



Press Release

26 August 2010

European students take to the high seas

Imagine being able to plan, design and carry out your own scientific survey into the seas around us. This week research students from across Europe were given just such an opportunity when they joined scientists onboard the Irish national research vessel RV *Celtic Voyager* in Irish waters off Cork. This unique opportunity for students to gain practical experience in carrying out multidisciplinary marine scientific research is part of the European 7th Framework Programme project EUROFLEETS (Towards an alliance of European research fleets), and was designed, developed and co-funded by the Marine Institute, Ireland.

Over the course of six days, 20 European postgraduate students (10 women and 10 men from 6 countries: Estonia (3); France (3); Ireland (5); Italy (4); Portugal (2), and Spain (3)) learned the skills necessary to map the seabed and the seafloor, identify the animals and plants living there, and investigate the local and oceanic currents that influence them. Training focused specifically on operational research and included the deployment of equipment and instrumentation, sample recovery and processing, and data acquisition. Other modules investigated designing and planning a survey, operations and capabilities of research vessels and safety at sea.

An additional shore-based day in University College Cork saw students processing and analyzing the data acquired during the course of the survey. The course, which aimed to provide a holistic ecosystem approach to studying the marine environment, concluded with integrating the data to produce a three - dimensional, interactive model of the study area.

"This was a unique opportunity for students to acquire the practical skills necessary to conduct offshore operations, whilst also providing invaluable experience of life onboard a research vessel," said Dr. Peter Heffernan, CEO of the Marine Institute. "These courses will increase European capacity for multidisciplinary marine research as well as contributing towards the employability of graduates internationally."

The training was led by Dr Pauhla McGrane - coordinator of the Marine Institute funded *National Research Shiptime Training Programme (NRSTP)* - and was modeled on previously developed national ship-based training programmes. "These practical training programmes equip the next generation of marine scientists with the skills necessary to carry out offshore marine scientific research," she says. "The NRSTP courses have been shown to be hugely successful at national



and European levels. The challenge is now to continue to develop innovative research vessel-based training programmes for the national and international markets.”

The training was carried out by scientists from Universities and Institutes, all EUROFLEETS partners, including professors from the *National Institute of Oceanography and Geophysical Research* (OGS), Italy, the *University of Aveiro*, Portugal (through FCT – the *Portuguese Foundation of Science and Technology*), *Tallinn University of Technology* (TUT), Estonia, as well as scientists from the *Marine Institute*.



Group photograph of one of the EUROFLEETS multidisciplinary ship-based training courses

The EUROFLEETS courses are recognised by the Institute of Marine, Engineering, Science and Technology (IMarEST) as contributing towards the continuous professional development of marine scientists.

Supported by the European Commission through the 7th Framework Programme for Research and Development, the EUROFLEETS project addresses the Capacities Programme: “Sustainable development, global change and ecosystems” and regroups 24 organizations from 16 countries with an EC contribution of 7.2 M€. Further details can be found at <http://www.eurofleets.eu>.

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