

## **Junior Sophister Year Abroad**

The Year Abroad is a hugely formative experience. It is both challenging and energising. For many of you, it will be the first time you live away from home. For some, it will be the first time you reside in a foreign country. The vast majority of students enjoy it immensely, and you are likely to come away from it with both a reservoir of memories and a feeling of personal development.

The purpose of this handbook is to help you plan ahead, and to ensure that your academic activities abroad meet Trinity's requirements, enabling you progress successfully into the Senior Sophister year.

### **University Erasmus information**

Because the year abroad is a compulsory part of the MEELC degree, you are guaranteed a place (though not necessarily your first choice). This means that some of the information circulated by the University to all second-year students will not apply to you.

You should, however, carefully read all the University guidance on study abroad. This handbook presumes it is read in conjunction with that information (as well as with the Study Abroad Handbook of your Dept, if available).

### **Academic Regulations**

The Junior Sophister Year Abroad is an integral and compulsory part of the MEELC degree programme. Passing it is a pre-requisite for progressing to the Senior Sophister year.

Permission to forgo or interrupt the Year Abroad (and instead to study in Trinity) can only be obtained from Student Cases and/or the Senior Lecturer (to whom any applications should be made via one's Tutor). Permission is likely to be granted only in exceptional circumstances, and without setting a precedent.

### **Credit requirements**

Students must pass at least 45 ECTS (or the equivalent at institutions which do not use the ECTS system) during their year abroad. This is lower than the usual Trinity minimum of 60 ECTS per year, in recognition of the fact that the year abroad presents challenges over and above those one encounters in Trinity.

The responsibility of ensuring that enough credits are accrued lies with each student. Students should check the credit-weighting of all modules they sign up for.

It is strongly recommended that students take *more* than the minimum of 45 ECTS, and some Departments may insist on this (consult information provided by individual Departments).

Where a student takes more than 45 ECTS, the best 45 will be used to count the mark for the year. If you spend the two semesters in different locations, a minimum of 22.5 (or next higher round number) will normally be used from each semester – subject to Departmental rules about modules which do and do not ‘count’. For example, if you had these grades:

Semester 1	Semester 2
module A, 5 ECTS, grade: 67	module E, 10 ECTS, grade: 69
module B, 10 ECTS, grade: 72	module F, 5 ECTS, grade: 54
module C, 4 ECTS, grade: 58	module G, 5 ECTS, grade: 74
module D, 4 ECTS, grade: 58	module H, 10 ECTS, grade: 67
total ECTS taken: 23	total ECTS taken: 30

In semester 1 no modules would be discounted, because this would take you under the threshold of 22.5. But in semester 2 the lowest grade of 54 would be discounted because you would still have 25 valid ECTS.

For rules about which modules do and do not ‘count’ for different Departments, consult information provided by individual Departments.

### **Resits / supplementals**

Some host Universities allow resits/supplementals, others do not. You should make sure you are aware of the situation at your host University.

In the event that your host University does allow resits/supplementals, and that you do this for one or more module, Trinity will use the resit/supplemental grade rather than the original (fail) grade *providing it is received in time*.

### **Policies applicable while abroad**

During the year abroad, students must comply with the policies and requirements of their host institution(s). In particular, they must comply to the satisfaction of Trinity’s Court of Examiners for MEELC with the host institution’s policies and requirements about assessment.

Your Trinity Departments may have their own Year Abroad (or equivalent) handbook, which you should read carefully. Insofar as they do not contradict the present document, those policies will apply to you.

### **Request for exemption or interruption**

The year abroad is a compulsory part of the MEELC degree. Permission to forgo or interrupt it can only be given by the Senior Lecturer, and is likely only to happen if there is grave cause.

If you think you have good reason to make such a request, you should ask your Tutor to write on your behalf to Student Cases.

### **Student responsibilities**

Students are notified that it is their sole responsibility to inform themselves of all procedures relating to enrolment and examinations abroad. This includes registering for modules, obtaining information on modes of assessment, noting dates of examinations and any supplemental examinations, etc.

