



EIL Connections

People. Cultures. Opportunities. Impact.

Autumn 2026

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Welcome

Welcome to EIL Connections, our newsletter celebrating the people, programmes, partnerships and experiences that bring the work of EIL/AFS Ireland to life.

So much of what we do is centred on connection, between people, cultures, communities and countries. Whether it is a young person preparing for their first international experience, an exchange student becoming part of an Irish family and community, a volunteer developing new skills, or a returning participant sharing what they have learned at home, each experience contributes to a wider culture of understanding, curiosity and active global citizenship.

2026 has already been a busy and inspiring year for EIL/AFS Ireland. We have welcomed international students, supported Explore Scholarship participants as they prepared for opportunities around the world, invested in volunteer training and development, strengthened partnerships, and continued to create meaningful spaces for intercultural learning both in Ireland and internationally.

Our volunteers remain a vital part of that work. They bring energy, experience and generosity to orientations, scholarship events, training, student support and many other areas of our programmes. In this edition, we are delighted to highlight the different ways people can become involved, the training available to volunteers, and the opportunities to build confidence, leadership and intercultural skills through participation in our wider international network.

We are also sharing some of the stories and milestones that have shaped recent months, from the Volunteer Summer Summit and international training opportunities, to Explore Scholarships, Study Abroad programmes, global competence initiatives and partnerships that continue to strengthen our impact.

Whether you are a volunteer, participant, host family, partner, educator, supporter, former programme participant or simply interested in intercultural learning, we hope this newsletter gives you a sense of the community behind EIL/AFS Ireland and the many ways to connect with our work.

Thank you for being part of that community, and we hope you enjoy this edition of EIL Connections.





VOLUNTEER WITH EIL

► **Make connections. Build skills. Make a difference.**

Our volunteers are at the heart of EIL/AFS Ireland.

Volunteering offers an opportunity to meet people from different cultures, develop practical skills, build confidence and become part of an international community committed to intercultural learning and active global citizenship. And there isn't just one way to get involved.

Volunteer opportunities

Our volunteers can support in-person student orientations, helping us facilitate welcome and departure sessions for international exchange students visiting Ireland.

Volunteers also play an important role in our Explore Scholarship programme, supporting pre-departure orientations for scholarship winners as they prepare to travel and taking part in welcome-back weekends when participants return to Ireland.

Through our international partners and wider AFS network, volunteers can also access opportunities to gain additional experience abroad, build international networks and develop their intercultural and leadership skills.

Why Volunteer?

Volunteering with EIL/AFS Ireland can help you:

Develop facilitation, communication and leadership skills

Gain practical intercultural experience.

Meet people from Ireland and around the world

Build confidence and experience that can strengthen your CV

Take part in training and development opportunities

Become part of an international volunteer community

Support young people through meaningful intercultural experiences

Access opportunities through our partners abroad

Most importantly, volunteering is an opportunity to contribute to something bigger: helping people connect across cultures and supporting the development of active global citizens.

TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Learn while you volunteer

We want our volunteers to feel confident, prepared and supported.

All EIL/AFS Ireland volunteers are **Garda Vetted** and complete **Children First online training with Tusla**.

Volunteers can then continue developing their skills through additional training opportunities.



Foundations Training (Virtual)

Our Foundations programme provides volunteers with a grounding in the knowledge and skills that support their work within EIL/AFS.

Next intakes

7 September 2026

2 November 2026



PEAK Facilitator Training (Virtual)

After completing Foundations, volunteers can progress to **PEAK Certified Facilitator Training**, developing further skills in facilitation and intercultural learning.

October intake: 5-31 Oct 2026

November intake: 2-28 Nov 2026



Interested in becoming a volunteer?

Get in touch with our EIL/AFS Ireland Volunteer Manager to find out how you can become involved.

Email: linda.oconnell@eilireland.org

Telephone: +353 21 455 1535



VOLUNTEERS CONNECT ACROSS BORDERS

A summer summit to remember

This July, Letterfrack in Connemara welcomed more than 100 volunteers from across Europe and beyond for the **18th Volunteer Summer Summit**.

Hosted by EIL Intercultural Learning, the six-day summit explored the theme **"Active Digital Citizenship for Resilient Students and Volunteers."**

Participants took part in workshops and discussions covering leadership, intercultural communication, digital citizenship, resilience and volunteer development. Just as importantly, the summit created opportunities for volunteers to exchange ideas, build friendships and strengthen an international network stretching across cultures and countries.

EIL's own volunteer network played an important part in making the event possible, supporting everything from planning and logistics to welcoming participants.

