AN EVALUATION REPORT OF ETWINNING IN IRELAND

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Introduction

eTwinning

Established in 2005, eTwinning is a multilingual online platform facilitating the development of and participation in projects between schools as well as other activities such as the continuing professional development (CPD) of school education professionals across 44 countries. At national level it is managed by the eTwinning National Support Service (NSS) situated in Léargas, the National Agency (NA) for the management of Erasmus+ and other national and European programmes in the fields of education, training, and youth. Across the participating countries, at the time of writing, there are 817,195 registered teachers, 207,993 registered schools and 107,338 projects[1]. In Ireland, there have been 3,369 registered teachers, 1,774 registered schools and 1,115 projects,[2] representing 5% of teachers and 4% of the eligible schools in Irelands.[3]

Aims and Objectives

The objectives of this report are to:

- explore the levels of engagement within the eTwinning programme and the relevance of eTwinning

- identify the levels of support provided by the NSS

- recognise barriers to engagement for participants

- establish primary motivations of users for joining eTwinning

- recognise the needs of those using eTwinning and how they can be addressed.

Data Collection

Covid-19 impacted on original plans and in March 2020 plans were changed and adapted to facilitate the continuation of the research. Data collection included desk research and exploration of the platform, membership, and activities. Three surveys were distributed targeting active users, dormant accounts with projects and dormant accounts with no projects. Forty-four telephone interviews were also conducted.

The potential target audience for questionnaires and interviews are people registered on the platform before 31 December 2019, which were 1,579 eTwinning community members. These are divided into two different categories: those with active accounts, a total of 1,042, and those with accounts where the account holder has not logged into the platform between a year and three years, which is a total 537. A detailed questionnaire was sent to active users with 22 questions; this received a 12% response rate.

Twenty-three of these participated in interviews. Two short questionnaires were sent to dormant accounts. One questionnaire with five questions was sent to dormant accounts who were previously involved in projects with a 31% response rate and four questions were sent to dormant accounts who had no previous projects with a 22% response rate. Twenty-one interviews with dormant accounts were held where 12 of these had no projects and 9 had participated in projects or professional development activities. Data collection received feedback from approximately 20% of the membership base in Ireland.

1 eTwinning website (accessed 27 July 2020) https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm
2 Unless otherwise stated all statistics and data related to eTwinning in Ireland have been taken from the National Support Service (NSS) desktop
3 Department of Education and Skills, Key Statistics 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 (accessed 25 June 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/key-statistics-2019-2020.pdf

2. Profile of Contributors

Responses to the survey for active users include: 72% teachers, 29% at post-primary level and 43% at primary level.

The remaining 28% include 12% school principals, 5% ICT coordinators, 3% librarians, 2% Special Needs Assistants and retired teachers or principals, 4% teacher trainers or trainee teachers and 2% a mix of categories.

The professional profile proportionally reflects the make-up of the membership cohort of the platform percentages where the majority are teachers at 79%. Some 30% of respondents had additional areas of responsibility outside their main role, demonstrating the multiple roles teachers play outside their main subject area or teaching activities. Out of those who participated in the questionnaire, 23 were interviewed.

The two surveys sent to dormant accounts received responses from the following categories:

- 58% primary school teachers
- 32% post-primary teachers
- 6% principals or deputy principals
- 2% retired educators
- 2% no longer working in education

More than 40% of current registered users enrolled in the last 3 years, which is reflected in the representation of respondents in this report. The duration of registration provides an indication of the potential sustainable use of eTwinning, with 17% registering more than 5 years ago; when deducting the dormant accounts from the total, this sits at 16%. It should be noted that 0.5% of those who participated were participants who re-registered after an account became dormant.

Of the active users, 44% state that eTwinning is driven by 1 or 2 teachers within their classes, which reflects the overall pattern where most schools have 1 or 2 registered teachers who are labelled as active within the platform. A total of 15% undertake an annual project with their class, which signifies a level of integration into the school. Some 9% adopt a whole school approach to eTwinning, and for

24% eTwinning forms part of the school digital strategy. Some 28% use it only with Erasmus+ projects showing the relationship between eTwinning and Erasmus+. This is a higher percentage than those officially registered in the platform as Erasmus+ projects, which sits at about 14% across 2018 and 2019 projects. The information is not accessible for the other years. Some 4% represented those joining Communities of Practice (CoP) and teacher training initiatives (TTI).

The definition of active user varies from person to person. Those who responded to the survey who are or were involved in Erasmus+ and Comenius projects did not consider themselves as active users of eTwinning, as their primary purpose for using the platform was related to their funded activity. This was mainly those who were not eTwinning users prior to participation in an Erasmus+ funded activity. Integration into the curriculum provides a low rate at 14%. However, given that the respondents who selected this have been members for two years or more, this demonstrates that it takes time to integrate eTwinning into the curriculum. The 24% who indicated that eTwinning was part of the school's digital strategy would imply that this is at various levels of implementation. The broad spectrum of subject areas demonstrates the applicability of eTwinning to a range of education professionals.

3. The Development of eTwinning in an Irish Context

This is divided into three areas as per the European Programme cycles: the eLearning Programmes 2005 to 2006, the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) 2007 to 2013, and Erasmus+ 2014 to 2020. This report relates to registered users up to December 2019, therefore information related to the Erasmus+ programme and the development of eTwinning is provided up to December 2019.

eLearning Programme 2005 to 2006

The initial two years of eTwinning demonstrated a good uptake of a new programme with increasing activity and registration undertaking relevant projects linked to the ethos of the Education Act 1998, where respecting and valuing diversity within Irish society is a core aim of education. The activities available under eTwinning fit well with Irish policy for the integration of information and communications

technology (ICT) into the curriculum, offering both training opportunities as well as a safe portal to enable and facilitate communication and collaboration with partners across Europe against the backdrop of investment in infrastructure of ICT in education. When eTwinning commenced in 2005, there was a focus on infrastructure and access to broadband from 2005 to 2008 with the roll-out of the Schools Broadband Action Programme. In 2005/06 the Department of Education and Skills (DES) carried out research into the impact of ICT on teaching and learning in schools, publishing the report in 2008.

There was one full-time staff member in the NSS, situated within the team who managed Comenius, Grundtvig and the Arion Programme. During this time, 261 education professionals registered, representing 218 schools undertaking 74 projects. Based on the project descriptions, most activities were carried out offline and then shared with partners at various intervals during the project, removing the need to have sustained access to a computer for most project activities. The partnership projects were primarily bilateral with 28% of the projects having more than 1 partner ranging from 3 to 9 partners. Ireland did not feature strongly in the founding countries in multilateral projects. Some 12% of the projects were bilingual, conducted in English and another European language, Spanish, French, German, and Italian, all involving post-primary students aged 13 to 19. Project topics within the age ranges 5 to 13 focused on myths, legends, communication between students learning about history, geography, the environment, and culture. There was an emphasis on literacy and communication skills as well as gaining knowledge about other countries. Within the age range of 12 to 19 project topics focused more on European citizenship, cultural identity, understanding similarities, and valuing differences. There was an emphasis on teamwork, collaboration, and language learning.

Lifelong Learning Programme 2007 to 2013

The introduction of the LLP saw eTwinning form a subprogramme of the Comenius Programme. The period 2007 to 2013 was one of steady growth in membership, with evidence of increasing engagement with the growing number of projects. There was an increase in the number of registered librarians, which can be linked to the expansion of the JCSP (Junior Certificate Schools Programme) Demon-

stration Library Project, who provide literacy and language development as an early intervention to students. There were several repeat activities with different partners and projects with the same partners increasing in complexity, demonstrating a level of sustainability. Most notable is the focus on the quality of the information involved in the research undertaken by students and the emphasis on the meaningful engagement with the information as well as stronger links created with partners in terms of exchange and relevance to the curriculum across all partners. At this point, there is a wide mix of projects, from beginners taking initial steps, starting with an initial teacher project examining areas for collaboration while learning about and from each other, to more advanced projects with a whole school approach to twinning all classes. Projects were beginning to focus on parallel goals targeting both teachers and students, with learning outcomes for both groups, with teachers sharing resources and seeking to learn from each other with concrete outcomes such as learning programmes for students with additional educational needs, while students were working on a different topic.

A total of 651 projects took place with 64% involving more than one partner, with 38% of these with Ireland as co-submitter or lead partner. Some 33% were conducted in more than one language primarily at post-primary age level. There is a 41% representation from post-primary age groups. Project themes with the 3 to 12 age cohort focused mainly on exchange of culture, traditions, and nature with the aim of intercultural learning and understanding using myths, legends, festivals, celebrations, and daily life with an emphasis on communication, literacy and creativity skills similar to the first 2 years. Themes such as healthy eating, healthy minds, dealing with change, and anti-bullying started to emerge from 2011 onwards. Planning was evident in terms of linking with world events such as the Olympic Games and the Paralympics, sharing traditional games, the UN Year of Biodiversity in 2010 concerning climate change and pollution among the participating countries. In terms of language projects, there was still more focus on the partner country and their linguistic skills. However, a core aim was to gain an understanding of the EU, creating connections and a sense of place and belonging within the EU. The post-primary age group 13 to 18 carried out both synchronous and asynchronous activities, notably the area of language learning and exchange took place with a focus on language learning and language exchange on specific topics, such as daily life, school life, and hobbies

as well as current events, learning key vocabulary around topics such as global warming. There were several projects focused on everyday maths which links with the numeracy and literacy strategy as well as early participants in project maths which commenced in 2008. There was a large emphasis on research and analysis of results as well as critical thinking involving comparisons between the results of activities in partner schools. The expansion of geography could be linked to the revised curriculum introduced in 2004, encouraging the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of the subject. History featured well, with perspectives explored on key historical figures, their relevance for the countries involved encouraging critical thinking.

The complexity of projects for several participants was increasing and as technology advanced, with the introduction of creating animations, technical drawing, and elements of coding. Steps were also taken to incorporate activities with national initiatives such as the Green Flag programme. The focus of projects or a secondary aspect included an emphasis on intercultural exchange and intercultural competences, which links with the Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010–2015[4]. The demographics of Ireland had changed as identified in the 2006 Census where 10% of the population identified as another nationality in the question What is your nationality? There was also an emphasis on inclusion, which can be linked to the publication of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) - The Action Plan for Educational Inclusion in 2005. This increased the emphasis on inclusion in education, which was supported by the series of European Years which all focused on or were strongly linked to the topic with 2007 the European Year of Equal Opportunities, 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and 2010 the European Year For Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The NSS had one full-time staff member and the programme was located within the team who managed Comenius and adult education with part-time administrative support. While there was still a focus on building the membership base of the programme with event and conference attendance with key organisations, networks, and associations, strong efforts were made to develop projects. A total of 34 projects were awarded the National Quality Label and 28 were awarded the European Quality Label. An eTwinning Steering Committee was formed with members from the ICT Policy Unit of the DES, the education centre network and teacher training organisations and representatives. In 2008, the

eTwinning Ambassador Network in Ireland was established to assist in creating awareness and promoting eTwinning at national and regional levels using a peer learning approach.

4. Erasmus+ 2014 to 2020

This report encompasses registered eTwinning users up to December 2019, when there is still a year left of the 7-year programme cycle. Under Erasmus+ eTwinning became one of the IT support platforms. Erasmus+ brought the largest changes experienced by the field of school education in the last 14 years, one of the key changes was the move to an organisational approach for mobility activities with the creation of European Development Plans and the integration of the activities with a whole school approach. This period also presented more developments in ICT policy within the sphere of school education with the introduction of the Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020 with eTwinning referenced in the plan as well as the Digital Action plans for 2017 and 2019. There is further evidence of the impact of the NSS at national level with a sampling of DES Inspectorate Reports looking at several schools that had a high number of eTwinning projects, which indicated an increase in the number of reports referring to the Erasmus+ programme compared to reports in previous years. A number of these were schools that would have been involved in Comenius at the time of the last report and no record of current funded activities could be found on the published lists or the Erasmus+ dissemination platform, which means that eTwinning was likely the main form of European activity within the school. It would be beneficial if eTwinning could be referenced by name rather than the umbrella of Erasmus+ as this would assist in underlying the unique opportunities eTwinning can bring beyond the funded activities.

eTwinning grew rapidly and the majority of this can be attributed to changes within the NSS. From 2014 to 2016, the NSS sat within the schools and Vocational Education Training (VET) client support services team for Key Action 1 and 2 of Erasmus+. In 2017, Léargas was reorganised to reflect the composition of the Erasmus+ programme. A new strategic initiatives team bringing together EPALE, Language Actions, Eurodesk, and ECVET created synergy between the activities and platforms. The role and scope

of the NSS expanded with additional human resources allocated in 2017. This demonstrates positive results particularly the addition of a second officer in 2018, which has created an evidence-based impact on the programme, with over 40% of new registrations taking place between 2017 and 2019.

The NSS is responsible for the management of a large communication network both within the eTwinning platform and external to the platform with the development of projects, information, and promotional materials and activities such as conferences, face to face training events, monitoring visits to schools, and collaboration at national level with the key stakeholders in school education, primarily the DES and Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST). This is in addition to the National Project Advisory Panel (PAP) and the eTwinning Ambassador Network. The graphic below summarises the work of the NSS. The work of the NSS includes activities that are visible to all members such as the development of materials and CPD activities, organising and hosting conferences and events as well as activities members may not be aware of such as meetings and consultation with key stakeholders at national level in the field of school education. Core to the work of the NSS is relationship building and communication.

Figure 1 The work of the National Support Service (NSS) From 2014 to 2019, there were 917 projects, which is a 30% increase on the previous programme period. Of these, 75% involved more than one partner, a 7% increase in comparison to the previous period. A total of 53% of all projects involved Ireland as a co-submitter, representing a 19% increase on the previous period. This demonstrates the stronger involvement of Irish participants in the creation and development of projects. Some 4% represent national projects between Irish organisations. Project themes in the 3 to 12 age cohort were like the previous cycle: myths, legends, dance, and getting to know European partners. The post-primary age group 13 to 18 also carried out projects on similar themes to the previous programme cycle. Across both age groups, there is an increased emphasis on languages with learning and authentic exchange. Literacy and digital literacy feature strongly. New themes such as entrepreneurship are featuring well including social entrepreneurship and the development of social enterprises. There were efforts made to link project activities with national initiatives such as the Green Schools Programme. The STEM area increased strongly among the projects including robotics and coding.
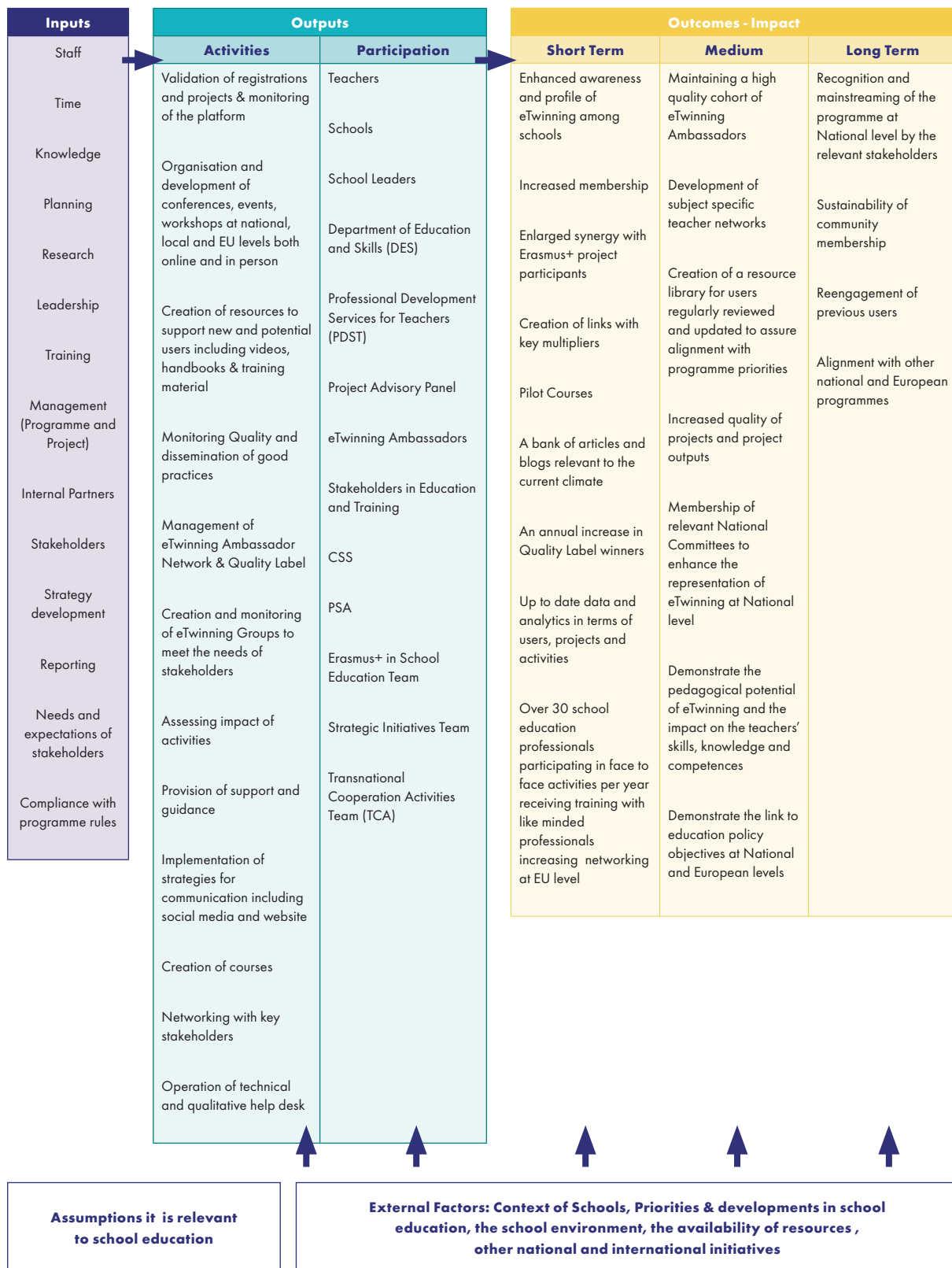
Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes - Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short Term	Medium	Long Term
Staff	Validation of registrations and projects & monitoring of the platform	Teachers	Enhanced awareness and profile of eTwinning among schools	Maintaining a high quality cohort of eTwinning Ambassadors	Recognition and mainstreaming of the programme at National level by the relevant stakeholders
Time		Schools			
Knowledge	Organisation and development of conferences, events, workshops at national, local and EU levels both online and in person	School Leaders	Increased membership	Development of subject specific teacher networks	
Planning		Department of Education and Skills (DES)	Enlarged synergy with Erasmus+ project participants		Sustainability of community membership
Research				Creation of a resource library for users regularly reviewed and updated to assure alignment with programme priorities	
Leadership	Creation of resources to support new and potential users including videos, handbooks & training material	Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST)	Creation of links with key multipliers		Reengagement of previous users
Training		Project Advisory Panel	Pilot Courses		Alignment with other national and European programmes
Management (Programme and Project)	Monitoring Quality and dissemination of good practices	eTwinning Ambassadors	A bank of articles and blogs relevant to the current climate	Increased quality of projects and project outputs	
Internal Partners		Stakeholders in Education and Training		Membership of relevant National Committees to enhance the representation of eTwinning at National level	
Stakeholders	Management of eTwinning Ambassador Network & Quality Label	CSS	An annual increase in Quality Label winners		
Strategy development	Creation and monitoring of eTwinning Groups to meet the needs of stakeholders	PSA	Up to date data and analytics in terms of users, projects and activities		
Reporting		Erasmus+ in School Education Team		Demonstrate the pedagogical potential of eTwinning and the impact on the teachers' skills, knowledge and competences	
Needs and expectations of stakeholders	Assessing impact of activities	Strategic Initiatives Team	Over 30 school education professionals participating in face to face activities per year receiving training with like minded professionals increasing networking at EU level		
Compliance with programme rules	Provision of support and guidance	Transnational Cooperation Activities Team (TCA)		Demonstrate the link to education policy objectives at National and European levels	
	Implementation of strategies for communication including social media and website				
	Creation of courses				
	Networking with key stakeholders				
	Operation of technical and qualitative help desk				

Assumptions it is relevant to school education

External Factors: Context of Schools, Priorities & developments in school education, the school environment, the availability of resources, other national and international initiatives

Figure 1: The work of the National Support Service (NSS)

5. Summary of Findings

Where Did Active Users First Hear About eTwinning?

- 51% of active users heard about eTwinning at a National Agency event or from its website. Some 29% learn about eTwinning from colleagues. When face to face events, conferences, meetings, and word of mouth is considered, this represents 74%, demonstrating the value placed on hearing about the programme from a person. This also links to a reoccurring theme of the need for offline professional relationships raised by participants.

- 5% learn about eTwinning from social media, which indicates that social media posts are more relevant to those who are already members of the community.

What Motivated Both Dormant and Active Users to Join eTwinning?

- The primary motivation to join is to develop contacts across Europe at 64%. It is evident that thought has been given to how eTwinning could benefit students, with 46% motivated to join in order to allow their students to gain new skills and competences, 35% to develop a network to work with their classes, and 35% to develop projects to integrate into teaching. This demonstrates the value placed on the benefits for students from the perspective of the teacher. Overall, motivation to join sought to balance the benefits for both the teacher and their students.

How Do Active Accounts Describe Their Use of eTwinning?

- 31% frequently log onto the platform. Given that 60% of respondents have participated in eTwinning activities, this indicates that half continue to log onto the platform when not participating in eTwinning activities. Some 26% have not logged in since their project finished which would indicate the possibility of nearly three-quarters of active users potentially becoming dormant. A total of 9% specify that they do not use the platform and an additional 3% indicate challenges when using the platform.

- Dormant accounts were asked if eTwinning met their primary goals: 71% who had projects stated that eTwinning met their primary goals for joining and 45% of those who had no projects indicated that eTwinning met their primary goals for joining. Therefore, it can be stated that less engagement with eTwinning contributed to lower success rates in terms of meeting their goals for joining the community.

What Are the Primary Two Reasons Active Accounts Log Onto the Platform?

- 68% of participants deemed themselves to be active users. This was adjusted to build Erasmus+ activities into the responses bringing the total to 74%. The main reason was connected to project work. The rationale for using the platform is a combination of both passive and active participation. While checking to see what is going on sits at 17%, it is encouraging to note that active participation forms most of the rationale for logging into eTwinning, with 27% either participating in CPD or eTwinning groups.

- 26% considered themselves inactive. Of these, 32% found the platform difficult to use and navigate, 40% cited a lack of time, 5% of these responses demonstrated confusion between eTwinning and KA1, and 6% believed that they did not have the technical know-how to use the platform.

- The 26% who considered themselves inactive were asked to consider what would motivate them to re-engage, which included:

  - Working with colleagues on a shared project

  - Ideas on how to motivate students

  - Help with finding ideas on how to incorporate it into the classroom

  - Addressing the feeling that they have nothing new to contribute in terms of discussions as everyone else is far advanced

This suggests that barrier of time is related to finding the space to develop ideas, and the potential support from a colleague may assist with this aspect. There seems to be a lack of confidence and awareness that the community is continually growing with new people joining all the time. An additional 20% of all active users provided suggestions on how to re-engage inactive users, and these include:

- More face to face meetings
- People are overwhelmed with the number of new initiatives – creating links with how eTwinning could fit into initiatives might help
- More interaction on the forum

What Are the Benefits of eTwinning Participation?

The responses can be combined to form three overall broad benefits:

- 92% collaborating with other countries
- 89% networking with other professionals
- 88% developing skills and knowledge

At school level, 33% stated that collaboration with other countries raises the profile of the school at local and national levels, and 21% of these specifically referenced that Erasmus+ project participation rather than eTwinning contributes to this. This suggests that a higher value is placed on Erasmus+ project participation than eTwinning. Linking with other schools abroad accounts for 78%, with general partner finding standing at 43%. The facilitation of collaboration provided by eTwinning is 72%.

At teacher level, this includes bringing the global dimension into the classroom sitting at 82%. Linking with other classes to introduce a European dimension into the curriculum represents 52%. Finding partners for activities sits at 45%, with an opportunity to see what others are doing at 63%. It is not clear from the general response 'see what others are doing' if the account holder is in contact with other teachers or passively reading forums or articles. The same applies for networking, which stands at 68%. The largest value for teachers is meeting likeminded teachers and professionals accounting for 82%, with 62% stating the exchange and sharing of practices and resources is beneficial. This is followed by CPD opportunities through a combination of participation and from interacting with eTwinning groups at 78%. The opportunity to present the curriculum in an alternative way is 62%. Increasing motivation for both students and teachers represents 31%. There was more emphasis placed on the skills and knowledge developed by students because of eTwinning participation rather than those of the teachers. This aligns with the motivation for joining eTwinning where a value is placed

on the potential for student learning. The development of intercultural skills and intercultural communication for students stands overall at 81%, which would indicate high involvement and contact between students in partner schools from the perspective of the teachers. Digital skills, competences, and literacy for students represents 62%. The development of language skills and competences is 57%. However, the highest percentage of 81% was learning about other countries and instilling a sense of global citizenship.

What Are the Challenges of eTwinning Participation?

The challenges can be divided into the following areas:

- Time is a barrier for 97% of respondents in several ways. There were several references to personal circumstances, which implies that teachers are carrying out activities in their own time which is further supported by 25% stating that they have difficulty in finding time outside their school day:
  - 51% cited an overcrowded curriculum and pressures to cover current content.
  - 43% referenced finding the time between the other initiatives which take precedence.
  - 45% cited time related to setting up projects, refining details and putting activities in place from initial communication to the start of the project.
  - 32% related to recognition of the time dedicated to eTwinning.
- Platform-related challenges represents 52%.
- Organisation-related challenges in terms of access was 35%.
- Organisation-related challenges excluding technical access was 62%, which includes lack of support within the school and recognition.
- Activity-related challenges amounted to 59% such as ideas for projects.
- User-linked challenges represents 32% and this includes confidence and feeling isolated as the only teacher within the school.

National Support Service Resources

- 83% stated that they were aware of the NSS supports. Some 27% lack awareness of the resources offered by the NSS and of the existence of a specific contact point within the NSS. Examining this further, this 27% represent those involved in Erasmus+ projects with no previous eTwinning participation and those who heard about eTwinning outside the NSS and National Agency.

- 31% stated that they have not made use of the resources, whereas 69% have made use of resources. The 31% who had not used any resources in the last 5 years can be broken down as follows: 11% of these have been registered users for more than 3 years, and therefore 20% who have not used supports registered in the last 2 years. Closer examination demonstrates that at least half of these are involved in activities with eTwinning. It is unclear why the supports are not reviewed or used and suggests either learning by doing or being guided by the partner. A third of these were involved in Erasmus+ projects and had not been involved in any eTwinning activities prior to their funded project.

Feedback on the NSS Supports

91%, demonstrates high satisfaction with the NSS and the adaptable nature over the years meeting the expectations of the users.

Activities Not Captured on TwinSpace or Appearing on User Accounts

There were references to ongoing eTwinning activities where the account was dormant and no other listed teachers marked as active within the school. Interviews demonstrated national activities or activities with other schools where only one school's activities are captured on the platform with no reference to the wider context of the project. The main reasons cited were challenges with the platform, time, and questions around why it should be added or included.

The use of the TwinSpace does not provide a full picture of the project work carried out within schools. A sampling was undertaken of 60 closed projects which took place in 2017 and 2018 projects. These projects did not receive the National eTwinning Quality Label were sampled. This demonstrated that:

- 12% of the Irish partners listed had not accessed the TwinSpace at all since the project commenced

- 22% had not uploaded any information on the activities which took place within the Irish school

- 31% demonstrated gaps in the information provided.

6. Main Messages from the Interviews

- Motivation for joining is varied, with some participants having concrete objectives and others a more general idea of what they want to achieve. Those with a clear plan and objectives when joining are more likely to remain engaged and motivated when faced with barriers. The introduction of a template to support people in planning their aims, objectives, and goals, with a timeline outlining what they would like to achieve by when, would help set realistic and focused expectations. While the end goal will keep some people motivated, it is important to remember that depending on the goals, it can take time to get there. Motivation and engagement can be retained by breaking down the goals into smaller attainable targets and timeframes.

- Relationships and the human connection seemed to be important to many participants. It featured highly across the surveys and the interviews from hearing and learning about eTwinning to exchanging viewpoints. This highlights the important role of each NSS as a designated national contact point. There were suggestions of adding a social element to eTwinning where an international book club could be formed, which would allow informal networking among the community.

- The comments in the feed as outlined in the eTwinning social statistics are generally low, and they fluctuate from year to year. No parallel has been found between the social statistics and engagement of eTwinning users who noted this as a challenge. Participants received no response or comments to initial posts, and therefore did not participate further in these areas. They do not feature in the top 100 posters in the feed posts, feed comments, partner finding, or mailbox messages. However, based on those who do appear in the top 100 across the different lists, all demonstrate higher involvement in terms of projects and event participation. The NSS could consider developing a mechanism to increase activity in this

area with a focus on managing expectations in terms of responses and comments.

- Support within schools is a challenge. The ideal situation and the one that seemed to work best was a top down and bottom up approach, where there was buy-in and commitment at all levels with a whole school approach to eTwinning. Many of those interviewed in this situation had an eTwinning schools working group, where all activity was discussed and built into the school digital plans. Participants stated that they would welcome examples of how eTwinning is integrated into the school structure as this would provide further ideas on how to improve the current situations and would also act as an aid to demonstrate the buy-in of other schools particularly those within the same region.

- National recognition of some of the eTwinning CPD courses would be welcome along with recognition of the skills and competences in terms of project management. It was felt that the quality is comparable or higher for most courses attended by participants. They also provide the opportunity to focus on skills relevant to the teaching profession which can be implemented and used within the curriculum rather than focusing on the curriculum itself. National recognition would provide more support and closer attention would be given to the programme, with buy-in from colleagues.

- eTwinning is well placed to fill the gap left due to the lack of travel during the pandemic and will facilitate the continuation of Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 projects. Due to other priorities and challenges within the school environment, some eTwinning projects may stall. However, common themes faced by all participating countries such as well-being, climate change, anti-racism, and the validity of science can act as drivers as they will remain topical within the classroom.

7. Project Participation and Examples of Addressing Challenges

Previous and current users have rich and diverse experiences and can provide many ideas for users who are experiencing challenges in developing project ideas, gaining buy-in from colleagues, project participation, and finding partners. Incorporating the examples provided, the interviews, and survey feedback, the following were the ideal conditions suggested for the integration of eTwinning within a school:

- At national and policy levels:

  - A stronger commitment to eTwinning within the Digital Strategy for Schools

  - Examine how eTwinning can be used to support national programmes and initiatives

  - National recognition of CPD

  - Value placed on the contribution eTwinning can make to diverse learning opportunities for students and the provision of quality CPD activities for teachers and education professionals complementing the curriculum

- At school level:

  - Integrated into the digital strategy for the school or school policies

  - A whole school approach and the creation of an eTwinning team developing a plan on how best to use eTwinning within the school to meet the school objectives, policies, and mission statement

  - Peer learning activities among staff to share approaches and methodologies

  - Recognition of the value and benefits of eTwinning at school level

  - Build planning time into the school day for people involved in eTwinning

8. Conclusion and Suggested Recommendations

Overall, there are three interlinked areas which impact on engagement, motivation, needs, and barriers for users:

• eTwinning users and potential users wish and want to engage and recognise the value of the programme in terms of learning, partnering, and collaborating with international partners. Depending on the initial source of information there can be an assumption that there are several preconditions required, which vary from ICT skills to previous participation in EU projects. A contributory factor to this can be linked to the increase in multilateral partnerships over the lifetime of the programme, where newcomers are commencing activities with larger partnerships, which can be more difficult and challenging particularly where there is no previous involvement or experience. Based on the feedback of users, it is important to recognise that eTwinning provides the tools for meaningful virtual exchanges between schools, teachers, and students. It is inclusive and accessible for all skill levels. For education professionals, the format of projects, the themes, and CPD activities go beyond virtual and distance learning building in the environmental factors and intercultural studies forming the basis and potential for significant virtual mobility.

