

# MOBILITY FOR ALL

There is a new energy in education and it involves studying abroad. Studying in Europe can be a very exciting time for a student, with much to be gained from participating in a course in another country. Many Irish students embrace travelling, and those who do indicate that studying abroad is as much about the cultural exchange and social experience as it is the academic experience.

There are some considerations prior to going from being away from home to the language challenge and cultural differences, nonetheless. It is essential that students prepare well prior to embarking on their international adventure. Moreover, if a student has a disability, there may be some additional areas to research prior to departure. Guidance counsellors have an essential role to play in supporting students (whether they have specific needs or not) to research the country and course they aspire to participating in.

AHEAD, The Association for Higher Education Access and Disability, developed the following tips as a guide for students with disabilities seeking a placement abroad. The intention is that they, like their peers, will embrace this new energy which is increasingly becoming part of the third level curriculum by taking up an European/mobility placement.

## 1. Inform Yourself

Find out more about ‘Mobility Programmes’ and what they offer for students with disabilities. (See page 32 for more information on Erasmus - one example of a European placement programme.)

Guidance counsellors can advise students to:

- Go to careers fairs and exhibitions where European placement programmes are represented (eg. an Erasmus stand is hosted at both the Higher Options and Better Options Fairs). Ask representatives what is involved in a placement and determine what additional supports can be funded as a student with a disability. For example if you are entitled to a personal assistance in Ireland, can they travel with you?
- Be inspired! Check out the experiences other students with disabilities have had. Video clips about European students and their experiences in other countries are available to view at [www.exchangeability.eu](http://www.exchangeability.eu). (Agnes and her story about studying in Budapest is worth viewing: <http://exchangeability.eu/blogs/293>).

- Advise students to use the Study Abroad Without Limits forum to ask questions about the situation for students with disabilities in the country they wish to study in. This forum is hosted by the LINK Network (<http://www.thelinknetwork.eu/>), a network of organisations, educational institutions, disability professionals, academics, students and interested individuals with the common goal of inclusion for students with disabilities in higher education.
- Practicalities need to be discussed with family from an early stage. Funding is one major consideration prior to embarking on a short-term or year-long educational journey to another country and families need to be aware of the funding mechanisms of the programme. In addition, additional funding may be available for educational supports specifically for students with disabilities. Parents, students and their guidance counsellor could draft a list of educational needs which are available to the student in their home country and request that funding be made available to ‘transfer’ these to the host country.
- Research the disability laws of the country to which they are going. What are their legal entitlements?
- Know how to contact disability organisations in the country of destination for backup resources.

## 2. Deciding where to go

To determine where a student wants to go, consideration needs to be given to both the student’s interests and the effect of their disability on them individually.

**Guidance Counsellors can advise the student to think about:**

- The culture of the country – is it similar to Ireland or very different? While this is a consideration for all students, remember that how disability is supported and defined can also vary from culture to culture. Research how the disability is viewed in the host country (in some countries, for example, dyslexia is not yet recognised). Access for people with disabilities including physical access might not be what the student is used to in Ireland. Furthermore, in some countries, students might not be familiar with the assistive technologies or adaptations used in Ireland. At the same time, they might have new ideas that would be of benefit to the student.
- The language – this is as much about the tuition language as it is about the language used in day-to-day life. Curricula are delivered through English in many countries now, and people might be very willing to converse in English. This is as relevant for sign language as it is for the day-to-day language.

- What the student is interested in studying. In some countries, they are known for their expertise in particular curricula (eg. Italy is renowned for art studies.) If a student is going to spend some time studying in this country, they need to be sure that the studies interest them also.
- The climate – will the student be able to adjust to a different climate? Is there any impact which requires consideration/accommodation from a medical point of view?
- How long they want to go for. What needs to be considered around access to medical services and medication requirements? Remember – it is possible to travel home for any medical appointments. However, if medication is required regularly, it is worth considering how and where to source it in the host country.

### **3. Requesting Accommodation(s) Accommodation/facilities for people with disabilities (including physical access) might not be what the student is used to in Ireland. Check it out!**

Guidance Counsellors can advise the student to give consideration to:  
student to think about:

- Where to look – the Higher Education Accessibility Guide (HEAG) website, a guide to disability support services in Higher Education Institutions across Europe, lists contact points across the EU (<http://www.european-agency.org/agency-projects/heag>). This can be a useful resource when researching what supports are in place in each country and what accommodation/resource needs should be considered.
- What and how much assistance will be needed when traveling?
- Whether someone needs to travel with the student or can an airline or public transport staff provide the needed assistance, for example?
- What is required for the student in order to maintain health and wellness, particularly when dealing with stressful situations (ie. medicines, medical facilities, backups to equipment such as wheelchairs or prostheses, therapists, self-help groups, nutritional foods, limited stimulation, etc.)?
- How willing the student is to be flexible if certain types of adaptive equipment, sign language interpreters, personal assistants, or public resources are not available?

- Whether the facility has a Disability/Accommodation Office if they are studying, researching or teaching.
- What the general level of accessibility to public buildings, public transport, and streets in the country of destination is. Encourage the student to develop a plan on their expectations and required adjustments.
- How much they know about the culture of the host country. Understanding the country's cultural values and attitudes to their disability is one of the best ways to prepare.

### **Disclosure & Requesting Accommodations**

Requesting accommodations is an important step of the application process. Early in the process (generally once a student has been accepted) they need to decide whether and how to disclose their disability. ([http://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/file/Diclosure\\_Online\\_08\\_04\\_11.pdf](http://www.ahead.ie/userfiles/file/Diclosure_Online_08_04_11.pdf)).

In order to receive accommodations such as note takers, sign language interpreters, additional time to take tests, personal attendants, accessibility to rooms or buildings, it is necessary to disclose disability in a timely manner so that pre-arrangements can be made by the host institution.

It is important to remember that the type of disability accommodations

students receive at home may not be available in every location around the world, so students may require flexibility and creativity in re-defining the concept of their own independence. In some countries they may be more technical and procedural and in others more family- or community-oriented.

Good preparation and research is essential for a successful placement, but it is important not to focus too much on possible problems. The key thing to impress upon all students is that undertaking an Erasmus placement is an extraordinary opportunity to experience the sights, sounds and customs of another country first hand and for many it can be a defining experience in their lives.

### **Erasmus- an example of a European placement programme.**

The Erasmus programme allows students in higher education to spend between three and 12 months in another European country – either for studies or for a placement in a company/organisation. Any student enrolled at a higher education institution (university or other) in one of the 33 participating countries can benefit. In the academic year 2008/09, 198,600 Erasmus students went abroad to study or train in one of the 31 countries then participating in the Erasmus programme (EU Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Turkey). This represented an annual increase of 8.7% compared with the previous year (the equivalent year-on-

year increase in 2007/2008 was 5.9%). Furthermore, it is anticipated that 4% of European students will receive an Erasmus grant at some stage during their studies. (<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/768&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=fr>)

The Erasmus programme has traditionally been a choice. More recently, however, students are actively encouraged to consider a European placement and for some undergraduate programmes a period in an international university is mandatory.



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme



Association for Higher Education Access & Disability



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