

A WORLD OF EXPERIENCE

How international opportunities benefit individuals
and employers, and support UK prosperity

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FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce this report which offers new research and insight into how international experiences help to build skills which benefit individuals, business and society.

UBS supports individuals, companies and institutions to develop the expertise they need to grow their business. We strongly believe that the current generation of learners has been 'born global' and must be urgently helped to acquire the language proficiency, international awareness, and 21st century skills needed for a global economy. We work with partners to increase the number of people with the qualifications, employability and skills to achieve their potential and drive growth.

This report confirms that the many opportunities available, from school exchanges and study abroad to work placements and travel, all have a role to play, allowing individuals to choose the activities that are right for them and support their personal development. It also reveals how individuals 'get the bug' and how initial international experiences encourage young people to seek out wider horizons throughout their life.

Individuals who have worked, studied or travelled abroad are perhaps unsurprisingly more likely to become involved in roles that have an international focus. However, this report also shows that those who have spent time working and studying abroad are more likely to be involved in research and development roles for their organisation, particularly

positions focused on innovation.

Individuals with international experience are also more likely to have the analytical, critical-thinking and problem-solving skills needed to identify new opportunities and to mitigate risk.

Ensuring that young people entering the workforce have the skills that businesses need to compete is key to the UK's long-term prosperity. Building a successful business and protecting and expanding investment relies on a combination of technical knowledge and practical and soft skills. Businesses also need a workforce with the ability to communicate and collaborate with people from different cultures and backgrounds. The current deficit in foreign language skills in the UK workforce is a very real concern. As languages become increasingly important in the global marketplace, companies will inevitably look abroad to fill roles for which there are no suitable home candidates. Over time this will have worrying implications for our young people, business, and for society.

It is therefore imperative that UK businesses, government and education come together to ensure that young people from all backgrounds are offered opportunities to develop their international awareness and capacity to make connections with other markets and cultures.



Richard Hardie

Richard Hardie
Chair, UBS Ltd

Richard Hardie has been Non-Executive Chair of UBS Ltd since 2011, having joined the group in 1977. He chairs the British Academy's 'Born Global' languages project.

Richard is also Chair of The Learning Trust, the UK's only not-for-profit independent LEA in the UK, and Vice-President of the Chartered Institute of Linguists. He speaks fluent French, and passable Italian and German.

Richard was named HRH The Prince of Wales' Business in the Community Ambassador for London for 2007.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the impact of international experiences on individuals, employers and wider society.

It is based on research undertaken by CFE Research and LSE Enterprise on behalf of the British Council¹ which explored the impact of different types of international experience – including school exchange programmes, volunteering overseas, independent travel, university study and work placements abroad.² It provides new insight into the way in which these experiences help to build skills that generate benefits for individuals, employers and UK wider society.

The study highlights three aspects of international experience that are particularly important to the development of skills and which enable individuals to become adept at navigating different cultural contexts and thrive in a global economy:

1. Exposure to cultural difference.
2. Duration of exposure.
3. Degree of engagement.

It also demonstrates that access to a range of activities is vital in reaping the full benefits of international experience, which often accrue over a series of international activities.

The survey of UK residents conducted as part of this research found that the vast majority of those with international experience felt it had helped them to develop a number of skills considered important to the contemporary workplace. It also found substantial evidence that involvement in international experience helped to shape participants' career paths. And it identified factors

associated with an individual's likelihood to participate in overseas international activities.

SKILLS

Flexibility and adaptability:

- Over 80 per cent were confident in their ability to adapt to new and unfamiliar situations, crediting their time overseas as a significant factor in acquiring this ability, compared to 70 per cent who did not have international experience.

Innovation skills:

- A large majority of people with international experience described themselves as having abilities needed for innovation, including strong analytical and critical thinking skills (73 per cent) and strong problem-solving skills (83 per cent). Individuals with international experience believed that this had helped them to develop these skills.
- Seven out of ten were confident communicators, able to work well with people from other countries and cultures.

Languages

- While only 26 per cent were confident in their ability to speak a foreign language, they felt their time abroad had helped substantially in achieving this level of confidence. Fewer than one in ten with no international experience felt they were proficient in a foreign language.

CAREER PATH

- Over half of those who had attended university overseas felt the experience had helped them find a job that interests them.
- Close to half of those who had spent time abroad were involved in innovation within the workplace including research and development and product improvement activities, compared with around one-quarter of those with no international experience.
- Those with international experience were more likely to be in roles with an international focus, with 60 per cent liaising with international colleagues, suppliers and customers, compared with less than 30 per cent of those without international experience.

PARTICIPATION

- The research went on to identify factors associated with an individual's likelihood to participate in overseas international activities. These are: having international experience within the family; speaking a foreign language; and having a degree. While more research is needed to confirm this, it is likely that many individuals who do not have this profile may be missing out on opportunities for personal development. Given the additional benefits gained by individuals participating in international activities, this poses important questions regarding equity and social mobility.

1. Hughes et al. (2015) *Research and analysis on the benefits of international opportunities*. CFE Research and LSE Enterprise.

2. International experience and an exposure to different cultures can also occur whilst remaining in the UK, for example through an internationalised curriculum at school, college or university, or global links in the workplace, but this report focuses largely on the benefits that can be gained from time spent overseas travelling, studying or working.

- There was significant variance between males and females at each end of the spectrum of international opportunities, with girls more likely to take part in school exchanges, and men more likely to take up opportunities to work abroad. The proportion undertaking university-level study abroad was similar for both genders. Men were also more likely to have experiences of three months or more, or multiple international experiences.

International experience and skills are increasingly important in ensuring individuals succeed in a globally competitive labour market and in enabling employers to increase innovation – a key factor in driving productivity. As economic growth remains a key goal of UK public policy and the government aims to increase exports to meet its ambition of £1 trillion exports by 2020, international experience has a potentially important role to play in supporting these ambitions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognise and promote the benefits of international experience

Policymakers and employers should consider the importance of international opportunities and experience. This could include working together to develop educational policy that supports increased ability for young people to learn languages and participate in international programmes within the curriculum, and employers enabling international experience as part of their development planning for staff. They should also consider whether participation in third-sector programmes for young people that have an international component could be further publicised, supported or incentivised to enable an increase in participation.

Encourage participation from an early age

Individuals with international experience are more likely to seek out similar opportunities in future. Policymakers and education institutions should, where possible, facilitate exposure to positive international experiences from an early age, particularly working to support a revival of school exchanges, which have declined in recent years.

Increase opportunities for work placements

Employers should consider investing in programmes that give individuals opportunities to gain work experience overseas at all stages of their careers.

Widen access to international opportunities

There are important variations in participation in international opportunities across different socio-economic and demographic groups. Policymakers should consider ways in which access to such programmes could be widened to promote social mobility.

Reinforce the connections between international experience and innovation

Mobility providers and employers should publicise the evidence that international experience is associated with higher levels of skills that support innovation and with career paths that support the development of new and innovative products and services.

Identify and build on benefits

Providers should be more specific about the benefits participants can expect to gain from their programmes, tailoring these as appropriate to create the conditions for sustained and active engagement with different cultural contexts that provide the greatest opportunity for the development of skills.

Reinforce foreign language benefits

Spending time abroad can help to improve foreign language proficiency. Those who already speak a foreign language are more likely to take up international opportunities; those who do not may be missing out because of fears about lack of language skills. Where appropriate, providers should reinforce that prior language skills are not a prerequisite; international experience represents an opportunity to learn new languages or develop existing proficiency. They should also continue to highlight the opportunities that exist for international experiences in English-speaking countries.

Deepen understanding of the benefits

Data on the full range of international programmes and benefits is limited. Further research is needed to deepen understanding of how individuals develop skills through international experience and to evaluate and measure the impact of different types of experience. This should be conducted with the involvement of a range of mobility providers to ensure individual programme benefits can be assessed with consistency, comparability and transparency, maximising the impact of individual programmes and the range of opportunities on offer.

Benchmark participation

Research is needed to gain a more detailed understanding of how the provision and take-up of international opportunities in the UK compares to its major international competitors and identify how to increase participation.

Seek to understand the barriers to participation

This research has found evidence of lower participation in the UK than in other countries and amongst particular socio-economic and demographic groups. Outside of the higher education sector, there is limited understanding of the relative impact of barriers to participation in international opportunities. Further research on this issue is required to help tackle important issues of equity and social mobility.

INTRODUCTION

The extent to which we interact with organisations from around the world and people from different cultural backgrounds has never been greater.

Young people moving into the workforce will have much greater exposure to, and engagement with, their counterparts in other countries than previous generations due to economic globalisation, the spread of traditional and digital media and increased international travel. They are also more likely to face international competition in the labour market and encounter cultural differences at home due to the growing diversity of contemporary society. An international outlook and intercultural skills are becoming more important in ensuring UK citizens thrive in this increasingly complex economic and social environment. Young people need to be offered opportunities

to develop the outlook, knowledge, skills and experience that enable them to take part effectively in an internationally connected economy and society. This can benefit them directly, but also bring advantages for employers, and supports the UK's economic prosperity.