• The need for relationships outside eTwinning activities features across interviews and questionnaires. This may link to the need to feel a sense of belonging to the community particularly for those who feel that they are working in isolation.

• Recognition of skills, learning gained, and activities carried out by users at national level would be a welcome development. This would contribute to gaining buy-in from colleagues and the organisation where they teach or work. Recognition of CPD activities at national level held higher importance than recognition of project activities and learning gained, which was more valued at school level. However, participants also felt the need for overall recognition of eTwinning and the contribution it can make to school education by National Authorities.

Suggested Recommendations

• Development of an official dissemination pack providing a clear tailored message when publicising and promoting eTwinning aimed at people who are officially promoting eTwinning and as part of the eTwinning welcome pack for new users.

• An infographic illustrating the ICT skills required for each activity from registration to project participation with links to training on complementary tools or where training can be gained and real-life examples of the tools used by other users would be beneficial for new users who may lack confidence in their ICT skills.

• Case studies showing the journey through eTwinning for those who started with bilateral partnerships and moved to larger partnerships may be beneficial in terms of highlighting the opportunity to learn and become familiar with the platform.

• Increase the visibility of Irish membership of the platform through the publication of statistics relevant to Ireland on the NSS section of the National Agency website.

• An accompanying handbook to the Digital Strategy providing examples and clear links demonstrating how eTwinning is relevant to the digital strategy and examples of how it can be built into a school's digital plan.

• Suggestions from participants included the hosting of informal social activities, such as a coffee break, where users can talk freely about their challenges and discuss their activities in a less formal manner. Others suggested an eTwinning European book club for teachers to add a social element and to create more confidence in using the platform in a more social manner. However, given that the uptake of training with the NSS for newly registered users is low as is the posting in the forums, clear thought will need to be given as to what would be the most beneficial use of time for the NSS. A focus on supporting participants to interact more on the forums may be a more beneficial starting point and when there is more activity in this area the organisation of additional social activities could be considered. The NSS has a strong role to play in the creation and facilitation of relationships with users and potential users. The challenge for the NSS is to find the balance to ensure that users take ownership of their projects, activities, engagement, and communication with partners and potential partners.

- Discuss the possibility of piloting programmes such as the Green Schools Programme with an international dimension with An Taisce and examine other programmes with relevant thematic areas to eTwinning to identify how these may fit with the programme and present to national stakeholders in education.

- Add recognition as a standing item to the agenda for meetings with the DES, PDST and PAP to work towards offering more CPD with Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) days and the possibility of national recognition for some of the other courses offered by eTwinning, after conducting a benchmarking or mapping exercise between the national offering.

- Consider a certified course in eTwinning project management recognised at national level, which would contribute to gaining more support and buy-in from schools particularly school leaders.

Relevance of eTwinning

The benefits of the eTwinning programme demonstrate that users focus on the advantages for students, particularly in terms of bringing the European dimension into the classroom. There is a large body of work being carried out to increase access to mobility and facilitate mobility for underrepresented groups across all field of education and training. eTwinning has the potential to address barriers which students encounter, particularly underrepresented groups, such as motivation, language, and confidence. Expanding on the collaboration with initial teacher training, a partnership between schools and their local tertiary education provider could be established to address some of the challenges experienced by students when they reach the stage where they will need to make a decision to participate in a term abroad.

The NSS has established relationships with the National Authorities and key stakeholders and decision makers in school education and has demonstrated the sustainable nature of this relationship. Regardless of changes in staff, either in the NSS or the stakeholders, the relationship has been built and maintained throughout. This would indicate support and recognition by both the NSS and key stakeholders of the relevance of eTwinning to the field of school education. However, this work is largely invisible to users, contributing to the perception that eTwinning is not valued by educational decision makers.

Suggested Recommendations

- Leveraging on the Erasmus+ Mobility in Higher Education, exchange at staff level bringing the face to face element could be incorporated for teacher trainers and educators. There is an opportunity for teacher educators within Erasmus+ KA1 in higher education to visit schools abroad. This could build on the relationship for local schools involved in eTwinning that host the trainee teachers where the potential to place the trainee teachers for a semester abroad with eTwinning partner schools could be investigated particularly for future language teachers, which would in turn lead to the enhancement of language assistants within the classroom, which fell in profile when the Comenius Language Assistant programme was amalgamated into Erasmus Student Mobility for Traineeships.

- A longer-term project could be considered between the Access Offices of Higher and Further Education Institutions and their local schools. As mobility activities become compulsory in tertiary education across more programmes, they could form a regional partnership focusing on potential future mobility for study or traineeships, addressing barriers beyond financial aspects. This could fall under a theme of preparing for physical mobility activities in future studies, addressing skills such as confidence, intercultural competences, and developing a deep knowledge base of potential future host countries for the students through eTwinning.

- Develop a comprehensive policy guide demonstrating the links between the eTwinning thematic areas, the curriculum as well as national and European policy targeting school leaders.

Consider the possibility of promoting meetings with the national stakeholders and the Project Advisory Panel on social media to create awareness that these are taking place. Consider publishing an annual communications matrix demonstrating the range of stakeholders and activities in which the NSS are involved for users, which would illustrate the range of stakeholders as well as policymakers involved in eTwinning and also further enhance the relevance of the programme to school education and provide additional information on the scope and nature of the work, which takes place in the background.

- Examples of how eTwinning is integrated into the school structure would be welcome as this would provide further ideas on how to improve wider buy-in and commitment to eTwinning and would also act as an

aid to demonstrate the participation of other schools particularly those within the same regions. This would also act as a starting point for ideas for newcomers to the programme on how to implement a whole school approach.

- A mechanism to capture activity which is not taking place on the platform but is a continuation of or was initiated with eTwinning would be beneficial for the NSS and Central Support Service (CSS) as well as demonstrating the sustainability of activities initiated under eTwinning.

Engagement, Motivation, Barriers and Needs of eTwinning Users

Time is the biggest barrier; consideration needs to be given to what can save time for teachers. Many of the interviewees both dormant and active spent time outside working hours finding partners and suitable projects. The survey results also demonstrate that at least 25% of respondents carry out these activities outside their school day. Buy-in from colleagues and support within the schools for activities presented a large barrier, which also impacted on motivation, creativity, and confidence. In addition to recognition, activities raising the profile of the school at regional and national levels would assist in this area. The needs of participants varied in terms of supports; some required reminders of the supports available and others suggested new ones, which they felt would address the challenges and barriers they face. It is clear from the feedback that participation in events abroad and hosting partners provide motivation within the organisation for more staff to become involved and contribute to the motivation of students which again highlights the importance of offline relationship building. Challenges with the platform can have a negative effect in terms of gaining buy-in from colleagues or within an organisation, given that 29% of respondents hear about eTwinning from work colleagues and will base their perceptions of the platform on what their colleagues say. Suggestions to improve the platform include:

- Mobile friendly platform
- The receipt of message notifications
- A history area so people know what they have and have not read
- More responsive to user needs and adapted to allow less cumbersome uploading of files, photos, and videos

- Quicker to load pages
- A simplified approach to eTwinning groups
- It was also stated that Covid-19 has highlighted challenges in terms of access to digital equipment for inclusiveness; as most young people have access to a smart phone but may not have access to a laptop, it is important that the platform is mobile friendly

Suggested Recommendations

- Participants suggested a template for newly registered users to plan their aims, objectives, and goals with a timeline of what they would like to achieve and by when, which would assist in setting realistic expectations, breaking the goals down into smaller attainable targets, which will remind the user of the progress they are making.

- Measures to maintain communication when projects are finished may contribute to continued engagement, such as a debriefing on the project or an evaluation of the experience, highlighting the strengths and the guidance on the creation of objectives building on the previous activity.

- Participants suggested the following could contribute to engagement and buy-in and support within schools:

  - Regional eTwinning competitions leading to a national competition which will create more recognition at local and national level of participation in the programme.

  - eTwinning schools that can act as role models within the region; job shadowing could be undertaken to share approaches to eTwinning and exchange ideas.

  - Schools within a region partner together for an eTwinning competition focused on a thematic area, with a regional winner and then the regional winners compete at national level.

  - Schools within the same region work on the same topic related to a theme of interest and value to the region with partners across Europe and beyond, leading to the formation of a bank of regional and curriculum-relevant projects, which can be replicated by other schools in the region, creating a national publication of thematic projects which can act as a resource bank of ideas.

- The creation of thematic project clusters where schools map out their projects linking with schools nationally working on the same theme.

- Supports suggested by participants include:

- Project guides or handbooks based on explicit curricular areas, with specific links to the Irish curriculum with class and level. This would address the area of time to develop and integrate into the curriculum.

- Workshops on how to integrate activities into the curriculum which clearly show that this does not impinge on class time which will highlight the value for teachers.

- A forum for teachers new to eTwinning projects to discuss arising issues and challenges.

- Assistance with the integration of eTwinning into the school.

- Creation of cluster groups of schools working on similar projects.

- Use retired teachers as Ambassadors to advise new schools who are interested in eTwinning, where there is more time to engage due to retirement.

- There were suggestions that the NSS creates projects and partners that schools can join to save time in organising.

- Run a national competition with regional winners.

- Guidance on how to select partners and what to check clearly before engaging.

- Template messages for initial emails to potential partners and what should be included.

- A financial incentive to upskill to participate in the programme.

- A bridging fund between Erasmus+ and eTwinning to allow either the receipt or sending of a staff member to or from a partner school.

The National Support Service (NSS)

The NSS take a dual approach in the management of eTwinning with a focus on both quality of projects and quantity of registrations. Based on user feedback there are high satisfaction levels with the support in place including the fast response rate to queries. The supports are relevant,

regularly updated, and new ones developed in various formats including documents as well as videos to meet the preferred learning styles of a range of users. However, there is a lack of knowledge on the part of some users of the existence of the materials. The increase in Quality Label awardees and applications demonstrate the results of the focus on quality. This also provides rich material and ideas focused on current projects through case studies, news items, experiences of eTwinners, and the outcomes of their activities leading to the awards. There are indications that newer users are less likely to ask questions or contact the NSS. This may be the reason for the low uptake in the offer of one to one or participation in training activities for newly registered users.

Suggested Recommendations

The broad range of activities, the objectives and expansion of the programme, as well as the focus on particular areas, such as the teacher training initiatives, requires at least two officers in order to maintain the current momentum, increase the retention rate of users and cater for the diversified eTwinning community however, eTwinning would greatly benefit from a third team member for additional administrative support.

There is limited information available at national level on how the integration of ICT in the classroom is impacting. The innovative methodologies used within eTwinning are not clear in the descriptions of the projects and not well documented in terms of linkages with the Irish curriculum. However, in the last three years the Irish NSS has refocused its efforts, and case studies and blogs published provide more of a focus on how things are done rather than what was done. This assists in creating awareness of the value and benefits for teachers in joining the programme. While there are project kits available, the main challenge for teachers seems to be finding the time to map out the activities and learning against the curriculum. There is an opportunity for eTwinning to lead the way in this respect, conducting research to demonstrate the clear impact of the programme in facilitating national and European objectives within the classroom.

LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CESI	Computers in Education Society of Ireland
CPD	Continuing professional development
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
CSS	Central Support Services
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
EACEA	Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency
ECVET	European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training
EPALE	Electronic Platform for Adult Learning in Europe
EPV	Extra Personal Vacation
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
EU	European Union
EUN	European Schoolnet
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICT	Information and communications technology
INTO	Irish National Teachers Organisation
IT	Information technology
JCSP	Junior Certificate Schools Programme
ITE	Initial teacher education
KA	Key Action
LLP	Lifelong Learning Programme
NA	National Agency
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCTE	National Centre for Technology in Education
NSS	National Support Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAP	Project Advisory Panel
PDST	Professional Development Services for Teachers
PDW	Professional Development Workshops
PSA	Partner Support Agency
SEG	School Education Gateway
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and maths
TTI	Teacher training initiatives
UN	United Nations
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VLE	Virtual learning environment

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ONE:
INTRODUCTION

1.1 What is eTwinning?

eTwinning, established in 2005, is currently available across 44 countries. It is a free online multilingual community of education professionals involved in school education from pre-primary to secondary school.

Education professionals and schools can:

- carry out projects with one or more schools in participating countries, promoting collaboration and cooperation across any topic or theme with no constraints on the duration

- facilitate teamwork and communication between students and staff bringing the European dimension into the classroom

- undertake professional development activities both online and face to face

- participate in networking activities and exchange views and practices through discussion groups

- avail of support, tools, and resources to enable participation and connect with potential partners.

In Ireland, participants must be an employee of a school recognised by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) or a recognised teacher training establishment or involved in the provision of national professional development training for the sector such as the Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST) or the network of Education Centres. Participation is voluntary. Funding is only available for participation in Professional Development Workshops (PDW) meaning that the administrative requirements for joining and interacting with the eTwinning community are minimal.

Across the participating countries, at the time of writing, there are 817,195 registered teachers, 207,993 registered schools, and 107,338 projects[5]. In Ireland, there have been 3,369 registered teachers, 1,774 registered schools, and 1,115 projects,[6] representing 5% of teachers and 4% of the eligible schools in Ireland.[7]

1.2 Who is Responsible for eTwinning?

The management of eTwinning is divided into European and national levels.

Management at European Level
The management of eTwinning at European level sits with the European Schoolnet (EUN) which acts as the Central Support Service (CSS), managing the programme on behalf of the Education, Audio-visual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA), an agency of the EU Commission responsible for managing funding and the associated programmes in education, culture, audio-visual, sport, citizenship, and volunteering.

EUN, founded in 1997, is a network of 34 Ministries of Education with an overall mission to 'support education stakeholders in Europe in the transformation of education processes for 21st century digitalized societies'.[8]

In addition to eTwinning, this includes among others the School Education Gateway (SEG), an online portal for all school education and VET professionals available in 23 languages, providing information on policy development, resources and toolkits for schools and teachers, opinions

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5 eTwinning website https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/index.htm (accessed 27 July 2020)
6 Unless otherwise stated all statistics and data related to eTwinning in Ireland have been taken from the National Support Service (NSS) desktop
7 Department of Education and Skills, Key Statistics 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 (accessed 25 June 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/key-statistics-2019-2020.pdf
8 European Schoolnet website http://www.eun.org/about

and views from the education community, and online courses and webinars for teachers as well as Erasmus+ information.

The CSS is responsible for:
- maintaining the multilingual eTwinning platform

- monitoring developments and ensuring alignment with policy objectives in school education

- managing and collaborating with the network partner agencies in participating countries

- organising events, developing workplans, and creating and delivering training and material

- reporting to the EACEA as well as monitoring, research, and evaluating and reporting on eTwinning from the perspectives of teachers, schools, school leaders, students, and the partner agencies.

Communication is open and two way between the CSS, the National Support Services (NSS) and the Partner Support Agencies (PSA) with the provision of advice, support, and guidance through direct contact. Communication and collaboration among the NSS and PSA across the participating countries is active. This is an important factor, ensuring cooperation, trust, and collaboration among the eTwinning management network in the organisation of transnational events and international Professional Development Workshops.

eTwinning is currently available to schools in 36 countries including the European Member States as well as Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of North Macedonia, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, Serbia, and Turkey. Within these countries, the programme is overseen by a NSS. Under the banner of eTwinning Plus, this expands the offer to an additional eight countries, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Lebanon, Georgia, Ukraine, Jordan, Tunisia, and Moldova, overseen by a PSA in each country. The NSS and PSA sit within different organisations across the community, for example some are in National Agencies managing the European programmes and others in Ministries of Education.

The National Support Service (NSS) in Ireland

Since 2005, the NSS resides in Léargas, the Irish National Agency responsible for the management of the Erasmus+ Programme in all fields of education, training, and youth except higher education, which sits with the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

1.3 Who Are the eTwinning Users?

The primary actors in eTwinning are teachers, representing 79% of the registered users in Ireland. They are often referred to as eTwinners. Within the context of eTwinning registrations, the NSS is working to meet the needs of the following categories:

Newcomers to the community who may require support, guidance, and assistance at technical, activity, and pedagogical levels

Experienced users who may seek advice or help with queries, problem solving, or challenges they are encountering

eTwinners who wish to participate in professional development activities in person and online, at both national and international levels

eTwinners who are participating in Communities of Practice Dormant accounts, which are those that are no longer active, with the primary aim of encouraging re-engagement.

Under the privacy policy set out by the CSS[9], if a user has not logged onto the platform for a year, the profile becomes inactive. The user will receive one notification from the CSS prior to this. When inactive, the public profile is disabled, and they cannot be contacted by other eTwinning users. A further email is sent two years after the first email, the profile is deactivated and anonymised, and personal information deleted from the system. Statistical information is kept for research purposes only. This means that the NSS has access to their contact details for two years before all personal information is anonymised.

1.4 What Can Users Access and Do?

eTwinning users have access to platforms to support partner finding, the implementation of projects, forum participation, and learning opportunities.

Access to Platforms

Users register on www.etwinning.net, which is the main website. Each NSS will have a national website, with supports and resources for the programme. Registration is a two-step process to ensure the validity and relevance of the potential user.

eTwinning Live: Once registered, users can access eTwinning Live where they create a profile, find partners, join and create forums, exchange ideas for projects, and participate in online groups, webinars, and courses.

TwinSpace: If participating in a project, this is the online platform for collaboration. Guests can be invited to join, such as parents. It is also possible to publish the TwinSpace page for public viewing.

Learning Opportunities Are Both Face to Face and Online

Face to Face:

- Professional Development Workshops (PDW): Three-day training events covering specific topics focusing on pedagogical aspects. They are held across participating countries and are organised by the CSS and NSS. Application and selection processes are in place, where grant support is provided by the NSS for successful applicants.

- Thematic Conferences: Three-day events with a general pedagogical focus with the aim of creating awareness of eTwinning. Non-members can participate such as policymakers and authorities in school education. They are organised by the NSS in conjunction with the CSS. Application and selection processes are in place, where grant support is provided by the NSS for successful applicants.

- Annual Conference: Three-day annual event focusing on a European theme organised by the CSS. Non-members can participate such as policymakers and authorities in school education. Application and selection processes are in place, where grant support is provided by the NSS for successful applicants.

- National Conferences: One to three days focusing on a specific theme organised by the NSS providing opportunities for eTwinning users to meet, participate in workshops, and network with peers.

Online:

- Learning Events are short events introducing a topic and are aimed at creating and generating ideas.

- Online Seminars are live hour-long events aimed at creating and stimulating discussion.

- Groups/Community of Practice: Participants share expertise and experiences on a specific topic.[10]

1.5 Aims and Objectives

Online platforms are constantly evolving and do not remain static. In the last 15 years, eTwinning has grown quickly, with the changing environmental factors, the evolving roles of school education professionals, and new education policies and priorities at both European and national levels. The NSS sought to gain feedback on the experience and needs of eTwinning users to identify potential actions to address challenges presented.

The objective of this report is to:

- explore the levels of engagement within the eTwinning programme and the relevance of eTwinning

- identify the levels of support provided by the NSS

- recognise barriers to engagement for participants

- establish primary motivations of users for joining eTwinning

- recognise the needs of those using eTwinning and how they can be addressed.

While there is a growing body of research on the topic of ICT in education, use and methodologies, with new perspectives developing and evolving, this report focuses on the experiences and perspectives of the educational professionals who participated in the questionnaires and interviews. It does not seek to obtain information on the methodologies used to incorporate or integrate eTwinning into their work or the levels of student engagement within the participating organisations. Nor does it provide a commentary on the impact of eTwinning on the users, schools, students, and teachers, which is well documented

at European level by the European Schoolnet through its publications and research activities. The registered participants included are those who were joined no later than 31 December 2019.

1.6 Structure of the Report

1. Introduction: This defines eTwinning and provides an overview of the management structure, eTwinning users, and activities and outlines the methods used to collect the information for this report.

2. Profile of Contributors: Summarises the professional roles, membership duration, and use of eTwinning of participants in this report.

3. The Development of eTwinning in the Irish Context: There are many layers to eTwinning both external and internal to the programme, which influence the perspectives of users. With this in mind, it is important to consider the external factors in tandem with the development of the platform such as educational policies at national and EU levels. This section traces the growth of eTwinning in the Irish context from 2005 to 2013, providing statistics and a flavour of the projects undertaken to demonstrate the relevance to the curriculum and policy development at national level.

4. Focus 2014 – 2019 eTwinning and Erasmus+ examines the activities of the NSS and membership growth from 2014 to 2019. It provides information on the scope and range of the NSS activities.

5. Summary of Findings examines the results of the questionnaires to identify the needs and experiences of the community in terms of motivation and engagement, as well as the supports provided by the NSS.

6. Main Messages from the Interviews summarises the feedback obtained from 44 interviews conducted under the main headings of motivation and engagement, support at school level, recognition, and the pandemic.

7. Project Participation and Examples of Addressing Challenges includes four project examples focusing on different topics and outlines the ideal situation for project participation with tips from participants demonstrating how barriers and challenges were overcome.

8. Conclusion and Suggested Recommendations provides an overview of the main findings along with suggested recommendations.

1.7 Data Collection

The research for this report took place over 60 days from October 2019 to July 2020. An extension was sought until the end of August 2020 due to interviews taking place up to the end of July 2020 to facilitate the further writing of the report. The initial plan developed included school visits, focus groups, in-person interviews, and attendance at eTwinning-related meetings hosted by the NSS and eTwinning Ambassadors. However, due to Covid-19 health and safety reasons and the physical closure of schools on 12 March 2020 plans were altered.

The main objective of the report is to gather the perspectives and needs of the eTwinning users. All registered users were contacted. The questionnaires were sent after schools had closed, where teachers were experiencing much change and adjustment to the way in which they carry out their work. The interviews were carried out during a period of uncertainty with a question over how and when schools would reopen, and within the post-primary school area there was ongoing uncertainty about state exams. In addition, there was a high circulation of surveys to the education community from many organisations focusing on the impact and changes because of Covid-19.

To this end the following activities took place

60 Days from October 2019 to August 2020											
	OCT	NOV	DEC	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG
Planning and meeting with NSS	■	■							■	■	■
Review Platform and literature, statistics, projects and membership		■	■								■
Questionnaire Design, Circulation and Review of information					■	■	■	■	■	■	■
44 Interviews and review of information							■	■			
Reporting to NSS	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

Table 1: Data gathering

Desk Research

This included a review of the eTwinning material, NSS final activity reports, CSS publications, and exploring the platform including statistics, projects, and activities as well as DES publications related to ICT in education.

Meeting with the National Support Service

In addition to email communication, there were four meetings with the NSS, two in person and two virtually, to discuss plans and progress and to answer queries related to documentation, findings, and the platform.

Field Research

The potential target audience for questionnaires and interviews are those registered on the platform before 31 December 2019, which was 1,579 eTwinning community members. These are divided into two different categories: those with active accounts, a total of 1,042, and those with dormant accounts where the account holder has not logged onto the platform for over a year, which accounts for 537. Anonymity was guaranteed for all respondents.

Questionnaires/Surveys

For the purposes of receiving input, thoughts, and opinions from as many stakeholders as possible in a succinct manner, three different surveys were distributed based on the category of eTwinning member:

- Active users, classed as those who have logged onto the platform within the last year, received a SurveyMonkey questionnaire consisting of 22 questions, both multiple choice and open-ended, covering the following:

- Position and subject area

- Motivation for registering, length of registration, and the information source for eTwinning

- eTwinning use and standing within the organisation

- Benefits and challenges

- The NSS and supports used and required

- An additional section where further comments could be added and consent to be contacted for an interview or the inclusion of their organisation within the report.

  This questionnaire was circulated on 13 March 2020 with an original closing date of 30 March 2020. Due to the low response rate, a reminder was sent extending the deadline until 10 April 2020. This yielded a 12% response rate.

Two short questionnaires were sent to dormant (inactive user) accounts. Qualtrics was used on this occasion due to account constraints with SurveyMonkey at the time. As part of its strategy, the NSS aims to re-engage these users, so to avoid interference with this strategy, the questionnaire did not request any personal details beyond job title. It contained 5 questions for the 192 people who had projects and 4 questions for the 345 people who did not have

projects. Each survey was sent in May 2020 with a June 2020 closing date and with one reminder a week before the closing date. The response rate was 31% for those who had previously participated in projects and 22% for those who had not participated in projects. Only two people asked to be removed from the mailing list related to the survey. The survey covered the following:

- Motivation for joining was an open-ended question

- Meeting objectives was a yes/no selection

- Relevance to current position was a yes/no selection

- Further comments

- How project topics were selected for those who participated in projects as several participants in interviews and the survey identified this as a challenge

Interviews

Forty-four semi-structured interviews took place over the telephone, Skype or Zoom. It was decided to conduct interviews in place of focus groups. Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and notes were taken rather than recordings. Twenty-three of these were active users who had completed the longer survey and the interviews intended to gain a deeper understanding of the responses received and the trends identified in the survey. When sending the survey to the non-active users, an additional line was included in the cover email seeking volunteers for a short interview.

This was included in 200 randomly selected dormant accounts, and 21 of these consented to an interview. Of these, 12 had no projects and 9 had participated in projects or professional development activities. These interviews focused on areas which would assist continued engagement with eTwinning and actions which could be put in place to support this. Some 45% of the interviews were conducted outside what would be considered normal working hours and another 11% at the weekend equally spread across

the 3 different groups. This demonstrates the high commitment of the education professionals to their work and willingness to use their own time to input into this report.

Originally, it was planned to have a specific section with the input of the eTwinning Ambassadors. However, of the 17 Ambassadors at the time, only 2 were available to discuss this aspect, and therefore this was abandoned as they would be identifiable from their input. However, their input outside the Ambassador role is included in this report.

Project Examples

Four project examples are included, demonstrating the conditions for successful project activity and the lessons learned from the implementation of the project. These four projects consented to their inclusion in this report. These examples illustrate feedback received from questionnaires and interviews. One of these projects participated in the interviews.

The survey data was analysed and cleaned, for example where a person stated that they had no contact with the NSS, yet rated it, this rating was removed from the statistics, or where the respondent had contacted Léargas about another action, this was removed. Where appropriate, all surveys are combined to reflect the overall percentage for the same questions.

The input into this report represents the range of users covering all areas with overall contact and input from 20% of the contactable registrations; given the external factors outlined previously, this is deemed an acceptable representation to provide a range of opinions, thoughts, and experiences.

TWO:
PROFILE OF CONTRIBUTORS

This section provides an overview of the professional profile of all validated users on the platform up to 31 December 2019, which provides background to the perspectives included in this report. It outlines the time of registration and considers the type of users feeding into the report and the status of eTwinning within their organisations.

2.1 Schools in Ireland

There are 3,240 primary schools in Ireland including 134 special schools with 37,341 teaching staff posts catering for 567,772 students. At post-primary level, there are 722 schools with 27,474 teaching staff for 362,899 students.[11] At primary school level there are 600 schools with 4 or fewer teachers.[12] According to the OECD, Education at a Glance 2019, investment in education in Ireland is lower than the OECD average. Teachers in Irish schools have above average OECD salaries; however, they have longer teaching hours with above average class sizes. The rate of investment has not kept in line with the number of students entering school.[13] The context in which individual teachers operate is a critical factor in the adoption of eTwinning; this was mentioned in most interviews as having an impact on eTwinning. While investment in education should increase because of Covid-19, at the time of writing there had been no clear announcement in this regard, and therefore it is unclear how this may impact the perspectives of participants.

2.2 Professional Profile of all Irish eTwinning Participants

The professional profile of registered and validated participants in Ireland are categorised as follows, with teachers representing the highest percentage at 79%.
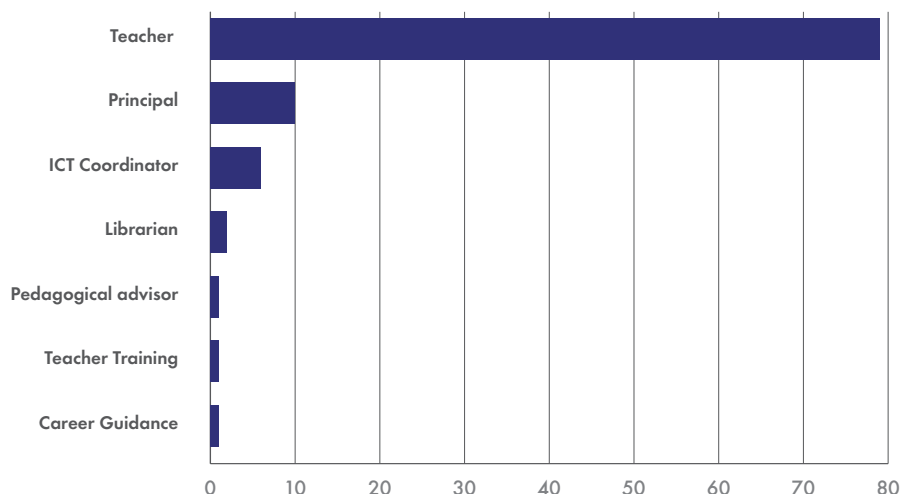
Figure 1: The profile of all registered participants on the eTwinning platform per role

11 Department of Education and Skills, Key Statistics 2018/2019 (accessed 25 June 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/key-statistics-2018-2019.pdf
12 Eurydice, Key Features of the Education System in Ireland (accessed 25 June 2020) https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ireland_en
13 OECD, Education at a Glance 2019 (accessed 25 June 2020) https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019_CN_IRL.pdf

2.3 Profile of Active Users Involved in This Report

The professional profile proportionally reflects the national composition of registered users where the majority are teachers. A promising aspect is the higher response rate from school principals and deputy principals, combined it is 12% compared to 10% registered on the platform. The figure of 4% for initial teacher education includes those registered on the platform as pedagogical advisors; therefore, this group is 1% student teachers and the remaining 3% are lecturers in education at teacher training institutes or pedagogical advisors in national organisations. There are more primary schools registered than secondary schools and this is also reflected in the responses.

Respondents were asked to identify their specific subject area and/or include information on areas where they have special responsibility as represented in Figure 3. Some 60% completed this, with multiple areas of responsibility for 30% of these people beyond subject specification. A high proportion of post-primary teachers were involved in language teaching and STEM subjects. While languages represent the largest cohort, when the science subjects are added with maths, it represents an equal cohort to languages. Learning support and special education are well represented. The representation of subject areas and areas of special responsibility among the participants is reflective of the diversity of the projects carried out in partnership with schools abroad. It also demonstrates the multiple roles teachers play outside their main subject area or teaching activities.

