

Key takeaway messages from discussions between Coimbra Group task group on post-Brexit UK-EU exchange & relevant stakeholders

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The UK is no longer an EU Member State. It has also opted not to take part as an associated third country in the new Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027. The UK will therefore not be taking part in the new programme as a Programme Country (EC 2021).

1. Introduction

The terms of the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement implies that the UK will be a non-associated third country in the Erasmus+ programme 2021-2027. This means the UK will only be able to participate in the Jean Monnet activities and Erasmus Mundus joint masters programmes as these are not limited to Member States and Associated Third Countries.

On behalf of all Coimbra Group (CG) member institutions, the task group on post-Brexit UK-EU exchange has consulted widely on the implications of the UK's decision for student and staff exchanges and for academic partnerships. Our findings are summarised as follows:

2. Short-term implications and issues (2021-2023)

Multi-annual **Erasmus+** programmes that were funded when the UK was a Member State will continue to operate to completion. In many cases, bilateral exchanges will take place until the academic year 2022/23 allowing a short period to consider the future of exchanges between Coimbra Group Universities and the UK. After that alternative formal arrangements (legal agreements) will need to put in place to facilitate student and staff exchanges.

In December 2020 the UK government announced funding of over £100 million for a new scheme to allow approximately 35,000 students in universities, colleges and schools to go on placements and exchanges overseas, starting in September 2021 (which may mean around £60-70 million for higher education). At present, [the Turing Scheme](#) has been allocated resources for one year in the first instance and has a stated aim of targeting students from disadvantaged backgrounds and exchanges not previously covered by Erasmus+ as it includes all countries. The window for application for UK providers opened on 12 March 2021. Results are expected to be issued in July 2021. Should there be sufficient funding available after the first round of applications, a second call may be launched in 2021.

EU Institutions should note that the Turing Scheme only funds outward mobility for UK students. The Turing scheme provides no funding for reciprocity (inward mobility). Reciprocity is allowed (and encouraged) but not funded through the Turing Scheme. The focus is on student mobility; staff mobility would only be possible if it were needed to facilitate the special needs of a student.

Inward (to the UK) mobility will be affected by the following changes:

- Higher Education EU students will be liable to UK University fees unless a fee waiver has been negotiated as part of a bi-lateral exchange agreement.

- A visitor may study for up to 6 months without a visa but for study periods longer than 6 months EU nationals will be required to obtain a Study Visa and must meet **all** the following requirements:

- (a) any fee and Immigration Health Charge must have been paid (this will be refunded for European Health Insurance Card holders); and
- (b) the applicant must have provided any required biometrics; and
- (c) the applicant must have provided a passport or other travel document which satisfactorily establishes their identity and nationality; and
- (d) the applicant must provide a Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies reference number that was issued to them by the UK university no more than 6 months before the date of application.

- Other points raised by consultees in relation to the Turing Scheme:

- Inequality - the highest ranked Universities may be most successful and have highest mobilities;
- Cultural aspects of mobility may be lost if mostly English speaking destinations are preferred;
- There is a risk of an Eastern vs Western European divide in future EU-UK mobility flows;
- If each EU university must deal individually with each UK institution there will be a huge bureaucratic overhead;
- The programme may lack resilience if no resource is made available for staff mobility to help develop long-term high-quality partnerships;
- There is no support for youth and sporting associations;
- There is no possibility of an inter-network agreement; the scheme is based on bilateral arrangements between each UK university and other HE Institutions. We wonder if it will be possible in the future for one UK university to sign a multilateral agreement with willing CG Universities?
- The scheme is flexible in the sense that UK universities are free to decide upon the geographical distribution, specific programmes (e.g. modern languages) etc. However, being a demand-led scheme with no target countries, there is a risk that EU countries such as Germany, Italy, Spain or France, will lose incoming UK students;
- In the period of transition, Turing will be complementary to Erasmus+ (no possibility of double funding of any mobilities);
- Turing actively supports widening participation (which refers to students from less advantaged backgrounds and those with special education needs and disabilities).

3. Long-term issues (post-2023)

One of the most challenging aspects of The Turing Scheme in its current form is the uncertainty that surrounds post-2021/22 funding and the implications for UK-EU mobility when UK Erasmus+ funding ends post-2023. We will not know whether multi-year funding will be allocated to the UK Turing Scheme until the outcome of the UK Government's Comprehensive Spending Review is completed, hopefully by October 2021.

The UK Department for Education will undertake a review of the first year of the Turing Scheme but we don't know how this will be done and whether it will result in any significant changes to its remit and priorities? For example, will short or longer visits be favoured? What level of resource will be allocated to HE compared with further education (FE) and schools? Will language-related mobility be looked on favourably?

