

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK – YOUTH EXCHANGES

“When you’re out of your own cultural context you have conversations with yourself you just don’t have at any other point in your life.” David Mitchell (Author The Observer 2005)

International Youth Work is potentially the singularly most powerful activity a young person can undertake in terms of their personal identity and sense of the world. It offers young people perspective on, and alternatives to, their culture, values and beliefs. In short, it makes young people think and question, quantify and clarify, who they are and why?

Although there are other possibilities for funding, Commonwealth Youth Exchange Committee, local trusts etc this paper focuses on the EU Youth Programme as it provides the most generous funding stream, has the most advanced support structures and offers the easiest and most viable opportunities for a voluntary sector youth group to engage within the international arena.

The European Commission wants to help fund your Youth Exchange through this programme, but in doing so it wants you to create opportunities for young people to grow and learn, it wants you to promote diversity and inter-cultural learning and it wants you to target these opportunities at young people who would normally not be offered an experience such as this.

Why do a Youth Exchange?

Because if you and your organisation are about the learning and growth of the young people you work with this is the ultimate stage. Your organisation can utilise the programme to offer opportunities to young people in response to at least four particular sets of needs:

1. Targeted Provision – to enable those young people who would not normally travel or undertake an international experience, or who would particularly benefit from the inherent learning within, to undertake such a project.
2. Rewards and Motivation – to utilise the programme as a motivation or reward for young people who have made significant contributions to the organisation or who need a motivation in order to achieve or sustain particular goals.
3. Generic Provision – to make international opportunities available to all young people utilising your youth provision, either through a unit based activity/project or through the provision of centrally organised and facilitated county projects/activities.
4. Utilising International work to challenge stereotypes and prejudice, where a group come from a predominantly white rural area and do not have opportunities to associate with other young people from alternative cultures on a regular basis.

However the main and unique element that a Youth Exchange offers is opportunities for Inter Cultural Learning. If in planning your international project you do not utilise and enhance these opportunities then you may as well link up with the neighbouring youth provision down the road. This agenda is almost unique for international projects and it is this constituent alone which ensures that international youth work will justify the time, energy and resources required.

“Taught me to have more respect for my country and the area where I live, Slovenians don’t seem to drop litter anywhere and I wouldn’t drop litter there so I shouldn’t drop it here.”
Sarah 16 (Slovenia 2005)

“We need to look after each other more as Slovenia has now found that democracy makes people unequal and that power gradually corrupts. Slovenia isn’t poor; Britain is, as their lives are richer because they still look out for each other, whereas in the UK people are cold.”
Elizabeth 16 (Slovenia 2005)



INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK – YOUTH EXCHANGES

Intercultural Learning

Intercultural learning is intrinsically linked to issues such as the respect for human rights, respect of minority rights, solidarity, equality of opportunity, participation and democracy.

Intercultural learning is best based on “The Iceberg concept of culture”. The idea behind the model is that culture can be pictured as an Iceberg: only a very small portion of the Iceberg can be seen above the water line. This top of the Iceberg is supported by the much larger part of the Iceberg, underneath the waterline and therefore invisible. Nonetheless, the lower part of the Iceberg is the powerful foundation.

Culture is far more than the oft-perceived combination of music, dance, arts, drama, costume, food and tradition; culture is the ideology of a society, the dominant hegemony; the beliefs, values and judgements that underpin and define its very existence. The Iceberg model implies that the visible parts of culture are just expressions of its invisible parts. It also points out, how difficult it is at times to understand people with different cultural backgrounds- because we may spot the visible parts of “their Iceberg”, but we cannot immediately see what the foundations that these parts rest upon are.

Among young people, cultural differences may sometimes not be so obvious to perceive: across borders young people like jeans, listen to pop music and need to access their Emails. Learning interculturally then means to become firstly aware of the lower part of ones own Iceberg, and to be able to talk about it with others in order to understand each other and find common grounds.

Curriculum

International youth work offers the following curriculum to those young people who engage in the programme:

Skills

Investigation, observation, language, communication, expression, self-reliance, decision-making, lobbying & self advocacy, dealing with the unexpected, reviewing and evaluation.

Knowledge

Other cultures, histories, world views, human rights, equal opportunities, issues affecting others, other ways of addressing personal and community issues.

Attitudes

Challenging stereotypes, tolerance, understanding, broader perspectives, greater disposition to learn languages, greater sense of responsibility for global issues, enhanced self esteem, and increased motivation.

If this offers the base curriculum of the learning opportunity then it would be folly not to **accredit** such learning. Duke of Edinburgh, Personal Records of Achievement, Youth Achievement Awards and the OCN accredited award in International Youth Work all offer opportunities to recognise young people's achievements and learning.

So what is a youth exchange?