- Primary School Teacher
- Post Primary Teacher
- Principal
- Deputy Principal
- ICT Coordinator
- Librarian
- Special Needs Assistant
- Initial Teacher Education
- Retired Teacher/Principal
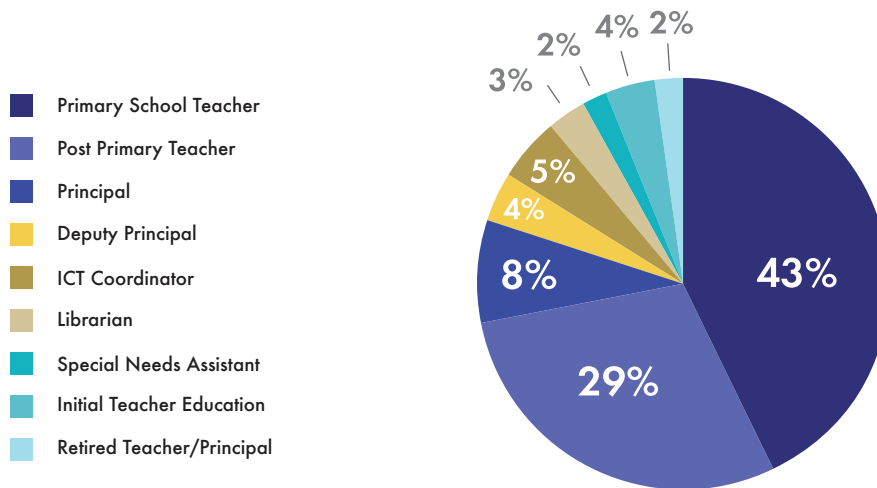
Figure 2: The representation of professional profile of active users as a percentage of those who responded to the questionnaire
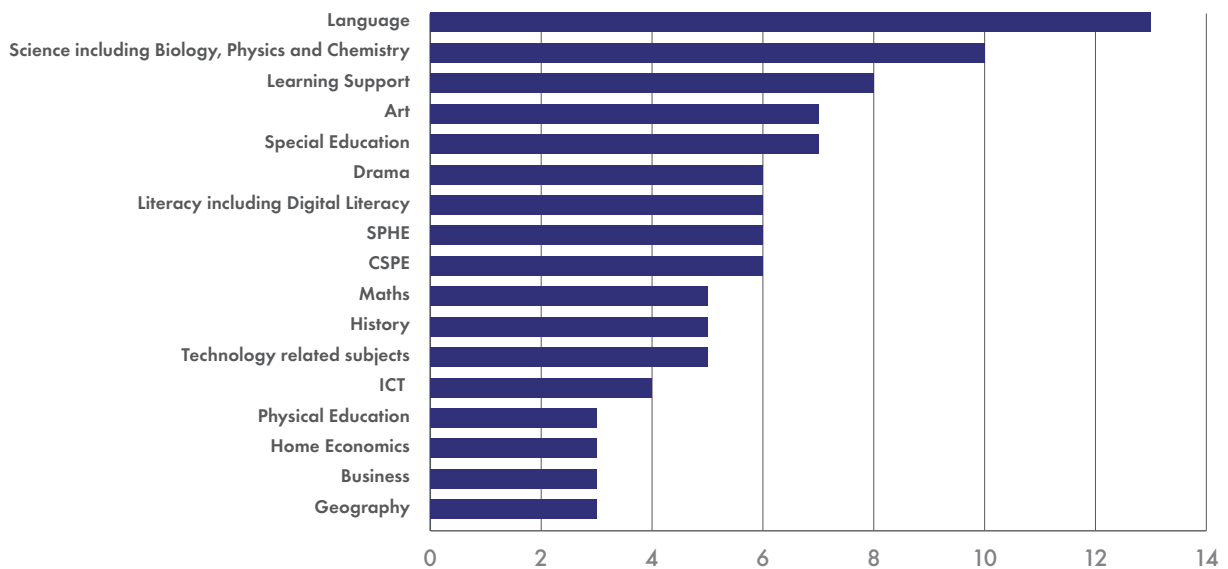
Figure 3: The subjects and areas of special responsibility as stated by active users in the questionnaire

Out of those who participated in the questionnaire 23 were interviewed and fall into the categories outlined in Figure 4.

No teacher training initiative or pedagogical advisors were available for interview. However, STEM and language subjects are covered equally.

2.4 Professional Profile of Dormant Accounts

The dormant account respondents are categorised as follows.

Retired educators represent 2% of respondents and the category of other are no longer working in the school education sector.

Table 2 outlines the percentages and areas of responsibility for the 21 dormant accounts interviewed.

It is interesting to note the participation of retired educators in both active and dormant categories; this demonstrates an interest in continuing to engage with eTwinning. However, the responses noted that there are limitations to what they can do now that they have retired. Some seemed to have a level of involvement with schools in their area in the provision of support.

2.5 Year of Registration

Figure 6 provides the duration of registration combined for the interviewees and questionnaire. It does not include the survey results from the dormant grouping, which would range from more than 1 year to more than 5 years depend-
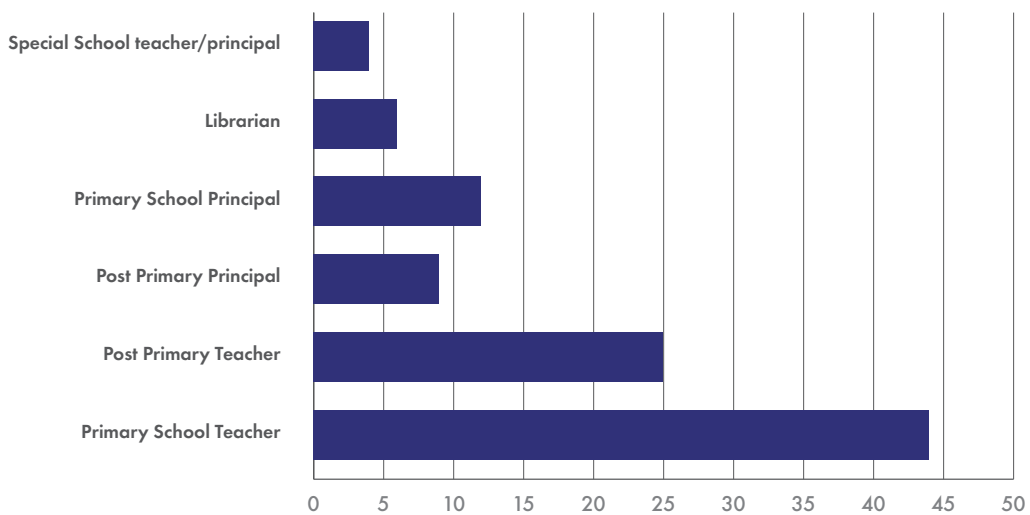
Figure 4: The profile of active users who were interviewed as a percentage
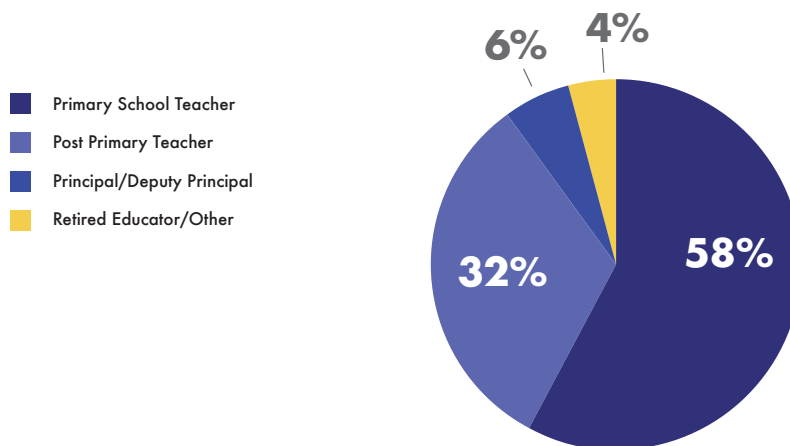
Figure 5 : The profile of dormant users who responded as a percentage

Role	Number	Subject or Area of Responsibility
Primary School Teacher	82%	Language
Post-Primary School Teacher	18%	STEM
		Art and/or Drama
		Literacy
		Digital School Plan
		Geography

Table 2: Area of responsibility of dormant account interviewees

ing on when they last logged on. More than 40% of the current active users registered in the last 3 years, which is reflected in the representation of participants in this report. The duration of registration provides an indication of the potential sustainability of eTwinning, with 17% registering more than 5 years ago; when deducting the dormant accounts from the total, this sits at 16%. It should be noted that 0.5% of those who participated re-registered after their account became dormant.

2.6 Self-Declared Type of User

The surveys and interviews did not define what is considered an active user. Two surveys targeted dormant accounts, who have not logged in for a year or more. The question-naire targeting active accounts contained two questions where participants had the opportunity to declare if they considered themselves active users of the platform. In one question 54% declared as active users and in the second question 68% considered themselves active users. Analysing the difference between the two percentages and comparing information from the interviews, those who are involved in Erasmus+ or were involved in Comenius School partnership projects did not consider themselves active users of eTwinning as the primary purpose for using it was linked to updating information or carrying out activities related to their funded project rather than eTwinning alone. These users joined the year they received funding for their project. Whereas those who were involved with funded projects and had been involved with eTwinning previously saw themselves as active users of eTwinning.

Figure 6: Years of registration of participants

Quotes from the interviews below demonstrate the range of registered participants, from project and training participants to those who use it for their own information.

I have a look from time to time, I don't think this makes me an active user.
Primary School Teacher

I check messages and reply to some of them, but I haven't done any projects or anything, so I use it for my own information and to get ideas for other things, but I don't contribute.
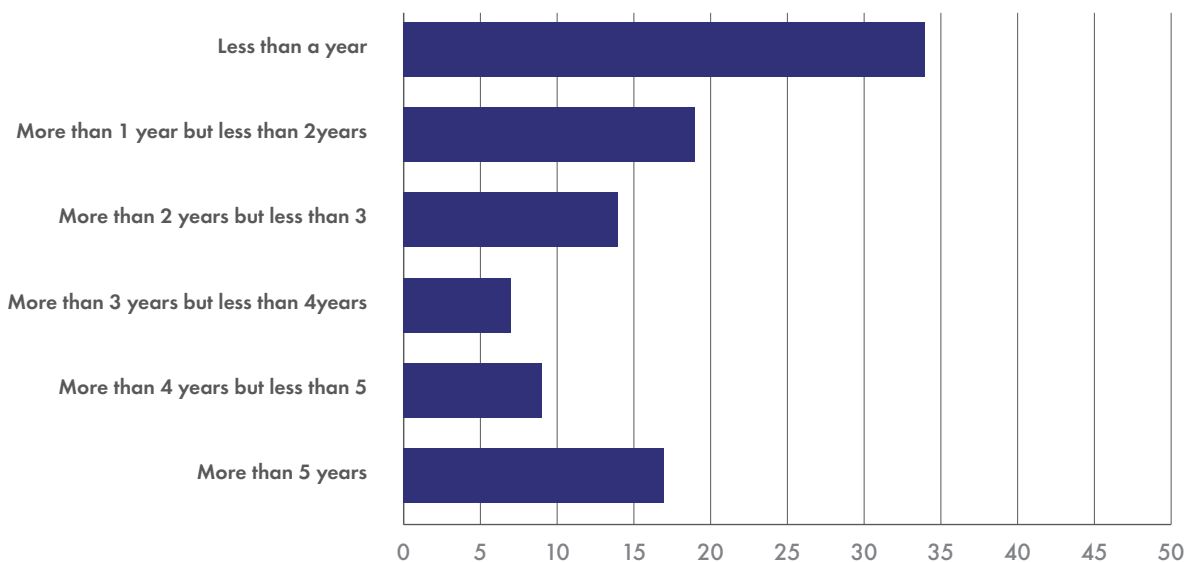**Post-Primary Teacher**

I registered to take part in a seminar, but haven't done anything since, I mean to, but I haven't seen anything that has caught my eye since.
Primary School Teacher

I have recently joined, and I am working my way through the videos and finding my way around it now.
Post-Primary Teacher

I try to look at it once a month, I find the newsletters a useful reminder.
Primary School Teacher

We joined because of a project application, but we didn't get it, I thought it was only for Erasmus.
Post-Primary Teacher

We use it all the time, we try to do projects every year and my students look forward to sharing their work with our partners.
Primary School Teacher

I have joined some groups, it's useful for ideas and seeing what others are doing.
Post-Primary Teacher

I have been involved for two years and it took me a year to find suitable partners, but our project worked really well, I've started another project now.
Primary School Teacher

eTwinning is a multi-layered flexible platform facilitating many activities from communication and collaboration to participation in training activities. Participation in all eTwinning has to offer is not possible for some users. Therefore, active users are users who use eTwinning to meet their objectives for joining, regardless of the number of activities they undertake; when participation is meeting users' needs, this should be considered a successful outcome.

2.7 eTwinning Within the Respondents' Organisations

The questionnaire for active users asked how they would describe eTwinning in their school or organisation, ticking all that apply from the list of options provided. Some 44% state that eTwinning is driven by one or two teachers within their classes

, which reflects the overall pattern where most schools have one or two registered teachers who are labelled as active within the platform. Some 15% undertake an annual project with their class which signifies a level of integration into the school. It is promising that 9% adopt a whole school approach to eTwinning and 24% forming part of the school digital strategy. Some 28% use it only with Erasmus+ projects showing the relationship between eTwinning and Erasmus+; however, as outlined further in the report, there is an element of confusion between eTwinning and Erasmus+. Integration into the curriculum is low at 14%, and on further analysis this was linked to those who have been members for more than 2 years; the same respondents selected part of a whole school approach at 11%. However, 24% stated that

it is part of the digital strategy of the school, which suggests that the integration into the digital strategy is in progress for approximately 12% of these respondents, rather than already built in. Some 4% selected other, which represented those joining Communities of Practices and teacher training initiatives, where one person stated:

A wonderful opportunity for student teachers to make contact with others to learn from their practice and to enable their learners to learn from learners in other settings.

Teacher Trainer

Of the 21 dormant accounts interviewed, 58% indicated that they were unaware of any approach to eTwinning within their organisations. However, combined with the other results, it shows that 36% of the organisations are aware of eTwinning outside the dormant account users within their organisation, as a result of other teachers joining and being part of or intending to be part of the digital strategy for the school.
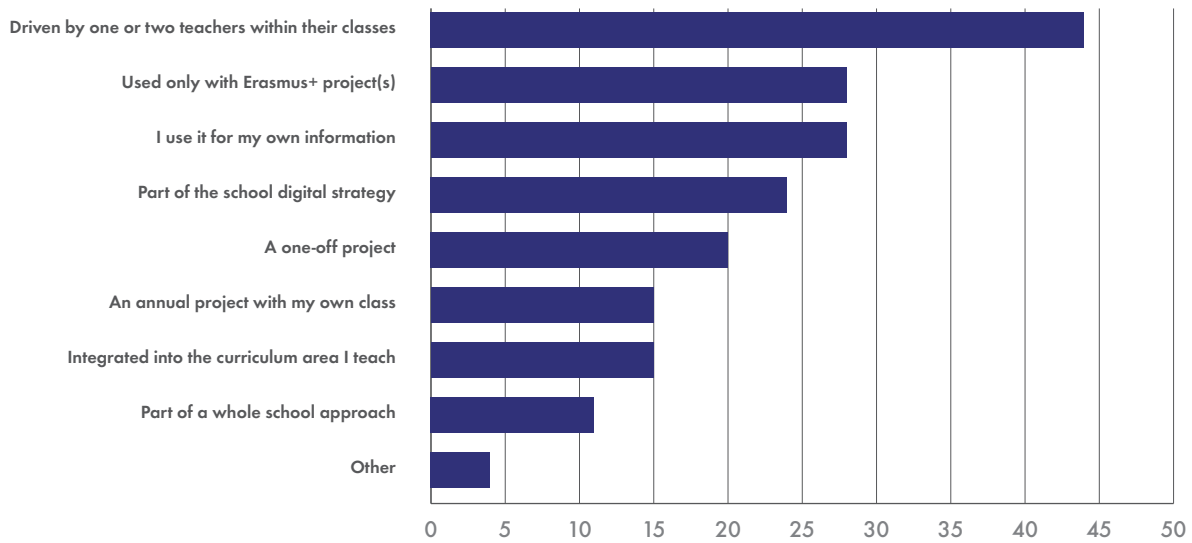
Figure 7: eTwinning within participants' organisations

Role	Number
A once-off activity	3%
Other teachers have since joined	17%
Part of the school digital strategy	6%
There is intent to include it in digital plans	13%
Intent to re-join	3%
None that they are aware	58%

Table 3: eTwinning within dormant participants organisations

2.8 Main Messages

The responses represent a cross section of the eTwinning community.

There is large involvement of those either working in SEN (Special Educational Needs) schools or classes as well as those providing learning support; this indicates the inclusive nature of eTwinning and the possibility of developing, adapting, and integrating all activities to suit all skill levels. This is further highlighted in CSPE, which was a common level subject among students when it was an exam subject. The higher response rate of school principals or deputy principals in terms of registration ratio to the platform creates the impression of a good level of interest in eTwinning within management levels of the participating schools.
A total of 30% of the active accounts had roles or areas of responsibility outside their main teaching activities which implies a level of commitment and motivation to undertake additional activities.

The definition of active user varies from person to person. It seems that those who responded to the survey who are or were previously involved in Erasmus+ and Comenius projects did not consider themselves as active users of eTwinning, as their primary purpose for using the platform was related to another funded activity. However, those who were involved in eTwinning prior to funded project participation considered themselves active users with a dual approach in their use of eTwinning.

Integration into the curriculum provides a low rate of 14%. However, given that the respondents who selected this have been members for two years or more, this demonstrates that it takes time to integrate eTwinning into the curriculum. The 24% who indicated that eTwinning was part of the school's digital strategy would imply that this is at various levels of implementation.

The broad spectrum of subject areas demonstrates the applicability of eTwinning to a range of education professionals.

The response rates of dormant accounts were higher than the active users. While this could be potentially related to the shorter questionnaires, it does still demonstrate an interest in the programme. The barrier of time impacted on their participation, as most are still working in an area where eTwinning is relevant.

eTwinning provides a range of activities and resources offering flexibility in terms of use to facilitate the circumstances, context, and environment in which the community member is working. The levels of users vary dependent on circumstances. However, once membership of eTwinning is meeting their needs, this is considered successful from their perspective.

THREE:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF ETWINNING IN THE IRISH CONTEXT

The development of eTwinning can be divided into three key timeframes based on the European Programme cycles. According to the interviewees, it is important to consider the context of the school education system in Ireland in terms of size of schools and policy development in the integration of ICT into the curriculum.

3.1 2005 to 2006 eLearning Programme

3.1.1 Launch of eTwinning
eTwinning, officially launched by the European Commission on 14 January 2005, was one of the four pillars of the 2004 to 2006 European Commission eLearning programme. It sought to integrate information and communication technologies (ICT) into the European education and training systems, promoting quality in education and training in meeting the needs of a knowledge-based society in line with the Lisbon objectives set out in 2000. This was followed by the call for a school twinning programme across Europe at the Barcelona Council in 2002.[14] The programme was open to 28 countries across Europe managed by 28 National Support Services (NSS).

The goal of eTwinning was to provide opportunities to highlight and incorporate the European dimension of education through cooperation and collaboration between schools in Europe and to strengthen language learning and

intercultural communication through the medium of ICT contributing to the development of digital skills, as set out in the Barcelona Council Conclusions in 2002, where the need for teacher training and professional development in the area of digital skills was deemed a priority. The European Council joint report Education & Training 2010 – The Success of the Lisbon Strategy Hinges on Urgent Reforms, published in February 2004, called on Member States to increase efforts to meet the Education & Training 2010 targets, with an emphasis on the key competences needed before the completion of compulsory education which includes digital competence. It re-emphasised the need to increase language learning, the importance of the European dimension in teacher training, the school curriculum, and for the teaching profession the integration of ICT into teaching and learning methodologies.[15] Digital skills has been classified as a key competence by the European Commission since 2006.[16]

Initially, commencing as twinning projects between schools, forming partnerships to work on collaborative projects, Professional Development Workshops (PDW) were added in late 2005, increasing opportunities for teachers to engage with their European partners to exchange learning by participating in funded face to face training activities with peers across participating countries.

Application and selection processes were put in place to allow the transparent nomination of participants from Ireland to undertake these activities as there were limitations in

14 Decision No 2318/2003/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 December 2003 adopting a multiannual programme (2004 to 2006) for the effective integration of information and communication technologies (ICT) in education and training systems in Europe (eLearning Programme) (accessed 14 March 2020) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32003D2318
15 Education & Training 2010 The success of the Lisbon strategy hinges on urgent reforms – Joint interim report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe (February 2004) (accessed 14 March 2020) https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/59381b9f-3a72-4bca-9b8f-1f9029644152/language-en
16 Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (accessed 14 March 2020) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32006H0962

numbers to ensure a balanced representation per participating country. eTwinning was also promoted at contact making or partner finding seminars both formally and informally through peer to peer networking. By November 2005, 10,000 schools across Europe were registered for eTwinning, with over 1,500 projects taking place deeming it to be one of the most rapidly growing programmes focusing on school partnerships.[17]

3.1.2 ICT in Education Policy in Ireland

In Ireland, the first major strategy for ICT in school education began with the publication of Schools IT 2000 by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 1997. It had four areas of focus, infrastructure, teacher training, support, and pilot projects under the Schools Integration Project (SIP), with the aim of developing and sharing good practices in the integration of ICT in teaching and learning. The overall objective focused on the integration of ICT into the curriculum at primary and post-primary levels. It recognised that Ireland was behind its European counterparts in the use of ICT in teaching and learning. The aim was to ensure all students attained ICT literacy and provided for Inservice Training (IST) courses for teachers to integrate ICT into their teaching activities. The National Centre for Technology in Education (NCTE) was established to support schools and teachers in achieving these objectives through the development of resources, the provision of training and guidance documentation as well as the establishment of the Scoilnet portal providing online resources.[18] ICT advisors were based in Education Centres to support teachers and schools. Courses for teachers were eligible for EPV (Extra Personal Vacation) days for three-day courses, an exception to the five-day course rule in place at the time. The Report on the Impact of Schools IT 2000 in 2001 noted the high satisfaction rates among education professionals but concluded that further investment was required for school infrastructure, training for teachers and further support in terms of using ICT as well as technical support.[19]

The Blueprint for the Future of ICT in Education 2001 to 2003 aimed to make further progress in the area of the integration of ICT in schools. Notably it acknowledged and highlighted the role of the school principal in the integration of ICT into the school, including infrastructure and training needs of staff as well as special education. As with Schools IT 2000, there was a large budget set aside. The DES Strategy Statement 2003 to 2005 reaffirmed commitment

to the integration of ICT in schools where Objective 3.2 stated, 'We will ensure that pupils in every school have the opportunity to achieve computer literacy and acquire the necessary skills for participation in the Information Society'.[20] Again, under Objective 3.2 the DES Strategy Statement 2005 to 2007 stated, 'We will promote the use of ICT in schools and encourage pupils to achieve computer literacy and acquire the necessary skills for participation in the Information Society.'[21] The change in wording can indicate less of a an emphasis on the integration of ICT into teaching and learning, which was further highlighted by the lack of overall national policy and direction until the publication of Smart Schools – Smart Economy Report in 2009 and Investing Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools 2008 to 2013. In 2004 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) published guidelines for primary schools for ICT in schools.

When eTwinning commenced in 2005, there was a focus on infrastructure and access to broadband from 2005 to 2008 with the roll-out of the Schools Broadband Action Programme. In 2005/06 the DES carried out research into the impact of ICT on teaching and learning in schools, publishing the report in 2008.

3.1.3 NSS and Membership Growth

The NSS had one full-time staff member and the programme was located within the team who managed Comenius and adult education. Much of the focus in the initial two years was on the provision of information through promotion and dissemination activities and establishing links with relevant stakeholders.

From 2005 to 2006, 261 education professionals registered, representing 218 schools undertaking 74 projects. The NCTE conducted a 2005 Census on ICT Infrastructure in Schools and it found that 44% of computers in primary schools are located within the general classroom whereas at post-primary level 4% are within the general classroom.[22] However, this did not impact on the participating schools in eTwinning as there was not a significant deviation in the age ranges of students participating in projects, with 38 of primary school age and 36 of post-primary school age. Based on the project descriptions, most activities were carried out offline and then shared with partners at various intervals during the project, removing the need to have sustained access to a computer for all project activities.

20 Department of Education and Science, Statement of Strategy 2003 to 2005, page 38 (accessed 15 April 2020) https://www.sess.ie/sites/default/files/DES%20Statement%20of%20Strategy%202003-2005.pdf
21 Department of Education and Science, Statement of Strategy 2005 to 2007, page 36 (accessed 15 April 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Corporate-Reports/Strategy-Statement/strategy_statement_05_07.pdf
22 Shiel, Gerry and O'Flaherty, Adrian, (2006), NCTE 2005 Census on ICT Infrastructure in Schools https://www.researchgate.net/publication/242422625_NCTE_2005_Census_on_ICT_Infrastructure_in_Schools

Year	Number of Registered Teachers	Number of Registered Schools	Number of Registered Projects
2005	116	102	25
2006	145	116	49

Table 4: eTwinning membership 2005 to 2006

3.1.4 Projects and Partners

The partnership projects were primarily bilateral, with 28% of the projects having more than 1 partner ranging from 3 to 9 partners. Ireland did not feature strongly in the founding countries in projects. Some 12% of the projects were bilingual, conducted in English and another European language, Spanish, French, German, and Italian, all involving post-primary school students aged 13 to 19. A trend towards the increased use of ICT in English as well as other modern languages was noted in the report on the implementation of Schools IT 2000.

The most popular partners were Italy, Poland, and France in 2005 and in 2006 Poland, Spain France, Norway, and Greece. According to the 2006 Census, the Polish population in Ireland represents the largest group of people living and working in Ireland from an EU member state with a population of 63,276 people, with 4,700 aged 0 to 14 years and 17,665 aged 15 to 24 years old.[23] The school partnerships with Poland were conducted by schools primarily in cities or large urban areas where there was evidence of a multicultural student cohort based on census figures.

3.1.5 Project Topics and Themes

Project topics in the age ranges 5 to 13 focused on myths, legends, communication between students learning about history, geography, the environment, and culture. Activities included pen pals through email and letter writing, exchanging photos and artwork, videos, recipes, pictures of local surroundings, and school life. Drama and singing were popular activities recording and exchanging traditional songs and acting out myths and legends. The tools used were primarily PowerPoint, email, word processing and video conferencing. There was an emphasis on literacy and communication skills as well as gaining knowledge about other countries.

Within the age range of 12 to 19 project topics focused more on European citizenship, cultural identity, understand-ing similarities, and valuing differences. There was an emphasis on teamwork, collaboration, and language learning. The tools in addition to those mentioned previously included podcasting, more use of chat forums, the use of virtual learning environments, and producing webpages, CDs, and e-magazines.

The initial two years of eTwinning demonstrated a good uptake of a new programme with increasing activity and registration undertaking relevant projects linked to the ethos of the Education Act 1998, where respecting and valuing diversity within Irish society is a core aim of education. The activities available under eTwinning fit well with Irish policy for the integration of ICT into the curriculum, offering both training opportunities as well as a safe portal to enable and facilitate communication and collaboration with partners across Europe against the backdrop of investment in infrastructure in ICT in education.

3.2 2007 to 2014 Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP)

3.2.1 eTwinning and the Lifelong Learning Programme

With the launch of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), the eLearning Programme was no longer a standalone programme; the four strands, including eTwinning, were integrated into the objectives of the new generation under the umbrella of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) with a budget of seven billion euro from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013. The LLP was composed of four key sectoral pillars and underpinned by a transversal programme covering all sectors of education and training. One of the four pillars, Comenius, focused on school education, providing opportunities for school partnership projects, regional authority partnerships, and teacher training and professional development activities. eTwinning formed a subprogramme of the Comenius Programme. This brought closer alignment with the EU funded programmes in school edu-

23 Census 2006 Reports Volume 4 – Usual Residence, Migration, Birthplaces and Nationalities and Volume 5 – Ethnic or Cultural Background including the Irish Traveller Community (2007) (accessed 19 April 2020) https://www.cso.ie/en/census/census2006reports/

cation. It provided formal recognition of eTwinning as a tool and contributor to the development of partnership projects and as a means of professional development between European colleagues in school education. It provided a clear and logical fit in the programme framework, which was not evident in the initial two years, where it was seen more as a standalone entity. It was recognised and established as the official partner finding tool for Comenius School projects.

The motto for eTwinning changed from School Partnerships in Europe to the Community for Schools in Europe, encompassing all the activities available under the programme to include partnership projects, eTwinning groups in 2008, learning events in 2009, and project kits to assist with developing projects and ideas, and modules to support participants when starting a project. The eTwinning portal experienced changes. The desktop was revamped in 2008 in line with Web 2.0, offering similar features of social media networking at the time, and the TwinSpace was developed further in 2009. These changes were implemented and in line with feedback from users by the CSS. New concepts were introduced such as eTwinning Schools, eTwinning School Teams and awards such as the European and National Quality Labels. In 2012, eTwinning Plus brought the opportunity to partner with neighbouring countries to the EU, which provided for richer cultural exchange.

3.2.2 ICT in Education Policy in Ireland

The Schools Broadband Programme 2005 to 2008 continued to be rolled out. In 2007, the NCCA published the ICT Framework – A Structured Approach to ICT in Curriculum and Assessment as a tool to assist teachers with a structured approach to the integration of ICT in teaching and learning.[24] In 2008, the DES Inspectorate ICT in Schools Evaluation was published, which noted positive aspects such as access to ICT for SEN Teachers and sharing the use of virtual learning environments (VLE). It recommended improvements to infrastructure, such as all classes should be equipped with a computer and data projector, sufficient internet bandwidth, reduction of the student to computer ratio, funding for both ICT capacity and upgrading of current systems, requirements for enhanced technical support, and maintenance. It called on policymakers to have an increased focus on ICT in teaching and learning in initial teacher education as well as CPD as a high priority for

support services.[25] In 2008, Investing Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools, 2008–2013, The Report of Ministers' Strategy Group was published with seven objectives including CPD, software and digital content for learning and teaching, ICT equipment, schools broadband and services, technical support and maintenance, implementation structures and supports, innovative practice, and research.[26] The Smart Schools Smart Economy – Report of ICT in Schools Joint Advisory Group to the Minister for Education and Science published in 2009 recognised schools as crucial for equipping young people with skills for the development of the economy and inclusive society.[27] It focused on five themes, infrastructure of the classroom, professional development of teachers, planning, digital content, and broadband for schools, to be delivered from 2009 to 2012. It committed to investing €150 million in infrastructure to close the infrastructure gap and an annual budget of €30 million for maintenance and services. In 2011, the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life – The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy Among Children and Young People 2011–2020 was published, which includes digital literacy. The Teaching Council published the Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education in 2011, where ICT would form part of initial teacher education (ITE) and teacher ICT would be a priority area in teacher CPD. It also extended the duration of ITE to four years to allow for an increased emphasis on the priority areas of ICT, inclusion and literacy and numeracy. In 2012, as part of several changes within the sphere of education, the functions and role of the NCTE were moved to the remit of the Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST).

3.2.3 NSS and Membership Growth

The NSS had one full-time staff member and the programme was located within the team who managed Comenius and adult education with part-time administrative support. While there was still a focus on building the membership base of the programme with event and conference attendance with key organisations, networks, and associations, strong efforts were made to develop projects. Some 34 projects were awarded the National Quality Label and 28 were awarded the European Quality Label. An eTwinning Steering Committee was formed with members from the ICT Policy Unit of the DES, the education centre network, and teacher training organisations and representatives. In 2008, the

24 National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, (November 2007) ICT Framework, A structured approach to ICT in Curriculum and Assessment, Report on the school based developmental initiative (accessed 19 April 2020) https://ncca.ie/media/2092/ict_framework_a_structured_approach_to_ict_in_curriculum_and_assessment_-_report_on_the_schoolbased_development_initiative.pdf

25 Department of Education and Science, ICT in Schools, Inspectorate Evaluation Studies, 2008 (accessed 12 April 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-Reports-Publications/Evaluation-Reports-Guidelines/ICT-in-Schools-Inspectorate-Evaluation-Studies.pdf

26 Department of Education and Skills, (2008) Investing Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools, 2008–2013, The Report of Ministers' Strategy Group (accessed 13 April 2020) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4598cc-investing-effectively-in-information-and-communication-technology-in/

27 Department of Education and Science, (2009) The Smart Schools Smart Economy Report of the ICT in Schools Joint Advisory Group to the Minister for Education and Science (accessed April 2020) https://assets.gov.ie/24670/be87ca90e27e4c898f-0029cfded3fca5.pdf

eTwinning Ambassador Network in Ireland was formally established to assist in creating awareness and promoting eTwinning at national and regional levels using a peer learning approach.

The number of registered users continued to grow steadily from 2007 to 2013, and given the difference between the number of new schools registering and the higher number of teachers, this demonstrates particularly from 2011 to 2013 that more than one teacher from the same schools were registering. There was an increase in the number of registered librarians, which can be linked to the expansion of the JCSP (Junior Certificate Schools Programme) Demonstration Library Project, who provide literacy and language development as an early intervention to students. This expansion occurred under Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion published in 2005.

