

# National Cheng Kung University Higher Education Continuing Education Program Study Abroad Report



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For the Second Semester of the 113th Academic Year

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## Abstract

A student exchange at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland helped me gain new experiences that enriched myself individually and academically. Since I was little, I have been wanting to study abroad and work internationally. My study in National Cheng Kung University has really helped me achieve this, as I grew a lot as a person. This program helped me break out of my comfort zone, by introducing a different education system while deepening my understanding for biotechnology research, which aligns with my future goal of obtaining a Master's degree in biotechnology in Europe. Outside the classroom, I am introduced to the warmth of Irish hospitality and friendliness, and gained some new hobbies such as hiking and exploring nature, learning Irish history and culture and cooking. Even though I faced some challenges such as language barrier and not being confident in communicating, I eventually practiced and gained friends from all around the globe. This experience has widened my global perspective and broadened my academic knowledge, yet solidified my future career plan in the biotechnology field. It taught me that by breaking from my comfort zone will improve my personal growth. I am grateful for this experience and believe that this is a great opportunity to prepare myself for my future career.

## 摘要

當我參與在愛爾蘭都柏林聖三一大學的學生交換計畫時，我獲得了許多新的經驗，這些經驗豐富了我在個人與學術上的成長。從小我就希望能出國留學並在國際舞台上工作，而在成功大學的學習過程確實幫助我朝這個目標邁進，也讓我在個人層面有了很大的成長。這個交換計畫幫助我跳脫舒適圈，讓我接觸到不同的教育體系，同時也加深了我對生物技術研究的理解，這也與我未來想在歐洲攻讀生物科技碩士學位的目標相符。在課堂之外，我感受到了愛爾蘭人熱情好客與友善的態度，也培養了許多新的興趣，例如登山、探索自然、學習愛爾蘭的歷史與文化以及烹飪。儘管我一開始面臨了語言障礙與溝通上的不自信，但在不斷練習下，我交到了來自世界各地的朋友。這段經歷擴展了我的全球視野，也拓寬了我的學術知識，更加堅定了我未來在生物技術領域發展的職涯規劃。這次交換教會我，唯有勇敢踏出舒適圈，才能實現真正的個人成長。我對這次機會心懷感激，也相信這是一個為我未來職涯做準備的寶貴經驗。

## **Purpose**

Since I was little, I have been wanting to study abroad and work internationally. My study in National Cheng Kung University has really helped me achieve this, as I grew a lot as a person. It made me more independent and mature. It also helped me academically. Talking with my friend that majored in the same field but different institutes reminded me of the importance of perspective. Although we basically learnt the same things, from different points of experience. That pushed me to broaden my knowledge and experience by joining student exchange. I wish to learn from a different perspective and get to know more of the science world. We are having different journeys as we are understanding the materials about the research system and scientists from all over the world.

As having a cancer research center that houses cancer researchers and laboratories, this made me sure that Trinity College Dublin will be a great place for my future plan and goals. Therefore, during the exchange period, I'll take this opportunity to know more about the education and research systems there, and also discuss with the professors there regarding my thesis and future Master studies. By studying in Dublin, I hope to challenge myself and step outside my comfort zone. My whole life, I've been surrounded by familiarity such as culture, the language, everything. Living in Dublin will definitely mean breaking out of my comfort zone, as I will go live independently in a new environment and be able to learn new cultures and traditions and experience them first-hand. Of course, there will be challenges such as language barriers and adapting to such different cultures. But I think this is a great opportunity to grow and push myself to be a better person.

After the completion of the exchange program, I believe that I'll be enriched individually and academically. I will gain more experience and deeper understanding about biotechnology research, which will also help me in my thesis process. I will also be clearer and sure about my future plan and career in Europe. As the Indonesian proverb goes, "Sekali merengkuh dayung, dua tiga pulau terlampaui" (By putting in the effort once, you can achieve multiple goals). By actively seeking out new experiences in Europe, I hope to not only gain knowledge but also build meaningful friendships and experience personal growth that will stay with me forever.

## **Application Process**

The moment the application process was opened, I was so excited and started preparing for the documents. I did review the past application requirements, and thankfully I have semi-prepared documents and the criteria needed previously. Both internal and external applications went smoothly, as I was accommodated with helpful systems and assistants. I had clear communications with both schools about pre-departure administrative steps, such as fundings, housing and course selections, making the process easier, especially with the help of a systematic website. However, the visa application was complicated as I am an Indonesian nationality who needed a visa to enter Ireland. Sadly, there is no Irish embassy in Taiwan, making it difficult to get the visa inside the country. Luckily, with my parents' help, I successfully obtained the Ireland visa by applying for it in my home country, Indonesia. The Irish embassy in Indonesia was helpful and issued the visa quickly, knowing that I would need it in such a short time.

## **Exchange Period**

I would say that the exchange period began the moment I started to say farewell to my friends. A week before my departure, different groups of my friends arranged farewell dinners for me. Every night was filled by memories, laughter, and deep conversation as we caught up for the very last time, before not being able to see each other for a semester. They

also gave me a souvenir to bring to Ireland, hoping that I won't forget them, which I personally thought is really thoughtful. Seeing so many people cared and loving for me makes me feel emotional leaving Taiwan, but also makes me promise myself to make them proud by studying hard in Ireland.