To explore the impact of international experiences undertaken by UK citizens, the British Council commissioned CFE Research and LSE Enterprise³ to review existing evidence and undertake new research to explore the specific benefits arising for individuals, the economy and wider society from different types and lengths of international experience.

This consisted of:

- A literature review on the UK's competitiveness and skills needs.⁴
- A literature review on opportunities for international experience in the UK, and a comparison with the US and Germany.⁵
- A survey of 1,148 UK residents between the ages of 25 and 65, of whom, 712 had international experiences and 436 had no international experience.
- Semi-structured interviews with individuals who have had international experiences.
- Case studies of a range of programmes that enable people to develop international experience.

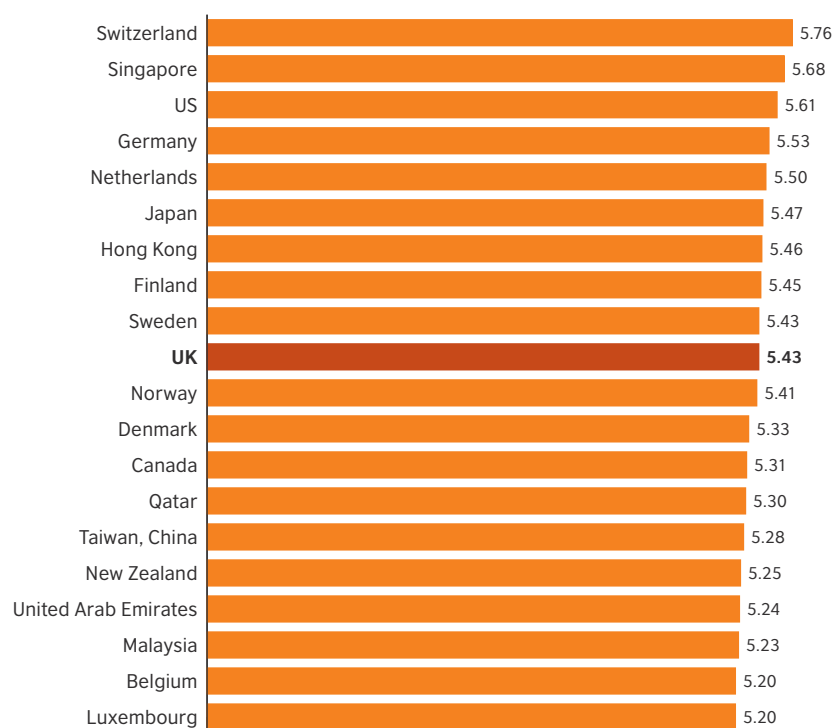
COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY

A globally competitive and skilled workforce is vital to achieving sustainable economic growth and prosperity for the UK.

The UK ranked tenth in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) assessment of the competitiveness of OECD countries for 2015–16 (Chart 1). The UK has long suffered from a productivity gap compared to a number of other advanced economies. Bridging this gap is critical to ensuring rising living standards and a strong competitive position for the UK economy in the years to come. To support this drive, the LSE Growth Commission has identified three areas in need of long-term investment: human capital and skills; infrastructure; and technology and innovation.⁶ The UK government has also recently published its Productivity Plan that set out a series of priorities for raising long-term economic growth, including a focus on improving skills.⁷

The government has also identified a number of sectors of strategic importance for long-term economic growth, including financial services, energy and construction. Each has its own technical skills requirements. However, young people hoping to enter these and other sectors will also need a range of generic and transferable skills to thrive. These skills, often known as 'soft skills', include communication skills, teamwork and problem-solving. International experience is one way in which young people can develop these abilities.⁸

Chart 1: WEF Global Competitiveness Index for OECD countries 2015–16



Source: World Economic Forum.⁹

Some employers clearly recognise some benefits of international experience. Multinational organisations increasingly have a need for graduates with 'global competencies' such as the ability to communicate and work collaboratively with people from a range of countries and backgrounds. Research by Think Global and the British Council found

that 74 per cent of the 500 business leaders surveyed worried that young people's horizons are not broad enough to operate in a globalised economy, and that unless we better support schools to teach young people to think more globally, 'the UK is in danger of being left behind by emerging economies such as China,

3. Hughes et al. *op. cit.*

4. *Research and Analysis of the Benefits of International Education Opportunities: A Literature Review on UK Competitiveness and Skills (needs) and Research.* Available online: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/literature_review_on_uk_competitiveness_and_skills_cfe_research_and_lse_enterprise.pdf

5. *Research and Analysis of the Benefits of International Education Opportunities: A Literature Review on Opportunities for International Experience in the UK, and comparison with the US and Germany.* Available online: https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/literature_review_on_opportunities_for_international_experience_cfe_research_and_lse_enterprise.pdf

6. LSE Growth Commission (2013) *Investing for Prosperity*. Available online: www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/units/growthCommission/documents/pdf/LSEGC-Report.pdf

7. HM Government (2015) *Fixing the Foundations: Creating a More Prosperous Nation*. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fixing-the-foundations-creating-a-more-prosperous-nation>

8. British Council (2013) *Culture at Work*. Available online: www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/culture-at-work-report-v2.pdf

9. World Economic Forum (2015) *The Global Competitiveness Report 2015-2016*. Available online: <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016/report-highlights/> <http://reports.weforum.org/global-competitiveness-report-2015-2016>

India and Brazil'.¹⁰ However, this message is not getting through to young people: as recently as 2011, the majority of undergraduates, while considering it important to have an international outlook, did not believe that it would necessarily help them in their future careers.¹¹

In the area of soft skills, the picture is less clear. In the absence of properly defined links between international experience, soft skills and business benefits, many employers do not appear to fully recognise or emphasise the value of international exposure in recruitment. This may be interpreted by young people as a lack of demand for this type of experience, which in turn may be acting to limit participation among young people.

Indeed, extensive research has suggested a mismatch between the abilities of graduates leaving education and employers' requirements, with graduates lacking 'real-life' skills such as negotiation, leadership and

project management.¹² Meanwhile, a UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) survey revealed that, to help drive innovation, 37 per cent of UK companies felt that managers needed to update problem-solving skills, making it the third most important training need behind job-specific and management skills.¹³

The relationship between skills development and international activity is perhaps clearest in terms of language learning. The British Chambers of Commerce has highlighted a lack of intercultural awareness and foreign language skills as a barrier to companies conducting business abroad. There are certainly signs that a lack of skills may be limiting company ambitions to expand activities in harder-to-reach markets and may be a contributory factor in lower levels of UK trade with Brazil, Russia, India, China, and Japan than would be expected. The estimated cost of shortcomings in foreign language skills to the UK economy was £48 billion in lost exports in 2006.¹⁴

It could be argued that this issue is being met with some complacency. Despite these long-standing concerns, a 2013 survey of employers indicated that less than one-quarter were actively seeking out intercultural and foreign language skills in their recruitment processes.¹⁵ Similarly, many companies do not consider updating foreign language skills as a priority for managers. The UKCES found that just 11 per cent of UK companies indicated that managers need to brush up their skills in this area, placing areas such as improved management ability above languages.¹⁶

To help explore the link between international experience and the needs of individuals, employers and wider society, this report seeks to identify the soft skills that young people need in the 21st century workplace and explores the extent to which international experience has an impact on their development.

10. Think Global and the British Council (2011) *The Global Skills Gap: Preparing Young People for the Global Economy*. Available online: <http://think-global.org.uk/resources/item/6404>

11. British Council (2011) *Next Generation UK*. Available online: www.britishcouncil.org/new/pagefiles/15492/yougov_report_v3.pdf

12. Branine, M (2008) *Graduate recruitment and selection in the UK: A study of the recent changes in methods and expectations*, Career Development International 13/6 and Docherty, D and Fernandez, R (2014) *Career Portfolios and the Labour Market for Graduates and Postgraduates in the UK: A Report to the Higher Education Funding Council of England*, London.

