EngageALL

Community of

Practice

STUDENT AFFAIRS IRELAND

Student Affairs Ireland (Gnóthaí Mac Léinn na hÉireann) supports the professional growth of student affairs practitioners across Ireland. By focusing on professional development and research-led policy, SAI leads the community in fostering the holistic growth of students within the Irish education system. To do this, SAI has set itself the following objectives:

- Advocate for policy development and change on issues affecting students in higher education.
- Promote and improve student development and support services for students entering and participating in higher education in Ireland.
- Facilitate national and international networking and communication between individuals and associations concerned with student affairs.
- Facilitate research on matters of common interest.

ENGAGEALL COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (COP)

Following successful application to the Student Affairs Ireland (SAI) Seed Fund (2025) University College Dublin and Atlantic Technological University established the EngageAll Community of Practice, a landmark national collaborative initiative.

This community of practice unites all 14 higher education institutions in the Republic of Ireland active in European University Alliances under a single mission: to unite student-facing staff in Irish universities engaged with EUA student initiatives to facilitate knowledge sharing and peer support.

Goals

In alignment with SAI's mission of professional growth and sustainability, the EngageAll Community of Practice (CoP) focuses on:

- Knowledge Exchange: Scaling best practices for student engagement across Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).
- Collaborative Problem-Solving: Addressing shared challenges to enhance students in Irish HEI's participation in the European Universities Initiative (EUI).
- International Visibility: Showcasing Ireland's HEI's expertise in student engagement on the European stage while integrating EU-wide policies and innovations into local practice.

Since its inception, the CoP has successfully:
- Presented posters in June 2025 at the Internationalisation in Higher Education Conference (SETU) and the SAI Collaborate Conference (MTU Cork).
- Facilitated peer networking and travel support for members.
- Produced this publication to further disseminate examples of student engagement activities within European University Alliances from around Ireland.

CONTENTS

Insectopia
Atlantic Technological University

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

Insectopia was launched to tackle biodiversity loss by actively engaging students and universities in sustainability action.

Instead of treating ecology as a specialist concern, the initiative reframed insect conservation as a student engagement opportunity, inviting multidisciplinary teams to co-design real solutions that enhance habitats, promote ecological literacy, and connect campus communities with nature.

The project responded to a broader challenge: students often lack accessible, hands-on avenues to address environmental issues that intersect with their lives and studies. By linking ecological purpose with creative practice, Insectopia aimed to empower students to take ownership of sustainability work, not just learn about it.

The initiative challenged traditional engagement models by embedding biodiversity into collaborative problem-solving rather than isolated lectures or singular events.

ACTIVITIES

Insectopia combined a call for project proposals with a transnational gathering, the Insectopia Festival & Hackathon in Jarandilla de la Vera, Spain. Universities in the EU GREEN Alliance were invited to form diverse teams of students, researchers, and staff to develop concepts for biodiversity-focused interventions on campus and beyond.

Winning teams were selected to attend the festival, where structured workshops, expert input, and hands-on collaboration drove creative problem-solving. The core activity was a multidisciplinary hackathon, where participants worked in mixed groups to turn ideas into actionable prototypes under mentorship from ecological and design practitioners.

The festival also included experiential learning in nature, reflective sessions, cultural exchange, and discussions with policy experts, reinforcing that sustainability work bridges academic knowledge with lived experience. Innovation came from blending artistic expression, ecological science, and social design, encouraging teams to create solutions that were both scientifically grounded and socially engaging. By situating learning outside traditional classroom formats, the initiative fostered active exploration and peer-led development, broadening participation across academic backgrounds.

OUTCOMES

Insectopia generated strong student participation and tangible outputs. Over 70 students and allies from multiple countries co-created biodiversity projects, building skills in ecological design, teamwork, and public communication. The hackathon produced a suite of proposals, including habitat designs,

REFLECTIONS

Insectopia succeeded by positioning sustainability as actionable and student-driven. The open call format empowered participants to lead, while the immersive festival provided structure and mentorship. Key successes included high engagement across disciplines and the generation of viable project ideas with real potential for implementation. Challenges included ensuring consistent participation and balancing scientific rigor with accessibility for non-specialists. Organisers addressed this through clear guidance and mixed mentorship during development.

For others planning similar efforts, two insights emerge: first, multidisciplinary frameworks broaden appeal and enrich outcomes; second, grounding sustainability work in creative, experiential formats makes ecological challenges more relatable and actionable. Providing support structures, mentors, expert input, and collaborative spaces, amplifies both participation and impact.

pollinator-friendly campus plans, and citizen science tools. Notably, the "Bee Friendly" project received recognition for its practical plan to enhance urban pollinator spaces, showing that student work can extend beyond the festival into real settings.

Participation also strengthened institutional networks within the EU GREEN Alliance. Students reported increased confidence in interdisciplinary collaboration and a deeper understanding of how sustainability intersects with academic work and community engagement. Interaction with policy representatives enriched student perspectives on how ecological initiatives can influence broader decision-making.

European University Alliance: ECIU

DCU ECIU Student Ambassador Community

Dublin City University

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

ECIU University offers online and in-person micro-modules, challenge-based learning, and mobility opportunities that help students develop transversal skills, broaden their European perspective, and expand professional networks. Across 12 European higher education institutions, these opportunities are accessible to more than 230,000 students.

In 2025, Dublin City University (DCU) established the ECIU Student Ambassador Community to build a sustainable, student-led network to promote awareness of these opportunities. The initiative was inspired by students who had participated in blended and in-person ECIU microcredentials and challenge-based modules and wanted to remain engaged.

The Student Ambassador community empowers students to share their experiences and insights, strengthening peer-to-peer engagement. It addresses a knowledge gap within the wider student body about what ECIU offers and how to get involved, while ensuring the student voice plays a central role in shaping ECIU participation at DCU.

ACTIVITIES

- Student Ambassador recruitment
  - We invited students who previously showed interest in ECIU
  - Recruited Student Union representative as ECIU ambassador
  - "On the Street" recruitment during orientation week
  - Rolling recruitment campaign
  - Taking part in student orientation week and presenting to incoming international students
- Creation of ECIU Student Ambassador documentation regarding expectations
- Student Leadership Development Programme, Lódz, Poland - 2 DCU ambassadors
- Student Leadership Development Programme, Trento March 2025 "Navigating the Future of Universities in Europe": challenge - 1 DCU student ambassador
- ECIU Hub at DCU libraries - ambassadors explaining ECIU opportunities
- Launch of DCU ECIU Instagram page, @teameciu_dcu
- Ambassador-led shout out to class reps with ECIU update
- Ambassador-led walkthrough session for new ECIU students
- Onboarding & welcoming of incoming ECIU students coming to DCU for a micro-module/challenge based learning module, and incoming ECIU staff.
- WhatsApp Ambassador Community

WHO WAS INVOLVED?

- ECIU Team (Administrator and Community Building Coordinator)
- Student ambassadors
- DCU staff from Marketing & Communication - elements of digital promotion on screens throughout campuses

OUTCOMES

The level of student interest and participation has been very positive. DCU had one ECIU student ambassador in 2023/24. Now in 2025, there are 11 ambassadors. Students have gained communication, organisation, leadership, innovation, and creativity skills as evidenced by the large number of activities and events they have taken part in and organised.

