's National School, Co. Waterford used the outdoor environment to facilitate learning. Through this mechanism language skills were enhanced, curricular competencies were delivered, and value, respect and tolerance were fostered. Interestingly, from the Irish perspective, this project incorporated an ‘Early Start’ group of pupils (aged three and up). This age group is significantly underrepresented in Irish Comenius School Partnerships as formal education does not usually start before the age of four to five. Whole-school involvement was of paramount importance to the project group with 28 Irish pupils with special needs being involved.
- in “Fuel for Future”, Belvedere College SJ, Dublin 1, aimed to raise the awareness of the importance of water. Eleven working groups were set up in the partnership to incorporate the theme in all curricular areas. Each working group consisted of teacher and pupils working together. These groups included curricular areas such as: sports, biology, history, civics, geography, fine arts, economics etc. Staff, parents and local authorities were very impressed with the impact that this project had on the pupils of the school. As a result of their participation, pupils enjoyed an increase in their self-confidence, their linguistic and ICT skills improved and their intercultural awareness was heightened..

## SOCIAL EXCLUSION

Many pupils in Comenius partnerships come from designated socio-economically disadvantaged areas and areas of rural disadvantage. For those who travel abroad as part of their partnership activity, the experience can have important life enhancing benefits. As one teacher put it: “Students from areas like ours tend only to visit holiday resorts and seldom visit cities or towns in other countries where real life can be experienced. Comenius affords this opportunity.”

While the impact of Comenius on the integration of pupils from other countries/ethnic backgrounds is directly experienced in about one third of projects, a further quarter of projects do not report this impact.<sup>30</sup> Schools report that they used the opportunity of Comenius projects to involve foreign national students in projects relevant to their country of origin. One reported that “Classes with international pupils felt special, important and integrated during those times.” Another report says that “Children are being made aware of our ongoing exchanges and are involved in them themselves. Any awareness of difference, ethnicity *etc.* which is portrayed in a positive light has a positive impact on the integration of pupils from diverse backgrounds.”

Almost 600 pupils and 14 teachers from five participating schools were involved in a project titled “Young Europeans Yes-YES” to encourage the students to come together via the internet and in person to improve awareness of their different attitudes to xenophobia and racism and to encourage them to make informed choices about the people they want to be. The culmination of this project resulted in a film and photo montage which was included in the Youth and Migration project in Stavanger in 2008. This exhibition continued to tour other European countries. The Irish partner was Loreto College, Drumkeen, Cavan.

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<sup>30</sup> Fox, Lisa (2008). The Impact of Comenius School Partnerships on Multilingualism in Irish Primary Schools. Dublin: Unpublished Dissertation, page 28.

Gaelscoil Ó Doghair Primary school, Co. Limerick, has been involved with transnational project work for 25 years. In 2006, Gaelscoil Ó Doghair hosted two Comenius assistants: one from Poland and one from Norway. The majority of Polish children attending Gaelscoil Ó Doghair, and indeed their families, did not speak English at that time. The role of the Polish assistant extended beyond the classroom to encourage integration and communication within the wider local community, and promoting not only linguistic but also cultural diversity and acceptance.

Staff working with children with low incidence disabilities can become isolated within regional and national boundaries. Comenius provides vital opportunities for such professionals to meet and work collaboratively with others in similar fields.

In a Hospital School serious illness and low morale can take its toll on teachers and school managers. The Special School at Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children, Crumlin, Dublin noted that the partnership added new motivation to the work of teachers and increased their commitment.

The programme has also provided an impetus for environmental changes in special schools. The "OPTIC-OPTimising the Inclusive Classroom" was a project to produce an 88-page full-colour handbook on the design of the learning environment for children with visual impairment. This led to the redesign of classrooms and corridors at St Josephs Primary School for Children with Visual Impairment, Drumcondra, Dublin.

Small rural and geographically isolated primary schools have recorded a "positive and enriching effect" arising from the transnational cooperation facilitated by Comenius.

The School of the Divine Child in Co.. Cork undertook a Comenius School Development Project which aimed to cater for students who were vulnerable to exclusion. A number of students were affected by physical and learning disabilities, others had behavioural difficulties and a number belonged to ethnic minorities. The partners wanted to research and share their experience of these disadvantages to see how the students could be helped to participate fully in their communities through the promotion of leisure facilities in their schools.

The students conducted surveys in their own schools and communities, and exchanged information on the resources available to them. The Irish students participated in new activities, such as workshops on music making for people with disabilities, and a film making project. The project also piloted games and outdoor activities such as 'giant draughts', and hurling for wheelchair users in the schoolyard, as well as online games with students from other schools. Students and staff involved in this project acquired new skills in many areas including those of research and pedagogical methodologies. Evaluation of the project suggested that while participating in leisure activities is hindered by factors such as physical access, financial restrictions and transport difficulties, "educational and cultural exchanges can be an important means of helping to reduce isolation and overcome some of the limitations set by disabilities".

The "Quest for Identity" involved pupils of Carndonagh Community School, Carndonagh, Co. Donegal, in a search for commonalities and the celebration of diversity as a strength. Pupils with special needs were a specific focus and the project used diverse methodologies such as the preparation of a time capsule to be opened in 100 years containing letters written by the students and participation in the European Day of Languages. The partnership also conducted an evaluation survey contrasting international, national and regional identity. The project identified appropriate pedagogical units with audio-visual and IT components that are readily available on official EU websites and incorporated these units into their Comenius activities. The



dissemination strategy included the creation of a website which hosted a video interview with a regional MEP.

## ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP

The promotion of active citizenship has been a central pillar of EU policy for decades. In its simplest sense this is the encouragement of participation in civil society in a variety of guises but primarily through associations both state and voluntary. The most fundamental such association is the school, and its activities provide the earliest and perhaps the most important of opportunities for the development of active citizenship.

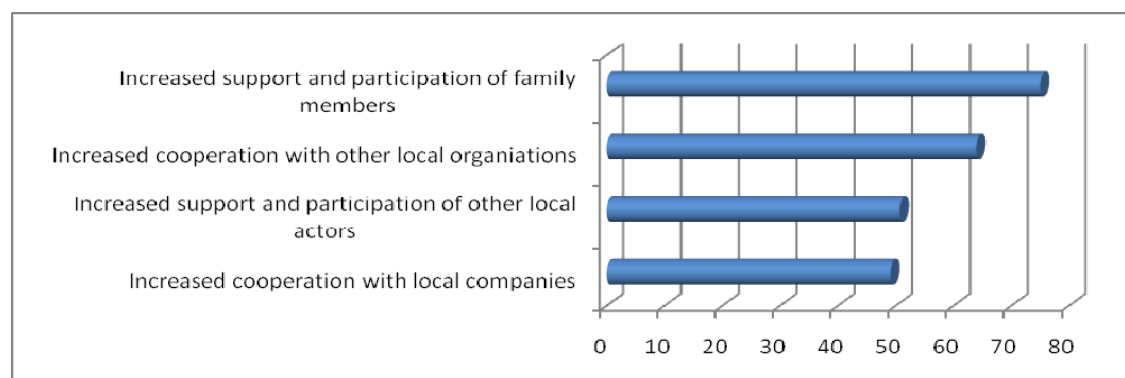
Throughout Comenius actions, a variety of active citizenship elements are to be found: in the engagement of teachers and pupils in the design and implementation of activities, in specific projects that are designed to develop social awareness, and in the contribution of the activities to the wider community and in turn the active participation of the community in supporting Comenius activities. We will look at various examples that illustrate these impacts in Ireland.

Enhancing the social awareness of pupils by fostering empathy with others was the focus of the Children's Rights project of St. Declan's National School, Ardmore Co.. Waterford. The project encouraged pupils to move from 'I' to 'We', from 'Me' to 'Us', through welcoming, respect, sharing and a sense of solidarity through project activities. A search for rights and duties identified through these project activities culminated in drawing up a declaration of the rights of children. The pupils also collected their experiences in project diaries and detailed:

- how they feel welcomed and included
- how they respect the values of their community and the responsibilities they have
- how they respect others and their differences
- how they become involved in making school a better place for all.

The impact of the community on Comenius schools partnerships, as estimated by the schools, is shown in Table 4.2. This highlights the importance of increased support and participation by parents and families closely followed by the support and cooperation of local organisations.

**TABLE 4.2. CONTRIBUTION OF COMMUNITY TO IMPACT**



Source: Analysis of Comenius EU Standard Final Report Forms (n57).

This is borne out by the Indecon Economic Consultants Report where 80% of 107 respondents confirmed that Comenius promoted stronger and wider school-community Links and 70% stated that the programme stimulated changes in practices between schools and the community.

Comenius project reports testify to this contribution by citing numerous examples, including:

- Comenius brought parents into the class – some overseas partners were surprised at the extent of parental involvement in Irish schools
- families helping with host visits
- parents accompanied groups on overseas visits
- before this we “would have been reluctant to involve parents in organising a school tour”
- community groups hosting social evening
- making packed lunches for visiting groups.

Loreto College, Drumkeen, Co. Cavan, reported that parents made a presentation at the Transition Year graduation highlighting how good their involvement in the partnership had been. Initially they had been apprehensive about traveling to another country and hosting students, but the experience had been a positive one and the whole family had benefitted from it.

There are also a large number of reports of support and involvement by other community partners, including the following examples:

- a wide range of farm and factory visits were organised with the support of local enterprises. A local Turkish-owned factory provided sponsorship for the partnership organized by Arklow Community College, An tInbhear Mór, Co. Wicklow
- In An tInbhear Mór, Co. Wicklow and Kinsale, Co. Cork, the town councils held Civic receptions for the visiting schools in the council chambers
- in Douglas, Cork, the local fisheries board demonstrated electrofishing techniques in the local river
- the Mayor of Donegal visited St Baithin’s National School in St Johnston and presented Letters and Gifts for the local government in each partner school area
- a local retirement group visited the school as part of a partnership visit in Galway

- the Minister for Education formally launched the Ovens National School project in Co. Cork on “Good Behavior—a rainbow that colours our life.” One of the overseas partner events was attended by the First Lady of Slovenia who spent an entire day at the project
- local sports clubs were supportive in organising games and lending facilities (GAA, tennis clubs).

