

The World is our Oyster: The Benefits of International Experiences in Higher Education.

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Abstract.

COVID-19 imposed limitations on international travel for all of society. In academia, this has impacted on the ability of staff and students to participate in international conferences, Erasmus exchange and mobility programmes and other international activities that had been part of their Higher Education experience. In this paper, we critically reflect on two international activities that we were involved in with students and highlight how a number of benefits and experiences cannot be replicated in virtual contexts. To this end we draw from previous reflections by staff and students that formed part of a number of small research projects and presentations that resulted from international travel. This has informed the planning for and design of extra-curricular activities, as well as programme development in our institution. For music graduates seeking to develop a career in performance or engage in interdisciplinary teams, international experiences and cultural competencies prepare them for a career in the global industries. Despite the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on international travel this paper highlights the ongoing potential of international projects to impact positively on staff and students' experience in Higher Education.

Keywords: Erasmus; Internationalisation; Mobility; Music Education.

1. Introduction.

International travel opportunities are one aspect of internationalisation and mobility in Higher Education that have been affected by COVID-19. This paper focuses on the experiences of staff and students engaging in a very short-term, typically one- to two-week international experience related but extra-curricular to their programme of study over a seven-year period. Unlike some international activities, the instances considered in this article involve both staff and students, often working collaboratively. The experiences include European funded projects involving

collaborations with international academic and industry partners and international performance tours by staff and students from the academic institution. Particular emphasis is placed on the feedback of students involved in these activities between 2012 and 2019.

For many students, 'Erasmus' refers to spending a semester abroad to develop competency in a language and experience learning and immersion in another culture. For staff, Erasmus also provides the opportunity for staff mobilities, through which academic and non-academic staff in higher education institutions can develop networks, experience practices in other institutions, engage in teaching and learning, and explore the potential for research collaboration. In this paper we focus on short, residential experiences. The Erasmus Intensive Programme (IP) CREAL took place over three years in annual two-week blocks, supplemented by on-going engagement by staff in planning, preparing and evaluating the project. The Erasmus Plus Strategic Partnership (SPACE) followed a similar structure, albeit with a shorter residential period. Reflecting on our experience as leaders, and informed by student reflections through student evaluations, focus groups and surveys, we recognise the value of the international experience in developing intercultural competency, personal development and transferable skills for all involved.

The paper also critically reflects upon performance tours by members of one of the Institute's ensembles. Participation in performance tours extended beyond performing. The groups facilitated music and dance workshops in schools, colleges and the community; engaged in informal sessions and collaborations with other musicians, delivered lectures, undertook ethnographic research and created short documentaries. The groups also benefited from attendance at conference sessions, classes and lectures, performances by other groups, visits to museums and art galleries, and the experience of cultures of different parts of the world. Other objectives included the desire to engage in scholarly discourse in music education and return to the classroom as learners and educators with new knowledge and understanding. The international opportunities presented an opportunity for emerging young Irish traditional musicians, selected from the Institute's traditional music ensemble, to undertake practice-based research and engage with an international audience through performances and workshops under the guidance of their lecturers.

2. Methodology and Ethical Considerations.

Responding to the call for papers for this volume of AISHE-J, this paper draws upon and

summarises several prior research projects that had their own research methodologies and frameworks and which individually went through ethical research processes. Data was gathered from students as part of the evaluation processes for each of the international activities described, which was a requirement of each project and students were informed that responses would be used for research purposes. Where required, ethical approval was granted from the ethics committee of our institution to incorporate the data into research presentations, which were primarily aimed at sharing new knowledge and approaches with other educators and to inform future developments and projects (Commins et al., 2013; Commins & Kearney, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Kearney & Commins, 2014a, 2014b, 2014c, 2015, 2017a, 2017b). While the focus of the presentations varied to consider pedagogical practices and developments, this paper focuses on the value of the international experiences as expressed by students and identified by staff. This is placed in the context of academic policies and reports that predate COVID-19. The research also analyses statements given for press releases from the academic institutions that provide insight into student perceptions of and reflections on their experiences abroad.

The authors held dual roles as both researchers and lecturer/facilitator, as well as performing with students as members of the ensembles. They were involved in the selection of participants and contributed to the writing of press releases at the time. In some instances they also lectured participants in the programme of study at their home institution. The research design involved critical reflective practice of their own involvement in international experiences, focusing on the benefits and challenges to their engagement in teaching and learning. The research was informed by efforts to share their reflections with international colleagues as part of the projects, at sharing practice events in their own institution, and at academic conferences.

