



EUROPEAN  
Higher Education Area



Erasmus+

# THE UK IN THE EUROPEAN HIGHER EDUCATION AREA

---

A report on the UK EHEA workshops  
2015-2016

The British Council commissioned John Reilly to write this report on the series of workshops supporting the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), run by the UK team of EHEA experts\*. The financial support for the workshops was provided by the European Commission and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS).

\*Michael Blakemore, Dugald Craig, Andy Gibbs, Stephen Jackson, Rebecca Maxwell Stuart, Jayne Mitchell, Huw Morris, David Phinnemore, John Reilly and Ella Ritchie

## THE AUTHOR

John Reilly has wide European and international experience. John was involved in the development of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and a member of the European Commission group which has helped in the revision of the new ECTS Guide. He has considerable experience of Erasmus Mundus as the former Director of the UK Erasmus Mundus national structure and has worked with a number of consortia in the planning, development and implementation of Joint first degrees, Masters and Doctorates.

## INDEX

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT	03
FOUR UK COUNTRIES	04
SHARED THEMES	05
BOLOGNA/EHEA TOOLS – INSTRUMENTS FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND RECOGNITION	07
DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL JOINT MASTER AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES	09
PROMOTING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH MOBILITY	10
INNOVATIVE STUDENT LEARNING AND ERASMUS+ STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS AND CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECTS	12
RECENT UK POLICY INITIATIVES	13
FEEDBACK	14
CONCLUSION	15

# INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

The UK has been at the forefront of the Bologna Process<sup>1</sup> from the outset. In 1998 the UK and three other countries (France, Germany, Italy) agreed the Sorbonne Declaration<sup>2</sup>, which established the framework for the Bologna Declaration<sup>3</sup>, which was signed the following year (1999) by 27 countries and which set in motion the 'Bologna Process' embodying a set of shared principles and action lines.

The Bologna Process has had a number of overarching objectives, one of which was to establish a European Higher Education Area which would encourage and facilitate Higher Education cooperation through establishing a commitment to shared objectives, the basis for comparison and recognition of qualifications and a set of tools to support the process and ensure quality.

Considerable progress was made in the first ten years with the realisation of a number of the initial goals and in 2010 the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was formally launched with the Budapest-Vienna Declaration<sup>4</sup> which acknowledged the achievements of the previous ten years but recognised the continuing need to embed, develop, enhance and strengthen the Bologna Process.

Following the most recent Bologna follow-up meeting of Ministers, in Yerevan in May 2015, 48 countries are now signatories to the Bologna Declaration.<sup>5</sup> Because it has established shared approaches and tools for recognition and quality assurance, the EHEA provides an unparalleled international arena for Higher Education collaboration.

The process is fully supported by the European Commission, which has funded a series of initiatives to foster

understanding, support effective implementation and embed shared objectives. The European Commission-funded Erasmus programme, which established the largest student and staff mobility programme in the world, is widely accepted as providing the basis and impetus for the Bologna Process, contributing to the realisation of a number of the initial action lines. Other EU programmes such as Erasmus Mundus and Tempus also addressed the implementation of Bologna themes.

The extensive Erasmus+ programme is continuing this work. Among the initiatives of Erasmus+ directly related to the Bologna Process and the development of the EHEA is a Call<sup>6</sup> through which National Authorities have been able to apply for funding to help in their implementation of the Bologna Process and the EHEA.

The UK National Authority (BIS) applied successfully for funding to focus on a set of priorities, which are shared by the four UK administrations, the EU and the EHEA:

- Student mobility (study and work) and competences for employability
- The promotion and implementation of joint degrees
- Effective understanding and implementation of Bologna tools
- Innovative student centred learning

The project was coordinated by the British Council with support from the UK Higher Education International Unit. The experts charged with the implementation of the project recognised the overlapping and intersecting nature of these fields and decided to approach them under three broad headings, each of which would

respond to EU programmes providing institutional and individual funding and operational support:

- Joint programmes focusing on: Joint Masters – Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degrees (Erasmus+) and Joint Doctoral programmes (Formerly Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctoral programmes now Marie Skłodowska-Curie Intensive Training Networks)
- Mobility and Employability
- Innovative Learning in the context of Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building projects which include the potential for mobility



The European Commission-funded Erasmus programme, which established the largest student and staff mobility programme in the world, is widely accepted as providing the basis and impetus for the Bologna Process, contributing to the realisation of a number of the initial action lines.

<sup>1</sup><http://www.ehea.info/article-details.aspx?ArticleId=3>

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.ehea.info/uploads/declarations/sorbonne\\_declaration1.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/uploads/declarations/sorbonne_declaration1.pdf)

<sup>3</sup>[http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/BOLOGNA\\_DECLARATION1.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/BOLOGNA_DECLARATION1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>[http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Budapest-Vienna\\_Declaration.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Budapest-Vienna_Declaration.pdf)

<sup>5</sup>[http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/5\\_2015/112705.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/SubmittedFiles/5_2015/112705.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>[https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/support-implementation-ehea-reforms-eacea-492015\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/erasmus-plus/funding/support-implementation-ehea-reforms-eacea-492015_en)

## FOUR UK COUNTRIES

Although there are overarching UK policies and shared practice in each of the thematic areas there are also distinctive features and policies in the four administrations – England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. For this reason it was decided to hold workshops on each of the main themes in all four countries.<sup>7</sup> The response and discussion at the workshops justified this, each providing distinctive features, which permeated discussion and were reflected in the presentations.