Project photos and press releases provided opportunities for schools to attain high levels of public visibility in their local communities. Local media carried many articles about partnerships. Comenius Partnerships have had a very positive impact on school communities and have enhanced the standing of school in their local communities.

## CULTURAL HERITAGE

Integral to enhanced community involvement and improved community identity has been the contribution that Comenius partnerships have made to heightened awareness of students of the cultural heritage of the local area, county and country as a whole.

An excellent example of this is Understanding European Cultures through Myths and Legends, which was the theme of a partnership involving St Michael’s BNS, Galway. The project promoted creative and collaborative relationships between the participating schools through the sharing of myths and legends which also allowed them to develop a better understanding of each culture and engage in a cross-curricular, whole-school approach incorporating all classes and subjects including music, drama, dance and art. In addition, the project developed the multi-media and ICT competences of the whole school community. The schools coordinator commented that “as we have many pupils from both traveller and multicultural backgrounds (over 20 nationalities), it was very beneficial for them to see the respect afforded to different cultures”. The dissemination of this project involved the launch of a book by the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs as well as local press and radio coverage. The wider school community were very involved in the Comenius initiatives.

## WHOLE SCHOOL PERSPECTIVE

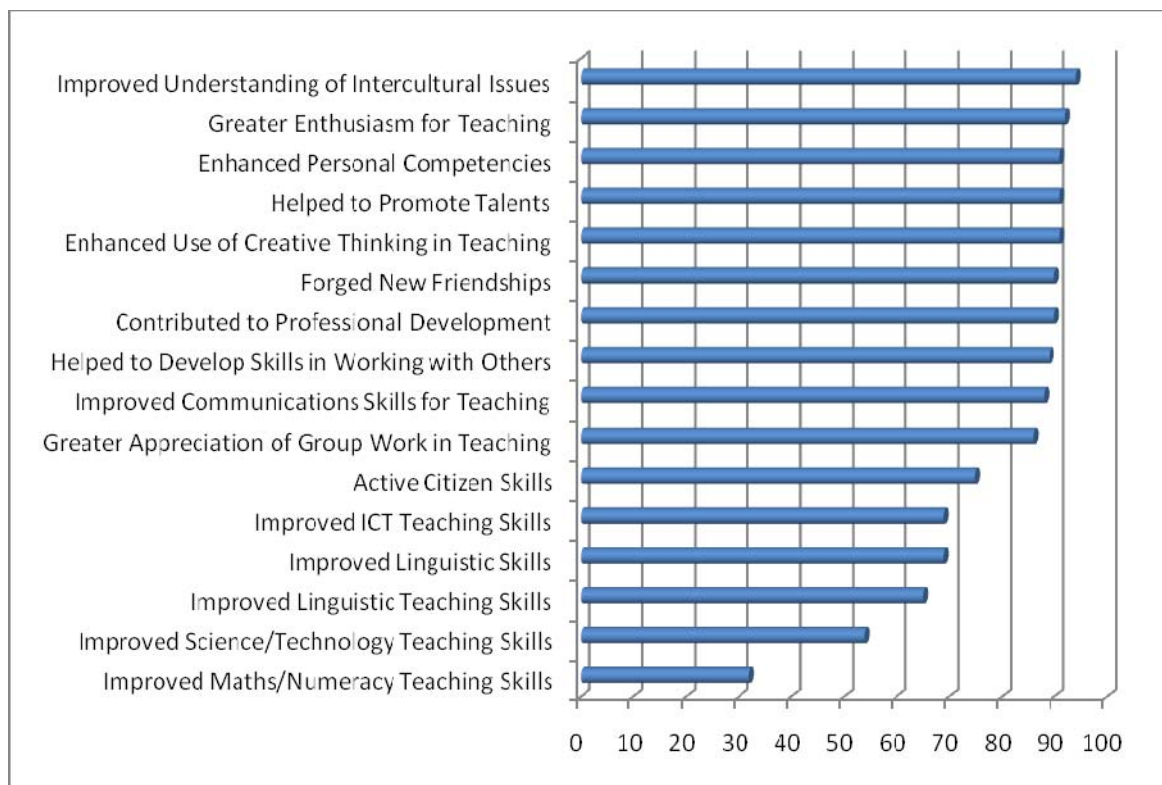
Comenius projects involve the whole school: the board of management, the local community as well as teachers, pupils and parents. In many cases Comenius acts as a catalyst for intra-school collaboration. Enthusiasm around hosting overseas visits increased motivation and energy throughout the school. For instance Scoil Mhuire, Oranmore, Co. Galway, points to an intangible and unintended impact of the project as how well the staff team united and cooperated together in new and exciting ways. They described it like this: “the buzz and camaraderie among team members was unique and very special.”

Aiming to compare and learn from pan-European strategies in order to implement improvements at an individual school level the LEADERS project (Leaders in Europe Aiming to Develop, Evaluate and Review) had immediate and direct impacts for each partner. The project examined school improvements in a holistic sense ranging from improvements to school buildings through to curriculum developments. This overarching Whole School Planning was of particular importance to the project participants as coincidentally each member of the three-school partnership underwent an Official School Evaluation by the respective Ministries of Education which coincided with the Comenius project. Each school in the partnership evaluated and shared these School Improvement plans. It should be noted that the Inspectors for the Whole School Evaluation were impressed by the insightful and comparative nature of the Comenius project which worked in tandem with the Whole School Evaluation. The Irish partner was the Mater Dei Primary School, Basin Lane, James Street, Dublin 8.

## 4.2. COMENIUS MOBILITY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The main impacts on teachers based on the Indecon survey are shown in Table 4.3. These include: improved understanding of intercultural issues; greater enthusiasm for teaching; enhanced personal competencies; ability to promote their talents; forge new friendships; develop group work skills; and a greater appreciation for the use of group work in teaching.

TABLE 4.3. IMPACT OF COMENIUS ON TEACHERS



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n120).

Examples of general impacts on teachers can be summarised as follows:

- learning from other methods of primary teaching in another EU Member State
- staff development and upskilling including in the use of ICT
- chance to use new equipment and new learning modes – DVDs, CDs, blogging
- improved presentation skills and creativity
- new ideas around the administration and management of schools
- learning about the school system in Ireland
- enhanced maths skills for teachers – surveys among pupils, interviewing, use of statistical data
- enhanced team work skills
- improved awareness of local geography and local history which was woven into projects.

Teachers get an opportunity to use **languages** they might not have used since their own school days. Some teachers have enrolled in language classes as a result of participating in Comenius projects.

**ICT Skills** were enhanced due to the pervasive use of computers to complete project tasks. Internet, Skype and blogs were also utilised by teachers, some for the first time.

**Project Management Skills** such as organising, coordinating activities, travel arrangements, communication, collating data and results, reporting and accounting were all required in running partnerships. Teachers also reported that the projects helped them improve their skills in preparing, executing and evaluating their work. The partnerships that involve mobility provide an effective mechanism for the professional development of teachers through mobility activities such as preparatory visits, local cooperation, problem-solving, seeing different pedagogical approaches to learning, and project meetings.

Teachers were actively involved with productions of DVDs and multimedia presentations as well as video editing, setting up exhibitions, and preparing and delivering power point presentations. This has challenged teachers to move away from more traditional teaching approaches.

## INITIAL AND CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

There are two main actions under the Comenius Programme that support the initial and continuing professional development of teachers, these are the Comenius In Service Training and Comenius Assistantship actions

### *COMENIUS IN SERVICE TRAINING*

The **Comenius In-Service Training** action enables teachers and other school education staff to attend a course, seminar or conference or undertake a job shadowing or work placement. Courses must be a minimum of five working days and other activities can be from one day up to six weeks in duration.

Participants report very positively on the training undertaken and for the most part value the opportunity to undertake training in another European country and meet with European counterparts. For those who undertake language training particularly, they view the combination of methodology and immersion as particularly valuable and they report that the resources, materials, methods and confidence gained by total immersion training could not have been achieved from training undertaken at home.

Those undertaking general in-service training report that the benefits of being exposed to new practice and theory around ICT, special needs, school development *etc.* could not have been achieved from training undertaken at a national level. The European dimension to the training was certainly a key component in terms of the 'value' of the training for the participants.

For **language teachers** the renewed energy, confidence, methodology and approaches acquired for their work in the classroom is a key impact. Language teaching is a key area under development at policy level in the education sector in Ireland particularly through the Modern Languages Initiative. Many teachers participating in this initiative have been supported by Comenius In-Service Training to undertake language training in Europe and they view this opportunity as integral to their professional development in the area of language teaching.

Comenius In-Service Training has also seen the participation of teachers working in the area of special needs. **Special Needs** teachers value the opportunity to be exposed to theory and practice at a European level. Teachers report that at both project level and individual professional development level, special needs teachers and schools working in this field see real

impact as a result of participating in learning mobility because they are open to trying out new practice and approaches to meet the challenges faced.

Paula Prendeville is a teacher of children with autism in Scarteigh National School. She attended a course entitled ADOS (Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule) run by the ARC (Autism Research Centre), University of Cambridge, in Malta. This training allows her to undertake a rapid assessment of children with autism which was not available at national level for teachers. She has disseminated her experience and learning to the national Special Education Support Service and to the Department of Education and Skills Inspector with responsibility for the delivery of education to children with autism.

Comenius In-Service Training also supports teachers to attend training around **teaching and learning methodology** in the area of ICT, media and other methodologies in the classroom. This is not only in relation to the teaching of subjects but also addressing issues around mixed ability, racism, equality and quality.