3.2.4 Projects and Partners

A total of 651 projects took place with 64% involving more than one partner, with 38% of these with Ireland as co-submitter or lead partner. Some 33% were conducted in more than one language primarily at post-primary age level. The top five countries featuring as partners in terms of lead or co-submitter in descending order were France, Poland, the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Germany. It was only from 2009 onwards that the United Kingdom began to feature more as a partner. Projects in the age range of 3 to 13 represented 59%, with 10% of these containing activities to complement Comenius project activities. There is

a 41% representation from post-primary age groups. Overall, 6% of projects used project kits, with the most popular being Culture in a Box representing 25% and both Digital Fairy Tales and E-journal bridges for foreign language learning representing 11%.

3.2.5 Project Topics and Themes

Project themes with the 3 to 12 age cohort focused mainly on exchange of culture, traditions, nature with the aim of intercultural learning and understanding through myths, legends, festivals, celebrations, and daily life with an emphasis on communication, literacy and creativity skills similar to the first 2 years. Themes such as healthy eating, healthy minds, dealing with change, and anti-bullying started to emerge from 2011 onwards. Planning was evident in terms of linking with world events such as the Olympic Games and the Paralympics, with sports and learning and sharing traditional games, the UN Year of Biodiversity in 2010 concerning climate change and pollution among the participating countries. In terms of language projects, there was still more of a focus on the partner country and their linguistic skills. However, a core aim was to gain an understanding of the EU, creating connections and a sense of place and belonging within the EU. For ICT tools, like from 2005 to 2006, the focus was on emailing and creating PowerPoints. However, there seemed to be an increase in synchronous activities via Skype and other platforms with evidence of planned meetings between classes, which included plays, songs, and dances. Asynchronous activities included the filming of sports and games as well as arts, class projects, and information researched and exchanged.

Year	Number of Registered Teachers	Number of Registered Schools	Number of Registered Projects
2007	125	103	74
2008	115	87	79
2009	145	97	105
2010	178	134	102
2011	134	93	77
2012	160	88	112
2013	153	67	102

Table 5: eTwinning membership 2007 to 2013

The post-primary aged group 13 to 18 carried out both synchronous and asynchronous activities. Notably the area of language learning and exchange took place with more of a focus on language learning and language exchange on specific topics, such as daily life, school life, and hobbies as well as current events, learning key vocabulary around topics such as global warming. There were several projects focused on everyday maths which links with the numeracy and literacy strategy, as well as early participants in project maths which commenced in 2008. There was a large emphasis on research and analysis of results as well as critical thinking involving comparisons between countries. The expansion of geography could be linked to the revised curriculum introduced in 2004, encouraging the use of ICT in the teaching and learning of geography. History featured well, with perspectives explored on key historical figures, their relevance for the countries involved, encouraging critical thinking. Marketing of the same product across partners offered comparisons between media approaches, target audiences, and creativity in the form of developing advertising campaigns and comparing results. There was an increase in learning about European institutions and their relevance to each country, the politics, voting as well as different political structures. Within the post-primary category, there was increased use of ICT tools for research as well as writing blogs, creating virtual tours, students creating videos to exchange as well as developing presentations and presenting them to partners. The importance of gaining new knowledge was highlighted across many projects.

Across all age categories, while either the main focus or a secondary aspect, topics included intercultural exchange and intercultural competences, which links with the Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010–2015[28] that reinforced the Education Act 1998 which aims to provide young people with an education that respects 'the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society'[29]. The demographics of Ireland had changed as identified in the 2006 Census where 10% of the population identified as another nationality in the question What is your nationality? There was also an emphasis on inclusion, which can be linked to the publication of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) the Action Plan for Educational Inclusion in 2005. This saw the introduction of national programmes to support students experiencing educational disadvantage creating a holistic approach with the Schools Support Programme (SSP). This increased the emphasis on inclusion in education, which was supported by the series of European Years which all focused or were strongly linked to the topic with 2007 the European Year of Equal Opportunities, 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and 2010 the European Year For Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

The period 2007 to 2013 saw a steady growth in membership, with evidence of engagement increasing with the growing number of projects. There were several repeat activities with different partners and projects with the same partners increasing in complexity, demonstrating a level of sustainability. Most notable is the focus on the quality of the information involved in the research undertaken by students and the emphasis on the meaningful engagement with the information as well as stronger links created with partners in terms of exchange and relevance to the curriculum. At this point, there is a wide mix of projects, from beginners taking initial steps, beginning with an initial teacher project examining areas for collaboration while learning about and from each other, to more advanced projects with a whole school approach to twinning all classes. Projects were beginning to focus on parallel goals targeting both teachers and students, with learning outcomes for both groups, with teachers sharing resources and seeking to learn from each other with concrete outcomes such as learning programmes for students with additional educational needs, while students were working on a different topic. The complexity of projects for several participants was increasing as technology advanced with the introduction of creating animations, technical drawing, and elements of coding. Steps were also taken to incorporate activities with national initiatives such as the Green Flag programme.

28 Department of Education and Skills and Office of the Minister for Integration, Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010–2015 (accessed 4 May 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Intercultural-Education-Strategy/mig_intercultural_education_strategy.pdf
29 Education Act, 1998 http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1998/act/51/enacted/en/html

FOUR:
FOCUS ON 2014 TO 2019 ETWINNING AND ERASMUS+

4.1 eTwinning and Erasmus+

This report focuses on registered users up to December 2019, with a year left in the 7-year programme cycle. Erasmus+ is the EU programme in education, training, youth, and sport, which commenced on 1 January 2014 and will end on 31 December 2020. With a budget of €14.7 billion, it aims to facilitate the participation of 4 million individuals in projects, training, study, and volunteering abroad. The programme is underpinned by policy development at EU level and aims to meet the objectives of Europe 2020 and Education and Training 2020, the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training. Erasmus+ brought all previous programmes under the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) along with Youth in Action and the former Tempus programmes under the one umbrella of Erasmus+. The brand names built up over the previous two programmes such as Comenius, Grundtvig, and Leonardo Da Vinci were phased out. It is divided into three Key Actions: Key Action 1 focusing on Mobility, Key Action 2 on Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices, and Key Action 3 which focuses on policy development. This is the largest change experienced by the field of school education in the last 14 years; one of the key changes was the move to an organisational approach for mobility activities with the creation of European Development Plans and a whole school approach to EU programmes.

eTwinning became one of the support services among a growing number of online platforms including the School Education Gateway, EPALE, and Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. This marked a large change where it was no longer under the umbrella of the school education programme; this provided more independence and identity for the programme. However, at the same time, it became more ingrained in the mobility programme (Key Action 1) and the partnership projects (Key Action 2) forming part of the evaluation criteria for project applications.

eTwinning Live was introduced in 2014 and the TwinSpace was redeveloped. An app was launched in 2017. The possibility to collaborate with another Irish school in the form of a national project was introduced. The number of countries participating in eTwinning Plus increased. The Quality Label criteria were redeveloped, and the concept of an eTwinning School was initiated. A thematic focus on initial teacher education which began in 2013 with the CSS grew considerably during this phase.

4.2 ICT in Education Policy in Ireland

The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020 Enhancing Teaching Learning and Assessment[30] was published in 2015, building on the recommendations of the 2013 ICT Census in Schools report and the 2008 Strategy, Investing

Effectively in Information and Communications Technology in Schools, 2008–2013. It aimed to embed ICT across the school education system to enhance the quality of education. It was developed with wide consultation among stakeholders, one of whom was the Irish eTwinning NSS. It committed to a €210 million investment in technology in schools and centred around four key thematic areas: Teaching, Learning and Assessment using ICT; Teacher Professional Learning; Leadership; Research and Policy; and ICT Infrastructure. The vision of the strategy is to:

Realise the potential of digital technologies to enhance teaching, learning and assessment so that Ireland's young people become engaged thinkers, active learners, knowledge constructors and global citizens to participate fully in society and the economy.[31]

In 2017, the Digital Learning Framework for primary and post-primary schools was published and piloted in 50 schools (20 post-primary and 30 primary schools) in 2017/18. Digital Learning Planning Guidelines for both primary and post-primary schools were also published in 2017. The Digital Learning Frameworks were rolled out across all schools in 2018/19 and are supported by extensive CPD to assist and support schools with embedding ICT in teaching and learning, overseen and delivered by the PDST – Technology in Education (PDST-TIE).[32]

eTwinning was specifically referenced in the 2017 Digital Strategy Action Plan, which sought to:

Raise awareness of eTwinning and other relevant EU and international resources and learning opportunities through online CPD and other PDST/PDST-TIE dissemination channels.[33]

The Junior Cycle reform was also published in 2015, with reference to the increased use of ICT for learning and communication as well as collaboratively and creatively working.[34] Again, the Digital Action Plan 2019 referenced eTwinning:

Promote where appropriate the use of the eTwinning platform to showcase school projects and to foster collaboration between schools.[35]

4.3 NSS and Membership Growth

From 2014 to 2016, the NSS sat within the schools and VET client support services team for Key Action 1 and 2 of Erasmus+. In 2017, Léargas was reorganised to reflect the composition of the Erasmus+ programme. A new strategic initiatives team bringing together EPALE, Language Actions, Eurodesk, and ECVET was formed creating synergy between the activities and platforms. This gave eTwinning further prominence as a programme under Erasmus+ as well as a complementary tool for schools involved in Erasmus+ activities. In mid-2018, a second full-time eTwinning Officer was employed. The benefits of the structural change within the organisation and the additional full-time staff member is reflected in the statistics with the largest growth across registrations, projects, and links created at national levels as well as the feedback received from participants contributing to this report. The networking with the PDST, the DES and involvement of the eTwinning Steering Committee, renamed as the Project Advisory Panel, was evident from the inclusion of eTwinning in the 2017 and 2019 Digital Strategy Action Plan. This provided recognition at national level of the programme.

The years 2014 to 2019 saw the largest growth in the eTwinning programme, notably from 2017, which reflects the move of eTwinning to the new strategic initiatives team and the increased staff resources. This enabled a large, targeted approach to increase the membership base, the number of projects, and the profile of eTwinning at national level.

31 Department of Education and Skills, (2015) Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020 (accessed May 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Digital-Strategy-for-Schools-2015-2020.pdf
32 Department of Education and Skills, Digital Learning Frameworks for Schools (accessed 14 June 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Schools-Colleges/Information/Information-Communications-Technology-ICT-in-Schools/DLF.html
33 Department of Education and Skills, (2017) Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020 – Action Plan 2017 (accessed 14 June 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Digital-Strategy-Action-Plan-2017.pdf
34 Department of Education and Skills, (2015) Framework for Junior Cycle (accessed 14 June 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/Framework-for-Junior-Cycle-2015.pdf
35 Department of Education and Skills, (2019) Digital Strategy for Schools 2015–2020 – Action Plan 2019 (accessed 14 June 2020) https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/digital-strategy-action-plan-2019.pdf

Year	Number of Registered Teachers	Number of Registered Schools	Number of Registered Projects
2014	52	87	105
2015	72	86	119
2016	68	69	100
2017	231	120	167
2018	467	205	213
2019	692	322	213

Table 6: eTwinning membership 2014 to 2019

The NSS has a broad remit in terms of the management of the programme. In the context of eTwinning, the NSS works with a large range of stakeholders in school education at both European and national levels, this involves the management of a large communication network both within the eTwinning platform and external to the platform with the development of projects, information and promotional materials and activities such as conferences, face to face training events, monitoring/support visits to schools and collaboration at national level with the key stakeholders in school education primarily the DES and PDST. Other stakeholder groups include the National Project Advisory Panel (PAP) and the eTwinning Ambassador Network.

National Project Advisory Panel (PAP)

The eTwinning Steering Group was renamed as the National eTwinning Project Advisory Panel with the same organisations represented since its establishment, including the DES, members of the Education Centre Network and members of the PDST. The group meet three times annually providing guidance, discussion, and input into the activities of the NSS. This ensures alignment with the school education sector and a connection with policy development as well as contributing to mainstreaming the programme.

eTwinning Ambassador Network

The NSS manage an expanding network of eTwinning Ambassadors, which has been scaled up in recent years, to ensure regional representation across Ireland. The geographical spread of eTwinning member schools requires a strong Ambassador presence across their regions.
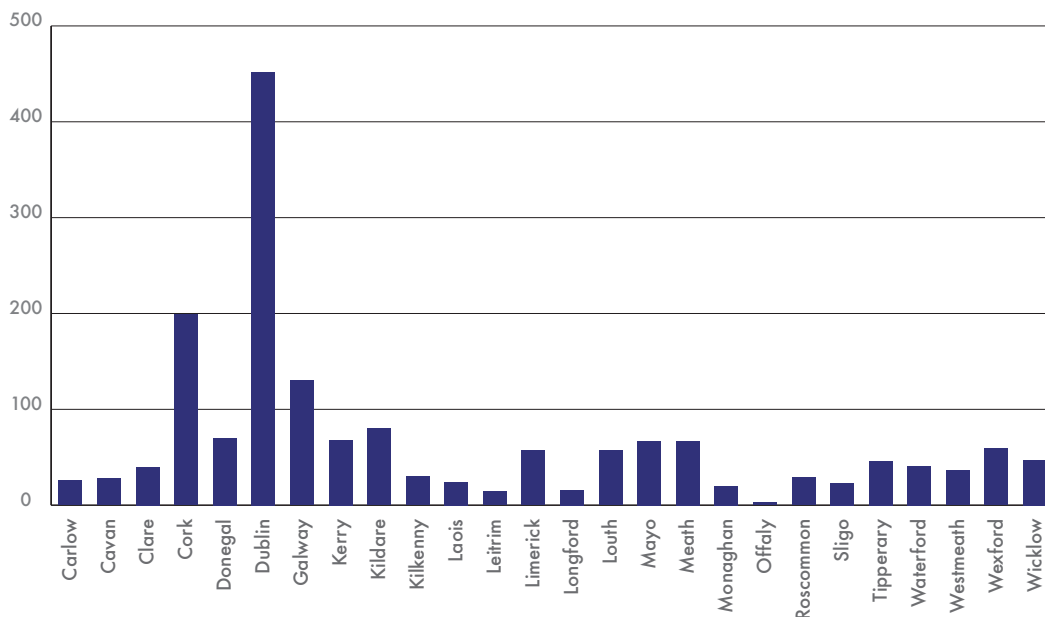
Figure 8: Regional distribution of eTwinning registrations 2005 to 2019

Year	Number of Ambassadors
2015	11
2016	15
2017	18
2018	19
2019	17

Table 7: Number of Ambassadors 2015 to 2019

There is an annual call for Ambassadors, where current Ambassadors can reapply and new Ambassadors are appointed. The expansion of the Ambassador Network will have a positive impact on the programme with more regions included. The annual call for Ambassadors and the changing composition of the group brings new ideas and a fresh outlook from the perspectives of the school education community including teacher educators.

The eTwinning Ambassadors attend two meetings per year with the NSS. The eTwinning Ambassador Networks across the participating countries differ in terms of the provision of school substitution and compensation for the time spent and recognition of the role while carrying out eTwinning duties. The Ambassadors commit to at least one presentation per year within their region and another activity such as a stand at a conference or the development and delivery of CPD activities for active users.

The activities of the NSS are summarised in the logic model illustrated in Figure 9, offering an indication of the broad spectrum of their work to achieve key targets and outcomes.

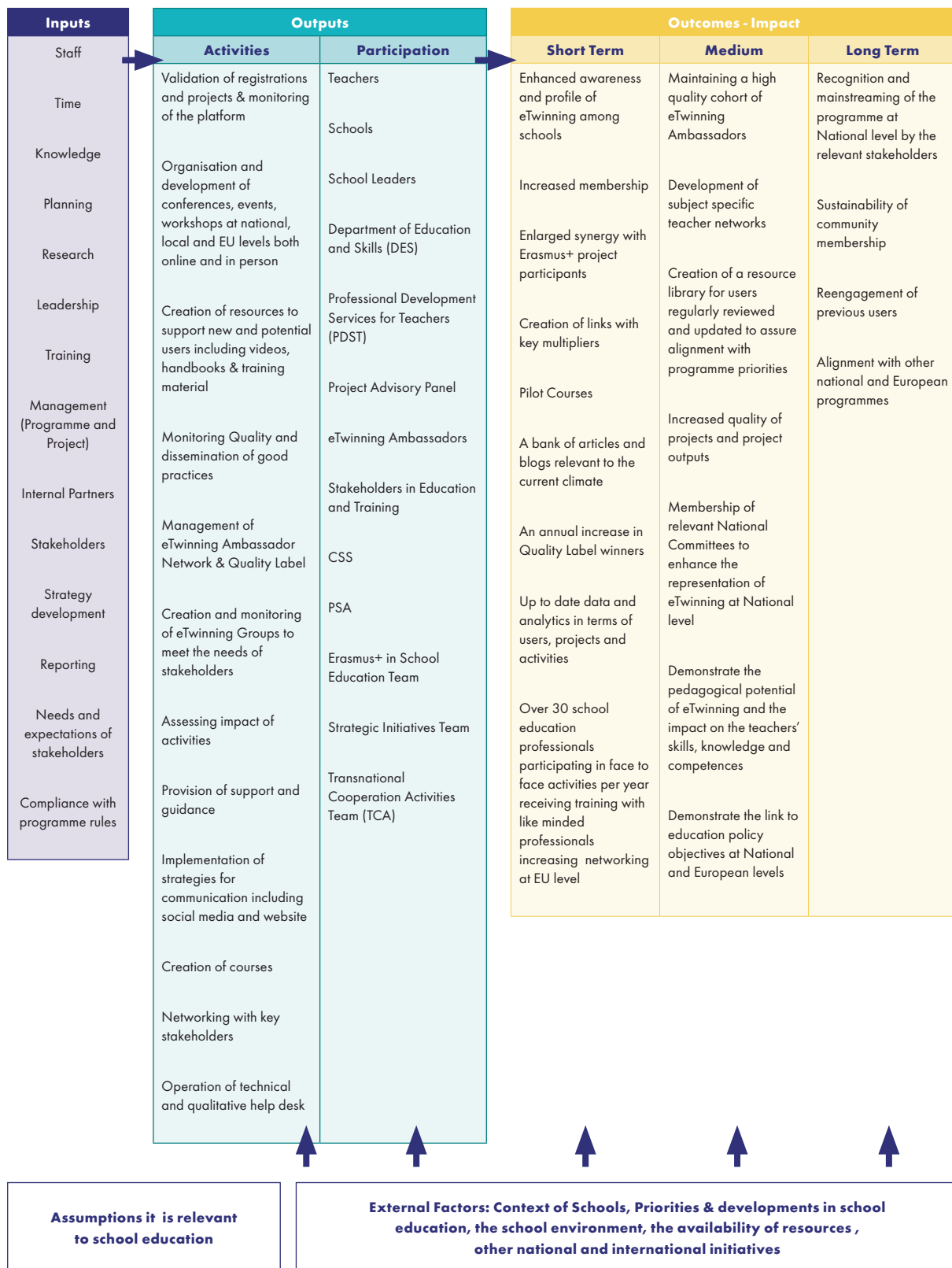| Inputs	Outputs		Outcomes - Impact		
	Activities	Participation	Short Term	Medium	Long Term
Staff	Validation of registrations and projects & monitoring of the platform	Teachers	Enhanced awareness and profile of eTwinning among schools	Maintaining a high quality cohort of eTwinning Ambassadors	Recognition and mainstreaming of the programme at National level by the relevant stakeholders
Time		Schools			
Knowledge	Organisation and development of conferences, events, workshops at national, local and EU levels both online and in person	School Leaders	Increased membership	Development of subject specific teacher networks	
Planning		Department of Education and Skills (DES)	Enlarged synergy with Erasmus+ project participants		Sustainability of community membership
Research				Creation of a resource library for users regularly reviewed and updated to assure alignment with programme priorities	
Leadership	Creation of resources to support new and potential users including videos, handbooks & training material	Professional Development Services for Teachers (PDST)	Creation of links with key multipliers		Reengagement of previous users
Training		Project Advisory Panel	Pilot Courses		Alignment with other national and European programmes
Management (Programme and Project)	Monitoring Quality and dissemination of good practices	eTwinning Ambassadors	A bank of articles and blogs relevant to the current climate	Increased quality of projects and project outputs	
Internal Partners		Stakeholders in Education and Training		Membership of relevant National Committees to enhance the representation of eTwinning at National level	
Stakeholders	Management of eTwinning Ambassador Network & Quality Label	CSS	An annual increase in Quality Label winners		
Strategy development	Creation and monitoring of eTwinning Groups to meet the needs of stakeholders	PSA	Up to date data and analytics in terms of users, projects and activities		
Reporting		Erasmus+ in School Education Team		Demonstrate the pedagogical potential of eTwinning and the impact on the teachers' skills, knowledge and competences	
Needs and expectations of stakeholders	Assessing impact of activities	Strategic Initiatives Team	Over 30 school education professionals participating in face to face activities per year receiving training with like minded professionals increasing networking at EU level		
Compliance with programme rules	Provision of support and guidance	Transnational Cooperation Activities Team (TCA)		Demonstrate the link to education policy objectives at National and European levels	
	Implementation of strategies for communication including social media and website				
	Creation of courses				
	Networking with key stakeholders				
	Operation of technical and qualitative help desk				

Assumptions it is relevant to school education	External Factors: Context of Schools, Priorities & developments in school education, the school environment, the availability of resources, other national and international initiatives

Figure 9: The work of the NSS

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Key to the success of eTwinning is the range of promotional activities put in place by the NSS, with six newsletters per year, a presence at relevant conferences with the support of the Ambassadors, presentations and joint promotion activities with the Erasmus+ School Education colleagues, and representation at the Léargas annual forum. Recent developments include the setting up of the eTwinning Ireland Twitter account in 2017, which now has over 2,000 followers. In context this is 50% less than the official National Agency Twitter account and 50% more than the official Twitter account of the National Agency for Higher Education.

Since 2014, the pattern of new users registering has remained relatively consistent in terms of the time when they join. Based on the data and activities carried out by the NSS, the period of January to February and March represents preparation for Erasmus+ project applications. eTwinning is promoted as part of this at information meetings and application workshops. However, in parallel, the NSS sends newsletters, is advertising PDWs, and conducting its own promotional activities. A combination of both the Erasmus+ activities linked to project applications and the NSS activities would contribute to the spike in registrations at this time. While NSS activities continue during the summer months including the running of DES-recognised courses where participants can gain EPV days, it is interesting to note that there are still active registrations outside the academic year, starting to rise again in August, coming into the conference and events season. With most conference activity and events taking place from September, the registration rate of new users aligns with the activities of the NSS. It demonstrates that the promotional activities are reaching relevant and interested audiences. However, given the challenges posed by Covid-19 and the uncertainty around the next academic school year, there is a large risk that the percentage of dormant accounts will increase and the number of new registrations will decrease along with new projects commencing.

The new project registrations follow a similar pattern, with some activity taking place in the first quarter, which could be linked to joint Erasmus+ promotion in terms of KA1 and KA2 activities; however, based on the registration dates on the platform of projects with or pending Erasmus+ funding, it is not linked to these projects. This would also indicate that approved Erasmus+ projects may not be registering with eTwinning at application stage, particularly when they are partners in a KA2 or KA1 project. Projects registered during the summer months imply planning and preparation for the school year. There is a continuous rise in the number of projects registered from August, peaking in November. The NSS sets out to engage participants to join or create projects in the early stages of registration with 2018 and 2019 project registrations commencing earlier than previous years, which again implies that participants are planning earlier to integrate the activities in the first term of the academic year, in comparison to previous years where the project registrations peaked over halfway through the term.
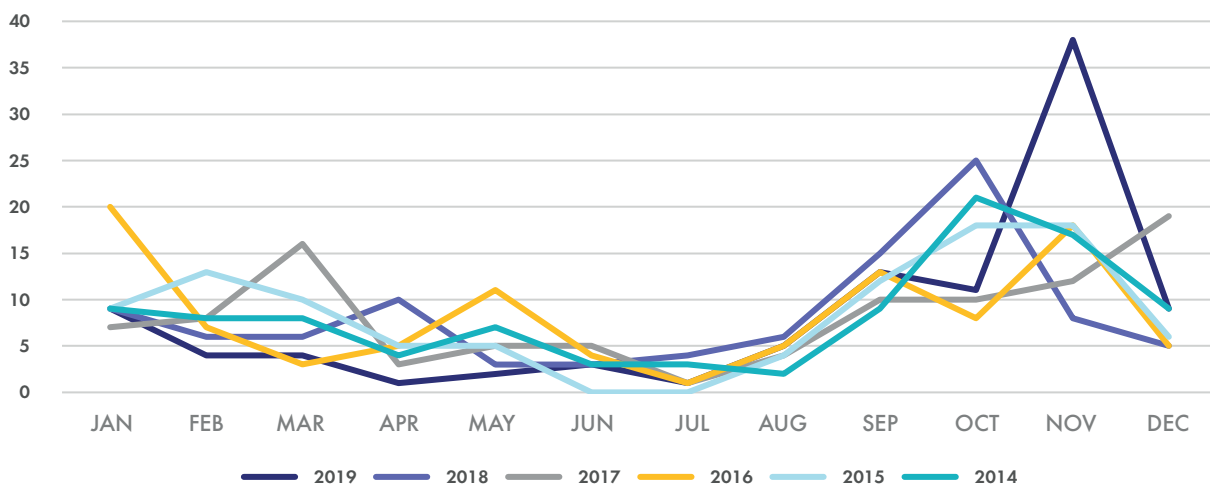

Figure 10: New users per month as a percentage of the annual total for the years 2014 to 2019

Support for new and current users includes a range of how-to videos created by the NSS, training events targeting newcomers, support visits to schools, and the operation of a help desk as well as a project handbook. Users receive the handbook on registration validation and links to the webinars and videos. The NSS offers direct training to newly registered participants; however, the uptake sits on average between 25% and 35%. To address this, the NSS has advertised the opportunity to book one to one time with the eTwinning coordinator at a time that suits the participant. When a user registers their first project, they are sent eTwinning material in the post as well as an email with supporting material, the offer of assistance, guidance, and a visit from a team member. This contributes to building a relationship with the NSS and it reaches out to all participants on registration of membership or a project with personalised emails, which also include a list of upcoming events and activities which may be of interest.

The NSS has demonstrated that it respond to the needs of users, for example when the schools closed on 12 March 2020, two national eTwinning groups were set up, one for primary and one for post-primary to share resources and ideas during this time. In addition to the other groups set up, a large body of work is required to keep users engaged, stimulate discussion, and create a sense of belonging. The

planned training for June 2020 where EPV days are granted was moved entirely online, and redeveloped to allow this to proceed.

Good practices and ideas can be gained from the dissemination activities focused on current projects through case studies, news items on the national television station, experiences of eTwinners, and the outcomes of their activities as well as the National Quality Award winners and the winners booklet.

Additional supports include sending participants to PDWs, thematic seminars, and events abroad. Each event is like a KA1 mobility project, with a call for applications, a selection process, and informing applicants of the outcome. Applicants and participants need to be carefully selected for relevance and meet the criteria set out by the hosting organisation. Selected participants require support with preparation, logistics, and guidance on contributions. The degree of support required varies depending on the person and their experience with mobility events abroad. After the event, there are reporting requirements and evaluation of the activities including quality and financial recording and reporting. The number of these events are increasing as are the number of participants.
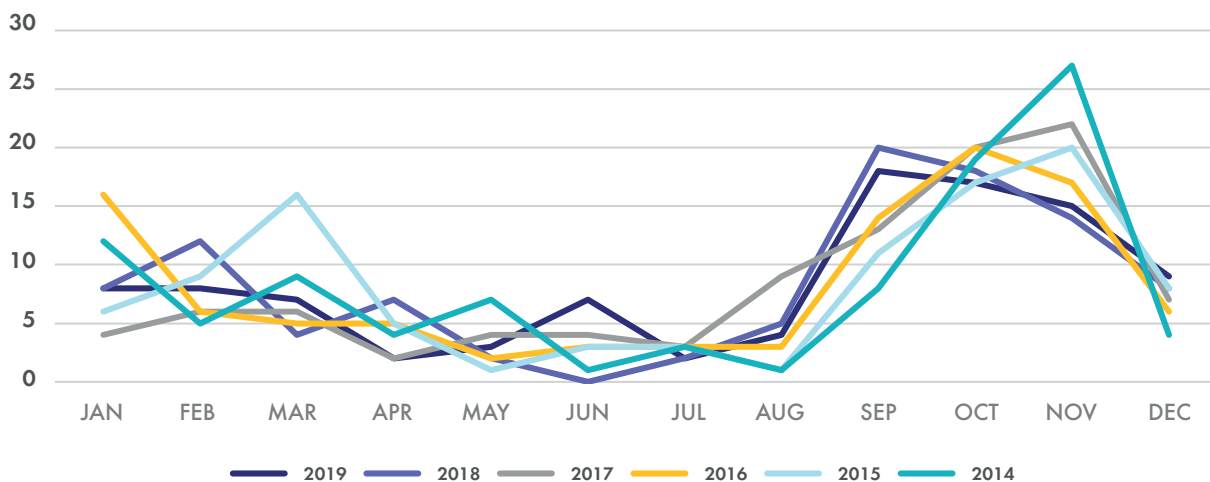

Figure 11: Percentage of project registrations per month per year 2014 to 2019

Year	Number of Irish Participants	Number of Events Abroad
2015	31	8
2016	37	10
2017	32	9
2018	69	15
2019	38	11

Table 8: eTwinning participants in activities outside Ireland 2015 to 2019

Activities which take time to become visible to those outside the NSS management team are the aspects targeting the medium to long-term goals. The reference to eTwinning in the Digital Action plans in 2017 and 2019 is a result of establishing relationships and creating awareness of eTwinning at national level with the ICT Policy Unit in the DES and the PDST. The NSS has been working with the Inspectorate promoting eTwinning through the Schools Excellence Fund, which promotes the innovative use of digital technologies in teaching, learning, and assessment through clusters of schools collaborating on thematic projects. A sampling of DES Inspectorate Reports was undertaken using several schools that had a high number of eTwinning projects; this indicates there is an increase in the number of reports referring to the Erasmus+ programme compared to reports in previous years. The NSS has been working with the PDST, which is using eTwinning Groups as its regional community of practice communication tool.

The communication and activities between the NSS and the stakeholders can be summarised in the Table 9. It demonstrates the multiple activities in terms of informing, supporting, motivating, and engaging members and stakeholders in the eTwinning community.