“A youth exchange brings together groups of young people from different backgrounds from two or more countries, providing them with an opportunity to discuss and confront various themes, whilst learning about each other's countries and cultures.

Exchanges between Programme countries can be bilateral, trilateral or multilateral. They must take place in one of the Programme countries involved in the project. Exchanges do not necessarily imply reciprocity, i.e. the sending group need not become the host group in a second phase of the project. If it does, a separate application must be submitted for the second phase.

Sending to Multi-lateral projects can be easier as the host applies for all funding but you advised to gain experience and build up contacts before you engage with such as experience has shown you could be badly let down.



INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK – YOUTH EXCHANGES

Who can participate?

Groups of young people, in principle aged between 15 and 25 and legally resident in a Programme country or Partner Country, can participate in a youth exchange.

Each youth exchange has a host group and one or more sending groups. The first step is to form a group to discuss the project idea and agree on how to go about it. The second step is to identify one or more partners for the future exchange. National Agencies, Connect Youth West Midlands and Culture Vulture can offer assistance in partner finding.

What are the general selection criteria?

Participants

Any youth exchange should have a minimum of 16 and a maximum of 60 participant's aged 15-25-group, leader(s) not included. National groups must be balanced in terms of numbers of participants.

The YOUTH programme specially encourages the involvement of young people with fewer opportunities (from a less-privileged cultural, geographical or socio-economic background, or with disabilities). The participation of young people for whom it will be the first European experience will be encouraged.

Group leaders

Each group should have one or more leaders (in accordance with national legislation or requirements for this type of activity). The representatives of the host and sending groups will be jointly responsible for carrying out and monitoring the project properly and for ensuring the active involvement of all participants.

(In Britain two leaders is recommended and usual due to our Child Protection/ Health & Safety policies)

Duration

The duration of the exchange activity should be between six and 21 days, excluding travel.

Project content

Non-formal learning experience

The project should contribute to the young people's education process and increase their awareness of the European/international context in which they live.

Theme

The starting point should always be the interest expressed by the young participants themselves. The exchange should have a thematic concept, which the groups wish to explore together and which is directly related to the everyday experience of the participants. A good theme will engage all young people in the project with a common interest.

Programme and working methods

In planning an exchange, it is essential for a clear and structured programme of daily activities to be established in detail. The daily programme and working methods should involve the participants as much as possible and allow the learning process to evolve. The methods could include working in groups, field visits, simulation or role-playing games, round-table discussions, practical work, presentations, cultural or sports activities, etc. Most activities, however, should be linked to the main theme of the exchange. The involvement of young people in the preparation, planning, implementation, follow-up and evaluation is seen as a critical constituent. Learning outcomes are desired and these must be linked to activities, but although this sounds complex, it's actually a very easy matrix to follow.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK – YOUTH EXCHANGES

Where can we go? (Which are the Programme countries?)

Member States of the European Union (EU)ⁱ		
Austria	Germany	Malta
Belgium	Greece	Netherlands
Cyprus	Hungary	Poland
Czech Republic	Ireland	Portugal
Denmark	Italy	Slovak Republic
Estonia	Latvia	Slovenia
Finland	Lithuania	Spain
France	Luxembourg	Sweden
		United Kingdom

Countries in the European Free Trade Association (EFTA)/European Economic Area (EEA)		
Iceland	Liechtenstein	Norway

Countries which are candidates for accession to the EU (Pre-accession countries)		
Bulgaria	Romania	Turkey

Other countries can participate in the YOUTH programme but the conditions are stricter and more complicated so for initial projects it is best to focus on the potential partners listed and look to diversify once experience and skills have been consolidated.

Other potential partners can come from all over the world including the former USSR, South America, Africa and South East Europe but conditions include the exact specification of participant's countries and an insistence on solely Multi-lateral projects. They are more complex and difficult and the budgets are huge. However the potential learning for young people is enhanced by the increased cultural diversity so never say never: who knows what opportunities may lay ahead?

What funding can we expect?

Sending group

70% of actual travel costs (young people and group leaders). This is your airfare and coach/train from destination to destination leaving you to find @ £50-100 per person from either organisational, fund raising or participants own funds, and according to your destination.

You will receive 100% of the travel costs and €64(£44) per day each for a worker (and a young person) to travel for an advance planning visit. This is where you do your Risk Assessments both H&S and cultural.

You will receive @ £230 for the preparation of participants and activities (including insurance)

Actual exceptional costs relating to young people with special needs or to the special nature of activities will also be funded i.e. BSL interpreters, specialist adapted transportation etc Vaccination and visa costs are regarded as exceptional costs.