Whatever the Turing Scheme brings in the future, it is clear that the UK will have a confusing mix of opportunities for mobility because:

- HE students in Northern Ireland will be able to participate in Erasmus by registering through an HE institution in the Republic of Ireland.
- In Wales, Education is a devolved responsibility of the Welsh Government who have allocated £65 million for the period 2022-2026 for a new [International Learning Exchange Programme](#). This programme will allow reciprocal exchange and will operate in a similar way to the existing Erasmus+ programme where funding is available for both incoming and outgoing student exchange. 15,000 outbound and 10,000 inbound mobilities are targeted. Note that the programme covers learners, educators and administrators.
- The Scottish Government are looking at options for running a scheme similar to that in Wales. Differences between Turing and opportunities in Northern Ireland and Wales may raise confusion as for the reciprocity vs. non reciprocity aspect; students & staff vs. only student mobility. The Welsh scheme will start from September 2022/2023, Turing starts 2021/2022.
- The European Commission declined the request from Scotland earlier this year to become associated to the Erasmus+ programme. This option is ruled out for individual regions within a country. At the same time, the EU is open to negotiate should the United Kingdom reconsider its position on Erasmus+ in the future.

4. TURING and complementarity to Erasmus+ 2021-2027

- The Universities of Edinburgh and Durham did not apply in this year's Turing scheme for funding for mobility with EU partners. All their Turing awards will be allocated to non-EU countries. The Erasmus+ grant covering mobility with EU partners will be continued until May 2023.
- The Universities of Edinburgh and Durham have given assurance that after the Erasmus+ grant ends in May 2023, ongoing study grants will continue uninterrupted until the end of the academic year 2022/2023 (until September 2023).
- Up to 20% of Erasmus+ Key Action 1 (KA1) funds awarded to higher education mobility projects can be used to support outgoing mobility of students and staff to any partner countries in the world (the UK is covered under "Region 14" - Faroe Islands, Switzerland, United Kingdom). However, higher education institutions are expected to allocate these resources to the widest possible geographic scope and not restrict it to just the UK. The European Commission has made it clear it would carefully monitor this. However, there is no clear position on this matter among Erasmus National Agencies. For example, for the next academic year Uppsala University plans to dedicate all 20% of KA1 grants to partners in the UK and Switzerland. This will be possible because all EU universities, due to COVID-19 outbreak, still have relevant resources for student and staff mobility from the year 2020 due to the huge reduction in mobilities during the pandemic.

- Partner Countries are eligible for the new Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes but using their own funding. In this programme, at least three HEIs from Programme Countries must be involved. The UK could participate as an extra Partner Country by using funds from the Turing Scheme to support the physical part of mobility, and other resources for virtual components (at present the Turing scheme does not support virtual mobility). CG members could apply jointly with the UK partners for this kind of grant to promote and enhance new forms of cooperation.
- CG UK partners are concerned that the Turing Scheme might not continue to be funded in the medium to long term. They are also concerned that it might be restricted in its scope and only used as a vehicle for widening participation.
- CG UK partners are aware that the volume of mobility, both incoming and outgoing, may reduce substantially when the UK withdraws completely from the Erasmus+ Programme.
- CG UK partners note that different schemes for mobility will exist in different parts of the UK and that, when these new schemes take effect, strong advocacy will be needed to help shape what will be a much changed landscape for exchange and mobility.
- The CG UK partners are encouraged that they can still participate in the Jean Monnet and Erasmus Mundus Actions.

5. National Agreements

Will national ministries/agencies offer special grants or other forms of support for mobility to UK universities or will there be a movement to other English-speaking countries? This will depend on the policies of individual nation states and national education agencies.

- Germany: The DAAD announced in March 2021 [ten propositions](#) to create a new normality in academic exchange with the UK. Negotiations on cooperation models and waiver of fees are already under way at various levels. The DAAD also announced they were working to develop alternative access routes and financing models for students by 2023. Some DAAD third country programmes should be opened to cooperation with UK institutions. This applies both to scholarship programmes after the end of Erasmus and to the funding of exchange projects based on grant agreements to German higher education institutions. Discussions are still ongoing.
- Poland: The Polish National Agency for Academic Exchange offers a number of short-term and mid-term mobilities for PhD students as well as academic staff (Programmes like PROM, Becker, Ullam, Academic Partnerships). It refers to UK universities as well, although it is not dedicated uniquely to UK partners. Due to Brexit, the National Agency is considering launching a new programme dedicated to student mobility to the UK.
- Italy: The [March 2021 meeting](#) of Italian rectors (CRUI) stressed the importance of future cooperation with the UK and announced that a draft cooperative agreement with the British Council is being prepared.
- Other countries: We are aware that other EU countries are interested in bilateral exchange agreements but there is nothing formal to report at this point. The focus for the moment is on ensuring the end of the Erasmus+ funding and initial year of Turing go well and that host institutions have the information they need.

6. Modern European Languages Programmes that include a compulsory year abroad present a particular set of difficulties:

Degree programmes in modern European languages and cultures face particular uncertainties with the loss of the Erasmus+ programme that helped underpin a compulsory year abroad. Student starting a degree in academic year 21/22 have no certainty that resources are available to support their year abroad starting in Sept or Oct 2023. This will also be a worry for universities trying to recruit home students for the academic year 21/22 and for students making degree programme choices without certainty over year abroad funding. Modern language departments in the UK benefit hugely from incoming students and, while the Turing Scheme might sustain some outward mobility it will not support incoming students thereby risking a substantial imbalance between outgoing and incoming exchange students.