Table 9: Communication activities of NSS

Target Group	Aim	Activity	Frequency	Expected Outcomes
Schools, teachers, and school education community	To inform of eTwinning and possible activities which can be undertaken by schools and create awareness of the programme	Conference attendance with a stand or presentation at relevant school association events, both face to face and online	4 to 6 times per year with Ambassador support	Inform and join the community, generate interest in activities
		Operation of help desk	Daily	
		Articles in relevant association newsletters and on National Agency website	2 to 4 times per year	
		National Agency Newsletter online	4 times per year	
		NSS events and meetings either face to face or online	4 to 6 times per year	
		National Agency Erasmus+ information and project management days for KA1 and KA2	Min. 4 per year	
		Update website and promotion of events and activities	Min. 12 times per year	
		Update social media (3 platforms: Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)	Min. 3 times weekly (total 9 posts per week adapted to the relevant social media account)	
		Partnering with languages colleagues to organise competitions and events promoting language learning and multilingualism using eTwinning	Min. 1 per year	
		National conferences and events organised by the NSS and National Agency	Min. 2 times per year	
Newly registered users	To commence and engage in eTwinning activities and the provision of support	Operation of help desk	Daily	Become engaged and active members of the eTwinning community and creating connections between other users nationally and internationally
		Offer of appointments for one to one support in getting started	Daily	

Active users	Maintain engagement Provision of support Dissemination of practices Inform of additional opportunities building on eTwinning	Creation of resources including videos and handbooks	At least 3 per year	Provision of ideas, examples of practices, demonstrate and share what others are doing Participation in professional development opportunities Increased networks Development of new projects Shorten the timeframe between joining and participation in activities
		Operation of a help desk	Daily	
		Promotion and organisation of PDW and conference attendance as well as online and face to face professional development opportunities	Min. 12 times per year	
		NSS Newsletter	4 per year	
		Promotion of the National Quality Label	Ongoing for 1 call per year	
		Promotion of Erasmus+ project opportunities and School Education Gateway	Min. 4 times per year	
		School Support Visits	6 to 8 per year	
PDW and conference participants taking place abroad	To promote mobility and networking Provision of the opportunity to meet likeminded professionals Promote professional development opportunities	Update website and promotion of events Selection of participants Grant and financial management Logistical support Follow up on dissemination and information gained	Min. 12 times per year	Expansion of networks Gain new insights and learning from peers Increase motivation and participation in eTwinning
Dormant accounts	To re-engage in eTwinning	Update social media	3 times weekly	Motivate to become re-involved and activate account
		Emails sent once a year	Once a year	
PAP	To ensure alignment with national policy developments and relevance of NSS activities to school education	NSS events and meetings either face to face or online	4 to 6 times per year	The provision of relevant activities and topics to the field of school education contributing to mainstreaming and feeding into annual planning of CPD and thematic areas
PDST	To ensure alignment with national policy developments and relevance of NSS activities to school education	Face to face or online meetings	2 times per year	The provision of relevant activities and topics to the field of school education contributing to mainstreaming and feeding into annual planning of CPD and thematic areas

DES	To ensure alignment with national policy developments and relevance of NSS activities to school education	Face to face or online meetings	2 times per year	The provision of relevant activities and topics to the field of school education contributing to mainstreaming and feeding into annual planning of CPD and thematic areas
eTwinning Ambassadors	To discuss plans and developments in line with the outcomes of meetings with the DES, PDST, and the PAP To gain ideas on how to mainstream and gain feedback on the programme activities Plan national CPD activities		2 to 4 times per year	Provision of regional support Dissemination plan development CPD plan development
Teacher training colleges	To link with the service training of trainee teachers	Communication with the PDST and pilot activities with the teacher training colleges	3 times per year	eTwinning will become embedded into the training of teachers

4.4 Projects and Partners

From 2014 to 2019, there were 917 projects, which is a 30% increase on the previous programme period. Some 75% of these involved more than one partner, a 7% increase in comparison to the previous period. A total of 53% of all projects involved Ireland as a co-submitter, representing a 19% increase on the previous period. This demonstrates stronger involvement of Irish participants in the creation and development of projects. Some 4% represent national projects between Irish organisations. The most popular partners in descending order are France, Spain, Italy, and Poland, which has remained consistent over the last 15 years. Some 5% represent activities related to Erasmus+ funding with an additional 1% marked as pending approval of funding. Overall, 2% of projects used project kits, which is a decrease on the previous period of 4%. The most popular was Cultural Heritage, linking with the European Year of Cultural Heritage. Some 49% involved additional languages other than English, demonstrating a 16% increase from the previous programme cycle. Projects in the age range of 3 to 13 represented 51%. There is a 49% representation from post-primary age groups.

4.5 Projects and Themes

Project themes in the 3 to 12 age cohort were like the previous cycle, myths, legends, dance, and getting to know European partners. The post-primary age group 13 to 18 also carried out projects on similar themes to the previous programme cycle. Across both age groups, there is an increased emphasis on languages with learning and authentic exchange more to the fore. Literacy and digital literacy featured strongly. New themes such as entrepreneurship are appearing including social entrepreneurship. There were efforts made to link project activities with national initiatives such as the Green Schools Programme within the project descriptions. The STEM area increased strongly among the projects including the areas of robotics and coding.

The impact of Languages Connect published in 2017 is evident and the linkages between the language initiatives teams and the NSS, with an increase in the language focused projects. The focus on inclusion, tolerance, accept-ance, and equality through various themes featured strongly with renewed focus because of the publication and review of the previous DEIS programme along with the publication of the new DEIS plan in 2017. The activities were becoming more complex; the difference between new and experienced project participants is becoming more evident. The quality of project descriptions increased with an emphasis on the skills participants will enhance and the knowledge they will gain within the project activities, and their roles in the project were clearly identified demonstrating a more planned approach.

4.6 Main Messages

eTwinning grew at a steady pace in the first nine years across members, schools, and projects, where there was a focus on building the programme in terms of the brand name and gaining buy-in and interest from the area of school education. During the period 2014 to 2019, eTwinning grew rapidly; the role and scope of the NSS expanded with additional human resources allocated in 2017. The move of the NSS to the new strategic initiatives team within the National Agency demonstrates positive results, with the addition of a second officer, which has created an evidence-based impact on the programme.

The context of the school environment in each participating country is unique with differing education systems, curricula, and policies. As eTwinning developed, there were large changes within the sphere of education in Ireland with curricular reform, a focus on school self-evaluation coupled with the lifecycle of a recession. It can be suggested that ICT policy in school education lacked continuity and clear direction, while there has been large investment in infrastructure and policy at national level, when the Digital Schools Strategy was published in 2015, this renewed impetus.

There is further evidence of the impact of the NSS at national level with a sampling of DES Inspectorate Reports using several schools that had a high number of eTwinning projects. This sampling indicates an increase in the number of reports referring to the Erasmus+ programme compared to previous years. A number of these were schools that would have been involved in Comenius at the time of the

last report and no record of current funded activities could be found on the published lists or Erasmus+ dissemination platform implying that eTwinning was their main involvement in Erasmus+. It would be beneficial if eTwinning could be referenced by name rather than the umbrella of Erasmus+ as this would assist in underlying the unique opportunities eTwinning can bring beyond the funded activities.

The projects which have taken place clearly demonstrate the relevance to the curriculum and policy developments across the sphere of school education. As the programme grew, projects became more complex and creative. There is a clear emphasis on the quality of the learning through eTwinning with a student-centred approach.

There are opportunities for eTwinning to support national policy in school education, and this is reflected in the themes and objectives in the project descriptions. There is evidence of the quality of projects increasing and growing in complexity.

The activities organised by the NSS are clearly impacting strongly, with recognition of the programme through the Digital Schools Strategy and subsequent action plans in 2017 and 2019. Communication, collaboration, and consultation are at the centre of the NSS activities with a clear communications plan targeting all stakeholders.

The continuous increase in multilateral partnerships in line with the membership growth indicates that a high percentage of new members are commencing with multilateral partnerships. This feeds into some of the challenges outlined in the findings.

FIVE: SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

This section outlines the findings of the questionnaires and where relevant the interviews. Where there were common questions across the surveys, these have been combined to reflect the collective responses.

5.1 Where Did Active Users First Hear About eTwinning?

Active users were asked to identify where they first heard of eTwinning.

Other is divided as follows:
- 3% eTwinning Ambassador
- 4% Education Centres
- 1% PDST
- 5% Social Media includes Facebook and Twitter posts from Léargas, NSS, the PDST, and Ambassadors

- 2% European Commission
- 2% Newsletter, which includes the INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organisation) and ETBI (Education and Training Boards Ireland) newsletters

Meetings, conferences, or events include:
- French Teachers Association
- Computers in Education Society of Ireland (CESI)
- PDST Training Event
- Institute of Physics conference
- German Teachers Association
- Training course abroad

Responses demonstrate that eTwinning is primarily discovered through the National Agency, its events, its website or the NSS directly for a total of 51%. Participants were asked to list events where they first heard about eTwinning.
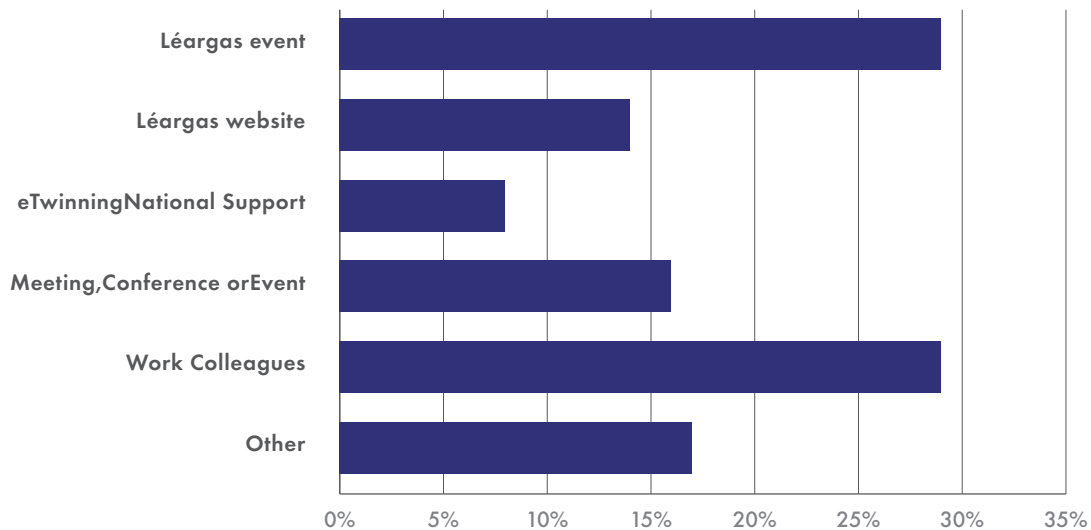

Figure 12: Where active users first heard about eTwinning

The Léargas events were a mixture of both NSS and Léargas events. The activities undertaken by the NSS in the promotion of eTwinning are clearly working and reaching a wide and relevant audience. The strategic alliances formed with the PDST and Education Centres are of value and demonstrate that the approach to the promotion and the development of the activities are clearly impacting directly on the membership. The evidence of the reach of the Ambassadors is also evident along with targeting the relevant associations.

When combining the results of events, conferences, work colleagues and Léargas events, this forms the highest percentage at 74%, highlighting the importance and value placed on hearing about eTwinning from a person. It signifies the importance of a face to face connection. Based on the responses, users are more inclined to join when they hear directly from another person.

A low percentage learn about eTwinning via social media given how active and widely it is used. The interviews provided additional information and it seems that social media posts are applicable after a member joins the community and there is little attention paid to the social media posts when not a member of the community.

Some 29% heard from colleagues; this is encouraging and demonstrates the role users can play in championing eTwinning within their own organisations.

5.2 What Motivated Both Dormant and Active Users to Join eTwinning?

All surveys included a question on motivation for joining. Each member of the eTwinning community will have their own reasons for joining, and this impacts on their needs and shapes their expectations. Each participant selected all that apply and had the opportunity to provide other reasons.

The category other includes:

- 3% had expertise in an area and joined to assist their colleagues

- 1% part of teacher training

- 2% to join a Community of Practice Cluster Group hosted on eTwinning

- 4% stated that it was a requirement of the school

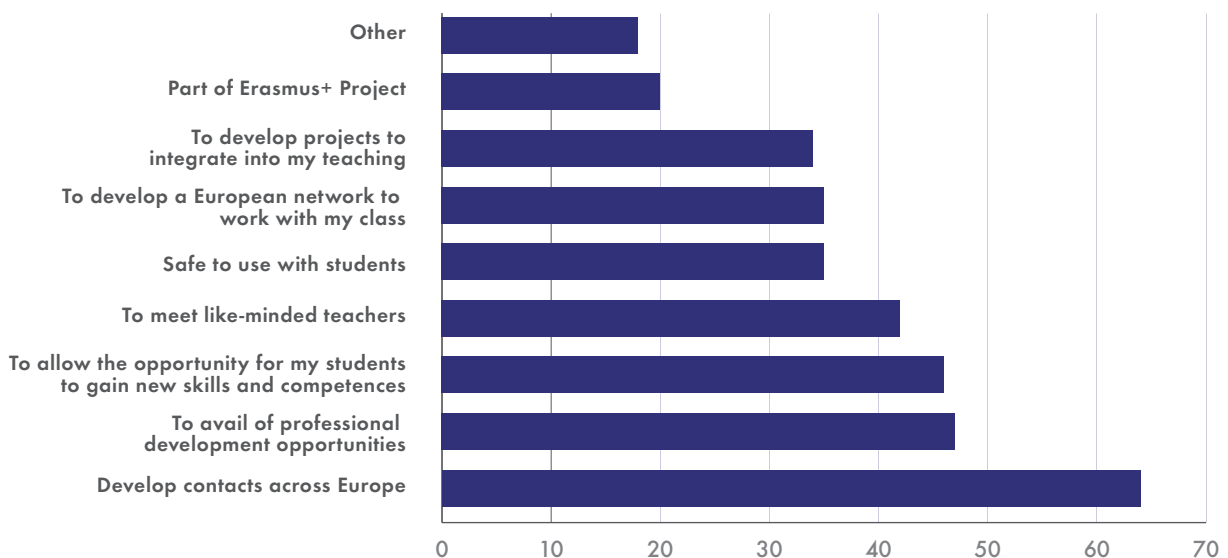- 8% relates to cost effectiveness of the programme

Figure 13: What motivated both dormant and active users to join eTwinning

The primary motivation to join is to develop contacts across Europe at 64%. It is evident that thought has been given to how eTwinning could benefit students, with 46% motivated to allow their students to gain new skills and competences, 35% to develop a network to work with their classes, and 34% to develop projects to integrate into teaching. The respondents placed value on how joining eTwinning can benefit students as well as the opportunity to explore their own professional development.

5.3 How Do Active Accounts Describe Their Use of eTwinning?

31% frequently log onto the eTwinning platform, this would imply that they log on when not directly involved in a project or an activity. 60% of active user respondents have participated in projects and/or professional development activities, therefore when not directly involved in an activity approximately half continue to log in. Adding this to the 26% who have not logged in since their project finished, accounts for the potential of approximately three-quarters of active accounts becoming dormant once an activity is complete. A total of 9% specify that they do not use the platform and an additional 3% indicate challenges when using the platform.

Other represents:
- 5% use it to find Erasmus+ partners
- 7% are in the process or have just found eTwinning partners
- 3% participate in eTwinning communities
- 3% indicated that the platform is not user friendly
- 2% log on to check messages

The responses indicate that the majority of active users who are involved in an activity will use the platform while the activity is ongoing. However, with 26% completing one or two projects and not logging on since they finished, this indicates an area where there is a risk that they will not log on again. The maintenance of communication at this stage may encourage continued engagement.

Active and frequently log onto the eTwinning Portal	**31%**
I have registered and created my profile but did not find suitable partners or projects	**12%**
I completed one or two projects and have not logged on since they finished	**26%**
I undertake annual projects with my class	**16%**
I have availed of professional development opportunities	**24%**
I log on and read the community discussions but do not participate	**12%**
I registered but then did not use the platform	**7%**
I read the newsletters but do not log on to the platform	**4%**
I don't use eTwinning anymore	**2%**
Other	**20%**

Table 10: How active users describe their use of eTwinning

Dormant accounts

The survey to the dormant accounts asked if eTwinning met their primary goal for joining. The dormant accounts who had projects responded with 71% stating that eTwinning met their primary goals for joining.

Some 45% of dormant accounts who did not participate in any projects state that eTwinning met their primary goal, with 45% considering that their goals were somewhat met and 10% stating that their goals for joining were not met at all.

Even if the dormant accounts had no projects, this does not necessarily mean that they had no engagement; they may have exchanged information and messages with other teachers or participated in some CPD activities. However, it can be stated that there was less engagement with eTwinning than those who had projects and this contributed to lower success rates in terms of meeting their goals for joining the community.

5.4 The Primary Two Reasons Active Accounts Log Onto the Platform

Respondents were asked to give the primary two reasons for logging onto eTwinning. The option of 'I am no longer an active user and this does not apply' was available. Some

68% of participants deemed themselves to be active users, and this was adjusted to build Erasmus+ activities into the responses bringing the total to 74%.

The main reason was connected to project work. Project work includes uploading information, photos and work related to the project; checking the TwinSpace; reviewing the project; and checking project-related messages. Reviewing the responses this includes previous projects, where the respondent has no current active projects. The rationale for using the platform is a combination of both passive and active participation.

While checking to see what is going on sits at 17%, it is encouraging to note that active participation forms most of the rationale for logging into eTwinning, with 27% participating in either CPD or eTwinning groups. Some 2% of those seeking to communicate with contacts specifically mentioned Erasmus+ projects. Some 4% of the 17% who were seeking partners also specifically mentioned Erasmus+.

Other includes:
- 2% to deliver training or to present
- 2% as part of the requirements for teacher training initiative
- 4% to learn how to use the site
- 2% as a requirement of the school digital strategy
- 5% did not provide a second reason but provided comments on the platform indicating that it is not user friendly
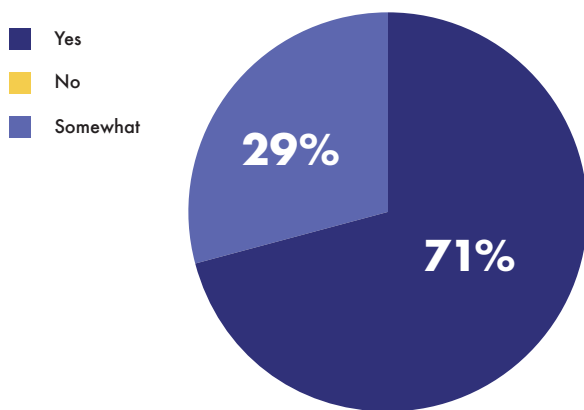

Figure 14: Did eTwinning meet the objectives of dormant accounts who had projects
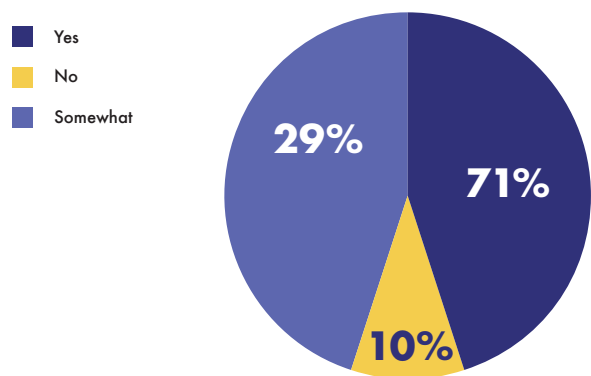

Figure 15: Did eTwinning meet the objectives of dormant accounts who did not have projects

An additional question was included to target users who considered themselves inactive which represented 26%. The responses are shown in Figure 17.

Other relates to the following:
- 32% found the website difficult to navigate and use
- 3% felt the platform is too quiet
- 5% of these, when checking all responses, revealed that there is confusion between eTwinning and KA1 or KA2 in terms of planning and setting up projects

A clear barrier is lack of time at 40% and another relates to the platform 32%, with 6% believing that they do not have the technical know-how to use the site. However, there is no indication as to what area is difficult to navigate. This is further addressed in terms of barriers to participation. The 26% who considered themselves inactive were asked

to consider what would motivate them to re-engage, which included:

- Working with colleagues on a shared project
- Ideas on how to motivate students
- Help with finding ideas on how to incorporate it into the classroom
- Feeling that they have nothing new to contribute in terms of discussions as everyone else is far advanced

This suggests that time barrier for this cohort is related to finding the space to develop ideas, and potential support of a colleague may assist with this aspect. There seems to be a lack of confidence and little awareness that the community is continually growing with new people joining all the time.
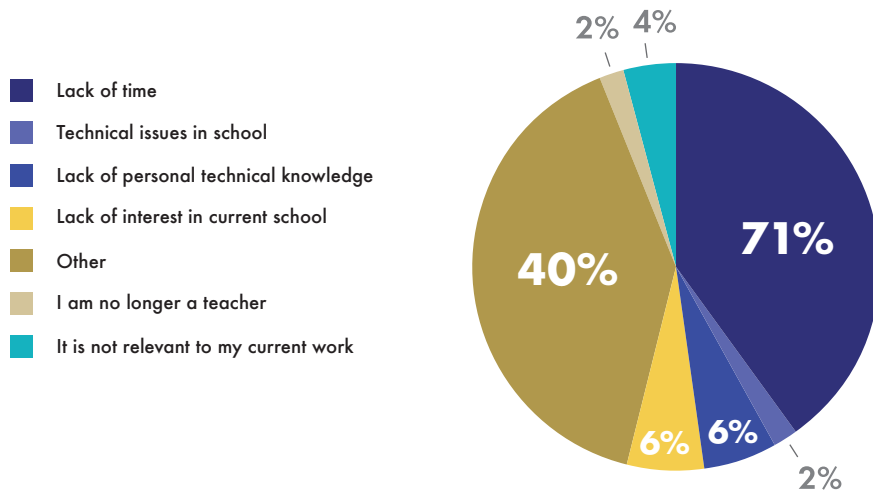

Legend:
- Lack of time
- Technical issues in school
- Lack of personal technical knowledge
- Lack of interest in current school
- Other
- I am no longer a teacher
- It is not relevant to my current work

Figure 16: Primary reasons for active users logging into their account
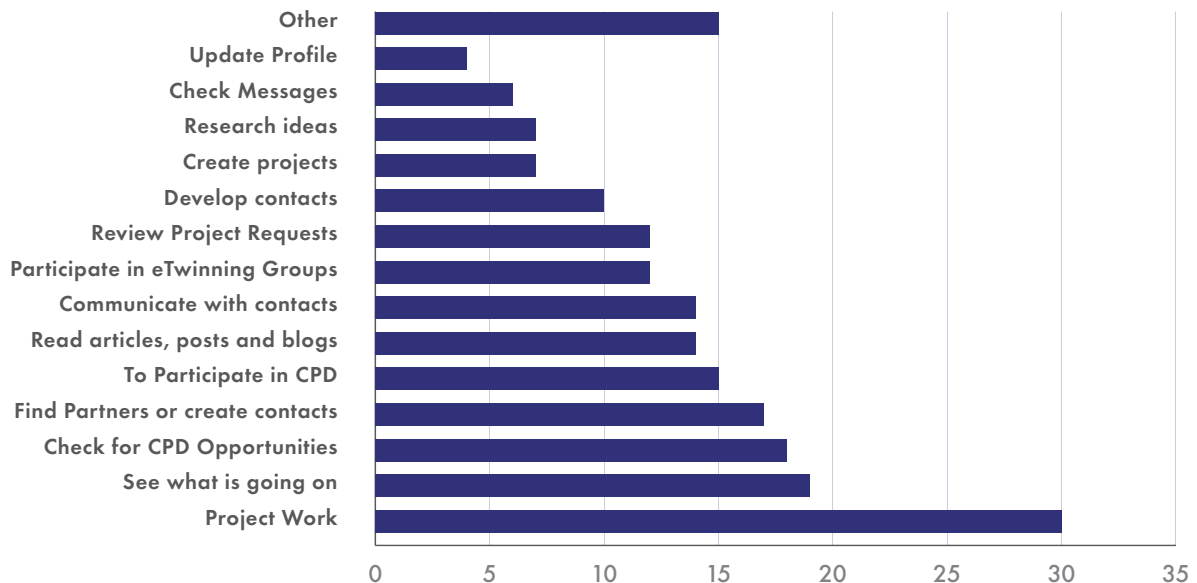

Figure 17: Active users who no longer consider themselves active users

Interestingly, in addition to the 26% who declared as inactive, an additional 20% of all active users provided suggestions on how to re-engage inactive users, and these include:

- More face to face meetings

- People are overwhelmed with the number of new initiatives, creating links with how eTwinning could fit into initiatives might help

- More interaction on the forum

5.5 The Benefits of eTwinning Participation

The active accounts were asked to identify the three main benefits of eTwinning participation. Some 4% of respondents skipped this question.

When colligating the results, they can be combined to into three overall broad benefits:

- 92% Collaborating with other countries

- 89% Networking with other professionals

- 88% Skills and knowledge development

These responses can be further subdivided into three areas indicating the benefits for the school, the teacher and their work, and their students. The percentages at school level are comparatively low as 44% of respondents previously stated that eTwinning is driven by one or two teachers within their classes.

At school level, 33% stated that collaboration with other countries raises the profile of the school at local and national levels; 21% of these specifically referenced that Erasmus+ project participation rather than eTwinning contributes to this. This suggests that a higher value is placed on Erasmus+ project participation than eTwinning. This may be as an organisational approach is required for Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2, whereas eTwinning can take an individual teacher approach. Some 23% referenced partner finding for Erasmus+ projects, which again due to the nature of the programme requires a whole school approach in terms of application and involvement. Among the 33% who indicated that collaboration with other countries raises the profile of the school, 24% of these had participated in eTwinning activities abroad, which may contribute to the recognition

of eTwinning at school level. Linking with other schools' abroad accounts for 78%, with general partner finding standing at 43%. The facilitation of collaboration due to eTwinning is 72%.

At teacher level, this includes bringing the global dimension into the classroom sitting at 82%. Linking with other classes to introduce a European dimension into the curriculum represents 52%. Finding partners for activities sits at 43%, with an opportunity to see what others are doing at 63%. It is not clear from the general response 'see what others are doing' if the account holder is in contact with other teachers or passively reading forums or articles. The same applies for networking which stands at 68%. The largest value for teachers is meeting likeminded teachers and professionals accounting for 82%, with 62% stating the exchange and sharing of practices and resources is beneficial. This is followed by CPD opportunities through a combination of participation and from interacting with eTwinning groups at 78%. The opportunity to present the curriculum in an alternative way is 62%. Increasing motivation for both students and teachers represents 31%.

There was more emphasis placed on the skills and knowledge developed by students because of eTwinning participation rather than those of the teachers. This aligns with the motivation for joining eTwinning where a value is placed on the potential for student learning. The development of intercultural skills and intercultural communication for students is 81%, which would indicate high involvement and contact between students in partner schools from the perspective of the teachers. Digital skills and digital competences and literacy for students represents 62%. The development of language skills and competences is 57%. However, the highest at 81% was learning about other countries and instilling a sense of global citizenship.

When analysing the results, some responses would merit further development as it is unclear in some instances if the benefits are because of active or passive engagement with eTwinning. Additional analysis demonstrated that those who had participated in eTwinning activities representing approximately 70% of respondents provided more concrete responses as follows. The percentage is calculated based on the number of respondents with a record of activity on their eTwinning profile.

Benefit	Percentage
Curriculum and Teaching Exchange: Recommendations from other teachers, support, and exchange of ideas to integrate into the curriculum through direct communication or participation in the forum or at eTwinning specific events	75%
Professional development opportunities and participation in eTwinning groups to expand knowledge, availing of CPD focusing on areas beyond the curriculum giving new ideas and refining current practices	72%
Students: Encourages students to understand that there is a larger world beyond their community, expands and develops a sense of European citizenship, understanding, and belonging to the wider world and see Europe and beyond as a future place for study and work	79%
Activities for Students: Introducing project-based learning approaches in collaboration with partners creating motivation for students, or an alternative means of presenting the curriculum, both providing a sense of fun and retains motivation	71%
Students, Language and Culture: Providing students with opportunities to contact students from different countries enhancing language competencies and the provision of authentic language exchange	59%
Student Skills: Enhanced critical thinking, problem solving, evaluation, and digital skills	57%
I read the newsletters but do not log on to the platform	4%
I don't use eTwinning anymore	2%
Other	20%

Table 11: Benefits of participation for active users who have been involved in activities

Benefit	Percentage
Safe to use	5%
User friendly	3%
Secure	4%

Table 12: Benefits of the platform

It is interesting to note that while a low percentage some of the benefits were focused on the platform itself. Some 3% of respondents referenced the use of the platform for monitoring students work, and 5% referenced the flexibility of the programme.

However, 3% stated that the platform is complex, not user friendly, and eTwinning groups could be presented in a more simplified manner.

While not explicitly requested, the dormant accounts within the further comments, provided positive benefits of participation in eTwinning, both those who had projects and those who had none. Some 62% of the dormant account respondents commented on the benefits of eTwinning.

Personally, I feel it is a fantastic opportunity for any school to broaden the ways we teach and to learn from other European schools.

Dormant account with project

I think eTwinning provides a fantastic opportunity for both teachers and parents to explore from their classroom and by also travelling to experience practically. It allows teachers to learn from each other, to enhance their knowledge and the learning experience for their pupils.

Dormant account with project

It is a great way to make friends and learn about different cultures. You are not inundated with emails either while never being out of the loop at the same time. I would say I have only positive things to say about eTwinning.

Dormant account no project

The sentiments echoed those of active users. Within the interviews, examples of raising the profile of the school at national and local level were given, such as visiting Am-

bassadors representing the partner country. At local level, examples of parental involvement were given with performances and exhibitions linked to the project activities. It seems that some participating countries have a budget to allow staff mobility outside funded Erasmus+ activities to allow visits to other countries, which increased the profile of eTwinning within the school and enhanced motivation of staff and students, broadening participation in the programme.5.6 Challenges of eTwinning Participation

Respondents were asked what they consider to be the three main challenges to eTwinning. While 100% of respondents identified one challenge, 80% provided a second and 40% presented a third challenge. In contrast to the question focused on benefits, the responses in terms of challenges were more concrete and specific.

The challenges can be divided into the following areas:

- Time is a barrier for 97% of respondents in several ways:

- There were several references to personal circumstances, which implies that teachers are carrying out activities in their own time which is further supported by 25% stating difficulty in finding time outside their school day.

- 51% cited an overcrowded curriculum and pressures to cover current content

- 43% referenced finding the time between the other initiatives which take precedence

- 45% related to time taken to set up projects, refine details, and put activities in place from initial communication to the start of the project

- 32% related to recognition of the time dedicated to eTwinning and the learning gained

Platform-related challenges is 52% covering a variety of areas. The main areas are:

- Not mobile friendly

- Difficult to upload videos, images, and documents

- Speed of uploading images and difficulty uploading multiple items at the same time

- Challenging to navigate

- Over complicated as a platform in the groups section

- Not user friendly

- Difficult to set up

- Layout takes time for students to learn when interacting as a vastly different layout to what they are used to with other platforms

- It is not as intuitive as it could be

Organisation-related challenges in terms of access sits at 35% and include:

- Wi-Fi challenges and broadband issues in the locality

- Access to technical equipment or lack of devices in the school

Organisation-related challenges excluding technical aspects sits at 62% and include:

- Lack of support within the school

- Recognition of the work

- Feeling of isolation, being the only teacher involved in the school

- Lack of staff support when initiated by the principal

- Lack of leadership support when initiated by a teacher

- Not part of the school digital strategy

- Lack of motivation of students

- Lack of motivation of staff

- Gaining whole school buy-in

Activity-related challenges at 59% include:

- Developing ideas for projects

- Finding partners with similar language levels and interests

- Finding partners with students of a similar age

User-linked challenges represents 32% include:
- Confidence in the use of ICT

- Overwhelmed by amount of information on initially joining

- Feeling of isolation

Other challenges representing 35% identified include:
- The different aspects of the site and purpose of these are unclear, as are the references to SELFIE and DigComp framework. It would be beneficial to have a mapping of where these all fit together and how eTwinning sits among them. Common terminology between countries would be welcome.

- The link with the School Education Gateway is unclear; it is not clear why there is no synergy between the teacher academy and eTwinning CPD activities. There is little referenced to eTwinning on the School Education Gateway, and the promotion of this to the eTwinning Community is unclear.

- In the survey, one person stated that there should be a stricter vetting procedure and it should be transparent. This was reiterated by three different people in the interviews. Within the interviews, this was related to child protection and parental consent for sharing images, where the vetting procedures for joining in each country would be beneficial to show transparency and alignment with the school child protection policy and data protection. In addition, the interviewees referenced the time they put into projects which did not come to fruition or the partner went silent during the project and felt that stronger vetting procedures would mitigate this. A random sampling of projects was undertaken on 40 active projects involving Irish partners. It was found that only 2 or 5% of these had an Irish partner who appeared as dormant in an active project. Given that 5% of those interviewed experienced the same circumstances, it can be concluded that across all countries this is likely to apply to 5% of the total active projects. While a small percentage, this can lead to demotivation and disengagement. Given that 29% of participants hear about eTwinning from colleagues who provide an outline of their experience, this can impact on the decision to become a member of the community.

