

**Comenius Project: Work Experience Europe**  
**Year 13 German Work Experience and Cultural Exchange Programme**  
**October 2013**

On Wednesday 23rd October, a group of Year 13 students accompanied by Mrs McAlinden and Mr McStravick, and later by Mr Lambon and Mr Douglas, embarked on the first part of the Belfast/Rastatt Work Experience and Cultural Exchange Project 2013-14.

The Work Experience Europe Project, funded through Comenius, aims to facilitate international work experience and collaborative social and cultural activities between students from St Malachy's College and Ludwig Wilhelm Gymnasium in Rastatt, Germany.

The 10 day trip began with a 3a.m. start at the College and after a bus, plane and train journey the group were warmly welcomed in Rastatt by participating teachers Mrs Merz and Ms Detrich as well as our student partners from Ludwig Wilhelm Gymnasium. There was no sign of travel weariness as Vice Principal Weinig formally greeted our party and new friendships were formed during our late lunch.

Our weekend visits to The Black Forest provided the opportunity for us all to get to know each other while following a packed itinerary which introduced us to the beautiful German countryside and surrounding towns. Daytime activities included visiting the fascinating 'Pfahibautenmuseum' (an outdoor Stone Age and Bronze Age Lake Dwelling Museum at Lake Constance), exploring Meersburg Castle (Germany's oldest inhabited castle), and hiking through the famous "Wutachschlucht" canyon.

Our evenings were spent enjoying each other's company. Full advantage was taken of the opportunity to consider the expectations and challenges of 'Work Experience Europe', to identify stereotypical opinions and to compare and contrast our different cultures. Work experience arrangements were also discussed as each German partner had prepared information on the participating companies and the associated travel arrangements. (See the video clip). Our exploration of this part of Germany concluded with sightseeing and a guided tour of the lovely city of Freiburg.

After the exertions of the previous days the comfort of Hotel Engel, a pizza and a quiet night were welcomed by all!

Sunday started with full breakfast followed by Mass (in German naturally) in the beautiful Catholic Church in the centre of Rastatt. The revitalised group then spent the day with their German partners and their families. Finding the location of their work placements in advance of Monday morning was a priority this afternoon and then the rest of the day was leisure time and a chance to enjoy typical German life.

Monday morning saw the start of the 4-day Work Placement Programme and an early start for all! The German work-day begins early and arrangements to 'meet partner at 7.00am', 'get the train at 7.10am', etc. were not uncommon. Dressed appropriately for the workplace, our students headed off to employers in Rastatt, Baden-Baden, Karlsruhe and Gaggenau. Making one's way to a work placement in a foreign country and without speaking the national language is a challenge, but as Matthew Quinn

reports, a rewarding experience. 'I enjoyed the independence of it the most ... also the responsibility of making my own way to work, which for me was a half an hour walk through the most picturesque part of Rastatt, really enjoyable!'

Work Experience was the focus of everyone's attention from Monday to Thursday, and finding out what each other's day involved in twelve different companies (see placement list below) ensured there was no lull in the conversation. Experiencing an international work environment meant that students learned a lot, not only about the specific jobs they were doing but also about the workplace generally. The need to have a good work ethic, to be punctual, hardworking, committed, efficient, to have a knowledge of a foreign language, to have good people skills and good listening skills, and to be highly motivated, were some of the qualities students recognised as being essential to success.

Even with a demanding work schedule our students and their German counterparts still had energy to socialise and build their friendship network. Ice-skating at Baden-Airpark, a guided tour and evening meal in the beautiful town of Baden-Baden as well as a final evening outing to the nearby town of Karlsruhe allowed our boys to learn more about the way German teenagers live their lives and helped to promote an appreciation of the German culture.

That our German Work Placement and Cultural Exchange Experience was so successful is due to a number of factors. This programme would not have been possible without Comenius funding and for this we continue to be grateful. The involvement of the German companies who welcomed and facilitated our students is greatly appreciated. Without their participation there would have been no experience of the German workplace. We thank them for their time and attention and look forward to visiting them again in the future.

We wish to pay tribute to the staff of our partner school Ludwig Wilhelm Gymnasium and in particular to Mrs Merz and Ms Detrich whose planning and organisation provided a superb experience for us all. Their company and that of their students was always a pleasure. We look forward to reciprocating the hospitality shown to us in Germany when we welcome them to Belfast in March 2014.

Mrs G McAlinden

# Thank you to Work Placement Employers

Work Experience Europe 28<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2013

	Company	Departments
1	<b>GRENKE LEASING AG</b>  <a href="http://www.grenkeleasing.de">www.grenkeleasing.de</a>	IT-Software Development, Marketing, International Sales / Administration
2	<b>Maquet GmbH</b>  <a href="http://www.maquet.com">www.maquet.com</a>	Various
3	<b>Dr. Willmar Schwabe Business Services GmbH &amp; Co. KG</b>  <a href="http://www.schwabe.de">www.schwabe.de</a>	Various
4	<b>Otterbach Medien KG, GmbH &amp; Co.</b>  <a href="http://www.otterbach.de">www.otterbach.de</a>	Media Design for digital and print media
5	<b>aluplast GmbH</b>  <a href="http://www.aluplast.net">www.aluplast.net</a>	Various
6	<b>Robert Bosch GmbH</b>  <a href="http://www.bosch.de">www.bosch.de</a>	Various
7	<b>Casimir Kast Verpackung und Display GmbH</b>  <a href="http://www.casimir-kast.de">www.casimir-kast.de</a>	Sales Sales/Pricing/Planning Process Production IT (one department each day)
8	<b>GMT Gummi-Metall-Technik GmbH</b>  <a href="http://www.gmt-gmbh.de">www.gmt-gmbh.de</a>	Aeronautical Engineering
9	<b>Daimler AG Mercedes-Benz Werk</b> <a href="http://www.daimler.com">www.daimler.com</a>	Various
10	<b>Fraunhofer Institut</b>  <a href="http://www.ict.fraunhofer.de">www.ict.fraunhofer.de</a>	Environmental Engineering, Plastics Processing
11	<b>Siemens AG</b>  <a href="http://www.siemens.com">www.siemens.com</a>	Purchasing Marketing Sales IT
12	<b>ARKU</b>  <a href="http://www.arku.de">www.arku.de</a>	Mechanical engineering, mechatronics, electronics and automation engineering