13. UKCES (2014) *Employer skills survey 2013*. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/327492/evidence-report-81-ukces-employer-skills-survey-13-full-report-final.pdf

14. Foreman-Peck, J and Wang, Y (2013) *The cost to the UK of language deficiencies as a barrier to UK engagement in exporting: A report to UK Trade & Investment*. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/309899/Costs_to_UK_of_language_deficiencies_as_barrier_to_UK_engagement_in_exporting.pdf

15. British Council (2013) *Culture at Work op. cit.*

16. UKCES (2014) *Employer skills survey 2013 op. cit.*



PROVISION OF INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

SCHOOL-LEVEL ACTIVITIES

International education initiatives in primary schools typically focus on building links with schools overseas rather than travel abroad. A recent report by the Institute of Education suggests that 82 per cent of primary schools have links with schools abroad and 62 per cent encourage pupils to correspond with students in overseas schools.¹⁷ The number and impact of these associations could be set to increase further. From September 2014, schools in England were also required to teach a foreign language at Key Stage 2. Connecting and corresponding with pupils overseas represents an ideal opportunity to practise the language skills learned in the classroom, potentially

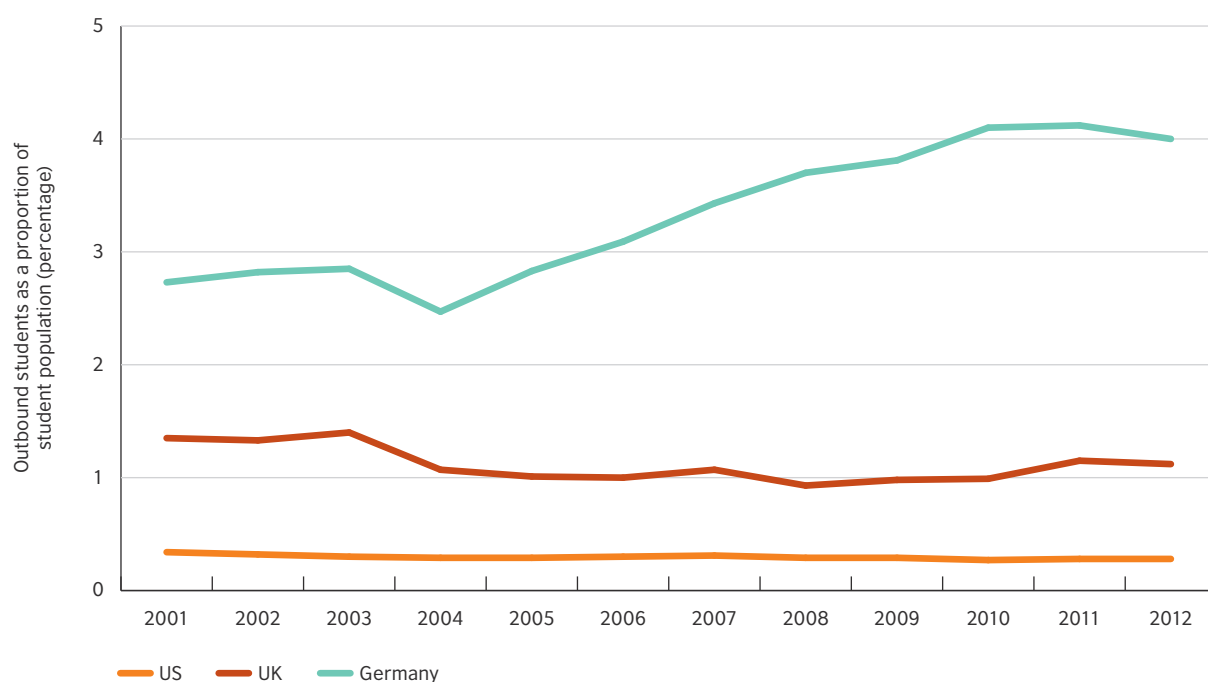
encouraging more schools to sign up for programmes such as the British Council's Connecting Classrooms scheme.

School participation in international programmes, such as UNICEF UK's Rights Respecting School Awards or the British Council's International School Award, is currently relatively modest at 1,600 and 3,000 schools respectively. International trips and school exchanges are also becoming less common due to pressures on school resources, worries about health and safety and child protection. A recently commissioned survey revealed that only 39 per cent of British secondary schools now run traditional exchange trips involving a stay with a host family.¹⁸ Of these only 30 per cent

of state schools reported that they run these exchanges, whereas 77 per cent of independent schools said they did. In addition, recent changes in the National Curriculum have reduced incentives for schools to incorporate a global dimension into lessons.

Despite the modest level of international experiences available to many in the UK school system, UK citizens are more likely to have attended school abroad than their peers from a number of other countries. A Eurobarometer survey commissioned by the European Commission found that 12 per cent of UK respondents had gone to school in a country other than the UK, which is higher than the EU average.¹⁹ However, four per cent of the UK sample

Chart 2: Internationally mobile students in the UK, 1999–2012.
(Net mobility = inbound – outbound.)



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.²⁰

indicated they had moved to the UK from another country, which may explain this relatively high number.

TERTIARY EDUCATION

UNESCO Institute for Statistics (the latest internationally comparable statistics) estimates that there were 28,000 UK students undertaking their whole degree in another country in 2012 – a figure that has been relatively consistent since 1999 and represents around one per cent of the population in higher education.²¹ In contrast, the number of students coming to the UK from abroad is significantly higher and has grown year on year to 2012.

The US is the most popular destination for UK students undertaking their entire course abroad with around 9,000 individuals on courses in the country. France ranked second, with English-speaking countries such as Ireland, Australia and Canada also popular.²²

According to the latest globally comparable student mobility figures, the UK is the second most popular international study destination for

students undertaking their entire degree abroad, hosting 13 per cent of internationally mobile students in 2012. Latest national figures from leading study destinations indicate that the UK remained in this position in 2013–14, behind the US. In contrast, the UK ranked 67th for outward mobility, with OECD figures showing around 28,000 students (1.1 per cent) choosing to study abroad in 2012.²³ This puts the UK behind Germany, where 117,600 or four per cent of higher education students are internationally mobile. However, the UK does have a greater proportion of its student population studying abroad than the US, where only 0.28 per cent of students chose to study their entire university programme in another country.²⁴

Students from all three countries tend to study in places that have linguistic and cultural similarities and connections with their home nation. The UK is the first choice for US students, just as the US is the first choice for those from the UK. The preferred study destination for German students is Austria.

A significant number of UK students who take a part of their degree course in another country visit a European destination with the support of the European Commission's Erasmus programme (known as Erasmus+ since 2014).²⁵ Figures published by Erasmus+ show that 10,316 UK students studied for part of their degree abroad in 2013–14 and 5,250 undertook work placements.²⁶ Take-up of international opportunities through Erasmus has increased by 25 per cent among UK students between 2007–08 and 2011–12.²⁷ However, UK student participation is still much lower than that from Spain, France, Germany and Italy.

Those in further education are also eligible to work or study abroad for between two and 12 months with support from Erasmus+. However, across all those participating, students on vocational courses make up just 0.6 per cent of those studying abroad with the programme and 11 per cent of those on work placements.²⁸ In 2012–13, the UK had 9,642 studying under Erasmus, compared with 4,930 on work placements.²⁹

17. Hunt, F (2012) *Global Learning In Primary Schools in England: Practices and Impacts*, London: Institute of Education. Available online: www.ioe.ac.uk/GlobalLearningInPrimarySchools.pdf

18. YouGov survey commissioned by the British Council. A summary of the results is available at: www.britishcouncil.org/organisation/press/british-council-says-%E2%80%98bring-back-school-exchanges%E2%80%99

19. European Commission (2010) *Geographical and labour market mobility*. Available online: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_337_en.pdf

20. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (accessed August 2015) *Data Centre*. Available online: www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx

21. See also Findlay, AM et al. (2010) *Motivations and Experiences of UK Students Studying Abroad Statistical Sources – Summary Metadata Report*. Available online: www.bis.gov.uk/assets/biscore/corporate/migratedD/publications/B/BIS-RP-008

22. UNESCO Institute for Statistics data (accessed August 2015). *Data centre*. Available online: <http://data.uis.unesco.org>

23. OECD (2014) *Education at a Glance 2014*. Available online: <http://www.oecd.org/edu/Education-at-a-Glance-2014.pdf>

24. UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2014) *Data Centre*, www.uis.unesco.org/datacentre/pages/default.aspx and European Commission (2012) *Eurostat database*. Available online: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database>

25. The Erasmus+ programme is managed in the UK by the British Council.

26. European Commission (2015) *Erasmus student and staff numbers by host country 2007–2014*. Available online: <https://erasmusplus.org.uk/erasmus-projects>

27. European Commission (2013) *On the way to ERASMUS+: A statistical overview of the Erasmus programme in 2011–12*. Available online: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/reports/erasmus1112_en.pdf

28. European Commission (2013) *On the way to ERASMUS+: A statistical overview of the Erasmus programme in 2011–12*, op. cit.

29. European Commission (2014) *Erasmus Facts, Figures & Trends: The European Union support for student and staff exchanges and university cooperation in 2012–2013*. Available online: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/statistics/ay-12-13/facts-figures_en.pdf

In the UK, students who undertake a period of study abroad as part of their degree may retain their student grant or loan. Erasmus participants also receive a grant from the European Commission. By contrast, funding for studying abroad for a whole degree is more difficult to obtain.