Four ambassadors further developed their public speaking and presentation skills. Additional competencies, including problem-solving and critical thinking, were demonstrated through the establishment of the DCU ECIU Student Society and the successful navigation of visa application processes for travel to partner higher education institutions.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

- 11 Student Ambassadors
- 5 applied for the ECIU Student Leadership Development Programme
- 2 DCU ambassadors attended the ECIU Student Leadership Development Programme
- 1 DCU ambassador attending the BIP in Trento March 2026
- Students made presentations to DCU classes, fellow ambassadors and attended the Library hub information stands
- Undergraduate, postgraduate and research students

Feedback from the DCU ECIU Implementation Group has been very encouraging.

REFLECTIONS

Key Success:

- Seeing the evolution of the student ambassador community—from a single ambassador to a diverse, engaged network actively involved in ECIU has been particularly inspiring, and reflects the ambition of DCU to be a leading European university
- Creating an ECIU student ambassador community that is looking to the future and sustainable. Student feedback is key to the success of the Student Ambassador experience. Outgoing student ambassadors complete a handover document giving them an opportunity to reflect on what worked well, what can be improved, and ideas for the following cohort of ECIU ambassadors
- The student enthusiasm and energetic approach to ECIU in DCU has been a key driver to the growth of the student ambassador experience so far
- Sustainable, co-creational ECIU student ambassador experience

Challenges:

The main challenge faced by non-EU ambassadors is the need for a travel visa when travelling to a partner HEI in the EU. To support these students, we have created in-house mentoring and guidance by fellow staff who have extensive experience in this area. It is not the final solution, but consistent issues can be anticipated, and expectations managed.

"It was a pleasure to share my ECIU experience with students. I'm really grateful for the opportunity, and I'm glad to help highlight the amazing possibilities ECIU offers. Looking forward to supporting more initiatives like this."

Institute of Art, Design + Technology Dún Laoghaire

FilmEU Annual Challenge
Institute of Art, Design + Technology (IADT)

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATIONS

The FilmEU Annual Challenge is a practice-based challenge module designed for film and media production students. Each year students from four partner institutions collaborate around a newly selected theme, which is explored collectively across the alliance. The initiative is grounded in the Samsara pedagogical framework, a challenge-based pedagogical framework specifically developed for higher education in film and media arts.

This year long module is designed for 2nd/3rd year undergraduate film and media production students who are asked to develop a project from concept development through to post-production. Students must incorporate the chosen societal issue within their creative work. The theme informs the development of educational modules throughout the academic year and serves as a foundation for teacher and student engagement, including training activities, partnerships, cross-cultural exchanges, research, meetings, events and exhibitions.

ACTIVITIES

'The Challenge' (10 ECTS), is comprised of two 5 ECTS modules delivered through a blended intensive format, partly funded by the Erasmus+ BIP mobility. This structure combines periods of physical mobility with sustained virtual collaboration. Each year, the host institution formalises the BIP factsheet, outlining target groups, duration, and mobility requirements in accordance with Erasmus+ guidelines.

The programme follows a consistent structure with two mobility moments. The first, 'Ideation Week' (BIP 1), takes place at the host institution, where all students are welcomed in person. During this week, themes and work cases are introduced, teams are formed, and individual learning needs are identified. Following Ideation Week, the virtual component begins, consisting of remote research and development supported by tutors. This phase continues until early January of the academic year. In Semester Two, students travel in their working groups to attend one of three partner institutions for the second mobility, 'Production Week (BIP 2)'.

During Production Week, teams collaborate to create and record all required material for an artistic short film. Students explore and test equipment, present and refine their production plans, review the rushes with tutors, and develop a structured approach for post-production. After this in-person phase, the virtual component of BIP 2 brings students through post-production, culminating in a formal screening at the end of the academic year.

Students work in self-organising, multinational teams that bring together a wide range of creative and technical abilities. They are encouraged to take on team roles where they have limited prior experience and to engage with all aspects of media production; from writing and directing to cinematography, design, editing, and sound. Staff from all four alliance partners contribute through supervision, tutoring, and coordination.

OUTCOMES

Drawing on the diverse expertise across four partner institutions each year has enabled the Challenge to foster meaningful learning outcomes, strengthen mobility opportunities, and enhance student engagement across the alliance. Each iteration has been hosted by a different partner, ensuring genuine co-creation. The structure of the Challenge, combining Ideation Week, Production Week, and the end-of-year Screenings, has resulted in outputs that demonstrate artistic development and international collaboration.

A key success of the programme is its strong participation from both highly mobile students and those traditionally less inclined to take part in long-term international exchanges. Through the support of the Erasmus+ BIP mobility, the Challenge has made international learning experiences accessible to a wider group of students, thanks to reduced costs, targeted funding, and short, intensive mobility periods.

Since 2021, over 380 students from across the alliance have engaged in the FilmEU Annual Challenge.

Each year, qualitative data is collected throughout the programme. Students consistently report personal growth, increased cultural awareness, improved language and communication skills, and a deeper understanding of cross-disciplinary collaboration. As one student noted "meeting different cultures was experienced as a great enrichment to the project".

REFLECTIONS

The FilmEU Annual Challenge has become a recognised and sought-after opportunity within each institution. Selection has become increasingly competitive, reflecting students' awareness of the value of building meaningful connections with peers across the alliance. Its success has reinforced structured co-creation as a powerful tool for student engagement, with elements of the Challenge now informing other alliance activities.

Challenges:
Working across multiple institutions brings administrative complexity, requiring careful coordination of regulations, academic calendars, and assessment processes. This has been addressed through early planning, shared procedural guidelines, and clear communication structures.

Language can also present barriers. Using English as the shared working language can, sometimes, create participation and confidence gaps for non-native speakers. Tutors play an important role, supporting communication practices to ensure all students can participate confidently.

Insights:
Key insights for others include the value of rotating host institutions to ensure shared ownership, and the importance of framing the Challenge around a common societal theme, which strengthens collaboration and integrates critical thinking into artistic practice.

The Alliance is looking forward to expanding the initiative in 2026/27 to include all eight partners, increasing participation to 96 students and further strengthening engagement across the network.

The Intercultural Dialogue Circle
Maynooth University

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATIONS

The Arqus Student Agora is an umbrella platform for student-led groups that provides a supportive space for students across partner universities to contribute actively to the academic, social, and cultural life of the Arqus Alliance. The Arqus Student Co-designed Projects contest aims to encourage forward-thinking projects that enhance student engagement, strengthen the Arqus community, and contribute to students' personal and professional development. Since 2023, Arqus has issued an annual call inviting students from its universities to collaborate on short-term projects.

The Intercultural Dialogue Circle was one of the successful applications in the 2024 Arqus Student Co-Designed Projects call, an initiative launched by the Arqus Student Agora.

ACTIVITIES

In 2024, Maynooth University student Hoang Khang Du was awarded funding to support the organisation of the Intercultural Dialogue Circle cultural event. The initiative offered students, academics, and staff an opportunity to learn about and celebrate different cultures through a relaxed, interactive, and enjoyable format.

Khang Du worked closely with staff from the Arqus team and the twenty Students from eight countries who joined as contributors. The group brainstormed ideas on how the Intercultural Dialogue Circle could become a welcoming space to share cultures, learn from others, and celebrate diversity.

