



IRELAND UNITED STATES
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Diplomacy in Action

The interchange of knowledge and culture
between the United States and Ireland
via exchange programmes

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Foreword



Vincent McCarthy, President Emeritus IUSA

In 1946, United States Senator J. William Fulbright had an innovative idea to use the power of international educational exchange programmes to create a more peaceful and prosperous world. Over the past seventy years, the United States has invested billions of dollars into 400 plus U.S. Exchange Programs that have positively transformed the lives of over one million U.S. Exchange Alumni. Exchange alumni are helping to strengthen the bonds and links that exist between the United States and countries around the world, including Ireland. These links are people-to-people, cross-sectoral, and intergenerational.

This report represents the first time a research initiative has been undertaken by any national alumni association to understand the impacts of these programmes on the lives of alumni and their communities. It shows that the U.S.-Irish exchange programmes had a profoundly positive effect on alumni's careers with considerable networking and collaboration with U.S. institutions following the exchange visit. One of the key findings relates to the increased understanding of the U.S. political system and a more nuanced view of American social life and values. These results demonstrate how exchange programmes are delivering on Senator Fulbright's original vision and are an invaluable tool to help bridge the divide in a more polarised world.

I would like to thank everyone involved in making this happen including, Dr. Anne Cleary and the UCD Geary Institute, the U.S. Embassy in Dublin, the IUSA Board of Directors and all the alumni who participated in this research project. We hope the insights gained from this report will showcase the value of U.S. State Department funded programmes on U.S. - Irish relations, individual alumni and communities across Ireland. The report will also form the basis for improving the work of the IUSA to ensure alumni have a platform to connect and contribute to our unique relationship across the Atlantic.

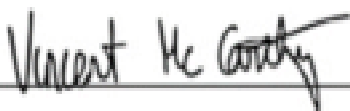


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Executive Summary

- This report describes the educational exchange system which has operated between the United States and Ireland for over six decades. The project was initiated by the Irish United States Alumni Association and funding was obtained from a U.S. Federal Assistance Award. The study was carried out in the Geary Institute for Public Policy in University College Dublin with the author as research director.
- The objective of the study was to describe the main exchange programmes operating between the United States and Ireland, to examine their effectiveness in meeting stated goals and to explore participants' experiences of these programmes. The methodology was primarily quantitative and the analysis was based on two sources - datasets provided by the U.S. Embassy and the Washington Ireland Program which contained basic, anonymised, details on awardees over a twelve-year period and a more detailed study of forty-nine exchange participants drawn from these lists. These exchange alumni were administered a pre-coded questionnaire based on schedules developed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State (ECA) to evaluate such programmes. Findings are presented in aggregate form supplemented by quotations provided by participants in response to a number of open-ended questions.
- Findings demonstrate the extent of the exchange system between Ireland and the United States. Over a twelve year period (2007-2018) almost 1200 people from Ireland participated in these schemes. Participants came from a variety of professional and disciplinary backgrounds but primarily from the Social and Behavioural Sciences and women are now more likely than men to participate in these exchange programmes.
- The study of forty-nine exchange programme alumni revealed a highly educated group of people who came primarily from the Irish public sector including Higher Education. While in the United States they were engaged in observational visits, academic activity or placements in Government and NGO settings. As with the larger group studied, they were usually located on the East Coast of the U.S. during the exchange visit.
- Satisfaction with the exchange experience was extremely high – whatever the type or length of the programme. Impact was analysed using a framework to measure outcome derived from similar studies and results demonstrated that the goals of these exchange programmes were largely met. Participants reported significant gains in terms of knowledge and understanding of American culture and politics. In relation to the application of this knowledge, findings implied a substantial impact on careers and professional output. There was evidence of collaboration and networking with U.S. colleagues following the exchange visit and dissemination of information about the exchange experience to colleagues and others.
- Alumni identified strongly with the goals of the programmes they had participated in and had a shared interest in using their experiences for the public good and to progress Ireland-US relations. They were keen to engage with other exchange participants to advance these aims and considered alumni to be a relatively untapped resource in this respect. To ensure alumni engagement they proposed linking with exchange participants in the immediate aftermath of the programme and ensuring long-term involvement via networking groups based on professional or special interests. Other suggestions focused on the overall goals of exchange programmes and how outcome could be improved in terms of U.S.-Ireland relations and national objectives. A co-ordinated approach to the exchange system, along with periodic review, was advocated in order to coalesce knowledge gains, progress transatlantic interchange, pursue Irish cultural and economic goals in the United States and meet the requirements of policy makers, funders and the public.

Introduction

Educational and cultural exchanges are a form of public diplomacy, aimed at the promotion of mutual understanding through interpersonal contact (Sevin 2015; Kim 2016; Bettie 2019). The principle goal of all United States exchange programmes, as set out in the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act 1961, is to promote international relationships, strengthen ties, and promote cooperation for educational and cultural advancement (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2005; 2006). These exchanges are an extension of traditional diplomacy and although they do not have an explicitly political agenda they can advance national interests and achieve foreign policy goals through mutual understanding, informing and influencing (Bettie 2019). In this way exchange participants have been referred to as culture carriers and the face-to-face interaction between cultures which arises from the exchange system has been shown to alter perceptions and reduce negative stereotypes in relation to the United States (de Lima 2007:237). Yet, despite the positive outcomes associated with these exchange programmes, diplomacy underpinned by educational and cultural policy has been described as the neglected aspect of U.S. foreign relations with the rest of the world (Mulcahy 1999). Although this form of diplomacy is in existence since the 1940s it has been used with varying degrees of emphasis by the United States Government since that time. After the Cold War budgets for exchange programmes waned but in the aftermath of 9/11 the U.S. Government appeared to turn once again to this form of diplomacy and increased funding for programmes such as Fulbright (Bellamy and Weinberg 2008; Kim 2016).

Since these exchange partnerships were formally introduced to Ireland in the 1950s thousands of Irish citizens have been involved in such programmes. The process has prospered under various political administrations both here and in the US and has been notable for cross-party support in both jurisdictions. And these programmes appear to be achieving their objectives. An evaluation of the International Visitor Leadership Program indicated that the programme yielded “a profound and long-lasting impact on alumni” (ECA 2006:3) in terms of improving foreign participants’ perceptions of the United States and the American people, increasing participants’ understanding of democratic values and principles, and promoting mutual understanding between participants and their U.S. counterparts. A similar evaluation of the Fulbright programme (ECA 2005) stated that “The Visiting Fulbright Scholar Program is resoundingly meeting its legislative mandate of increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries” (Sevin 2015). Despite these positive findings and the important diplomatic rationale for their existence, public awareness of the exchange system is relatively low and programmes tend to be perceived in terms of individual careers and agendas. The individual dimension to exchange programmes, in that the ostensible focus is on the person’s career or educational progression, contributes to this perception and professional development has been identified as a critical goal by exchange participants (Kim 2016). Output from academic- or business-related synergies arising from these programmes do occasionally get public attention but more generally the impact remains at the level of individual, primarily academic, stories. Another reason for the lack of public awareness is the absence of published data relating to these programmes in the United States and in participating countries including Ireland. Programmes are infrequently assessed partly because the outcome of public diplomacy projects may be difficult to capture (Sevin 2015). As Sevin (ibid:562) notes “projects tend to yield changes on intangible concepts such as awareness and attitudes and these changes occur over a long-time period and cannot be directly attributed to them.” Yet, as Sevin (2015:567) suggests, it is possible to track the effects of exchange programmes by using impact indicators such as public relevance and opinion and the ECA is now in the process of creating a comprehensive performance monitoring system for all programmes under its aegis. Reviewing the benefits of the educational exchange programmes (there are more than 400 U.S. exchange programmes) and disseminating this information is important for funding as well as for strategic purposes in that programmes need to be tactically designed to serve as effective public diplomacy tools for the United States (Bellamy and Weinberg 2008). Sevin (2015) concludes that these exchange programmes, if strategically organised, could become an effective tool for transforming participants into cultural ambassadors and two commissioned reports from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State (ECA 2005; 2006) confirm this finding. In Ireland similarly positive reviews have emerged from the evaluation of programmes such as the Washington Ireland Program (Mountgomery 2012).

A review of programmes would help to identify the benefits to both the United States and to Ireland, help to tailor the exchange system to contribute to national goals and harness the power of alumni to promote these aims. In this way Global Ireland, the Strategy for the US and Canada 2019–2025 (Government of Ireland 2019) aims to

significantly increase Ireland's influence across the world and enhancing relations between the U.S. and Ireland is viewed as central to this endeavour. As this report implies exchange programmes could make an important contribution to building economic and cultural partnerships and promoting our reputation in the United States as they represent ready-made structures and networks of collaboration within the U.S. In light of these issues this research initiative of the Irish United States Alumni Association is timely and was made possible by a U.S. Federal Assistance Award. The report describes a system of cultural diplomacy which has been on-going between the United States and Ireland for over six decades and the main objective is to describe the principal U.S. exchange programmes operating in Ireland and describe their effectiveness in terms of meeting goals and participants' experiences.

Methodology

This research project was initiated by the Irish United States Alumni Association and funding was obtained from a US Federal Assistance Award. The project was carried out in the Geary Institute for Public Policy in University College Dublin by the author with the assistance of Dr. Barbara Moore. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (Evaluation Division) were supportive of this endeavour and some of the items in the questionnaire come from assessment schedules they are developing for use across all ECA exchange programs. The study information came from two main sources – anonymised datasets of exchange participants (2007-2018) provided by the US Embassy and the Washington Ireland Program which contained basic information on programme participants – the exchange programme they participated in, year, type of host institution etc. This information forms the basis of the findings in the initial part of this report which provides descriptive detail about the exchange programmes. The main section of this report is based on a more detailed study of forty-nine exchange alumni (drawn from the larger dataset) from the four main exchange programmes operating between the United States and Ireland (Fulbright, International Visitor Leadership Program, The Irish Institute at Boston College and the Washington Ireland Program). Programme alumni were contacted by the U.S. Embassy or the Washington Ireland Program and asked to participate and contact and other identifying details were not made available to the researchers. The invitation to participate contained a description of the study plus ethical details relating to the voluntary nature of involvement, anonymity and confidentiality, including the use and disposal of data gathered. Prior to interview respondents were again reminded of these ethical issues and their permission sought to proceed. No specific personal details were recorded other than gender and information was primarily collected via pre-coded categories which are presented in summary form. In the report no details are provided which might identify the participants and if quotes (based on a number of open-ended questions) were included they were anonymised and additional permission was sought from participants to use these quotations. Respondents were self-selected in that they responded to an invitation to participate and although the response rate was relatively low (7%) the sample which emerged was well balanced and included a good proportion of people from all the main exchange programmes. The distribution of respondents across the programmes is not included in this report as this might identify participants due to the relatively small numbers involved. The research focused on participants' experiences and outcome in individual and programme terms. Data were gathered using a questionnaire with thirty-three questions divided into four sections which collected information on the awardee and the programme, the impact of participation in the programme and attitudes to participation. The questions were mainly pre-coded but there was a small number of open-ended questions to allow participants more freedom to express ideas about the programmes. The questionnaire sections and items were drawn from the assessment protocols currently in development by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Evaluation Division (ECA 2018) for use in exchange programmes. Participants were mainly interviewed face-to-face or online but some respondents choose to self-complete the questionnaire. This is a pilot project but the data do provide important information on the extent and reach of these programmes and how they are meeting stated goals at the individual and broader, strategic, level.

