

From Erasmus to Turing: What now for Study Mobility between the UK and the EU? Damage Limitation and New Opportunities¹

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On 24th December 2020 the EU and the UK concluded the Trade and Cooperation Agreement and announced, contrary to widespread hopes and expectations, that the UK would not remain associated with Erasmus+ 2021-7 but would instead establish its own mobility programme, the Turing Scheme, available to fund student mobility across the globe for UK based students. This article considers the reasons for this decision and various features of the new scheme. Concern is expressed at the implications for collaborative work between universities of the absence of funding for students coming to the UK for study periods, and for staff mobility; on the other hand, the emphasis on funding opportunities for disadvantage students is welcomed, as is funding for very short study periods. The position of Switzerland, no longer a full member of Erasmus since 2014, and the lessons for the UK afforded by the experience of Switzerland, are considered.

Keywords: Brexit, study mobility, Erasmus Programme, Turing Scheme, Swiss-European Mobility Programme, student exchanges, short term study mobility

1. Introduction

We were told that the Erasmus Programme created ‘the first generation of young Europeans’;² ‘truly European citizens’.³ These statements were made with pride, wonderment and aspiration. They were made at a time when the all EU Member States, including the UK, participated in Erasmus. Since then, the UK has voted to leave the EU in the referendum of 23 June 2016, formally left the EU on 31 January 2020, entered, by virtue of the Withdrawal Agreement,⁴ a Transition Period during which many aspects of the UK’s erstwhile membership of the EU remained, for practical purposes, unchanged, and on 24 December 2020 concluded, after painful negotiations, the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), which came into effect upon the expiry of the Transition

¹ This article reprises the author’s article in this journal written in the immediate aftermath of the Brexit referendum: C. James, *Brexit: What now for Study Mobility between the UK and the EU?* PJIEL Vol 2, 2016, pp. 7-20.

² U. Eco, *It’s culture, not war, that cements European identity*. The Guardian (London, 26/1/12), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/26/umberto-eco-culture-war-europa> (8 April 2015).

³ J. Figel, (2007) *20 Years of Erasmus: From Higher Education to European Citizenship*, Erasmus 20th Anniversary Closing Conference, Lisbon.

⁴ Agreement on the withdrawal of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland from the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community (2019/C 384 I/01)

Period at midnight (CET) on 31 December 2020.

However, as a counterweight to the considerable relief generated by the Christmas Eve conclusion of the TCA, came the news that the UK would not remain associated with the Erasmus+ Programme after the end of the Transition Period but would instead set up its own student mobility programme, the Turing Scheme. This has led not only to widespread surprise⁵ to those not party to the negotiations,⁶ but has raised a number of questions: ‘Why?’; ‘How will the Turing Scheme work?’; ‘What is lost by the move from Erasmus to Turing, and can anything be gained?’. The UK’s decision to withdraw from Erasmus has been called ‘cultural vandalism’ by Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland’s First Minister,⁷ and one of Michel Barnier’s two chief regrets about the outcome of the negotiations.⁸

2. The Rationale for Turing

There is of course from one perspective a superficial logic about the UK government’s decision not to participate in the next manifestation of the Erasmus+ Programme and instead to launch the Turing Scheme. In many ways, this decision is consistent with both the drivers for the original Leave campaign, and more recently the UK government’s policy agenda to make Brexit a reality. On 31st January 2020, the EU citizenship hitherto interwoven into UK nationality vanished like Cinderella’s ball dress and coach as the clocks struck midnight in Brussels and 11pm in London. Precisely eleven months later, the various features of EU citizenship status which the Withdrawal Agreement had permitted UK nationals to enjoy until the end of the Transition Period also melted quietly away as the December night became the January morn. It is trite to say that the most notable of these features comprised the free movement rights attaching to the status of EU citizenship. Much emphasis has been placed over the years by the European Commission about the potential for Erasmus to act as a vector for the development of EU citizenship. Indeed the genesis of Erasmus has its roots in discussions in the 1970s about activities having the potential to develop a European identity.⁹ Supporters of Brexit have long been particularly sceptical of certain aspects of Erasmus such as the Jean Monnet Programme, designed to develop EU studies worldwide, which they have

⁵ See, for example, E. Peltier, *Britain Mourns a Cherished Education Exchange Program ended by Brexit*, New York Times, 29 December 2020. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/29/world/europe/brexit-erasmus-uk-eu.html?smtp=cur&smid=tw-nytimesworld> (21 January 2021). However, there were hints earlier on that the UK government had reservations: the UK government’s Policy paper ‘Our approach to the Future Relationship with the EU’ of 27 February 2020 asserted in decidedly reserved tones that the UK would consider ‘options for participation in elements of Erasmus+ on a time-limited basis provided the terms are in the UK’s interest’. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-approach-to-the-future-relationship-with-the-eu> (21 January 2020); also Rishi Sunak, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, committed funds in his November 2020 spending review to a ‘domestic alternative’ to Erasmus: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/spending-review-2020-documents/spending-review-2020> (26 January 2021).

⁶ It has been suggested that the UK had for some time had more reservations about participation in Erasmus+ 2021-7 than was apparent to the EU negotiators; Erasmus+ was only dropped from the negotiating agenda a few days before the conclusion of the TCA yet the Turing Scheme was presented as a worthy alternative as soon as the TCA was concluded. A. Corbett, *Why has the UK ditched participation in Erasmus+?* University World News, 1 January 21. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=2021010111206409> (20 January 2021).

⁷ O. Ralph, *Brexit deal: Reaction from around the world as UK seals EU trade deal – as it happened*, Financial Times, 24 December 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/34dd4cbe-33ef-32f8-9aa2-904339e46bf0> (21 January 2021).