Host group

Fixed amount for the preparation of activities and participants @£230

Fixed amount per project to cover general activity costs @£450

Flat rate per participant (young people and group leaders) from all countries including hosts £15 per day

Actual exceptional costs relating to young people with special needs or to the special nature of activities (as above). Vaccination and visa costs are regarded as exceptional costs.



INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK – YOUTH EXCHANGES

What are the financial and resource implications for me & my organisation?

Well 'Sending' to a bilateral will cost you £50-100 for the air flights & travel per person depending on where you travel to. You will be responsible for submitting the application to the Connect Youth.

Hosting a project varies according to your activities and partner group(s) but as a rule of thumb: if you are hosting a group of 14 for 7 days programme you will receive @£2150 leaving you to find a further £1500-2500. Again you apply to Connect whilst your partner simultaneously applies to their National Agency.

But this should be done over a year... or two... and actually only leaves you to find @£280 per person for two week long projects inclusive. Through personal contributions, trusts, organisational monies and sponsorship this is not an insurmountable total. Young people should be engaged in the fund raising as part of their preparation.

Time wise it will cost the time of two workers for the duration of the project and if you wish to maximise the impact, a session a week for twenty weeks planning and preparing with the young people.

Ok it's a big commitment but the relationships with the young people, their growth, their learning, the fun, and most of all, the shared memories make this work amongst the most rewarding pieces of youth work you will ever undertake.

How do we ensure we are following Health & Safety guidelines?

You need to do exactly the same as you do on a trip in Britain: follow your organisational training and policy, do written risk assessments and use basic common sense. As an adult accompanying such a trip you do have an enhanced duty of care and you are expected to take responsibility for such, according to the age and maturity of the young people involved.

But this is no more or less a duty of care than you have doing your usual youth activities at base. Is there really any additional risk in taking young people abroad? I would argue that a day trip to London is infinitely more dangerous and hostile than most European destinations you are likely to encounter.

As long as you stick to your organisational policy and procedure, undertake a written risk assessment and maintain a constant vigilance for danger you will be fine. Organisations should adopt a clear organisational international policy on the framework of their existing H&S and Child Protection policies, including who will do what in the unlikely eventuality that something does go wrong. The law also states that the organisation is responsible for ensuring that staff are competent to lead such activities but training allied to effective policy/procedure will ensure legal obligations are met. It is advisable that those leading projects have some valid experience of travelling.

Where can we get training and support? Useful Contacts...

Connect Youth West Midlands administers the grants regionally on behalf of the British Council. Various course and training opportunities are available throughout the year, locally, nationally and in other European countries.

If you are completely new to International Work then I would recommend the bi-annual 3 day International Youth Work courses run regionally and extremely accessible. Solely focused on British youth work and crammed full of information, they received excellent evaluations from all participants last year, although it can be a tiring weekend. Alternatively Salto the EU training organisation run a similar course internationally over 5 days but there are only around 4 places for the UK per annum.

For a more experienced worker then I would recommend a European level course, seminar or partner finding seminar. However competition for places is tough. A more productive route to training opportunities is often Euro Desk of which both Connect Youth WM & Culture Vulture are members.



INTERNATIONAL YOUTH WORK – YOUTH EXCHANGES

Full details can be obtained from Kate Lawton, Regional Co-ordinator, Connect Youth West Midlands;

Tel: 01782 297605 Fax: 01782 297601
Email: connectyouth.wm@staffordshire.gov.uk

Details on international training opportunities can be obtained from Susie Green, Salto Co-ordinator, Connect Youth

Tel: 020 7389 4030 Fax: 020 7389 4033
Email: Susie.green@britishcouncil.org

Your Worcestershire Connect Youth WM Representative is Brian Sheridan, Youthworcs, Worcestershire CC

Tel: 01905 612494
Email: BSheridan@worcestershire.gov.uk

Written by Jan Blazak, Training & Development Officer, Connect Youth WM & Freelance Trainer/Consultant

Tel: 01905 357361 Mob: 077 340 59456
Email: Janb@culture-vulture.co.uk

Culture Vulture also offers opportunities for local training, partnership and collaboration www.culture-vulture.co.uk whilst further international training opportunities can be found at www.salto-youth.net & www.eurodesk.org.uk .

Where do we start? How do we apply?

Talk to your young people and see if they are interested, explain the commitment, plan a year ahead, also explain the benefits and the fantastic opportunities that are on offer!

If they are interested, work out a theme, something they are really keen on, a common interest that unites, then talk about possible partners, see where they want to go? Do partner searches, find a likely match, and set the dates for the project.

Agree a theme, objectives, working methods, maximise the young peoples learning by thinking about it here, work out your budget, write your application, submit, raise funds, prepare the young people...

And then enjoy one of the most awesome experiences you can share with young people, watch them grow, grow with them and then sit back and reflect on one of the best pieces of youth work you have every done.....