The event took place on 21 November 2024 and the organisers created mini-games, challenges, and country-themed stalls that formed the core of the event.

This game-based approach, was designed to help attendees engage with and better understand different countries and cultural traditions. These activities allowed students to showcase their national identity in various creative ways, including:

- Traditions: Sharing songs, stories, games or aspects of their country's history.
- Language: Teaching simple phrases from their native languages.
- Arts and crafts: Displaying traditional artwork or crafts.
- Performances: Presenting traditional music or dance.

Participants were encouraged to complete as many national challenges as possible, collecting "stamps" (stickers) in their event passports as they visited each booth. Once completed, these passports could be returned to the Arqus team in exchange for a small goodie bag.

OUTCOMES

The one-hour event attracted a lively flow of visitors, all of whom were invited to explore the booths, engage with collaborators, and enjoy a meaningful celebration of cultural diversity. Each participant left not only with a goodie bag but also with new insights and connections formed through shared intercultural experiences.

The event received positive feedback from everyone who attended. In total, around 60 people took part, which was a great success. After the event, the collaborators had lunch together and announced the winners for the best performances on the event day.

REFLECTIONS

The Intercultural Dialogue Circle delivered several impactful outcomes:

- Enhanced Cultural Awareness: Students gained a deeper understanding of cultural diversity through activities like food tasting, performances, and storytelling
- Sense of Belonging: International students felt more integrated and supported through this shared experience.
- Arqus Alliance Engagement: The event attracted participation from students, staff, and international guests from the Arqus Alliance.

The Intercultural Dialogue Circle exemplifies how student-led initiatives can bridge cultural differences and build an inclusive academic environment. By exploring culture shock and intercultural adjustment, participants felt supported and more connected while studying abroad.
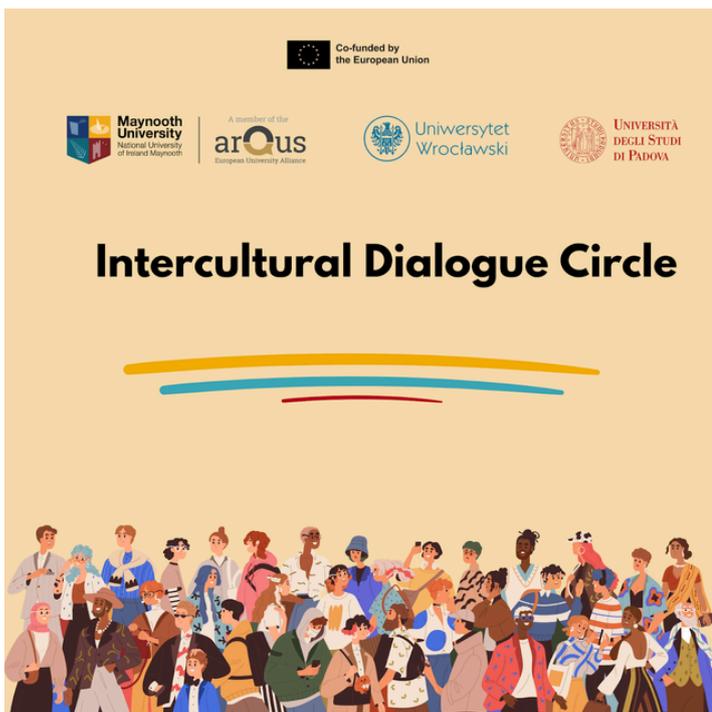
ASPIRE Student Leadership Programme

MTU Cork

AnSEO – The Student Engagement Office

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATIONS

The ASPIRE Student Leadership Programme is an Education Lab (EdLab) initiative within the INGENIUM European University alliance, delivered collaboratively by Munster Technological University (Ireland), South-Eastern Finland University of Applied Sciences (XAMK), and Gheorghe Asachi Technical University of Iasi (TUIASI). Co-funded by the European Union, the programme aligns with EdLab's mission to foster innovation, leadership, and student engagement across partner institutions.

ASPIRE was developed to address a recognised gap between academic study and the leadership capabilities required for graduates in contemporary workplaces and civic life. While many students demonstrate leadership potential through extracurricular involvement, opportunities for structured leadership development within a European alliance context are limited. The pilot programme for students builds on current MTU staff leadership initiatives as well as training of our AnSEO Student Engagement Associates (current MTU students who work alongside AnSEO on student engagement programmes and initiatives), to create a transferable, student-focused model.

Its purpose is to enhance students' academic experience while preparing them to transition confidently into diverse professional environments, equipped with resilience, emotional intelligence, and collaborative skills essential for future leadership roles.

ACTIVITIES

ASPIRE combined experiential learning, self-reflection, and international collaboration through a structured programme delivered in hybrid formats. Participants explored core leadership competencies including self-awareness, emotional intelligence, ethical decision-making, communication, teamwork, conflict resolution, and project management using real-world scenarios.

A central element was the use of the Insights Discovery psychometric tool alongside positive psychology interventions. Students received personalised strengths reports identifying leadership tendencies and emotional intelligence indicators, followed by facilitated round-table discussions to interpret results and consider their application in team contexts. This evidence-based approach supported deep self-reflection and personal development.

12

Individual growth was further supported through optional one-to-one coaching sessions focused on goal setting and participative leadership techniques, which participants described as highly valuable and insightful. These sessions were facilitated virtually by one member of staff from MTU and one from UAS XAMK, Finland.

International collaboration was a defining feature. Staff from TUIASI delivered a unit on team collaboration and conflict resolution during a five-day visit to MTU, while UAS XAMK facilitated a Courageous Leadership workshop online, engaging both in-person and remote students through interactive activities. An EdLab webinar shared experiences of the programme across the alliance and explored future cooperation.

Programme identity and recognition were reinforced through distinctive branding symbolising distributed leadership and a digital badge hosted on the INGENIUM Virtual Learning Environment, and Open Badge Factory. The badge certifies achievement, can be shared professionally, and contributes toward MTU's EDGE Graduate Development Gold Award through reflective application of learning.

OUTCOMES

The pilot programme generated significant educational and collaborative outcomes. Students reported enhanced self-awareness, improved communication skills, stronger capacity for teamwork, and greater confidence in leadership roles. Reflective surveys indicated that participants developed a deeper understanding of leadership styles, empathy, ethical decision-making, and conflict resolution strategies applicable to academic, professional, and community contexts.

Qualitative feedback highlighted the value of combining theory with practical tools and discussion-based learning. Several students linked their learning directly to current roles, particularly those serving as Student Engagement Associates.

REFLECTIONS

Key successes:
Key successes included the strong synergy among partner institutions, the effectiveness of hybrid delivery, and the emphasis on reflective practice. Clear communication, flexibility, and a shared commitment to student development enabled productive collaboration despite geographical distance. The integration of psychometric assessment, coaching, and international teaching created a holistic learning experience that participants found both engaging and transformative.

Challenges:
Challenges included coordinating schedules across institutions, managing hybrid participation, and ensuring consistent engagement for remote learners. These were addressed through careful planning, interactive session design, and continuous communication among organisers.

