Social Enterprise and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland is an optional module undertaken by international students as part of the Semester Abroad in Northern Ireland. It is undertaken alongside two classroom based modules delivered by the Irish School of Ecumenics at Trinity College Dublin at Belfast. It aims to give students the opportunity to put into practice the theory they have learned in the classroom, to reflect on their service-learning experience and to gain new and deeper insights from their learning journey.

Students are paired with a social enterprise that works directly on the front line of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Students keep a reflective journal throughout the semester and complete an exploratory research exercise on behalf of the social enterprise partners. The programme lasts for 12 weeks, with students spending a minimum of 8 hours per week with the partners.

**Benefits**

“It integrates theory with practice and links the classroom to the community. Students often describe it as one of the most important aspects of the course.”

*Dr. David Tombs, Irish School of Ecumenics*

“Students have been a vital part of Theatre of Witness in Northern Ireland over the past four years. They have deeply engaged with audiences and performers in this delicate peace-building process as they’ve worked with ex-combatants, victims and witnesses. We rely and applaud their enthusiasm and inquiry.”

*Teya Sepinuck, The Derry Playhouse*

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**Challenges**

**For academic staff...**

Each student’s reflective learning experience is unique, therefore staff must provide enough structure to enable the student to explore their learning without being overly prescriptive, inadvertently affecting the student’s individual experience.

**For community partners...**

The social enterprise partners operate in a complex environment and are sometimes faced with considerable uncertainty. In spite of this, partners continue to offer high quality experiences to students.

**For students...**

Students must come with an open mind and a willingness to engage when their initial reaction might be to judge and give prescriptive solutions to complex problems.

**Tips for Colleagues**

- Work alongside community partners and academic colleagues to design a service-learning teaching and support framework which suits their needs while fostering the students through their learning experience.

- Plan opportunities throughout the programme for students and partners to offer feedback on the journey thus far. Build this feedback into programme design.

- Design an induction for students to understand and practice the reflective writing element and to gain familiarity with the new environment.