In the case of UK students who go to the US or Australia some organisations offer scholarships, including the UK–US Fulbright Commission, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and Rotary International. There are also a range of scholarship schemes relating to specific countries, subjects and level of study. The British Council, for example, plays a role in supporting international education opportunities in higher education, including managing programmes such as Erasmus+, Language Assistants, Generation UK and Study USA.

Recent research by the UK Higher Education International Unit and the British Council found that almost all of the 2,842 students surveyed across 37 higher education institutions perceived a positive link between mobility programmes of one year or less and academic, career and personal development.³⁰ Among the most commonly reported realised benefits were developing independence and intercultural understanding, and an increased likelihood of working abroad long term. The research also found that almost all students who had been mobile wanted to experience further mobility. The research found that barriers to mobility observed by students considering a period abroad included insufficient funding, lack of knowledge of available opportunities, lack of language skills and language training options, and the potential impact on degree length, and that services and information offered by institutions,

such as support in choosing a destination and completing an application were considered to be the most valuable in decision making, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

GAP YEARS

A gap year can take many forms and take place in different places. It is usually understood to mean a ‘...break in full-time education between sitting A-levels and starting university, often devoted to travel and work’,³¹ though of course not all of those who undertake a gap year go on to higher education. The range of activities pursued and duration of the experience may vary. For the purposes of this study, it has been defined as a period between three and 24 months.³² There can be a significant overlap with other potential international activities such as volunteering, with providers including Projects Abroad, VSO and Raleigh International all offering gap-year volunteering programmes.

This variety makes measuring participation challenging and there is a lack of up-to-date data on the number of individuals in the UK taking a gap year. In 2003, the figure was around 50,000 per year, but this figure may have changed significantly in the intervening period.³³

Not all gap years involve activity abroad, though Crawford and Cribb (2013) found that 60 per cent of those who had actively planned a gap year, travelled abroad at some point during the period, while 15 per cent worked abroad and approximately another 15 per cent volunteered abroad.³⁴ Among those who had not intended to take a gap year but subsequently did so (for example as a result of not having achieved their desired grades)

fewer than 30 per cent travelled, about five per cent worked abroad and approximately another five per cent volunteered abroad.

Compared with students who go straight into university, those who take a gap year are more likely to speak English as a first language, have been to a better performing school and be of higher socio-economic status – with only 3.7 per cent being classified as not in education, employment or training (NEET).³⁵

WORKING ABROAD

UK citizens are more likely to report that they have lived and worked abroad than their European counterparts. Some 16 per cent of UK respondents to a Eurobarometer study³⁶ indicated that they had lived and worked in another country, compared with the European average of ten per cent and eight per cent for Germany. It showed that UK respondents were also more likely to have family and friends who had worked abroad – 48 per cent versus 29 per cent.

Formal programmes offering work placements abroad include the Erasmus programme, as well as the International Association for the Exchange of Students for Technical Experience (IASTE). Meanwhile, some multinational employers are placing increasing value on the employability benefits of experience in another country and multinationals Nestlé and Enterprise Rent-a-Car, are building international placements into their graduate training programmes to increase European and wider mobility.³⁷ However, the extent of participation in these schemes is difficult to assess, as information is both dispersed and proprietary.

UK levels of participation in a range of international activities



Source: CFE Research (2015) *Research and Analysis of the Benefits of International Education Opportunities: A Literature Review on Opportunities for International Experience in the UK, and comparison with the US and Germany*. YouGov (October–November 2014). Base: teachers in UK (836).

30. Robin Mellors-Bourne, Elspeth Jones, William Lawton and Steve Woodfield (2015) *Student Perspectives on Going International*. Available online: www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/iu_bc_outwd_mbity_student_perception_sept_15.pdf
31. Crawford, C and Cribb, J (2013) *Gap year takers: uptake, trends and long term outcomes*, London: Department for Education. Summary available online: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RB555.pdf>
32. Jones, A (2003) *Review of Gap Year Provision*, London: Department for Education and Skills. Available online: www.rgs.org/NR/rdonlyres/3147D7BD-5359-4387-BAC9-CEC80EC7D85F/0/
33. *Ibid.*
34. Crawford, C and Cribb, J (2013) *op. cit.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. European Commission (2010) *Geographical and labour market mobility op. cit.*
37. CBI (2011) *Building for growth: Business priorities for education and skills. Education and skills survey 2011*. Available online: www.cbi.org.uk/media/1051530/cbi__edi_education___skills_survey_2011.pdf



UNDERSTANDING INTERCULTURAL ABILITY

To understand how international experience helps to build an individual's skillset, it is important to consider theories of intercultural competence. This can help to isolate the types of experiences that are likely to generate the greatest benefits.

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity³⁸ suggests that with exposure to other cultures, individuals pass through six stages from denial of any cultural difference through to a high degree of acceptance of previously perceived difference

'It definitely makes you a little bit more open to people, more receptive to people and their cultures.'

Market researcher, worked abroad for 18 months

in which techniques to deal with and accommodate that difference are integrated into their approach and their behaviour is permanently modified.

Change takes place over time and the length of time that an individual is exposed to cultural difference is an important factor in accepting and adapting to difference. The extent to

which an individual is immersed in the new culture is also critical. Superficial exposure to another culture – even over a long period of time – may result in little or no behavioural change. Living and working in another country for a period of time is, for example, more likely to result in a greater degree of engagement with a new culture, than a two-week holiday in a purpose-built resort.

Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

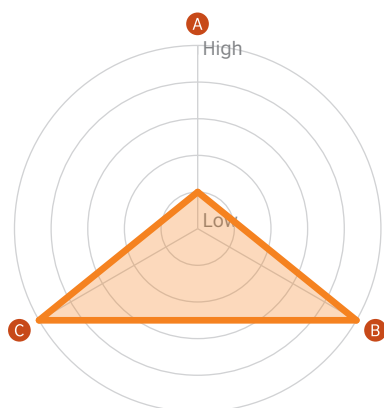


Source: Bennett (2004) 'From ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism' in Wurzel, JS (ed.) *Toward multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education*. Newton, MA: Intercultural Resource Corporation.

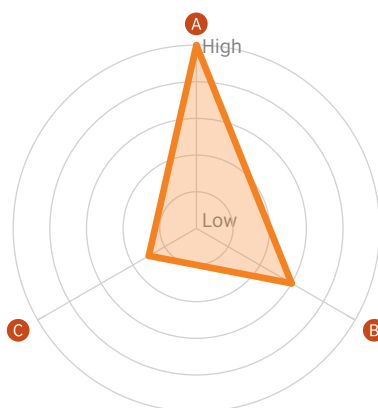
38. Bennett, MJ (1993). 'Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Cultural Relativism' in Paige, R (ed.) *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Yarmouth ME: Intercultural Press.

Degree to which international experience impacts individuals

Scenario one: individual has worked abroad, in a country with a similar culture and same language, for more than five years



Scenario two: individual has studied abroad, in a country with a very different culture and language, for three months



Scenario three: individual has travelled abroad, to a country with a similar culture and language, and stayed in a resort for two weeks



A Degree of difference **B** Degree of engagement **C** Duration of exposure **Orange** Impact on individual

Note: Scenarios are not based on real data.

Degree of immersion may also be an important factor in the level of active engagement with an unfamiliar international context. This can include how individuals deal with the everyday challenges such as finding a job or a place to live in a new country, or navigating processes at an unfamiliar educational institution. The transformation happens when the individual becomes aware of their ability to successfully overcome these hurdles and make a positive contribution in a culturally and linguistically different environment.

