

A student-led exchange in Education

Overview

Summary

In September 2016, a group of second and third year Education students were challenged with arranging their own exchange trip to Maynooth University in Ireland. They were linked with a similar group in Maynooth, County Kildare and left to organise an exchange opportunity that was purposeful but manageable in terms of timetabling, finances and content for both cohorts of students.

The week-long exchange took place in March 2017 with students spending equal amounts of time together in Glasgow and Maynooth. Both groups organised a range of academic, professional, cultural and social experiences with very limited support from university staff. There were no costs involved for either university for this exchange.

Context

School of Education

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Contact Details

Amanda Corrigan

<https://www.strath.ac.uk/staff/corriganamandajanemrs/>

Themes

Internationalisation

Student Transitions

Rationale

As the University of Strathclyde endeavours to be a place of useful learning for students from all backgrounds, the needs of an increasingly diverse student body at Strathclyde must be taken into consideration in order to ensure an equitable experience for all. While aiming to ensure all our graduates are international in outlook, the opportunity for an international experience at university is not easily accessible to all students. Family commitments, additional support needs, language skills, confidence and finance can all create barriers. The Strathclyde students involved in this project cited the length of time abroad, the expense of living abroad and having to take time off work as barriers to traditional exchange opportunities like Erasmus.

The success of a range of projects in the School of Education where students are supported to be leaders of learning assured us of our students' ability to take on challenges and to see these through to successful completion. But was it possible for Education students to plan, organise and manage their own student exchange? It was proposed that taking an approach that was completely student-led would allow students to define the parameters of their trip. They would be able to make decisions about timing, cost and content while negotiating that space between their own levels of confidence and being beyond their comfort zone.

After an initial meeting to introduce the challenge to a group of students who had responded to an e-mail advertising the opportunity, a group of twelve was charged with organising an exchange opportunity to Maynooth in collaboration with a group of Education students studying there. One requirement was that students would create a committee to organise and manage the exchange which would be sustained after the first trip took place to ensure similar experiences for students in the future. Staff involvement beyond this was minimal and mainly related to ensuring health and safety requirements were met.

Successes

Students from the School of Education at the University of Strathclyde and the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University successfully ran their own week-long exchange in March 2017. The Irish students spent the first part of the exchange in Glasgow with the whole group travelling to Maynooth together for the remainder of the week. Both groups of students had organised on-campus activities, visits to local schools and cultural events, while time was also allocated for each group to explore the city on their own. Students ate together, visited schools together, shared experiences of their own education and attended on-campus events together. At Strathclyde, the Irish students got to work with students from Scotland, China, Belgium and the USA offering new international perspectives for all involved. Minimal support was required from university staff and there were no costs involved for the School of Education.

Student feedback

- *"It was so interesting to learn from education students from another country and to be able to use what I've been learning in practice."*
- *"One of the best personal and professional experiences which has developed my confidence and which I have gained so many transferable skills from."*
- *"A truly enriching learning experience that I can take into my career."*
- *"A great experience and opportunity to meet new people, learn new skills, and develop both personally and professionally."*
- *"Educationally eye opening and a thoroughly enjoyable, worthwhile experience."*

- *"The exchange was a fantastic learning experience and I hope to utilise the partnership we have made with the Irish students in my career in teaching."*
- *"The exchange was a great experience that I would highly recommend to other students who are looking to develop their professional practice in teaching."*
- *"A fun and worthwhile experience that would benefit any student in developing their professional practice."*

Challenges

- Students found identifying a mutually suitable time for the exchange to be the most problematic feature of the challenge.
- The composition of the committee changed over the term of the project as student interest waned and as one third year student found that she could not travel because of family commitments.
- Students found that other challenges they faced related to practical elements like negotiating bus routes in a new country and managing the demands of a group of visiting students when none of the Strathclyde students lived on or near campus.

Lessons Learnt

- Short-term student-led exchanges beyond the UK are possible and straightforward to facilitate where students are motivated, organised and have the will to succeed.
- Students must be given full leadership responsibility to ensure the exchange is completely student led. As a result, students developed skills in negotiation, collaboration, communication and problem solving.
- A committee structure allows the project to be sustainable beyond the window of the student exchange itself. This year third year students participated in the exchange while second year students will stay on the committee and participate next year. They will recruit new second year students to take their place while those who attended the exchange will support the work of the committee during semester one only before allowing the new committee to take over entirely.
- Closer links between universities can be established by students creating new partnerships.

Scalability

This type of project could be run in any degree programme where academic staff can help the students make connections and where students have the vision to take full responsibility for the challenge they will be set.

Having an established working relationship with the other university was useful.

NB. Students in the School of Education often have very good experience of taking full responsibility for extra-curricular, non-credit bearing activity which may help with the skills base required to ensure success on a project like this.

Suggestions for Transferability

This kind of project could be adapted by any discipline in the university and across universities.

Attachments

File	Modified
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No files shared here yet.