

Cultural Awareness



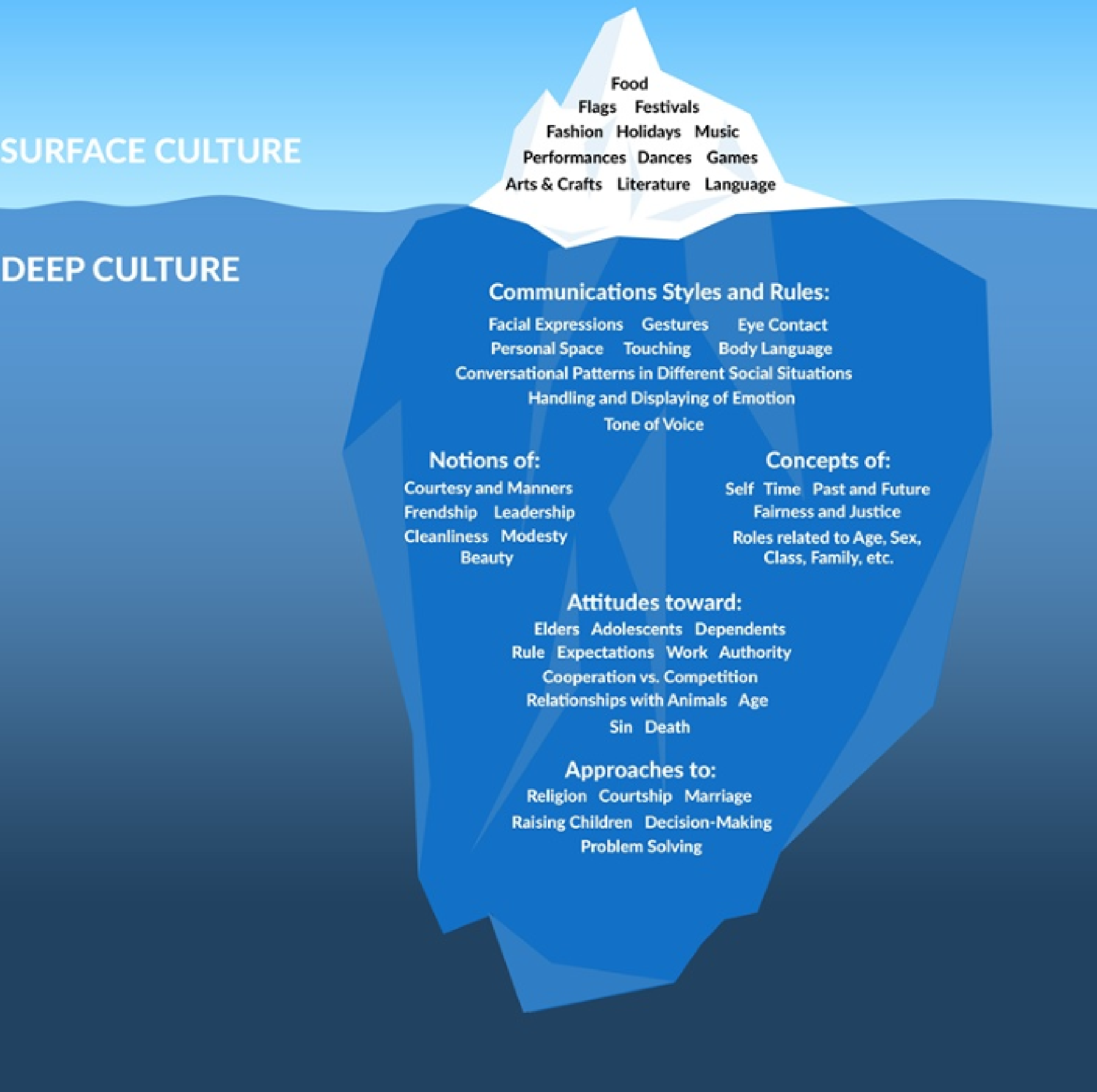
An introduction to Cultural Awareness

The purpose of this brief introductory module is to help orientate new staff from overseas to the Irish and HSE cultures, preparing you for some of the different cultural practices you may see.

Learning Objective - Having read this introduction to cultural awareness you will:

- Understand what is meant by cultural awareness
- Gain an initial understanding of the main aspects of Irish culture and Irish healthcare culture, including communication, cultural norms (e.g. social norms, interpersonal norms) in a context of mutual respect for difference
- Have developed an understanding of the multicultural working environment in the HSE
- Know where to go for guidance as you settle in

THE CULTURAL ICEBERG



Why is it important?

Understanding and respecting different cultures helps us to:

- Develop strong, mutually respectful, working relationships with colleagues from different cultures. This will help the team to provide the best care to patients.
- Bring our own strengths, insights and experience to the workplace in an effective and positive way, minimise any risk of accidentally

Communication

Communication takes many forms, including verbal, non-verbal, written and visual. Work colleagues may have preferred communication forms.