- Within the survey, one person cited the lack of recognition of the School Inspectorate towards European projects and participation. However, within the interviews 50% referenced this. It was felt that more focus could have been on eTwinning within national policy.

5.7 National Support Service Resources

Participants were asked to reflect on supports that the NSS could provide to assist with eTwinning. Firstly, a few questions were asked to gain an understanding of the interaction with the current supports available and the NSS.

The participants were asked to rate their frequency of contact with the NSS as follows:

- Only on initial registration

- Only when I have a question responding to emails or attending conferences and events organised by the National Support Service approximately once or twice a year

- I contact the NSS more than five times per year

The results are:
- 11% have only had contact at initial registration stage

- 33% contact the NSS approximately twice a year

- 20% make contact more than twice a year but fewer than five times a year

- 37% make contact more than five times a year

This demonstrates that most respondents contact the NSS more than twice a year at 57%. Answers were further analysed to ensure that it was the NSS and not other areas of the National Agency, which showed that approximately 30% of these do not differentiate between other areas of Erasmus+ managed by the National Agency and eTwinning. This is also reflected in questions where participants were asked if they had attended an NSS event in the last 5 years; 32% listed a National Agency event or an Erasmus+ specific activity such as an information meeting where eTwinning would be mentioned but it would not be the sole or primary focus of the meeting.

Participants were asked about their awareness of the NSS supports, and 83% stated that they were aware of the NSS supports. Some 27% lack awareness of the resources offered by the NSS and of the existence of a specific contact point. Examining this further, this 27% represent those involved in Erasmus+ projects with no previous eTwinning participation and those who heard about eTwinning outside the NSS and National Agency.

To further qualify the responses participants were asked if they had attended an NSS event in the last 5 years, with 32% indicating a National Agency event rather than an eTwinning specific event. Some 22% listed eTwinning events abroad. Overall, 35% stated a number and cannot remember all of them and listed some NSS specific activities. This reflects the percentage of 37% who contact the NSS more than 5 times a year and shows that those who contact the NSS more frequently are more actively involved in eTwinning than those who contact less frequently. Participants were also asked if they could provide a reason if they had not attended an NSS event which demonstrated the main barriers:

- 61% time

- 41% lack of substitution cover

- 37% lack of awareness

- 21% answered in the context of events abroad citing time and substitution

The lack of awareness is concerning and links to the 27% who were not aware of any supports provided by the NSS. The NSS has a specific newsletter which is issued six times per year and requires additional sign-up due to data protection. The number signed up to the newsletter is less than the number of registered eTwinning participants, which suggests that participants who are not aware of supports or events are not signed up to the newsletter or following the social media accounts of the National Agency or the NSS. An effort was made to try and pinpoint the exact event or place where these participants decided to sign up for eTwinning, based on the NSS calendar of activities. The accuracy of this is questionable; however, there are indications that it was not an NSS specific meeting for approximately 10% of these, and the remaining percentage is not identifiable.

Participants were asked to indicate if they have used any supports in the last 5 years; 31% have stated that they have not, with 69% making use of resources. The 31% who had not used any resources in the last 5 years can be broken down as follows: 11% of these have been registered users for more than 3 years, and therefore 20% who have not used supports registered in the last 2 years. Closer examination demonstrates that at least half of these are involved in activities with eTwinning. It is unclear why the supports are not reviewed or used and suggests either learning by

doing or being guided by the partner. A third of these were involved in Erasmus+ projects and had not been involved in any eTwinning activities prior to their funded project. The 69% who indicated that they had made use of the resources were asked to list the ones that they have used with the following results:

- 42% have looked at the handbook supplied by the NSS

- 33% have viewed the webinars and videos; as these are relatively new additions, this is indicative of the 40% who have joined in the last 3 years, and 18% of these explicitly stated the supports provided in the initial registration email

- 21% have contacted the NSS directly for support

- 17% access resources through social media updates

- 15% had their questions answered at specific eTwinning NSS events or conferences, which implies follow-up queries were addressed at subsequent conferences where eTwinning was represented

Other supports listed include:
- Printed material

- Information on USB keys

- A visit to the school by the NSS

- An eTwinning Ambassador visited the school

Participants were asked to list supports they would like to assist them in their use of eTwinning. This question revealed that there is a lack of awareness of current supports, which suggests that participants are not reading the initial registration email where all the links are provided or that they have forgotten that the supports are already in place. There were suggestions of handbooks and videos; however, no further specific information was given in relation to subject area. Some 33% indicated that they were happy with current supports in place.

The suggestions for supports include:
- Project guides or handbooks based on explicit curricular areas, with specific links to Irish curriculum with class and level. This would address the area of time to develop and integrate into the curriculum

- Workshops on how to integrate activities into the curriculum with clear demonstrations that this does not impinge on class time which will highlight the value for teachers

- A forum for teachers new to eTwinning projects to discuss arising issues and challenges

- Assistance with integration into the school

- Creation of cluster groups of schools working on similar projects

- Use retired teachers as Ambassadors to advise new schools that are interested in eTwinning, where there is more time to engage due to retirement

- There were suggestions that the NSS creates projects and partners that schools can join to save time in organising

- Run a national competition with regional winners

- Guidance on how to select partners and what to check clearly before engaging

- Template messages for initial emails to potential partners and what should be included

- A financial incentive to upskill to participate in the programme

- A fund in between Erasmus+ and eTwinning to allow either the receipt or sending of a staff member to or from a partner school

- There were suggestions in terms of the website and platform to include: mobile friendly website and platform, a user friendly site

There were further suggestions, which are already in place. However, several participants stated that reminders of the supports available would be beneficial for those who have been members for some time:

- Designated contact person

- Presentations and presence at teachers' conferences

- Linking with the PDST and DES

- YouTube channel

- Create links with the Colleges of Education

- Campaign more for eTwinning at national level

- More visits to schools to assist with gaining buy-in from other staff

- More workshops to increase the choice of dates for attendance

- Activities targeting school leaders such as groups and conference attendance

- Further supports in how to navigate the website

- Introduce a mobile app

- Link CPD with primary EPV days

- Checklists and guidance on what to bring to events abroad

- Create rolling induction sessions online once a month

- More workshops on how to use Padlet and other applications

The areas suggested where activities already take place are largely invisible to users, such as the links with the PDST, DES, and the Colleges of Education, as these take place in the background with a focus on mainstreaming at national level. Some of the supports suggested, such as more visits to schools, workshops, and contact, do not take into account that the NSS has limited resources; it also indicates a lack of awareness of the scope of the programme and the number of registered schools and participants in Ireland. When accessing the platform membership statistics are easily seen; however, it would be beneficial for the NSS to create more awareness of the state of play at national level. It was mentioned in the interviews that they seem to see the same schools and people involved being promoted. However, on further investigation these are the Ambassadors carrying out activities to raise awareness of the programme in Ireland and their regions.

The partnership within the National Agency between the NSS and the languages team has provided the opportunity to further expand on the examples of projects along with the increased eTwinning National Quality Label winners over the last two years. Some of the suggestions, such as activities targeting school leaders, demonstrate that the information is not being disseminated on return to the school. In terms of additional supports, the NSS will need to find a clear balance between the supports provided for participants and providing guidance, as this can remove accountability in the long run and can impact on creativity and buy-in if ownership of the project idea and activities does not sit within the school. School policies, environment, and the resources teachers can access differ from school to school, and therefore each school needs to adapt their eTwinning activities to fall in with and fit naturally with the policies in place.

It is important to reiterate, as noted previously, that the NSS has moved from a focus of increasing membership to include

a clear focus on quality of provision and widen the supports available, particularly over the last three years. The impact of this is evident with more registrations, more quality award winners, and quicker and higher engagement rates. A random sampling of members from 2014 and 2015 compared to 2018 and 2019 demonstrates that progressing to activities within eTwinning has moved from an average of a year to an average of three months.

5.8 Feedback on the NSS Supports

Participants were asked to provide a rating of their satisfaction with the supports provided by the NSS to include materials, events, responses to queries, and other activities. The responses which related to the wider organisation were not included in the percentages in Error: Reference source not found.
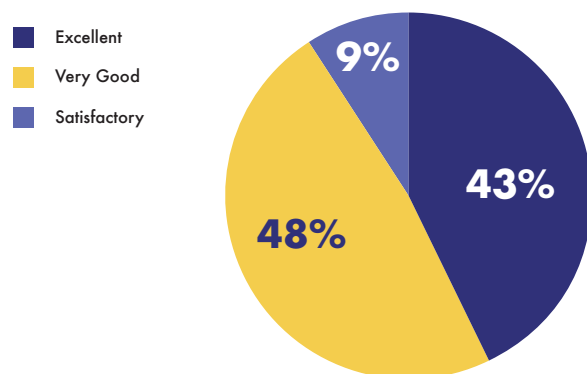

Legend:
- Excellent
- Very Good
- Satisfactory

9%
43%
48%

Figure 18: Satisfaction rates with the supports provided by the NSS

High satisfactory rates with the majority above average at 91%. This clearly demonstrates the satisfaction rates with the NSS and the adaptable nature over the years meeting the expectations of the users. Comments include:

1. 'Any queries and requests for help have been dealt with promptly and efficiently.'

2. 'The support has increased in diversity and effectiveness over the years I have been involved.'

3. 'Our engagement needs to be better. The support and emails have come and the NSS have been supportive at all times.'

4. 'eTwinning have been very supportive, always reply to calls/emails promptly and are also understanding of the school settings we are in.'

The rating of satisfactory provided positive comments such as:

- 'Helpful staff always respond to emails and phone calls.'

- 'Very efficient knowledgeable and friendly support service.'

5.9 Activities Not Captured on TwinSpace or Appearing on User Accounts

The survey to the dormant accounts in the further comments section provided a large indication that projects and activities are still ongoing with partners. There are some projects still ongoing and a continuation using digital means of previous projects. Within the interviews, there were references to ongoing eTwinning activities where the account was dormant, and no other listed teachers marked as active within the school. Other interviews demonstrated national activities or activities with other schools where only one school's activities are captured on the platform with no reference to the wider context of the project. The main reasons cited were challenges with the platform, time, and queries around why it should be added or included.

The use of the TwinSpace does not provide a full indication of the project work carried out within schools. A sampling was undertaken of 60 closed projects covering 2017 and 2018. These projects had not received the National eTwinning Quality Label. This demonstrated that:

- 12% of the Irish partners listed had not accessed the TwinSpace at all since the project commenced

- 22% had not uploaded any information on the activities which took place within the Irish school

- 31% demonstrated gaps in the information provided.

5.10 Main Messages

Word of mouth or in-person recommendations are incredibly important as users seem to place value on hearing about the programme from others. It highlights the importance of hearing from a trusted source be it the NSS, a colleague, or a presentation at a teacher-related conference. This links to the theme of relationships external to the platform.

In terms of motivation to join a high value is placed on the benefits for the students from the perspectives of the teachers, along with their own CPD opportunities.

Satisfaction rates in terms of meeting user objectives are lower for those who do not actively participate in activities than those who do.

Erasmus+ participants do not consider themselves active eTwinning users because their primary purpose in using eTwinning is to facilitate their Erasmus+ project activities. This links further with comments in terms of the status of eTwinning where it appears to rank lower in the hierarchy of programmes as there is no funding connected to it. It appears that there is an understanding that no funding equals no work.

Challenges with the platform contribute to a lack of engagement with eTwinning.

The benefits are primarily focused on the teacher, the students, and the class. It should be noted that the benefits for the school sit at a lower percentage and there is limited information provided related to a whole school approach or enhancing teamwork and collaboration within the school. This indicates the composition of the respondents, where 44% are the only person driving eTwinning within their organisation.

The responses demonstrate that active participation and engagement with eTwinning provide more meaningful and specific benefits rather than general perceived benefits.

The only negative comments in relation to CPD activities were in terms of time to participate; however, CPD featured highly among the benefits of participation. Interviews across the board from those who had participated in CPD activities, at home and abroad, highlighted their value and quality. There were comparisons made between other CPD activities for those who participated in CPD offered by the School Education Gateway, and while a small percentage, they stated that the eTwinning offer was of a higher quality. Others found the opportunity to participate in non-specific curriculum CPD focused on pedagogical approaches and

methodologies of greater benefit than some national CPD on offer. While the NSS offers CPD once a year which qualifies for EPV days, more would be welcome as well as recognition of all CPD associated with eTwinning at national level.

Time is the greatest barrier and challenge with eTwinning and presented in many formats, from time to plan the integration into the curriculum between national initiatives, which take priority, to the stated overcrowded curriculum. Coupled with the feelings of isolation and the majority of schools' reliance on one or two teachers, if there was more recognition of eTwinning, this would gain more interest and commitment from others within the school allowing the time burden to be shared across more colleagues. The responses from participants who were more engaged with the platform were more specific in terms of the time allocation. It is evident that participants are making efforts with the programme outside working hours. Planning may also be a challenge in this area.

Recognition was a recurring theme in terms of activities and CPD. It appears that if there was formal recognition, this would address several challenges. While eTwinning is recognised through its inclusion in the Digital Schools Strategy, recognition of CPD and activities undertaken by teachers would be very welcome.

There are challenges with the platform; the most pertinent is the need for a mobile friendly platform. This would also assist with uploading, as many people use their phones as cameras, and video recorders and can quickly access the relevant documents. It also allows more freedom in terms of accessing and uploading without having to use a laptop or desktop computer. It would also allow the involvement of more students within the classroom depending on the school policy regarding mobile phone usage.
There are challenges with finding ideas and partners with similar interests.

Some 83% of participants are aware of the supports provided by the NSS. It is not clear that they are reading the initial registration email with links to the supports. There is also slight confusion as to the existence of the NSS. This could be linked to the number of people who also promote eTwinning within the National Agency at project meetings and information sessions as well as those external to the agency.

Some 69% made use of the supports provided, which is relatively low. While they are available on the website and in the initial registration email, consideration should be given as to how the current supports could be better housed on the NSS website for easier access.

The satisfaction rates of the support provided by the NSS rank highly at either satisfied, very good or excellent. No one rated it as poor. Given the contact with the NSS directly and the frequency of this contact, this is an incredibly positive outcome.

The participants who contact the NSS seem to be more involved and engaged with eTwinning than those who are less engaged. Mechanisms to encourage new members to contact the NSS when there is a challenge or clarification required should be introduced. However, the supports are well advertised on the NSS website and highlighted in the registration email. A reorganisation of the NSS section of the website may assist with this.

Suggestions for additional supports included material already available, which indicates lack of knowledge of the current supports available. The main suggestions were related to the provision of assistance in increasing the profile of eTwinning within the respondents' organisations, the generation of ideas, and creating links with the curriculum.

Based on surveys and interviews, there is activity which originated with eTwinning taking place that is not captured on the platform particularly by users who are dormant. Among those surveyed and interviewed it sits at 31%. Furthermore based on those interviewed the activities fit within the scope of an eTwinning project. It is not contained or captured on the platform as it creates another layer to a continuous activity between classes. A mechanism to capture this activity would be beneficial and would also demonstrate the sustainability of activities initiated under eTwinning.

SIX: MAIN MESSAGES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

6.1 Motivation and Engagement

Motivation for joining is varied, with some participants having concrete objectives and others a more general idea of what they want to achieve. However, the main reason for joining is to develop contacts across Europe. Based on the interview feedback, on initially joining users can be divided into the following categories:

- Curiosity: The user's interest is sparked by information received from a colleague or a person at an event or conference, where the user tests and explores the platform with a sense of curiosity, carrying out research and interacting with the information leading to participation in either CPD or projects.

- Purpose to participate in an advertised activity: The user joins with a general objective after receiving information about a conference or training event which is of interest. If the application is not successful for the activity, this impacts on motivation for proceeding with the exploration of the platform and other opportunities. However, if successful this can lead to high levels of engagement.

- Decisive: The user joins with a clear objective and a plan of what potential activities are to be carried out, with an idea of what is to be achieved within a timeframe.

- Necessity: The user joins as part of an Erasmus+ project application or part of the school digital plan. Feedback indicates that there is less meaningful engagement as eTwinning is seen as another thing to add to the list.

Participants who have attended an event abroad have shown higher levels of engagement after meeting partici-

pants from other countries who are using the platform. The face to face meeting assists in the creation of new or initial eTwinning activities. They also noted that they gained a lot more information and tips from participants at events abroad after spending several days completely focused on eTwinning and building relationships learning from peers away from their daily routine. This highlights the benefits of the mobility activities associated with eTwinning in terms of cementing partnerships and the provision of the opportunity for international peer learning.

> I did find even myself it was only when I attended a seminar that I really became active in utilising the platform, in other words teachers need that lift off face to face to make personal connections with other professionals to be enabled to kick off projects more easily as trust is needed to engage in these projects.
>
> **Active User**

In terms of the registration process and eTwinning journey, the interviewees identified four key areas where there is a risk of disengagement or non-progression. These are:

- Before registration, it was felt that there was an emphasis on what can be done rather than how it can be done, leading to participants just seeing the end results rather than the steps in getting there, which does not assist in managing expectations where there is a lack of awareness of the inputs required to reach the end goal.

- On initial registration, if a member does not update their profile and create a small biography outlining their interests, there is a risk that they will not proceed with activities and if they are reluctant to make contact with potential partners, it is likely that they will be contacted by more potential partners with little in common as their interests and areas are unclear. This can lead to frustration and take up time responding to requests.

- When joining initially, it can be overwhelming when deciding what direction to take. Depending on the person and their reasons for joining, there is no active participation until the participant decides on their course of action.

- When an initial activity is over, there is a risk that the member will not consider taking up another activity depending on the success. While there are evaluation templates, if the member is the only person working on the project or activity within the school, it is useful to have a debriefing discussion with someone to review the lessons learned and how activities can be refined or redeveloped if they were to run again or a debrief on where CPD can be applied to their own work. If there were challenges with colleagues within their own organisation or with the partner, people would rather discuss the challenges with independent people or people removed from the situation to get an objective viewpoint on how these can be addressed in the future. The lack of a debriefing can impact on engagement for future activity.

Several interviewees had experiences of setting up a partnership project, spending several weeks in correspondence with the potential partner, confirming plans, and then the partner no longer wishes to be involved. Others received no replies to partner requests. The interviewees felt that this was a learning curve; however, it seems that the reaction to these occurrences determine the continued engagement for the user. Among the interviewees who mentioned this, 30% of them did not proceed with further actions or activities.

The interviewees suggested the introduction of a template to support people in planning their aims, objectives, and goals, with a timeline outlining what they would like to achieve by when. This would help set realistic and focused expectations. While the end goal will keep some people motivated, it is important to remember that depending on the goals, it can take time to get there. Motivation and engagement can be retained by breaking down the goals into smaller attainable targets and timeframes. While everyone sees the product and what can be achieved using the platform, the work that goes into getting there takes time. It was suggested that several new users could share their experience in the form of a group or a blog demonstrating that each user has different experiences when initially engaging with eTwinning.

Relationships and human connection seemed to be important to many participants. It featured highly across the surveys and the interviews from hearing and learning about eTwinning to exchanging viewpoints. This highlights the important role of each NSS as a designated national contact point. There were suggestions of adding a social element to eTwinning where an international book club could be formed, which would allow informal networking among the community. Others suggested a monthly coffee break to welcome new users.

A small number of those interviewed mentioned commenting and posting feeds. Between 2014 and 2019, while the number of feed posts is increasing slowly, the same people feature as having the highest number of posts per year, with one person (an Ambassador) consistently over 20 posts per year. The other people generally have under 10 posts per year, with the majority in the top 100 having 1 post. The NSS and Ambassadors primarily create the live events. The comments in the feed as outlined in the eTwinning social statistics are generally low, and they fluctuate from year to year. No parallel has been found between the social statistics and engagement of eTwinning users who noted this as a challenge. Participants received no response or comments to initial posts, and therefore did not participate further in these areas. They do not feature in the top 100 posters in the feed posts, feed comments, partner finding, or mailbox messages. However, based on those who do appear in the top 100 across the different lists, all demonstrate higher involvement in terms of projects and event participation. The NSS could consider developing a mechanism to increase activity in this area with a focus on managing expectations in terms of responses and comments.

The compatibility of schools primarily raised by post-primary senior cycle levels outside the area of languages is considered a challenge, particularly in subject areas due to the divergence of the curriculum at this level. Participants

in this area noted that the age differences and the focus of what potential partners wish to do presents difficulty integrating it into the current Irish curriculum. This may be because of the SEG, which focuses on school and VET education, where there is no specific platform like eTwinning to carry out projects. VET in the Irish system sits outside school education and is delivered by Colleges of Further Education, therefore at the time of writing they are not eligible to join eTwinning.

6.2 Support at School Level

The level of support and engagement from a whole school approach is mixed. The school situation for participants interviewed varied:

- School leaders who were highly supportive and encourage participation and aided when appropriate

- School leaders who faced challenges gaining the support of staff

- Staff who faced challenges gaining the support of school leaders

- Staff who had the support of the school leader, but other staff would not become involved

- Staff who had the support of other staff and the school leaders

The ideal situation and the one that seemed to work best was a top down and bottom up approach, where there was buy-in and commitment at all levels with a whole school approach to eTwinning. Many of those interviewed in this situation had an eTwinning schools working group, where all activity was discussed and built into the school digital plans. Participants stated that they would welcome examples of how eTwinning is integrated into the school structure as this would provide further ideas on how to improve their current situation and would also act as an aid to demonstrate the buy-in of other schools particularly those within the same region.

Participants, particularly those who are the only person actively using eTwinning within their organisation, stated that they feel isolated at times as there is no interest among colleagues in their projects. They spoke about cluster schools and the need to connect with people in the same situation. Inspectorate Reports in the use of ICT have recommended

the creation of links with other schools in the community; while this may be about the cluster groups, national eTwinning projects can play a strong role here. Users suggested:

- regional eTwinning competitions leading to a national competition which will create more recognition at local and national level of participation in the programme

- eTwinning schools which can act as role models within the region; job shadowing could be undertaken to share approaches to eTwinning and exchange ideas

- schools within a region partner together for an eTwinning competition focused on a thematic area, with a regional winner and then the regional winners competing at national level

- schools within the same region work on the same topic related to a theme of interest and value to the region with partners across Europe and beyond, leading to the formation of a bank of regionally and curriculum-relevant projects, which can be replicated by other schools in the area, creating a national publication of thematic projects which can act as a resource bank of ideas

- the creation of thematic project clusters where schools map out their projects linking with schools nationally working on the same theme.

When asked if they had contacted an Ambassador for advice or guidance within their region, the majority had not. The reasons ranged from a lack of knowledge of their existence to the reluctance to contact someone they did not know. A small introductory video or text about each Ambassador along with a photo may assist in this area. It was suggested that the Ambassadors send an email introducing themselves to newly registered users in their region with their contact details. Ambassadors are generally in full-time employment in addition to their Ambassador role and the duties they commit to in this role; some regions have a higher demand than others. In the context of the increased registrations and the need to develop a plan to ensure continued engagement of users considering the current pandemic, should face to face contact become viable, it may be worth piloting a retired education professional in one region and tracking the demand and cost to see if this would have any impact over the course of a year.

There were challenges around confidence in teacher abilities in the use of ICT, which varied from person to person;

those who were the only person registered within their school noted that they would benefit from having someone with experience to run through ideas. This links back to the area of the need for offline relationships and contacts. It was suggested that a diagram is developed to show the ICT skills necessary for each activity, to remove the sense that users need to be highly skilled in each area. It was also suggested that direction is given or short videos are developed to show how to use applications such as Padlet and how it was used in practice with real-life examples. Interviewees considered that there was emphasis on what can be done and would welcome more input into how things can be done.

The eTwinning app was only mentioned by one person across all interviews and questionnaires. It was considered useful for reading articles on the go, but there were limitations for further use.

Participants identified challenges around the development of ideas for projects and concern about how they could link them to the curriculum, and as this is a big change, support would be welcome in this area along with validation that they are on the right pathway. The support at school level impacts on this; with no support, teachers are not inclined to try new things. The lack of support within a school can impact negatively on innovation and creativity and in turn on the student experience as earlier indicated; the surveys show that motivation for joining is linked to the benefits for students in the longer term. There were further suggestions of curriculum mapped projects and ideas linked to the curriculum particularly to assist teachers who are working in isolation.

Another perspective was given by the interviewees where they believe that fewer people involved within the organisation limits the accountability to these people, meaning that if something does not work, they will be held accountable, whereas the more people involved provides shared accountability. It was felt that this is a large burden for one person to hold. However, it was also stated that one teacher within the class has the opportunity to experiment, pilot, and test new things showing concrete impact, which then can assist in gaining support across the wider school community.

Participants in the interviews who had not participated in project activities cited reasons, which mirror those of

dormant accounts with no projects, that eTwinning is a great opportunity and of benefit; however, time is the largest barrier. Other reasons given were lack of buy-in within the organisation, no support, recognition, or time. In a small number of instances there is a lack of confidence in trying new things in case it does not work out; participants will tend to use eTwinning for their own information and benefit. This includes reading groups, newsletters, and publications, but with no participation in official CPD activities or projects within eTwinning.

6.3 Recognition

Recognition featured heavily in the interviews, particularly among dormant users and those who had been involved for some time. It focused on both internal to the school and external to the school.

It was felt that in general eTwinning does not hold the same status as Erasmus+ funded activities. While light in terms of application and reporting, the administration in terms of uploading to the platform and record keeping depending on the project and partners can be similar to the role of a partner in a funded project. The project management cycle is the same. It was considered that there is more work in an eTwinning project in comparison to the work of a partner within a KA1 or KA2 activity where a school may be a partner, particularly in bilateral partnerships. The recognition of the following skills was mentioned:

- Project management

- Planning

- Monitoring and evaluating

- Dissemination

- Creating and developing new material

- Piloting, testing, and adapting new methodologies

- Leadership

- Team working

- Intercultural and cross-cultural communication

- Creativity and innovation

Suggestions included a certified course in eTwinning project management recognised at national level, which would contribute to gaining more support and buy-in from schools,

particularly school leaders. Collaboration between Digital Schools of Distinction and eTwinning was also suggested as there is national recognition for this; however, this has already been explored by the NSS and there is representation of the Digital Schools of Distinction on the Project Advisory Panel.

While there is a summer course which allows for EPV days, spaces are limited. It was suggested that courses allowing EPV days could be run two or three times, with priority given to newcomers or those who have not previously participated.

National recognition of some of the eTwinning CPD courses would be welcome. It was felt that the quality is comparable for most courses or higher attended by participants. They also provide the opportunity to focus on skills relevant to the teaching profession which can be implemented and used across the curriculum rather than focusing on the curriculum itself.

National recognition would provide more support and closer attention would be given to the programme, with buy-in from colleagues. Recognition of the work undertaken in developing, implementing, and participating in projects would yield strong support within the participating organisations gaining more buy-in for a whole school approach to the programme.

6.4 Living Through the Pandemic

Interviewees outlined that we are currently functioning in challenging and dangerous times, and themes such as the following will continue to emerge challenging shared European values:

- Mental health and well-being for both students and teachers returning to school taking into consideration that each person will have had a diverse experience of the lockdown depending on their home life

- The rise of racism and the far right

- The questioning of the validity of scientific evidence

- Climate change, the environment, and sustainable living

eTwinning has the potential to play a substantial role in bringing international schools together to share experiences and approaches to well-being and work together to stand and unite against racism and discrimination. Based on the interviews, project kits, seminars, and tools in these areas, with explicit links to the Irish curriculum, would be a welcome addition supporting teachers in how to approach these topics with their students.

Some projects and activities may have continued as evidenced in some of the interviews and recent blogs published by the NSS. For example, one interviewee continued their project with the partners, changing the project to maintain communication, with students exchanging videos and letters about life during lockdown, which they made at home, and also the example of St Andrews provided in Section 7. Based on the overall dormant accounts rate, other project-related activities will have stalled for other users. The NSS has a large undertaking to re-engage users in eTwinning and is in some sense starting afresh being one of the only mechanisms to maintain communication between partners to continue Erasmus+ projects which may have stalled. A focus on the value and benefits of eTwinning, and the flexibility of the programme to allow the continuation of activities should another lockdown occur in Ireland or partner countries, should be highlighted. Tools and guidance demonstrating and providing information on how current projects can continue their activities and engage parents/ guardians who can, should school policy and school child protection policy allow, be invited guests to the project to gain more of an understanding of the project activities. It should also include ideas on how to engage students who do not have access to the required devices. A sampling of common project activities with ideas on how to adapt these written by teachers would support this.

6.5 Main Messages

- Users are motivated to join for a variety of reasons and this impacts on their engagement, particularly when faced with challenges. Participants who have attended events abroad or hosted visiting staff members in the context of their eTwinning participation demonstrate higher levels of engagement and motivation as a result and this has contributed to recognition and buy-in within their organisations.

- There are key areas in the user journey where engagement and motivation can be impacted. The first is on registration where expectations need to be managed. The second is the importance of updating the user profile to ensure relevant requests are received. The third is deciding on a course of action; this is where participants may decide to opt out or remain passive users. Until the participant decides on a course of action they are not truly engaged or motivated to participate. Fourth is when an activity is over, particularly for participants who are the only ones involved within their organisations; depending on the outcomes of the activities, this may lead to a once-off activity risking disengagement from the programme. Finally, no responses from potential partners when undertaking partner searches or when agreeing on a project or an activity can lead to disengagement when time has been put into planning and correspondence.

- The development of a template to map out the new user's intended journey will focus objectives and manage expectations. This will enable the creation of timebound goals to fit in with the time the user has available. It will also assist with a sense of purpose rather than getting lost and side-tracked when exploring the platform, which can happen easily. This could be in the form of an online diary, where the user can track their progress in line with the goals.

- The interviewees recommended having a clear plan in place when joining eTwinning. While it takes time, which has been highlighted as the main barrier, it is important to be familiar with the platform, understand its limitations, and see how best to approach these.

- Relationships and the need for contact both on and off the platform were highlighted as an area of key importance. The NSS fulfils this role; however, users wished to have contact with peers in an informal manner such as book clubs or a welcome coffee for new users to network at national and local levels.

- Interviewees suggested a formal way where new users could share their experience in the form of a group or a blog demonstrating that each user has different experiences when initially engaging with eTwinning and how challenges were overcome, which would assist users who may feel isolated giving an outlet to share experiences with peers.

- Accountability was highlighted as a challenge, particularly where teachers are working alone; however, this may also be linked to confidence in trying new approaches, the lack of support within some organisations, and limited opportunities to discuss plans with colleagues as a result.

- Recognition featured strongly in the interviews as well as the survey for both CPD courses and for project work. Recognition would contribute to increasing support within participating organisations and increase motivation when encountering challenges. Participants would welcome recognition for CPD courses as well as project participation. Recognition may also decrease the rate of dormant accounts.

- eTwinning is well placed to fill the gap left due to the lack of travel during the pandemic and will facilitate the continuation of Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 projects. Due to other priorities and challenges within the school environment, some eTwinning projects may stall. However, common themes faced by all participating countries such as well-being, climate change, anti-racism, and the validity of science can act as drivers as they will remain topical within the classroom.

- Suggestions were made for Ambassadors to welcome new users to the region with a visit to the school along with correspondence. Ambassadors are generally in full-time employment in addition to their Ambassador role and the duties they commit to; some regions have a higher demand than others. In the context of the increased registrations and the need to develop a plan to ensure continued engagement of users considering the current pandemic, should face to face contact become viable, it may be worth piloting a retired education professional in one region and tracking the demand and cost to see if this would have any impact over the course of a year.

SEVEN: PROJECT PARTICIPATION AND EXAMPLES OF ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Challenges were outlined in terms of project participation, finding partners, and developing project ideas. Previous and current users have rich and diverse experiences and can provide many hints and tips for users who are experiencing challenges in this area. To demonstrate activities that can be undertaken, highlight the benefit for stakeholders, and to provide concrete examples of how others have addressed some of the challenges outlined in the report experienced by other users, four project examples have been included to illustrate this.