Exchange programmes operating in Ireland

There are four main exchange programmes operating between the United States and Ireland – Fulbright, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), the Boston College-Irish Institute scheme and the Washington Ireland Program. The J-1 program is a more nebulous set of programmes outside the remit of the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), the most popular of which is the summer work and travel visa. Data relating to the J1 programme are included in the initial results but alumni from this programme were not included in the in-depth element of the study.



The Fulbright Program, the largest U.S. international exchange programme, was set up by Senator William Fulbright in 1946 and is sponsored by the US Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). The Fulbright Program in Ireland was established in 1957 and was initially administered by An Bord Scoláireachtaí Cómalairte (The Scholarship Exchange Board). In 1988 a bilateral agreement was signed between Ireland and the U.S. and in 1991 the Ireland-United States Commission for Educational Exchange (The Fulbright Commission) was established. The Fulbright Commission in Ireland is therefore a bilateral partnership supported by the U.S. Department of State and the Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and its funding is derived from the Irish and U.S. governments, higher education institutions and public organizations. The Commission annually awards grants for Irish citizens to study, research, or teach in the U.S. and for Americans to do the same in Ireland and since its formation over 2,000 postgraduate students, scholars, professionals, and teachers have participated in the programme.



**International Visitor
Leadership Program**
U.S. Department of State

The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) is the U.S. Department of State's premier professional exchange program and is designed to build mutual understanding between the United States and other countries and to support the foreign policy goals of the United States. The IVLP programme began in 1940 and more than 200,000 people have participated in this scheme with participants selected by Foreign Service Officers at U.S. Embassies around the world. The programme consists of short-term, customised, visits to the United States for current or emerging leaders and is designed as an opportunity for participants to expand their professional knowledge base, to develop leadership skills, and to enable them to cultivate links with their American counterparts. While relatively brief, these visits frequently result in linkages which lead to international partnerships and alumni are encouraged to remain connected to the people they meet throughout the programme. Since 1972, The Institute of International Education (IIE) in Washington, DC, has administered the IVLP and working with the U.S. Department of State, they have developed programmes that address the interests of the international participants, facilitate conversation around key global and domestic issues, demonstrate the diversity of the United States and address U.S. foreign policy goals. Programme themes have included Arts and Culture, Science and Technology, Counter-Terrorism, Democracy and Human Rights, Women's Issues, Energy Resources and the Environment and International Crime.



The Irish Institute Boston College Center for Irish Programs

The Irish Institute at Boston College, under the auspices of the Center for Irish Programs, offers professional development programmes to facilitate personal, corporate, and professional educational exchanges with the goal of promoting lasting peace on the island of Ireland. The Irish Institute hosts officials and policymakers from Ireland and Northern Ireland for professional development programmes in areas such as government, non-profit, business, and education. The aim is to contribute to social, political, and economic stability on the island of Ireland through cross-community and cross-border cooperation. Participants are introduced to successful U.S. models of practice and offered an opportunity for cultural and professional exchange that promotes mutual understanding between Ireland, Northern Ireland, and the United States. The focus is on creating and maintaining personal and professional links between people from the three jurisdictions. Since its inception in 1997, more than 1,200 decision-makers from all social, economic, and political sectors have participated in over one hundred Irish Institute programmes. Programmes balance on-campus seminars led by Boston College faculty with site visits to innovative and effective industry leaders in Massachusetts and across the United States. Topics addressed include social enterprise, executive leadership, innovation in marine economies and renewable energy, political leadership, access for the disabled, and business development. The Institute receives annual funding from Boston College, the United States Congress through the U.S. Department of State, the Bureau of Cultural and Educational Affairs (ECA), as well as through external business partnerships.



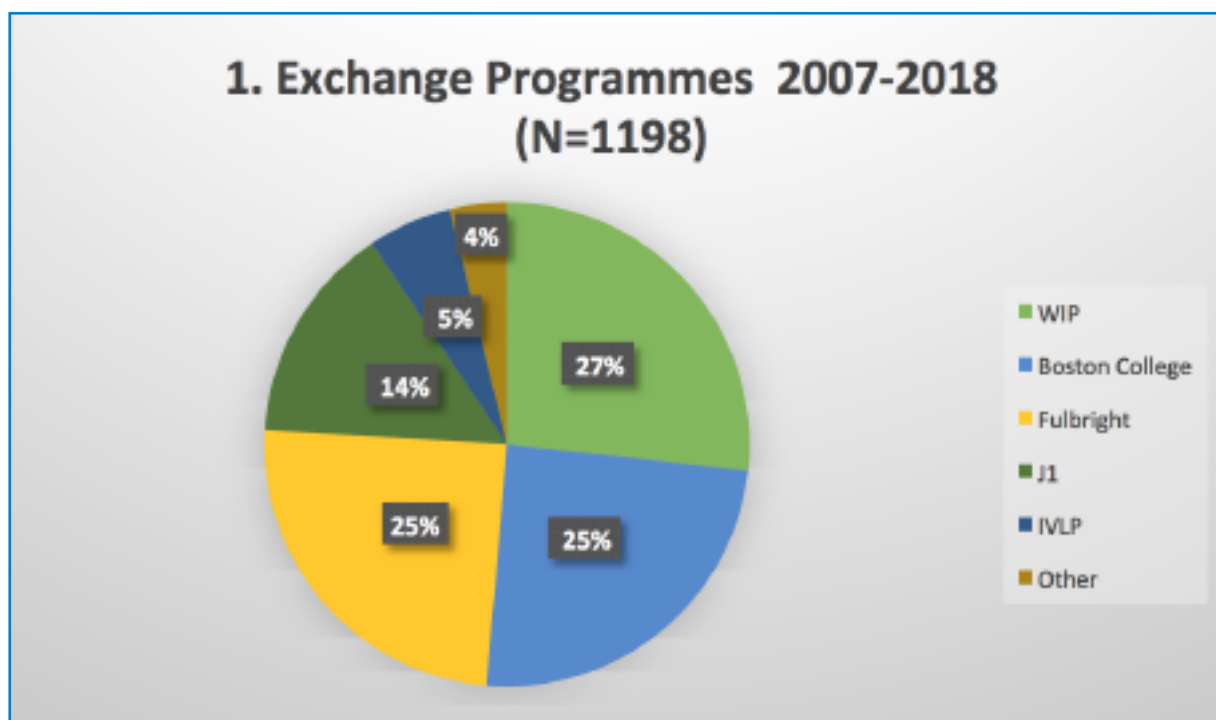
WASHINGTON IRELAND PROGRAM FOR SERVICE & LEADERSHIP

The Washington Ireland Program (WIP) is a U.S. based not-for-profit organisation which focuses on developing leaders through a programme of personal development, policy debate, and community service and includes an 8-week internship generally within government in Washington DC. WIP was established in 1995 to facilitate a new generation of leaders in Northern Ireland to assist the emerging peace process. Initially the programme focussed on participants from Northern Ireland only but this was extended in 2002 to include people from the island of Ireland. The aim was to provide future leaders from North and South with an opportunity to engage in discussion and debate on the future of Ireland and Northern Ireland and to enable the development of mutual understanding and a cross-border network of future leaders. WIP's operations are overseen by a Board and a local volunteer committee, comprised of members from Ireland and Northern Ireland (chaired by a Northern Ireland member of the WIP Board), promotes the programme locally and has oversight of the recruitment and selection process. While the content and format of the programme has evolved over time, a number of core elements have remained constant and these include skills training and development through Washington DC based professional internships, personal and leadership development, and community service at home and in Washington DC. During their time in the United States participants stay with host families to provide them with a more authentic experience of life in the United States. In recent years the programme has incorporated a requirement for participants to produce a paper related to political reform in Ireland, Northern Ireland and relations between both countries, as a tangible and practical output for the curriculum.

Results

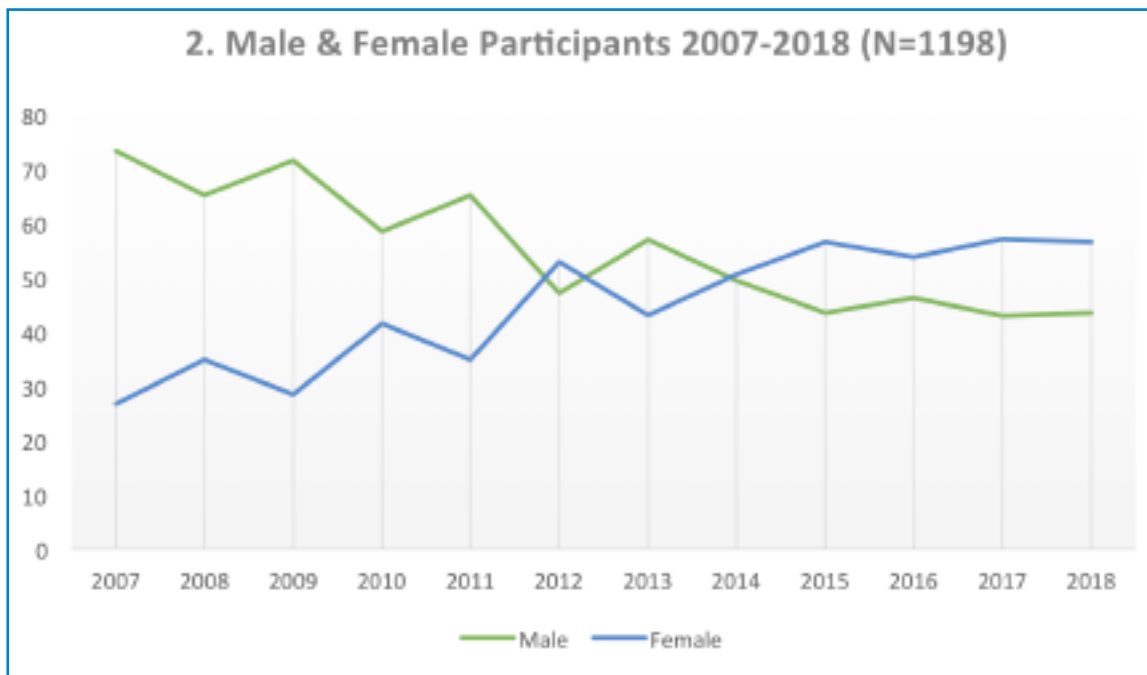
The extent and reach of United States-Irish Exchange Programmes