⁸ K. Buck, *The Erasmus Scheme has been scrapped under the Brexit deal after the UK government decided ‘not to participate’*, LBC News, 24 December 20. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-approach-to-the-future-relationship-with-the-eu> (3 January 2021).

⁹ See, for example, C. Shore, *Building Europe*, Routledge, London-New York, 2000, pp. 4-5, and picked up in 1985 in the recommendations of the Adonnino Committee which suggested (Section 5.8) that exchanges of young people would assist in promoting a European identity among the youth of Europe. Adonnino Committee (1985) A People’s Europe. Bulletin of the European Communities Supplement 7/85.

perceived as having an overtly Europeanising agenda.¹⁰ It follows that the nurturing of a sense of European citizenship in young UK nationals (particularly as their ‘fundamental status’)¹¹ was, for supporters of Brexit, at the very least a cause for concern, and potentially a cast iron justification for parting company with it. That such is a significant motivation for withdrawing from Erasmus is certainly suspected: a Scottish newspaper quickly observed that ‘Erasmus removal shows the de-Europeanisation of young Scots has begun’.¹² At this point it should be noted that the UK government present their decision as driven by economics: one of the two main reasons given is that remaining associated with Erasmus+ 2021-7 was simply too expensive. This proposition is shared by the Swiss government.¹³ The Brexit narrative is well known to have been predicated to a considerable extent on the UK having full control of its own borders and immigration policy, on an end to EU free movement; this was one of the main planks of the successful ‘Leave’ campaign. The central right of EU citizenship and the one most prized by its holders is exactly this right.¹⁴ It is also the right the compromise of which led to the suspension of Switzerland from the Erasmus Programme in 2014, of which more will be said later in this article. Significantly, it is also precisely the right which generates the mobility capital which Erasmus makes such efforts to nurture for the future, and which is made real and given the fullest expression when Erasmus alumni, the well-educated hopes for the EU’s future, build on their early mobility capital by undertaking further study or going on to engage in economic activity abroad.

Despite the rejection of the practical expression given to the right of free movement by Erasmus mobility, it is, however, self-evident that the ability of British youth to turn their gaze outwards and engage enthusiastically with the wider world will be a *sine qua non* for the success of the ‘Global Britain’ mission promoted as the underpinning rationale for the Turing Scheme and the other reason for leaving Erasmus.¹⁵ Many studies demonstrate the contribution to the development of such an outward looking mindset which can be made by the ready provision of study mobility: the benefits of a different way of life and different study styles, developing intercultural competences, and often improving foreign language skills.¹⁶ The ‘Global Britain’ label is sometimes parodied as embodying a swashbuckling ‘Britannia Rules the Waves’ narrative, seen at once as being new and as grounded in history, in many respects a contradiction to the insular, ‘pull up the drawbridge’ approach popularly perceived as being the true antithesis of European free movement and natural

¹⁰ See, for example, E. Korosteleva, *Jean Monnet Chair: we have every right to engage in debates about Europe*, The Conversation, 3 August 2015. <https://theconversation.com/jean-monnet-chair-we-have-every-right-to-engage-in-debates-on-europe-45509> (23 January 2021)

¹¹ Case 184/99, *Grzelczyk v Centre publique d’aide sociale d’Ottignies-Louvain-la-Neuve*, [EU:C:2001:458]; Case 413/99, *Baumbast and R v Secretary of State for the Home Department*, [EU:C:2002:493]; Case 184/02, *Garcia Avello v Belgian State*, [EU:C:2003:539]; Case 200/02, *Zhu and Chen v Secretary of State for the Home Department*, [EU:C:2004:639]; Case 147/03, *Commission v Austria*, [EU:C:2005:427]

¹² E. Samara, *Erasmus removal shows the de-Europeanisation of young Scots has begun*, The National, 28 December 20. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/18972043.erasmus-removal-shows-de-europeanisation-young-scots-begun/> (20 February 2021)

¹³ See section 5 below.

¹⁴ Most EU citizenship rights can only be exercised by EU citizens who can demonstrate a sufficient ‘cross-border’ element in the form of actual or potential movement from one Member State to another: the Preamble to Directive 2004/38EC of the European Parliament and the Council of 29 April 2004 states that ‘Union citizenship is the fundamental status of nationals of the Member States *when they exercise their right of free movement*’ [italics: author’s own].

¹⁵ UK government press release, *New Turing Scheme to support thousands of students to study and work abroad*, 26 December 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-turing-scheme-to-support-thousands-of-students-to-study-and-work-abroad> (2 March 2021)

¹⁶ There is a huge literature on this topic; see, for example, E. Murphy-Lejeune: *Student Mobility and narrative in Europe*, Routledge, Abingdon 2002; M. Byram & F. Dervin (eds): *Students, Staff and Academic Mobility in Higher Education*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle 2008; B. Feyen & E. Krzaklewska (eds): *The Erasmus Phenomenon – Symbol of a new European Generation?* Peter Lang GmbH, Frankfurt 2013; there are many other examples.

outcome of Brexit. Perhaps, therefore, the inherent irony in the rejection of a programme which seeks to flesh out and give real expression to free movement rights, in favour of one implicitly mandating even wider mobility, should not surprise us. The UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's assurances that the UK was leaving the EU, not leaving Europe,¹⁷ stand slightly unsteadily beside the 'Global Britain' vision of the UK government's post-Brexit era, which manifestly entails and prioritises trade, travel and collaboration with countries the world over.¹⁸ Michelle Donelan, the UK's Universities Minister, has made it clear that this is a significant motivation behind the Turing Scheme: a desire to give UK students the opportunity to study for part of their degree course not only in Europe but also in the rest of the world, US and Commonwealth universities being thought to be at the top of the list of those in the UK government's line of sights.¹⁹ The EUA's Thomas Jorgensen has pointed out that the UK could have achieved the same objectives whilst remaining in Erasmus and launching the Turing Scheme as the UK's own worldwide adjunct, focussing on universities outside Europe, or even to some extent by participation in the Erasmus international credit mobility scheme.²⁰ However, the economic implications of participating in two mobility schemes, as well as the perceived value of a single 'British own brand' scheme, may well have militated against such an outcome.