Insights:
Leadership development programmes benefit from combining personal growth with intercultural collaboration. Students valued opportunities to learn from peers and staff across Europe, reinforcing a sense of belonging within the alliance. For institutions considering similar initiatives, establishing strong partnerships, providing formal recognition of participation, and embedding reflective components are critical to sustaining student motivation and optimising learning impact.

"ASPIRE strengthened my self-awareness, communication skills, and confidence to lead while working effectively with diverse teams"

European University Alliance: EUGLOH

RCSI Erasmus BIP in Research Ethics and Integrity

RCSI University of Medicine and Health Sciences

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

The Erasmus+ programme introduced Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) in 2021 under its 2021–2027 charter to promote flexibility and inclusion in student mobility. BIPs combine short-term physical mobility with virtual learning, making international experiences more accessible to students who face barriers to long-term study abroad, such as financial constraints or caring responsibilities.

Recognising this opportunity, RCSI launched its first BIP in January 2024 on Research Ethics and Integrity, a topic central to responsible research and aligned with Erasmus+ priorities on fairness and inclusion. The initiative aimed to diversify Erasmus activity, strengthen collaboration within the European University Alliance for Global Health (EUGLOH), and provide postgraduate students with an interactive, internationally networked learning experience. This approach addressed the challenge of limited mobility options for research students while fostering academic excellence and global engagement.

ACTIVITIES

The BIP was designed as a blended 5 ECTS accredited micro-credential, coordinated by Prof David Smith and approved by RCSI's Academic & Quality Committee. The structure combined asynchronous online modules with an intensive in-person week in Dublin, ensuring flexibility while maintaining academic rigor.

The programme featured interactive teaching methods, including case-based learning and group presentations.

Students were assigned ethical scenarios to analyse in pairs, culminating in collaborative presentations on the final day. This approach encouraged critical thinking and cross-cultural dialogue.

We have hosted the BIP three times with our EUGLOH partners. The first BIP in January 2024 welcomed 22 students from Wroclaw Medical University (WMU) (Poland)(15), Humanitas University (Italy)(3), and University of Porto (Portugal)(4). The second iteration in January 2025 hosted 10 postgraduate students from four EUGLOH partners: Humanitas University, Medical University of Vienna, Wroclaw Medical University, and University of Porto. Our January 2026 BIP hosted 21 postgraduates from across 6 partners of the alliance.

Both programmes were supported by Erasmus+ funding and RCSI's School of Postgraduate Studies. Twelve RCSI faculty members and external experts delivered sessions, creating a rich, multidisciplinary learning environment. Innovative elements included the micro-credential accreditation, hybrid delivery model, and emphasis on international collaboration, positioning the BIP as a scalable and inclusive mobility solution.

OUTCOMES

The BIP achieved significant outcomes across student engagement, academic collaboration, and institutional strategy.

Student participation and experience:
- 2024: 22 students attended; 2025: 10 students and 2026: 21 attended.
- Feedback scores were exceptionally high: 9.6/10 in 2024, 9/10 in 2025 and 9.7 in 2026, with students praising the relevance of content, interactive teaching, and hospitality.
- All students successfully completed the course and were awarded 5 ECTS credits, enhancing their academic portfolios.

Skills and learning gains:
Students developed advanced understanding of research ethics, integrity, and fair access to healthcare. Group work fostered teamwork, intercultural communication, and ethical reasoning skills—critical for global health research.

Collaborations formed:
The programme strengthened ties with EUGLOH partners and opened new opportunities for joint teaching and research. Faculty reported positive experiences, noting the quality of student engagement and presentations.

Evidence of impact:
- Repeat funding secured for 2026 delivery.
- Positive lecturer feedback highlighted the value of diverse perspectives and interactive methods.
- The initiative positioned RCSI as a leader in implementing Erasmus+ innovations, contributing to strategic goals on internationalisation and inclusion.

Overall, the BIP exceeded expectations, demonstrating how short-term, blended mobility can drive meaningful academic and cultural exchange.

REFLECTIONS

Key successes:
High student engagement, strong feedback, and successful accreditation of the micro-credential were major achievements. The programme enhanced RCSI's Erasmus portfolio and deepened partnerships within EUGLOH.

Challenges:
Logistical issues such as visa requirements for non-EU students and coordination across multiple institutions required careful planning. Early communication and clear guidance mitigated these challenges.
Insights for others:

- Interactive teaching and case-based learning significantly enhance engagement in short-term programmes.
- Accreditation as a micro-credential adds value for students and institutions.
- Strong collaboration between academic and professional services teams is essential for success.
- Early planning for travel and administrative requirements ensures smooth delivery.

The BIP model demonstrates that blended mobility can be inclusive, impactful, and scalable, offering a blueprint for institutions seeking to expand international engagement.

"The programme offered a dynamic mix of lectures, case studies, and group discussions, fostering a practical understanding of ethical challenges in research...I would highly recommend it to others. Grazie!"

EU-CONEXUS Festival and Student Congress

South East Technological University (SETU)

EU-CONEXUS is the European University for Smart Urban Coastal Sustainability. SETU is a partner along with eight other universities: La Rochelle Université (France), Agricultural University of Athens (Greece), Catholic University of Valencia (Spain), Klaipeda University (Lithuania), University of Zadar (Croatia), Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest (Romania), University of Rostock (Germany) and Frederick University (Cyprus).

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

In 2025, the EU-CONEXUS Festival was hosted by Frederick University at its Limassol campus in Cyprus. The festival celebrated the Alliance, fostered cultural connections, and explored coastal sustainability at all levels, with a focus on the complex dynamics of the Mediterranean Sea and its sustainable future.

As part of the event, students participated in a range of activities including art exhibitions, workshops and sporting activities. One of the highlights was the Student Congress, a co-creation activity where students had the opportunity to share their opinions and provided feedback on the future direction and offerings of EU-CONEXUS. At the heart of the festival was the opportunity for students to connect with one another, build lasting friendships and generate ideas for future projects.

ACTIVITIES

As part of the three day festival, students enjoyed a full schedule of activities. The opening ceremony brought together students and staff, creating an energetic and welcoming atmosphere. Afterward, participants were divided into teams for "The Scent of the City" workshop, a guided walk through historical and modern landmarks, neighbourhoods, and museums across Limassol. During the walk, students collected visual and audio references that captured the city's essence from a visitor's perspective. This material was later transformed into a video installation. Later on the first day students and staff explored the open-air art exhibition on Limassol promenade which presented artworks from students from across the alliance.

Day two offered a mix of sports and creative activities, including stand-up paddleboarding and dragon boating. Other students joined a sustainability workshop focused on the theme Re-use, Re-imagine, Re-design. A highlight of the day was the IAMSTUDENT Congress, which explored EU-CONEXUS student identity and guided participants to co-create an action plan and roadmap for future inter-campus activities. That evening, students and staff gathered at the amphitheatre on the Limassol promenade for outdoor performances, including

poetry, music, and theatre.

The final day of the festival gave students the chance to snorkel at the archaeological site of the ancient port of Amathus. Others joined a walking tour of the coastal area between Limassol's old and new port. This workshop encouraged participants to reflect on the transformation of the city's historic industrial zone, now rapidly gentrifying into a new real-estate hotspot. During the guided walk, students captured photos for their presentations, later sharing their images and discussing their thoughts and experiences.