The first set of data is based on anonymised information supplied by the US Embassy and the Washington Ireland Program and shows the distribution of participants in U.S.-Ireland exchange programmes between 2007 and 2018. The five programmes included are Fulbright, the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), Boston College Irish Institute scheme, the Washington Ireland Program (WIP) and the JI programme. The Fulbright and IVLP programmes were initiated in the US in the 1940s but Fulbright did not operate formally in Ireland until the late 1950s from which time thousands of Irish citizens have participated in the exchange process. The Washington Ireland Program and the Boston College Irish Institute project are more recent initiatives but a considerable number of people have participated in these programmes which share a strategic interest in North-South collaboration and reconciliation. The JI programme represents a series of mainly short-term initiatives, the most popular of which is the Summer Work and Travel Visa. Data for the 12-year period (2007-2018) illustrate the extent of the exchange system and provide an indication of the numbers involved since the inception of this process in Ireland in the 1950s. The total number of participants during the study period was 1198 and Diagram 1 demonstrates their relative importance with Fulbright, WIP and the Boston College Irish Institute programmes dominating.



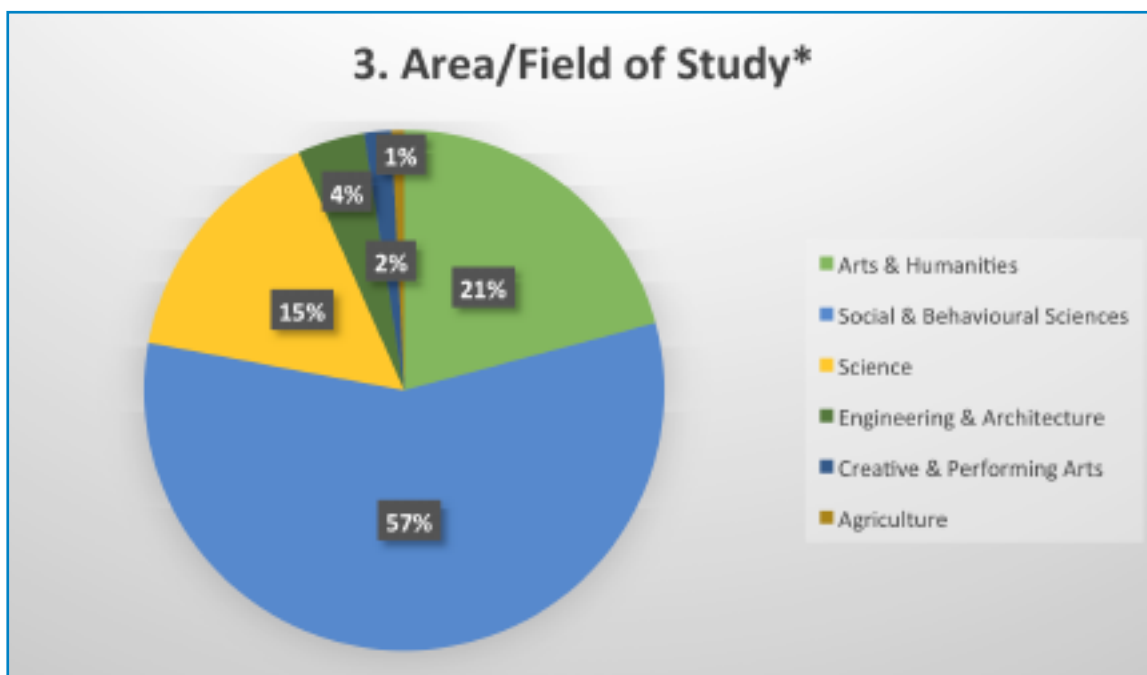
Gender

In gender terms more men than women (54% compared to 46%) participated in these programmes over the 12-year period but this masks a significant rise in female participation. As diagram 2 illustrates women are now more likely to participate in these programmes.



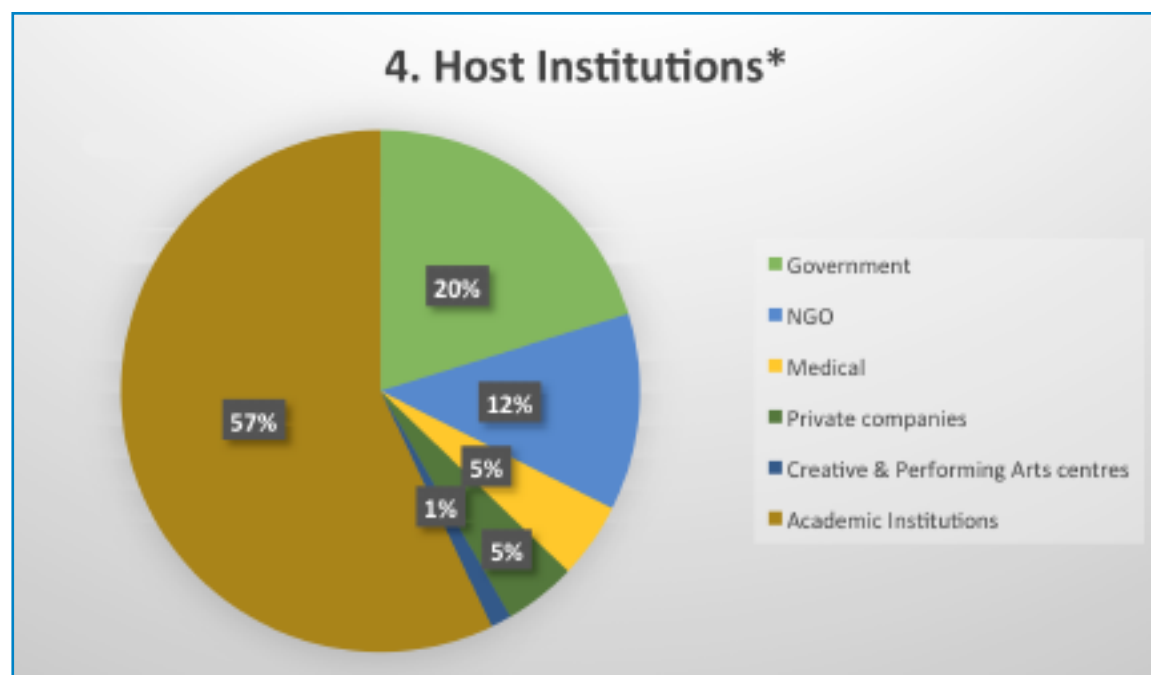
Disciplinary and professional background of alumni

In terms of disciplinary background (Diagram 3) participants came primarily from the Social and Behavioural sciences followed by Arts and Humanities and Science and Medicine. However, this information was missing for 40% (475) of the participants and the data presented are probably more reflective of Fulbright awardees who tend to come from an academic background. The International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) which was set up in the U.S. in 1940 and gained traction some decades later in Ireland, has included relatively more participants from business and the public sector. The Washington Ireland Program has focused on developing political and leadership skills in young people and shares with the Boston College Irish Institute an interest in North-South issues and reconciliation, drawing participants from across the political and religious spectrum.



*N=723 (data were missing for 475 participants)

Host institutions (Diagram 4) reflect the profile relating to disciplinary interest with the majority of participants going to academic institutions but approximately one third were affiliated with government or Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) which is more reflective of programmes such as IVLP and WIP. Exchange participants on shorter stays do visit sites and organisations outside Washington DC and in fact multi-site visits are a feature of the IVLP programme.



*N=1039 (data were missing for 159 participants)

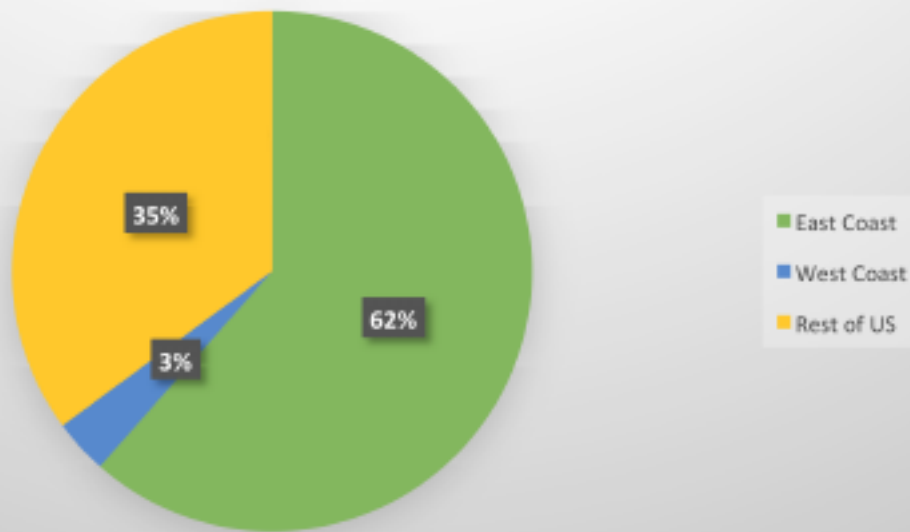
The location of exchange participants in the United States

Exchange participants were sited in almost every state of the US but, as Diagram 5 demonstrates, participants were overwhelmingly concentrated along the East Coast states and especially in Boston (Massachusetts) and in Washington (DC). This reflects the particular focus and organisational hubs of the Washington Ireland Program, the Boston College Irish Institute programme, and the IVLP (International Visitor Leadership Program) although the latter programmes involve mandatory visits to sites and organisations outside Washington DC. Academic-based visits (generally Fulbright Awardees) also tend to accumulate along the East Coast States where many of the Ivy League universities are located while the West Coast sites are mainly Stanford and universities in the University of California system.

While this geographical distribution of participants has a rationale in terms of programme focus and organisation it tends to omit a large swath of the United States and the diversity of political and cultural attitudes which this implies. This issue emerged in the detailed study described below and was exemplified in a quotation from a participant when she/he was asked about key memories of the exchange visit.