Those who left Letterfrack took home more than new knowledge: they returned with new ideas, stronger leadership skills, renewed confidence and an expanded international community.

Read the full story on the EIL Ireland website.

BUILDING BRIDGES ACROSS CULTURES

Volunteer development in Egypt

Earlier this year, Volunteer Manager **Linda O'Connell** and long-time EIL volunteer **Rachel Maher** represented Ireland in Cairo as members of the European Pool of Trainers.

The three-day international programme brought together participants from across the AFS and EFIL network to explore ways of tackling xenophobia, racism and stereotypes.

Workshops and collaborative learning focused on inclusion, challenging prejudice and developing future volunteer training.

Staying with local host families also gave Linda and Rachel an opportunity to experience Egyptian culture and everyday life first-hand.

They returned to Ireland with new ideas, perspectives and connections to share with EIL volunteers and students, a great example of the development opportunities that can come from being part of an international volunteer network.



EXPLORE: TRAVEL, LEARN, CHANGE

Our **Explore Scholarship Programme** supports people to step outside their comfort zones, experience different cultures and develop as active global citizens.

Earlier this year, our 2026 scholarship winners came together for their pre-departure preparation. Alongside EIL staff, volunteers Isabel and Rachel shared their own experiences of travelling on scholarship programmes, offering practical advice and encouragement before the group began their summer adventures.

But Explore doesn't end when participants come home.

A central part of the programme is **Action at Home**, through which returning participants turn what they have learned internationally into something meaningful in their own communities.

In 2025 alone, 32 scholarship recipients were selected, with 31 participants completing programmes across 13 destinations around the world.



Looking ahead to Explore 2027

Explore offers funded intercultural learning opportunities for different age groups, with experiences ranging from youth leadership and cultural immersion to volunteering and global learning.

Applications for 2026 have closed, but expressions of interest for 2027 are open.

To find out more visit: eilireland.org/explore

STUDY ABROAD IN IRELAND

STUDY ABROAD
Ireland Programmes

STUDENTS BETWEEN 15 - 17YO

EXPLORE, LEARN, AND GROW
Our immersive study abroad programmes give secondary students the chance to experience Irish culture, language, and education while living with a carefully selected host family. Choose **3 or 5 months**, or a **full academic year**, and gain a deeper understanding of the world.

WHERE: IRELAND - THE EMERALD ISLE
Located on the western edge of Europe, Ireland offers vibrant towns, safe communities, and stunning landscapes. Students are placed in selected locations, attending local schools and living with welcoming host families. Experience authentic Irish life in a friendly and supportive environment.

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EIL **AFS**
INTERNATIONAL LEARNING
EXPERIENCE THE WORLD

Explore. Learn. Grow.

Every year, international students discover Ireland not simply as visitors, but as members of local schools, families and communities.

EIL's immersive Study Abroad programmes give secondary school students aged 15-17 the opportunity to experience Irish culture, education and everyday life while living with a carefully selected host family.

Students can choose a three-month, five-month or full academic-year programme, attending a local school and becoming part of their host community.

Ireland offers students the opportunity to develop their English naturally while experiencing our culture, music, festivals and sports, and building friendships and memories that can last long after their exchange ends.

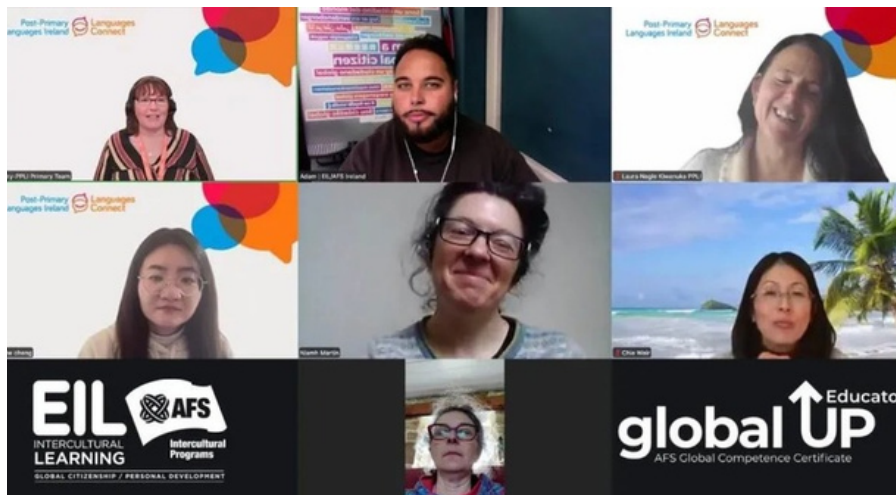
At the heart of the experience is something simple: learning about another culture by living it.