The festival closed with a lively final-night celebration, which quickly became a student favourite. Musical performances by fellow students set the tone as everyone came together to enjoy a memorable evening of music, dancing and community.

OUTCOMES

- 70 students attended in total
- 7 SETU students attended
- Students who connected through the festival successfully initiated and submitted a collaborative project to the EU-CONEXUS Student Project Fund

Skills gained:

- Intercultural communication
- Multi-disciplinary team work
- Creativity
- Independence

"I'm incredibly grateful for the opportunity to attend the EU-CONEXUS Festival in Limassol. It was an honour to represent SETU by showcasing one of my artworks. This experience allowed me to network with students from different European universities, all united by a shared passion for sustainability and creative expression. It made me think of the importance of international collaboration in contemporary world. It has motivated me to continue exploring themes of important world issues and sustainability, and the role of art and culture and how they could help solve some of these problems".

Anna Bekmansurova, Visual Art student, SETU

EZ-ID Initiative

Technological University of the Shannon: Midlands Midwest

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

The Regional University Network – European University (RUN-EU) is an alliance dedicated to driving regional development, innovation, and inclusion. Recognizing that many SMEs and community partners struggle to access European-level opportunities, the alliance established the European Zone of Interregional Development (EZ-ID).

The EZ-ID serves as a collaborative bridge between education, research, industry, and local communities. It is powered by three interconnected initiatives:
- European Programmes Academy (EPA Missions)
- European Stakeholder Engagement Centre (ESEC)
- European Research Area (ERA)

Together, these initiatives provide structured pathways for regional partners and students to engage in European research, innovation, and mobility programmes, ensuring that regional expertise is fully integrated into the broader European landscape. Our goal for the EZ-ID initiative is to integrate our region, local companies, community organisations and schools into our RUN-EU work. We achieve this through structured and interconnected strands.

ACTIVITIES

A first example of collaboration can be seen in our Future Innovator Labs (FILs), which we hold on our Limerick Campus. The FILs involve six secondary schools working with TUS staff and RUN-EU partners on Smart Sustainable Tourism.

Using a design-thinking approach, students are guided through challenge-based workshops focused on themes such as sustainability, digital transformation, and social inclusion. FILs encourage teamwork, creative problem-solving, and early engagement with European values and innovation practices. They also help establish a bridge between secondary education and higher education through shared regional and European priorities. The labs are attended by regional companies who support the work of the students.

A second example of our EZ-ID work is our European Programmes Academy (EPA), which has implemented a series of missions aimed at co-creating short learning opportunities in partnership with students, regional stakeholders, and European experts. One mission, hosted in our Athlone campus, focused on Smart Sustainable Tourism and brought together six regional bodies to develop pilot learning activities that combined practical regional insights with European policy frameworks. This collaborative model ensured that learning outcomes were relevant to both local needs and European objectives.

OUTCOMES

The initiative generated significant results in student engagement, skills development, and regional–European collaboration. Through the FILs initiative, by the end of 2025-2026 we will have delivered six sessions to thirty students. These students are participating in training and lab-based activities that enhanced their understanding of innovation, STEAM teaching methodologies and university research.

Participants are reporting increased confidence in teamwork, communication, and innovation skills, as well as a greater awareness of European values and opportunities.

The European Programmes Academy Mission in Athlone on Smart Sustainable Tourism connected six regional bodies with TUS and RUN-EU experts to co-create pilot learning modules. This collaboration produced new short learning opportunities that are now being considered for adoption across the RUN-EU alliance.

REFLECTIONS

Key successes:
A key success of the initiative has been our ability to engage our regional partners. They are interested in RUN-EU and attend and speak at our events. They are making meaningful connections between regional partners, students, and European networks.

The combination of the Future Innovator Labs, the European Programmes Academy Missions, and participation in international research groups has demonstrated the value of integrating education, innovation, and regional development. Students can then gain practical skills and confidence, while regional bodies and enterprises accessed new opportunities for European collaboration and funding.

Challenges & Responses:
Challenges include differing levels of experience with EU programmes among partners, time constraints for participants, and the complexity of aligning regional priorities with European frameworks. To date we have managed to address these through clear communication and strong facilitation support from TUS and RUN-EU teams.

For others seeking to implement similar initiatives, key insights include the importance of early stakeholder involvement, co-creation of learning experiences, and sustained institutional commitment to ensure long-term impact and regional–European alignment.

European University Alliance: CHARMEU

CHARM-EU Challenge-Based Learning Card Game Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) for Everyone

Trinity College Dublin

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

Challenge-Based Learning (CBL) is widely recognised as an innovative pedagogical approach for situational learning and fostering a wide range of student competencies, yet it can be time-intensive to design and often difficult to explain to those unfamiliar with it. To address this, CHARM-EU, TCD, developed an interactive, card-based game that introduces the core principles of CBL in an accessible and engaging manner.

This activity is a way to explain and show students, educators, administrators, and members of the public a simplified version of the CBL process.

ACTIVITIES

Using a short 10-minute card game, participants identify a challenge, consider relevant stakeholders (Transdisciplinary perspectives), reflect on available resources, and propose potential solutions. The game provides an entry point to the CBL mindset while offering insight into how CHARM-EU students and staff engage with complex challenges.

The steps are as follows: (picture of sample cards below)

- Select a global challenge card (e.g. Zero Hunger, Sustainable Cities, Climate Resilience).

- Choose stakeholder cards who could help address the solutions (e.g. students, local communities, policymakers). The cards have velcro at the back and are then attached to a display stand.
- Pick resource cards that might be needed (e.g. money, technology, cultural knowledge). The cards also have velcro at the back and are then attached to a display stand.
- Sketch or write their solution and post up on a board.

Challenge Card — Stakeholder Card — Resource Card

The game culminates in a collective display of ideas, illustrating a central principle of CBL: addressing complex global issues requires collaboration, diverse perspectives, and creativity. Even within ten minutes, participants can engage in critical thinking and collaborative problem-solving, reflecting the essence of the CBL approach.

20

CHARM-EU Educational Principles covered
- Sustainability
- Transversal skills
- Transdisciplinarity
- Challenge-based learning (CBL)
- Student-centred
- Situated learning
- Inclusivity

The card game is used at public engagement events, student learning activities in the classroom, and for staff training. The game has been used by a number of our alliance partners and translated into other languages for various events they have a presence at.

The cards can be used as is, or be modified to specific themes (e.g., AI, Water, Food). The cards can also be adapted for schools, youth groups, or community activities who want to experiment with challenge-based learning.

Both staff and students have hosted this game at events such as: Open Days, European Researchers Night, Erasmus information events and we intend to use the game more widely at student union activities such as Orientation events, Freshers Week, Green Week, Rainbow Week etc.

OUTCOMES

All who played this game have found it a fun and simple way of understanding what we do in CHARM, especially in the CHARM Master's programme.

- We increased numbers of applicants to our master's programme.
- We generated interest in CHARM across the college community, both amongst students and staff.
- We generated interest in finding solutions to sustainability challenges with the broader public who attended some of our events.
- We created connections amongst students and staff who have subsequently become involved with CHARM study, teaching and research.
- We also have fostered relationships with stakeholders who are now supervisors of our capstone projects.