Two memories come to mind. First, landing in the airport in (US city mentioned) on a very snowy day in winter and realising the challenges of living in this environment, in rural (State mentioned), with these weather conditions. It was life in rural America, far away from the cities which sometimes are seen to exemplify the U.S. Second, living with a farming family in rural (State mentioned), which really grounded one in terms of normal America and the lives of many American people. Apart from the social aspects it also heightened my knowledge of the interface between people, politics and their political representatives – which was more like Ireland than I imagined. (Participant 33)

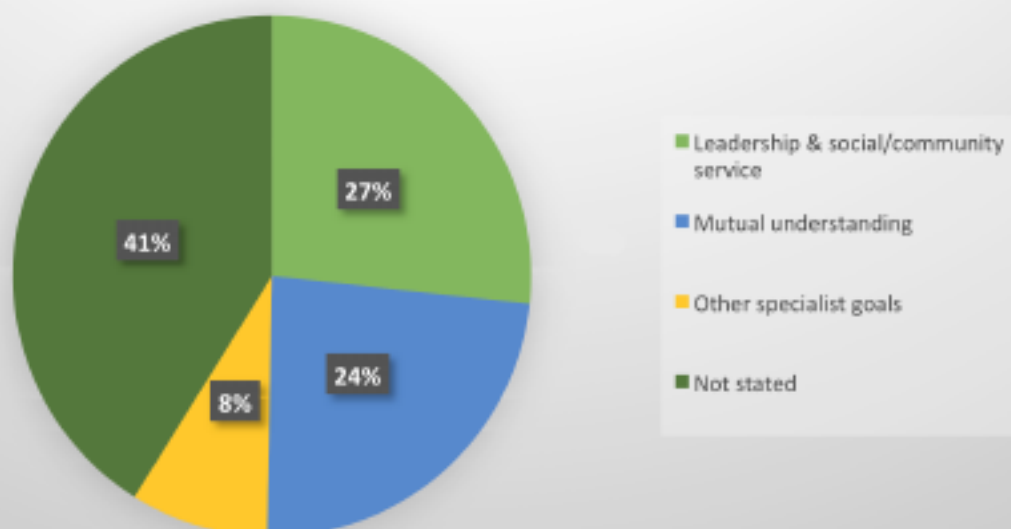
5. Location of Participants in US (N=1198)



Programme Goals

The movement of people between Ireland and the United States via exchange programmes is primarily to facilitate mutual understanding and this is a stated goal of many of the programmes. As Diagram 6 illustrates this represents the strategic goal of approximately one quarter of the awards. However, goals were not stated for a considerable number of programmes or specific, thematic, aims were supplied (rather than the underlying strategic goal) and this was especially so in relation to IVLP programme.

6. Programme Goals (N=1198)

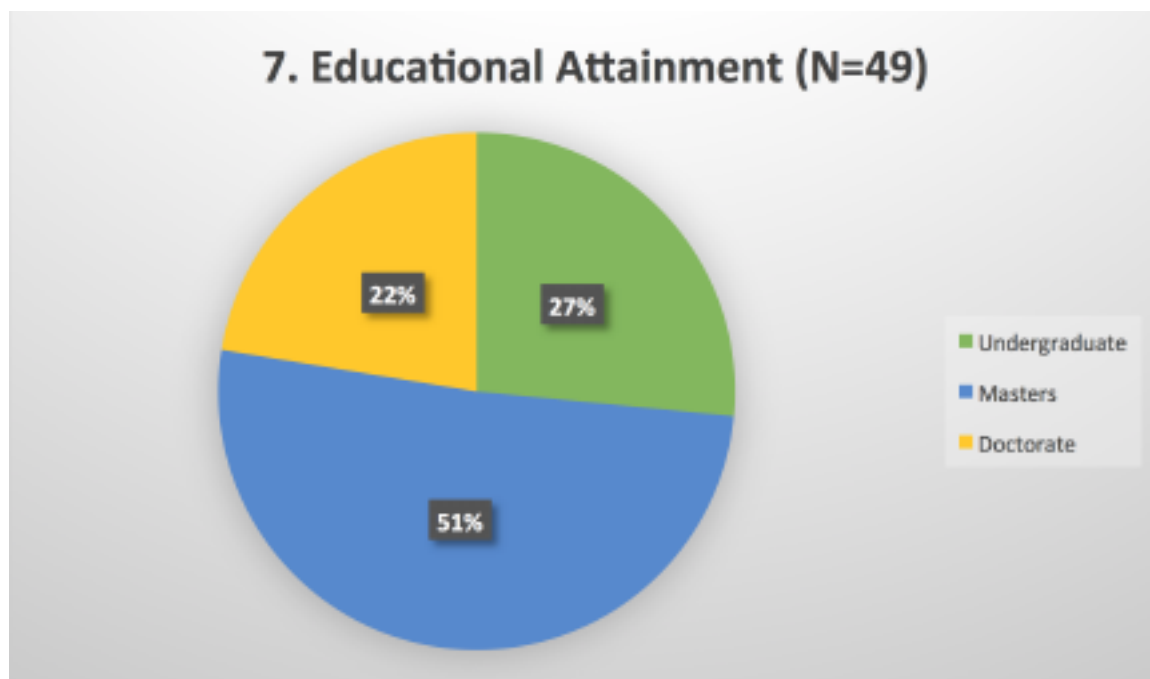


Exchange Programmes: Outcomes and Participants' Experiences

The second part of this report focuses on a study of forty-nine exchange participants who were mainly interviewed face-to-face or online. The research focused on participants' experiences and outcome in individual and programme terms. Data were gathered using a pre-coded questionnaire which collected information on the awardee and the programme, the impact of participation and attitudes to the programme. The questionnaire items were drawn from assessment protocols currently in development by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs Evaluation Division (ECA 2018) to assess exchange programmes. There were a number of open-ended questions, to allow participants more freedom to express ideas about the programmes, and some of these responses are included in the following sections.

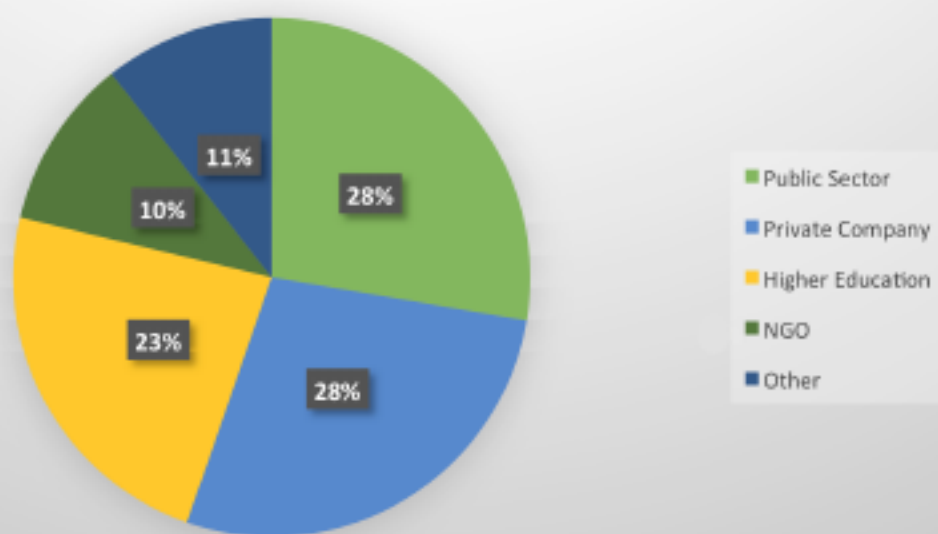
Participants' professional and disciplinary background

The majority (59%) of the participants identified as male which reflects the male-female distribution of awardees over the 12-year time period of the study. As Diagram 7 illustrates they were a highly educated group in that over three-quarters of the participants had a postgraduate degree and 22% had a doctorate and this is in line with programme goals and recruitment strategies.

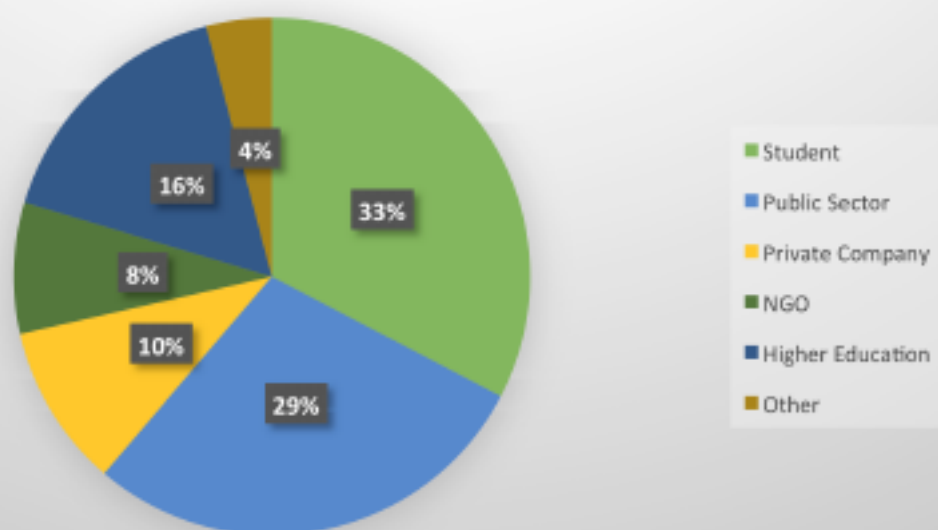


In terms of their employment background (Diagram 8) participants came primarily (51%) from the public sector which includes Higher Education and 28% came from private industry. There appears to be an over-representation of respondents from the private sector in terms of the profile of all participants for the period (2007-2018) presented above and might indicate on-going alumni engagement or more positive feelings towards the exchange process. Over one quarter of the study participants came from government departments or agencies, just over one fifth (22%) worked in academia and 10% worked in Non-Governmental Organisations. None of the participants were currently students although one third had been students on entry to the programmes (Diagram 9) at which point 45% came from the public sector including Higher Education and 19% from private industry. These variables – educational attainment and professional background - indicate that these people were well placed to act as influencers which is in line with the goals of US exchange programmes and information provided at interview (but not included in this report to ensure confidentiality) confirms this.