To find out more visit:
eilireland.org/studyabroad

GLOBAL LEARNING IN ACTION

Preparing educators for an interconnected world

Forty-three educators from across Ireland completed the Global Competence Certificate earlier this year through EIL Ireland's partnership with AFS Intercultural Programs and Post-Primary Languages Ireland.



Through online learning and facilitated sessions, participants explored culture, identity, inclusion and diversity, while developing practical approaches to creating supportive and globally minded classrooms.

The programme focused on four key areas: self-awareness, awareness of others, emotional intelligence, and tools and strategies for bridging differences. The result is learning that extends well beyond a training programme, into classrooms and communities throughout Ireland.

PARTNERSHIPS, EDUCATION & INNOVATION

EIL Ireland also joined business, education and community leaders at the Cork Chamber Business Breakfast in May.

CEO **Aideen O'Leary** and Volunteer & Communications Manager **Linda O'Connell** took part in conversations about Ireland's future skills, innovation and sustainability.

Speakers included Minister James Lawless and University College Cork President Professor John O'Halloran, with discussions highlighting the importance of education, exchange, collaboration, inclusion and global citizenship.

The event provided another valuable opportunity for EIL to connect our mission with wider conversations about education, communities and Ireland's place in an interconnected world.



A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR THE FUTURE

EIL reflects on a record year

At our recent online AGM, members reflected on what had been the most successful year in the organisation's history.

The 2025 Annual Report highlighted progress across programmes and the launch of our new Strategic Plan, centred around three priorities:

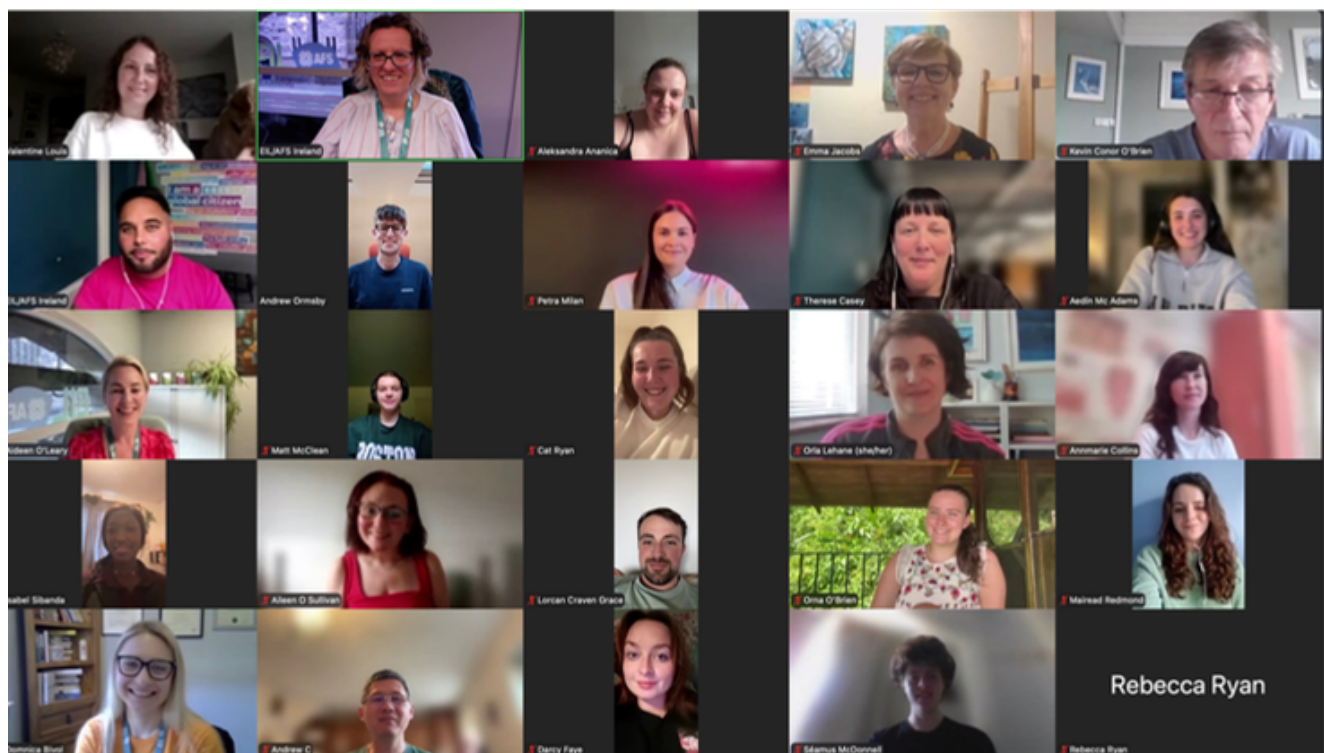
- Renewing Our Identity
- Inspiring Lasting Change
- Enhancing Our Capabilities



A particularly important milestone was the allocation of **€175,000 to our Scholarship Reserve**, providing sufficient funds to support full scholarships for at least the next five years.