REFLECTIONS

Successes:
- We got some amazing ideas from our participants.
- We recruited some new students.
- We simplified and demystified the essence of CHARM for students and staff.
- We recruited some new teachers and supervisors.

Challenges:
- Not everyone likes drawing – so we also said they could write a short piece about their idea.
- The game can take a good 10-15 minutes per person/team so it's best to set up two games in parallel to avoid queuing.
- You need a good bit of space and a minimum of two people running the game, I would suggest 2-4, especially if there are two games running concurrently.

21

Inno Eut+ Climate Entrepreneurship Programme

Technological University Dublin

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

The European University of Technology (EUt+) alliance, a consortium of nine diverse universities, launched the Inno-EUt+ project to integrate educational and research activities into a unified, innovation-driven ecosystem. The initiative aims to enhance the entrepreneurial capacity of the alliance by bridging the gap between higher education, industry, and research.

A cornerstone of this mission is the Inno-EUt+ Climate Entrepreneurship Programme (INNO-CEP). Funded by the European Institute of Innovation and Technology through Climate-KIC, INNO-CEP adapts the world's largest green business ideas competition, Climate Launchpad, specifically for university students across all faculties. By providing a structured, eight-module curriculum, the programme equips students with vital skills—such as market identification and climate impact assessment—to transform sustainability-focused ideas into viable cleantech solutions. Ultimately, INNO-CEP leverages the collective strength of the EUt+ alliance to foster a human-centered, innovation-focused environment that directly supports Europe's green and digital transformation agendas.

ACTIVITIES

Through the INNO-CEP programme, student teams engaged in a structured, hands-on process to develop climate-focused business ideas. The programme guided participants through right modules, providing practical tools, templates, and step-by-step instructions to support the creation of a start-up business case. Students began by conceptualising a product that addressed a climate or sustainability challenge and developed a clear value proposition targeted to a defined market segment.

Teams then conducted customer research, gathering insights to validate their ideas and iteratively refine their product concept. Feedback from peers, trainers, and coaches was embedded throughout, ensuring that students learned to adapt their solutions to real-world requirements. Students also formulated a financial plan, considering costs, pricing, and revenue projections, and assessed the climate impact of their enterprise as a core component of their value proposition.

The culmination of the programme was a 6-minute recorded pitch, in which each team presented their climate enterprise business case in a professional and compelling manner. This exercise allowed students to apply entrepreneurship principles in practice, combining innovation, sustainability, and business strategy. Across the programme, students gained experiential knowledge in business planning, customer engagement, and pitching, while developing critical thinking, teamwork, and communication skills.

The culmination of the programme was a 6-minute recorded pitch, in which each team presented their climate enterprise business case in a professional and compelling manner. This exercise allowed students to apply entrepreneurship principles in practice, combining innovation, sustainability, and business strategy. Across the programme, students gained experiential knowledge in business planning, customer engagement, and pitching, while developing critical thinking, teamwork, and communication skills.

OUTCOMES

The INNO-CEP programme highlighted the importance of balancing depth and breadth within a limited timeframe. As the team reflected, "we needed to cut off some of the parts because the time wasn't long enough and find innovative approaches to ensure the students covered all the work." This prompted creative adaptations in the delivery of content, including condensed modules, focused exercises, and the use of practical templates to maximise learning outcomes.

Mentoring emerged as a critical factor in student engagement and success. The programme integrated dedicated mentoring sessions, allowing students to receive tailored guidance, feedback, and support throughout the development of their climate enterprise projects. As noted, "we had a lot of mentoring, and that was a big role into play."

The use of transdisciplinary teams and role-play exercises also enhanced the learning experience, encouraging collaboration across disciplines, fostering creative problem-solving, and developing communication and teamwork skills. Overall, INNO-CEP demonstrated that structured guidance, hands-on practice, and adaptive teaching strategies are essential to enable students to translate climate-focused ideas into viable, actionable business concepts.

REFLECTIONS

Key successes:
- The opportunities through art, creating canvas' and storyboards through different medias such as collage, drawing, writing, colouring was important for students on the INNO-CEP
- The presence and guidance of field-related specialists were invaluable, giving us real insight into what it feels like to defend an idea to a client or a superior.
- TU Dublin Students valued working in mixed teams with students from different universities on real-world problems.

Challenges & Responses:
- Participants came from different countries, disciplines, and cultural backgrounds, which sometimes made it difficult to find common ground and connect ideas to shared life experiences.
- Differences in communication styles, academic traditions, and levels of prior entrepreneurial experience also added complexity to teamwork.

"Overall, the experience was extremely fruitful - if only too short. I would have loved more time to connect with the inspiring people I met throughout the week."

Fostering student leadership in environmental sustainability

University College Cork

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

University College Cork (UCC) is the world's first Green Flag campus and ranked second in the world for sustainability performance (UI GreenMetric rankings). It is also a campus with ample green space; the university tree collection has inspired its own tours and projects, and wild areas of the campus are cultivated for biodiversity. The community garden is a space where staff and students can grow their own food and spend time in a semi-natural setting between classes and commitments.

UCC has long been steered by student leadership in the sustainability space. UCC brings this student-led expertise and strategic focus to the UNIC alliance. Environmental sustainability represents a key thematic pillar of UNIC and consolidates academic and professional expertise to advance sustainability impact in a range of contexts.

ACTIVITIES

This case study is presented by UNIC Programme Manager in UCC, Aoife Dowling, and UCC Greenshoots Co-ordinator in UCC, Irene Ní Shúilleabháin. We focus on our productive collaboration in the academic year 2024/25 with our UNIC UCC student representatives (student leaders), Maddalena Fortune-Brandi and Ella Barrett.

These incredible students developed and delivered a UNIC sustainability week, bringing together representatives from across UNIC universities to our campus to share ideas and inspiration on student-led sustainability initiatives. This engagement was a significant prompt towards further work on student leadership in sustainability via the UNIC student board and UNIC sustainability strand. It also built upon and contributed to the work of the UCC Green Campus initiative. UCC Green Campus is a collaboration between students and staff which advocates for, and champions, embedded sustainability on campus. The Greenshoots Programme aspect of UCC Green Campus harnesses and platforms student engagement for action on climate, biodiversity and environmental justice.

As staff members, we focused on working in partnership with Ella and Maddalena to provide support, connections, and guidance. We maximised the impact of student-led work by embedding it within the university and alliance structures.

The following beliefs were fundamental to the staff-student partnership on sustainability:
- student partnership and leadership is vital for meaningful work on sustainability on our campuses, and fosters inner development amongst students
- students can be supported by providing appropriate time, space and resources to direct their own work in sustainability
- students' pro-environmental attitudes, learning, connection to nature and emotional resilience in

24

the face of ecological grief and climate anxiety can be enhanced and facilitated through time spent in green space

Maddalena and Ella developed a sustainability-focused week-long programme aimed at their UNIC student board counterparts, welcoming 13 student leaders from across our partner universities.

The programme featured expert presentations, campus tours (e.g. a Nature Walk) and open discussions which included the topic of carbon emissions caused by physical international mobility; a key tension for us as an alliance. Attendees from across UNIC took part in panels and workshops, and shared experiences from their own universities. The ideas and outcomes included tangible actions to promote more sustainable campuses across our alliance.