Teachers have gained important insights into different pedagogical systems in other European countries. They have been able to observe at first hand contrasts between teaching styles, staff expectations and student behaviour. As one teacher remarked, this was a two-way process: "Having other teachers in our own classrooms had a high impact and made us think more about our actions – it helped us become more reflective teachers."

Laura Ryan from Scoil Oilibheir in Dublin attended the MUSE (Multigrade School Education) course designed to meet the specialised educational needs of multigrade schoolteachers. The main goal was to provide continuous support to multigrade teachers in order to improve their educational performance in a multigrade school environment. Through this course she acquired new ICT-based methodologies which can be applied in the classroom and reported an increased confidence in the use of ICT. She also described exchanging ideas with participants on the course as a 'European Support Network'.

Elizabeth Sheridan had been discussing with a support group of primary school principals what good teaching and successful learning looks like and asking the question: "How as principals do we know about the quality of teaching and learning in our schools." She attended a two week in-service course run by Cambridge Education, entitled "Supporting Improvement in Teaching and Learning in your school". Emphasis was placed on relating the learning to good practice and making it relevant for all participants. DVDs of successful teaching were used to enable participants to explore various teaching strategies. Coaching and modelling enabled them to observe effective teaching and learning with a view to using these outcomes to improve future practice. Practical models and strategies were provided to encourage self-motivation in the classroom. They reflected on their perceptions of motivation and explored how motivation works in the classroom. Practical hands-on sessions were given to support the development of formative assessment to improve student learning. ICT and internet Personalised Learning tools were presented and critiqued. Elizabeth reported very positively on this In-Service opportunity. The mix of nationalities led to an increased awareness of the different approaches and systems of education throughout Europe. As a follow up to this course she is investigating using some personalised learning software explored during the course with a group of exceptionally able pupils. She intends to investigate further the issue of classroom observation with principals to see how to best implement good practice in schools.

Fionnuala Ward, a primary teacher, attended a course entitled 'Strategies and Practical Tools Challenging Homophobia and Gender Discrimination in Formal and Non-Formal Education for

Teachers and Trainers' in Berlin, Germany. Her school had begun to address gay issues and were challenging the use of the word 'gay' as a pejorative term in the playground; introducing several story books with gay characters in the junior classes; organising a project on American Gay Rights activist Harvey Milk in 6th Form and arranging a visit from Senator David Norris to the same class. While courses on gender discrimination are available within Irish educational circles, she was unaware of an equivalent course addressing homophobia. This course provided new ideas and approaches which could be readily applied in her school, and knowledge of the work being done in other countries--specifically Germany, Spain, Greece, France and Poland--with regard to gender discrimination.

### *COMENIUS ASSISTANTSHIPS*

Comenius Assistantships enable trainee teachers to spend 13-45 weeks as assistants in schools in other participating European countries. Under the programme, Irish schools can also host assistants from other European countries. The quality and attractiveness of assistantships is increasing and their popularity among teachers also reflects the current economic climate and the lack of jobs for recent graduates in Ireland. The main host countries over the period have been Spain and France, followed by Austria, and the main language involved in the placement was English.

The obvious impacts of Comenius Assistantships on the assistant is the possibility of improving their professional skills by gaining teaching practice abroad or by learning a foreign language, and thereby improving their career prospects.

Former assistants report that the experience of teaching abroad had a clear impact on the transition to work and employment. Taking part in an assistantship not only helped them to obtain a job but it helped them to cope with the everyday work tasks and improved the quality of their professional performance. The longer the assistantship lasted, the more often employment-related benefits were reported by the participants.

The presence of a Comenius Assistant in the host school contributes to the curriculum but also opens a window to the language and culture of another European country. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of Irish schools reported a strengthening of the European Dimension in daily school life. This was allied to the value of employing a native speaker to teach a foreign language and extending the range of foreign languages offered. This was accompanied by an increased interest of staff members in foreign language learning.

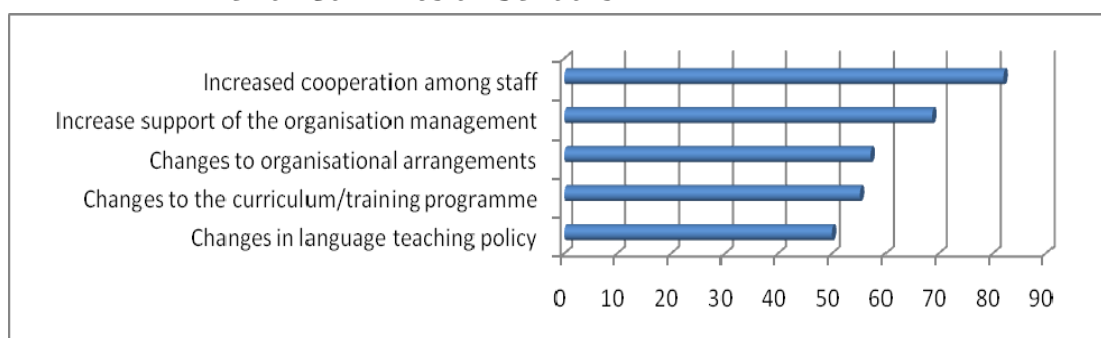
Jessica Gough undertook a five-month Comenius assistantship at the École Primaire Georges Brassens Poulx in southern France. "From the moment I arrived, I received a welcome that I would not have thought possible, from my colleagues, pupils, host family and people of the local community. The day-to-day working and social atmosphere was fantastic as smiles and kind words of encouragement were never too far away. The pupils quickly settled into the routine of having English classes each week and their progress continued as the weeks went by. Although they encountered some little difficulties along the way, they managed to make the most of the experience and learn quite a substantial amount of basic English over the five-month period. My disability was never an issue for them; just something they were curious about and therefore wanted to do anything they could to help. The same can be said for my colleagues, host family and people of the community. My disability was something that they believed to have enhanced the experience rather than inhibiting it. I was accepted as part of the local community and part of the families that make it. I now know that I can go back to Poulx whenever I want, as it is really like my second home. My disability did not hold me back, but rather encouraged me to do all I could to make the assistantship a success."

Janire Iglesias Marzal did a nine-month assistantship at St. Laurence’s NS, Co. Wicklow. She was included in school life and in cross-curricular activities. Janire taught Spanish to all children from Junior Infants to 4th Class and also gave Spanish lessons to the school staff as an extra-curricular activity. She assisted with special needs pupils in the school and used art, drama, games and project work to teach her mother tongue. Her mentor at the school commented “Janire was a great ambassador for her country and parents and children were always aware of her presence throughout the year and had no trouble in trying out their Spanish in her company. No matter how little [they] knew, Janire always made them feel good about their Spanish competencies. Her Spanish classes for teachers were very popular too”.

### 4.3. IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

The impact of Comenius schools partnerships on participating schools is shown in Table 4.4. In line with anecdotal data, the increase in cooperation among staff is by far the greatest impact as assessed by more than 80% of schools. The increase in support of management (Boards, etc.) is second highest and changes to the curriculum and organizational arrangements are recorded by more than half of the 57 schools who reported.

TABLE 4.4. IMPACT OF COMENIUS ON SCHOOLS



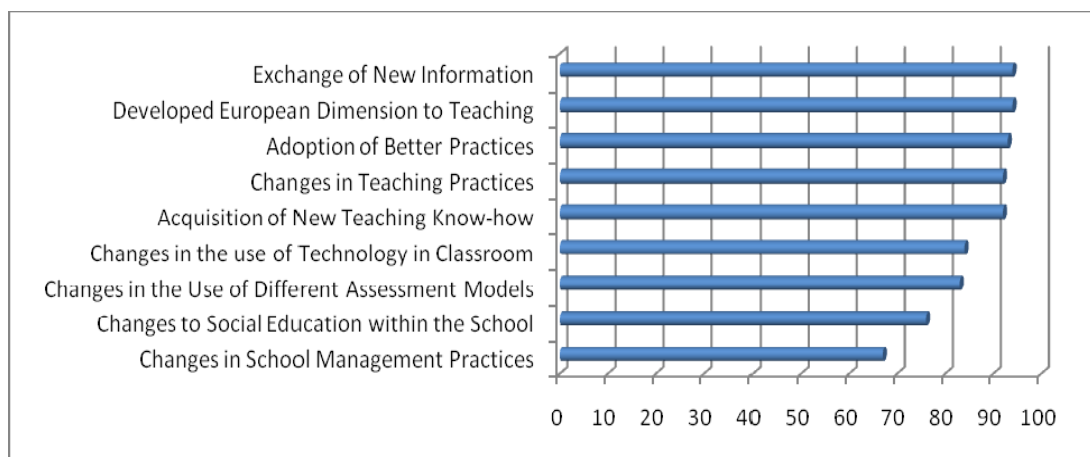
Source: Analysis of Comenius EU Standard Final Report Forms (n57).

A mark of the importance and relevance that schools attribute to Comenius partnerships is reflected in the comments made by participants in the Focus Group sessions organised by Indecon. Both first-time and previous participants said that they would participate again and first-time participants said that next time would be “even better” because they would have a “better understanding of the system”.

The impact of Comenius on **Teaching Methodologies** in participating schools is shown in Table 4.5. The impacts are significant and the top five relate to developing a European dimension in teaching, exchanging information with EU colleagues, adopting better practices, acquiring new know-how and changes in teaching practices. These results from the Indecon survey come from a large cohort of 107 respondents. None of the impacts listed were rated less than 65% which indicates that the impact of Comenius was very substantial in Irish schools.