8. Present Work Background



9. Work Background on Entry to Programme



Programme curriculum and activities

As Diagram 10 demonstrates the programmes were introducing people to the United States who, in general, had little previous experience of the U.S. which would also seem to be in line with exchange programme objectives. Less than one fifth of participants had previously lived in the United States and then usually for a brief period of time. The remaining participants had never been in the United States or had visited for a short holiday stay although 12% had been engaged in collaborative work with U.S. colleagues. Participants found out about the programme mainly from colleagues (42%) or a university source (24%) or the U.S. Embassy (20%) and the latter organises the selection process for the IVLP programme.

10. Previous contact with United States

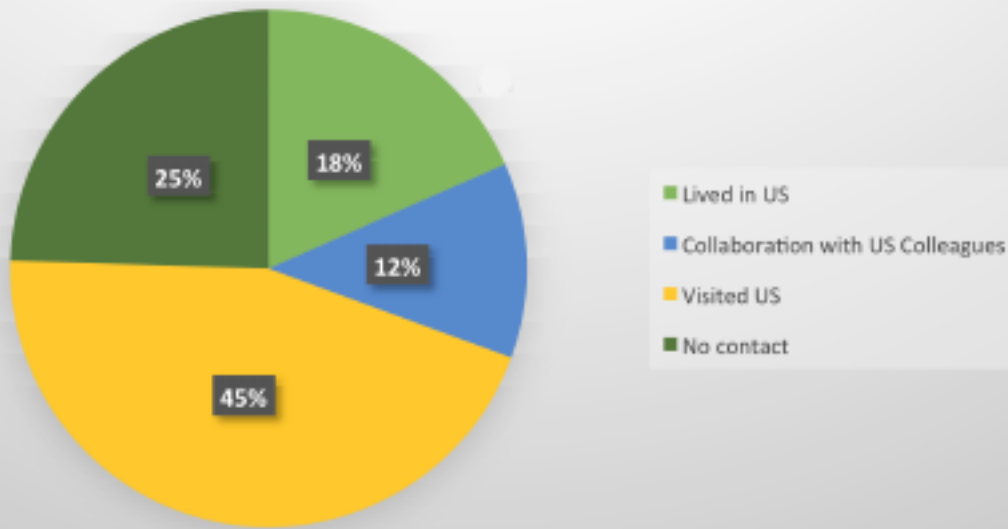
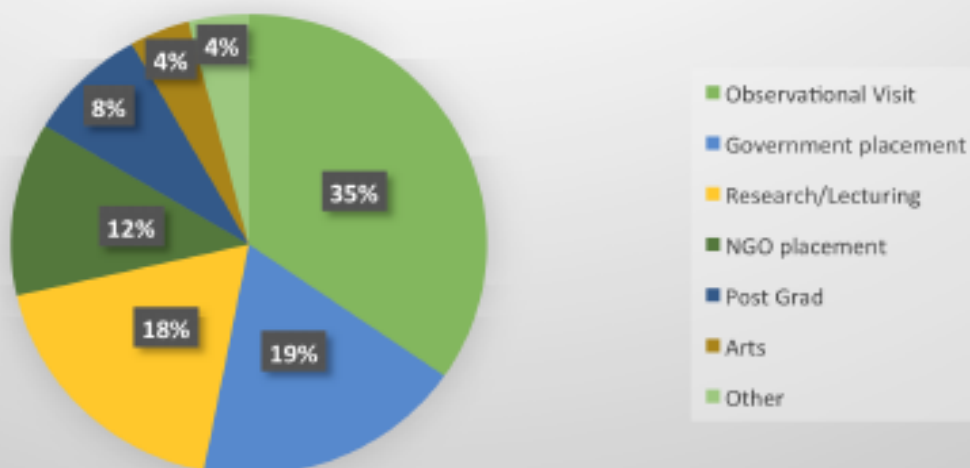
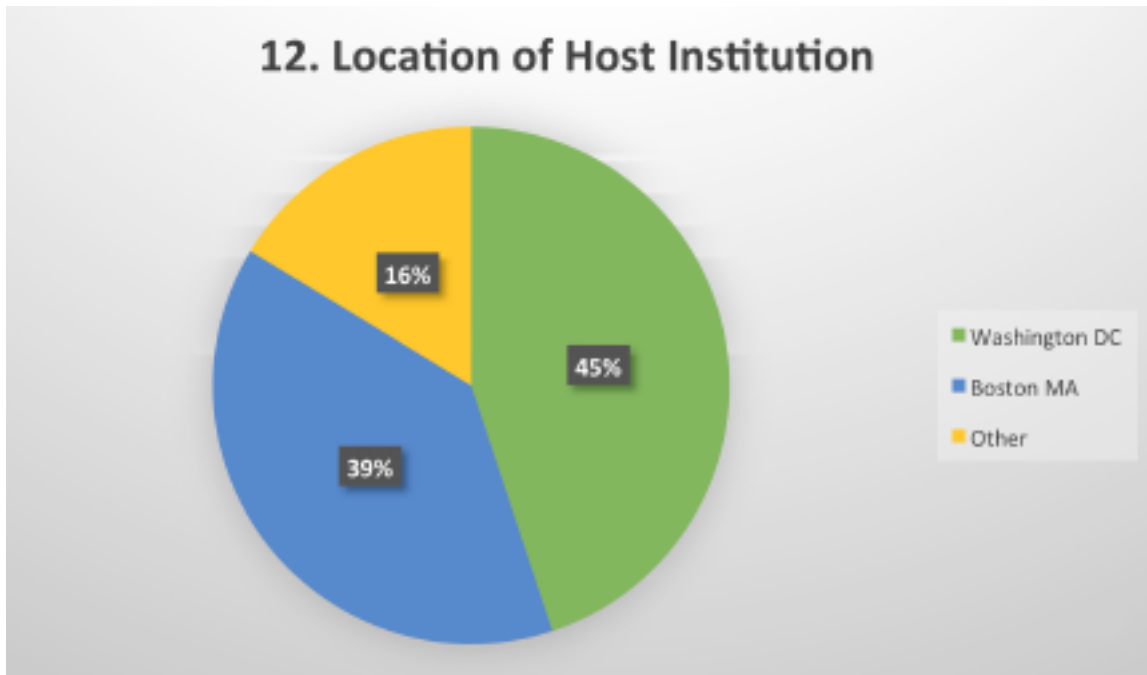


Diagram 11 illustrates the main purpose and content of these exchange visits. Over one third of participants were engaged in an observational tour combined with customised visits to various organisations. This refers particularly to the IVLP programme which involves outreach visits aligned with the goals of the specific program and participants' professional backgrounds. This programme is concentrated within a relatively short period of time and requires a high level of engagement – a feature participants frequently alluded to. About one quarter were involved in academic activity which generally refers to Fulbright awardees and close to one third were on placements in government or NGO settings which reflects the Washington Irish Program and Boston College Irish Institute activities. Participants in the Fulbright and Washington Ireland programmes tend to spend a longer period of time in the United States although Fulbright consists of individual placements while WIP is a more group based programme. These differing features might imply difficulties in comparing the programmes and participants' experiences but the focus in this study is on the strategic basis and outcome goals of these exchange programmes. The location of participants in the U.S. (Diagram 12) reflects the larger dataset in that they were primarily sited on the East Coast and especially in Boston and Washington DC. This reflects, as cited above, the organisational hubs of the programmes and does not include the visits made outside these cities which are an integral part of programmes such as the International Visitor Leadership Program.

11. Professional Activity during Exchange Visit



12. Location of Host Institution



Outcome and experience of the programme

While the overall strategic goals of U.S. exchange programmes are established in legislation there is variability in how this is operationalised within individual programmes. As mentioned in the Introduction to this report, the general premise is that exchange programmes contribute to mutual understanding between the United States and participating countries and in this way are part of the U.S. system of cultural diplomacy. Yet, there is relatively little empirical knowledge about the outcomes of these programmes and if and how they meet general and specific objectives. The resource implications of evaluation along with a lack of standardised outcome indicators has resulted in few assessments of U.S. exchange programmes in Ireland and elsewhere. The ECA (ECA 2018) is developing indicators and schedules to address this issue and these instruments form the basis of this study. Further guidelines for the analysis of outcome are provided by a previous evaluation of the IVLP program (ECA 2006) which lists four programme outcomes compatible with all ECA-sponsored exchange programmes - alumni satisfaction, professional and cultural Learning, the application of this knowledge and the development of linkages and networks. These items are similar to indicators developed by Kim (2016) for these programmes which include professional and cultural development, leadership enhancement, and networking.

The findings of this study are mainly presented as aggregate data, arising from responses to pre-coded questions, but participants' quotes (elicited via open-ended questions) which provide more detail regarding attitudes to the exchange visit, are also included. In the following sections these quotes are followed by the number assigned to the respondent.

Attitudes to the exchange programme

There were very high levels of satisfaction with the exchange visits – whatever their type or length – and this satisfaction extended to the structure and content of the exchange visit. Almost all (98%) the participants expressed satisfaction with the programme in terms of opportunity to learn, to gain professional experience, do research and a similar high percentage (96%) were satisfied with the support provided during their visit. More generally the visit exceeded expectations as the following quotes imply.

The programme surpassed all my expectations in terms of academic, cultural and social benefits. (12)

The programme greatly exceeded my expectations. It was a much broader programme than I expected and due to this I learned much more than I anticipated. (6)

Definitely expectations were met and exceeded. My expectations were very high going into it because once I was accepted onto the programme I met with other people who were on it previously and they really sold it to me. My expectations were probably as high as they could be and they were definitely exceeded. It was a mix of how they set us up and got everything prepared in advance, and it was also how we worked as a group. The participants, we got on really well, and I think we bonded quite quickly and that really helped to enhance the U.S. experience. (44)

Participants who mentioned that the visit exceeded their expectations often related this to the programme curriculum and the fact that it was customised to their professional interests and provided access to senior levels of government and other agencies. In this way participants considered they gained a considerable amount of knowledge, even when on relatively short visits, as the programmes were well organised and they had access to high levels of expertise.

The experience exceeded my expectations, it did really. The attention to detail by the organisers, the State Department, was impressive and ensured as broad an experience as possible for a visit of this duration. I was given access to an extensive array of organisations, places and people. I engaged with people and organisations from grassroots to national, governmental, level. There were no limits and I was free to progress issues as I wished. (33)

I didn't think I would get the level of access that I did and the level of autonomy, being able to meet people and do things. (45)

Overall a fantastic program. Very well structured overall ... Although a short visit, such programmes have a significant effect on you and your work. (25)

I honestly had no expectations going out on the exchange, but the professionalism of my host organisation and the warmth of reception at my host family was way beyond anything I experienced previously. (48)

Knowledge Gains: Professional and cultural learning

There were good learning outcomes across a range of indicators which form part of the rationale for U.S. exchange visits and these items were measured using ECA questions which tap into these features. Outcomes under this heading include increased knowledge and understanding of the United States, its institutions, cultural values, and its people. Outcomes under this heading include increased knowledge and understanding of the United States, its institutions, cultural values and its people. The extent of the knowledge gained was dependent to some extent on the duration of the programme, as mentioned above, but relatively short visits often yielded significant results in terms of knowledge gain. Longer visits, usually indicative of Fulbright awards, might imply exposure to a greater range of cultural experiences but this is largely the responsibility of the individual her/himself as well as the opportunities available. Participants on shorter, more highly organised, exchange visits are frequently involved in a great variety of professional and cultural experiences concentrated over a shorter time period.