In the words of an interviewee:

eTwinning provides an opportunity to experiment and see what suits my students best. With each project there is a learning curve, working with new partners and people, learning about others, you are continuously improving your own project management skills and learning new teaching methodologies from others.

Active Use

7.1 St Brigid's Primary School

Table 13: St Brigid's Primary School project details

Name of project	Culture4kids – Beyond the Textbook
Target group	Age 5–13 Primary School
People/staff involved within your school	An eTwinning team (12 people)
Subject area(s)	History, Geography, English
Partners	Italy, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Portugal
Brief description of activities	Aiming to bring cultural activities 'Beyond the Textbook' Collaborative book on legends across the partner countries Creating a collaborative logo Creating a dictionary of crafts to show how many words are shared across cultures Creating a colouring book based on each country's national dress Games around cultures – some online like breakout rooms and Who Wants to be a Millionaire and some physical activity but with culture focus like QR code hunt Sharing craft ideas for use in classroom Sharing Christmas and Easter traditions Learning and sharing culture dance via videos In future we will create a recipe book and recreate partner recipes Visiting cultural places locally and drawing to share with partners in Memory Game
Positive results students and school have experienced because of participation	Motivation of staff and pupils Sense of school community increased Teachers discovered ways of teaching 'Beyond the textbook' Pupils recognised their European identity more Adaptation of curriculum to differentiate for all types of learners Many activities will now become part of how we teach these subjects Concrete games in school now to be integrated into the classroom We linked in with the local community more such as the library and local historians
Lessons learned	• The IT tools for bringing the Geography and History Beyond the Classroom will be used in future • I have expanded my IT skills by using websites such as Book Creator, genially and learnongsapps.org • Planning cultural activities beyond the classroom is the best way to teach it • There are many local speakers available to give free talks and tours of our local area that previously I was not aware of. So link in with your local area • The pupils loved linking up with the partner children for online meetings at Christmas and were more motivated to learn their Christmas songs and material when they had an audience from another country. They told me they felt they were representing Ireland

Key success factors in achieving the objectives	• A good plan for the project activities split up into monthly tasks • Linking the project to work you already do in your classroom but approaching the work a different way • Asking for IT help and support from partner countries • Good communication and deadlines in place for answering group questions • Using a calendar website like TEAMUP to see each partner schools' holidays so that the targets for each activity are realistic in each school
Ensuring these factors or conditions were in place	• From the beginning we had a clear work plan with realistic targets and aims – a template on website would have been a good tool, perhaps there is one • Everyone was clear on the tasks and we held many online meetings to clear up any problems or questions • Each partner was encouraged to ask for help from each partner regarding some new IT tools that not everyone was familiar with. Online videos recommending some tools and how to use them would be a good starting point for people • We shared numbers so we created an informal bond also offline which created a sense of community and ownership over the project • We set deadlines for group decisions and every decision was democratic • If any teacher involved was ill or unable to complete a task for a genuine reason, they were supported and had a team of people in their school who could take over

7.2 Court National School

Table 14: Court National School project details

Name of project	'Let's taste your traditions!': Introducing, sharing and tasting traditional food recipes from other countries
Target group	Age 5–13 primary school
People/staff involved within your school	Primary school teachers
Subject area(s)	All primary school subjects are used but the main interest is food
Partners	Latvia, Finland, and Italy
Brief description of activities	First of all, students introduce themselves and their schools, then they choose three or four traditional recipes of their own country and share them on Padlet with partners. After that, partner chooses one of recipes and tries to make it; pupils share videos, pictures, and comments about the process. The students will explore Christmas, Carnival, and Easter recipes.

Positive results students and school have experienced because of participation	• Knowledge of food around Europe and how to cook these dishes • Collaboration between teaching staff and the pupils on a European level • Gain recognition • Develop digital literacy and improve classroom practice • Our school is more inclusive and has a European outlook
Lessons learned	• Time management – I would allocate an hour every day after school to plan for the project • Digital resources. Ensure all of the ICT tools in school are operational • Dissemination. Very important to let the school community know how hard everybody is working on the project
Key success factors in achieving the objectives	• The work ethic and enthusiasm of the teachers involved so they can stimulate a desire to foster European citizenship among the children of the respective schools • The cooperation of the heads of primary schools is very important as they can encourage the project on a whole school basis as is happening in our school • Get all the children involved and show them the positives about making connections with friends from all around Europe
Ensuring these factors or conditions were in place	Distribute positions of responsibility to the teachers and small jobs to the children to make everyone a stakeholder and empower everyone in the school community. Disseminate the results through social media to make everyone aware.

7.3 Our Lady of Fatima Special School

Table 15: Our Lady of Fatima Special School project details

Name of project	Our World of Well-Being: eat, sleep, play, dance, and sing
Target group	Age 5–17 students
People/staff involved within your school	eTwinning team
Subject area(s)	Art, Citizenship, Cross Curricular, Drama, Health Studies, Home Economics, Music, Physical Education
Partners	Turkey, Romania, and Italy

Brief description of activities	The project will help promote well-being in our school communities. In doing so we hope to adopt a whole school approach to health promotion. Each school will look at activities that are already happening in their schools that enhance the well-being of their students. Each month we will participate in an activity that promotes well-being. We will share some of our experiences with our partners by using Skype. At the end of the project all experiences and activities will be collated and presented in a book (Calaméo). We will also create a common blog where all countries will be members. Our students can participate in the blog through us and comment on our partners' work.
Positive results students and school have experienced because of participation	Involvement of the whole school community. A feeling of collegiality Sharing of skills Peer tutoring/mentoring – adding to this sense of cooperation Collaboration among teachers was enhanced Improvement digital literacy skills – part of our whole school digital strategy for 2019–2020 – Our Digital Learning plan. Therefore enhancing the use of digital technology in our school for teaching, learning, and assessment across the curriculum. It had a particular positive outcome for reluctant users among the teaching staff Creation of a "pineapple Project" where teachers visited classrooms where apps or tools were in use for lessons. A timetable advertising these sessions was up in staffroom, and teachers could visit if wanted to observe or learn how to use app or tool. Students also became mentors to teachers and also to their peers Therefore through participation in this project, a culture of collective, collaborative, and reflective practice was promoted, with school and European colleagues School had a greater understanding of well-being and took steps to foster this culture throughout the whole school community. Our well-being policy was revisited and updated A greater sense of a European identify and understanding of European citizenship
Lessons learned	Group/whole school approach can encourage reluctant users of ICT It is good to plan well and link to the curriculum. On a whole school level you could discuss with management or your eTwinning team on an area that needs to be developed in your school. If a policy needs to be updated, or if you have an improvement plan/strategy for a particular area, linking your requirements with an eTwinning project is beneficial on a number of levels. For example, you will learn from your European colleagues and can adapt for your needs; your learning objectives could accommodate different areas within the curriculum that need to be developed or nurtured Good, clear planning, with achievable targets
Key success factors in achieving the objectives	Good, clear planning, with achievable targets
Ensuring these factors or conditions were in place	Formation of an eTwinning team imperative Identify your focus: class/individual level or whole school? What needs to be improved/worked on? In class or whole school? Can you identify an area: class/whole school? What about SSE? Look at policies at staff level? Gather evidence – surveys Write and share – eTwinning team Put into yearly plan and link to curriculum Put into action (how long should it last?) Monitor and evaluate

7.4 St Andrew's College

Table 16: St Andrew's College project details

Name of project	Desde la Perla Esmeralda a la Perla del Mediterráneo
Target group	1st class to 6th class
People/staff involved within your school	Spanish teacher
Subject area(s)	Spanish
Partners	Ortega y Gasset primary school, Ceuta (Spain) and Ciudad de Ceuta Primary School participating next school year
Brief description of activities	This year the students from both schools have carried out three different activities within the project which are: • Designing the logo for the project: the youngest students had to draw a picture with cultural elements from Dublin and Ceuta with the aim of choosing a logo for the project. The different groups participating in the project voted for the best one • Researching about a Spanish festivals called 'Carnavales': the students had to research about it and design a poster where they added the information translated and worked by them. Due to Covid-19 we could not finish it, although we have some drafts and designs done • Cultural and Digital Poster: the Irish students shared with the Spanish students all the aspects of life in Ireland using the Spanish language. This activity was carried out remotely through different online resources and tools. The poster includes podcasts, pictures and small tour around Dublin. Both schools prepared one and our students had the chance of interacting with each other through the website 'Padlet'
Positive results students and school have experienced because of participation	• As a language teacher I have always considered the culture as the core when we are learning a new language, that is why the culture is always in my classroom. The students enjoy discovering about new countries, so when I told them we were going to participate in a European project they got very excited. They loved the idea of interacting with a Spanish school and share with them their culture • Thanks to eTwinning we had the chance to develop a collaborative practice with a school from a Spanish city in Africa called Ceuta. From the very beginning the children showed interest and excitement and it was amazing to see how much they learned about the city, its main monuments, buildings and the most important its culture. They also found out that Ceuta has a link with Ireland, as one of its street is called O'Donnell who was a descendant of an Irish King • The most positive impact was when the children realised they were using the language that they were learning to share their culture with students from a different country. Sometimes we spend too much time learning content which are not going to be used, that could end up in a lack of motivation. This project provides the students a way to use what they are learning to bring the education to a different level, a level where they can become truly citizens and where they can change the world

Lessons learned	• The most important lesson I learned is that there is a huge educational community formed by schools from different countries willing to support and improve our teaching and learning experiences. Thanks to eTwinning we were able to carry out a language project which supports our students and also provides them real communication experiences using the language they are learning (Spanish and English) • This year was special, we had to live a pandemic situation with the Covid-19, all the schools closed making a bit difficult keep working on the project. The teachers had to reinvent ourselves to provide the best learning experiences to our students. Once again the Spanish school and ours redesigned the project to adapt it to the new situation and the results were even better. The students made a huge effort taking pictures of their day to day, describing their routine and recording podcasts using the language they were learning
Key success factors in achieving the objectives	For me the key success factors to achieve the objectives is to have a great communication between all the teachers participating in the project and a collaborative approach. The Spanish schools and ours have been having virtual meetings since we started 'Desde la Perla Esmeralda a la Perla del Mediterráneo' and even now we are planning few more meetings to keep working and improving the project. Another important factor for us was to design activities which were attractive and interesting for the children, activities where the students could use the language to create links and develop common projects with different communities
Ensuring these factors or conditions were in place	Once again to ensure the factors were in place is very important to have a collaborative approach and promote a clear and continuous communications between the schools to organise and design activities and share the different issues or inconveniences which might happen during the process.

7.5 Learning from Examples

The four examples demonstrate varied approaches from a school to team to an individual teacher. They address several challenges mentioned within this report and provide ideas on how these can be addressed:

• Dissemination within the school creates awareness of the activities and the work that goes into the project; this can be done through visual displays in and outside the classroom and externally through social media.

• Buy-in from colleagues can be achieved by allocating areas of responsibility or roles within the project activities. The fact that they have been given something concrete to do which is part of an overall plan can facilitate buy-in and commitment.

• Planning is especially important to ensure that time is managed accurately and effectively. There is a suggestion of a planning template which would be useful for projects. Activities can be planned to take place once a month.

• All project examples are clearly linked and integrated into the curriculum and complement these areas. This demonstrates the effective use of presenting the curriculum in an alternative way.

• Asking for help is necessary; this can be help from the partners or the NSS.

• The creation of in-school peer training such as the pineapple project, where staff visit different classes where tools are being used to see them in action and also provides an opportunity to see the reaction and the engagement of students in the class. This can contribute to gaining buy-in from colleagues and address areas where there is less confidence in ICT.

• It is clear that the formation of an eTwinning team within the school is important and will assist with the planning and work; the advice given regarding dissemination, role allocation, and mechanisms such as the pineapple projects will assist in creating awareness of the programme within the school.

• It is important to allow flexibility in your project to alter plans as St Andrew's did to continue their project during the pandemic.

- The projects provide plans on how they hope to build on their activities, for example St Andrew's will involve a second partner.

- Communication and relationships are at the heart of eTwinning with partners, creating relationships between the students as well as within the organisations.

7.6 The Ideal Factors for the Inclusion and Integration of eTwinning Within a School

Based on the above examples and incorporating feedback from the interviews and surveys, the following conditions and tips were given for successful use and integration of eTwinning.

National Level and Policy Level
- More commitment within the Digital Strategy for Schools with examples illustrating how eTwinning can meet the goals and objectives of the strategy

- Examine how eTwinning can be used to complement and work in conjunction with national initiatives such as the Yellow Flag and the Green Schools Programme with synergies between the activities meeting dual goals

- Examine how eTwinning can be used to support national projects bringing the international dimension and perspective to these projects within the field of school education and teacher training

- Value placed on eTwinning by the national education authorities on the contribution it can make to:

  - diversifying learning approaches for students

  - the provision of quality CPD activities which complement the curriculum and broaden perspectives of teachers with official national recognition of the CPD activities

School Level
- Integrated into the digital strategy for the school or school policies

- A whole school approach and the creation of an eTwinning team creating a plan on how best to use eTwinning within the school to meet the school objec-

tives, policies, and mission statement

- Peer learning activities among staff to share approaches and methodologies

- Support and buy-in from school management and all staff

- Access to broadband and resources to enable participation

- Recognition of the value and benefits of eTwinning at school level

- Build planning time into the school day for people involved with eTwinning

- Where one or two teachers are involved in eTwinning, ensure that there is awareness across the organisation

- Recognition of the value of eTwinning and the CPD activities at school level

- Have an eTwinning noticeboard in a public area and a section on the website promoting participation

Teacher/User Level
- Keep your profile up to date to ensure that the most suitable requests are received

- Answer all correspondence honestly, for example if there is a request to develop a project and there is no interest in the topic, it is important to communicate this rather than giving false hope

- Watch the videos and read the handbook on how to get started

- Don't be afraid to make mistakes as you learn from these

- It is important to communicate and actively ask questions and remember that everyone has something to share as all schools are different

- Actively participate in the groups and forums, even the inclusion of a link or a short introduction

- Use eTwinning to enhance or complement current activities integrated into the curriculum; it should not be in addition to the curriculum

- Plan carefully in terms of what it is hoped that eTwinning will achieve

- It is important to stay motivated by the end goal and remember that it takes time to get there

- Interviewees spoke about not being afraid to experiment to see if something will work

- Seek feedback from colleagues and ask for help if needed

- Be clear of the intended learning outcomes

- Keep a notebook with ideas and things you have seen on the platform that you could use in the future or might be of interest to colleagues

- Give jobs to other colleagues to contribute to activities

- Provide updates at staff meetings

eTwinning is a community, there is no judgement, everyone is there to learn and try out new ideas and share ideas and discussions.

Active User

CPD

- Plan participation carefully and ensure particularly when online full attention can be paid

- Review the content and make some notes or questions you may wish to have answered

- Actively participate and introduce yourself

- Publish and promote participation within the school

- Share learning with colleagues

- Provide updates at staff meetings

- Review and consider where you can use and apply the new information

Projects

- Plan carefully with partners and ensure that you can do the allocated tasks

- Start with a small partnership to get used to the platform

- Actively participate and meet the deadlines

- Publish and promote participation within the school

- Involve relevant community organisations

- Provide updates at staff meetings

Class Level

- Active participation by students when communicating with partners and students in other countries

- Ensure students understand the link between their activities and the activities within the partner school

- Confirm communication and interactions between students are meaningful

- Include active activities for students and assign roles of responsibility

Tips for Selecting Partners Included

- Check previous eTwinning activity

- Build trust through correspondence and virtual face to face communication

- Search the web and look up details on the school

- Check the Erasmus dissemination platform for track history in funded activity

- Check with the Irish NSS if still unsure

- Always trust initial instincts

Tips for Project Ideas included

- Ideas from partners

- Discussions with students

- Reviewing previous projects

- Reflect on what you are doing already and where value would be added with the international perspective

EIGTH: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTED RECOMMENDATIONS

The objectives of this report are to:

- explore the levels of engagement within the eTwinning programme and relevance of eTwinning

- identify the levels of support provided by the National Support Service (NSS)

- recognise the barriers to engagement for participants

- establish the primary motivations of users for joining eTwinning

- recognise the needs of those using eTwinning and how they can be addressed.

Overall, there are three interlinked areas which impact on engagement, motivation, needs, and barriers for users:

- eTwinning users and potential users wish and want to engage and recognise the value of the programme in terms of learning, partnering, and collaborating with international partners. Depending on the initial source of information there can be an assumption that there are several preconditions required, which vary from ICT skills to previous participation in EU projects.

- The need for relationships outside eTwinning activities features across interviews and questionnaires. This may link to the need to feel a sense of belonging to the community, particularly for those who feel that they are working in isolation.

- Recognition of skills, learning gained, and activities carried out by users at national level would be a welcome development; this would contribute to gaining buy-in from colleagues and the organisation where they teach or work. Recognition of CPD activities at national level held higher importance than recognition

of project activities and learning gained, which was more valued at school level. However, participants also felt the need for overall recognition of eTwinning and the contribution it can make to school education by National Authorities.

The findings show that users learn about eTwinning from a variety of sources and potential users primarily act when they hear about eTwinning face to face rather than online. There is a wide cross section of stakeholders promoting eTwinning officially. The NSS collaborates with colleagues within the school education mobility and partnership projects under Erasmus+, where there is input about eTwinning at application workshops and project management days. The NSS also partners with the Language Actions, promoting competitions supporting the European Day of Languages. It also works with the Transnational Cooperation Activity Officer in the development and organisation of thematic events where eTwinning is a relevant component for the target audience.

Key to the success of eTwinning in Ireland is the distinct focus on reaching the school education community who may not be involved in the Erasmus+ programme. This underlines the accessibility of eTwinning to all stakeholders. Based on the statistics, the percentage of eTwinning projects that are also Erasmus+ funded is low. Regardless of this, there is confusion between Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2 and eTwinning. It is not clear where or how these perceptions are obtained. There are also assumptions regarding the status of eTwinning in comparison to the funded activities of Erasmus+ KA1 and KA2. This also links with the recog-

nition of eTwinning activities. There is a lack of awareness of the size of eTwinning in Ireland.

For newer members, there seems to be a misconception that high-level ICT skills are required to use the platform. Given that most participants hear about eTwinning at face to face events, when disseminating the message, personal experiences and perspectives play a large role, which can give the impression that there are certain preconditions or requirements for participation in terms of skills. These users believe that eTwinning is illustrated as an alternative to funded programmes or as a route to funded programmes, providing the notion that it holds a lesser status or that its function is to act as a route to funded programmes. eTwinning needs to be promoted as a programme or a complementary activity to funded programmes rather than offered as an alternative, with a streamlined message across all who promote and disseminate the programme. A contributory factor to the perception of the skills required can be linked to the increase in multilateral partnerships over the lifetime of the programme, where newcomers are commencing activities with larger partnerships, which can be more difficult and challenging particularly where there is no previous involvement or experience. In addition, 45% cited a barrier of the time taken to set up projects, refine details, and put activities in place from initial communication to the start of the project. Smaller partnerships take up less time in this respect as decisions are made more quickly as there is less consultation and reaching consensus.

Given that eTwinning activities do not have mobility built into the planned activities or rely on mobility to carry out the projects, the current Covid-19 situation allows eTwinning to strongly contribute to continuing to enhance the European dimension within the classroom as well as enabling networking among peers at European level. For funded Erasmus+ project participants who join out of necessity as it is a requirement of the programme, this may assist in a change of perception, where there are strong indications that they did not consider themselves as active eTwinning users as their primary objective was to carry out their funded project activities. Based on the feedback of users, it is important to recognise that eTwinning provides the tools for meaningful virtual exchanges between schools, teachers, and students. It is inclusive and accessible for all skill levels. For education professionals, the format of projects, the themes, and CPD activities go beyond virtual and dis-

tance learning building in the environmental factors and intercultural studies forming the basis and potential for significant virtual mobility.

The personal connection is important to users, particularly those who may be the only person working on it within their organisation. Several suggestions were made to facilitate social activities and informal networking among users to allow the exchange of views and experiences and to use the platform informally before embarking on project activities. Interviewees were asked if they contacted Ambassadors and the majority did not and did not know of their existence or only had the email address without further knowledge of the Ambassador, and therefore were hesitant to make contact. Some participants stated that the forums were too quiet; however, when reviewing the posts on the platform, engagement and contribution was not high from Irish participants, with a number of Ambassadors posting over 20 times per year with an average of one post from other participants. There is low uptake of initial training provided by the NSS. The findings demonstrate that participants who are more engaged contact the NSS more frequently. The NSS operates a help desk and promotes and organises events, training, activities, and thematic conferences delivered by educational professionals, eTwinning Ambassadors, national representatives, other NSS's, the CSS, and eTwinning users. Some of these events take place abroad, in person, online, or using a blended approach; however, they all provide the opportunity to network and discuss activities with peers, where personal relationships and connections can be developed. Participants who took part in these activities demonstrate higher engagement after these activities than those who have not. Some 31% of participants in the survey had not made use of the NSS supports, with approximately 10% of these involved in current eTwinning activity, which suggests that some aspect of guidance and support is given by the partners. Reasons for non-participation in these activities vary from lack of time, awareness, and substitution issues primarily related to physical attendance at events. There are opportunities to develop relationships external to the platform and where participation can be discussed with peers and the NSS.

There is a strong need for the recognition of the value of new skills gained as well as the CPD activities. While recognition of all eTwinning activities would be welcome, based on the ideal conditions for eTwinning outlined in Section 7, recognition of CPD activities at national level

held higher importance than recognition of project activities and learning gained, which was more valued at school level. However, participants also felt the need for overall recognition of eTwinning and the contribution it can make to school education by National Authorities. eTwinning is mentioned in the Digital Schools Strategy 2015 as well as two action plans 2017 and 2019; however, participants believe more could be done with more information on how eTwinning can meet the goals of the strategy. Participants also suggested to examine how eTwinning can be used to complement and work in conjunction with national initiatives such as the Green Schools Programme and the Yellow Flag Programme taking a dual approach. This would add value to eTwinning and address recognition within the participating schools gaining more buy-in and make a large contribution to mainstreaming the programme as well as addressing the challenges faced by users where national initiatives take priority and curriculum overload. A key challenge is conveying the benefits of eTwinning for teachers and schools. Based on the responses, integration of eTwinning into the curriculum is low at 14%, and 24% stated that eTwinning was part of the digital school strategy, which implies that it takes time for eTwinning to make an impact within the organisation, particularly as most of the respondents were the only teacher active or registered within their organisation. Recognition would play a large role in strengthening this aspect.

Suggested Recommendations

- Consider an official dissemination pack providing a clear tailored message when publicising and promoting eTwinning aimed at people who are officially promoting eTwinning and as part of the eTwinning welcome pack for new users. The aim of this is to avoid misconceptions in terms of preconditions for participation and to place eTwinning on an equal level in terms of value as the other programmes within the Erasmus+ framework. This could include recommendations on tailoring personal experiences demonstrating how challenges were addressed, providing a positive message while acknowledging some difficulties experienced with a focus on how they were overcome or addressed. This may assist in streamlining creating a sharper message.

- An infographic illustrating the ICT skills required for each activity from registration to project participation with links to training on complementary tools or where

training can be gained and real-life examples of the tools used by other users would be beneficial for new users who may lack confidence in their ICT skills. To further enhance this, the addition of other competences and skills such as communication, project management, time management, and organisational skills could also be included, which would act as a tool to demonstrate the other skills used and may contribute to buy-in among colleagues.

- Case studies showing the journey through eTwinning for those who started with bilateral partnerships and moved to larger partnerships may be beneficial, in terms of highlighting the opportunity to learn and become familiar with the platform, before progressing to larger project partnerships where decision making and reaching consensus is slower, which may address some of the challenges around the factor of time, given the increase of users commencing with multilateral partnerships.

- Suggestions included the hosting of informal social activities, such as a coffee break where users can talk freely about their challenges and discuss their activities in a less formal manner. Others suggested an eTwinning European book club for teachers to add a social element and to create more confidence in using the platform in a more social manner. However, given that the uptake of training with the NSS for newly registered users is low as is the posting in the forums, clear thought will need to be given as to what would be the most beneficial use of time for the NSS. A focus on supporting participants to interact more on the forums may be a more beneficial starting point and when there is more activity in this area the organisation of social activities could be considered. The NSS has a strong role to play in the creation and facilitation of relationships with users and potential users. The challenge for the NSS is to find the balance to ensure that users take ownership of their projects, activities, engagement, and communication with partners and potential partners.

- Increase the visibility of the Irish membership of the platform through publication of statistics relevant to Ireland on the NSS section of the National Agency website. If possible, consider a redevelopment of the NSS section of the website to ensure that the programmes particularly the strategic initiatives section are more visible, especially eTwinning. The research has shown challenges in the differentiation between the NSS and other National Agency activities. While it is understood that the website must follow the style

of the National Agency website, not all programmes fit within the 'prepare, register, apply, do, share' format and the section for resources can be confusing for new users.

- The provision of a short biography and links to the eTwinning activities of the Ambassadors may prompt users to contact their regional Ambassador directly.

- An accompanying handbook to the Digital Strategy providing examples and clear links demonstrating how eTwinning is relevant to the digital strategy and examples of how it can be built into a school's digital plan, which would assist in creating more buy-in and commitment from school leadership as well as demonstrating the value of eTwinning to teachers and schools who have not yet engaged.

- Discuss the possibility of piloting programmes such as the Green Schools Programme with an international dimension with An Taisce and examine other programmes with relevant thematic areas to eTwinning to identify how these may fit with the programme and present to national stakeholders in education.

- Add recognition as a standing item to the agenda for meetings with the DES, PDST and PAP to work towards offering more CPD with EPV days and the possibility of national recognition for some of the other courses offered by eTwinning, after conducting a benchmarking or mapping exercise between the national offering.

- Consider a certified course in eTwinning project management recognised at national level, which would contribute to gaining more support and buy-in from schools, particularly school leaders.

8.1 Relevance of eTwinning

eTwinning has significantly developed over the last 15 years with an increasing participation rate. Based on DES published statistics,[36] in Ireland 5% of teachers and 4% of the eligible schools have been registered with eTwinning. Given that participation is voluntary and there is no direct funding, this is a significant achievement and demonstrates an extended reach of the programme beyond the funded programmes and a direct result of the work of the NSS. As eTwinning developed there were large changes within the sphere of education in Ireland with curricular reform, a focus on school self-evaluation coupled with the lifecycle of a recession. It is suggested that ICT policy in school

education lacked continuity and clear direction; while there has been large investment in infrastructure, policy at national level received renewed impetus with the publication of the Digital Schools Strategy in 2015. The projects which took place during the initial nine years clearly demonstrate the relevance to the curriculum and policy developments across the sphere of school education. As the programme grew projects became more complex and creative. There is a clear emphasis on the quality of the learning through eTwinning with a student-centred approach.

A significant achievement is the recognition of eTwinning and the references made to the programme in the Digital Action plans for 2017 and 2019. Communication and relationship building are at the core of eTwinning and embedded into all activities of the NSS and key to their success to date. This accomplishment has created the foundations to move significantly towards the goal of mainstreaming eTwinning within school education at national level. A review of the projects which took place throughout the programme demonstrate their relevance to the curriculum, educational policy in Ireland as well as key thematic areas. However, challenges noted include buy-in and commitment to the programme within the respondents' organisations from other colleagues, teachers, or school leaders.

Wider opportunities with eTwinning could be explored in terms of increasing the profile of eTwinning across all sectors. It has the potential to facilitate wider relationships in terms of increasing cross-sectoral relationships at national level. Building on the mainstreaming at national level, with the introduction of ICT into initial teacher training, this provides the opportunities to enhance the European dimension in initial teacher education. The teacher training initiative while a national approach is in place through the Communities of Practice hosted on eTwinning; there are opportunities to expand at European level creating connections with schools and teacher training organisations in Europe providing a complementary approach when student teachers, primarily future language teachers, undertake Erasmus Mobility abroad.

The benefits of the eTwinning programme demonstrate that users focus on the advantages for students, particularly in terms of bringing the European dimension into the classroom. There is a large body of work being carried out to increase access to mobility and facilitate mobility for underrepresented groups across all fields of education and training.

36 Department of Education and Skills, Key Statistics 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics/Key-Statistics/key-statistics-2019-2020.pdf

eTwinning has the potential to address barriers which students encounter, particularly underrepresented groups, such as motivation, language, and confidence. Expanding on the collaboration with initial teacher training, a partnership between schools and their local tertiary education provider could be established to address some of the challenges experienced by students when they reach the stage where they will need to make a decision to participate in a term abroad.

The NSS has established relationships with the National Authorities and key stakeholders and decision makers in school education and has demonstrated the sustainable nature of the relationship, regardless of changes in staff, either in the NSS or the stakeholders; the relationship has been built and maintained throughout. This would indicate support and recognition by both the NSS and key stakeholders of the relevance of eTwinning to the field of school education. However, this work is largely invisible to users, contributing to the perception that eTwinning is not valued by education decision makers.

Over time, there have been many publications of frameworks, platforms, and information related to digital tools and learning such as the School Education Gateway and DigComp frameworks for educators and citizens. There is a lack of clarity among users as to how these all fit or are linked to eTwinning or the relevance to the eTwinning community.

eTwinning is welcomed by both active and dormant accounts. Throughout the interviews and comments within all surveys, eTwinning and the concept was met with high positivity. Most users and previous users are clear on the benefits of eTwinning or the potential benefits. This is evident where 29% of participants heard about eTwinning from colleagues, demonstrating the role that the users can play in championing eTwinning within their own organisations, which some users find challenging in gaining buy-in from colleagues. There was little differentiation in this when comparing the year of registration with longer-term users' experiences similar to those who had more recently joined. However, the common element was that there were no other active teachers involved in their organisations.

Suggested Recommendations

- Leveraging on the Erasmus+ Mobility in Higher Education, exchange at staff level bringing the face to face element could be incorporated for teacher trainers and educators. There is an opportunity for teacher educators within Erasmus+ KA1 in higher education to visit schools abroad. This could build on the relationship for local schools involved in eTwinning who host the trainee teachers where the potential to place the trainee teachers for a semester abroad with eTwinning partner schools could be investigated, particularly for future language teachers, which would in turn lead to the enhancement of language assistants within the classroom, which fell in profile when the Comenius Language Assistant programme was amalgamated into Erasmus Student Mobility for Traineeships.

- A longer-term project could be considered between the Access Offices of Higher and Further Education Institutions and their local schools. As mobility activities become compulsory in tertiary education across more programmes, they could form a regional partnership focusing on potential future mobility for study or traineeships, addressing barriers beyond financial aspects. This could fall under a theme of preparing for physical mobility activities in future studies, addressing skills such as confidence, intercultural competences, and developing a deep knowledge base of potential future host countries for the students through eTwinning.

- Develop a comprehensive policy guide demonstrating the links between the eTwinning thematic areas, the curriculum as well as national and European policy targeting school leaders.

- Consider the possibility of promoting meetings with the national stakeholders and the Project Advisory Panel on social media, to create awareness that these are taking place. Also consider publishing a list of members of the Project Advisory Panel on the website. Publish an annual communications matrix demonstrating the range of stakeholders and activities in which the NSS is involved in targeting users, which would illustrate the range of stakeholders as well as policymakers involved in eTwinning and also further enhance the relevance of the programme to school education and provide additional information on the scope and nature of the work, which takes place in the background.

- Publish a short guide mapping how digital frameworks and new platforms are linked to eTwinning or where eTwinning fits into the bigger picture to provide

an understanding of the interconnectivity between them as well as the relevance of these to eTwinning providing the overall landscape of ICT and the competences at European level.

- Examples of how eTwinning is integrated into the school structure would be welcome as this would provide further ideas on how to improve wider buy-in and commitment to eTwinning and would also act as an aid to demonstrate the participation of other schools, particularly those within the same regions. This would also act as a starting point for ideas for newcomers to the programme on how to implement a whole school approach. Active users act as a large resource for the provision of real-life examples on how they addressed barriers and challenges.

