

Fulston Manor once more flexed its diplomatic muscle and international connections in late February, welcoming students and staff from 5 European nations at the beginning of its third European Parliament Funded Erasmus+ project: *Using ICT to Preserve European Craftsmanship*.

The new project has seen the school connect with partner schools in Czechia, Estonia, Iceland, Lithuania, and Spain and will once more provide Fulston students with the chance to travel across Europe and enjoy unique educational experiences in exciting contexts. Over the course of two academic years, participating students will explore the relationship between craftsmanship and cultural identity, investigating how it plays a crucial role in modern economies and nurtures creativity in young learners.



Arriving from every corner of Europe- from the Arctic Circle to the Mediterranean, the Moravian countryside to the Baltic Sea- partner staff and students brought a cosmopolitan atmosphere to our community with tales of distant shores, peculiar school routines and even stranger winter weather-patterns. With this the first mobility in the project, the pressure was on for Fulston staff and students, not just to provide exciting learning experiences and meet the aims of the project, but to represent our nation and set the tone for the years ahead.



Had the pewter Sunday skies of Sittingbourne dampened the mood, our host families were on-call to lift spirits, provide sumptuous dinners and offer hospitality fit for royalty. Across the community, kettles boiled, Sunday dinners were placed upon incredulous laps and exciting plans forged for the week ahead. In the words of one host parent, "They don't have a choice- they are going to get the full British experience this week!"

And so it was that Fulston's Samba band opened proceedings in dramatic style, bringing the sound of the favelas to the Millenium Hall first thing Monday morning as our visitors took their seats alongside the local mayor Cllr Ken Ingleton and MP for Swale Gordon Henderson for warm welcomes during the opening ceremony. Following rousing speeches and video presentations of the partner regions, the entire cohort marched into a sodden train station en-route to the programme's first instalment: a day of creative workshops at Rochester's University for Creative Arts. In a programme that included cyanotype photography, lino-print production, jewellery creating and screen-printing, students were directed by the university's finest practitioners and given an insight into a range of creative industries. Even before lunch, the multi-national group were holding their creations up to the light, surrounded by the colourful flotsam of UCA's well-stocked studios and wondering if their future at university could be this exciting.

It would require an impressive itinerary to eclipse the bustle of the first day and banish the February drizzle blues. After all, how exactly *do* teenagers connect with experts in the creative industries? As cameras and microphones were charged and primed ready for filmed interviews, the programme began in earnest. With no stone left unturned, Fulston's staff organised a parade of incredible contributions from the private sector: from





MBE-credited jewellers and expert potters to London fashion-label owners; master rope-makers, innovative textile company owners and globe-trekking architects- it was almost as if the region's most creative minds were ready to lend a hand and help the intrepid group of students on their quest for the secret to success in the industry.

As the footage began to roll in, the messages were consistently clear and inspiring: follow your heart, have faith in your own imagination, change the world around you for the better, inspire others and share your

passion with your community. With these words still lingering in the minds of the group, they set about realising the most ambitious aims of the project: creating a large-scale mural of interconnecting artworks created by every participating student and bespoke fashion pieces forged deep inside Fulston's art rooms and textile studio.



Between the frantic editing of interviews and paint-spattered workshops, visitors were given a reprieve from the programme's academic aims with outings across the southeast. Whisked across the garden of England by coach and train, the group were treated to the cobbled streets of Canterbury town-centre, the rich naval heritage of Chatham Dockyard and the restless streets and iconic sights of London main attractions. Inevitably, it would be during these experiences that the trepidation and stilted exchanges that invariably accompany new partnerships would disappear. Whether it be over sumptuous, marshmallow-decorated coffees, strolling through Hyde Park in rare spring sunshine, ducking

between the intricate interior of decommissioned submarines or gazing down the Thames upon a London Clipper as the sun set over Waterloo Bridge, friendships started to flourish and the week began to take on a life of its own...



With the wind in the students' sails, it was down to the wire in finalising the project's final products- 40 hand designed and pressed tee shirts kept the Textiles staff busy whilst finishing touches were made to animated presentations about the experiences of the week. And as the finished fashion and mural pieces were brought en-mass to the Millennium Hall on Friday, the closing ceremony began *almost* on schedule...



Emotions ran high as- in a blur of speeches and handshakes, animated interviews and gift-exchanges- the programme for the week reached its crescendo. The students had realised the project's aims and tackled its challenges in the most spirited and optimistic way. Sadly, it could mean only one thing: the UK mobility was drawing to a close and soon it would be time for our visitors to return home. Amidst the flashing lights and sounds of the evening's bowling party, and the animated farewells at hotels and railways stations the next morning, it felt like something special was coming to an end. Or to be more precise: something special was just beginning. With trips to Estonia, Iceland, Czechia and Lithuania

lined up in the next 12 months, the project is only in its infancy and a whole range of creative opportunities await those lucky enough to count themselves Erasmus participants.

As with so many previous Erasmus exchanges, the young people at our school continue to provide a valuable antidote to cynical and divisive times. Overcoming geographical barriers and embracing cultural differences, they offer hospitality and goodwill with open arms. Celebrating diversity and investing in creativity, they are not simply hoping for a better tomorrow, they are crafting a better future together.

Once again, Erasmus has allowed the art of friendship to flourish at Fulston Manor School.



*Fulston Manor School would like to thank: 1508 London Architects, Wordsmithery, Canterbury Pottery, Katie Briggs @ The Textile Review, Natasha Steer @ Creatabot, The staff @ Tatty Devine, Sebastien Stobbs @ Conquer Gear Fashion, The Design Museum, London, Chatham Dockyard Master Ropemakers and Sarah Lily Designs for their invaluable help during the week.*

*On behalf of the school, Mr Matthews would like to thank all the families who volunteered to host and provided such a welcoming experience for our guests. Your hospitality makes these opportunities possible.*