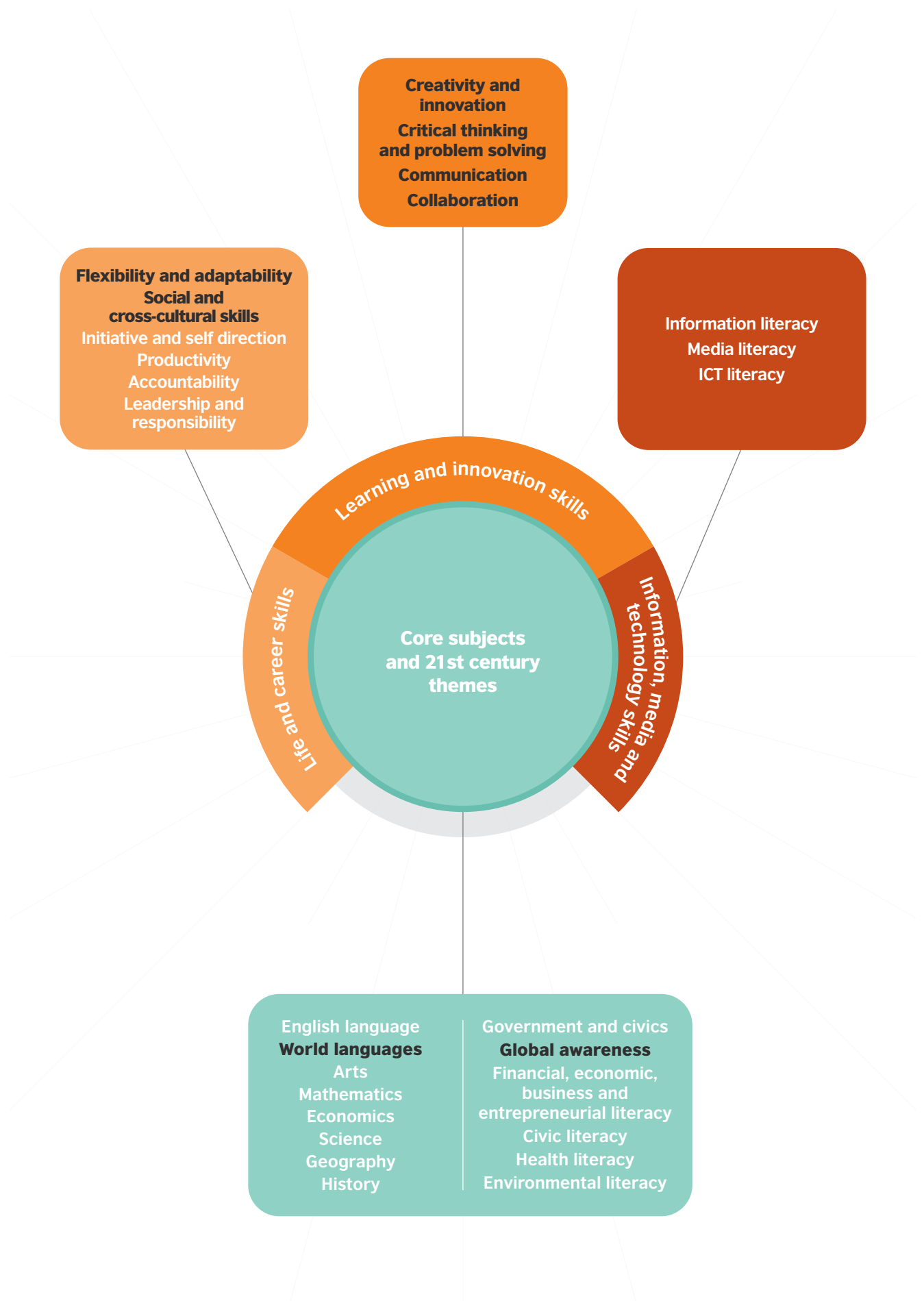
Research to date has focused on how study overseas has helped students

develop skills. This includes how higher education programmes, particularly the Erasmus programme,³⁹ can develop short-term employability skills, helping students to make the transition from university to work. However, it does not cover the impact of participation on long-term career development⁴⁰ or look at the benefits that accrue via a broader range of opportunities available such as independent travel, volunteering or work placements.

There have been several attempts to summarise soft skill requirements in developed economies. Partnership for 21st Century Learning, (known as P21) has set out the skill requirements for

young people in the contemporary workplace in its *Framework for 21st Century Learning*.⁴¹ These range from academic disciplines including English and maths, and proficiency with digital technologies to 'life and career skills' and 'learning and innovation skills'. This report analyses responses of survey participants according to the categories of benefits identified by P21 as the most likely to be developed as a result of international experience. These are highlighted in black in the diagram opposite.

39. Bracht, O et al. (2006) *The Professional Value of Erasmus Mobility*. International Centre for Higher Education Research, University of Kassel. Available online: www.parlement.com/9353210/d/belang%20erasmus%20onder%20professionals.pdf; HEFCE (2009) *Attainment in Higher Education: Erasmus and placement students*. Available online: <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100202100434/http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2009/200944> and European Commission (2014) *The Erasmus Impact Study*. Available online: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf
40. Docherty, D and Fernandez, R (2014) *Career Portfolios and the Labour Market for Graduates and Postgraduates in the UK: A Report to the Higher Education Funding Council of England*, London; Porter, A (2014) *Student Employability Index 2014: Part One*, London: NCUB; Andrews, J and Higson, H (2008) *Graduate employability, 'soft skills' versus 'hard' business knowledge: A European study*. *Higher Education in Europe*, 33/4; CBI (2010) *Ready to grow: business priorities for education and skills*. *Education and skills survey 2010*; Helyer, R (2011) *Aligning higher education with the world of work*, *Higher Education, Skills and Work-based Learning*, 1/2; Mason, G et al. (2009) *Employability skills initiatives in higher education: What effects do they have on graduate labour market outcomes?* *Education Economics*, 17/1; Tomlinson, M (2008) *The degree is not enough: students' perceptions of the role of higher education credentials for graduate work and employability*, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 29/1.
41. P21: Partnership for 21st Century learning (2009) *Framework for 21st Century Learning*. Available online: www.p21.org/storage/documents/docs/P21_Framework_Definitions_New_Logo_2015.pdf



Source: Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2009) *Framework for 21st Century Learning*.

KEY FINDINGS

LIFE AND CAREER SKILLS

The research found that the vast majority of those with international experience believed that it had enabled them to develop as a person. It also indicated that experience gained later in life may offer greater opportunity for personal development compared with experiences at a younger age. Some 84 per cent of survey respondents who had worked abroad or travelled extensively believed that they had developed as a person during their time overseas, compared with 74 per cent of those who had attended university in another country and with 67 per cent of those with school-level experiences.

The research explored whether international experience had an impact on characteristics including confidence, tolerance and curiosity. Until recently, it had been unclear whether it was because individuals already displayed these characteristics that they sought

‘I think it makes you kind of aware of keeping an open mind about things, and about issues, and trying to work out what’s really going on as opposed to what you’re told.’

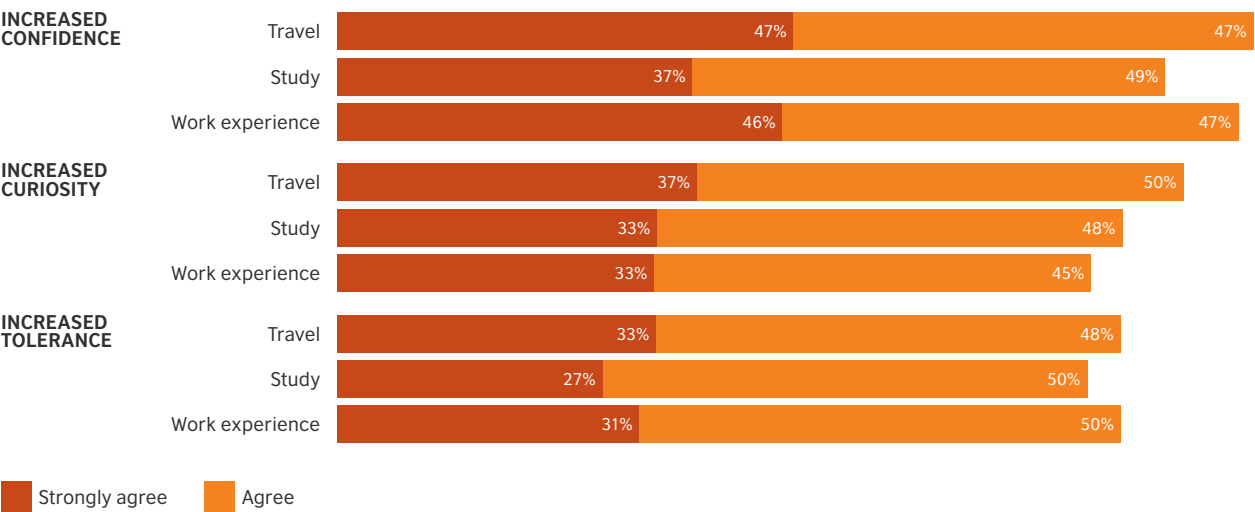
Dancer, studied abroad for 12 months

out international experience, or whether the fact that they had studied or worked abroad had helped the individual to develop them. Recent research by the European Commission which compared three groups – individuals not intending to go abroad, individuals intending to go abroad, and individuals who have been abroad – indicates that there is likely to be two-way causation.⁴² The group with international intentions had higher levels of confidence than the group with no intention, but the confidence of the group who had completed an international experience was higher still.

The results of the CFE and LSE Enterprise research lend further weight to this. Respondents felt that all types of experience helped to boost their confidence, with over 90 per cent of those who had travelled and worked abroad agreeing, or strongly agreeing with this statement. 85 per cent of those who had studied abroad indicated that the experience had an impact on their confidence levels.

Travel was most associated with increased curiosity, with 87 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that the experience had made them more

Chart 3: Impact of international experience on tolerance, curiosity and confidence



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148 total; 712 with international experience).

curious. A large majority also felt that the experience had helped them become more tolerant.