3. The Turing Scheme

3.1. The basic framework: the loss of the exchange principle

So what is known to date about the Turing Scheme, and what are the implications for UK and EU students? It has now been made clear that Turing will provide funding to assist with the costs of study mobility and work placements/internships from four weeks to twelve months in length, anywhere in the world. Such funding will be available to all 'UK based' students, that is, any students studying at UK universities, rather than simply (as had been speculated) to UK national students studying at UK universities.²¹ In this respect it will mirror Erasmus+, which is (though has not always been) open to any students studying at universities holding an Erasmus Charter: broadly speaking, universities in the EU and a few other countries, and not just to EU citizens studying at such institutions.²²

However, crucially, the Turing Scheme is not an exchange programme, based on reciprocity: the Turing Scheme will not contribute to the costs of students coming to the UK for study mobility periods. In this respect it is fundamentally different from Erasmus. The consequence is that students visiting universities in the UK will not receive funding for fees or living costs from Turing; nor, it should be noted, will such students be eligible for such assistance from Erasmus since study

¹⁷ Boris Johnson, appearing before the UK Foreign Affairs Committee, BBC News 13 October 2016. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-politics-37641405> (20 February 2021)

¹⁸ Jo Johnson, UK Minister of State for Universities 2015-8 and July-September 2019, and the Prime Minister's brother, has been in favour of a British alternative – a strong advocate of increasing HE's contribution to global trade – he has recently become chair of advisory board of an international organisation called ApplyBoard which connects international students and recruitment partners to educational opportunities at institutions around the world, its stated mission 'to educate the world'.

¹⁹ M. Donelan MP, *The Government's new Turing Scheme will open up the world to British students*, ConservativeHome, 28 December 2020. <https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2020/12/michelle-donelan-the-governments-new-turing-scheme-will-open-up-the-world-to-british-students.html> (25 January 2021)

²⁰ <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/apply-for-international-credit-mobility> (26 January 2021)

²¹ <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/funding-opportunities/higher-education-funding/> (25 February 2021)

²² Erasmus+ Participating Countries. <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/participating-countries> (2 March 2021)

mobility periods in the UK will not be taking place in a university with an Erasmus charter, as the UK will have left Erasmus. Therefore students visiting the UK from Europe or elsewhere for a period of study will either have to self-fund, or hope to access some form of funding which may be available from their home universities or in their home countries.²³ The aim appears to be that UK universities will negotiate fee free bilateral exchanges with universities to whom they would like to send students, and if they manage to do so, students visiting the UK for a period of study would at least be relieved of the obligation to pay UK university fees, which are, compared with fees in the rest of Europe, very high. However, it should also be noted that for all non-UK national students studying in the UK for a whole academic year, costs now include approximately £800 (€900) for visas and healthcare, charges not previously levied on EU national students, but to which Brexit now makes them liable.

The corollary of this is that outgoing UK students will prima facie be liable to pay such fees as are levied by host institutions abroad, unless their UK university has negotiated a bilateral fee-free exchange programme with that particular university: the funding provided by the Turing Scheme would be unlikely to make anything but the smallest contribution to the cost of fees as well as of living away from home. University fees of course vary enormously, ranging from the very high levels seen at many US universities to the fee free or low cost tuition on offer in much of Europe. The budget for Turing in 2021-2 will apparently be £100 million a year for 35,000 students. This amounts to an average of approximately £2900 (€3300) per student, which whilst it will assist with living costs, would not go far with fees in the USA, Australia, or indeed towards the international fees levied in some EU countries and which EU countries are now entitled to charge UK students.²⁴ The expectation that UK universities will negotiate bilateral fee waivers may be challenged by the scheme's lack of reciprocity if students from European universities find studying in the UK economically unviable as they would no longer be eligible for Erasmus grants to help pay their living costs in the UK.²⁵ The concern for UK universities and their students is that if studying for a semester or a year in the UK becomes a less attractive or practical proposition for students based at Erasmus universities in Europe, those universities may be less interested in establishing bilateral fee free deals with UK universities so that UK students can undertake study periods with them. From the UK perspective, it is to be hoped, however, that the longstanding popularity of UK universities as a study mobility destination, not least because of the perception of English as the lingua franca,²⁶ will persist to a sufficient degree to make it expedient for European universities to facilitate a certain level of fee free bilateral exchange arrangements with UK universities, but such exigency may be tempered by the continuing availability of study in English at universities in Ireland²⁷ as well as the increasing number of courses taught in English at universities particularly

²³ In theory, such funding could be available under Erasmus Key Action 107 which funds mobility worldwide between Erasmus Programme countries and Erasmus Partner countries, of which the latter group can include most, but not all, countries in the world; however, the UK would first have to register as an Erasmus Partner country. European Commission, *Erasmus+ International Credit Mobility – Handbook for Participating Organisations*, Version 4.1 (February 2020). https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/sites/eacea-site/files/whatsnew-icm-call-2020_1.pdf (5 March 2021)

²⁴ The EU only having supporting competence over education in the Member States, decisions on fee levels are the prerogative of Member States, sometimes, for example in Germany, varying from state to state. Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union Article 6; *The cost of studying at a university in Germany*, Times Higher Education Student, 5 December 2017. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/student/advice/cost-studying-university-germany> (20 February 2021)

²⁵ Unless their universities can access for Erasmus KA107 funding for this purpose – see n. 23 above.