On the Erasmus funded projects, feedback sessions were requirements of the funding and followed established practice involving all members of the international staff team. Group feedback sessions were facilitated by a staff team member on each project who prompted discussion with a number of prescribed questions agreed by the staff team. Viewpoints were sought from participants from all participating groups and the discussion was monitored by staff team members from all institutions who made anonymized notes. Students were also required to complete an anonymized survey, which was based on a standard questionnaire provided by the funding body. Students were made aware of this prior to beginning the project and, through discussions over the period of each three-year cycle were made aware of responses from previous years. The staff team demonstrated to student participants how they developed the

project and implemented feedback. All of this data contributed to co-written reports to the funding agency and conference presentations. Staff members were also required to complete surveys but the results of these have not been included in this paper but reflecting on this data was useful in informing the interpretation of student related data and critically reflecting on the importance of such opportunities for both staff and students.

The international performances tours were more discrete in nature, involved fewer participants and required less extensive analysis. Participants were made aware of the requirement to complete a short anonymized questionnaire upon their return. Informal conversations that developed between the researchers and participants during the extended periods of time together during international trips greatly inform the research. The small numbers on these trips raised the potential for identifying individuals, whose identities as participants was widely publicised due to the nature of public performance, and participants were made aware of this prior to completing their responses. At all times, participants understood that the team leaders were engaged in monitoring the projects and were encouraged to contribute to this process to ensure the success of future projects.

The analysis of data was undertaken in previous exercises and presented. Thus, this paper engages with the already disseminated data. It is informed by the reflective practice of the academics involved and observations of the students participating in the projects. Responses in all instances were coded based on different aspects of the activities that the students engaged in. Main areas of interest included why students were attracted to participate, highlights and challenges from their participation and recommendations for future development of similar projects. Other areas that emerged highlighted the relationship of projects to their programme of study, engagement in different modes of learning and an appreciation of cultural experiences in international locations. For the purposes of this paper the findings presented in each of the previous studies were collated and compared to generate a broader critical perspective of international projects at DkIT.

3. Student Recruitment.

For each of the international activities, students were recruited by a process of application. For the Erasmus opportunities, students in Music and Creative Media programmes in the participating institution were invited to apply to participate and were selected based on a number of criteria including grades achieved and statements of interest. All registered undergraduate

students were eligible to apply and there was no selection bias towards any grouping. For performance tours, eligibility was limited to members of an ensemble and this was open to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. All applications were evaluated and shortlisted according to criteria that considered the applicants' academic track record and participation in other activities, their motivation and potential benefits to their professional development. Those shortlisted by the project leaders were invited for audition and/or interview. The interviews addressed a number of relevant areas including motivation for participation, experience in groupwork, standard of performance, ability to communicate ideas and facilitate workshops. Following selection, all members of the group engaged in rehearsals and/or planning meetings and preparatory workshops, some of which took place during evenings and holiday time. None of those involved in the project were under the age of eighteen, included mature students, and the project did not discriminate on gender. For some of the projects, which took place outside of term time or extended over weekends, some students indicated that they were unable to participate due to other commitments including part-time employment.

4. International Travel in Context.

While internationalisation is widely considered in the scholarship of teaching and learning, there is still room for further development of understanding (Buckner and Stein, 2020). The examples presented in this article are largely absent from the discourse on internationalisation in Higher Education but reflect many of the definitions presented (see de Wit, 1997; Knight, 2004). By relating the experiences to that of tourists and the values of experiencing other places and cultures, we can gain further insights into the benefits of international travel in Higher Education (van't Klooster, 2008; Lesjak et al., 2020). We recognise that mobility was a core aim of the Bologna Process (Papatsiba, 2006; de Wit, 2011) and the Department of Education and Skills (2011) encourages Irish Higher Education Institutions to cooperate with institutions in other countries and seek opportunities to enrich student experiences.

There are many motivations for developing mobility that will remain relevant when it is safe to resume international travel after COVID-19. Papatsiba (2006) identifies both an economic and professional rationale and a civic rationale for student mobility and states:

'Mobility involves encounters and confrontation with differences, requiring a broad range of individual adaptive responses, and also encouraging their renewal. Hence, mobility would maintain individuals in a state of awakening akin to the acquisition of new

competences and new knowledge'. (2006, p. 99)

For both staff and students, the break from the norm through engaging with new people, new cultures and new places, creates intensified learning contexts that continue to be beneficial, not only for the participants but their institutions, colleagues and fellow students, long after the experience.

