

Jessica Gough

Focus on Employability

- 1. In your Léargas video, you mention the ‘benefits of an exchange’ can you expand on what the benefits that have been for you, personally, professionally and academically?**

Erasmus has been a huge learning experience for me. I have benefited personally, academically and professionally from each Erasmus experience. I studied Applied Languages at UL and through Erasmus, I have gained practical skills that I have had a direct impact on my career to date. During my Erasmus year, I undertook a Comenius Assistantship as an English Teacher in Poulx, France for 6 months and also went on to study at the UAB in Barcelona under the Erasmus programme. Both experiences were hugely beneficial in developing my language skills, and created a desire to live and work abroad in future. Erasmus opened my eyes to new culture, new people and lots of opportunity.



- 2. Please set out the skills acquired from your Erasmus experience that you think are attractive to employers and/or relevant to your current employment?**

As a language student, the Erasmus experience was extremely important for building my proficiency both speaking and writing in two European languages. I want to use my languages throughout my career so having a strong academic performance will make me an attractive candidate for employers seeking applicants with language proficiency requirements.

After graduation in 2011, I went on to complete an MA in Conference Interpreting at the National University of Ireland, Galway after which I worked as Thematic Collections Research Fellow at the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe in Graz, Austria. I currently works as a language tutor for Waterford and Wexford Education Training Board, and is actively involved in promoting Erasmus+ for students with disabilities. Erasmus has enabled me to continue on a career path combining my passions and skills. I have always been involved in work that I enjoy.

Apart from language skills, during Erasmus, I gained a new understanding of other cultures and the importance of a cultural identity. By meeting people from all over the world, I now have a new understanding of the similarities and differences between us all. Meeting new people all the time is a great way to build confidence and social skills, which are so valuable for getting on well in the workplace. I acquired so many other valuable skills such as learning to overcome obstacles, team work, self-awareness, maturity and patience.

My disability was not a barrier to my Erasmus experience, however it did require me to plan effectively and become a problem solver. This has made me more equipped to overcoming challenges surrounding disability that I may face in the workplace and with traveling in the future.

Focus on Support & Responsibility

1. What were the supports you utilized during your time at UL and in the host universities?

The international office at the University of Limerick were so supportive throughout college. Due to my disability, I did require some supports, such as a PA service, which were organised and funded by the University. I can recommend the services provided by Comfort Keepers, the Irish Wheelchair Association, and Galway centre for independent living which I use frequently. In the host university, I used Google and carried out my own investigative research into how the supports are provided for in each country. It was very tedious and I think there is a huge need for a European wide online information service for people seeking information or who wish to use disability services during Erasmus or when traveling.

2. In your opinion, can you suggest ways in which you could have been better supported during both of your Erasmus experiences?

I had fantastic support from the University of Limerick throughout my Erasmus experiences. I did lots of planning beforehand, but would have also benefited from an advance planning visit. It would have been very helpful to see the areas where I was planning to work and study and ascertain if the environment there was suitable for me well in advance of my trip. It was stressful to have to organise living arrangements, understand college life and the new locality while attempting to adapt to life away from friends and family all at the same time.

As the system of finding Personal Assistants is different in France and Spain to Ireland, I had to find and appoint the Personal Assistant myself. I would have preferred to have more support on what was available from the host university. I think this is an area that has serious opportunity for development in terms of managing a disability on Erasmus as it is something which could limit uptake in future.

3. Would you agree that the onus on the individual student to pursue their Erasmus opportunities, but that in order to pursue to the opportunities they need the support of the institution? Please explain the reason for your agreement or disagreement.

I definitely agree that the onus is on the individual to pursue their Erasmus opportunities and seek out arrangements that suit them. A lot of the learning in the Erasmus experience is about facing up to the challenges of living in a new environment and learning from the whole experience, not just the language.

Do your research. Learn about the place you are going to live in. Live like a local. Speak to students who have gone before you. Ask your international office and the host university questions and try to get your concerns dealt with before you go, to avoid any unnecessary struggles when you get there. In my opinion, preparation beforehand is key!