Students are also responsible for maintaining communications with lecturers abroad. Lecturers who hear nothing from a student over issues which arise are likely to be considerably less sympathetic than those who have been kept in the loop.

To illustrate this point, here is a real reply received in response to a plea from the MEELC Course Director about accommodating a student who had been unwell:

I am sorry to let you know that I can not let [student] write an essay in lieu of the final exam. [They] had asked me in early December whether [they] can write an essay instead of sitting in the midterm exam. I had granted [them] the exception. However, [they] did not submit the midterm paper, neither did [they] write to me ever why [they] could not submit it. Only when [they] approached me again to ask if [they] could write a final paper instead of taking the final exam, I found out that [they] had been sick in [month] therefore [they] could not submit [their] midterm paper. And this I found out by asking [them], because [they] did not open the subject of her not submitting the midterm paper. I find this unacceptable.

Better communication on the student's part along the way might have led to a different outcome ...

### **In the event of failure**

Students who fail a module in their year abroad, or who think that they will, should notify their Trinity Department's MEELC Coordinator as soon as possible.

Students should be aware that not all partner institutions offer supplemental examinations. If the institution does not offer them, once a module is failed there is no way to 'salvage' it. Unfortunately, Trinity rules do not normally allow for supplemental work to be organised or assessed by Trinity.

If the minimum number of 45 credits is not achieved across the Year Abroad as a whole, the student is deemed to have failed the year. The student may then repeat the Junior Sophister year in Trinity, paying full fees.

As for the 22.5-22.5 credit split across the two terms, there may be some flexibility on this if an imbalance is small. This cannot, however, be guaranteed, and you should operate on the

principle that the 22.5-22.5 split is of the essence: in principle, failing to meet it could cause you to repeat the year *even if* you have a total of 45 credits.

### **Syllabus abroad**

Your selection of modules abroad requires the approval of *both* the exchange coordinator in your host university *and* the relevant Trinity Departmental MEELC Coordinator. The modules studied should normally be from disciplines relevant to the MEELC programme.

All modules studied abroad must generate a mark/grade.

It is particularly important that *throughout the year abroad* you keep up either or both of the languages that you plan to study in Fourth Year. Where a partner institution does not offer this facility, you will probably be able to sit in on Trinity classes remotely. Approach the relevant Department's MEELC Coordinator in the first instance.

### **Modules taught in the local language**

Some Departments may insist on a minimum number of credits being taught and assessed by medium of the language of the host country. This 'minimum number' may, in some cases, be 100%.

For further information on this point, consult the Year Abroad Handbook of the relevant Dept and/or the relevant Dept's MEELC Coordinator.

### **Before going to your host institution**

It is – obviously! – very important that you plan ahead carefully for your year abroad. For those of you going to two different destinations, this applies twice over.

### **Selecting your host institution(s)**

The precise configuration of institutions available to MEELC students changes from year to year.

Normally in December of your second year, the MEELC Coordinators of the Trinity Depts will inform students of the available options, and invite them to express a preference. For students wishing to study at two different institutions, the choice for both is made at the same time.

Before expressing your preferences, make sure to research the institutions and locations in question. For example, check what language is used in teaching (do not assume classes are given in English); read about the city and country; ideally, talk to Trinity students who have already been there. You should not be making a choice without a decent level of fact-finding.

Each partner institution has a fixed number of available places. In the event that this precludes granting all students' first choices, places will be allocated on grounds of academic merit (as evidenced by the average grade obtained at the end of First Year). Exceptional personal circumstances may also be taken into account.

Once the MEELC Coordinator has determined the 'ranking', the students will be nominated to the Trinity Erasmus Office. The Erasmus office then contacts the host Universities.

### **Hearing about your host institution**

MEELC *nominates* you to the Erasmus Office for a host institution. The Erasmus Office and the host institution subsequently *approve* your placement.

You hear where you are going once the placement has been *approved* (as opposed to when you are *nominated*).

### **Erasmus vs non-Erasmus**

The Erasmus and Erasmus Plus schemes are organised by the European Union, to facilitate exchanges between University students and teachers.

