

# Universities Scotland submission to ECYP on Erasmus+ and the replacement schemes in place across the UK

Universities Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide evidence to the Education, Children and Young People Committee on their inquiry into Erasmus+ and the replacement schemes in place across the UK.

## Key points

- Scotland's students, staff and universities would benefit significantly from the introduction of a two-way mobility scheme in Scotland, that would complement the opportunities available as part of the Turing Scheme, as run by the UK Government.
- A Scottish scheme, as indicated in the Scottish Government's 2021-22 Programme for Government, would need to be financially supported from additional funds. It cannot be delivered within existing higher education budgets. Regrettably, given the pattern of cuts to university funding (and the recent clawback of £20 million from higher education) this does not seem to be a realistic proposition.

Mobility schemes are an important aspect of the university experience. Opportunities for outward mobility, for work or study, are vital to help open minds, exchange ideas, contribute to diplomacy and soft power links, to grow cultural awareness, build confidence and employability skills. Two-way mobility also supports wider economic and societal agendas like the need for global perspectives on shared challenges. For that reason, Erasmus+ was greatly valued by students, staff and institutions.

Scottish organisations will cease their final Erasmus+ projects when the current cycle of the programme ends on 31 May 2023. Scottish universities benefited hugely from Erasmus+ participation, proportionally being one of the most active nations across Europe as well as within the UK (16% of all UK students participating in Erasmus+ were from Scottish institutions). 18,124 students from Scottish universities participated in Erasmus+ between 2014/15 and 2022/23. According to Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) figures, 2,755 Erasmus+ students attended Scottish universities in 2018/19 on inbound schemes. In addition, Erasmus+ offered opportunities for staff with 2,667 university staff participating during the same time period.

## The impact of a gap in mobility opportunities in Scotland

Much to the disappointment of universities, Scotland has not progressed the development of its own two-way mobility scheme for students and staff as was indicated in the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2021-22. This means that university students only have access to Turing Scheme, or bilateral

exchange agreements between specific institutions. This has led to a number of issues.

**Sharp decline in the budget available for mobility.** Our biggest concern since it was announced that Scottish universities were to be excluded from Erasmus+ was a loss of opportunity for students and staff.

Whilst the Turing Scheme is very welcome (and we expand upon this below) Erasmus+ offered two-way exchange and with a significantly larger range of programmes and projects it would fund. This means Scottish universities will either receive less or no funding for mobility. As a result, most Scottish (and UK) universities have a significant funding shortfall around student and staff outward mobility. With the final Erasmus+ funding only coming to an end imminently (in academic year 2022-23), it is too early to understand the full impact of the delay in the creation of a Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP). However, our members have seen a drop in funding for mobility in the transition from Erasmus+ to Turing. On average, Scottish universities received about 50% less in funding for student mobility via Turing (which as outlined above only supports study abroad opportunities for students).

Universities' own efforts at establishing and maintaining partnerships are funded through the Teaching Grant and philanthropy. The university Teaching Grant has been cut by 27% in real terms between 2014-15 and 2022-23. Continued high inflation during academic year 2023-24 will mean another substantial real terms erosion of university funding. In a recent member survey, around half of our universities were only able to offer financial support to between 25-50% of their total outbound students this academic year. For next academic year (2023/24), universities estimate that without Erasmus+ funding, this proportion will decrease further. The consequences of this are stark: our members will be forced to rationalise who gets to undertake an opportunity to study abroad. This will have consequences for current students but will also impact prospective students' choice of course and university.

**Unmet demand.** A timely introduction of SEEP, like the Welsh Government was able to achieve with Taith, would have supported universities in their competitive offer to students. Our members are seeking to recruit students from not just within the UK but internationally too and the ability to study abroad is highly valued by students. Although mobility levels have not caught up with those before the pandemic, from 2015/16 to 2018/19 there was a 32% increase of students in the UK who chose a mobility period as part of their degree, indicating the continued demand and value students place on such an opportunity<sup>1</sup> offered by UK universities.

**Reputation.** A further element of the delay to SEEP is the impact the absence of a student mobility scheme will have on the perception and reputation of Scotland. Expectations for Scotland to offer a national alternative to Erasmus+ raised much attention amongst European nations clearly indicating their intention to partner with Scottish universities. The rhetoric from the Scottish Government about the importance

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<sup>1</sup> [International Facts and Figures 2022 \(universitiesuk.ac.uk\)](https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/international-facts-and-figures-2022)

of student mobility at the time of our exclusion from Erasmus+ has not been followed by action to deliver an alternative.

**Employability skills.** A [2015 report](#) from Universities UK showed that UK students who have international experience tend to do better academically and in employment, and the benefits are greatest for those who come from the least advantaged backgrounds. Additionally, global citizenship is a key graduate attribute for students progressing from universities in Scotland and is in demand by employers across the country.

