

# The TUTOR Project: Reimagining Inclusive Education in Second Level and Further Education

An innovative, Europe-wide model for continuing professional development

## Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of education, the need for innovative professional development for educators has never been more critical. The Erasmus+ funded TUTOR project (Teachers' Upskilling aiming at a hOlistic inclusivity in leaRning) addresses this need by developing a comprehensive continuing professional development (CPD) programme and a central hub for Europe-wide teacher exchanges, sharing of resources, and communities of practice focused on integrating innovative pedagogies and inclusive teaching practices.

By connecting educators from diverse backgrounds, the TUTOR project aims to enhance the quality of teaching and learning across Europe. This article will describe its objectives, methodologies, and anticipated outcomes, highlighting its significance for educators and students alike.

## What is the TUTOR project?

Initiated in 2021 and funded by the Erasmus+ programme, TUTOR is a three-year project that draws on the partnership of expert groups and institutions across Ireland, Austria, Greece, Turkey, and at EU level. Maynooth University is the Irish partner. The objective is to create partnerships of initial teacher education and CPD training providers to establish teacher academies to support teachers to develop their capabilities in understanding and developing more inclusive learning environments.



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The TUTOR project views inclusion as the process of addressing and responding to the diverse needs of learners, particularly its three target groups of students from LGBTQI+, migrant and ethnic minority, and socio-economically disadvantaged communities. We draw on transformation education theories and combine the multidisciplinary knowledge of advocacy groups and NGOs working in partnership with universities to develop and deliver a CPD programme for educators in second level and further education and training (FET), situated in current knowledge, context, and practice.

We aim to promote the adoption of innovative pedagogical approaches that enhance student engagement and learning outcomes. As an example, see our workshop Empowering Every Student (TUTOR project, 2024a) with Dr Katriona O'Sullivan, which examined inclusive education practices for students experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

### How did we create our CPD programme?

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To create a CPD programme that was relevant and addressed the real needs of current educators and educational establishments, we first carried out a needs assessment. This involved five steps:

1. A desk-based literature review was carried out at national and EU level examining the research, policy, and best-practice examples to establish the desired state of affairs (TUTOR project, 2023).
2. Surveys were sent out to second-level schools and FET centres nationwide.
3. Focus groups were held in Maynooth University with stakeholders, including educators, leadership, and advocates from several advocacy agencies.
4. In-depth interviews were conducted with educators, leadership, and advocates. The surveys, focus groups, and interviews were used to establish the existing state of affairs (TUTOR project, 2024b).
5. An analysis on the gaps between the desired state of affairs and the existing state of affairs was conducted, resulting in a needs analysis report (TUTOR project, 2024c).

Based on the needs assessment, the project team spent several months developing a suite of training resources and teaching materials for the CPD programme.

### What is in the CPD programme?

TUTOR's Inclusive Education CPD programme is a blended learning programme comprising one introduction course and three specialisation courses. Each

specialisation course focuses on a target area (migrants and ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+, socio-economically disadvantaged).

The programme will be piloted by selected parties who express an interest in doing so. This will allow the project team to gather feedback from participants, refine the training materials, and assess effectiveness, ensuring our commitment that the project remains responsive to the evolving needs of educators and the inclusive education landscape.

#### Students from the LGBTQI+ community



#### Students with migrant background



#### Students facing socio-economis disadvantages



### What are the opportunities for educators?

Educators from second level and FET are invited to take part in the inclusive education training programme free of charge. Candidates, on application, will be asked if they would like to undertake the training as educators or to apply for a limited place on a train-the-trainer programme.

Trainers will be chosen and undergo further training, funded by the project. The other applicants will undergo the programme as students. All applicants who successfully finish the programme will be invited to apply for the opportunity to travel in Erasmus mobilities to Turkey, Greece, and Austria, fully funded by TUTOR, for further face-to-face training.

### What do we hope will happen?

The TUTOR project anticipates several positive outcomes that will significantly impact teacher training and educational practices across Europe. We hope for enhanced teacher competence, increased collaboration among educators across Europe, the adoption of more inclusive teaching strategies, and sustainable professional development.

TUTOR seeks to establish a sustainable model for professional development that can be adapted to educators' changing needs in relation to inclusive education. By creating a robust network of support and resources, TUTOR aims

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to ensure that teachers have ongoing access to high-quality training throughout their careers.

With this in mind, the project website will have an internationalisation box that will host information about institutions and schools across Europe that are willing to host or send staff for learning opportunities through Erasmus+ mobilities, information on how to conduct an Erasmus+ funded mobility, and an online professional community of practice for educators. Please see the website for more information: <https://tutor-project.eu/>.



## Conclusion

The Erasmus+ funded TUTOR project is a significant initiative to enhance teacher training and professional development across Europe. By focusing on developing a comprehensive competence framework, creating modular training programmes, fostering collaboration, and promoting inclusive pedagogies, TUTOR aims to empower educators to thrive in today's dynamic educational landscape. As the project unfolds, its impact on the quality of teaching and learning promises to be transformative, paving the way for a more inclusive future in education.

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## REFERENCES

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