The 'European' part of your Year Abroad will fall within the Erasmus scheme, meaning you will be eligible for the Erasmus bursary.

The 'Middle Eastern' part of your year abroad (assuming you do it – it is encouraged but not compulsory) may or may not fall within the Erasmus scheme. This does not affect the academic side of your experience there, but it has financial implications. At the time of writing (2023), of Trinity's partner institutions in the Middle East the Erasmus grant is available only to those going to Israel. The logic of this (which is a Governmental decision) is that in the other countries the cost of living is sufficiently low that students should meet them entirely from their own pocket.

### **Finance**

You should plan ahead for travel and other expenses, have appropriate insurance in place, and seek advice from your bank about managing your funds while abroad. Please make all practical arrangements in good time.

Check with current and former Trinity students (and also other sources, such as reliable websites) on their experiences of local costs. This may play a factor in determining your preference of institution.

### **Accommodation**

You should check with your host university whether they offer student accommodation.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you have the necessary documentation before going to claim your room. Therefore, during the months in which the exchange is being organised, you must liaise closely with the host institution in relation to both registration and accommodation.

### **Living in a foreign country and city**

Different countries, and cities, expect different things of their residents, and offer different things in return. Make sure to research online, and to think about practicalities. For example, familiarise yourself somewhat with the public transport system of the city you're moving to: is there a student/semester pass, and what documents do you need to access it?

### **Healthcare**

Students must ensure that before leaving Ireland they make suitable arrangements around healthcare.

If you are an Irish resident, you are entitled to healthcare through the public system in countries of the European Union (EU), European Economic Area (EEA), and Switzerland if you become ill or injured while on a temporary stay there. In order to access the local healthcare system you need a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC).

It may be necessary to acquire private health insurance as a top up. Students going to Russia and to destinations in the Middle East and North Africa are required to take out private health insurance.

If you are privately insured, make sure to find out how you go about being refunded by your insurance company, once you are abroad. It is important to know this well in advance. Also make sure that you know how to make a claim, should the situation arise, and that you always have these details easily to hand.

Familiarising yourself with the practices of the health system in your host country will minimise the stress associated with ill health.

Some universities will require you to have a health insurance policy through them, and some may require specific vaccines (e.g. AUB).

Some vaccines are recommended, or even required, for certain countries – inform yourself in advance, and bring copies of your vaccine passport.

### **Registration at Trinity / Fees**

You must register in Trinity for the year you spend abroad, and pay the Trinity registration fee. Registration should be completed prior to departure if possible. It is extremely important that you register on time, in order to avoid late registration penalties.

EU-national Erasmus students do not pay fees at their host university. Please note that if a *non*-EU national is studying abroad with one of the Erasmus partner universities, full tuition fees must be paid to Trinity College and there may be some fee implications at the host university.

### **Erasmus Intensive Language Courses**

The Erasmus Intensive Language Courses (EILC) scheme, supported by the European Commission, offers specialised courses in the less widely-used European Union languages and the languages of other countries participating in the Erasmus programme. EILCs give Erasmus students the opportunity to study the language of the host country for 3–8 weeks. Participating students do not have to pay any tuition fee. Students who participate in one of the special EILCs receive a small supplementary grant. (Language courses other than the special EILCs are *not* eligible for this supplementary grant).

Students who participate in an EILC must submit a copy of the certificate received at the end of the course to the Trinity Erasmus Office in order to receive the supplementary grant. The application for an EILC must be submitted electronically.

For further information see the EILC website.

(Apparently these grants are suspended until January 2024, but it is hoped that they will be reinstated thereafter. If they are available to you, the Trinity Erasmus Office expects you to do them).

### **Documents**

There are a number of documents you will need during your time abroad (several of them are mentioned in this Handbook). Make sure to collect these in advance of going. It would also be a good idea to have a backup scan of them all.

Also, it is a good idea to leave backup copies of all important documents (passport, EHIC card, vaccine passport, etc.) at home with parents or guardians.