The Scottish Government has established an International Framework and is working with NUS Scotland on a project, *'Developing Scotland's Graduates for the Global Economy'*.<sup>8</sup> Part of this project includes working with NUS Scotland and the Scottish Higher Education Institutions to promote outward mobility. However, a concern is that currently Erasmus+ outward mobility is concentrated in a small number of Scottish institutions and the majority of mobile students

are not domiciled in Scotland. This is a challenge which is being addressed and was discussed in the Scottish workshops.

The Welsh Government in its *'Policy statement on Higher Education'*<sup>9</sup> stresses its commitment to work with Welsh universities to promote outward student mobility. The Welsh Government and Welsh universities have established a 'Global Wales' partnership to foster the internationalisation of Welsh universities.

A feature of the outward mobility from Northern Ireland is that a high percentage is immediate cross-border to the Republic of Ireland. This is recognised to be a positive development but at the same time there is a concern that it keeps students in their 'comfort zone' and hence may not entail the same learning opportunities, challenges and personal development as mobility to one of

the other EU countries. Persuading students from Northern Ireland to be mobile is seen as a persistent challenge. Northern Ireland derives advantages from the small number of Higher Education Institutions and the ease of meeting and networking with colleagues in other institutions. The relationship with the Higher Education sector in the Republic of Ireland is also beneficial as evidenced by the participation in the workshops of colleagues from the Republic and the Irish National Agency.



<sup>7</sup> There were ten workshops in total (three in England, three in Wales, two in Northern Ireland and two in Scotland)

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012\\_NUS\\_Scotland\\_From\\_Here\\_to\\_Where.pdf](http://www.nus.org.uk/PageFiles/12238/2012_NUS_Scotland_From_Here_to_Where.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/130611-statement-en.pdf>



## SHARED THEMES

A number of recurring themes emerged in the three sets of workshops.

In UK HEIs considerable attention is paid to the costs and benefits of all institutional activity. The availability of adequate **resource** is an incentive for participation and equally a perceived lack of, or low resource, can be a deterrent for the engagement of staff, students and institutions.

Many staff, academic and administrative, are enthusiasts, who give freely of their time and energy to realise projects but it is suggested that they receive little institutional recognition for their work in preparing and managing projects. The workshop discussions stressed the need for targeted resource and effective recognition of the workload and responsibility entailed in preparing applications, organising mobility, running joint programmes and managing projects.

Ultimately, resource depends on active institutional engagement and in large institutions, with competing claims on the time and interest of colleagues at all levels, strategic commitment is essential. An excellent presentation on an institutional approach to engagement was given by a delegate at one of the workshops - '*Promoting Mobility ....Making the case*' - Natalie Cunningham, Head of Student Mobility.<sup>10</sup>

**Risk and risk assessment** was another overarching concern. This is perhaps most evident in the promotion and management of mobility - study and work placements. It is not limited to health and safety but applies also to curriculum compatibility, credit transfer, grade transfer, quality assurance of placements and relations with placement providers. Projects too (Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building) require an effective risk assessment and risk management policy.

**Employability** was an explicit theme for the second series of workshops - mobility and employability. It was also emphasised in the workshops on joint masters and doctoral programmes and in discussion of innovative learning and curriculum development/reform in the context of Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building. In all cases the focus has to be on impact and outcomes.

The workshops, particularly the workshops on mobility and employability, each echoed a sense of failure – institutional and individual – to articulate and validate the **benefits and competences** acquired through mobility.

While the Diploma Supplement (in the UK the Higher Education Achievement Report - HEAR - incorporates the European Diploma Supplement) and Europass provide instruments for recording achievement, it is evident that with limited exceptions, the competences acquired through mobility are not expressed in terms of assessed learning outcomes and are consequently not formally recognised. This is possibly a more acute challenge in Erasmus+ work placements (traineeships) particularly those in Humanities and Social Sciences where there seem to be few examples of specific learning outcomes and assessment related to the placement. This is in marked contrast

---

Ultimately, resource depends on active institutional engagement and in large institutions, with competing claims on the time and interest of colleagues at all levels, strategic commitment is essential.

to work placements within the UK, especially in the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, where generic and specific competences related to the actual work placements are assessed with the collaboration of employers.

These points apply with equal force to Joint Masters and Doctoral programmes with integrated study and/or work mobility.