**TABLE 4.5. IMPACT OF COMENIUS ON TEACHING METHODOLOGIES**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n107).

This data is borne out by the review of Comenius reports conducted for the present study and by participants in focus groups conducted by Indecon,<sup>31</sup> a sample of which includes:

- Comenius was a very worthwhile project
- hope to participate in the future again
- invaluable to forge links with fellow European professionals
- wonderful opportunity to understand how other countries’ educational systems work and to recognise the similar challenges faced
- gives an opportunity to develop professional skills and to reflect on our own system and methodologies
- one of the best professional development opportunities available
- “very beneficial long term gains
- “the Comenius Project is considered to be one of the most important areas within our school. It is viewed as an extremely positive experience and well worth the extra effort.”
- “the experience has been great for our school, opened new avenue of innovation, brought teachers together, level of collaboration enhanced.”

## SCHOOL CURRICULUM

There is widespread agreement among all stakeholders in the Comenius network in Ireland that the success of Comenius projects is linked to how well they have been aligned with and integrated into the curriculum in Ireland in a themed manner. In this way the interaction with overseas partners reflected and enhanced the curriculum in the school and the curriculum flowed into and enriched the partnership.

A number of projects used Comenius to develop new teaching methods and explore challenging issues such as:

- the example of developing teamwork and problem-solving among students of Moneystown National School, Co. Wicklow which is detailed above
- the example of taking on a particular issue is that of the Holy Child Pre-School in Dublin which undertook a comparative study on gender equity in European Pre-Schools

<sup>31</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland (March 2010).

- Gurraneasig National School, Kilbrittain, Co. Cork, commenced cookery lessons and created a sensory garden as a result of the project
- Deansrath Community School, Dublin 22, adapted “Heart Rules” for junior cycle students from Garvik Skole, Norway
- St Aidan’s Community College, Cork altered its policy of overseas school tours as a result of participation in Comenius and now insists that such tours are to areas where Comenius partnerships are planned or have been conducted.

This integration with the school curriculum has been encouraged and informally recognised by the Department of Education and Skills with School Inspectors giving positive feedback on the wide cross-curricular element to Comenius partnerships. And it’s not just one way: a number of schools report that their European partners have found many points of interest in the Irish school curriculum. For instance, St Canice’s Coeducational National School reported that their partner school decided to set up systems they had seen operating in Kilkenny.

Participation in appropriate Comenius activities by Departmental officials and others engaged with curriculum development will help in this respect. For example, Gerardine Skelly, a Whole School Evaluation Reporting Inspector with the Department of Education, attended a course entitled Circe: A classics and ICT resource Course for Europe. This course was aimed at integrating ICT into the teaching and learning of classical subjects (Latin, Ancient Greek, and Classical Studies) and may provide some of the solutions to the survival of classical subjects. As a result she reports that she is more informed and aware of the potential for ICT to add value to the current and more traditional methods in the subject areas.

## EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN SCHOOLS

The development of a European Dimension to teaching was highlighted by 94% of 107 respondents to the Indecon survey of schools. All projects were keen to emphasise the European dimension, and a number of partnership projects were specifically directed towards that end, such as:

- Unique European Citizen project of St Mary’s on the Hill National School, Cork
- ONE EUROPE, MANY VOICES project of Greenmount National School, Cork
- Castleknock College, Dublin, introduced a European Studies Module in the Transition Year programme.

A sample of some of the projects--which give a flavour of the range of measures to improve cultural understanding and provide a European Dimension to the partnerships--are as follows:

- Européanisation du continent et retour en Europe (Presentation College, Carlow)
- Growing together as Healthy Citizens of Europe (St Finnachta’s National School, Co. Clare, Clare)
- TEACH, Tell Everyone About Cultural Heritage (St Flannan’s National School, Co. Clare, Clare)
- Cultural Identity through Dance and Music (Gaelscoil Chloch na gCoillte, Cork)
- Europe - Changes and Challenges (St Mary’s Boys’ National School, Dublin 14)

## 4.4. ETWINNING

The eTwinning element to the Comenius Programme allows schools to set up partnerships online using a variety of online tools for joint project activities, sharing of information, comments, blogs and so on. A school simply needs to register on [www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net) and find a partner school to get started. A partnership can last as long as the partners wish.

Activities also on offer to eTwinning teachers include:

- *Online Learning Events*: Learning Events are short intensive online events on a number of themes. They are led by experts and include active work and discussion among teachers across Europe.
- *eTwinning Groups*: bring together specific interest groups for networking purposes. eTwinning Groups are private platforms for eTwinners to discuss and work together on a specific topic or theme. Moderated by an experienced eTwinner, each Group sets out activities and tasks for teachers to do and discuss. Topics vary from languages teaching and collaborative writing to experimental sciences. The aim is for eTwinners to share practice examples, discuss teaching and learning methodologies and find support for professional development.
- *Professional Development Workshops (PDWs)* are aimed at teachers who want to learn more about eTwinning and develop their skills in European collaboration using ICT. These PDWs bring together participants from different European countries to network and share experiences. They are held in different European countries throughout the school year.

There are over 182 registered schools and 114 Irish partnerships already registered on eTwinning and the numbers are increasing rapidly.

The potential for significant impact at a range of levels is quite obvious. These include:

- creating opportunities for new Comenius schools partnerships
- development of ICT skills of teachers and students
- transforming teaching methods by integrating eTwinning with existing themes in the school curriculum
- eTwinning is being used as a forum for Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in which teachers of subjects other than foreign languages and foreign language teachers can meet and share methodologies, information, material and experiences
- development of new digital resources for teaching and learning
- developing creativity in students through creative thinking techniques, activities, games *etc.*
- exploring new ways to help disadvantaged students overcome linguistic, social or learning difficulties
- engaging students in more attractive Maths and Science learning in the online and collaborative environment.

*Benefits for students:*

- increased interest, knowledge and understanding of other cultures
- increased motivation to learn
- improved ability to work in teams

*Benefits for teachers:*

- better knowledge and understanding of other school systems
- opportunities to try new teaching methods
- opportunities for peer learning

The Department of Education and Skills supports the concept that virtual mobility can be an important catalyst for physical mobility and also that it can be an appropriate and practical form of mobility for young pupils.

According to Tom Roche, Principal of Knockaclarig National School, Brosna, Castleisland, Co.. Kerry, and one of the early participants in the eTwinning network, the “participation in the eTwinning project was a very positive experience for the school.”

Their first eTwinning project--“Make Film and Share IT with Friends”--was with a Swedish school. In addition to the establishment of a strong transnational partnership, this project provided them with a template for a myriad of exemplars in the many areas of national curriculum. Using all the Twinspace tools and past experience they decided to mediate a new project through blogging, podcasting, video conferencing and wiki writing. They also enhanced the share aspect through online tutorials and established working links with a third-level institution (university for teacher students). In this way they created “Make Film and Share IT with Friends 2.0!”.

The project helped to develop innovative teaching methods. Tom reports that he incorporated the use of more technologies into his teaching. The project allowed him to become more ICT confident. Tom says that “eTwinning has changed my teaching methodology - I moved away from the ‘one to many’ approach to becoming more of a facilitator. The project allowed us to use outdoor inquiry-based learning.”

The children of Anne McMorrough's class at St. Martin de Porres National School, Tallaght, Dublin 14 have been involved in eTwinning since 2007 and are partnered with a school in England. According to Anne “there was a hugely positive impact on the school as other teachers, parents and the wider community learned of the possibilities that eTwinning could bring to learning in a simple way, even with the youngest children involved.”

The Principal commented that “eTwinning started off motivated by one teacher and I hoped it would spread from there to other staff members and that is exactly what happened. I am absolutely delighted with eTwinning.” The teachers involved have developed their ICT skills and discovered the joys of working with colleagues in other countries. Teachers who were not involved have expressed an interest in joining an eTwinning project.

Anne points out that “Teachers in the school are more likely to take part in eTwinning projects than exchanges because of the flexibility and variety that eTwinning offers to teachers without excessive commitment outside of school hours.”

The eTwinning project allowed Anne to develop innovative teaching methods and to use more technology within her teaching. As well as changing her views about the value of European projects, eTwinning has changed the way that Anne teaches now. Anne noted: “This eTwinning project has absolutely transformed my teaching. Instead of looking at teaching from a linear point of view, it made me step back and look at teaching from a thematic point of view. The

project has made my teaching much more creative ... It takes the flat 2D element of a text book and brings it to life.”

Parents have spoken of the positive impact it has had on their children's learning and motivation. Anne believes the greatest gain was finding a way to implement ICT, even in a simple way with very young children, into the curriculum.

## 4.5. CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO COMENIUS

### *ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT*

The conclusion of this study is entirely consistent with the conclusions of the Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland (2010) as it relates to Comenius.<sup>32</sup> Items 1 and 2 below repeat the Indecon conclusions while the impacts listed in item 3 arise from the current study.

1. Comenius is **highly beneficial** and complements and adds value to school education in Ireland rather than duplicating any other policy or initiative. The benefits which flowed from participation in Comenius could not have been achieved but for its unique European partnership dimension.

2. The relevance of Comenius stems from the fact that the partnerships are fully integrated into the school curriculum.

3. Particular **impacts** include:

- Personal development of the pupils, including:
  - increased Intercultural awareness
  - development of language, ICT and performance skills
  - development of creativity, personal motivation and self-reliance.
- Impact on teachers include:
  - enhanced language skills
  - enhanced teaching and in some cases management skills
  - development of new teaching skills and methods
  - greater enthusiasm for teaching
  - increased Intercultural awareness.
- Impact on schools include:
  - introduction of new teaching methods
  - strengthening of the European dimension in the school curriculum
  - improved collaboration among teachers in the school
  - improved collaboration with parents and the community
  - exchange of best practice
  - specific beneficial impact on schools with special needs.

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<sup>32</sup> Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, p8.

- Impacts of Comenius Assistantships and In-Service Training projects include:
  - enhanced personal and professional development of teachers and trainee teachers
  - enhanced recruitment opportunities for trainee teachers
  - stronger European dimension in participating schools
  - establishment of new partnerships with other EU schools
  - increased interest of staff members in foreign languages.

