

Comenius: Work Experience Europe

Belfast Work Experience and Cultural Exchange Programme

Sunday 3rd February – Saturday 9th February 2013

The second part of the Work Experience Europe involved a reciprocal visit by staff and students of Ludwig Wilhelm Gymnasium to Belfast.

Work experience placements were arranged for the German students during the day from Tuesday to Friday, and a range of social and cultural experiences were scheduled throughout the week.

We were delighted to welcome our German partners to Belfast and to reciprocate the hospitality shown during our visit to Rastatt in October.

Thank you

St. Malachy's College and Ludwig Wilhelm Gymnasium thank the following employers for providing work placements for the German students.

Job Title	Employer
Primary School	St Bride's PS Botanic PS Holy Cross Boys PS
Journalism	Irish News
Medicine	Mater Hospital
Variety of Work	Ulster Museum
Administration	Belfast City Council
Hospitality	Culloden Estate and Spa Europa Hotel Madison's Hotel Wellington Park Hotel
Administrative Work/Accountancy	Danske Bank

Much More Than a Mere Visit

A brief look back

by Ms Sandra Merz, Head of the English Department, and
Mr Matthias Weinig, Deputy Head of Ludwig-Wilhelm-Gymnasium
20 February 2013

We arrived in Belfast at last.

For months we had been looking forward to our trip in order to start our work experience project.

On Sunday, 3 February 2013, a group of 16 German students from Grammar School Ludwig-Wilhelm-Gymnasium in Rastatt (southwest Germany) got off the coach and were welcomed by year 13 students from St Malachy's College in Belfast, Mr David Lambon, their Principal, and Mrs Gerardine McAlinden, Head of Careers.

Our stay was based on 3 strong pillars:

A personal face-to-face encounter of the Northern Irish and German youngsters, a deep cultural insight into Belfast and its life and a workplace experience.

After an initial bus tour that showed the young people around Belfast, the German students were accompanied by their St Malachy's hosts to the places where they were to have their work experience.

The next morning we all visited St Malachy's College and were given more information on the project.

That was also a chance for the accompanying teachers, Ms Sandra Merz, Head of the English Department, and Mr Matthias Weinig, Deputy Head of Ludwig-Wilhelm-Gymnasium, to attend a few lessons and to talk to the staff of St Malachy's College and exchange ideas.

In the afternoon the students and their partners were given a tour around Queen's University. The newly built library was a temptation hard to resist: Who would not have liked to sit down at one of the desks that invite you to start reading a book chosen from the shelves?

On Tuesday the real thing started. The German teenagers went to their workplaces Mrs Gerardine McAlinden had found for them. And she had found a wide range of places: hotels, primary schools, hospital, bank, newspapers, museum and the City Hall.

The students were heartily welcomed by all their 'employers' and this is another occasion for the Germans to say how much we appreciate that the Rastatt students were given the opportunity to go in for such a work experience in Belfast.

The cultural programme set up for the German teenagers and their Northern Irish friends included – among other things – a Lagan boat tour, bowling, a Ceili class and the Titanic Visitors Centre.

These common activities gave scope to personal encounters that allowed us some insight into, and understanding of, Belfast's present situation. A particular highlight for our students was no doubt an evening spent in the families of their Belfast partners.

The accompanying teachers found the often repeated phrase confirmed: You can only teach if you never stop learning yourself.

And learn we did! It is another part of the United Kingdom that we have somewhat become familiar with and especially our 2-day visit to Stormont has not left us unimpressed, seeing the way the Assembly is devised to be fruitful.

Our visit was a reciprocation of the Northern Irish visit to Rastatt last October when 16 St Malachy's students had their work experience in the Daimler company (Mercedes).

Two more rounds of exchange are scheduled for the next 2 years and hopefully the well-established contacts can carry on. The whole project was mainly Comenius-funded.

We are very grateful to our St Malachy's friends and we consider it an honour to have had the chance to get to know so much in just one week.

We appreciate to such a high extent the time and the patience (!) devoted to us by our colleagues from St Malachy's who spent their leisure time and the evenings with us answering all our questions about school and Northern Ireland.

Our special thanks go to Mr Lambon, Mrs McAlinden, the deputy heads and the staff and personnel who took us into their classes and whom we had interesting conversations with, the bus drivers included.