²⁶ Economist, *Lingua Franca*, 13 May 2017. <https://www.economist.com/europe/2017/05/13/britain-is-leaving-the-eu-but-its-language-will-stay> (2 March 2021), quoting figures from Eurostat data 2015. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/images/3/3f/Foreign_language_learning_in_the_European_Union_%28Data_from_2015%29_final.png (2 March 2021)

²⁷ Additionally, the Republic of Ireland has undertaken to fund Erasmus grants for students at universities in Northern Ireland undertaking study mobility; they will need to register temporarily with Irish universities to enable this. L. Ce-

in The Netherlands and Germany, study mobility to which from elsewhere in Europe would be eligible for Erasmus grants.

3.2. The administration of Turing

Universities will bid for a share of Turing funding each year. Future spending will be set annually; for universities calculating how many students to encourage to consider Turing mobility a year or so in advance, this may lead to planning difficulties absent from encouraging student mobility under Erasmus, with overall budgets set seven years at a time and funding for each academic year known well in advance.²⁸ The timeline from the allocation of funding to the Turing Scheme in the UK's annual budget, to universities' bids for funding, to allocation to specific students, may need careful attention; it has been suggested that pressure needs to be brought on the UK government to make multi-year spending commitments to facilitate planning by universities.²⁹ A final word of caution: the continuing existence of the Turing Scheme cannot be taken for granted. The British Council, in conjunction with Ecorys, has only been asked to manage it for one year, and it is inevitable that once the Covid pandemic is over or under control, ravaged public finances will have to be repaired and much will be under threat. The fact that cost and value for money have been given as reasons for not joining Erasmus+ 2021-7 speak for themselves: the Turing Scheme can expect to be subject to strict financial scrutiny.

In any event, as already noted, UK universities will have to negotiate their own arrangements for the reception of UK students in overseas universities. Many European universities, in the UK and elsewhere, already have partnerships with universities in the USA, Australia and other countries outside Europe, for bilateral exchanges generally based on fee free stays in both directions, outside of and complementary to the Erasmus Programme. The model exists. However, if the Turing Programme is to become the UK's main mobility vehicle, such bilateral exchange arrangements will need to be scaled up considerably, and fast. The Erasmus Programme, whilst certainly not a paradigm of administrative straightforwardness, offers considerable economies of scale by operating through a centralised administration system, delegated to national level. The extent of any central coordination of the Turing scheme and what that will cover save for distribution of funds is at the time of writing unclear, but what is certain is that to be able to bid for funds early in 2021, the invitation given in late December 2020 stating that 'universities, colleges and schools are encouraged to begin preparation with international partners as soon as possible' will impose a considerable administrative burden at very short notice on UK universities already struggling under the impact of numerous other fundamental changes necessitated by Covid 19 or wrought by Brexit. The UK government will provide some funding to successful applicants for administering the scheme, but this does not take into account the considerable amount of time and frontloaded expense involved in the provisional establishment of partnerships by academic staff. Indeed, it is hard to see how UK universities will not, at least to start with, hope simply rely on partnerships already in existence, the majority of which will have been fostered under Erasmus. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*.³⁰

ulus, *Ireland to fund Erasmus scheme for Northern Irish students*, Politico, 27 December 2020. <https://www.politico.eu/article/ireland-fund-erasmus-northern-irish-students/> (5 March 2021)

²⁸ Though under Erasmus, budgets are managed by national agencies who fix individual annual budgets with universities well in advance.

²⁹ J. Higgins, *The Turing Scheme: A licence to do things better?* University Business, 20 January 2021, <https://universitybusiness.co.uk/the-turing-scheme-a-licence-to-do-things-better/> (20 February 2021)

³⁰ Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr, *Les Guêpes*, Paris, 1849. The more something changes, the more it is the same thing, or, what goes around, comes around.

3.3. The implications of the loss of reciprocity

This probable extensive reliance on existing partnerships is a most revealing point: the importance of the principle of exchange for relationships of all sorts between universities. These are not limited to fee free status for exchange students. More significant, though much harder to quantify, are the ‘soft’ advantages for universities themselves: the development of long lasting partnerships which may lead to research, to joint masters degrees, to cooperation projects in knowledge alliances with business.³¹ Erasmus, with its foundational principle of reciprocity, fosters the notion of partnership between home and host subject areas. It is regular contact between subject area partners, for example at the International Weeks hosted by many universities, where academics from partner universities, funded by Erasmus staff mobility, are invited to teach as well as to promote their own universities, which is often pivotal in injecting sufficient confidence into students to consider a mobility period at a partner university. Erasmus partnerships between universities are also of considerable value in developing synergies within Horizon Europe,³² in which the UK is continuing to participate, participation which is unlikely to be made easier by non-participation in Erasmus.³³ Whilst there is obviously nothing in the Turing Scheme to prevent the establishment of reciprocal exchange programmes, neither is there anything in it aimed at promoting them.³⁴ Funding for outward student mobility for UK based students is to be welcomed, but the very pared down and minimalist nature of the Turing Scheme risks causing significant losses flowing from the decision not to provide funding for incoming student mobility, given the popularity of the UK as a destination country and the potential consequences of this limitation on other sorts of relationships with universities overseas.

4. Turing’s target audience: the attempt to level up

4.1. Mobility capital: the haves and the have nots

One aspect of the Turing Scheme which has received particular attention is its laudable aim to aid social mobility, that is to ‘target students from disadvantaged backgrounds and areas which did not previously have many students benefiting from Erasmus+’.³⁵ It is undeniable that Erasmus and in-

³¹ See, for example, U. Kammerer-Rutten & U. Schulze, *International education and the cross-cultural setting: Learning and teaching in international settings*. In H. Hatakka (ed) *Interprofessional and international learning experiences in social and health care higher education in Lahti University of Applied Sciences*. Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Finland, p. 58. https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/39980/Hatakka_Helena_Lamk_2011.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y (26 January 2021); R. Precey & M.J. Rodriguez Entrena, *Developing the Leaders We Want to Follow: lessons from an International Leadership Development Programme*, *International Journal of Contemporary Management* (2011) 10 (2) pp.70-83, both of which demonstrate the wider benefits not just to students but to the staff and institutions participating in collaborative projects.