## 5. GRUNDTVIG

The Grundtvig Programme aims to provide adults with alternative pathways to return to education by improving their knowledge, skills and competencies and facilitate their personal development. The programme aims to develop the adult education sector by engaging organisations and staff in projects and professional development opportunities in a European context. The Programme reaches all types of organisations from community groups to universities who are working with adults returning to education.

The specific aims of the Grundtvig programme are to:

- increase the number of people in adult education supported by Grundtvig funding to 25,000 annually at a European level by 2013 and to improve the quality of their experience
- improve conditions for mobility so that more adults can benefit from adult education abroad
- improve the quality and amount of cooperation between adult education organisations
- develop innovative adult education and management practices, and encourage widespread implementation
- ensure that people on the margins of society have access to adult education, especially older people and those who left education without basic qualifications
- support innovative ICT-based educational content, services and practices.

These objectives are achieved through the sub-actions of the Grundtvig Programme which support the mobility of staff and learners through projects addressing specific themes and also individual mobility actions for the professional development of those working in the sector. Mobility is carried out through both project-based activities and individual mobility actions of the programme.

### ***Anticipated Impacts***

It should be noted that the European Commission does not specify impacts as such but defines them as the effect that the programme has on systems and practices, and on EU policies. However the key anticipated impacts that can be assumed from the foregoing objectives are:

#### Impacts

1. Improved quality of the experience of adult learners;
2. Improved quality of adult education;
3. Improved quality of cooperation between adult education organisations;
4. Improved pedagogical approaches and improved management practices;

#### Outputs

The objectives above imply the following specific outputs:

1. Increase the numbers of people in adult education;
2. Increase numbers of adult learners and improve the quality of their experience of mobility;
3. Assist vulnerable social groups to access adult education;
4. Develop innovative adult education and management practices, and encourage widespread implementation;
5. Support innovative ICT-based educational content, services and practices.

## 5.1. IMPACT OF GRUNDTVIG PROJECT ACTIONS

Project-based mobility is organised in the Grundtvig Programme through **Grundtvig Learning Partnerships, Grundtvig Multilateral Projects, Grundtvig Thematic Networks** and, since 2007, the **Grundtvig Senior Volunteering** action. **Grundtvig In-Service Training** enables those involved in the delivery of adult education to attend training courses of up to six weeks for their professional development. The **Grundtvig Visits and Exchanges** action enables participation in conferences, seminars, job shadowing or work placement from one day up to six weeks. **Grundtvig Assistantships** enable present or future staff involved in adult education to spend a period of 12-45 weeks as a Grundtvig Assistant at an adult education institution in another EU country participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP).

The Grundtvig Learning Partnership action is the most successful of the project actions. It facilitates practical and process-oriented cooperation activities between organisations, universities and others working in adult education on themes of common interest. These small scale projects often act as a stepping stone to larger-scale projects such as Grundtvig Multilateral Projects or Grundtvig Thematic Networks. The impacts across all these actions will be reviewed on a thematic basis.

### *IMPACT ON ADULT LEARNERS*

In terms of supporting the adult learner these actions have addressed challenges and provided new approaches in the area of guidance, counselling and outreach that have facilitated improved access to and participation in the learning environment. The Grundtvig programme has particular focus on addressing the complex and varying needs of under-represented groups and this has been demonstrated with success in the areas of prisoner education, special needs/disability and migrant education.

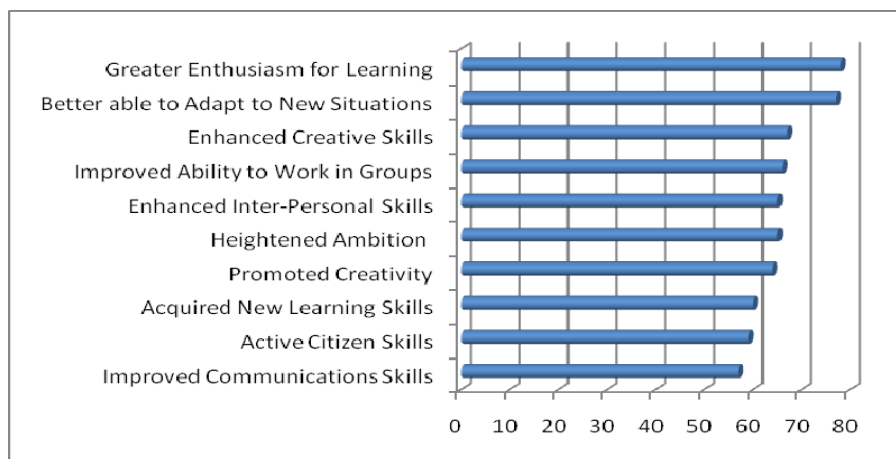
The main impacts on adult learners from participating in Grundtvig projects are shown in Table 5.1., which is based on the Grundtvig section of Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland.<sup>33</sup> By far the highest impact was greater enthusiasm for education and learning and being better able to adapt to new situations or new environments. Enhanced creative skills, improved ability to work in groups; enhanced inter-personal skills and heightened ambition were also important impacts for adult learners.

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<sup>33</sup> *Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, Annex Table 107.*



**TABLE 5.1. IMPACT OF GRUNDTVIG ON ADULT LEARNERS**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n39).

Particular benefits highlighted in the focus group conducted by Indecon Consultants included opportunities for cross-learning in Europe, multiculturalism, and the sharing of ideas regarding adult learning.

### *IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF ADULT EDUCATION*

Grundtvig Learning Partnerships have made a significant contribution to the development of the adult education sector in Ireland by facilitating the sharing of ideas and experiences at a European level. It has become a valued **test-bed of innovation** for those working in the sector and has provided a way to address issues of **quality** in adult education provision through the sharing and development of teaching and learning methods and materials. Staff who participate in projects report that it provides a professional development opportunity with many applying and using methods and resources after the project has finished.

In Ireland, Grundtvig operates within the context of two policy frameworks. The first is the National Development Plan (2007-2013), which identifies targets for those seeking to access 'second chance' and further education in Ireland. The second national policy development is 'Towards 2016 - Ten Year Framework Social Partnership Agreement 2006-2015', which was agreed by employers, trade unions and the voluntary sector in Ireland. The policy identifies people of working age, older people and people with disabilities as part of the key lifecycle stages.

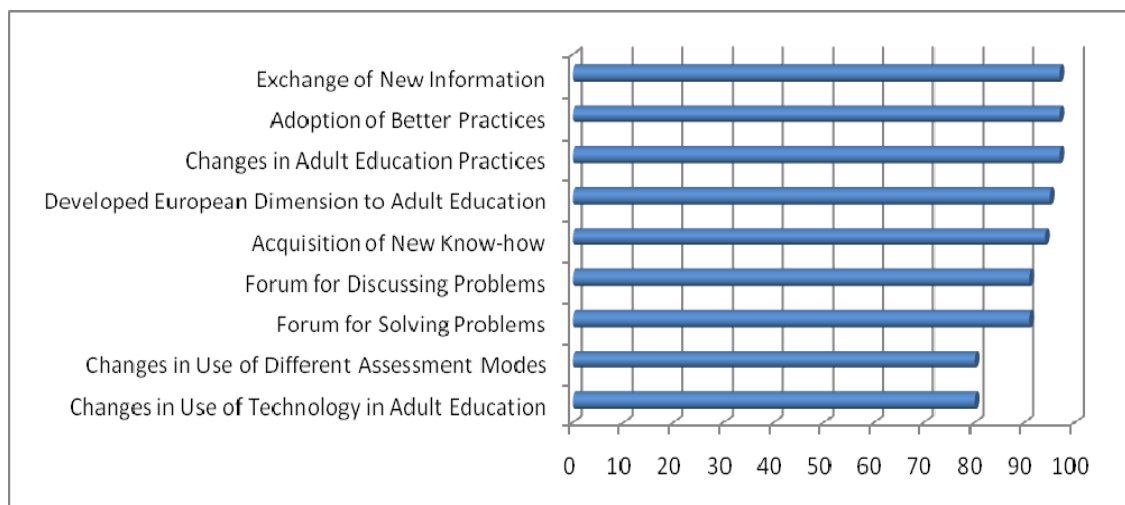
In general, Grundtvig fits well within the parameters of the Irish adult education system since the objectives of the programme have been very broadly defined. This provides the flexibility to meet institutional or national priorities and for the programme as a whole to respond to shifts in need over time. The close involvement of key organisations in the sector--such as AONTAS (The Irish National Adult Learning Organisation) and NALA (The National Adult Literacy Agency)--in Grundtvig activities is testament to this.

Grundtvig has played an important role in the provision of Irish adult education by providing the wherewithal to bring about developments in policies and programmes which might not otherwise have been possible.

This is borne out in Table 5.2., in which adult education providers identify the exchange of information, adoption of better practices, changes in adult education practices and the

development of a European dimension to their programmes as the key impacts arising from their involvement with Grundtvig.

**TABLE 5.2. IMPACT OF GRUNDTVIG ON ADULT EDUCATION PROVISION**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n38).

Attendees at the Grundtvig focus group organised by Indecon Consultants were complimentary of the benefits from participating in the programme, which would not have occurred but for the Grundtvig intervention. The view was also expressed that the potential to enhance adult education *via* Grundtvig is especially large in a small country like Ireland and the role of external interventions like Grundtvig will become even more important in adult education in Ireland in the years ahead, when funding from other sources will become more challenging.

Among the other benefits arising from participation were the opportunity to enhance a range of skills relating to adult education, including staff development, adopting new methods of teaching and learning and of assessment.

In the case of assessment of adult learning methodologies it was felt by focus group participants that the Irish system is generally flexible to the extent of being able to accommodate other assessment modes.

At adult education provider level, Grundtvig facilitates meaningful networking with both familiar and trusted partners as well the opportunity to develop new relationships. It also brings social awareness and a fresh perspective (at European level) beyond the boundaries of national programmes, priorities and constraints. It is clear from a review of the final project reports that the programme provides new teaching and learning tools and materials.