At a minimum, you will need:

- A letter translated into the host language and signed by parent/guardian to accompany the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), confirming the parent/guardian's permission to have any re-imbursment paid directly into the quoted student bank account.
- A number of passport-size photos
- Current passport (for students going to Russia this must be valid for 6 months after the expected date of return)
- Original full format birth certificate

It is also important to compile a list of emergency contacts (e.g. partner universities, embassies), to have them all in the one place.

## **Dept rules**

Your module selection at the host university will be dependent on approval by the relevant Trinity Dept's MEEELC Coordinator. It is important, therefore, to find out as soon as possible (and well in advance of actually going abroad) what any applicable Dept rules / policies are.

Since different MEEELC students belong to different Trinity Depts, you cannot assume that the rules you hear about from your peers apply also to you.

## **Preparing for lectures in the foreign language**

Attending lectures in a foreign language is exciting and formative, but for the first few weeks it can pose big demands on your aural comprehension skills. It is a good idea to prepare yourself for this by extra practice (podcasts, Youtube videos, etc.)

## **On arrival at your host institution**

### **In general**

On arrival, you should generally familiarise yourself with the structures and practices of the host institution.

Keep all important documents in a safe and retrievable place.

Find out how to contact your coordinator / the International Student Coordinator/ other relevant parties, in case of problems or emergencies.

### **Registration**

Your host University will be expecting you, on foot of information from the Trinity Erasmus office. But you still need to formally register with them, and it is your responsibility to do so.

The nature of registration and of the documentation required for it varies considerably between universities. It is up to you to ensure that you have the necessary documentation from Trinity, from the host university, and from any other necessary authorities, in order to be able to register on arrival.

You may need to register yourself as a resident of the city you move to. For example, in Vienna registration is mandatory and opens access to benefits such as free comprehensive healthcare.

### **Your local coordinator**



It is essential that you contact your local coordinator on arrival, and again at reasonably regular intervals.

### **Problems**

Problems are best solved by informing your local coordinator promptly. Serious difficulties should be reported immediately to the Trinity Dept MEELC Coordinator.

### **Contact details**

Send the SLLCS Undergraduate team and the Trinity Erasmus Office your address abroad and local telephone number (and notify them of any changes).

### **Health Centre**

As soon as possible after arriving, find out where the student health centre (or equivalent) is in your host University, what steps (if any) are needed to register with them, and how you go about requesting a treatment or prescription – e.g. what documents are required, and what forms you need to complete.

### **Module choice**

Building your course structure is, after arriving at your host institution, urgent, and it can also be complex. Feedback from former Erasmus students is that they wish they had realised beforehand how complex and urgent it is! So get cracking ...

Your choice of modules is subject both to the rules of our host university and to approval from the relevant Trinity Dept's MEELC Coordinator.

For Universities which do not follow the ECTS system, make sure to check conversions before choosing modules.

When choosing your modules, take the credit weight into account - it may be more efficient (e.g. in terms of workload and contact hours) to take one 8-credit module rather than two 4-credit classes.

### **Learning agreement**

Your Learning Agreement is a document which sets out your study programme at your host university.

It is a requirement of the European Commission that all students participating in the Erasmus Programme must complete this Agreement to gain credit for the work studied abroad. Trinity requires a learning agreement also for students whose study abroad falls outside the Erasmus programme.

The learning agreement should be sent for signing to the Trinity Departmental MEELC Coordinator, ideally **by the end of the third week of teaching** in your host institution. It is your responsibility, not that of the host coordinator, to obtain the approval of the Trinity Departmental MEELC Coordinator.

If you go to multiple institutions, then multiple learning agreements are required.

Without a valid and up-to-date learning agreement signed by all relevant parties, your study abroad may prove invalid. It is therefore crucial that you make sure the Agreement is in place.

Any subsequent changes of programme or later decisions on second semester courses must be submitted to the Trinity MEELC Coordinator for approval. If the learning agreement is modified, this must be submitted to the Trinity MEELC Coordinator.

### **Integrated courses of study**

Some exchange partners offer students the possibility, instead of selecting courses on an *à la carte* basis, of following a pre-established programme which leads to an extra qualification.