One of the main aims of internationalisation in Higher Education is to enable graduates to be 'globally competent citizens' (Dewey & Duff, 2009, p. 492). This requires the development of intercultural competence (Perry & Southwell, 2011; McKiernan et al., 2013). The experience from the Erasmus projects demonstrated that both teachers and students engaged in new ways of learning and teaching that challenged philosophies and established practice and led to new discoveries for all involved. The international performance tours similarly presented new challenges for staff and students and highlighted future opportunities for networking, collaborating and working.

Influenced by environmental concerns (Shields, 2019) and the requirements of working during COVID-19 restrictions, moves towards virtual mobility (Schreurs et al., 2006; Teresevičienė et al., 2011) were already underway. While the researchers have previously engaged in virtual mobility, both as an element of the projects considered in this article and as part of other projects or collaborations (Kearney & Grass, 2019; Kearney & Robberstad, 2019; Commins et al., 2019), and recognising the potential scope for increased virtual mobility in response to the restrictions and new contexts post-COVID-19, the focus of this paper remains on the act of travelling abroad.

Influenced by strategies in their institution, as well as national and international reports and scholarships, the authors have sought out opportunities to collaborate on an international level. As well as enjoying the experiences and incorporating experiences into their professional practice, we are cognisant of the value for students. As stated by the Department of Education and Skills: *'International experience and intercultural expertise are regarded as core competencies for graduates in an export driven and innovation-based economy'* (2011, p. 80). Nevertheless, our experiences have highlighted some of the challenges for internationalisation that exist in Higher Education, specifically in the context of international mobility. Some of these echo the work of Dewey and Duff who note: *'International engagement involves extensive bureaucratic procedures and administrative red tape that is a burden to the faculty member'* (2009, p. 497). They also note that some respondents to their study at the University of Oregon

cited 'an administrative attitude considering faculty participation in a study abroad program as a "perk" for faculty' and that this 'would be off-putting or even offensive, given the extensive work involved'. Additionally, Gordon notes the perception of 'the school trip' as little more than 'educational tourism' (2001, p. 407) but highlights the many benefits observed through the Socrates initiatives at a European level. As Gordon notes: 'Teachers invoke the international experience as a necessary part of the updating of their skills' (p. 407) and as such projects foster project management, organisational and teamwork skills (pp. 413–414) and they make staff members more valuable to the Institutions in which they are employed.

Although focusing on the student experience, it is noteworthy that the projects under discussion provided important opportunities for staff mobility also, which led to international research collaborations, international teaching experiences, discussions with international colleagues on programme development and pedagogical approaches, greater awareness of opportunities for future internationalisation, and collaboration on funding applications.

5. Benefits and Challenges of International Experiences.

The international activities discussed in this article shared a number of core aims. These included efforts to provide students with international experiences and engagement with other cultures that augmented their learning 'at home', develop cultural awareness and improve transnational cooperation. The activities presented an opportunity to practise and reflect on learning processes in diverse creative and artistic educational contexts and to study, reflect on, engage in and share innovative practices in the creative arts. As well as benefiting the students involved, the activities presented staff with opportunities to learn from colleagues in other institutions in order to internationalize the curriculum in their home institution and continue their own career development as educators and performers. For the students, they highlighted career opportunities in a global marketplace. The institution also benefitted from its enhanced international profile. These reflect de Wit's (2002) four categories of rationales for internationalisation: political rationales, economic rationales, social and cultural rationales and academic rationales.

6. Personal Development.

The students involved were highly motivated and highlighted the opportunity to gain experience

in working creatively with people of different backgrounds and cultures and to experience new things in their applications, in discussion forums during the residential programmes and in subsequent reflections. Students identified the trips as an opportunity for personal development, particularly referring to developing confidence and communication skills and many referred to the opportunity to experience education in another country. The development of a sustainable and recurring programme of activities was important as students in later surveys indicated that they were motivated to apply based on the positive experiences of previous participants in international projects and trips, who found it to be a very enjoyable and a once in a lifetime experience. Some students participated in more than one activity and many were repeat applicants.