Flexibility, adaptability and direction

The survey findings indicated that spending time abroad was associated with confidence in one area in particular; 82 per cent of individuals with international experience were confident in their ability to adapt to new and unfamiliar situations, compared with 70 per cent in those with no experience. Those with international experience were asked to rate out of five how significant their international experience was in helping them develop this attribute. The vast majority felt it was an important factor, with 73 per cent of those that had studied abroad scoring a four or five. The proportions were even higher for travel and work abroad at 86 per cent and 90 per cent respectively.

Some 85 per cent of those with 'deep' experience (defined as studying or working abroad for a period of three months or more or travelling for more than six months) described themselves as confident in their ability to meet new challenges; the corresponding figure for the groups with 'medium' (defined as one to three months) and 'light' exposure (defined as under one month) was 77 per cent.

Respondents with international experience were also slightly more likely to describe themselves as resilient.

LEARNING AND INNOVATION SKILLS

P21 has identified a group of learning and innovation skills which it defines as the '4Cs': critical thinking, creativity, communication and collaboration. Strength in these areas has been identified as a key ingredient in innovation, an important factor supporting economic growth. The survey also asked participants to indicate whether or not they possessed particular attributes identified by the OECD as indicators enabling innovation, including problem-solving, critical thinking and creativity.⁴³ The research revealed benefits from international experience in all of these areas.

Respondents with international experience were more likely to report that they had strong analytical and critical thinking skills (73 per cent, 13 percentage points higher than those without such experience), problem-solving skills (83 per cent; +11 percentage points), and a creative mindset (66 per cent; +9 percentage points). Experiences later in life appeared to offer the greatest opportunity to strengthen these skills. 70 per cent of those who had worked abroad believed their international experience was a significant factor in helping them to develop a creative mindset, rating it four or five out of five in terms of importance. Some 68 per cent of those who worked abroad also attributed the development of strong problem-solving

'When you're working with people whose first language isn't English you have to think ... very carefully and you have to learn how to be precise and concise and minimise ambiguity.'

Consultant, studied abroad for four months

abilities to their international experience. This compared with 66 per cent of those who had studied abroad at university level who believed that their international experience was a key factor in their developing a creative mindset, and 64 per cent in developing problem-solving skills. Even for those whose only international experience was at school, the results for creative mindset and problem-solving skills were still high at 52 per cent and 51 per cent respectively. The research also identified that international activities could influence individuals' career paths, as those with international experience were more likely to be involved in innovation and development activities in the workplace.

42. European Commission (2014) *The Erasmus Impact Study*. Available online: http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

43. OECD (2011) *Skills for innovation and research*. Available online: www.oecd.org/innovation/inno/47164461.pdf

COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION

One of the anticipated benefits of studying or working abroad is an improved ability to communicate and connect with others. The proportion of those with and without international experience rating their verbal communication skills as excellent was similar. However, those who had spent time abroad believed that they were more confident in their ability to communicate with people from other countries and cultures and to deal with linguistic barriers (71 per cent compared with 45 per cent in the group without international experience). Levels of confidence increased

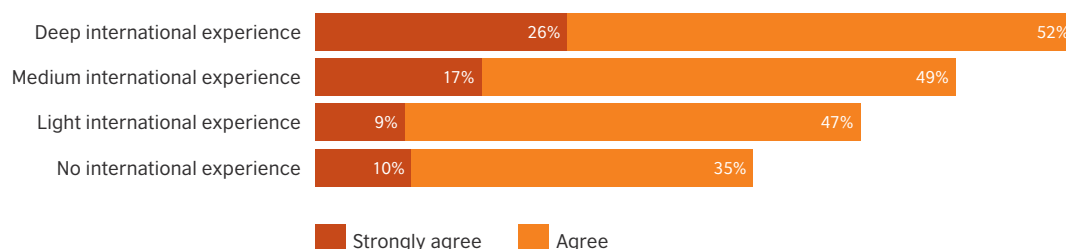
noticeably the longer the individual had spent abroad. Studying, working and travel abroad were all associated with higher scores, with 76 per cent of those who had studied abroad and 83 per cent of those who had worked or travelled abroad saying they were confident in their ability to communicate with people from other countries and cultures.

Those with international experience were also more likely to be open or willing to listen to others' ideas (92 per cent and 87 per cent respectively for those with and without international experience). When asked to rate the significance of their international experience on a scale of one to five, over three quarters

of those that had worked abroad rated it a four or a five. The corresponding figures for travel and study were 60 and 59 per cent respectively.

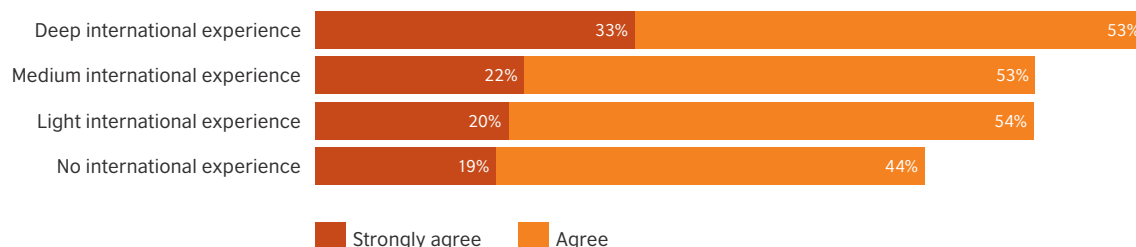
Four-fifths of survey respondents with international experience agreed they had an ability to work well with people from other countries and cultures, compared with 63 per cent of those who had had no such experience. Nearly 90 per cent of those who had worked abroad rated their international experience as an important factor in acquiring this skill. The proportion of those who studied overseas or travelled extensively rating the contribution of their international experience as a four or a five was also

Chart 4: Individual's confidence in their ability to communicate with people from other countries and cultures



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148).

Chart 5: Individual's perceived ability to work well with people from other countries and cultures



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148).

high at 78 and 80 per cent respectively. Those with deeper experiences were more likely to feel confident in their ability to communicate with people from other countries and cultures and to believe that they work well with other people.

Over half of individuals who had international experiences reported that these activities had allowed them to expand their network of professional or personal contacts. 56 per cent of individuals with study-related international experiences and 61 per cent of those with travel experiences felt they had formed new friendships as a result of the experience, while 57 per cent of those who had worked abroad felt that it swelled their professional network. Interviewees identified these elements, too: 'It's given me a network which has been really helpful professionally.' (Senior business leader, studied at international school for two years).

LANGUAGES AND GLOBAL AWARENESS

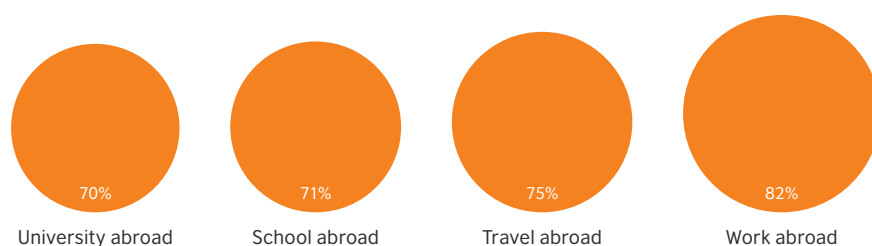
Previous research by the British Council has also revealed that the lack of foreign language skills is perceived as a barrier by around half of UK students when considering study abroad.⁴⁴

This survey found that amongst those who had participated in international experiences, confidence in foreign language ability is significantly higher than those without international experience, with 26 per cent agreeing or strongly agreeing that they are proficient in speaking a foreign language compared to just eight per cent of

those without international experience. This still remains a relatively low frequency, but would translate into very significant economic, social, cultural and soft power benefits if such a level could be achieved across the wider UK population. The survey showed that the majority of confident foreign language speakers felt that their stay abroad was a significant factor in developing their current level of proficiency.

Length of stay appears to be an important factor in building confidence, with 31 per cent of those with 'deep' exposure claiming they are confident, compared with 23 per cent for 'medium' and 14 per cent for 'light'. The level of immersion also has a role to play. As one interviewee noted: 'I was surrounded by German speakers all of the time and was constantly learning... my fluency increased dramatically.' (Actor, studied abroad for one year).

Chart 6: Proportion of confident foreign language speakers crediting international experience with development of their foreign language proficiency



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148 total; 712 with international experience).

Chart 7: Development of international knowledge and understanding



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148).

44. British Council (2015) *Broadening Horizons: The value of the overseas experience*. Available online: www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/6.3_broadening-horizons-2015.pdf

A stay abroad can also have a significant impact on individuals' knowledge and understanding of foreign countries and international affairs, and can stimulate an ongoing desire to learn about other countries and cultures. This is an important factor in ensuring that the UK has an internationally aware workforce who will be aware of opportunities for future international collaboration, as well as being culturally sensitive when dealing with people from other countries. An interviewee summarised it as follows: 'I think you'll keep an eye more on current affairs. I think you do because you know something. You can identify with the place if you've been there.' (Teacher, studied abroad for 12 months, travelled abroad for 12 months).

