

15 January 2021

To the Rt Hon Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education

We, the undersigned, write to express our concerns at the withdrawal of the UK from the Erasmus+ programme. We urge the UK government to reconsider its position and to ensure that the Turing scheme offers the same or increased global opportunities compared to the Erasmus+ programme.

The Erasmus+ programme offers **unparalleled access to personal and professional development for UK students, trainees, and organisations**. According to the European Commission's Factsheets on UK participation, in 2019 alone, 54 619 participants in 684 UK projects benefited from Erasmus+ mobility in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult and youth learning. This equated to a total UK grant of € 144.69 million. Whilst we write to you from the perspective of UK Higher Education, the Factsheet makes clear that Erasmus+ has funded educational and training projects across all education sectors. UK Higher Education makes up just 28.5% (195) of the 684 projects funded in 2019, followed, in order of grant receipt, by Schools Education, Vocational Training and Education, Youth and Adult Education.

The Erasmus+ programme offers UK students, scholars, and educational professionals **highly valued global mobility opportunities with 190 countries, within and beyond the EU**. The outward-bound benefits of the programme are matched by the rich contribution of incoming Erasmus students to our student communities. They are integral to the research vitality of our campuses in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, as well as in science innovation, knowledge transfer and partnership. This intangible cultural and intellectual benefit may not be measurable in direct financial terms but the contribution of Erasmus+ students to the overall UK economy certainly is. This is estimated at £243 million per annum by Universities UK International.

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Losing-study-abroad-scheme-would-blow-a-hole-in-UK-economic-prospects.aspx>

Whilst we have highlighted here national benefits, we would wish to focus on the **real difference the Erasmus+ scheme has made to individuals**. Personal testimonies on social media and in the UK press attest to the impact of Erasmus on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as Hashid Mohamed, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/erasmus-was-no-gap-year-lark-it-was-my-passport-to-the-world-w7lnbq85d>. It is this diversity and accessibility of funding for young people from a range of backgrounds that must be sustained in future.

Should the UK government proceed to withdraw from membership of the Erasmus+ programme, we would **urge government colleagues to permit the devolved administrations to consider associate membership** and/or forms of sponsored participation as is likely to be the case for Higher Education students in Northern Ireland.

Finally, we would **urge the UK government to extend the scope and ambition of the Turing scheme** which is in preparation to replace the UK's participation in Erasmus+. We are concerned that the outline proposal, available on the UK government website, will not offer the same or increased opportunities for study and work abroad for UK young people as has been pledged. We are concerned on three fronts.

Firstly, **reciprocity is not built into the current proposals**. This will significantly inhibit UK sending institutions from maintaining or building global opportunities. Lack of reciprocity may lead to many partnerships being unviable, resulting in a lack of placement opportunities for our students abroad. It is also administratively burdensome to facilitate different agreement types outside the standard Erasmus+ template. Our universities, our society, and our economy all benefit from the presence of Erasmus+ students.

Secondly, **the scheme does not appear to support staff mobility, which is essential for building partnership and trust and encouraging mobility from disadvantaged groups**. The Turing Scheme must include the equivalent of Erasmus+ 'Organisational Support' funding aimed at offsetting the costs of administering the programme, such as staffing costs to prepare students, promote the programme and maintain partnerships. Inter-institutional agreements are complex and take time to develop and mature; they also seed further opportunities.

Thirdly, it is most concerning that the Turing **scheme is not being funded on a multi-annual basis**. An annual cycle of funding does not consider how universities recruit students to study and work abroad. This happens at least a year in advance of a placement. Advertising funding is key to encouraging students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to consider a placement abroad. Uncertainty around funding for future years abroad will have an impact on recruitment to modern language degrees disproportionately and undermine faith in the Turing scheme as a recognised UK programme, worthy of investment from our partners.

As learned societies and organisations whose extensive experience confirms our deep belief in global mobility for young people in the UK, **we urge the UK government to work with us and others in the education and training sector as a community to retain Erasmus+ or to provide a truly exceptional equivalent**. We would be happy to meet with the Minister and/or his colleagues to discuss and review potential ways forward.

Yours sincerely

Professor Claire Gorrara, Chair, University Council of Modern Languages (UCML)

Professors Susan Bruce and Martin Halliwell, Co-Chairs, Arts & Humanities Alliance (AHA)

Dr Martin Howard, President, and Dr Emmanuelle Labeau, Vice-President UK Affairs, Association for French Language Studies (AFLS)

Professor Nicola McLelland, President, Association for German Studies (AGS)

Professor Kim Bower, President, and Professor René Koglbauer-Franklin, Chair of Management Board, Association for Language Learning (ALL)

Dr Christine Sas, Chair, Association for Low Countries in the UK and Ireland (ALCS)

Professor Chris Tinker, President, Association for the Study of Modern and Contemporary France (ASMCF)

Professor Philip Cooke, Chair, Association for the Study of Modern Italy (ASMI)

Professor Claire Taylor, President, Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland (AHGBI)

Professor Stephanie Dennison, President, Association of Lusitanists of Britain and Ireland (ABIL)

Caroline Strevens, Chair, Association of Law Teachers (ALT)
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Professor Simon Gilson, Chair, Society for Italian Studies (SIS)
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