Table 1: Knowledge gained about U.S. culture, politics, education, economy

	Little/None %	Some %	Great Deal %
Culture/Way of Life	4	27	69
Political System	2	22	76
Educational System	35	33	32
U.S. Economy	14	49	37
US/Ireland relations	23	22	55

N=49

As Table 1 demonstrates, participants on all programmes felt they had learned a considerable amount about the United States and particularly about its culture and political system. This reflected the specific focus of some programmes but considerable knowledge of these topics was apparent amongst all respondents. The curriculum of the programmes contributed to this as did the access they were given to senior personnel and to key environments in terms of U.S. political and cultural life.

I got incredible experience and insight into American politics. (49)

When I was there the Iran nuclear deal was going through the Senate, ... my senator was on the Foreign Relations Committee and I was helping the foreign relations team because I was 'the foreigner' in the office. So I got to go to that hearing with the Secretary of State, Secretary of the Treasury, Secretary of Energy, and take notes and feed them back to the rest of the team and the Senator. So that was pretty cool, because that was all over the news. Yeah, it really was very cool. (45)

Amazing opportunities that many other people wouldn't have access to. Not at all what I was expecting, it was such an amazing experience. Networking, cultural exchanges, the people we got to meet, senators, senior politicians. There was a lot going on, sixteen hour days - I wasn't expecting that but I mean this in a good way, definitely. I learned about hard work and focus. (41)

Due to the programme curriculum participants learned about American cultural values and approaches to government and how this differed from the Irish model.

An experience that stands out was visiting a women's refuge in California and witnessing the work, commitment and philosophy of those who ran the centre. Much of this was volunteer work. In contrast to Europe, volunteering is essential to run such organisations as State funds are generally not forthcoming and volunteering is part of the American philosophy. (7)

In the context of on-going discussions in Ireland about the problem of who pays for higher education, I have particular memories of discussions with students at (university mentioned) and hearing their perspective on the high cost of their education, their sense that this cost was fair, given the value and subsequent life chances that would arise, and their practice of already becoming donors to the college, notwithstanding the significant debts accrued. (29)

Another important factor in terms of knowledge accumulation was engaging with people from different sectors of American society.

Meeting the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, visiting a local Church in D.C. and sitting down with Martin Luther King's photographer and any time we spent with our host 'father' ...are memories I will always have. (48)

Participants' perceptions of the United States outside the realm of the programme were also positive and a number of respondents remarked that their views about America and the American people had changed following the exchange visit. During their visit they became aware of the diversity of cultural and political attitudes within the U.S. and subsequently developed a more nuanced picture of the United States than is represented by mainstream media.

The visit was excellent in a professional sense in that I experienced a wide array of political activities and viewpoints in the United States. I was able to engage with, and learn about, a range of political views and people who might not generally feature in mainstream discourse and the media outside the U.S.. In this way the programme enabled me to gain knowledge about structures and institutions but also to obtain a much more nuanced view of America and American political and social life than I hitherto had. This was possible because of access to such a wide spectrum of people and organisations – from top officials to individuals - and made the visit extremely valuable. (33)

I genuinely think that these programmes are excellent from a personal development perspective and for enhancing the understanding of how everyday work, institutions, politics etc. works in the USA. I think participants come away with a much more rounded understanding of America and Americans. (32)

International exchange is very valuable especially as it makes us question our own pre-conceptions and challenge our own practice. (31)

According to the respondents, learning about the American way of life was greatly facilitated when they lived with a host family which is a feature of some programmes. Participants welcomed the opportunity to learn about 'normal' Americans and this was especially evident in responses to the open-ended question asking for a favourite memory of the visit.

Without a doubt the people I met were my favourite part of the experience. The people and colleagues were lovely. Under different circumstances, I would never have met these people. What I mean is that they would never have travelled to Europe to meet me. They were 'real' Americans. I had to make the effort to go to the U.S. but I have to say it was worth it. They were great people! (11)

It is difficult to single out one memory as the experience as a whole was incredible but on a professional level editing a video in where I had filmed a number of senators speaking while in a hearing on (topic mentioned) was a highlight but personally every BBQ I had with my host family was a highlight. (47)

The number one memory for me is sitting around the kitchen table with my host family and getting to know them. (37)

These opportunities contributed to the learning environment as did the group experience which was a feature of most programmes. The group dimension was cited as important by many participants and was regarded as especially critical when the programme involved understanding and reconciliation and brought diverse groups together.

Shared conversations with groups, knowledge exchange and the intensity of interaction was excellent. There was energy generated by the group in the context of the excellent opportunities provided by the programme. Professional and social interaction was excellent. Access to individuals and organisations was quite exceptional and the reflections shared by participants after these visits was very helpful in developing ideas. (8)

In terms of a personal (impact) we left feeling that we have a really, really strong bond. You got to know people very intimately and personally, their challenges, their identity, their life. That was a real 'stand-out' for anyone. ...The engagements we had, the people we met, were all incredible. The leadership lessons we did in the evening after our work experience were amazing. We learned so much. It was doing it together, the craic we had. There was a really

strong bond there. And a lot of people had very serious differences. There were people in there that politically there was just no common ground but ...like we had the craic! We really, really, had a ball and that really helped. There was a feeling that we're all in this together, kind of thing. (39)

Applying Knowledge: Effects on subsequent behaviour

Outcomes in this category include dissemination of the knowledge gained during the US visit, career development, taking on a leadership role in one's workplace or in civil society and participation in alumni affairs. When respondents were asked to indicate reasons for participating in the exchange programme (Table 2) the most frequent factor cited was career or professional development which is in line with existing research on this topic (Kim 2016). Other influencing factors were a desire to gain an international perspective and a wish to access specific U.S. expertise, both of which imply people who were open to new knowledge and learning opportunities.

Table 2: Principle reason for participation in programme

First Preferences		%
Professional/Academic development	20	41
To gain international perspective	13	27
To access US expertise	9	18
Favourable reports from colleagues	6	12
Other	1	2
Total	49	100

In terms of professional development 94% of the participants considered that the exchange visit had impacted positively on their career. The findings in Table 3 reflect these views in that a high proportion of respondents considered that the experience had altered their career, a considerable number felt that the knowledge accumulated during the visit had enabled them to make a contribution to their discipline or professional area and or increase their academic or professional output. A very high proportion of the participants felt that the exchange visit had enhanced their professional credentials to some degree and 51% considered it had significantly contributed to their professional lives.

Table 3: Impact on professional life

	Great Deal %	Moderate Amount %	Somewhat %	Not at all %
Altered my career	35	39	14	12
Contributed to insight in my field	59	27	10	4
Contributed to professional publications	25	37	12	26
Enhanced my professional credentials	51	27	16	6

N=49

The opinions reported above are subjective although underpinned by objective indicators such as publications and other forms of professional output (Table 4). As Table 4 indicates output resulting from the exchange programme was high. Almost 80% of the participants had produced at least one of these outputs and over 50% had produced two or more such outputs. Dissemination of knowledge was related to professional background with academics focusing on books and peer-reviewed journal articles and other exchange participants producing magazine articles or conference presentations. In addition, many of the participants had disseminated information about the visit via talks to professional and other groups and some participants had created performance pieces directly related to their U.S. exchange visit.

Table 4: Output from exchange programme

		%
Books or peer-reviewed articles	12	25
Articles in newspapers and magazines	28	57
Conference presentations	30	61
Creative and Performance Arts	4	8
Other forms of dissemination	21	43

N=49

The following table (Table 5) provides some further detail on how the exchange visit contributed to career development and the quotations which follow elaborate on how the experience helped in various areas and at different career points. Programmes impacted positively on participants' professional lives whatever the duration of the exchange visit – a point frequently made by respondents. A very high percentage of participants reported that they had applied the knowledge accrued in the U.S. in their professional lives and two-thirds stated they had become a resource for their colleagues in terms of the information gained during their stay. There was definite evidence of participants subsequently developing an international dimension to their work and initiating co-operative engagement with U.S. colleagues.

Table 5: Impact of exchange visit on professional activities

	Yes %	No %
Used knowledge, skills in my profession	94	6
Became a resource for my colleagues	67	33
Refocused career towards international issues	41	59
Increased collaboration with international colleagues	47	53

N=49

The knowledge gained from the programme had specific benefits for participants' work and the impact was increased if the person was in a position of national influence. The following responses demonstrate the extent of the knowledge gained and that it was subsequently applied within individual organisations and at national level.

From a professional perspective, it was everything I hoped for and more. I needed to use specific scientific instruments and software that was not available in my academic institution. I also needed particular expert advice and support for my research analysis and this was forthcoming. In (US university mentioned) I was able to develop a more complex and relevant research study because of the specific expertise available in the department and their willingness to guide me. (11)

It was an exceptional opportunity – to access all areas and to learn – and it had an impact on my work and my thinking and in this way on national policy. (8)

Incredible opportunities and doors opened. For me, it has been an on-going experience, not just the programme but years after other opportunities and roles that have come from it ... I could never have foreseen this level of impact and future opportunities for growth and friendships made. (27)

More usually the knowledge gained impacted in a broad way in facilitating creative thinking and the confidence to progress ideas. The context of the learning experience, combined with group reflection and discussion, moved participants to think more creatively about issues and this in turn increased their confidence to develop projects and their career. This was true for respondents at various career stages and at least one respondent took up a senior professional opportunity abroad in mid-career which she/he attributed to having participated in the exchange programme.