³² https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/european-commissions-supports-erasmus-european-universities-pilot-additional-34-million-horizon-2020-2020-jul-24_en ‘Through the complementary support from Horizon 2020 for the Erasmus+ European Universities pilot we maximise synergies between education and research & innovation policies, helping universities to create greater critical mass to find solutions and train talents to solve EU’s major societal challenges.’

³³ See, for example, *Association to Erasmus: Challenges and Opportunities, A British Academy UK-EU Briefing*, August 2020, p. 8 ‘The Erasmus programmes plays a key complementary role to the Framework Programmes for research and innovation [sc. Horizon].’

³⁴ UK Parliament Written questions, answers and statements: Question for Department of Education, UIN 133978, tabled 6 January 2021, answered 15 January 2021. <https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-questions/detail/2021-01-06/133978> (25 January 2021)

³⁵ Press release, UK government Department for Education, 26 December 2020. <https://www.gov.uk/government/>

deed any form of student mobility is undertaken in the UK and elsewhere to a greater extent by students already in possession of ‘mobility capital’.³⁶ Such students are already more at ease with the idea of foreign travel, from families who can subsidise and so enhance the time abroad, from backgrounds where schooldays have easily elided with university life and before the need to maintain tenancies or consider caring responsibilities generally enters into the equation.³⁷ In the UK, such students are disproportionately represented amongst language students, who form the lion’s share of the UK’s outgoing Erasmus students. This point is picked up below (4.4). The UK government’s aim to focus the efforts of the Turing scheme more intently on students from disadvantaged backgrounds can hardly be faulted, given the evidenced benefits of even a short study period abroad.³⁸ The benefits of international student mobility are of course well known but include a cosmopolitan, open and more rounded outlook, increased independence, improved language skills, empathy for and understanding of cultures beyond their own.³⁹ We are assured that Brexit Britain, far from luxuriating in its island status, is going to look outward to the rest of the world. In that case, such attributes as these will be essential if the vision of ‘global Britain’ is to be achieved. The long term advantages of a period of study abroad are even more pronounced for BAME and disadvantaged students, and can be expressed in harder, economic terms.⁴⁰

4.2. Redressing the balance: the role of money and of universities

However, there are ‘long-standing systemic issues that create barriers to participation (such as perception, engagement, and family circumstances and background)’.⁴¹ If the Turing Scheme’s laudable aim to encourage disadvantaged students to participate in study mobility is to succeed, these will need addressing, with more than the enhanced grant rates and extra funding for travel costs, visas, passports and health insurance promised under Turing, welcome though these are.⁴² But to pretend that this can be achieved simply by leaving Erasmus and embracing Turing is disingenuous and discounts the inherent and inbuilt encouragement in Erasmus to foster participation

[news/new-turing-scheme-to-support-thousands-of-students-to-study-and-work-abroad](#) (21 February 2021)

³⁶ Murphy-Lejeune 2002 pp. 51ff.

³⁷ See, for example, T. Kuhn, *Why Educational Exchange Programmes Miss Their Mark: Cross-Border Mobility, Education and European Identity* (2012) 50(6) *Journal of Common Market Studies* 994; R. Brooks & J. Waters *International higher education and the mobility of UK students* [2009] 8(2) *Journal of Research in International Education* 191; R. King & E. Ruiz-Gelices *International Student Migration and the European “Year Abroad”*: *Effects on European Identity and Subsequent Migration Behaviour* [2003] 9(3) *International Journal of Population Geography* 229

³⁸ There is a considerable literature on this subject; an overview can be found in A. Roy, A. Newman, R. Ellenberger & A. Pyman, *Outcomes of international student mobility programs: a systematic review and agenda for future research*, *Studies in Higher Education*, Vol. 44, No. 9, 2009, p. 1630

³⁹ Evidence of such benefits is widely published; one such summary can be found at Association to Erasmus: Challenges and Opportunities, A British Academy UK-EU Briefing, August 2020 p. 4. <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/association-erasmus-challenges-and-opportunities/> (4 March 2021)

⁴⁰ *Widening Participation in UK Outward Student Mobility*, Universities UK International, 12 December 2017. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/widening-participation-in-uk-outward-student-mobility.pdf> (26 January 2021)

⁴¹ M. Dowse, *UK universities’ half-hearted support for Erasmus+ must not be repeated*, *Times Higher Education*, 26 January 2021. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/uk-universities-half-hearted-support-erasmus-must-not-be-repeated> (26 January 2021)

⁴² UK government, Turing Scheme website. <https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/funding-opportunities/higher-education-funding/#parentHorizontalTab4> (21 February 2021)

by less advantaged students.⁴³ Under Erasmus, travel funding is available for the less well off.⁴⁴ Extra funding is available for students with special needs.⁴⁵ Take up by those with special needs or from otherwise disadvantaged backgrounds is explicitly monitored, and applications for funding for specific Erasmus Programmes are required to detail how those from such backgrounds will be targeted for inclusion in project activities.