CAREER PATH

One argument that is well-rehearsed in support of international experience is that it enables participants to demonstrate exposure to 'real life problems',⁴⁵ pick up valuable skills and ensure their CV stands out when it comes to applying for a job. Some of the interviews conducted for this study supported these views: 'I think it was really good on my CV for future job interviews, showing that I had travelled for a year and was able to do the logistics of arranging that.' (Healthcare professional, worked abroad for one year and travelled abroad for 13 months).

The survey found that just over half of those with university-level experience abroad (53 per cent) reported that it helped them to get a job that interested them. This is a slightly higher proportion

than had indicated it enabled them to secure a job of any kind (47 per cent). 42 per cent of those that had worked abroad felt the experience had helped them to decide on their ideal career path. It also helped some to open up immediate or short-term job opportunities in their chosen career path and progress more quickly towards their long-term career aspirations (both 38 per cent).

Interviewees described how their international experience helped them to understand their personal and professional priorities better. One said, 'The impact in the short term was to change my outlook of what I wanted from my career, what I wanted in the company I was in.' (Consultant, volunteered abroad for six months). Another stated that 'I did come back with a clear path, which I followed, in terms of my career... going away gave me a breather to think about what were my priorities.' (Healthcare professional, worked abroad for one year and travelled abroad for 13 months).

This increased clarity of purpose can enable those with international experience to seize further opportunities both at home and abroad. One interviewee said, 'The experience inspired me and motivated me to try and engage with policymaking and decision making at a European level.' (Consultant, studied abroad for four months). Just over one-third of those with university-level international experiences (36 per cent) said they would look to study abroad again, while 43 per cent of those with work-related international experiences would consider looking for a job overseas in the future. Importantly, some 60 per cent of survey respondents with multiple international

International experience motivates individuals to seek out new international opportunities



experiences stated that their first international experience encouraged them to actively look for further study-, travel- or work-related opportunities abroad. The percentage of those whose initial experience was at school age, who agreed that they were inspired to look for other international opportunities was slightly higher at 62 per cent.

PROFESSIONAL IMPACT

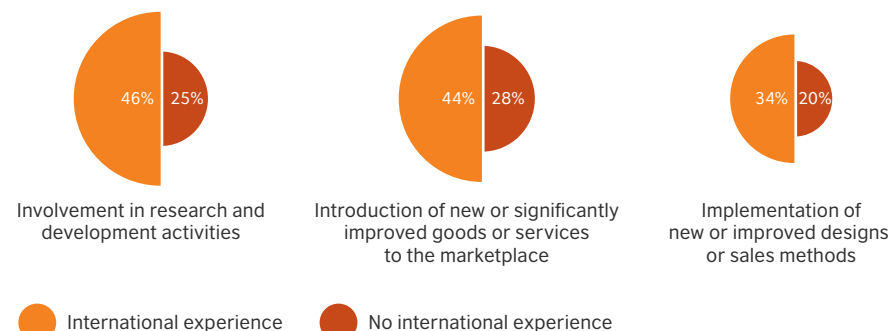
Once in work, those who had participated in international opportunities were more likely to take on a number of specific professional activities. 46 per cent of individuals with international experiences were involved – or had been involved in a previous role – in research and development, compared with 25 per cent of individuals without experience. A difference was seen in terms of those involved in introducing new or improved goods and services to market (44 per cent of those with international experience compared with 28 per cent of those without)

and the implementation of new or improved designs or sales methods (34 per cent versus 20 per cent). Those with more extensive international experience were more likely to be involved in these activities, with 52 per cent of those with deep experience involved in research and development, compared with one-third of those with light experience. The proportions of those involved in introducing new or improved products were 49 per cent and 30 per cent respectively.

This finding is of particular importance given the role of innovation in economic growth. The greater involvement in innovation among individuals with international experience – coupled with indications that these individuals credit their international experience with the development of strong analytical, critical thinking and problem-solving skills and a creative mindset – suggests that increasing the availability of international opportunities may be one way to help promote future innovation in the UK.

Furthermore, individuals with international experience are also more likely to be, or have been, involved in roles that require a more international focus. This increased with the amount of time spent abroad, with 64 per cent of those with deep experience holding a role that required them to work with colleagues, clients and customers abroad, compared with 48 per cent for the light group. A similar variance was seen between those who were required to travel for work (62 per cent for the deep group, +30 percentage points compared with those with light experience), or to employ their foreign language skills (38 per cent, +23 percentage points).

Chart 8: Involvement in innovative activities



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148).

Chart 9: Responsibility for international activities



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148).

Across all levels of experience, the majority believed their involvement in these activities could be attributed to their previous international experience.

While there is growing evidence that international experience brings many benefits in terms of employability, there is not yet enough evidence to say that this experience also impacts positively on long-term earnings. A study that focuses on the impact of higher education level international experiences gained through the Erasmus+

programme indicates that 64 per cent of employers assign greater professional responsibility more frequently to individuals with international experience, but that this did not necessarily translate to increased pay.⁴⁶ Similarly, a report by the UK Higher Education International Unit found a mixed picture: mobile students in some disciplines earned more than contemporaries who had not gone abroad, but there was no discernible difference between the groups in other academic disciplines.⁴⁷ This issue was also explored in the CFE Research and

45. Branine, M (2008) *Graduate recruitment and selection in the UK: A study of the recent changes in methods and expectations*, Career Development International 13/6.

46. European Commission (2014) *The Erasmus Impact Study*, op. cit.

47. UK Higher Education International Unit (2015) *Gone International: Mobile students and their outcomes – Report on the 2012/13 graduating cohort*. Available online: www.international.ac.uk/media/3207989/Gone-International-mobile-students-and-their-outcomes.pdf

LSE Enterprise research. However, once the impact of other variables had been taken into account, including level of education, it did not find a significant association between salary levels and international experience.

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT

The survey findings indicate that there is an association between international experience and higher levels of engagement. This is one of the key ingredients in developing intercultural skills. Through navigating an unfamiliar environment, individuals begin to appreciate their ability to overcome hurdles and make an active contribution which provides the motivation and empowerment needed to face future obstacles.

In many cases, particularly where individuals have been involved in volunteering overseas, this also translates to a greater global and local civic awareness, as an individual's outlook on international affairs and appreciation of their ability to bring benefits to others is influenced by their international experience. One interviewee with experience of working abroad stated that they came back 'with such a strong resolve to try and address systemic issues around why people were living in poverty or development or why the market had failed them' (Consultant, volunteered abroad for six months).

PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

It is important to consider the profile of those most likely to participate in and benefit from the opportunities available. The research sought to understand more about the group with no international experience, particularly why they had decided not to participate in international activities. A large majority (75 per cent) of respondents without international experience confirmed they were aware such opportunities exist. However, further analysis suggests that some groups may be better informed about the opportunities than others. A greater proportion of individuals with a degree (83 per cent) were aware of such opportunities compared with those respondents without a degree (72 per cent). Awareness also increased with socio-economic status. It was 85 per cent among the most privileged group, but was still high, at 71 per cent, among the less privileged. There were also significant differences by gender, with a significantly higher proportion of male respondents (85 per cent) aware of international opportunities compared with female respondents (71 per cent).