I really wasn't sure what to expect but feared I might not gain any practical benefit from it. In reality, the exchange gave me a really interesting insight into the wider role of good governance in the public sector. (32)

When I came back I worked for the Minister for (topic mentioned). I went on and worked for an MEP, I went to Europe, and I think a lot of the stuff I did there, I would definitely attribute it to being on (programme mentioned). It gives you that experience that you wouldn't have had, and it's great on your CV as well, you know the way. I think in the earlier part of your profession, that is really important, when you're graduating from college. (44)

I was offered a place on the programme in mid-career and this very welcome as such opportunities in the past were often offered to very senior personnel and this was likely to have less impact on the organisations they came from. (7)

Participants felt they benefitted from exposure to different styles of learning and action and described approaches to discussion and problem-solving which were more intensive than they had hitherto experienced. The learning environment had a very dynamic effect as it required the active involvement of all the (frequently international) participants and forced people to organise and focus their thoughts. According to respondents, this type of learning situation altered thinking and behaviour and enhanced professional confidence, themes which are evident in the following quotations.

The knowledge of the U.S. has helped me enormously in my work. The programme was particularly apt for my job. The programme improved my confidence considerably – mixing with international colleagues was significant and being forced to focus ones views also helped. (2)

It was a privilege to work in such a different culture... ...The experience pushed me out of my comfort zone, encouraged me to explore a wider world and new things. (37)

The knowledge and experience I gained in my field was incredibly valuable and has, I feel, progressed my career incredibly. The experience of living in the States changed my view of the world. It has been one of the, if not the best, experience of my life. (47)

The perspective the programme gives you, is amazing. "No" is not an option for me now and this has been so valuable in my life. I have started my own business and had the confidence to do this, especially as I'm from a working-class background. (41)

It has been a hugely formative part of my life. How I think, process information, have difficult conversations, see myself... ...it really opened my world, and allowed me new spaces to grow into and learn from. (27)

I think one of the main things that came out of the programme for myself and, having spoken to a lot of people that have done the programme, would be the confidence building, that the programme allowed us individually to develop in a setting that took us out of our everyday lives. It gave you so many different skills and really did allow people to develop their own individual confidence. I think that is one very valuable thing that has come out of the programme for myself and the other Alums I have spoken to ... We talked about everything, ...about ourselves, our own lives, our own experiences and then also how we can change the future of our own country. A lot of that came about through those discussions and we now feel more skilled, capable and more confident to get involved in that type of thing. Whereas maybe before, we would have hung back a wee bit and not put ourselves forward. So, the skills and the confidence building that we got really are invaluable to us. I know (programme named) does intend to equip future leaders with these skills and I think they were very good at achieving those aims and outcomes. (42)

It is an incredibly powerful programme and even though it's been five and a half years, it is hard to pinpoint something and say 'this was really good'. It is just like, you are so far out of your comfort zone for so long that when you come back it gives you that confidence to want to do things that you probably wouldn't have done otherwise. (44)

Developing linkages and networks

Another outcome measure related to their subsequent professional activities including engagement with U.S. institutions and colleagues. The exchange visit clearly extended the international horizons of the participant – towards the US and beyond – which represented a positive outcome for the individual and for the organisations they worked for. There was also evidence that the exchange visit had produced results in terms of transatlantic co-operation. As illustrated in Diagram 13, a significant percentage (84%) of programme participants maintained some level of contact with professionals they met during the exchange visit and almost one quarter had developed more significant collaboration with US colleagues. .

13. Collaboration with U.S. Colleagues

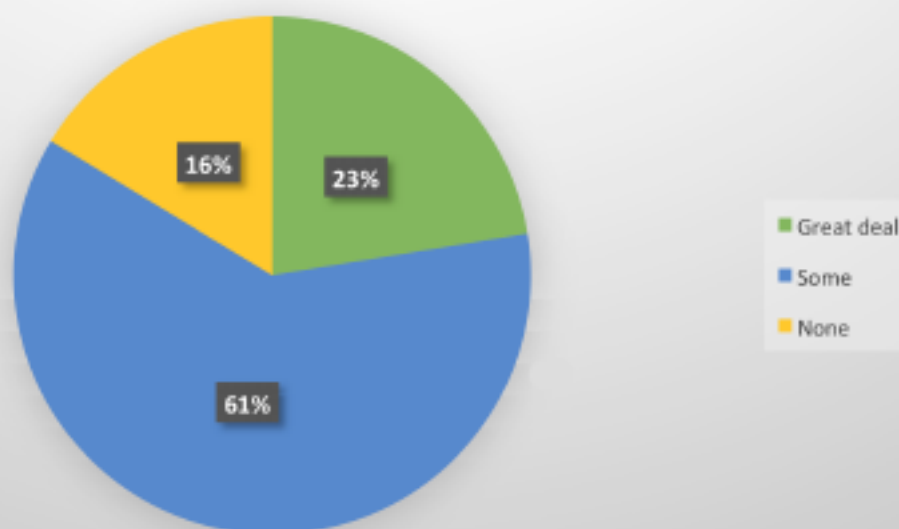


Table 6 elaborates on the kind of co-operative work participants were involved in. Forty percent had facilitated further exchange within their home institutions or environments, one fifth had subsequently organised for U.S. faculty or professionals to come to Ireland and a similar number had organised movement in the opposite direction – to the United States. This represents considerable success in terms of setting up co-operative partnerships with American universities and organisations. Forming partnerships with prestigious U.S. institutions is challenging as these organisations have a wide range of international possibilities to choose from and personal contact is key to this process.

Among the unintended consequences of the exchange was the development of a working relationship with the school of (discipline named) in (university named) – on-going to this day. All told, a really positive experience for me. (18)

Exchange of personnel, students, and knowledge was not just confined to academic environments and those in local and national government as well as NGOs similarly hosted U.S. visitors. The level of transatlantic interaction arising from the exchange programmes is impressive and the positive effects extend to a wide arena encompassing local and national organisations as well as to the individual participant.

Table 6: Ireland-U.S. activities following exchange visit

	Yes %	No %
Brought U.S. faculty/ professionals to work in Ireland	20	80
Brought U.S. students to Ireland	10	90
Sent faculty/professionals to work in U.S.	18	82
Fostered international exchanges of faculty, professionals, students	41	59

N=49

Participants engaged in this transatlantic interchange for professional reasons but they also identified as alumni of exchange programmes and felt the need to 'pay back' for their own positive experiences. In this way they actively relayed information about the U.S. and the programme they had participated in within the organisations they worked in and a considerable number of respondents (80%) joined alumni organisations on their return.

I got a lot out of the visit and continue to gain from it due to the networking nature of the programme. ...I really enjoyed participating and I got a lot out of the whole experience. I have also given back a lot since, as I host students from the University (university named) at least once a year, give talks, arrange tours, lunch etc. I don't hesitate to get in touch either with academic personnel from (university named) when I need information or advice or with any other participants on the programme. This relationship building has been very beneficial as one participant became the Minister for the area I work in and due to spending time with me, he was familiar with the issues long before he was in that position. (1)

It's a brilliant programme and I would and do encourage everyone who I come in contact with, who are eligible, to get involved. Although at times we found it really exhausting, when you come back home and think about what you've actually done and the opportunities that you were provided with, you realise it was brilliant. (38)

I was treated very well by both hosts who went out of their way to ensure I was included in both professional and social activities. I've been conscious to return the compliment when American scholars visit our institute. (4)

I became a (program named) ambassador for our college which was very worthwhile as it gave me a chance to 'give back'; this aspect of post-scholarship activity is to be particularly commended. (4)

Table 7: Attitudes to participation in exchange program

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Other Response
Valuable experience	100	0	0
Life-Changing experience	59	27	14
Deeper understanding of US	75	25	0
Gained professional expertise	72	22	6
Better understanding of my culture	37	41	22
Enabled me to be more effective in my home institution	41	43	16
Enabled me to be more effective in my country	31	49	20

N=49

Table 7 brings together a series of items relating to the impact of the visit some of which have been discussed above. All the participants viewed the exchange visit as a valuable experience but a significant number described it as a life changing experience and this is supported by the qualitative data. The exchange visits clearly met the goals of cultural diplomacy in terms of a deeper understanding of the U.S. and also impacted at local and national level. Many of the participants felt they had gained a better understanding of their own culture and this was especially so when the programme's format included participants from the North and South of Ireland. Having the opportunity to travel and engage with people from different religious and political traditions was described as transformative and appeared to have far-reaching effects on participants. Relations between programme participants, including

Unionist and Nationalist politicians, on such visits were invariably cordial (often in stark contrast to their public interactions at home), which generally surprised other members of the group. In this way, the programmes organised by WIP and Boston College which include a North-South reconciliation theme, would appear to be successfully achieving their strategic objectives.

I met people who I probably would never have come across in general day-to-day life in Northern Ireland. In the sense that in Northern Ireland we go to Catholic or Protestant schools and you don't really meet that many people outside of your own religion. Now I know loads of people who I am good friends with from different backgrounds. That is the whole purpose of the program so it exceeded my expectations in terms of meeting people and staying in touch with them. (38)

So, my favourite memory certainly would be engaging with our own group, who all came from different backgrounds, different parts of the country, and being able to learn from them and their experiences and then to bring that back home with us. We were in a neutral environment, if you like, when we were away so that kind of, I would say, lowered people's inhibitions and they spoke more freely and that enabled us to learn from each other. (42)

Reflections on the programme and its aftermath

As the above narrative implies participants were overwhelmingly positive about their exchange experiences but they were asked to suggest ways the programmes might be improved.

I honestly don't think I have any suggestions on how to improve it. I thought it was fantastic and it was very busy and it did immerse us into the entire culture, politically, and socially. So, I don't really have anything to offer in regards to that part of it. (42)

Suggestions for improvement generally concerned practical issues such as extending the shorter programmes and more extensive sessions for those going on longer visits as well as closer vetting of host institutions and the supports available.

It was highly intensive so perhaps lengthening the duration would be helpful. (29).

When going to lots of talks etc., having someone who can succinctly frame and unpack the different sessions with the group is essential, as distinct from attending heaps of talks and events. The key for me is how it's unpacked and explored by the group. Leaving space and capacity in the programmes for this is something I would make more time for. (27)

It might help to provide more information on the organisation plus practical aspects of living in the United States, especially accommodation. I found accommodation costs extremely high so this was a challenge. (5)

A number of participants suggested increasing diversity on the programmes and publicising the programmes more widely to facilitate this. Participants felt that the programmes should reflect the cultural, gender and socio-economic reality of contemporary Ireland and that organisers should reach out to groups who are not well-represented at present.