You will notice that although everyone is speaking in English, people in Ireland speak with different accents, depending on which part of the country they are from. You will become familiar with the local accent in the area you are working in, and gradually you will become familiar with accents from other parts of the country also.

Communicating involves more than using the correct language and terminology. It also involves being aware of your non-verbal communication. This includes your body language, gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions. This non-verbal communication has a strong impact on how your

doing or saying something that could lead to misunderstandings or problems with our colleagues.

We are all on an on-going journey of understanding each others' cultures and developing the ability to describe issues and concerns that can arise when someone's values, beliefs, and practices differ from those of the majority of people in the environment

words are understood and interpreted by other people. Eye-contact is an example of this.

Here are some guidelines to help you with communications:

Common phrases:

We have listed some common phrases here (insert link to colloquialisms).

There are also some particularly Irish ways of speaking. For example, Irish people say 'Sorry' a lot. Sometimes, this is an apology – as you would expect. Often, however, it is used in place of 'excuse me'. For example, if someone wants to get past you in a crowded place, they will often say 'Sorry, can I get by' or just 'Sorry'. You will hear 'sorry' a lot.

The Irish language:

English is the main spoken language throughout the country, and everyone can speak English fluently, however, the Irish language is taught in schools, and is still spoken daily in a small number of locations known as ‘Gaelteacht’ areas. You will notice that all official documents and street signs are provided in both languages.

Communicating with people from diverse backgrounds:

Ireland is a modern, diverse and inclusive society. At work, you will meet colleagues and service users from many diverse backgrounds The HSE has developed Inclusive Communication Guidelines covering: Gender and sexual orientation; Race and ethnicity; Disability. You will find these helpful guidelines on the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion team page on [HSeLanD](#).

Communication in your professional setting:

This 90-minute on-line training session on [HSeLanD](#), ‘Making Conversations Easier’, provides examples of good communication in action, in the HSE, and it is recommended to complete this as early as possible.

Body language:

Eye contact: In Irish culture, it is polite to make eye contact with the person you are speaking with, no matter what their age or job is. This may be different to your own culture – it is not necessary for you to change your own culture and customs.

You are encouraged always to ask questions if you are unsure about anything.

Food and Breaktime Etiquette

As the international community has grown in Ireland, so has the range of foods available. You should be able to find the foods you are used to in supermarkets or specialist food markets.

Irish people eat main meals with knives and forks, and foods such as sandwiches, burgers, snacks etc are usually eaten with the hands.

At work breaktimes, remember to chat in English, so that everyone can join in.

Social Norms

Interest in your background:

People who you meet, even briefly, will often express friendly interest in you, your background and family, and may ask you questions. Their intention is to demonstrate friendliness and interest in you as a person. This may seem a little intrusive to you, if this is not usual in your culture. This interest does not necessarily mean that they want to be best friends with you – it takes longer to set up a friendship.

Discussion of politics and religion can be sensitive – we recommend that you treat these topics with sensitivity if they arise.

At work as well as socially, people move on to first names quite quickly, and socialising with

colleagues is common. The healthcare system can be a little more hierarchical, so ask for advice if you are unsure whether to use a first name or not. In work, people greet each other with a handshake or – since the Covid pandemic – you may be greeted with a wave of the hand. Kisses on the cheek are not commonly used.

Informality / formality:

Generally, Irish people see themselves as quite easy-going and informal. In social settings, for example, it is quite common for people to be a few minutes late for an appointment with a friend. In the professional world however, this is different. It is important to arrive to meetings, etc on time and prepared.

Meetings at work will often start with some general discussion, for example about the weather, sports news, or other general social topics. It will then progress quite quickly to the topic of the meeting.

Family life:

Family is important to Irish people, and most have strong family ties. Ireland has the second-lowest divorce rate in the EU. Same-sex marriage was introduced in Ireland in 2015. There is a relatively young population, and a significant focus on the importance of childhood.

Tipping:

Tipping is common in restaurants (about 10-12% of your bill), but not compulsory. In pubs, it is common to tip staff who serve tables, but not the staff who work behind the bar. You might tip a taxi driver by rounding up your fare, also the hairdresser usually gets a 'rounded up' tip.

Cultural activities:

Music, literature and sports are important in Irish culture, and bring much life and fun to social life. Newcomers are welcome!

Learn more about Irish cultural activities [here](#).

Meet one of our staff who made the move to Ireland

Meet [Matilda Regan](#), Clinical Skills Facilitator in the Emergency Department of Kerry University Hospital. Matilda explains her experience of the cultural differences between her home country of Sweden, and Ireland.

Where to find additional guidance on cultural awareness

Where to go for additional guidance as you settle in:

Ask your line manager (or buddy) for guidance

Ask a colleague who has just joined the HSE or who has been in Ireland for some time

Join the HSE Cultural Diversity Staff Network to connect with colleagues from different cultures:
Employee networks - HSE Staff Contact
diversity.hr@hse.ie

If you feel you are subject to unfair or unpleasant bias from others, please speak with your manager. You will also find guidance in the Dignity at Work policy

