

# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is based on a two-year study entitled 'The Significance of International Student Mobility in Students' Strategies at Third Level in Ireland' conducted under the NUI Dr Garret FitzGerald Post-Doctoral Fellowship for the Social Sciences. A number of academic papers based on this study have been published (Courtois, 2016, 2017, 2018a, 2018b) and two additional papers are currently in review. The present document reports on specific aspects of the research that have been identified as being of interest to higher education institutions in Ireland.

The motivation for the study was a concern about the lack of research on the experiences of Irish students engaging in short-term mobility for studies, in a context where Irish higher education institutions are encouraged to increase outgoing numbers. The study employed a principally qualitative methodology. It was based on documentary research, a questionnaire and in-depth interviews with staff and students engaged in outgoing mobility or returning from a sojourn abroad.

According to the study, outgoing student mobility brings a number of benefits at individual, institutional, national and regional levels:

- Students reported increased self-confidence, autonomy, intercultural and interpersonal skills. A number of students reported increased confidence in relation to academic progress and career prospects.
- Returning students were more aware of the international presence on their campuses. Potentially, this can help improve the experience of incoming international students.
- Mixed or negative experiences of the support structures at continental universities made students more appreciative of their home institution. Returning students reported being inclined to recommend their university to potential incoming students.
- Several students reported being inclined to promote Irish culture and their home country in general.
- Students developed a deeper understanding of the European project and several were drawn to the idea of European careers.

The year or term abroad is a positive experience for the vast majority of students. For many, it is an opportunity for independent living, travel, discovery and building international networks. Students value the experiential learning provided by the experience.

Students for whom the year or term abroad is mandatory are more likely to report mixed or negative experiences. However, the majority of these students still report having a positive experience.

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