#### Scottish universities and outward mobility

Our members hugely value the chance to offer students outward mobility programmes. A recent Universities UK International (UUKi) report, [The management of outward student mobility programmes in the UK, 2022](#) found that Scottish universities are ambitious about student mobility but there are challenges:

- 86% of Scottish members include outward mobility in their institution's strategic plan (compared to 68% for UUKi members).
- 71% are able to offer short, medium and long-term mobility programmes<sup>2</sup>.
- The top three priorities of our surveyed members for outward mobility was: 1. increase student numbers; 2. offer more short-term programmes; and 3. offering programmes for widen access students.
- 71% specific mobility scholarships or funding packages to widening access students.
- The biggest barriers our members are: 1. lack of funding for 'non-traditional' mobility such as short placements or staff mobility; 2. meeting student demand for placements; and 3. disruption caused by the pandemic.
- 86% have seen most growth in short and medium-term opportunities in the last three years. Short term has been the biggest increase in student demand say 57.1% of members.
- 43% of members have just 0-2 FTE staff working on outward student mobility. Only one member has 10 or more staff doing such activity.
- Only one member said over 50% of the outward student mobility budget was being funded by the Turing Scheme.

#### **Post-Brexit mobility schemes as progressed in the rest of the UK**

##### Turing Scheme

The UK Government introduced the Turing Scheme in February 2021 and was welcomed by our members who made it their priority to make the scheme as successful as possible to allow their students to study abroad in 2021-22.

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<sup>2</sup> Definitions for length of mobility schemes. Short: 1-4 weeks; Medium: 5-13 weeks; Long: 14+ weeks.

The Turing Scheme's [Funding Results for 2022 to 2023](#) saw applications from all 19 Universities Scotland members with 16 receiving funding, totalling £5.81m. In 2022-23 we believe that 3,300 Scottish students from universities and colleges are participating in the Turing Scheme<sup>3</sup>. Organisational funding helps cover costs directly linked to the administration and implementation of a project. Funding to cover living costs is also available for all projects.

There is clear guidance from the Turing Scheme on the criteria for funding with four objectives: global Britain; levelling up; developing key skills; and value for UK taxpayers. There is a focused widening access element to the Turing criteria, which is welcome.

<b>Turing Scheme funding amounts and number of approved projects (Higher Education) (Scotland)</b>	
AY 2021/22	AY 2022/23
Funding: £6.95m	Funding: £5.81m
Projects: 17	Projects: 16

However, a key weakness of the Turing Scheme, which has been conveyed by the sector to the UK Government is the lack of reciprocity. The inability for students to come to the UK to study on a short-term basis is a disappointment and diminishes any ambition that Turing might have to replicate Erasmus+.

Operationally, demand for the scheme from higher education and beyond outstrips resource. This means some of our members are not getting funding for mobility schemes. Furthermore, administrative delays in notifications and allocations of student funding through the scheme mean that students are left uncertain as to whether their planned study outside the UK will get Turing funding. That's a real operational problem and a major deterrent for many students who are reliant on this funding and who may choose not to study abroad because of the risk of taking on a commitment they can't fund. It also risks undermining the widening access objectives of the scheme.

### Taith

The Welsh Government has delivered its own two-way mobility scheme, Taith. Taith was announced in March 2021 and has been operational since 2022. The scheme has been funded to the value of £65 million until 2026 with the clear aim to fund 15,000 people from Wales to go on exchanges with 10,000 people expected to come to Wales.

### **Desirable criteria in a Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP)**

The following principles underpin what universities are looking for from a Scottish scheme:

- A Scottish exchange scheme should be two-way, allowing an inward flow of talent into Scotland with the resultant social and economic benefits that this involves. This would also work in harmony with the Turing Scheme, without duplication.

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence presented to the [19 January 2023 meeting](#) of the Cross Party Group in the Scottish Parliament on Colleges and Universities by Ms Alex Barker, Policy Lead for Turing at the Department for Education.

- We would be looking for a new scheme to be open to the EU and beyond, to sustain links that Scotland's universities have developed over many years with institutions across the EU.
- A long-term funding commitment. Taith has been funded for four years with £65m funding. We would like SEEP to match this level of ambition, proportionally based on population, or to go even further than Wales. This would need to be covered by additional funding from the Scottish Government given the very real pressures on existing HE budgets.
- SEEP should have a clear linkage to the Scottish Government's International Education Strategy and synergies should be sought.
- SEEP should, like Taith, Erasmus+ and Turing Scheme, be open to universities, colleges, schools, youth and community groups to enhance learning and understanding of both young people and staff.

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