I think one thing we as a class were interested in was how people from non-tertiary educational backgrounds would get onto the programme. ...I guess, opening it up to as many as you can ... It's not a criticism, it's just how can you get it to as many people as possible so that everyone can benefit from it. ...I want other people to have the same opportunities I've had and if the programme could improve inclusion, that would be even better. (43)

I would have loved to have seen more diversity in terms of women and ethnic minorities as speakers. ...I think it is so important for young people to see leadership in varying forms, backgrounds and voices. (38)

I think there are many Irish people who are not 'traditionally' Irish who would apply for these opportunities if they knew that the (programme mentioned) in Ireland is really interested in everyone and all fields (which it is as I have learned), and not only the stereotypical 'Irish' fields. (15)

A related point concerned the lack of public awareness about these programmes and the need for greater communication about their impact.

I felt in my professional life I had little or no knowledge of the programme and as a result was quick to dismiss it as professional experience. ...I think more people in the field of (discipline mentioned) should be made aware of the huge benefits the programme possesses. (13)

Some respondents emphasised the two-way element of the exchange system and suggested that the United States could gain by listening to feedback from exchange visitors. This might be pursued during the programme in the context of dialogue between exchange participants and Americans of similar age or interests. Participants noted that attitudes to the United States are more negative than previously and exchange alumni could be helpful in mediating these messages for Americans as well as helping to inform Irish people about the U.S.

It might be a good idea to sit down in a 'roundtable' with other American twenty-somethings, to talk about different things, what is relevant important to them. (37)

Another focus for participants in terms of proposals for change concerned the overall objectives of exchange programmes, how outcome could be improved in terms of U.S.-Ireland relations and national relevance and how exchange alumni could contribute to this. These suggestions were frequently linked to points about the relative lack of public awareness about the programmes. Respondents felt that the exchange system could be publicised more widely by participants producing papers or reports on topics (which some programmes have introduced).

There is an opportunity in follow-up to bring together people who can continue the knowledge gained in the programme and distribute it more widely as well as bringing together people to co-operate and for change at national level. (8)

The programme was excellent but I think a bit more could be done around the follow-up elements and opportunities. It could be helpful to provide a short guide to leveraging the experience for individuals but also to connect people in various ways to improve overall outcomes. Participants from the programmes could perhaps be nominated as ambassadors of sorts to help connect people. They could act as sounding boards and provide information and assistance to future participants and those thinking about participating. (5)

I suggest that there should be a requirement to produce a follow-up report and arrange a meeting of programme participants. The output from this would summarise benefits and lessons learned for the participants individually and at group level, help in organising future programmes and more generally contribute to fostering good relationships between the two countries. (33)

These suggestions focused on having a more strategic approach to programmes and how alumni might be involved in this.

On improvement, the question might be asked "towards what end?". On content design, none is required, it was excellent. On encouraging continuing contact between participants and host organisations around policymaking, perhaps a web-based forum for participants to raise specific questions and get views on previous approaches or referrals to experts might be helpful. If there was some type of follow-up network with specific aims developed, linked to a university, this would be attractive. ...I would link this network to U.S. and Irish universities who have an existing cooperative agreement and this could act as a vehicle for on-going collaboration between U.S. and Irish organisations. (21)

I think the programmes work very well at the individual level - participants get a lot out of it - but I'm not sure about the outcome for funders and the State Department. This outcome could be improved by developing networks of participants especially those in similar areas and creating interdisciplinary groups to create additional synergies. At present this type of general outcome is not apparent and perhaps not intended as it would require time and other

resources. Even if groups are not united over time it would be important to do so at first to indicate the value of the programme. This could be done by organising a seminar with presentations by participants which also indicates accountability from participants. (9)

As these responses imply exchange participants gained significantly from the experience and identified with the objectives of these programmes. Participants also felt that the positive attitudes towards the U.S. which resulted from the visit could contribute to the more general aim of advancing mutual understanding between Ireland and the United States. The respondents were positive about engaging with other exchange participants and furthering exchange goals and considered alumni to be a major resource in terms of building U.S.-Ireland relations and contributing in beneficial ways to both countries. They emphasised that the desire to connect with other alumni and prolong the experience was greatest when they returned home at the conclusion of their U.S. visit and a considerable number had joined alumni organisations at that point but some (20%) later dropped out. Participants knew about the various alumni organisations and felt they were doing a good job. Approximately half the participants had heard of the Ireland United States Alumni Association (IUSA) and 25% had attended IUSA activities and, in general, liked the type of events provided. Other than having more events outside Dublin and ensuring timely notification, there were few suggestions to add to the existing IUSA schedule of activities. Yet, while respondents were satisfied with the IUSA and other alumni organisations as well as with the specific programmes they participated in, they felt that a new concept of engagement, or at least more creative ideas about connecting, were required to ensure strong links with alumni and to benefit from their involvement. They were clear about the benefits of harnessing alumni power and considered that exchange participants had a responsibility to contribute but felt that a new concept of engagement, or at least more creative ideas about connecting, were required to ensure links with alumni and to benefit from their involvement. Participants were adamant that links with alumni were best pursued in the immediate aftermath of the programme and that this process of engagement required structure and co-ordination. It was felt that a formal gathering or debriefing session was required for all programme participants at the conclusion of the visit or programme and that a co-ordinated effort should be made to connect with alumni from then on. There was a recognition that some programmes do better than others in terms of engagement but the general view was that many participants are lost to the alumni community during this time.

Improve follow-up, especially after the buzz and excitement of the visit, to continue the experience. This would be very useful at periodic points. The group experience is a very good context for learning and as the program brought together people from the North and South of Ireland it would be particularly good re sharing knowledge and understanding. (6)

I think improving outcomes would be ... like giving people the opportunity to really engage. It was kind of unstructured. ...I think for some people, having a more formalised approach to participating in a programme after the fact could have been really beneficial. (45)

According to respondents, alumni are generally positive about connecting with other exchange participants but willingness to engage is influenced by one's career stage and commitments and these factors need to be considered in organising an alumni agenda. Respondents suggested that the most effective way of sustaining alumni engagement would be via professional or special interest networks. Social media could be used to form and maintain these groups and they could exist alongside more formal alumni activity and connect to the IUSA via board representation and or organised events. The public face of alumni organisations remains important and events such as speaker-based networking sessions were favoured over formal occasions such as dinners. According to respondents, networks align better with people's career and life trajectories and bring together expertise which can be drawn on for events and mentoring. Mentoring, which was frequently linked by participants to the creation of special interest groups, was highly valued. Alumni in leadership positions, it was suggested, who might not be able to engage on a regular basis could contribute by facilitating activities within their professional domains, presenting at one-off events and by mentoring. The concept of organising groups or networks based on professional and special interests might seem daunting but in reality the disciplinary fields involved are not extensive (as this report shows) and respondents suggested delegating responsibility for the co-ordination of these groups to members. What is clear from these responses is that a unified, 'one size fits all' approach to alumni engagement is unlikely to work and that any method

adopted requires regular review and re-working.

I think maybe it's just sort of the communications and the follow-ups. ... how we keep people connected. ...like so many people, their work will overlap... ...I think no matter what, it's about people's 'buy-in'. You can create as many events, forums and platforms and whatever, but it's about personal ...when you're on the programme around that feeling of service, that commitment to service and community and engagement. So, you know, no matter what you put in place, it's just human nature, some people are 'opted in' and some aren't. And also, people need to feel that they have something to opt in for! (39)

You can't make people turn up to things, but maybe if there was a six-month debrief as well or one year later, to talk about how the programme has affected you or how it hasn't affected you. Then it's useful internally for the programme. I know logistically that is very difficult because you are dealing with a whole new class as well. I think a lot of issues like diary scheduling is difficult, but keeping the class as a unit and doing an additional meeting or something might be useful. (43)

Formal, maybe annual get together of people involved to share and update re experiences. Perhaps appoint an ambassador for each group to maintain connections and progress further connections. I feel sure that these get-togethers could be facilitated in the context of interesting events. (8)

Summary and Conclusions

The educational and professional exchange programmes operating between the United States and Ireland are a well-established and extensive system of cultural diplomacy and there are high levels of participant satisfaction with these programmes. Almost 1200 people from a variety of professional and disciplinary backgrounds participated in these programmes over a 12-year period (2007–2018) and a considerable number came from the Social and Behavioural Sciences. More men than women participated over the time period studied but in recent years women are more likely to take up these exchange opportunities. In terms of stated goals, these programmes adhere to the objectives of achieving mutual understanding between the two countries but some gaps are evident in relation to participation in that the private sector is underrepresented and there are geographical disparities in that programme participants are mainly concentrated on the East Coast of the United States.

A study of forty-nine alumni of exchange programmes demonstrated high levels of satisfaction with these programmes. In terms of outcome indicators, participants demonstrated significant knowledge gains in terms of professional and cultural learning whatever the type or duration of the programme. Their knowledge and understanding of American culture and politics had increased and this was facilitated by access to senior personnel and key environments during the visit. In terms of application of the knowledge gained, findings implied widespread dissemination of this information and that the experience had had a substantial impact on careers and professional output. There was also considerable evidence of collaboration and networking with U.S. colleagues following the exchange visit.

The professional and career status of the study participants indicate that they are particularly well placed to be influencers in that they were academically able, well-sited professionally, and interested in progressing transatlantic interaction. Alumni identified strongly with the goals of their individual programmes and had a shared interest in using their experiences for the public good and in contributing to Ireland-US relations. They were keen to engage with other programme participants to advance these goals and, in this respect, considered alumni to be an important but relatively untapped resource. They were supportive of alumni organisations such as the IUSA and the activities offered by these groups but noted that a minority of alumni engage with these bodies. To ensure alumni engagement they advocated linking with exchange participants in the immediate aftermath of the programme and consolidating

commitment by developing networking groups based on professional or special interests. Other proposals concerned the overall objectives of exchange programmes and their contribution to U.S.-Ireland relations and national goals. Respondents proposed a more co-ordinated approach to exchange programmes, linked to national policy goals (such as Global Ireland), which would coalesce knowledge gains and leverage benefits for Ireland as well contribute to US-Ireland cooperation. Exchange programmes represent an existing structure and network of collaborative connections within the United States which, if strategically developed, could be an important element in progressing Irish cultural and economic goals in the United States and in ensuring attention from policy makers, funders and the public. Similarly, programmes which focus on North-South interaction and leadership could make a significant contribution to the discourse of reconciliation in Ireland as well as to economic development on the island of Ireland. Regular evaluation of the major programmes would permit outcomes to be reviewed as well as identifying synergies and gaps across programmes and standardised instruments are now being developed by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State (ECA) for this purpose.

In conclusion, this study of Irish-US exchange programmes demonstrates significant success in terms of outcome and participant satisfaction at the individual programme level but some attention may be required to capitalise on these programmes in terms of Ireland-US relations and national goals and ensuring greater alumni involvement in these tasks.

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