Experience shows that none of these approaches, however, amounts to a silver bullet. If universities do not themselves encourage mobility and specifically target students whose life chances make it seem a less realistic option, possibilities designed in at Programme level are unlikely to bear much fruit. Universities themselves need to lead the way and promote the benefits of study mobility. The effect of hearing from students at their own university who have already studied abroad cannot be underestimated: participation in mobility opportunities is a virtuous circle, with ‘strong subject links commended by enthusiastic returning students’ as well as hearing directly from incoming visiting students about their home universities constituting some of the strongest encouragements to the next student generation considering its options.⁴⁶ The latter of course may be less frequent given the lack of funding for incoming students under Turing. In both cases, the impact on students of the thought that ‘if they can do this, maybe I can too’ cannot be overestimated. The enthusiasm of staff who have visited partner universities and can provide first hand reports is also valuable, as is teaching provided by staff visiting from abroad, such exchanges being encouraged and facilitated by the provision of funding for staff mobility by the Erasmus Programme, another funding stream unfortunately absent from the Turing Scheme which may also indirectly reduce the willingness of UK based students to study abroad.

4.3. Redressing the balance: the solution of the shorter stay

There is another feature of the Turing Scheme to be welcomed, particularly in the context of making study mobility more attractive and viable for less advantaged students: that it will provide funding for periods shorter than a full semester, the minimum length of a study period eligible for funding being just four weeks. This is encouraging. Short term mobility of a week to a month has been found to be of considerable value in encouraging participation by students not blessed with the mobility capital to feel equipped to consider a longer study period abroad, and for whom issues such as fear of losing a tenancy or a part time job or caring responsibilities preclude longer periods away from home. The old Erasmus Intensive Programmes provided funding for projects involving just such short term study mobility; Erasmus+ 2014-20 funded Intensive Programmes taking place under the umbrella of a Key Action 2 Strategic Partnership, and this will continue in Erasmus+ 2021-7. The inclusion of short term mobility funding in the Turing Scheme is one feature very much to be welcomed, and should improve the accessibility of the scheme to less advantaged UK based students: research has clearly demonstrated not only that shorter periods of study in universities abroad are a much more realistic prospect for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and much more attractive to them, but also and crucially the long term utility of study mobility of

⁴³ This will become even more of a priority in Erasmus+ 2021-7: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20190321IPR32121/erasmus-2021-2027-more-people-to-experience-learning-exchanges-in-europe> (26 January 2021)

⁴⁴ <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/apply-for-higher-education-student-and-staff-mobility-funding> (26 January 2021)

⁴⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/individuals/students/studying-abroad_en (26 January 2021)

⁴⁶ J. Murdoch, *The fatal design flaw in UK's Erasmus-replacing 'Turing scheme'*. The National, 5 January 2021. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/18986269.fatal-design-flaw-uks-erasmus-replacing-turing-scheme/> (13 January 2021)

even a short duration, in terms of increased employability and career outcomes.⁴⁷ It is to be hoped that UK universities and universities based elsewhere will be imaginative in fashioning short study programmes, summer schools or other short term opportunities for collaborative study. European universities should surely be the favoured partners for such activities, given the growing awareness of the importance of universities taking sustainability considerations into account and consequent undesirability of long distance travel for short periods.

4.4. Redressing the balance: the effect of English as lingua franca

Helping less advantaged students to access study mobility opportunities is a particular issue in the UK. There are structural aspects of UK school and higher education which make the opportunity for study abroad more difficult for many students at UK universities than at universities in many European countries, and at the same time, lead to higher take up of mobility opportunities by those already blessed with ‘mobility capital’. The majority of UK outgoing Erasmus students are those studying Modern Languages degrees, which customarily require students to spend a year, usually the third year of four, abroad. It is a fact that Modern Languages degrees, are in the UK, to a disproportionate extent the preserve of more advantaged students: 76% of pupils at independent schools took a language GCSE in 2017 against 47% overall, and Modern Languages degrees in UK universities admit a higher proportion of students from independent schools than any other discipline.⁴⁸ This can largely be explained by the low priority given to language teaching in UK schools: 49% of children do not study languages over the age of 14.⁴⁹ In turn, there are wider societal issues at play here, not least of which is over-reliance on a heavily anglophone world. It is a truism to say that students in many European countries tend to have greater linguistic facilities than UK students and are therefore more prepared to study in a foreign language. Furthermore, if English is seen as a lingua franca, one major reason for UK students to go abroad to study falls away, whereas by contrast it acquires more importance to non-UK students, many of whom see the opportunity to improve English language skills as a significant rationale for a period of study abroad.⁵⁰ In any event, studying abroad for a semester or a year is only possible if the degree course in question includes study abroad as an option; whilst it is generally a requirement for those studying Modern Languages to spend a year abroad either studying or working, and a possibility in some other degree courses, it is not widespread in UK degree courses.⁵¹

5. Switzerland: a cautionary tale

⁴⁷ *Widening Participation in UK Outward Student Mobility*, Universities UK International, 12 December 2017, (n. 37 above).

⁴⁸ T. Tinsley & N. Doležal, *Language Trends 2018, Language Teaching in Primary and Secondary Schools in England Survey Report*, British Council. https://university-council-modern-languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/language_trends_2018_report.pdf (28 January 2021)

⁴⁹ I. Collen, *Language learning is still in decline in England's schools*, British Council Voices Magazine, 29 June 2020. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/language-learning-decline-england-schools> (28 January 2021); *Valuing the Year Abroad: A Position Statement*. British Academy and University Council of Modern Languages, March 2012. <https://university-council-modern-languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Valuing-year-abroad.pdf> (27 February 2021)

⁵⁰ See, for example, C. James, *Citizenship, Nation-building and Identity in the EU: The Contribution of Erasmus Student Mobility*, Routledge, London-New York, 2019. pp. 133-4 and 152-4.