The year also saw continued investment in communications, volunteer development, governance and organisational capacity, alongside strong results across Study Abroad, Road Scholar and Explore.

It gives EIL/AFS Ireland a strong platform from which to continue expanding access, creating meaningful intercultural experiences and delivering our mission.



PEOPLE & COMMUNITY

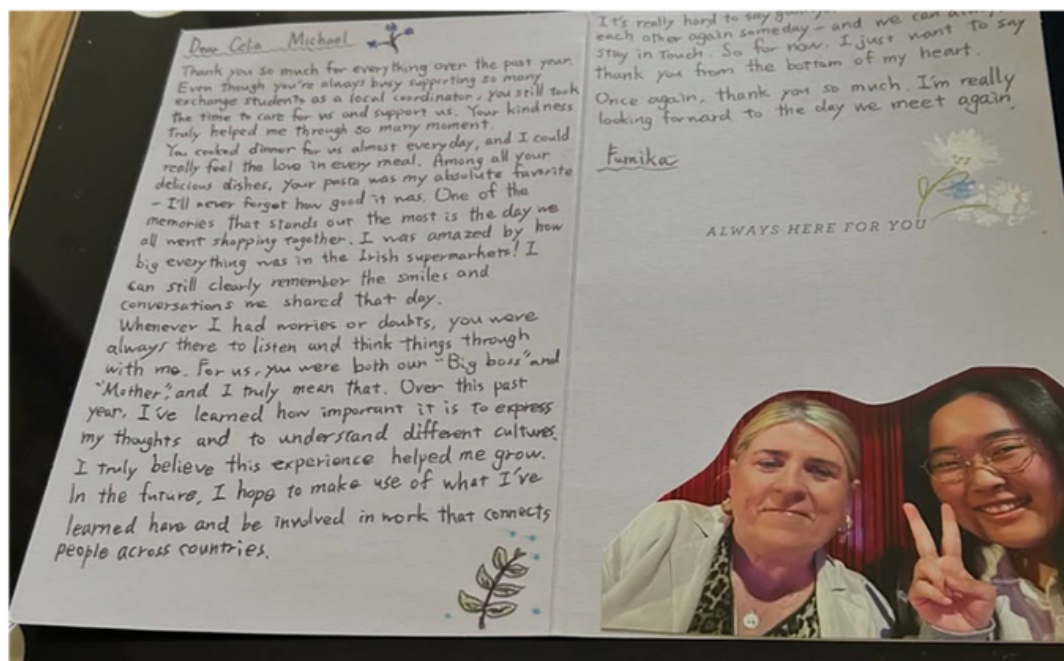
The connections behind the programmes

Some of the most powerful EIL stories happen away from formal programmes and events.

They happen when an exchange student begins to feel at home with an Irish family. When a volunteer reassures a nervous young person preparing for their first journey abroad. When a returning scholarship winner shares what they have learned with their community. Or when friendships formed across cultures continue years after a programme has ended.

Our local coordinators, host families, volunteers, Board members, staff, partners and participants all contribute to that community. As one local coordinator, Celia, reflected after rediscovering a card from a student she had hosted, the relationship had continued long after the exchange ended. Those lasting relationships are a reminder that intercultural exchange is about much more than travel.

It's about connection, care and community.



STAY CONNECTED

There is always something happening at EIL/AFS Ireland. Follow us for programme updates, volunteer opportunities, scholarship news, stories from our international community and a behind-the-scenes look at intercultural learning in action.



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linkedin.com/company/eil-intercultural-learning

Visit **eilireland.org** for the latest news, programmes and opportunities.

Want to get involved?

Whether you would like to volunteer, study abroad, host, apply for an Explore Scholarship, partner with us or simply learn more, we'd love you to stay connected.

EIL/AFS Ireland, connecting people and cultures, one experience at a time.



ACTIVITES THROUGHOUT 2026