Grundtvig has undoubtedly helped to increase the general visibility and standing of non-vocational adult learning throughout Europe and to confirm its importance within the overall lifelong learning spectrum.<sup>34</sup> In Ireland, adult education providers testify that Grundtvig has done much to strengthen the adult learning community as a whole in a real and practical sense, through the participation of so many and so widely varying organisations and personnel in

<sup>34</sup> Background Document for Grundtvig 10th Anniversary Conference Paper 'European Cooperation in Adult Learning - Shaping the Future' Prepared by GHK for the EU Commission Directorate-General for Education & Culture, Copenhagen, September 2010. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc/10th/back.pdf>

partnerships, mobility activities and projects. Grundtvig undoubtedly contributes to the development of the European dimension of adult learning among Irish providers and in so doing has played a decisive role in helping to create a culture of European cooperation in a sector lacking in a previous tradition in this regard.

### *IMPROVED EMPLOYABILITY OF ADULT LEARNERS*

The 2007 Action Plan on Adult Learning described adult learning as a key response to the need for a highly qualified labour force to achieve the shared EU and Ireland goal of becoming a dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy. In addition, in the current economic climate, the skills of Europe's workforce are crucial to economic recovery and will be vital in responding to whatever new economic structures emerge post-downturn. Moreover, at a time when the average working age is rising, older workers need to engage in learning to address their competence needs to meet the requirements of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.<sup>35</sup>

Adult learning can enable an individual to develop the fundamental skills required for lifelong learning, including crucially the ability to continue learning. The themes of Grundtvig projects are extensive and directly support skills and competence development and therefore improve the employability of those returning to education. This is being realised through providing adults with a second chance to learn and improve levels of literacy, numeracy and basic skills.

Adult learning can help ensure that immigration, which has the potential to be a partial counterbalance to an ageing population and to meet skills and labour shortages in certain sectors, can take place in a way that is beneficial to both migrants and the host country. Most new migrants, even those who are highly skilled or very well educated often have needs in terms of language and cultural understanding.<sup>36</sup>

### *SOCIAL EXCLUSION*

However, adult learning is not just about getting, maintaining or progressing in a job. It is also about the personal, civic, social and cultural life of the individual and the community, region and state in which s/he lives. This indispensable role of adult education as an agent of social inclusion is well recognised. Adult learning offered in a variety of environments, involving multiple stakeholders (including public and private sectors, higher education institutions, local communities and NGOs) and covering learning for personal, civic, social and employment-related purposes, is central to reaching disadvantaged and at risk groups.<sup>37</sup>

Participation in adult learning helps combat social exclusion including rural isolation; enables seniors to remain socially and mentally active; supports migrants to live and work in Ireland; assists prisoners to re-integrate into the community and enables individuals with a disability to participate more fully in society.<sup>38</sup>

Grundtvig Learning Partnerships also demonstrate the impact of adult education on combating social exclusion by supporting the development of innovative ways of enhancing learning

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<sup>35</sup> Action Plan on Adult Learning 2007 – 2010: *Final report of the Adult Learning Working Group*

<sup>36</sup> European Commission (2006) Communication on adult learning It is never too late to learn, <http://eurlex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2006:0614:FIN:EN:PDF>

<sup>37</sup> Action Plan on Adult Learning 2007 – 2010: *Final report of the Adult Learning Working Group*

<sup>38</sup> *Background Document for Grundtvig 10th Anniversary Conference Paper 'European Cooperation in Adult Learning - Shaping the Future'* Prepared by GHK for the EU Commission Directorate-General for Education & Culture, Copenhagen, September 2010. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc/10th/back.pdf>

opportunities for marginalised adults. Almost two thirds of Grundtvig Projects and Partnerships have a social inclusion dimension. Given the complex nature of the barriers that marginalised adults face returning to education, the Grundtvig Programme has been instrumental in facilitating those working in the sector to address these complex challenges to support returning adults' full participation in education. Specific target groups of the programme have included adults with disability, adults with intellectual disability, migrant and ethnic minorities, prisoners, women, isolated rural men and older people.

Examples of these impacts follow:

### **Disability**

The DEAF ARE NOT DEAF project aimed to raise the awareness of the hearing world, about the myriad issues affecting the **Deaf community**, with their specific social needs. This project brought members of the deaf community from Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Poland and Ireland together with the intention of sharing national experiences, and learning from each other. The Irish partners were People with Disabilities in Ireland (PWDI) and the Training and Occupational Support Services of the Health Services Executive North West who assist people with various types of disability in their pursuit of educational and employment goals.

The long-term objectives of this project were towards improving the position of Deaf and hearing-impaired people in the community, helping them to break out of social isolation and developing their social skills. The project aimed to improve their basic competencies for better quality participation in society, and more dialogue with the hearing world. It also aimed to enable Deaf citizens to take full advantage of the benefits that new information technology can offer, as a factor of social integration and improvement of their quality of life, including mobile phones, internet, text messages, text phones, Minicomms, and so on. This project won the 2007 Grundtvig Award.

The National Institute for Intellectual Disability (NIID), Trinity College, Dublin, worked with similar groups from Belgium, Iceland and the UK on a project which developed a Resource Kit where each country presented materials that other groups of people with intellectual disabilities and their supporters could use to run workshops on how to promote advocacy and do inclusive research. The project title, Nothing About Us Without Us, underlined the approach that the partners took with their reported research and advocacy activities.

The NIID students' contribution to the Kit was based on a technique called photo voice. Each student had a digital camera for a day and then decided which photos best illustrated a day in their life as a student at Trinity. As a group they then choose the common themes to be included in the overall written and pictorial story about being a student undertaking the Certificate in Contemporary Living. A major outcome for the NIID students and staff of participating in this Grundtvig project was that it provided the group with a cross-cultural learning journey which allowed them to promote the value of third level education for students with intellectual disabilities.

### **Prison Education**

The area of Prison Education has benefited greatly from Grundtvig and has seen participation from the Prison Education Service in both Grundtvig projects and In-Service Training. There have been a number of Grundtvig projects in Ireland where the theme of prison education has been explored and the issue of prisoner participation in

education has been addressed. This has been echoed in Europe where the area of Prison Education has gained visibility and benefited from the sharing of practice and expertise.<sup>39</sup>

Jane Kelleher, who works as an art teacher in St. Patrick's Institution, Dublin, attended a week-long training on the topic of 'Qualifications and Vocational Opportunities in Prison Art Education' run by the Prison Arts Network (PAN) in Denmark. Many of her students were early school leavers with previously negative experiences of education. The training has had a direct impact on her practice and work. She has engaged an artist in to work with the students on a two-week project incorporating art and drama, which was a result of seeing how successful the outcomes were from involving art and drama in Denmark.

Marie Breen works as a teacher of History, Maths, Business and Personal Skills in Mountjoy Prison, Dublin. She attended a training course 'Trends in Prison Education' in Cyprus which was a follow-up activity from the Grundtvig Project 'Virtual European Prison School'. As an executive committee member of the Irish Prison Education Association she has been involved in the Virtual European Prison (VEPS) project in partnership with a prison school in Athens to transfer experience of pre-release programmes. The impact on her work has been an increased sharing of practice and research with colleagues in Ireland and Europe; and learning which has influenced the content of her classes particularly on political participation and dissemination of learning to other colleagues.

### *ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP*

The European Commission has been advocating the social dimension of education and training for a long time. Expanding access to adult education can create new possibilities for active inclusion and enhanced social participation, especially for the low-skilled, unemployed, the elderly, migrants, and adults with special needs.<sup>40</sup>

In Ireland the Grundtvig Programme has made a notable contribution to the development and concept of **active citizenship** with a number of projects addressing the issue of active citizenship competencies and the development of teaching methodologies and resources for the promotion of active citizenship, community involvement and lifelong learning and the training of trainers in the area of active citizenship

Some examples include:

University College Dublin linked up with County Donegal VEC around developing **active citizenship themed workshops** and how to build a citizenship dimension into the adult education curriculum. They looked at each partner's work in relation to citizenship and also tackling the topic and understanding of citizenship as a theme. UCD reports that the project has motivated tutors to consider how adult education impacts on citizenship and how citizenship can be incorporated into their course planning and material. Some

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<sup>39</sup> For examples of this see European Commission report 'Pathways to Inclusion –Strengthening European Cooperation in Prison Education and Training'

<sup>40</sup> European Commission (2005). Proposal for a Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning COM (2005) 548 final, 10.11 [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/keyrec\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/doc/keyrec_en.pdf)

lecturers have now introduced citizenship components into their course material/sessions.

County Donegal VEC researched the link between **active citizenship and community education** through its Community Education Forum - this they hope will allow them to identify models of good practice and identify gaps in the provision of community education –which directly impacts on local communities’ ability to engage.

One of the key challenges facing those working in the **multicultural classroom** is placing due emphasis on commonalities and facilitating fellow Europeans’ participation and promoting integration and cooperation within communities. Adult and community education has a key role in achieving this. Pauline Mc Dermot, a Community Education Facilitator from the Adult Education Services in County Mayo VEC, attended a course in Cyprus entitled TEACH -Teaching European Active Citizenship, which was designed to improve the training of people involved in non-formal adult education in the area of teaching active citizenship. She reported that the range of methodologies were inspiring and participatory and is applying these methodologies where appropriate.

### *ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL CREATIVITY*

By providing opportunities for cultural engagement through art, literature, music, dance, cinema, and crafts the scope and effectiveness of adult education is significantly enhanced. Such opportunities for diverse artistic creation and cultural appreciation are conducive to individual and collective creative expression and, significantly, to strengthening dialogue between cultures. They also support the development and maintenance of social cohesion in communities through the promotion of mutual understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity.<sup>41</sup>The Grundtvig Programme in Ireland has strongly supported the development of artistic and cultural creativity within adult education—not only to develop the artistic skills of adults but as a tool and methodology in adult learning.