⁵¹ S. Sweeney, *Going Mobile: Internationalisation, mobility and the European Higher Education Area*, Higher Education Academy, 2012. https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/resources/Going_Mobile.pdf (2 March 2021)

It is clear that there are many issues to consider when launching a student mobility scheme outside of the comforting framework of a tried and tested system. In this respect, it might be prudent to take note of the experience of another country formerly participating in the Erasmus Programme but now operating outside it. Switzerland, a non-EU country with close ties to the EU in many forms, was an associated partner with Erasmus until negotiations on its full participation were suspended in the wake of the Swiss referendum in 2014 to limit free movement into Switzerland following the accession of Croatia to the EU.⁵² Switzerland acted quickly to protect already planned exchanges and formulated a system, initially intended to be for 2015-8, then extended until 2020-1, the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP), under the terms of which the Swiss government provides finance for outgoing and, crucially, incoming visiting students, thus keeping alive the benefits of reciprocal exchange and also qualifying Swiss universities to be partners in some, though not all, forms of Erasmus collaboration. SEMP also provides for mobility for higher education staff, either teaching at a partner institution or taking further specialist training courses, as under Erasmus. In providing funding for incoming student mobility and staff mobility, SEMP therefore facilitates forms of mobility which are not envisaged to receive financial support under the Turing Scheme.

However, Switzerland has decided not to join Erasmus for its 2021-7 iteration. The reasons are essentially economic: the significant increase in the Erasmus budget for the period 2021-7 has made the Swiss government decide that the financial contribution, calculated on the basis of GDP, it would have to make to rejoin Erasmus as an associated partner, was too high.⁵³ To Swiss universities, and to students in Switzerland, this decision is a cause of considerable concern and regret; they point to SEMP's disadvantages as compared with participation in Erasmus.⁵⁴ First and most obviously, administration of SEMP for Swiss universities is more difficult than it was when participating in Erasmus, since the arrangements are sui generis, and Swiss universities do not receive funding for organisational support, such as is provided by Erasmus, to cover the costs incurred by universities in managing and promoting mobility. Digitisation of Erasmus mobility administration is a priority for Erasmus+ 2021-7, and Swiss universities are concerned that the additional work for non-Swiss universities involved in managing exchanges with Swiss universities outside of a streamlined Erasmus system will be unpopular, and potentially lead to exchanges with Swiss universities being given a lower priority by their non-Swiss exchange partners. Secondly, maintaining mobility levels requires considerable effort; mobility with Swiss universities does not qualify as Erasmus mobility for the (non-Swiss, Erasmus) universities with which students are exchanged, and therefore does not feature in the Commission's statistics about participation in Erasmus (the Past Performance calculation);⁵⁵ the Past Performance calculation contributes to the non-Swiss university's eligibility for future Erasmus funding, therefore student mobility which takes place outside Erasmus disin-

⁵² The referendum prevented the Swiss government from signing a protocol (the Croatia protocol) to the EU Swiss Free Movement of Persons Agreement (Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the Swiss Confederation, of the other, on the free movement of persons [2002] OJ L 114) to extend unrestricted free movement rights to Croatian nationals following the accession of Croatia to the EU on 1 July 2013.

⁵³ The budget for Erasmus+ 2021-7, agreed by the European Council as 55% over the budget for 2014-20 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1856

⁵⁴ See, for example, O. Tschopp, *Switzerland and the potential of participating in the Erasmus+ programme*, Le Temps, 2 September 2020. <https://blogs.letemps.ch/olivier-tschopp/2020/09/02/switzerland-and-the-potential-of-participating-in-the-erasmus-programme/> (31 January 2021); also see B. Upton, *Swiss rectors plead for full association to Erasmus+*, Research Professional News, 29 January 2021. <https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/tr-news-europe-universities-2021-1-swiss-rectors-plead-for-full-association-to-erasmus/> (31 January 2021); I. Leybold-Johnson, *Students step up pressure over international exchanges*, Swissinfo.ch 23 September 2020. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/students-step-up-pressure-over-international-exchanges/46049832> (31 January 2021)

⁵⁵ Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Key Action 1, Mobility project for higher education students and staff, Award criteria for a mobility project within Programme Countries. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/programme-guide/part-b/three-key-actions/key-action-1/mobility-higher-education-students-staff_en (31 January 2021)

centivises the non-Swiss university from encouraging their students to study in Switzerland; since the inception of SEMP, growth in student mobility has slowed and in some cases fallen sharply, a disappointing fact which Swiss universities attribute to their position outside of Erasmus.⁵⁶ Thirdly, the more cooperative, multilateral activities funded under Erasmus, such as Strategic Partnerships and Knowledge Alliances,⁵⁷ are considerably less available to Swiss universities. SEMP can fund a Swiss partner to take part in, for example, an Erasmus Strategic Partnership, but cannot contribute to the overall project, which leads to an inherently complex situation; furthermore, the Commission prioritises directing funds towards Erasmus Programme countries, and applications for funding for such partnerships projected to include Swiss universities may be rejected altogether unless the participation of the Swiss partner can demonstrate unique added value. This means that it is now much harder for Swiss universities to ‘dock onto European projects, even with own resources’.⁵⁸ Overall, the networking opportunities of Swiss universities are thus compromised, the potential for institutional cooperation cannot be fully exploited, and there are concerns that Swiss higher education risks becoming marginalised.⁵⁹

The irony of this in the context of the Covid pandemic has been highlighted, when ‘the importance of exchange, mutual understanding and openness to the world....and the contribution of these elements is strongly underlined in the management of a crisis such as the one currently facing us’.⁶⁰ The Swiss experience is a salutary lesson for the UK as it embarks on its new adventure of ‘going it alone’ in the sphere of study mobility: an increased administrative burden, loss of the encouragement which the reciprocity of exchange mobility provides, and the threat to research programmes and other collaborations with European universities which so often develop from synergies underpinned by exchanges.