The inspiring Green Campus environment and the ready platform of our university alliance formed a perfect backdrop for this work by default. Furthermore, we (Irene and Aoife) worked to create a work culture for the students where they had time and space to develop their ideas, including via regular meetings.
We provided personal support to student leadership, thinking along with the student reps, and offering them the freedom to propose ideas within the general themes and goals of the UNIC alliance. We also provided logistical support both on the practicalities of event management as well as navigating engagement across the alliance and institution: from room booking, to catering, to risk assessments, event invitations, panel approaches and staff contacts.

OUTCOMES

The results of the initiative included:
- Vibrant experience for our UNIC UCC student representatives in taking responsibility, event management, sustainability engagement
- Substantial knowledge-sharing and awareness-raising of student-led sustainability across UNIC campuses
- Deepened connection between UNIC alliance and UCC on-campus sustainability initiatives such as the UCC Green Campus programme
- Increased impetus and motivation to take action on behalf of our shared environment through

shared inspiration and knowledge-building

Ella and Maddalena exemplified organisation, time-management, communication and event-facilitation skills far beyond the standard expected of students at their stage of academic and professional development as a result of constructing and fine-tuning the week's events for the 13 visitors.

REFLECTIONS

The initiative highlighted to us what outcomes can be achieved when student leaders are given the trust, resources and support to deliver on their own initiative and creativity. It also demonstrated the power of peer-to-peer student knowledge exchange in fostering leadership and learning outside the curriculum. Regarding lessons learned, the Sustainability Week highlighted to staff involved that students are already so knowledgeable on environmental issues; they have a deep desire to see systemic change demonstrated by their universities, communities and government leaders.

We're building upon this work via our development of further student-facing leadership initiatives in UNIC (such as the UNIC Student Citizens Assembly on environmental policy, additional opportunities for Green Campus collaboration and more). On a more granular level, there is still a further project for student engagement staff in UNIC to support actionable follow-through and next steps from the tangible ideas of the UNIC Sustainability Staff Week.

Una Europa Language Café

University College Dublin

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

The Una Europa Language Café is a multicultural and multilingual peer-learning programme that provides UCD students the opportunity to practice speaking German, Italian, Finnish, Polish, Dutch, Spanish, French, English or Irish in an informal setting.

The programme promotes language acquisition, intercultural exchange and social interaction, allowing students to improve their language skills, meet people and learn about different cultures. It was created to strengthen multilingualism as a key value of Una Europa, building confidence in students speaking a foreign language, fostering a sense of shared identity, and connecting students across disciplines. Students desire opportunities to improve their language skills socially, but they lack low-pressure environments for that. Many students cite language as one of the main barriers for exchanges.

The programme aims to address these challenges by enabling students to gain real conversational experience. By creating meaningful peer-to-peer interactions and encouraging participation from diverse groups, the programme also allows students to experience internationalisation at home, helping make internationalisation a lived experience.

ACTIVITIES

The programme runs for 4–6 weeks during the Autumn and Spring trimesters, offering 3–4 one-hour language sessions each week. Each session hosts 6-9 student groups practising different languages. Open to all students—regardless of year, programme, or proficiency—the initiative is especially popular among those preparing for exchange.

Students are placed in groups based on their chosen language, proficiency level (beginner, intermediate, or advanced), and availability. Sessions are led by Language Guides, student volunteers who are native speakers or fluent at C1 level. Using non-formal education methods, Guides facilitate interactive and engaging activities rather than formal lessons.

Language Guides are not required to create structured teaching materials but are responsible for organising smooth, engaging sessions. They incorporate activities such as bingo, Guess Who, Mad Libs, and Scrabble to promote peer-to-peer learning in a relaxed environment. Their role includes encouraging spontaneous and meaningful interaction, adapting conversations to suit different language levels, building learners' confidence in speaking, fostering a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere, and promoting cross-cultural awareness.

All UCD students—part-time, full-time, and exchange—can apply to become Language Guides, and many exchange students participate, supporting volunteering during exchange experiences. Guides receive training on planning and delivering sessions, can book one-to-one consultations with the programme coordinator, and have access to guidelines, templates, materials, and printing support throughout the programme.

OUTCOMES

The programme has been run three times so far, with a fourth iteration planned for Spring 2026. Across these three iterations, it ran for 15 weeks (55 days), involving 100 Language Guides and 350 learners, divided into 100 groups to practise nine different languages. Some languages have a single group, while others have multiple groups. Similarly, offerings vary from one day a week to daily sessions. Spanish, French, and German remain the most in-demand languages.

Learners who attend at least 70% of sessions receive a certificate of participation, with 100 certificates awarded so far. Language Guides may choose either a certificate or a LinkedIn recommendation. Both learners and volunteers log their hours on the Una Europa Language Café via studentvolunteer.ie, which can also be used to apply for the UCD Advantage Award, recognising skills, knowledge, and experience gained through co-curricular activities.

Feedback indicates that learners experience increased language fluency, confidence in speaking, communication, and intercultural awareness. They also note vocabulary growth and the programme's value for social engagement. Key motivators include practising a foreign language and meeting new people. Language Guides report improved facilitation, communication, leadership, and intercultural skills, motivated by sharing language and culture, connecting with others, and developing their own skills. Overall, the programme fosters personal growth, social interaction, and language development for both learners and guides.

REFLECTIONS

Key successes:
- High interest and strong participation from learners (especially for students taking part in exchanges)
- Supports students in achieving their language goals
- Proven track record of skills development (communication, leadership, intercultural awareness)
- Student-led sessions encourage engagement and co-creation
- Promotes internationalisation at home
- Offers volunteering opportunities and language preparation for exchange experiences

Challenges & Responses:
- Incorrect level placement: Some learners misjudge their proficiency, creating mixed-level groups
- Beginner frustration: Beginners often feel self-conscious or limited in their progress
- Planning activities for beginners: Guides initially struggled to create suitable conversations
  - Response: Introduced activity guidelines, session templates, and guide training (positive feedback)
- Large group sizes: Made sessions harder to manage and affected engagement
  - Response: Reduced group sizes, improving learning and participation
- Low attendance without notice: Affected volunteer motivation
  - Response: Implemented participation certificates, increasing learner commitment

"I wanted to participate to boost my confidence in speaking another language. I feel this ... has really helped me."

ENLIGHT Student Network Bootcamp 2025

University of Galway

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

The ENLIGHT Student Network brings together student representatives from the 10 ENLIGHT universities representing the interests of over 330,000 students.

The ENLIGHT Student Network consists of 20 people – 2 per ENLIGHT university.

The ENLIGHT Student Network works in two teams:
1. Student Network Governance with responsibility for student representation and strategic decision making within the alliance.
2. Student Network Community with responsibility for building the ENLIGHT student community and promoting ENLIGHT in our universities.

The ENLIGHT Student Board oversees the workload of the Student Network and works to ensure that the SN Governance and SN Community is involved across each of the relevant work packages. The ENLIGHT Student Board is an active and voting member of the ENLIGHT Governing Board and ensures the students perspective is represented in the long-term, strategic decision making of ENLIGHT.

The ENLIGHT Student Network Bootcamp is an annual event that brings together new and existing members to elect a new Student Board, and to facilitate onboarding and handover.