The flight to Dublin itself was a huge journey. It made a huge impact on this exchange experience. I am not a person who is fond of taking flight, and I have never taken a long flight before. I was feeling nervous, but then this 24-hour flight, alone, helped overcome my two biggest fears: flying and long-flights, which I thought would give myself a huge self-improvement.

My earliest and fondest memory that I had when I first arrived in Dublin was meeting my new roommates, which are my first friends that I made there. We had dinner together on the very first night, trying to get to know each other. Everyone was so nice and sweet, each sharing backgrounds and experiences. Learning that most of them are from the top schools in the States, makes me so grateful for having these hard-working people as my friends and I really hope to learn more from them. I also feel grateful for being chosen to represent my school in this opportunity, which motivated me to be a better scholar.

Academically, the system here is unfamiliar from what I'm used to in Asia. A course is mostly worth five credits, unlike the one or two credits per course in NCKU. In a semester, we are supposed to take 20 to 30 credits which means we need to take 4 to 6 courses which is very less compared to what I had back home. The classes here and back in NCKU also had 18 or 36 hours of teaching contacts, depending on the classes. Since we only needed to take 4 to 6 classes, we had less classes per day. I had two hours of class each day, which is less compared to NCKU. Students here spent the extra hours in the library, revising for the materials and doing some reading materials of the course they had that day. The teaching style is similar as we have both lectures and laboratory experiments. We had quizzes, multiple choice exams, and group presentations as assessments. However, the grading system is unlike since the passing grade is 40%.

The examination system here is different, as back home, the exam is taken in the class during the class hours. Here, the examinations have their own exam week where we will take an exam in a designated exam schedule and place, such as exam halls. We were given a few hours there to do our exam. There are several questions and we are allowed to choose 2 to 3 questions to answer. We need to answer it in the form of an essay of at least 2.5 pages. This part shocks me a lot since this is new for me. Luckily, before the exam week, they gave me a whole study week to help us prepare for the exam. During this period, the library was always so packed all the time that we couldn't even find a seat, and we needed to go to another place outside the campus, such as the café to study.

Aside from the academic experience, the environment and weather in Dublin is very different from what I experienced at home. The weather is always so cold, unlike the place where I grew up. However, the lack of sunlight can cause vitamin D deficiency, making the need to take extra vitamins to fulfill my nutrients. Luckily the food groceries there, such as meat, poultry, seafood, dairy products, vegetables are nutritious, fresh and don't use any preservatives and synthetic coloring. They came in big portions, making them affordable. However, eating out in Dublin can be expensive. A week's grocery products can cost the same as one eating out meal. Hence, with the wide range of fresh food and a beautiful, modern kitchen in our flat make me full of a new hobby, which is cooking.

I am grateful that we are given very nice on campus accommodation. We live in a flat, consisting of eight people with individual rooms for each person with shared living spaces such as living room and kitchen. Our flat is located in the middle of the campus, which is also in the middle of the city centre. Hence, it's very accessible for us to walk everywhere, to the class, library, gym or the market in just five to ten minutes. This also helps me to reduce the

transportation cost in the city, even though we are given student transport cards which give us discounted fares.

That said, living in Dublin has its own challenges. I would say that the living expenses in Dublin are affordable, except for a part: the rent. The rent is considerably expensive, especially if compared to rent in Taiwan. Medical fees there are also more expensive compared to Asian countries, so it is better for us to own insurance. Luckily we have a student clinic on campus which is free so whenever we need anything we can just go to the clinic on campus and they can give you medication for free.