6. The reality of geography and of climate change

One further relevant consideration for the UK government as the Turing Scheme is launched in pursuit of the global Britain mission relates to simple geography, the not so simple concerns about climate change, and the moral imperative to take sustainability into account in everything we do. The Covid pandemic has brought to an abrupt halt mobility of all sorts, and universities have turned to collaboration in the online world, including ‘virtual’ mobility where students stay at home but study online with students at the host university to which they had hoped to travel. This has led to suggestions that in the light of what might have been the crisis to which the world started to respond in 2020 but in fact became the almost forgotten crisis – the climate crisis – virtual mobility might supplant actual mobility in the longer term, with all the benefits in terms of sustainability which that brings. However, whilst the Covid pandemic has undoubtedly provided a masterclass in virtual higher education which will lead to significant changes in practice in the future, there is growing recognition that virtual mobility is in all honesty no substitute for actual mobility, living, studying

⁵⁶ Mobility Monitoring – Facts and Figures on Swiss Higher Education Mobility, Movetia, January 2020. https://www.movetia.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/1_News/Archiv_2020/Januar_2020/MobilityMonitoring_EN.pdf (31 January 2021)

⁵⁷ Erasmus+ Programme Guide, Innovations and Good Practices. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/opportunities/organisations/innovation-good-practices_en (27 February 2021)

⁵⁸ Movetia booklet on the internationalisation of higher education: Erasmus+ programme: Opportunities for higher education, p. 3. https://phzh.ch/globalassets/international.phzh.ch/english/movetia_cahier_erasmus_higher_education_en.pdf (31 January 2021)

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* p. 9.

⁶⁰ O. Tschopp, 2020.

and immersing oneself in another country to realise its benefits to the full.⁶¹

This then raises the question: in the light of the climate crisis, to which, once the Covid crisis has (hopefully) receded if not disappeared altogether, and once travel is possible again, how can the objective of encouraging students to travel overseas be squared with universities' moral obligations to consider the sustainability aspects of their actions? This question is relevant when sending students to Europe, but is decidedly more acute when sending students from the UK to study in the USA, in Canada, in Australia, all likely prime destinations under the Turing Scheme and all considerably further away than places in Europe where they may have studied under Erasmus. Students tend to travel from the UK to European destinations by plane though often access destinations in the Netherlands, Belgium, France and Germany by train, and growing concern about the effect of air travel may well lead to universities endeavouring to encourage much more travel by train where it is practicable. However, it is hardly possible if crossing the Atlantic to go to the USA or the world to reach Australia (though there are anecdotal stories of academics travelling to China by train, motivated by an admirable determination not to fly and also equipped with sufficient time for the very lengthy journey). It remains to be seen whether concerns about students flying across the world for a few months is going to influence destination choice and favour nearer, European destinations which exist under Erasmus. Of course, there is nothing new in UK and indeed other European universities having bilateral exchanges with universities at much greater distance than Europe, but if this were to become a more prominent form of exchange for UK based students, UK universities are going to have to engage in some serious soul-searching to square the cultivation of the global citizen of the future with commitment to sustainability, usually viewed as an essential part of being a global citizen rather than in tension with it.

7. Conclusion

The decision of the UK government not to participate in Erasmus+ 2021-7 is but one of the countless shockwaves reverberating down the years since the Brexit referendum in 2016. The decision has caused considerable consternation, but in the light of the UK government's objective of forging a 'Global Britain', and the Commission's rhetoric, expounded over many years, linking participation in Erasmus with the creation of new generations of European citizens, perhaps it should have been anticipated a little more clearly. The task now, for universities in the UK and in Europe, is to do their best not to lose the positive outcomes which have emerged from the UK's participation in Erasmus since its inception in 1987, but to endeavour to capitalise on those outcomes to the benefit of staff and students at UK and European universities alike. Existing Erasmus partnerships can constitute the foundations for bilateral agreements providing for fee free student exchanges, though the fact that students coming from a European university for a period of study in the UK will not qualify for funding under Turing raises concerns about the feasibility for many students of a study period at a UK university unless they are blessed with the ability to fund themselves. This potential retrogressive effect on the demographic profile of students who may be the most likely to undertake study mobility to the UK in the future is ironic given the determined emphasis of the Turing Scheme on making study mobility for UK based students more accessible to those who have histor-

⁶¹ There is much more to be said about the potential for virtual mobility as substitute for or complement to physical mobility, but this is beyond the scope of this article. However, there is an increasing literature recognising that although virtual mobility has its place and has been invaluable during the Covid 19 pandemic, it is no replacement for physical mobility. See, for example, *Research for the CULT Committee – virtual formats versus physical mobility*, European Parliament Briefing, March 2020. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/629217/IPOL_BRI\(2020\)629217_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2020/629217/IPOL_BRI(2020)629217_EN.pdf) (27 February 2021)

ically found it challenging to avail themselves of such opportunities. One possible outcome of the UK's move from Erasmus to Turing may therefore be an increase in participation of study mobility opportunities by UK based disadvantaged students, but a decrease in participation of such opportunities in the UK by such students from universities abroad. Whether or not this transpires, the imbalance inherent in the Turing Scheme's lack of reciprocity is concerning, given the role of the exchange principle in maintaining the complex matrix of international collaboration which drives so much of the innovation and research constituting touchstones of successful higher education. It is to be hoped, however, that funding streams provided by Turing for short term study mobility can form the basis for creative new short study programmes, to the benefit of UK and European universities alike. The UK's decision to quit Erasmus and establish Turing instead has led to considerable regret and concern about the future relationships between UK and European universities. But the decision has been made, and it is now up to all those universities to make the new situation work, for the benefit of students, staff, universities and ultimately the peoples of the UK and Europe, of which the UK, the aspirant global player, remains forever a part despite its departure from the EU.