The two-day Bootcamp combines interactive workshops, design-thinking labs, and team-based challenges that encouraged participants to develop concrete proposals for enhancing student engagement within ENLIGHT.

The third ENLIGHT Student Network Bootcamp was held at University of Galway in August 2025. Planning kicked off in April 2025, with a sub-committee meeting regularly alongside the host representative to develop a full programme – from a 'speed-friending' opening event to a drumming workshop. A participant handbook was also produced, covering event details and practical information for participants.

Each working session was facilitated by either a University of Galway Student Network representative, the outgoing ENLIGHT Student Board and/or University of Galway staff.

Day one introduced new SN representatives to the history of the ENLIGHT alliance and the Student Network. The afternoon then split into focussed sessions for each of the two teams – SN Community and SN Governance – allowing members to get up to speed with their respective areas.

Day two opened with an overview of how student engagement is structured across each of the ENLIGHT partner universities. This was followed by a skills-based workshop on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) facilitated by staff from the Office of the View President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (VPEDI).

The Bootcamp culminated in the Student Network General meeting with the nomination of the ENLIGHT Student Network Board for academic year 2025/2026.

The Bootcamp produced a series of tangible outcomes that advanced ENLIGHT's goal of embedding student voices in alliance governance. Student feedback indicated significant gains in confidence, collaborative competence, and understanding of international partnership dynamics. Participants noted that the bootcamp environment enabled them to build meaningful relationships and to recognise their capacity to influence institutional and alliance-level decision-making.

Evidence of impact is visible in increased student representation on ENLIGHT work packages, as well as in continued collaboration between student participants who have initiated independent virtual working circles. Staff observed greater alignment between student-generated insights and ENLIGHT's strategic objectives, demonstrating the value of structured co-creation spaces.

REFLECTIONS

Key successes:
- The high level of student ownership, the strong sense of community built over a short period, and the production of actionable proposals with alliance-wide relevance.
- The combination of structured facilitation and open creative space proved effective in stimulating meaningful collaboration.

Challenges & Responses:
- Coordination across multiple partner institutions during the planning phase
- Ensuring equitable participation for students facing travel or visa constraints. These were addressed through early planning, and dedicated support from the ENLIGHT team.

- For institutions considering similar initiatives, the bootcamp demonstrated that investing in student-centred design, peer leadership roles, and cross-institutional facilitation yields strong engagement and sustained impact. Clear communication, well-defined expectations, and space for student autonomy are essential to ensuring the success of such collaborative, multi-campus initiatives.

European University Alliance: EMERGE

EMERGE Alliance Student Ambassador Force (BIP)

University of Limerick

CONTEXT AND MOTIVATION

EMERGE is an alliance of nine European universities united by a shared mission: Empowering the Margins of Europe through Regional and Global Engagement. The Alliance seeks to better serve marginalised regions and communities by building a network of equal partners that are deeply rooted in their local contexts.

Together, the partners aim to challenge dominant top-down models of development and societal representation by proposing more inclusive, regionally embedded alternatives.

Within EMERGE, students are recognised as key stakeholders and active contributors to governance, exemplified by structures such as the Student Advisory Board, which reports directly to the Governing Board.

Against this backdrop, the Student Ambassador Force was established as a student-led network to strengthen engagement, representation, and shared identity across the Alliance.

ACTIVITIES

The Student Ambassador Force is composed of students from each partner university who are interested in international mobility experiences. As part of their engagement, these students are offered the opportunity to take part in an annual Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), which this year included a dedicated in-person week in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. The programme addressed a wide range of themes, including international mobility and interculturality, support for international students, diversity and inclusion, sustainability, event organisation, communications, and content creation. Through this blended and experiential approach, student ambassadors are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to actively contribute to Alliance-wide initiatives.

OUTCOMES

Through their participation in immersive learning activities and hands-on engagement, student ambassadors play a critical role in shaping the EMERGE community.

By promoting events, sharing practices, and identifying opportunities to improve the student mobility experience, they help strengthen cooperation across partner institutions. Their contributions support the development of a common identity within EMERGE, foster a shared academic culture, and enhance the sense of belonging among students and staff across the Alliance.

REFLECTIONS

The Student Ambassador Force demonstrates the value of meaningful student involvement in international university alliances.

Empowering students as co-creators and representatives not only enriches their own learning and leadership development, but also strengthens the Alliance as a whole.

By embedding student voices at both governance and operational levels, EMERGE reinforces its commitment to inclusivity, collaboration, and bottom-up engagement, ensuring that its mission is lived and experienced across all partner institutions.

"One of the key skills the experience helped to extend was my ability to engage constructively with uncertainty and difference. Many of the most valuable learning moments emerged not only during structured sessions on resilience, sustainability, and inclusion, but also in group discussions and informal exchanges, where we had to navigate ambiguity, disagreement, and varying expectations. This strengthened my dialogic listening skills, cultural sensitivity, and awareness of my own positionality within intercultural settings..."

"The EMERGE BIP in Banska Bystrica was a highly formative experience for me, both personally and professionally. ... the workshop helped me further develop skills in intercultural communication, reflexivity, and collaborative working within a diverse international group. Bringing together student ambassadors from nine universities, the BIP created a space where differences in academic culture, communication styles, and social norms became an active part of the learning process..."

"The insights gained have since informed how I approach student engagement, mentoring, and community-building ..., particularly in supporting students who are navigating transition, mobility, or uncertainty in their academic journeys...."

THE ENGAGE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Evan Connor
University College Dublin

Colleen Doyle
University College Dublin

Bridget Cheasty
South East Technological University

Aoife Dowling
University College Cork

Paula Murray
Dublin City University

Enya Murray
Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dún Laoghaire

Perry Share
Atlantic Technological University

Aishling Hanrahan
University of Galway

Emil Kindl
Atlantic Technological University

Phillippa Harper
Maynooth University

Róisín O'Grady
Munster Technological University

Sylvia Gavigan
Technological University Dublin

Anthony Johnson
Technological University of the Shannon

Jenny Kirkwood
Trinity College Dublin

Irene Ní Shúilleabháin
University College Cork

Tajana Mohanki
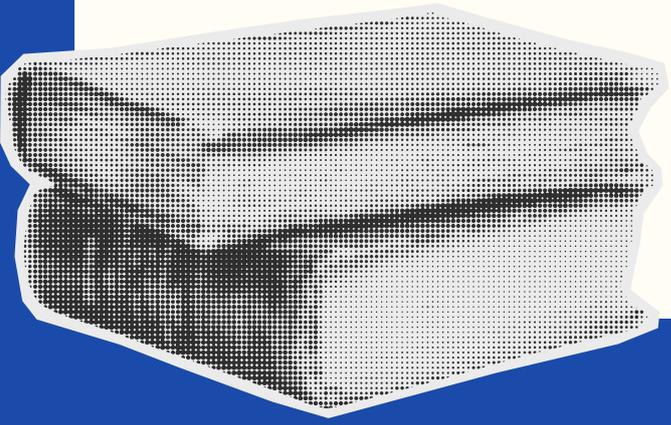*University College Dublin*

John Mulcahy
University of Limerick

Róisín Moriarty
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

Denise McMorrow
Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dún Laoghaire

NOTES

Co-funded by
the European Union