Some examples include:

The Irish Museum of Modern Art’s (IMMA) Grundtvig Learning Partnership was a shared research project that started in 2008. It involved a partnership between European museums and cultural institutions in the UK, Italy, Portugal and Sweden. This project explored, assessed and articulated the special learning benefits to young people aged 16+ in working with contemporary visual art and the museum. The partnership explored how museums can create a climate that encourages participation, supports interaction with young learners and promotes self-determined learning within the museum space.

The Smashing Times Theatre Company engaged in a project with partners from Finland, Spain, Greece, Norway and Poland to explore how to use drama and theatre to promote language learning and active citizenship, introducing new arts-based methods of learning into adult education teaching practice and evaluating its effects and benefits. The final product of this project was a booklet of case studies on the use of these and other drama and theatre methods to promote language learning and active citizenship.

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<sup>41</sup> Background Document for Grundtvig 10th Anniversary Conference Paper ‘European Cooperation in Adult Learning - Shaping the Future’ Prepared by GHK for the EU Commission Directorate-General for Education & Culture, Copenhagen, September 2010. <http://ec.europa.eu/education/grundtvig/doc/10th/back.pdf>

Using cultural heritage as a resource to encourage active participation in adult education was the theme of a project of Donegal VEC with partners from Sweden, Turkey, Denmark, Cyprus and Estonia. Having shared experiences and practices of cultural heritage programmes the partners then examined how cultural heritage can be used to engage learners. The project developed new approaches to using cultural heritage to make learning more relevant and attractive for adult learners. The research and workshops formed the foundation for best practice guidelines for using cultural heritage as a tool to engage adult learners. New elements such as drama, visits to historical sites and digital storytelling have been added to the curriculum.

## 5.2. GRUNDTVIG MOBILITY FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Grundtvig programme aims to develop adult education practice in Europe by supporting the continuing professional development of those working in the sector. While this happens through the project actions, it is also supported through Grundtvig individual mobility actions: Grundtvig In-Service Training, Grundtvig Visits and Exchanges and Grundtvig Assistantships.

Grundtvig In-Service and Visits and Exchanges actions enable those working in the field to attend courses, conferences or undertake job shadowing or work placement for up to six weeks. Grundtvig Assistantships, which is a new action, enables individuals to undertake a longer period (minimum 12 up to 45 weeks) on placement. Grundtvig mobility grants enable some 2,000 adult education staff in Europe to participate annually in this way.

These actions have also improved the sector's capacity to evaluate, research and monitor its work. The EU Commission Communication on Adult Learning 'It's always a good time to learn'<sup>42</sup> reports that 'failure to demonstrate the benefits of adult learning is a major weakness of the field'. Staff have availed of training in evaluation, monitoring, quality assurance, and validation to quantify and qualify the work that they are doing which is also contributing to the quality of adult education. Participation in projects activities provide staff with time out to reflect on their work and network with other educators working in a similar field.

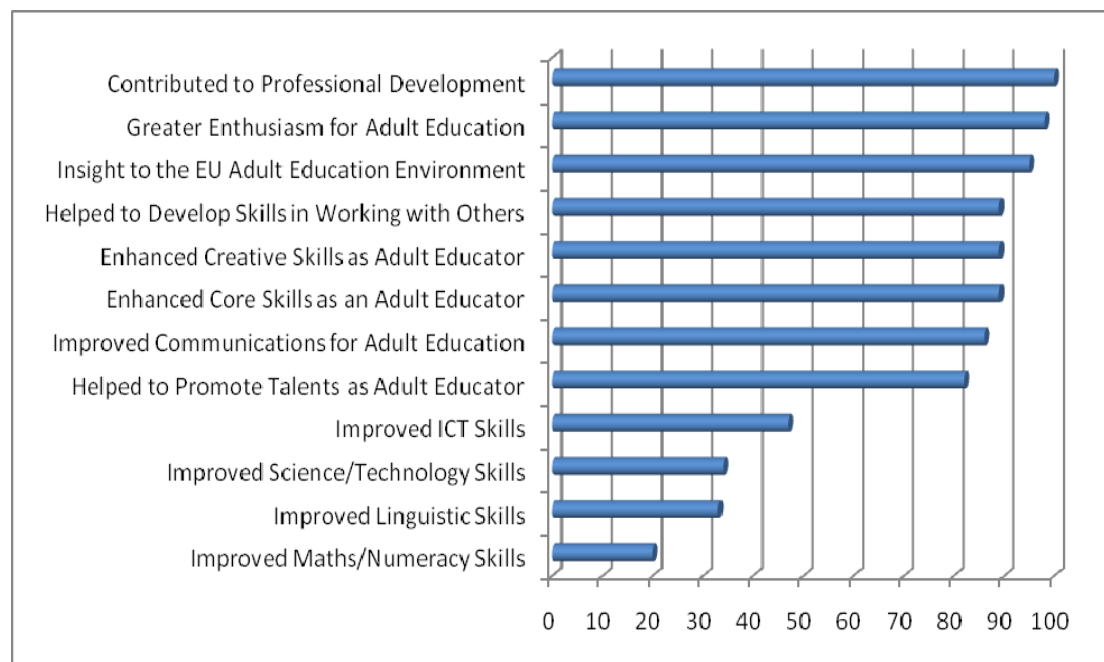
Research has shown that the **adult education as a profession** is nascent or not yet established in most countries. In spite of this, the demand for funding under these actions demonstrates those working in the sector view the opportunity to undertake training in European context as a valuable one. 'It's always a good time to learn' states that the key priority to be addressed by the professional development of those working in the sector is the **quality of provision**. This has been realised through addressing quality in the area of delivery through acquiring new teaching and learning methods and materials in the area of basic skills, literacy, numeracy, languages, citizenship and intercultural education, to name but a few.

In Table 5.3., the proportion of adult education staff (including trainers, guidance counsellors, outreach workers and managers) who stated that participation in Grundtvig contributed to their **professional development** in a significant way was 95%. The other key impacts for adult staff were greater enthusiasm for adult education, better insight to the adult education environment in another European country, improved communication, creativity and core adult education skills.

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<sup>42</sup> Brussels, 27.9.2007: COM(2007) 558 final [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/adult/com558_en.pdf)

**TABLE 5.3. IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION TRAINERS**

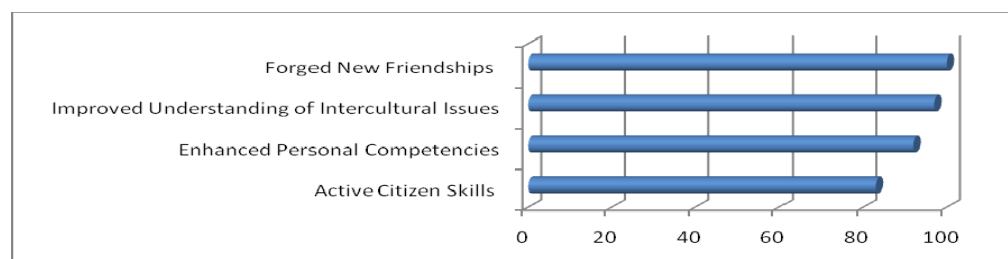


Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n39).

The range of other professional skills enhanced as a result of participation in Grundtvig mobility also point to new methods of teaching and learning, the opportunity for cross-learning in Europe, multiculturalism, and the sharing of ideas regarding the teaching of adults. It is clear that Grundtvig acts as a staff development tool and generates new skills and knowledge in the staff who participate directly.

In addition there are important professional development impacts arising from their experience in the Grundtvig programme (Table 5.4.), of which sustainable professional networks and improved intercultural awareness are the most frequently cited.

**TABLE 5.4. IMPACT ON PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADULT EDUCATION TRAINERS**



Source: Adapted from Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010. (n39).

It is clear from a review of Grundtvig reports that the programme also makes adult education staff feel more valued by providing the opportunity for learning and growth, which includes having access to new collaborations and learning opportunities.

Other impacts have been identified by staff in the area of management and running of adult education organisations and programmes; a renewed commitment to working in the field of



adult education and an opportunity to network with educators from other countries working a similar field.

A number of other specific impacts can be summarised as follows:

- improved understanding of adult education approaches
- knowledge of new ways of managing adult education programmes
- renewed commitment to continue in the field of adult education
- establishment of personal contacts with educators from other countries and adult educators or institutions with particular expertise
- knowledge of new adult teaching methods.

Some of these are intangible or motivational impacts that are more personal and less easy to quantify. They are illustrated quite well in the report by an Irish Grundtvig Assistant, Maurice Murphy, who went on a six month placement in Edinburgh University Settlement, Scotland. He worked in a literacy class for older Chinese people who had never been in formal schooling. He worked with parents returning to education who were hoping to achieve a Scottish National Qualification in Childcare, and in an IT centre where learners were following self-directed courses such as ECDL.

However, his main assignment was working on the “Personal Steps Programme” which provides communication skills to 30 adults with learning difficulties. This also formed his abiding memory of the experience: “This Grundtvig Assistantship gave me a unique insight into the Scottish adult and community education sector. My most valuable learning however, came from the Personal Steps Learners. Their philosophy of life, which manifested itself in the care, support and patience that they showed to each other, and the courage they displayed in their everyday lives, is a lesson that will remain with me forever.”

Other examples include the following:

### **Literacy**

Helen Murphy, head of the Literacy Development Centre in Waterford Institute of Technology, participated in a seminar on ‘Intercultural Learning/Communication Seminar’ in Larnaka Cyprus. Participants came from a variety of backgrounds in 18 countries. Part of the work of the Literacy Development Centre managed by Helen in WIT delivers programmes in the area of Equality and Diversity and Intercultural Education so one of her objectives was to ensure that their programmes were up to date and reflect current thinking in the field. The programme provided an overview of recent research in the area which has greatly contributed to the knowledge base at the Literacy Development Centre at WIT.