- Erasmus+ Key Action 103 allows 20% of funds to be used flexibly for mobility to any destination (ESN will advocate to use part of these 20% to mobility to the UK), in fact only a low percentage can be used for UK partners (due to the requirement to demonstrate geographical distribution among regions);
- There may be an evolution of the format of mobility with a transition from full year abroad to shorter mobilities, summer schools, and blended virtual and actual mobility. Many universities may consider enhancing virtual exchange opportunities to compensate real mobility;
- We note that the EU allows for visa waivers for conferences or unpaid work for 180 days (6 months) which will assist with some forms of short-term mobility;
- Joint masters: UK institutions can join, but also lead consortia;
- Erasmus Mundus Design Measures: new sub-action, supporting design of high-level study programmes at master level (single lump sum of 55.000€/consortium);
- Participation of UK institutions is also possible in Erasmus+ Key Action 2 - Cooperation Partnerships and Alliances for Innovation (Forward Looking Projects);

7. Comments from CG UK members (Bristol, Durham and Edinburgh)

These headline points relate to the University of Edinburgh's (UoE) Erasmus participation and performance noting that over the duration of the Erasmus programme (since 1987), Bristol, Durham & Edinburgh have sent well over 7,000 students to study and work in Europe through Erasmus.

- UoE has over 250 student exchange agreements with European partner institutions in over 20 countries.
- UoE is the number one UK study destination for inbound Erasmus students and has one of the largest UK cohorts of outbound students.
- UoE has been the largest UK recipient of Erasmus+ student and staff mobility funding in recent years.

- UoE's current Erasmus+ award for the 2020/21 project year is €4.1M (to support both European and international mobility) – this project has been extended until May 2023 meaning that UoE can continue to fund its outgoing students until then.

8. Concluding concerns and considerations:

- Erasmus+ has been the key framework that has supported students on Modern European Languages programmes who have a mandatory year abroad requirement. There is no prioritisation of mandatory study/work abroad through Turing.
- One of the key objectives of Turing is Widening Participation. For example, only about 7% of University of Edinburgh outbound European exchange students qualify for the supplementary “Widening Participation” Erasmus grant. This could negatively impact on the amount Edinburgh and other leading UK universities are awarded.
- The Turing Scheme's lack of inward mobility has resulted in the perception that the benefits are one-sided and that there are no incentives for EU students or institutions to engage.
- Many organisations including universities, the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) and the British Council are particularly concerned about maintaining already established and long-lasting partnerships with EU institutions;
- The ESN will undertake to raise awareness among students about the Turing Programme, and communicate to UK students that there are alternatives to Anglophone countries;
- If the Turing scheme does not include short-term staff exchange after 2023, will the UK universities accept outgoing staff from EU Universities within the Erasmus+ scheme?
- There is no legal framework for creating/re-negotiating partnerships under Turing - to avoid further frustrating / alienating EU partners, a standard UK-wide agreement template is suggested. The University of Nottingham announced at a recent Universities UK International (UUKi) webinar that they were initiating conversations around creating such a template.
- The new Erasmus+ Programme foresees only outgoing mobilities both for EU countries as well as worldwide. Previously the Erasmus+ Key Action 107 for Partner Countries offered funding for outgoing and incoming. Now it will be harder to manage mobilities outside the EU (UK included). What's more, EU higher education institutions will have fewer outgoing mobilities to the UK than previously and they will not be able to prioritise the UK as a destination due to the criterion of geographical distribution.
- UK institutions may need to work with their partners to identify creative solutions for different types of engagement beyond standard reciprocal exchanges – e.g. summer schools, short exchange and study programmes.
- To ensure outward opportunities for students, the UK universities need to be proactive in ensuring that EU partners choose UK study destinations for their outbound students. While Turing is not a like-for-like Erasmus replacement post-Brexit, with appropriate lobbying it could evolve into a scheme that allows for bilateral exchange.
- The Coimbra Group can help to promote constructive dialogue between the UK Government (Department for Education), the EU, UUKi, British Council, ESN and its member universities about the Turing scheme. Such advocacy will help to promote a constructive two-way exchange of information and views to assist the UK to develop a Turing Scheme that embracing best practice in reciprocity, staff mobility, equality and inclusion for all students.

List of people consulted by the CG task group (March-April 2021)

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- **Mr Kostis GIANNIDIS**
President, Erasmus Student Network
- **Prof Claire GORRARA**
Chair of the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) and Professor of French, Cardiff University
- **Ms Naquita LEWIS**
Implementation Manager for the Turing Scheme and the Higher Education Lead for the Erasmus+ programme in the UK, British Council (*has left her position since then*)
- **Ms Vivienne STERN**
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- **Prof Janet STEWART**
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