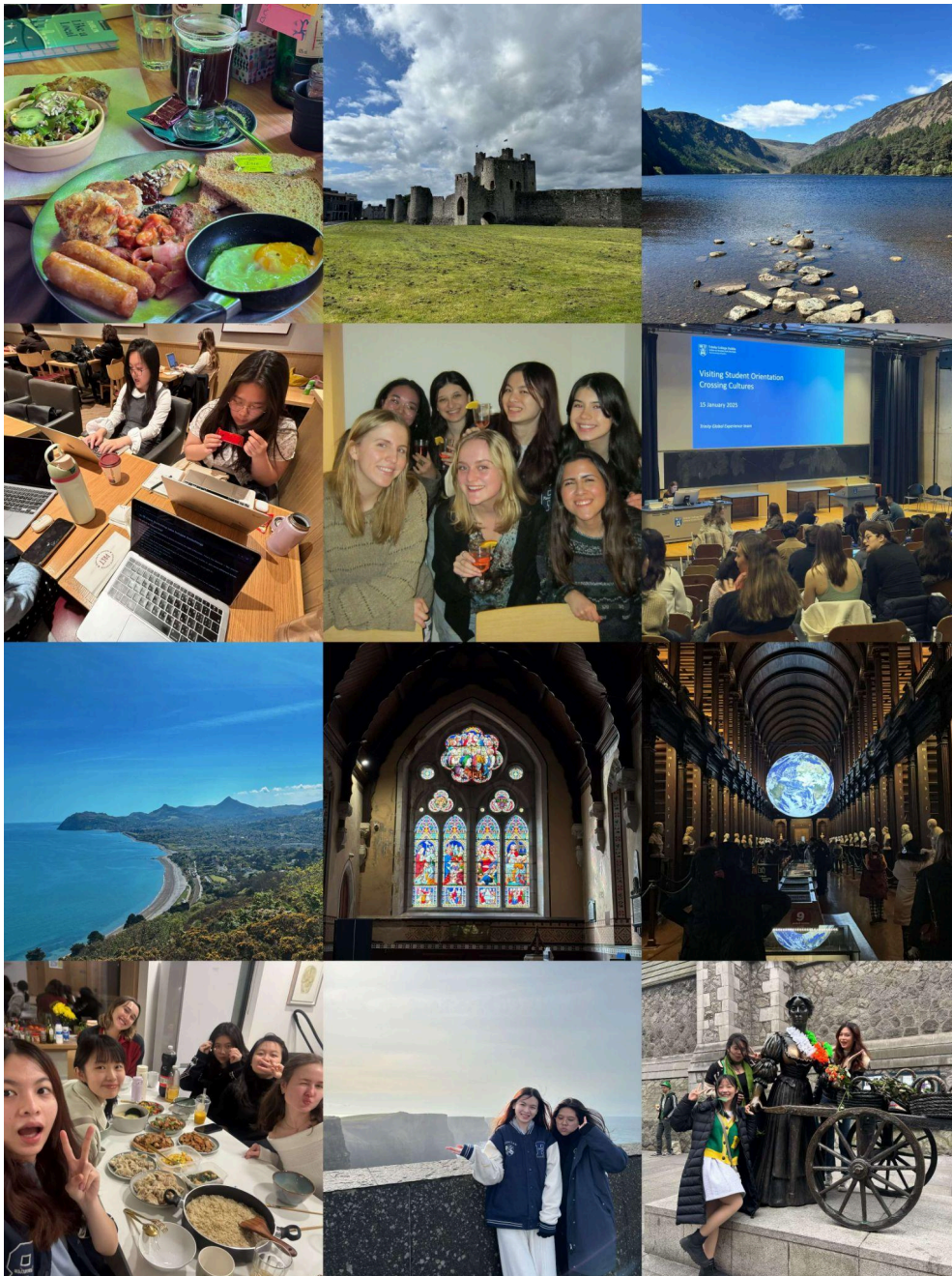
Despite the differences, I have really grown to love my life in Dublin. With fewer class hours, I have achieved a better work-life balance. I spend more time studying and revising my materials at the library, but also exploring new hobbies like cooking, hiking, and walking around the city. Weekends are filled with an hour train ride along the Dublin scenic coastline or picnics with friends at the campus park. Sometimes we gather for dinner to try authentic Irish food, or enjoy the cozy, welcoming atmosphere of a local Irish pub.

### **Reflections and Suggestions**

Overall, I am forever grateful to have the opportunity to study in Ireland. The Irish hospitality made me feel welcomed and warm, their friendliness made me feel at home, even though I am a hundred kilometres away from home. The cuisine surprisingly suits my preferences, even though this is my first time trying Irish food and I was not a huge fan of Western dishes before. The pub culture is the only one in this world, the music, warm lights, drinks, socialising and dancing. The beautiful nature, the cliff and coastline, where the ocean meets the sky, the best place to hike and relax on the weekends. The beautiful history, the thousand years old remains and castles, anciently captivated their beauty while telling a beautiful generation stories.

I am grateful for this experience as I got to step out of my comfort zone and upgrade myself to the best version of myself. Growing up with a long line of nomad family members, I believe that living abroad can enrich myself individually and academically. Studying abroad both in Taiwan and Ireland has helped me achieve this. I became more independent, mature and confident. Academically, I gained a wider perspective in this science world, making it clearer for my future career plan in the biotechnology field. Even though there might be some challenges, such as cultural adaptations and language barriers. I believe that they are a good learning process, a great opportunity to grow and push myself to be a better person. For example, when I first arrived in Dublin, I was nervous to communicate with native friends, afraid that my pronunciation and grammar might be wrong. Luckily, my friends are super sweet and understanding. Their friendliness helped me gain my confidence, making me fluent at the end of the program. From this event I learnt that there is no point in being scared and overthinking. As long as we try our best and dare to try, we will be able to learn and move forward. It is better to feel uncomfortable at first but then be better for the rest of your life.

## Appendix



- a. Trying traditional Irish breakfast
- b. Visiting the thousand years old Trim Castle
- c. Hiked around the Glendalough Lake
- d. Preparing for exam with friends
- e. Bonding time with roommates
- f. Orientation
- g. Hiked to see Killiney Beach view
- h. Irish stained glass in a cathedral
- i. Book of Kells Museum in the campus
- j. Chinese New Year Dinner with friends
- k. Visited UNESCO Site, Cliffs of Moher
- l. Celebrated St. Patrick's Day