### **Special Needs**

The impact of Grundtvig learning mobility is particularly appropriate to the high proportion of professionals who work with adults with special needs. These educators especially value the opportunity to share good practice, and solutions to the unique challenges which they face. Grundtvig mobility activities also offer them the chance for reflection and renewal in their career.

Siobhan Colclough, Advisor to Students with Specific Learning Difficulties, Disability Support Service, at University College Cork, has applied the knowledge she gained from

attending a seminar organized by the British Dyslexia Association. In particular a new innovative assessment tool, The Learner Profiler, was presented and if mainstreamed in Ireland could streamline the dyslexia assessment process.

### **Family Learning**

The topic of family literacy was the focus of a seminar in Istanbul, Turkey, attended by Jenny Derbyshire from the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA). The training covered how to develop, implement, carry out and evaluate Family Literacy Programmes. The results have been disseminated throughout the NALA network and also directly impacted NALA's work in relation to family literacy development work in Ireland and to the European-level work of the organisation.

Maria Hegarty, a teacher in the Cork Adult Literacy Scheme, attended a course in Finland entitled Family Learning Practice and Networking. The course covered novel theories of family learning, and methodologies for integrating them into teaching practice. As well as directly improving her knowledge and skills in the field of family learning practice she made useful contacts with other family learning practitioners.

A Danish seminar focused on the importance of the home environment for the learning of children was attended by Philip Mudge, Chairperson of the National Parents Council Primary (NPC), which has a nationwide network of over 1000 members. The learning from the seminar has had an impact on the organisation at a governance level, at an operational level (informing the day to day work of the council), and at a representative level (to the parents in approximately 1300 primary schools).

Clare Sheehan, a resource worker in Clare Family Learning Project, went to the UK to attend 'Family Learning, Delivering a Learning Society'. The conference focused on providing opportunities for exchange of innovation and ideas and increasing understanding of policy and practice in family learning across Europe in three key themes: innovation and improvement in the learning process; social inclusion with migrant families and disadvantaged groups; and stimulating demand for learning among adults. The seminar provided access to current research and new practice.

### **Guidance Counselling**

Ita Lane works in Kerry Education Service as an Adult Guidance Counsellor. She attended the annual conference of the UK National Association for Educational Guidance for Adults (NAEGA); her aims were to see how adult guidance works in the UK, see what learning/practice she could bring back to her organisation and to share learning and good practice with British counterparts. Since adult guidance is a relatively new profession in Ireland, attending the conference exposed her to a deeper and wider breadth of experience and learning. A unique tool that caught her attention was 'The Rickter Scale' - a motivational, assessment and evaluation package which helps adult learners to identify for themselves where they are at in different areas of their life, *e.g.* work, education or health, allowing them to examine what impact these areas have in their life and come up with realistic ways of improving those areas that they may be unhappy with. The scale doesn't require any reading or writing on the part of the learner and therefore has potential for use in such Irish adult education programmes as Adult Basic Education and Traveller Education.

## 5.3. CONCLUSIONS RELATING TO GRUNDTVIG

### *ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT*

The conclusion of this review is entirely consistent with the conclusions of the Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland (2010) as it relates to Grundtvig<sup>43</sup>. Items 1 and 2 below repeat the Indecon conclusions while the further impacts arise from the current study.

1. Grundtvig is seen as **relevant and complementary** to the Adult Education Sector in Ireland. The benefits which flowed from participation in Grundtvig could not have been achieved without the programme.
2. Through the opportunities provided by Grundtvig for sharing at European level, Irish adult education providers have found new ways to address the challenges they face and developed new approaches to providing quality adult education for learners with different needs and interests.
3. Particular impacts include:
  - increased **funding** into the adult education sector for innovation and staff development in non-vocational adult learning
  - increased **visibility** and importance of non-vocational adult learning
  - contribution to the **quality** of adult education
  - a strengthened **European dimension** of adult learning
  - supported for the development of adult education **practice**
  - support for the development of **sustainable professional networks**
  - contribution to **informing national and European policy** in adult education.
4. **Professional development of adult learners**, including:
  - greater enthusiasm for education and learning
  - improved adaptability to new situations or new environments
  - enhanced creative skills, and improved ability to work in groups
  - increased intercultural awareness.
5. Impact on **adult education professionals** include:
  - greater enthusiasm for adult education
  - better insight to the adult education environment in the EU
  - improved communication, creativity and core adult education skills
  - development of new teaching skills and methods.
  - increased intercultural awareness.
6. Impacts on **adult education providers** include:
  - exchange of new information on adult education issues
  - adoption of better practices, and changes in current practices
  - development of a European dimension to programmes
  - introduction of new teaching methods

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<sup>43</sup> *Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010, p12.*

*SPECIFIC BENEFICIAL IMPACTS ON PROVIDERS OF ADULT EDUCATION TO THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE IMPACT*

Which factors contributed to the varying degrees of impact?

1. Though Grundtvig is a European Union initiative, in an Irish context it is uniquely a demand-led initiative. This arises from key current needs in adult education in Ireland consisting of primary social and economic needs (such as ICT, basic skills, language skills and integration) as well as key structural needs (such as improved access to learning, advice and guidance, recognition of qualifications and recognition of informal learning). Responses to these challenges within the boundaries of a small and geographically peripheral, relatively isolated country like Ireland are always going to be limited. Consequently, the opportunities for **cross-European solutions** manifested through Grundtvig present an irresistible draw for providers of adult education in Ireland.
2. The particular attraction of Grundtvig and its capacity to be **highly relevant** to the needs of adult education in Ireland lies in the fact that its objectives have been very broadly defined. This provides the flexibility to meet the unique institutional or national demands created by the Irish adult education experience.
3. Grundtvig is **highly integrated into the policy and practice** of adult education in Ireland. Consequently it is able to rapidly respond to changing needs, target its activities in areas acknowledged by the sector as of greatest importance and in this integrated framework significantly enhance its capacity to create a notable impact.
4. The relatively unique capacity of Grundtvig to provide strategic, policy and practical inputs in the area of **migration** was, and remains, a crucial contribution to Ireland's national response to rapidly increased inward migration over a relatively short period. In a country where migration had been of miniscule proportions, this contribution highlights one of the many ways in which Adult Education in Ireland has benefited through learning mobility under Grundtvig.
5. Grundtvig has provided a much needed injection of funding for **innovation and staff development** in non-vocational adult learning in Ireland, the least well-funded education and training sector in the country.
6. At a time of severe contraction of public and private funding in Ireland, Grundtvig has the capacity to provide some prospect for **continued growth and professional development** in the adult education sector. It has also provided an opportunity for those working in adult education to create and engage in sustainable professional networks across Europe through which they can share practice, innovate and address challenges. In general the importance of additional funding to a relatively underfunded sector should not be underestimated.
7. Participants in Grundtvig reflect the great diversity of organisations involved in non-formal and informal adult education in its partnerships. For many of these organisations Grundtvig is their first experience of a European programme and its continued success lies in its ability to convert that experience into a long-term commitment to **sustaining a European perspective** in those organisations.
8. Grundtvig participants testify to the importance of the promotion efforts, openness and user-friendly attitude of the national agency—Léargas. The diligence and care taken by the agency in the assessment of applications for funding, , and in the subsequent monitoring and evaluation of projects has played no small part in the success of the action in Ireland.

## 6. LIFELONG LEARNING PROGRAMME OVERALL CONCLUSION

The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) in Ireland is highly relevant and beneficial to vocational education and training, education in general and adult education in particular. It complements and adds value to existing national policies and initiatives by providing a unique European dimension at each stage in the lifelong learning process.<sup>44</sup>

**Impacts on Learners** at all age levels are significant and measurable and are highlighted in each of the sections dealing with the sub-programmes. The same is true for the **impacts on teachers and trainers** across all disciplines and stages of education and training provision and on the **providers** of all forms of education and on the Vocational Education and Training system and on the general **education system** in Ireland as a whole.

The LLP facilitates a range of trainee work placement and staff development opportunities, some of which are not available in Ireland and might not be possible were it not for the Programme.

The LLP also facilitates the European dimension to lifelong learning and adds to quality and innovation in a wide variety of Irish institutions that have taken part. It is also evident that the LLP facilitates the European Community horizontal policies, notably promoting appreciation of the cultural and linguistic diversity within Europe.

The LLP assessment, funding, reporting and evaluating mechanisms also encourage efficiency, effectiveness and lean management practice across a wide range of Irish institutions.

Of special note is the role that the LLP has played during the current period of sharp economic downturn in Ireland where the Programme has been able to facilitate many apprentices, especially in the construction sector, who might otherwise have been unable to gain such experience as an integral part of their training. For example, in a national Call held in the latter half of 2008, Leonardo Mobility was able to offer support to relevant organisations and so contributed in responding to a national crisis.

In a wider context, the LLP concept of the ‘exploitation’ of best practice--which combines mainstreaming and the so-called ‘multiplier’ effect<sup>45</sup>--is particularly relevant to study visits and partnerships. There is strong evidence of both these impacts outlined in Sections 2 and 3.

The LLP has succeeded in attracting to European programmes both institutions and people who had never previously been involved in such activities. At the same time it has sustained the commitment and support of substantial numbers who have previously participated. The various interventions are of a consistently high quality, and overall few problems have been reported.

The individuals who have participated have successfully increased and enlarged their personal and professional skills. They have also gained invaluable intercultural experiences and awareness and returned with higher levels of motivation and ambition.

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<sup>44</sup> These conclusions are based on Indecon Consultants Interim Evaluation of the Lifelong Learning Programme in Ireland, 2010.

<sup>45</sup> Lifelong Learning Programme, Guide for Applicants, 28 September 2007.

At institutional level the LLP has created a new paradigm for organisational effectiveness, one that incorporates an unrestrained commitment to internationalisation in general and Europeanisation in particular. The long-term benefits for organizations and individuals alike are well understood and highly valued.

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