Groupwork has become an integral part of many programmes of study in music and creative media in the home institution and the international activities further developed this. Working with people from other countries was an opportunity and challenge for staff and students. Students enjoyed *'working with like-minded people from other countries'*, being creative, making friends, working towards a common goal and having fun. One student noted how *'[M]eeting new people and working together as a team to watch how a simple idea can grow and develop'* and *'in a short time one can attain incredible amounts of information about oneself and others'*. Another stated: *'People from different disciplines often offer a creative solution to a creative problem that you yourself cannot see, as you are too close to the problem'*. While opportunities for learning in this manner are presented in the home institution, the intensity of the activities along with the coming together of students with very different backgrounds presents different opportunities for learning.

While many respondents noted an improvement in interpersonal and communication skills, some indicated that they were challenged by the intensity of the experience and the presence of different personality types that they encountered in international activities. One respondent from the IP noted *'At times I felt that there was a clash of ideas and personalities and that people should be more considerate and encouraging of quieter group members'*, while another stated: *'there were many different opinions [...] so it was exciting to hear and work together on these things'*. One respondent noted: *'I now feel more confident to talk in a group of people and argue my point'*. Respondents noted the need to develop compromise and, while acknowledging the development of a democratic ethos, they cited the presence of a lecturer as a mentor as a positive dimension. Even in situations where teams developed difficulties, whether in communicating effectively or finding solutions to challenges, students recognised that they

learned.

There is also significant learning in terms of financial management. In developing the opportunities for international travel, it was essential that the cost factors were not prohibitive to potential applicants. External funding for the Erasmus projects included costs of travel, accommodation and a significant proportion of the food, in addition to costs for other activities including visiting museums and other attractions. For international performing opportunities, external funding was secured from Culture Ireland and the Milwaukee Fest Foundation in some instances, and performances generated income or benefit in kind. Participants – both staff and students – engaged in fundraising prior to travel which included performances at home, busking and a cake sale. Prior to travelling, information sessions which included advice on the cost of living in the destinations were convened but some students noted the expenses incurred that exceeded expectations, particularly in Norway where the cost of living was significantly higher than in Ireland, Belgium or Portugal. This was an important aspect of developing cultural awareness.

7. Cultural Awareness and Future Employability.

For students in Higher Education, international travel, be it through formal activities facilitated by the institution or activities undertaken by students outside of term time, are important in broadening their world view. It can prepare them for opportunities after graduation. One student who participated in a performance tour noted: *'It made me more aware of how important networking is after my studies as there are thousands of wonderful musicians with degrees everywhere and the job market is very competitive no matter what area of music you wish to work in'*. Another stated: *'It has made me more open to travelling abroad to study and work in the future'* and another indicated that the experience prompted them to consider teaching abroad.

While the Erasmus projects focused on developing networks and ideas, they also included opportunities for placement whereby students worked with school children in different countries, bringing new ideas to the classroom. This model of placement was also evident on the performance tours when participants presented a series of workshops and performances in universities, schools, cultural centres, churches, and public spaces. Students experienced role change, acting as teachers and facilitators, sometimes in contexts where the participants had little or no experience of Irish culture and for whom English may not have been their first

language. One student reflected '*I learned [sic] how becoming a full-time touring musician is hard work as it is extremely important to always be on time, on schedule, well dressed and being able to communicate effectively with the audience. Performing is only one side of becoming a successful musician*'. Students appreciated the diversity of performance spaces, performance types and audiences. A student noted how 'performing within schools demonstrated how we communicated with the students instead of just performing as if it were a concert'. Students indicated increased awareness of the value of their own culture and the potential to share the intangible cultural heritage that they possess.

8. Adapting and Responding to Challenges.

The international activities also presented challenges. These included the stress of travelling, the aforementioned challenges of group work in new contexts with diverse personalities, and the level of preparedness the students felt they achieved. Unrestricted by the normal structures of our home institution, such as timetabling, the international activities presented a challenging schedule for many students. In relation to one of the performance trips, one student noted the challenge of trying to prepare themselves for the various performances and maintaining energy levels but stated: '*However, I'm glad we did everything we did in [...] even if we were all exhausted*'. Another student similarly noted: '*It was a tightly packed schedule; however, it was well worth it as we really gained so much experience from the trip*'. For the Erasmus activities, which involved development over a number of years and a number of trips, student feedback was invaluable in adjusting the schedule of activities to ensure a better balance. In all activities, attempts were made to ensure a balance between formal activities and leisure time, recognising the learning opportunities that existed for individual exploration or the development of friendships in informal activities.