This applies in the Russian Federation, but may also apply in EU universities. A number of French IEPs, for instance, offer the possibility of doing a *Certificat d'études politiques* (CEP).

There are two advantages to enrolling for such programmes: it ensures the coherence of your programme of study, and it also means that you obtain an internationally recognised certificate in addition to your Trinity degree. This could particularly have advantages if at some future point in your career you wanted to work in the host country.

The Trinity assessment requirements if you enrol on such a programme would be the same as for any other MEELC student: Trinity would only take account of your best 45 credits.

If the possibility of enrolling on such a programme arises, you are strongly encouraged to discuss it with their host coordinators and Trinity Dept MEELC Coordinator.

### **During your stay**

#### **Communication**

Most of you will hopefully have an enjoyable and trouble-free time. But, in the event that issues arise which will affect your grades, it is important to keep relevant parties informed.

For example: a student once mentioned *after* leaving a partner institution that they dropped a module because the instructor was supposed to teach in language A, but often switched into language B. This is something which, had someone been notified at the time, might have been fixable.

In the first instance, issues should be reported to your local coordinator, who will very likely be happy to help. But you can also contact your Trinity Dept MEELC Coordinator, who may be able to exercise moral suasion.

We particularly ask you to contact your Trinity Dept MEELC Coordinator if you fail a module, or think that you will.

Make sure to meet your local coordinator shortly after arrival, and to contact them from time to time throughout your stay.

### **Staying in touch with Trinity**

Trinity will normally communicate with you via your Trinity email, so check this at least once a week.

Many students like to keep an eye on the Student Union's social media to keep up to date with events at home.

You should also keep an eye on the TCD academic calendar and have it in the back of your mind, in the case of having to contact people (e.g. about Erasmus/Capstone) – there might be a large discrepancy between the Terms at your home university and Trinity.

### **Ill health**

If by some mischance you should suffer ill health while on your year abroad, please make sure that you take the following steps: seek appropriate medical assistance, and, when doing that, don't forget to take your insurance documents and means of identification. Tell a friend about what has happened. Contact your parents, your local coordinator and your TCD MEELC Coordinator (if appropriate, also your College Tutor) as soon as possible (or ask a friend to do so).

Ensure that the above have some way of maintaining contact with you (or a person through whom contact can be made, a telephone number, an address).

Any information you give your tutor, your Trinity Dept MEELC Coordinator, or the Director of MEELC is treated in the strictest confidence.

### **The Erasmus Mobility Grant**

If you are an EU national you will be eligible to apply for an Erasmus Mobility Grant, which is intended to cover travel to the country and the difference in the cost of living between that country and Ireland.

The Erasmus Mobility Grant is issued by the European Commission. Universities have no control over the amount allocated. The amount of the grant varies from year to year and from country to country. In some EU countries, the government subsidises study abroad

schemes, so students from those countries are likely to receive larger grants than the usual Erasmus grant.

The first instalment of this grant will not be sent to you until after you arrive in your host country.

If for any reason you withdraw from the Erasmus Programme earlier than planned, and after you have been issued with part or all of the Erasmus Grant, you must declare this to the Trinity Erasmus Office to organise a reimbursement of the Erasmus grant, or part of it.

### **At the end of your stay**

#### **Documentation of results**

Students are responsible for ensuring that all necessary documentation about examination results in the host university is submitted to the relevant Trinity Dept MEELC Coordinator.

A precise deadline will be emailed to you, but normally it is around mid-August.

Please note that you are responsible for obtaining all module marks and examination results at your host university. These must be certified on original certificates of the exchange university, and in the local grading system, as used for that country's own students.

If you spend two different terms at two different institutions, make sure to collect your documentation from the first term shortly after it ends. If you wait until your second term is also complete, you might in the meantime have lost access to the first institutions' email/interfaces, and getting it back could prove complicated (or indeed impossible). Much better if you already have your certificates stored away.

*This handbook is updated from year to year, not least on the basis of student feedback. If you think there is information which would be helpful for future cohorts of students, please notify the MEELC Course Director.*