



Internationalisation
in Higher Education
for Society

>>> The SMiLE Programme Student Mobility & Learning English

#IHES project

SMiLE is a joint coordination programme between the Rovira i Virgili University (URV) and the Department of Education in Tarragona. The programme is specially designed for incoming international students at the URV and Erasmus+ Internships. The aim of the programme is to promote the learning of foreign languages (mainly English, French and German but also the international students and trainees' mother tongue and culture). We offer work placement exercises especially to those who might wish to specialise in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Those working as language assistants will obtain 6 ECTS credits after completing 40 hours of work placement

1 WHAT IS THE GOAL OR REASON FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PROJECT?

The project focus in its impacts and aims on the pupils and teachers at the schools on the region taking URV international students and offering an opportunity to work face to face with society.

Smile complies fully with the IHES concept pursuing two SDGs: SDG4 Quality education and SDG10 Reduced inequalities, transferring the international know-how (international students) to the society (schools).

Smile emphasize the following IHES items:

- improve oral language, understanding of other cultures and intercultural education
- acquire intercultural teaching experience
- improve intercultural communication abilities
- get to know other education systems in the world
- get to know other cultures
- improve linguistic and intercultural competences
- break down barriers
- increase tolerance

2 WHO ARE THE BENEFICIARIES?

The project is targeted at pupils and teachers at the primary and secondary schools. To date, around 3000 primary and secondary school students have benefited from the programme.

We also consider important the indirect impact that the programme has on the families and those closest to the primary and secondary school students, as the students can share their experience with them and represent a learning experience for them as well.



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WHO ARE THE PARTNERS IN YOUR UNIVERSITY?

The key actors are the URV incoming Erasmus and other mobility students from around the world. To date, some 250 foreign students have benefited from the programme. They are called SMILEts (Catalan diminutive for Smile students) and must assume certain work goals such as:

Also, two URV' key units are involved in making SMILE possible:

1. The SMILE Coordinator at the URV who belongs to the Department of English and German Studies (DEEA) of the Faculty of Arts (FLL) and who are in charge of selection, admission, training and assessment of these students.
2. The URV's International Centre, which is in charge of disseminating the programme and recruiting student-actors through European and international mobility programmes. It also supports the academic coordination in training, hosting and welcome management and is in charge of the certification as an actor in an IHES project activity in the framework of the IHES Lab Catalunya.

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HOW DID YOU REALISE THIS PROJECT?

The programme began in 2007 at the proposal of Dr. Liz Russell, an academic from the URV's Department of English Philology, Ms. Mónica Escarcellé, a secondary school language teacher, and Ms. Susana de Llobet, Director of the Relations Office, who saw the opportunity to combine their work to bring about educational and social improvement. Subsequently, the Department of Education and Territorial Services of Tarragona joined the project, which has been a key element for the extension of the activity from secondary schools to primary schools. To this end, an agreement was established to develop this activity and work is coordinated with the faculty in the selection and organisation of the stay in primary and secondary schools.

SMILE has grown during these 15 years and this long trajectory has allowed it to disseminate, create, develop and then adjust and correct the structures, roles, tools and educational and work and evaluation methodology.

One of the key events to highlight for the smooth running of the programme is the training course and welcome meeting given by the URV and the Department of Education (Generalitat de Catalunya) prior to the student's incorporation into the school.



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WHAT ARE THE MOST RELEVANT ENABLERS OF THIS PROJECT AND HOW DID YOU CONVINCE THEM TO PARTICIPATE?

The most relevant enablers are the URV incoming students. In order to convince them the URV offers a SMILE academic recognition (6 ECTS) and the opportunity to assume certain personal and work goals such as:

- to have teaching experience
- To develop intercultural communication skills and to pass them on.
- To improve the students' written and communicative skills in front of different receivers and to learn new ways of communicating.
- To gain experience working in a different environment from the one of origin, in a multicultural and multigenerational environment.
- To get to know and engage with other realities and gain experience in working on equity, diversity and inclusion.

Also, the success of the programme lies in the mutual support and understanding between all stakeholders to ensure a quality, sustainable and socially committed project and they are:

- Department of Education (Tarragona Territorial Services) facilitates access to the URV educational centres and teaching community.
- URV governing bodies facilitate the resources of its academic and administrative services.

The key to work together was convey them that joining our forces, structures and human capital we would added value to education and internationalization of the regions improving the foreign language training and developing soft skills through the internationalization.

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WHAT WERE THE MAIN OBSTACLES YOU ENCOUNTERED AND HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THEM?

Different obstacles have appeared depending on each phase in the life of the programme, that is to say, we have grown and develop new strategies thanks to working on them.

At the beginning the main difficulty was to convince how Smile could be a programme useful for all the URV international incoming students (whatever were their area of studies) and how fruitful could be collaborate with society working with other education levels in the territory.

We did a remarkable previous effort explaining SMILE to avoid misunderstandings and to gain allies within URV to the governing bodies, to the academic service (to achieve a full credit recognition) and to the Faculty of Education (in order to inform them that it would not be an intrusive programme with their own school internships).



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In a second phase we worked hard developing a partnership with the education department of the Generalitat de Catalunya involving them as a partner signing a formal agreement.

Finally, during the third phase, the pandemic was the main problem but as a positive part it has opened us the possibility to SMILE 2.0., the new modality which is online or hybrid and is specially designed for teaching in schools far away from Tarragona and Reus and where public transport is less frequent.

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WHAT WERE THE KEY "DO'S AND DON'T'S" THAT YOU LEARNED WHILE SETTING UP AND RUNNING THIS PROJECT?

Do's and don'ts that we learned during the Smile project are quite similar to other projects based on the collaboration of University, Society and Internationalization, in definitive in all IHES activities project.

Do's:

- Study the feasibility of the idea in your institution and territory according to available resources and needs of each part.
- Looking for the university governing bodies support and their services commitment to collaborate during all the project.
- Involve society thorough key regional/country institutions (: in the Smile case were schools, Department of education.)
- Design a good work plan (everybody needs to know what is their role, times, tools...)
- Give priority to internal and external communication in fact it is a must for the project survive!
- Assure some type of recognition for all the participants depending on their role (credits, media recognition, certifies...)

Don't's:

- Give up when all seems lost (always you can find other ways to develop new ideas in order to save the long way travelled)
- Believe that you know all the society needs. Observe and listen what are the society needs.
- Forget keep your partners and allies duly informed and updated
- Begin working without a clear budget
- Focus the internationalization transfer are only learn languages