Another challenge was the timing of activities. Some occurred outside of term time when some students were unable to participate due to other commitments such as summer jobs. When activities took place during the semester, concerns were raised about the potential impact of the project on students' ability to maintain progress and engage with their programme of study. Some students highlighted the challenge of 'catching up' with lectures when they returned to class but many others highlighted how engaging in the projects developed their ability to 'think outside the box', which they were able to apply when they returned to regular coursework. One respondent noted: '*We did a lot of projects that I wouldn't be used to normally, so I learned that*

it is good to explore the unexpected and unknown and that you can achieve great things without inhibitions about activities and projects you haven't tried before'. While some students felt the projects had a positive impact on their studies and related to other learning outcomes, one student noted the challenge in relation to coursework that involved group activities in the home institution. For individual assignments, participants prepared before the trips by submitting written assignments prior to their departure and bringing study material with them. In some instances, students had the opportunity to attend classes and lectures in other institutions, which informed their perspectives on learning and teaching in their home institution. Although the intensity of trip itineraries was noted, students expressed a desire to experience more classes and engage to a greater extent with learning opportunities while abroad. Participating staff made arrangements to deliver classes at other times, set coursework prior to departure and maintained communication with students via email and their virtual learning environment for the duration of the trips. It should be acknowledged that while there is a strong desire for internationalisation, which is often written into strategies and policy documents, there is a need to consider the flexibility of systems and structures in Higher Education to facilitate and encourage international activities.

9. Impact of International Experiences.

The international activities engaged in by staff and students in this institution provided new perspectives for graduate opportunities, future projects and pedagogical development. The transferable nature of the skills gained is critical. The performance tours gave students an insight into the challenges of life as a touring musician and students acknowledged an increase in confidence, creativity, communication skills, artistic ability, musicality, presentation skills and the ability to work in groups following participation. One student noted *'I learnt that presentation is everything. How you present yourself as a person will stand to you for the rest of your life'*. Another student also acknowledged the importance of presentation, as well as noting their development in relation to time management and flexibility. *'It highlighted to me that you need to be incredibly flexible and to look for opportunities rather than to wait for them to appear'*.

The international experiences gained in these short projects also encouraged students to explore more opportunities. One student noted that they wished to *'check out'* one of the partner colleges in advance of potentially spending a semester abroad, stating *'It has given me a great insight into what it's like to study abroad'*. Focusing on the experience of living or studying in

another country, one student stated:

“It has shown me that studying working or living internationally is very possible as communication can be done without words [and] if you submerge yourself in your surroundings anything is possible.”

Another noted: *‘I had never experienced working/living/studying abroad so it certainly was eye opening! I would definitely be more open to it now’.*

10. Experiencing Place.

While we live in an increasingly globalised world and experience a wide range of places through evermore technologically advanced media, a global understanding of people and cultures is increasingly important. Student feedback on the international experiences examined in this article suggests that their experiences cannot be easily replicated virtually. The opportunity to explore different cities, spend time with groups of people from different places and perform or present ideas to new audiences who gave immediate feedback were critical to the success of these activities. This is further underlined by related research that sought to create links between classrooms in Ireland and North America, the result of which underlined the desire amongst staff and students for international mobility (Kearney & Grass, 2019). It is clear that travelling abroad impacted on students’ geographical awareness and appreciation of cultures, including their own. The value of immersion is emphasised by Haigh, who notes:

“Learners learn from their total environment, absorbing more ideas and values from the world they inhabit than from classroom experience”. (2008: 434)

By not only bringing students into international spaces in which they demonstrate and apply their learning but also placing them in new contexts for learning, the projects discussed help achieve many of the goals of internationalisation in Higher Education. The impact of COVID-19 on education has intensified blended learning development and the analysis of virtual experiences is a developing area of research in this context that may inform future reflection.