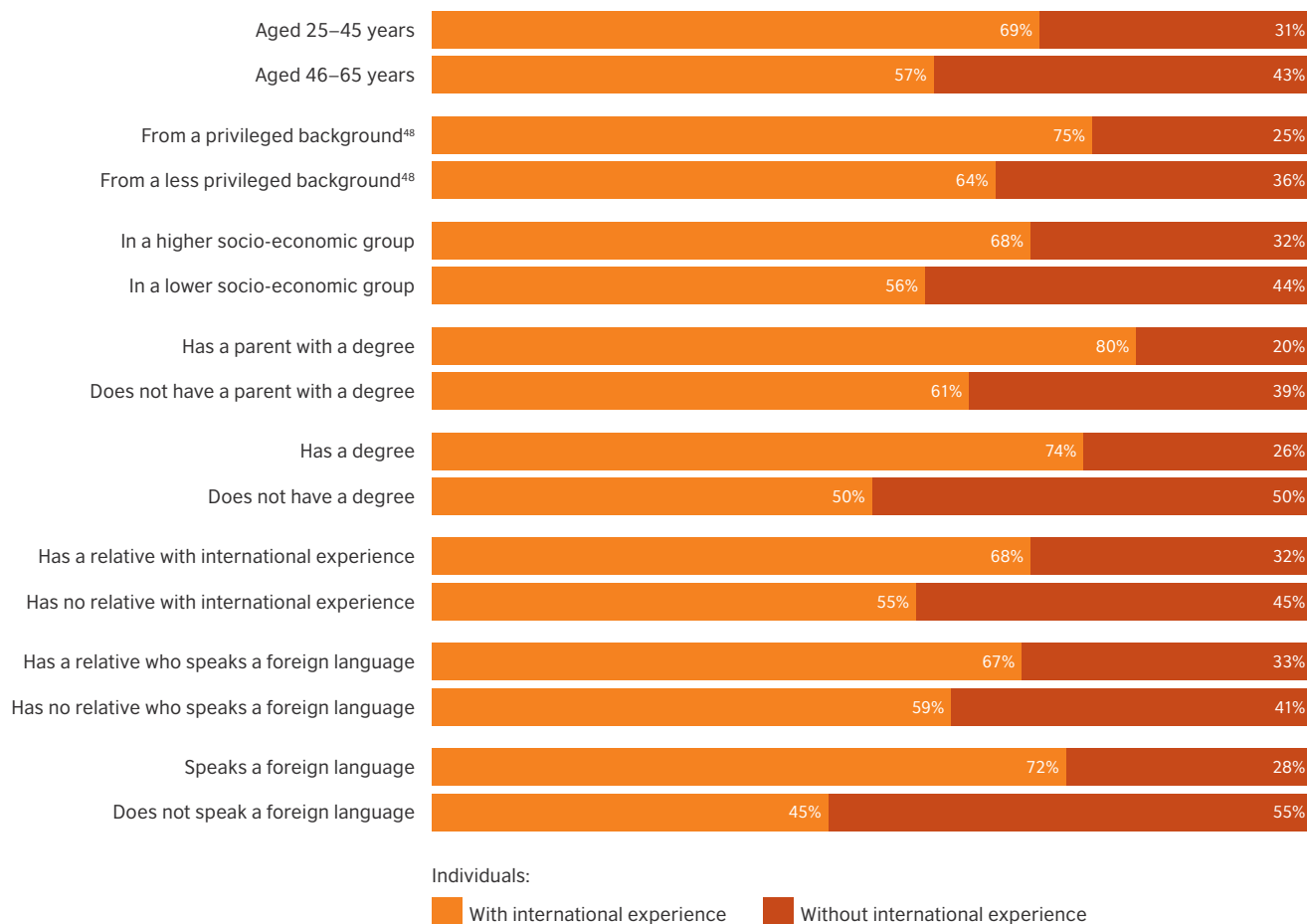
The research identified traits most associated with the likelihood of participation in international experience as: having international experience within the family, speaking a foreign language and having a degree and being male.

However, caution should be taken with the results from this analysis, as it is difficult to determine the direction of the relationship in all instances. Further research is needed to determine why and how these factors appear to influence levels of participation.

The research revealed significant gender differences in participation. One-third of women with international experience had been involved in a school exchange, compared with 24 per cent of men, but similar proportions of male and female students study for all or part of their degree overseas. 66 per cent of men with international experience had worked abroad, compared with 38 per cent of women with international experience. Men were significantly more likely to have 'deep' or extended periods of international experience (44 per cent compared with 29 per cent women) and to have had multiple stays abroad (57 per cent of male respondents with international experience versus 44 per cent of women with such experience).

Given the increase in skills gained from these types of opportunities and the ways in which these support positive career outcomes, different participation rates raise important questions in relation to equity and social mobility.

Chart 10: Comparison of individuals with and without international experience



Source: CFE Research (2014). Base: 25–65 year olds in UK (1,148).

48. 'Privileged background' is defined as those whose main wage-earning parent is classified in social grades A or B; 'less privileged' as those whose main wage-earning parent is classified in social grades C or D.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Working, studying and travelling abroad can help to build a toolkit of skills which employers seek and that benefit the UK economy.

The research found that there are a wide variety of programmes available to young people at different stages of education as well as the opportunity to travel, volunteer and work abroad. There is, however, a lack of public and consistent data available which means it is challenging to gain a comprehensive overview of the scale, nature and impact of these opportunities, while meaningful comparison between the UK and other countries is virtually impossible. The limited data available at higher education level suggests that, while UK students may be more likely to pursue international opportunities than their US counterparts, take-up of these opportunities is not at the level seen in other countries, including Germany.

Limited understanding of the impact of international experiences on the individual and the associated benefits may be one aspect affecting demand. Young people may be opting against working or studying abroad for a period because it is unclear whether it will affect their future employability. Among employers, there is an appreciation that working and studying abroad can support skills development, but there is little evidence that they are looking for individuals with international experience when recruiting – something which would likely drive take-up among young people.

To promote the benefits of international experiences more effectively, those who offer such opportunities need to better understand what makes

a more powerful experience and actively promote the development of appropriate opportunities.

The research by CFE Research and LSE Enterprise that underpins this report found that people who had travelled, worked or studied abroad indicated that as a result of the experience they had increased confidence and improved verbal communication and analytical and critical thinking skills. They reported an increased understanding of foreign cultures and an awareness of international affairs. They felt they were more tolerant of difference and were more confident in their ability to adapt to new and unfamiliar situations. The experience also helped them to clarify their personal priorities. The research also demonstrated that participation in international opportunities can support individuals developing fulfilling career paths.

The research demonstrated that there was an association between international experience and the skills that support innovation. It showed that those with international experience were more likely to be involved in the introduction of new or significantly improved goods or services to the marketplace, and the implementation of new or improved designs or sales methods. These are all important factors that influence economic growth.

Finally, the research indicated that there appear to be differing levels of participation in international

experiences by different social groups, which given the benefits that can be derived from these experiences, poses important challenges for equity and social mobility.

Given the clear benefits that derive from international experience for individuals, employers and the UK economy, it is important that more young people are given the opportunity to participate in these experiences in the future. This research suggests that increasing and widening access to these opportunities could make an important contribution to future UK prosperity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognise and promote the benefits of international experience

Policymakers and employers should consider the importance of international opportunities and experience. This could include working together to develop educational policy that supports increased ability for young people to learn languages and participate in international programmes within the curriculum, and employers enabling international experience as part of their development planning for staff. They should also consider whether participation in third-sector programmes for young people that have an international component could be further publicised, supported or incentivised to enable an increase in participation.



Encourage participation from an early age

Individuals with international experience are more likely to seek out similar opportunities in future. Policymakers and education institutions should, where possible, facilitate exposure to positive international experiences from an early age, particularly working to support a revival of school exchanges, which have declined in recent years.

Increase opportunities for work placements

Employers should consider investing in programmes that give individuals opportunities to gain work experience overseas at all stages of their careers.

Widen access to international opportunities

There are important variations in participation in international opportunities across different socio-economic and demographic groups. Policymakers should consider ways in which access to such programmes could be widened to promote social mobility.

Reinforce the connections between international experience and innovation

Mobility providers and employers should publicise the evidence that international experience is associated with higher levels of skills that support innovation and with career paths that support the development of new and innovative products and services.

Identify and build on benefits

Providers should be more specific about the benefits participants can expect to gain from their programmes, tailoring these as appropriate to create the conditions for sustained and active engagement with different cultural contexts that provide the greatest opportunity for the development of skills.

Reinforce foreign language benefits

Spending time abroad can help to improve foreign language proficiency. Those who already speak a foreign language are more likely to take up international opportunities; those who do not may be missing out because of fears about lack of language skills. Where appropriate, providers should reinforce that prior language skills are not a prerequisite; international experience represents an opportunity to learn new languages or develop existing proficiency. They should also continue to highlight the opportunities that exist for international experiences in English-speaking countries.

Deepen understanding of the benefits

Data on the full range of international programmes and benefits is limited. Further research is needed to deepen understanding of how individuals develop skills through international experience and to evaluate and measure the impact of different types

of experience. This should be conducted with the involvement of a range of mobility providers to ensure individual programme benefits can be assessed with consistency, comparability and transparency, maximising the impact of individual programmes and the range of opportunities on offer.

Benchmark participation

Research is needed to gain a more detailed understanding of how the provision and take-up of international opportunities in the UK compares to its major international competitors and identify how to increase participation.

Seek to understand the barriers to participation

This research has found evidence of lower participation in the UK than in other countries and amongst particular socio-economic and demographic groups. Outside the higher education sector, there is limited understanding of the relative impact of barriers to participation in international opportunities. Further research on this issue is required to help tackle important issues of equity and social mobility.

Study Work Create

Study Work Create is an initiative run by the British Council, focusing on opening up international opportunities for young people and professionals from the UK. The aim is to give young people the opportunity to experience another culture and gain international experience. This can come in several different forms ensuring individuals can find the opportunity that best suits their needs and interests. Opportunities include: scholarships, work placements, internships, volunteer opportunities, funding creative projects, teacher training, language learning and more. Activities range from short-term opportunities of just a few weeks to much longer experiences.

Find out more at: www.britishcouncil.org/study-work-create

IMAGE CREDITS

Pages 9 and 14 © Mat Wright

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