

This paper is based on a study done by the European League of Institutes of the Arts, ELIA

### **Learning Abroad in the Arts ; Bringing International Mobility in the Arts to the Forefront’.**

The main aim of the study ‘Learning Abroad in the Arts, Bringing International Mobility in the Arts to the Forefront’ was to explore student and teacher mobility in Higher Arts Education Institutions and Universities.

The objectives for the project were identified as follows:

- Collect quantitative and qualitative data from higher arts education institutions and gain knowledge on the practice of international mobility in the arts
- Address art specific and discipline specific factors of international mobility
- Develop a better understanding of the benefits for graduates of mobility
- Improve school-based policies
- Publish and disseminate a handbook on international mobility in higher arts education

#### **Key outcomes of the study**

Mobility in higher arts education follows the same trends as other subjects in higher education. In many situations there is an imbalance between incoming and outgoing students. Some extremes illustrate this diversity: In the UK there are many incoming students and few outgoing students. In Germany and Austria there is a high percentage of incoming students and an average number of outgoing students. In Scandinavia many students study abroad but there is a low percentage of incoming students.

Within countries the situation varies considerably. In attractive cities like Barcelona, London, Paris, Florence, Berlin, Vienna and Amsterdam the high percentage of incoming students is not matched by the same percentage of outgoing students.

In the arts, long-term spontaneous mobility, driven by a more diverse student population from all over the world, is becoming more significant. Evidence shows that Europe’s world-class arts schools host around 20 - 40% of international students, increasingly coming from Southeast Asia and the USA. In disciplines such as dance and music these figures can be even higher, up to 60%.

From the students’ perspective there is strong evidence that international mobility is increasingly an element essential to the ambition of achieving a rounded profile as an arts professional. Arts students seek a variety of educational experiences in order to advance their individual artistic growth. This seems to be the common denominator in key choices students make during their studies, both nationally and internationally, within one arts discipline or cross-disciplinary.

The most important benefit of mobility as experienced by students is the capacity to develop one’s profession and to develop a professional network on a global scale. Students seek to connect with the global environment of the arts world and different local arts scenes. In highly internationalised disciplines such as music and dance as well as new media and film, mobility and working almost become the same thing and similar tendencies can be seen in all arts disciplines. Among the student population no discrepancies have been detected between functioning in a local environment and on a more global scale.

The tutor-student contact ratio differs considerably. These differences can be a source of misunderstanding and disappointment for students. More transparent information about these sensitive issues would provide a better means of judging whether the student fits into a given approach.

Teacher mobility or teacher visits provide a way to gain better insights into the philosophy, working methods of working and provisions of partner schools.

While valuing the exchange period as useful for students, professors and tutors tended to look at the Erasmus exchanges as a possible interruption of the curriculum and of the group process. On the other hand students looked much more at the result, in terms of a meaningful international experience. This argument about the possible disruptive effect of mobility is stronger in the performing arts where the learning process involves a group process. It is clear that mobility can interfere with the curriculum and especially the group process of the performing arts. Other ways than individual Erasmus exchanges as an integral part of the curriculum such as joint group projects are seen as an equally valuable contribution to mobility.

Arts education institutes are deeply rooted in national or regional culture and work within their national regulations. The research came across significant differences in styles of working and educational approaches between countries and between schools, sometimes with the result that partnerships have been broken off. Important differences were found between a compulsory curriculum on the one hand and project and own initiative based system on the other. A second difference was between an individual studio-based system and a class or group-oriented system.

In higher arts education a new profile for the international institution is emerging:

#### **Profile of the international institution**

Like any arts institution, the international institution is deeply rooted in the national or regional culture and characteristics of the home country or region and plays an active role in the local and regional community. The proposed profile summarises the different elements of mobility as an integrated part of an arts institution.

*The international institution would:*

- Encourage all students to study abroad as a normal and integrated part of the study;
- Encourage/initiate involvement of staff and students in international projects/events;
- Develop appropriate preparation and evaluation models, including sharing the experience of studying abroad with peers
- Integrate international elements in the curriculum, provide an international outlook to their students and look at arts and culture and their specific discipline from an international perspective (through visiting professors, international juries and examiners);
- Have a deliberate policy to recruit international educational staff (say 10 to 30% of the staff) and to recruit staff with international experience;
- Encourage staff mobility and frequent staff exchanges;
- Have one or more international Masters programmes or other international programmes in close collaboration with partner institutions;
- Have an active policy to promote and organise research activities either by educational staff or by students in an international setting;
- Host a considerable percentage of international students, say between 20 and 50%, but consciously maintain a balance between national and international students;
- Have a deliberate language policy, either facilitating an intensive course to allow international students to follow the programme in the home language, or decide to teach in English. Institutions located in countries within a smaller language area may already have made the choice to teach in English in any case;

- Be open to the special demands and needs of international students;
- Have established an active international office to provide precise information and support to incoming and outgoing students;
- Collaborate closely with a wide range of partner institutions in different countries and be informed about differences in pedagogical and artistic approaches;
- Set up specific marketing and recruitment activities, for instance focusing on particular countries or regions through recruitment offices and websites.

### **Lessons learnt**

Many lessons were learnt in and through the project but two shifts in thinking are particularly important. Firstly the project focus shifted from ERASMUS exchange programmes to 'spontaneous mobility': incoming students from outside Europe turned out to be the largest percentage of international mobility in higher arts education and this trend will have a major impact on higher arts education.

Secondly the title of the project publication 'Bringing International Mobility in the Arts to the Forefront' indicates that mobility should not be looked at as an additional activity of the individual art student neither as a marginal aspect within the arts institution. International mobility is, and should be developed in the heart of the educational process and in the professions in the arts. It is an integral part of any arts institution with an open attitude to the outside world. In other words, international mobility is changing the face of arts education and is changing the perspectives of the professional lives of emerging artists.