To this end, the reference to specific experiences in student feedback highlights the importance of tangible events in contrast with virtual experiences. All students involved in a series of performances in North America identified a performance at the American Irish Historical Society as a unique and memorable experience. The historical connections between Ireland and the USA are significant, and an understanding of this reflects Buckner and Stein reminder of the

importance 'to engage critically with histories of international engagements' (2019, p. 12), albeit that their emphasis is on colonial histories and inequality. Chris Cahill, the Executive Director of the AIHS led the performing group on a private tour of the Society's archive collection, allowing them to view significant historical artefacts, which reinforced their appreciation for the importance of the society and venue, as well as their perspectives on history and culture. One student noted '*It was a unique and enlightening experience to perform in such a historic venue. It is a memory I will always treasure*'. Other notable experiences included visits to the Ground Zero memorial and Broadway in New York; tours of the American Jazz Museum, Kauffman Centre for Performing Arts, Irish Cultural Centre at Union Station and the BAC Trombone Factory in Kansas City; attending a dress rehearsal of an opera in the Opera House in Antwerp; a visit to the grave of eighteenth century fiddler-composer William Marshall in Bellie, Scotland and the museum in the former home of nineteenth century composer Edvard Grieg in Bergen, Norway; and a visit to the Usina do Gasômetro Cultural Centre in Porto Alegre. It is clear that the impact of the experiences highlighted by the students can only be realised through international travel and cannot be fully replicated in the traditional classroom or online. The opportunity to see, touch, smell and experience the happenings in a place – the textures of place (see Adams et al., 2001) – as well as meet with local people, are all important parts of the experience when visiting another country and cannot be experienced in the classroom (see also Haigh, 2008).

11. Conclusion.

In response to COVID-19, we are faced with new challenges for Higher Education. These challenges require us to consider what is essential in our teaching and we are all working to ensure that the student experience remains engaging, exciting and valuable. International activities remain underutilised in Higher Education despite strategies and policies for internationalisation and we argue that, with restrictions likely to continue, we should not ignore the value of international experiences for staff and students when the opportunities for travel return.

There is need to continue to develop and broaden an understanding of internationalisation in Higher Education. This article demonstrates that international activities are learning opportunities for both staff and students in Higher Education that have a wide range of benefits, notwithstanding some challenges that must be overcome. The international activities discussed

moved beyond the prescribed curriculum and provided unique opportunities for teaching and learning for all involved. Students sought to participate in the international activities to experience travelling as part of group and developing new skills. As well as musical development, participants were challenged to improve their groupwork and communication skills in intercultural contexts. In the context of performance, the stage becomes an extension of the classroom. The rationales for student mobility identified by Papatsiba (2006) are realised with students referring to economic, professional and civic learning and development. Reviews of the projects and trips have informed further international learning opportunities for students and the internationalisation of their programme of study 'at home'.

International performances and collaborative projects with international teams provide opportunities for Irish students to disseminate their learning and develop awareness of international practices and standards. The Erasmus projects emphasised working in international teams with a focus on creativity and STEAM education that was beyond the scope of their programme for study. International performance tours by musical ensembles from Higher Education institutions are not uncommon but have not been critically evaluated in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The performance tours provided staff and students with an opportunity to perform internationally and experience performances by other international groups. Performance tours provide opportunities for collaboration with international musicians and the development of networks and links with international institutions and performing groups. Lecturers learn about standards, best practice and realize the potential of their students through real-world demonstration of learning in an international setting. Participation in international conferences can enhance the design and provision of programmes 'at home' that prepare students for a globalised world.

It is clear that the international experiences discussed provided students with a greater awareness of international opportunities and encouraged them to explore graduate opportunities beyond their home country. It was also evident to staff that international performance tours motivate and inspire students who seek to rise to the challenge of being selected for performances. International travel provides an opportunity for students to disseminate learning and for all participants to raise the profile and reputation of their institution locally and internationally. The trips and projects have highlighted the international relevance of the curriculum in the host institution, notably the value of music and, in particular, Irish traditional music, beyond Ireland and beyond the discipline.

Internationalisation in Higher Education is much more than international travel but the experiences reviewed in this article indicate that such experiences are valuable learning opportunities for both staff and students. While some challenges already exist in terms of adequate supports and levels of bureaucracy, COVID-19 has added another layer of complexity. With moves towards a greater dependence on online learning and virtual access to cultural institutions in the context of tourism, we assert that the value of the actual experience outweighs the classroom experience or virtual experience. While international travel was effectively suspended in March 2020, with many activities such as academic conferences and musical performances entering a virtual space, it is clear that academics and Higher Education institutions should give consideration to international activities when it is again safe and feasible to do so.

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