- A mechanism to capture activity which is not taking place on the platform but is a continuation of or was initiated with eTwinning would be beneficial for the NSS and CSS as well as demonstrating the sustainability of activities initiated under eTwinning. However, this may pose a risk to formalising and changing informal activity between partners contributing to demotivation, and therefore in keeping with the ethos of eTwinning this must take a light administrative approach.

8.2 Engagement, Motivation, Barriers and Needs of eTwinning Users

eTwinning users are highly motivated given the barriers outlined, with 30% of participants in the survey having roles outside their main teaching duties. Motivation for joining placed value on how joining eTwinning can benefit students as well as the opportunity to explore their own professional development. Participation in events abroad and hosting partners provides motivation within the organisation for more staff to become involved and contributes to the motivation of students, which again highlights the importance of offline relationship building.

Through the supportive and partnership approach taken by the NSS, it has increased engagement rates among users in eTwinning. The NSS has moved from a focus on increasing membership to include a clear focus on quality of provision and widened the supports available, particu-

larly over the last three years. The impact of this is evident with more registrations, more quality award winners, and quicker and higher engagement rates. A random sampling of members from 2014 and 2015 compared to 2018 and 2019 demonstrates that progressing to activities within eTwinning has moved from an average of a year to an average of three months. The feedback shows that there are points within the registration and activity cycles where users are more likely to disengage. Those with a more concrete objective when joining appear to have more motivation to continue to engage when encountering barriers and demonstrate resilience to overcoming them as there is a planned end goal.

Participation in eTwinning does not necessarily require frequent use of the platform based on user feedback. The responses indicate that the majority of active users who are involved in an activity will use the platform while the activity is ongoing. However, with 26% completing one or two projects and not logging on since they finished, this indicates an area where there is a risk that they will not log on again, becoming a dormant account. Reasons for logging onto the platform are a combination of active and passive use. While 30% was related to project work, further examination revealed that half of these projects were closed. When the second reason was examined, this was divided as 25% actively seeking partners, 10% looking for CPD opportunities, and 65% a combination of looking to see what was going on and reading articles. This further points to the possible appearance of dormant accounts when projects are complete as a combination of 53% of respondents joined in either 2018 or 2019, with 44% of all respondents stating that eTwinning is driven by one or two teachers within their school. Some 31% of respondents frequently log onto the eTwinning platform, and this would imply that they log on when not directly involved in a project or an activity.

Challenges with the platform can have a negative effect in terms of gaining buy-in from colleagues or within an organisation, given that 29% of respondents hear about eTwinning from work colleagues and will base their perceptions of the platform on what their colleagues say.

Suggestions to improve the platform include:
- Mobile friendly platform

- The receipt of message notifications

- A history area so people know what they have and have not read

- More responsive to user needs and adapted to allow less cumbersome uploading of files, photos, and videos

- Quicker to load pages

- A simplified approach to eTwinning groups

- It was also stated that Covid-19 has highlighted challenges in terms of access to digital equipment, for inclusiveness; as most young people have access to a smart phone but may not have access to a laptop, it is important that the platform is mobile friendly

Time presents as the biggest barrier; consideration needs to be given to what can save time for teachers. Many of the interviewees both dormant and active spent time outside working hours finding partners and suitable projects. The survey results also demonstrate that at least 25% of respondents carry out these activities outside their school day. Buy-in from colleagues and support within the schools for activities presented a large barrier, which also impacted on motivation, creativity, and confidence. In addition to recognition, activities raising the profile of the school at regional and national levels would assist in this area. The needs of participants varied in terms of supports; some required reminders of the supports available and others suggested new ones, which they felt would address the challenges and barriers they face. It is clear from the feedback that participation in events abroad and hosting partners provides motivation within the organisation for more staff to become involved and contributes to the motivation of students which again highlights the importance of offline relationship building.

Suggested Recommendations

- Participants suggested a template for newly registered users to plan their aims, objectives, and goals with a timeline of what they would like to achieve and by when, which would assist in setting realistic expectations, breaking the goals down into smaller attainable targets, which will remind the user of the progress they are making. Suggestions included a blog or group made up of new users sharing their experiences, demonstrating that people have different experiences.

- Measures to maintain communication when projects are finished may contribute to continued engagement, such as a debriefing on the project or an evaluation

of the experience, highlighting the strengths and the guidance on the creation of objectives building on the previous activity. Combining the training for new users and a debriefing for those who have finished activities where new activities can be planned and users will have an opportunity to share their experiences with advice from previous participants may assist in this area.

- Approaches to increase the frequency of logging onto the platform when not directly involved in an active activity may contribute to increased engagement with eTwinning. However, the suggested modifications to the platform such as mobile friendly, message notifications, and a history section where users can see and find what they have already read would be welcome and could contribute to this.

- Time is a barrier linked to several areas including planning, integration into the curriculum, and motivation. Recognition of the work and activities along with the suggested platform modifications may contribute to reducing the challenge of time.

- Participants suggested the following could contribute to engagement and buy-in and support within schools:

  - Regional eTwinning competitions leading to a national competition which will create more recognition at local and national level of participation in the programme.

  - eTwinning schools who can act as role models within the region; job shadowing could be undertaken to share approaches to eTwinning and exchange ideas.

  - Schools within a region partner together for an eTwinning competition focused on a thematic area, with a regional winner and then the regional winners compete at national level.

  - Schools within the same region work on the same topic related to a theme of interest and value to the region with partners across Europe and beyond, leading to the formation of a bank of regionally and curriculum-relevant projects, which can be replicated by other schools in the area, creating a national publication of thematic projects that can be act as a resource bank of ideas.

  - The creation of thematic project clusters where schools map out their projects linking with schools nationally working on the same theme.

- Supports suggested by participants include:

  - Project guides or handbooks based on explicit curricular areas, with specific links to Irish curriculum with class and level. This would address the area of time to develop and integrate into the curriculum.

  - Workshops on how to integrate activities into the curriculum which demonstrates clearly that this does not impinge on class time, which will highlight the value for teachers.

  - A forum for teachers new to eTwinning projects to discuss arising issues and challenges.

  - Assistance with integration into the school.

  - Creation of cluster groups of schools working on similar projects.

  - Use retired teachers as Ambassadors to advise new schools who are interested in eTwinning, where there is more time to engage due to retirement.

  - There were suggestions that the NSS creates projects and partners that schools can join to save time in organising.

  - Run a national competition with regional winners.

  - Guidance on how to select partners and what to check clearly before engaging.

  - Template messages for initial emails to potential partners and what should be included.

  - A financial incentive to upskill to participate in the programme.

  - A bridging fund between Erasmus+ and eTwinning to allow either the receipt or sending of a staff member to or from a partner school.

8.3   The National Support Service (NSS)

The activities undertaken by the NSS in the promotion of eTwinning are clearly working as the first point of encountering the programme is primarily the National Agency. The strategic alliances formed with the PDST and Education Centres are of clear value and demonstrate that the approach to the promotion and the development of the activities are impacting directly on the membership.

The move of the NSS to the new strategic initiatives team within the National Agency demonstrates positive results, with the addition of a second officer, which has created an evidence-based impact on the programme in terms of membership growth. The NSS is catering for a range of needs of a diverse user group from experienced to newcomers as well as stakeholders, which can be complex in the development of supports for each category. As previously stated, relationship building and communication are at the core of the NSS activities. It is continuously adapting, evolving, introducing new approaches, and creating contacts and networks to meet the needs of the eTwinning programme as well as the users, with the goal of mainstreaming eTwinning, with notable success to date. The clear management structures at national and European levels and the highly skilled officers are key to this. However, there is a lack of external visibility of the work undertaken with the main stakeholders in education and the identity of the NSS can become diluted with the range of eTwinning promoters.

The evidence of the reach of the Ambassadors is clear along with the targeting of relevant teacher associations. There is clear evidence within user feedback that some Ambassadors display a high level of activity engaging new users and supporting fewer experienced users, demonstrating the success of the selection process of Ambassadors. The NSS takes a dual approach in the management of eTwinning with a focus on both quality of projects and quantity of registrations. Based on user feedback there are high satisfaction levels with the support in place including the fast response rate to queries. The supports are relevant, regularly updated, and new ones developed in various formats including documents as well as videos to meet the preferred learning styles of a range of users; however, there is a lack of knowledge on the part of some users of the existence of the materials. The increase in Quality Label awardees and applications demonstrates the results of the focus on quality. This also provides rich material and ideas focused on current projects through case studies, news items, experiences of eTwinners, and the outcomes of their activities leading to the awards.

There are indications that newer users are less likely to ask questions or contact the NSS, and this may be the reason for the low uptake in the offer of one to one or participation in training activities for newly registered users.

There is a large risk that 2019 registrations will be negatively impacted by Covid-19. With more than a third of all registrations taking place in 2018 and 2019 since 2005, there is a large body of work to be undertaken to ensure continued engagement with the programme. The dormant account rate for 2014 to 2019 sits currently at 50%, which is lower than the previous period. A key development is the reduction in the time between registration and engagement with eTwinning activities. This has demonstrated clear results particularly in 2019, which should feed into the longer-term engagement of newly registered participants. A random sampling of members from 2014 and 2015 compared to 2018 and 2019 demonstrates that progressing to activities within eTwinning has moved from an average of a year to an average of three months.

The composition of the team is very important to ensure both quantitative and qualitative objectives are met and to address the large risk of dormant accounts appearing, particularly from 2019 as a result of the pandemic, undoing the work of the NSS to date. In addition, there is the risk of lower project uptake and when schools return due to a focus on the changing pandemic situation. Some 27% of participants were not aware of the supports provided by the NSS.

Suggested Recommendations

- Given the range of activities, the objectives, and expansion of the programme and the focus, such as the teacher training initiatives, in order to maintain the current momentum, increase the retention rate of users, and cater for the diversified eTwinning community, two officers are required. However, eTwinning would greatly benefit from a third team member in order to provide support in meeting the growing objectives and maintain the current level of service provision. The evidence of having one officer and partial cover from 2015 to mid-2017 clearly impacted negatively on the programme in terms of registrations and project participation. The results to date with two officers have ensured that the eTwinning programme has progressed and expanded at all levels.

- The NSS could consider developing an eTwinning recovery plan, targeting areas which will be very topical such as well-being, the rise of the far right, racism, the questioning of the validity of science, and the environment. These are European-wide topics and

added value within the classroom may be gained from students seeing that young people across Europe and the world all have similar experiences.

- There is limited information available at national level on how the integration of ICT in the classroom is impacting. The innovative methodologies used within eTwinning are not clear in the descriptions of the projects and not well documented in terms of linkages with the Irish curriculum. However, in the last three years the Irish NSS has refocused its efforts and case studies and blogs published provide more of a focus on how things are done rather than what was done. This assists in creating awareness of the value and benefits for teachers in joining the programme. While there are project kits available, the main challenge for teachers seems to be finding the time to map out the activities and learning against the curriculum. There is an opportunity for eTwinning to lead the way in this respect conducting research to demonstrate the clear impact of the programme in facilitating national and European objectives within the classroom.

- Contemplate a way of increasing the uptake of training for newly registered users. While users have demonstrated a need for relationships offline and outside the eTwinning activities to allow space to discuss, rolling training could be offered to all participants incorporating experiences to discuss their challenges, needs, and activities with peers.

- Given that social media plays more of a role for registered users, consider promoting the work with external stakeholders through this medium or adding a policy development section to the newsletters.

ANNEX ONE SWOT (STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES, OPPORTUNITIES, AND THREATS)

Based on the findings of this review, the main points have been divided into a SWOT analysis. This provides a snapshot of the results of all the activities included in the research highlighting the key messages. While this has been divided into NSS, Users and eTwinning categories for strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats, these are related to that category

Strengths		
NSS	**Users**	**eTwinning**
Relevance	**Relevance**	**Relevance**
• High satisfaction rates with the NSS and supports based on user feedback	• Diverse range of users from the field of school education in terms of subject areas, topics of interest, and countries providing a rich cultural user group	• Relevant to the context of school education providing a clear link with policy and European and national level
• Provides a wide range of support	• Access to platforms to connect outside the classroom and develop relationships with schools across the world	• One stop shop for a range of activities
• Relationship building is at the centre of the programme both on and offline		• The concept and idea are well received and valued by users; overall a positive reception
• Ambassadors from some regions display a high level of activity engaging new users and supporting fewer experienced users	• An alternative way to present the curriculum	• Clear research carried out by CSS demonstrating the value and impact of eTwinning
• Focus on quality and quantity evident in terms of resources and user registrations	• Access to CPD opportunities considered higher quality than alternative offerings	• Thematic focus of activities adapted to reflect the EU context and external environment
• Open communication channels and collaboration between CSS, other NSS and PSAs, and users	• Projects developed linked with national policy	• eTwinning is applicable to all subject areas and not only languages which seems to be a common misconception
• Resources updated and new ones developed in line with advances and trends in the production of information, for example the move to videos from printed documentation	• 29% heard from colleagues; this is encouraging and demonstrates the role users can play in championing eTwinning within their own organisations	• As the programme grew projects became more complex and creative. There is a clear emphasis on the quality of the learning through eTwinning with a student-centred approach
• Adapted activities planned to deliver CPD courses online during the pandemic	• Benefits include 92% Collaborating with other countries, 89% Networking with other professionals, and 88% Skills and knowledge development	
• Created groups offering and discussing supports for primary and post-primary levels at the start of the pandemic		**Support:**
• A range of Ambassadors with varying experiences representing all levels and types of school education, relatable to users	• The development of intercultural skills and intercultural communication for students stands overall at 81%, which would indicate high involvement and contact between students in partner schools from the perspective of the teachers	• Strong management structure at EU and national levels
• Fast response rate and follow up on questions and queries		• Collaboration at between CSS, NSS, and PSAs
• Strong relationship management structures	• The more experienced the user the more concrete the benefits and value of eTwinning is seen by their colleagues and school in comparison to newly registered participants	
• New user registrations aligned with the activities of the NSS		
• Offers direct training to newly registered participants		
• Good practices and ideas can be gained from the dissemination activities focused on current projects through case studies, news items on the national television station, experiences of eTwinners, and the outcomes of their activities as well as the National Quality Award winners and the winners booklet		

Engagement:

- Consistently increased the number of users particularly from 2017
- Reduction in time between initial registration and participation in an activity
- Strong social media presence and identity
- Mechanisms in place to build relationships with new users from the outset
- The move of the NSS to the new strategic initiatives team within the National Agency demonstrates positive results, with the addition of a second officer, which has created an evidence-based impact on the programme
- eTwinning primarily discovered through the National Agency through National Agency events, its website or the NSS directly with a total of 51%
- Social media posts are applicable after a member joins the community and there is little attention paid to the social media posts when not a member of the community
- Successful initiatives implemented through partnership with other strategic initiatives such as the language programme taking a dual approach to the promotion of two programmes and the opportunity to proactively use eTwinning in a curriculum-relevant area
- NSS has moved from a focus of increasing membership to include a clear focus on quality of provision and widened the supports available particularly over the last three years. The impact of this is evident with more registrations, more quality award winners, and quicker and higher engagement rates. A random sampling of members from 2014 and 2015 compared to 2018 and 2019 demonstrates that progressing to activities within eTwinning has moved from an average of a year to an average of three months

Engagement:

- Engagement levels are rising particularly in the last three years with users participating in activities at a quicker rate
- Very positively received by both active and dormant accounts
- Engaged users harness the benefits of the programme and demonstrate a large commitment to the activities
- Established two-way communication with long-term users with the NSS
- Newsletter and promotional activities act as reminders for people who have not logged onto the platform in a while
- Clearly working as an Erasmus+ partner finding tool
- Dormant accounts still engaged in activities initiated on the platform
- 9% adopt a whole school approach to eTwinning and 24% forming part of the school digital strategy given the Digital Schools Strategy 2015 to 2020
- Dormant accounts with projects responded with 71% confirming that eTwinning met their primary goals for joining
- Primary reason for logging onto the platform is linked to project work

Engagement:

- Inclusive and broader appeal than the funded programmes
- Flexibility of the programme
- The range of countries involved within and outside Europe contributing to the intercultural learning
- It is inclusive and is suitable for all levels; there is high engagement among those working with students with additional needs with clear benefits and engagement within the classes
- Increased reference to Erasmus+ was noted in a number of whole school evaluation reports for schools involved in eTwinning in comparison to previous reports.
- Teachers are the primary target group for using eTwinning and this is represented in the platform statistics for Ireland
- The broad spectrum of subject areas demonstrates the applicability of eTwinning to a range of education professionals
- Mobility activities are high value and have a lasting impact

Relevance:

- Nationally known with access to the relevant stakeholders where relationships have been built
- Stakeholders on the Project Advisory Panel are relevant to policy and education and complementary activities
- Clear national management structure linking in with all relevant national bodies
- Sampling of DES Inspectorate Reports was undertaken using several schools that had a high number of eTwinning project; this indicates there is an increase in the number of reports referring to the Erasmus+ programme compared to reports+ in previous years
- Relevant activities to national projects where the PDST, which is using eTwinning Groups as its regional community of practice communication tool
- ICT policy in school education lacked continuity and clear direction; while there has been large investment in infrastructure, policy at national level received renewed impetus with the publication of the Digital Schools Strategy in 2015 and subsequent reference in the 2017 and 2019 action plans

Motivation:

- A total of 30% of the active accounts had roles or areas of responsibility outside their main teaching activities which implies a level of commitment and motivation to undertake additional activities
- A high importance is placed on face to face connection in hearing about the programme. Based on the responses, users are more inclined to join when they hear directly from another person
- The respondents placed value on how joining eTwinning can benefit students as well as the opportunity to explore their own professional development
- Participation in events abroad and hosting partners provides motivation within the organisation for more staff to become involved and contributes to the motivation of students which again highlights the importance of offline relationship building

Needs:

- • The role and scope of the NSS expanded with additional human resources allocated in 2017
- • The strategic alliances formed with the PDST and Education Centres are of value and demonstrate that the approach to the promotion and the development of the activities are clearly impacting directly on the membership

Weakness

NSS	Users	eTwinning
Relevance: - Lack of external visibility of the work linking with the main stakeholders in school education **Barriers:** - Limited resources to increase school visits and have a presence at all events where eTwinning is mentioned or promoted **Support:** - Catering to a range of needs of a diverse user group from experienced to newcomers can be complex in the development of supports for each category	**Barriers** - Barriers include time, recognition, gaining ideas, support within the school - Personal barriers include confidence in IT and testing and piloting activities - Generating ideas for activities - Difficulty contextualising and putting policy into practice - Finding relevant partners - Time barrier is related to finding the space to develop ideas and potential support of a colleague may assist with this aspect. There seems to be a lack of confidence and awareness that the community is continually growing with new people joining all the time - Working in isolation - Lack of ideas on how to motivate students - Challenges finding ideas on how to incorporate it into the classroom - Overcrowded curriculum and pressures to cover current content - Organisation-related barriers such as Wi-Fi and access to equipment - Gaining buy-in from school and staff - Trust was a barrier with a lack of knowledge of the vetting procedure for joining across participating countries - Lack of substitution cover to attend events - Fear of trying new things in the classroom particularly where only one teacher is involved for accountability reasons **Relevance:** - Integration into the curriculum provides a low rate of 14%; however, given that the respondents who selected this have been members for two years or more, this demonstrates that it takes time to integrate eTwinning into the curriculum - 24% who indicated that eTwinning was part of the school's digital strategy would imply that this is at various levels of implementation - Little awareness of the scope and scale of eTwinning in Ireland	**Barriers:** - Challenges with the platform - Within participating organisations a higher value is placed on Erasmus+ project participation, than eTwinning - The benefits for the school sit at a lower percentage and there is limited information provided related to a whole school approach or enhancing teamwork and collaboration within the school. This indicates the composition of the respondents, where 44% are the only person driving eTwinning within their organisation **Relevance:** - Confusion arising between new platforms and websites such as the SEG and DigComp frameworks, lack of clarity how they all fit or are linked **Engagement:** - The assumed and implied status of eTwinning in comparison to funded programmes - Overshadowed by the funded programmes - eTwinning illustrated as an alternative to funded programmes or as a route to funded programmes, providing the impression that it holds a lesser status or that its function is to provide a route to funded programmes. A mixed message is being understood by users - Differences in national approaches and national initiatives across the participating countries where some users receive national funding to complement eTwinning activities according to users where discussions were held at various events - TwinSpace does not provide a full indication of the project work carried out within schools. 60 finalised projects, which took place in 2017 and 2018 were sampled. The selected projects did not receive the National eTwinning Quality Label This demonstrated that 12% of the Irish partners listed had not accessed the TwinSpace at all since the project commenced, 22% had not uploaded any information on the activities which took place within the Irish school, 31% demonstrated gaps in the information provided

Engagement:

- 31% of respondents frequently log onto the eTwinning platform, and this would imply that they log on when not directly involved in a project or an activity

- Lack of clear plan when joining and deciding on a course of action

- Starting with ambitious projects or projects with too many partners

- Based on respondents, a percentage of Erasmus+ participants are using eTwinning as it is strongly recommended and are not using resources or seeing the value of eTwinning as an entity outside Erasmus+ projects

- Those involved in funded projects did not consider themselves active users of eTwinning as the primary purpose for using it was linked to the funded project

- Users are not availing in high numbers of the project kits

- Newer users tend to be hesitant in contacting the NSS

- Relevant activities are carried out by users but not captured on the platform particularly dormant users

- Partner finding at senior cycle levels in terms of age and compatibility

- Users primarily log onto the platform when involved in an activity or seeking to become involved; while this is part of the function of eTwinning, the motivation to log on again is dependent on the user

- Uptake of NSS training for new users sits on average between 25% and 35% which is relatively low but is in line with the ratio of accounts becoming dormant

- The continuous increase in multilateral partnerships in line with the membership growth indicates that a high percentage of new members are commencing with multilateral partnerships, which diminishes accountability and the opportunity to learn more about the platform when a new user due to the large numbers of partners, when not the initiator or coordinator of the project. This is further underlined during a sampling of TwinSpace where details and activities of the Irish partner were missing or incomplete

- 26% have not logged on since their project finished; this accounts for the potential of approximately three-quarters of active accounts becoming dormant once an activity is complete

- Based on the responses from active users already 9% specify that they do not use the platform

- 45% of dormant accounts who did not participate in any projects state that eTwinning met their primary goal, with 45% considering that their goals were somewhat met and 10% stating that their goals for joining were not met at all. Whereas dormant accounts who had projects responded with 71% stating that eTwinning met their primary goals for joining. Even if the dormant accounts had no projects, this does not necessarily mean that they had no engagement; they may have exchanged information and messages with other teachers or participated in some CPD activities. However, it can be stated that there was less engagement with eTwinning than those who had projects and this contributed to lower success rates in terms of meeting their goals for joining the community

- Users stated that they have nothing new to contribute as everyone else is far more advanced

Motivation:

- Focus on results and final outcomes rather than how to get there
- There is an underlying message from the post-primary cohort that it is more applicable for the primary school curriculum in terms of cross-curriculum links as there tends to be the one teacher for all subject areas. It is not considered that primary school teachers may also be working with other teachers as well as learning support teachers
- Relevant activities are carried out by users but not captured on the platform particularly dormant users
- Information and promotion of the total Irish membership would enhance the scope and scale of eTwinning at national level and ensure users were aware of the size of the programme and would contribute to mainstreaming
- Recognition of CPD
- Recognition of the project work and additional skills such as project management, planning, and leadership
- Before registration, it was felt that there was an emphasis on what can be done rather than how it can be done, leading to participants just seeing the end results rather than the steps in getting there which does not assist in managing expectations where there is a lack of awareness of the inputs required to reach the end goal
- If a member does not update their profile and create a small biography outlining their interests, there is a risk that they will not proceed with activities and if they are reluctant to contact potential partners
- Depending on the person and their reasons for joining, there is no active participation until the participant decides on their course of action

Support:

- Lack of dissemination within the organisation upon return from conferences or activities
- 44% of activity is driven by one or two teachers within their classes
- Lack of support within the organisation
- Shortage of awareness of supports available depending on where first encountered eTwinning and then not reading information received on sign-up from the NSS
- Lack of clarity between the work of the NSS and the other programmes within the National Agency
- 41% have not used NSS supports; 20% who have not used supports registered in the last two years

Needs:

- The need for personal relationships and someone to discuss ideas with
- Support within the school where some teachers feel isolated
- Need for a social aspect to membership and the need for a feeling of a sense of belonging to a community
- Interviewees considered that there was emphasis on what can be done and would welcome more input into how things can be done

Threats

NSS	Users	eTwinning
Support: • Should the NSS resources be reduced this will impact negatively on statistics, activities, and mainstreaming even more because of Covid-19 where there is a large body of work to continue to engage and re-engage **Engagement:** • Due to Covid-19 there is a risk that a large percentage of dormant accounts will increase, and the number of new registrations will decrease along with new projects commencing	**Motivation:** Disillusionment can set in when a lot of time is spent on eTwinning outside working hours particularly when there is no buy-in within the organisation • Based on the survey 30% of respondents had additional responsibilities as well as actively engaging with eTwinning; there is a risk that these participants take on too much adding to the time barrier	**Engagement:** • Covid-19 will impact on registrations with the disruption to the school year and the uncertainty surrounding the next academic year and the potential for further disruptions during the next academic year • With Covid-19 there is risk that eTwinning will become a key support for Erasmus+ projects only. This will turn the balance of users to primarily those with Erasmus+ projects. This may mean that eTwinning as a single entity will become subsumed under Erasmus+ Key Action Projects. This will impact on the diversity of projects and limit the pool of partners for non-Erasmus+ funded organisations. It will risk becoming a tool exclusively for funded projects rather than the flexible programme it is currently. This will affect new members who are not actively involved in funded Erasmus+ projects. • Activities are continuing and being developed that are not captured within TwinSpace by both dormant accounts and active accounts where the platform is not used as the primary medium of communication or sharing. These activities share all the characteristics of eTwinning School projects and partners met via the platform

Opportunities

NSS	Users	eTwinning

Engagement:

- The maintenance of communication at the stage between the NSS and the users once a project is complete may encourage continued engagement
- Devise a mechanism for users to encourage logging on when an activity is complete to avoid accounts becoming dormant. The high value placed on offline contact with a person when involved provides opportunities in this area
- When new initiatives are introduced into school education create a promotional campaign indicating how eTwinning can assist with the implementation
- Review common initiatives such as the Green Schools Programme and Yellow Flag Programme to demonstrate how eTwinning can support and enhance these programmes
- Consider mechanisms to promote active engagement, given that the link between the language programmes and eTwinning worked well; another aspect could be piloted in another subject area partnering with a teacher association to run a competition such as maths or geography
- Consider developing a mechanism to increase activity in terms of comments and feed posts as those involved in these activities demonstrate higher engagement overall in activities
- eTwinning has the potential to play a substantial role in bringing international schools together to share experiences and approaches to well-being and work together to stand and unite against racism and explore the validity of the growing anti-science movement. Based on the interviews, project kits, seminars, and tools in these areas, with explicit links to the Irish curriculum, would be a welcome addition supporting teachers in how to approach these topics with their students

Relevance:

- Information and promotion of the total Irish membership would enhance the scope and scale of eTwinning at national level and ensure users were aware of the size of the programme and would contribute to mainstreaming
- Engagement:
- Motivation and engagement can be retained by breaking down the goals into smaller attainable targets and timeframes
- Several new users could share their experience in the form of group or a blog demonstrating that each user has different experiences when initially engaging with eTwinning
- Participants stated that they would welcome examples of how eTwinning is integrated into the school structure as this would provide further ideas on how to improve current situations and would also act as an aid to demonstrate the buy-in of other schools particularly those within the same regions

Needs:
- Project guides or handbooks based on explicit curricular areas, with specific links to Irish curriculum with class and level. This would address the area of time to develop and integrate into the curriculum
- Workshops on how to integrate activities into the curriculum with clear demonstrations that this does not impinge on class time which will highlight the value for teachers
- A forum for teachers new to eTwinning projects to discuss arising issues and challenges
- Assistance with integration into the school
- Creation of cluster groups of schools working on similar projects
- There were suggestions that the NSS creates projects and partners that schools can join to save time in organising
- Run a national competition with regional winners
- Guidance on how to select partners and what to check clearly before engaging
- Template messages for initial emails to potential partners and what should be included
- A financial incentive to upskill to participate in the programme
- A fund in between Erasmus+ and eTwinning to allow either the receipt or sending of a staff member to or from a partner school
- An international book club could be formed, which would allow informal networking among the community
- eTwinning schools who can act as role models within the region; job shadowing could be undertaken to share approaches to eTwinning and exchange ideas

Relevance:

- It would be beneficial if eTwinning could be referenced by name rather than the umbrella of Erasmus+ in Inspectorate Reports as this would assist in underlying the unique opportunities eTwinning can bring beyond the funded activities. This would also contribute to recognition
- There are opportunities for eTwinning to support national policy in school education; this is reflected in the themes and objectives in the project descriptions. There is evidence of the quality of projects increasing and growing in complexity
- Potential to contribute to the development of cross-sectoral cooperation
- Highlight the applicability to the area of STEM
- Recognition of some of the CPD courses with national recognition or European accreditation; European recognition would contribute to providing support for national recognition
- A mechanism to capture activity which is not taking place on the platform but is a continuation of or was initiated with eTwinning would be beneficial and would also demonstrate the sustainability of activities initiated under eTwinning

Barriers:

- There are challenges with the platform; the most pertinent is the need for a mobile friendly platform. This would also assist with uploading, as many people use their phones as cameras and video recorders, and can quickly access the relevant documents. It also allows more freedom in terms of accessing and uploading without having to use a laptop or desktop computer. It would also allow the involvement of more students within the classroom depending on the school policy regarding mobile phone usage
- More recognition of eTwinning would gain more interest and commitment from others within the school allowing the time burden to be shared across more colleagues. The responses from participants who were more engaged with the platform were more specific in terms of the time allocation. It is evident that participants are making efforts with the programme outside working hours. Planning may be a challenge in this area

Support:

- It seems that eTwinning has become part of organisations' digital strategy or is planned for it to become part of the strategy, and therefore an accompanying handbook would assist organisations in this area with the provision of tried and tested examples from more experienced organisations
- Create an eTwinning role of advisor to leverage the expertise of retired teachers/principals to increase school visits
- Highlight the strengths of the Irish education system demonstrating that users have much to contribute, such as the strong areas of inclusion, low dropout rates, high school completion rates, above average performances in standardised tests, and much more
- The introduction of a template to support people in planning their aims, objectives, and goals, with a timeline outlining what they would like to achieve by when. This would help set realistic and focused expectations
- Tools and guidance demonstrating and providing information on how current projects can continue their activities and engage parents/guardians, who can, should school policy and school child protection policy allow, be invited guests to the project to gain more of an understanding of the project activities. It should also include ideas on how to engage students who do not have access to the required devices. A sampling of common project activities with ideas on how to adapt these written by teachers would support this

Motivation:

- Information and promotion of the total Irish membership would enhance the scope and scale of eTwinning at national level and ensure users were aware of the size of the programme and would contribute to mainstreaming
- The NSS offers CPD once a year which qualify for EPV days; more would be welcome as well as recognition of all CPD associated with eTwinning at national level

- Schools within a region partner together for an eTwinning competition focused on a thematic area, with a regional winner and then the regional winners compete at national level
- Schools within the same region work on the same topic related to a theme of interest and value to the region with partners across Europe and beyond, leading to the formation of a bank of regionally and curriculum-relevant projects, which can be replicated by other schools in the area, creating a national publication of thematic projects that can act as a resource bank of ideas
- The creation of thematic project clusters where schools map out their projects linking with schools nationally working on the same theme demonstrating relevance to national policy
- A diagram to show the ICT skills necessary for each activity, to remove the sense that users need to be highly skilled in each area
- Short videos are developed to show how to use applications such as Padlet and how it was used in the practice with real-life examples

Relevance:

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- There are opportunities for eTwinning to support national policy in school education; this is reflected in the theme