If mobility is integral, it is argued, the competences derived from the mobility should be explicitly recognised and will contribute to employability. The same point can be made for Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building projects which incorporate mobility. The failure to develop a positive, validated evaluation of mobility competences suggests an area for further research and reflection and active engagement with employers.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/promoting\\_mobility\\_-\\_making\\_the\\_case.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/promoting_mobility_-_making_the_case.pdf)



**Student engagement** in the workshops was invaluable and illustrated the insights and appreciation that only the reflective student perspective can provide. The value for learner and teacher of full active engagement of students before, during and after mobility was a strong message.

The implications of the lack of such engagement was illustrated by two participants in a mobility and employability workshop – one an older participant, who had studied abroad, remarked, during discussion of competences acquired through mobility, “I only wish that someone had helped me to understand what the workshop is making clear at the time that I graduated”. A more recent graduate, asked to identify the competences acquired from the

mobility (academic and personal) admitted that it was a question no-one had previously asked and that the question, the process of responding and the discussion in the workshop, had proved revelatory.

The experience of an Erasmus Mundus Masters mobility which illustrated the effectiveness of different styles of teaching and a thought-provoking reflection from Rebecca Maxwell Stuart (*‘How I learned... How I would have liked to have learned...’*)<sup>11</sup> demonstrated the potential for constructive and creative student engagement. The discussion and the student contributions to the workshops underline the relevance and implications of student centred learning which was echoed in the review of the Bologna / EHEA tools.

---

The value for learner and teacher of full active engagement of students before, during and after mobility was a strong message.

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2\\_the\\_student\\_perspective\\_2.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/2_the_student_perspective_2.pdf)

# BOLOGNA/EHEA TOOLS – INSTRUMENTS FOR QUALITY ENHANCEMENT AND RECOGNITION

All the workshops included presentations and discussion on the EHEA tools which are incorporated in the European Quality Framework. As well as providing an overview and explanation of each of the ‘tools’ the presentations and discussion covered the policy context and objectives. The Bologna ‘tools’ provide a shared set of values and instruments for collaboration and quality enhancement which facilitate mobility, joint programmes, curriculum development, projects and recognition if they are correctly understood and implemented.

A feature of the workshops was that although some of the participants were aware of key EHEA instruments, many were not, and virtually none were aware of the full range and the implications for effective, high quality mobility, recognition of competences for employability, planning and implementing joint programmes and planning and participating in Capacity building and Strategic partnership projects.

The presentations on the relevance of Bologna and the EHEA for joint programmes, mobility, employability, innovative learning and Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building stressed that the principle objectives of the EHEA are to enhance the quality and relevance of Higher Education through innovation in student centred learning, exploiting digital technologies, research based learning and teaching in all cycles, transparent descriptions of learning outcomes and workload and the involvement of students and other stakeholders as full members of the academic community in curriculum design and quality assurance.

The EHEA objectives are to foster employability so that “at the end of

*each study cycle graduates possess competences suitable for entry into the labour market which also enable them to develop the new competences they may need for their employability throughout their working lives.”* The EHEA stresses the importance of social inclusion, which includes permeability and articulation between different education sectors, gender balance, international mobility, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The workshops gave an overview of the EHEA and the European Qualification Frameworks (EHEA and EU), European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the new Guide, the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area<sup>12</sup>, the European approach for quality assurance of joint programmes, the European Quality Assurance Register and the Diploma Supplement.

Particular attention was paid to the new **ECTS Guide (May 2015)**<sup>13</sup>, which is now a fully endorsed Bologna/EHEA document, providing a comprehensive review of the importance and value of credits and an approach to grade conversion and transfer, which is complemented by the European Commission-funded project **EGRACONS**<sup>14</sup> (European Grade Conversion System) which offers a comprehensive software approach to the conversion and transfer of grades.

The presentations noted developments in Doctoral education referring to the European Universities Association (EUA)<sup>15</sup> project and the *Principles for Innovative Doctoral Training in Europe*<sup>16</sup>, which emphasise the need for generic (transferrable) competences for employability, not only in research but in the wider employment field.



---

The Bologna ‘tools’ provide a shared set of values and instruments for collaboration and quality enhancement which facilitate mobility, joint programmes, curriculum development, projects and recognition if they are correctly understood and implemented.

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG\\_2015.pdf](http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/ESG_2015.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/publications/2015/ects-users-guide_en.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> <http://egracons.eu/>

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.eua.be/>

<sup>16</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research\\_policies/Principles\\_for\\_Innovative\\_Doctoral\\_Training.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/pdf/research_policies/Principles_for_Innovative_Doctoral_Training.pdf)



The revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA, which stress the need to involve students in curriculum development, to include well-structured placement opportunities where appropriate, to define the expected student workload e.g. in ECTS, to ensure that programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process, should inform curriculum development for joint programmes, student mobility and Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building projects.

The workshops for all three themes emphasised internationalisation and the ways in which it is viewed and promoted in the EHEA, the EU and the national agendas. High quality joint masters and doctoral programmes, regarded as a 'hallmark' of the EHEA, manifest a commitment to internationalisation and enhance

the international attractiveness of the members of the consortium. Participation in Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building projects strengthens and extends the range of international cooperation for mutual benefit. Student mobility (outward and inward) is essential for developing a genuine international environment and establishes and reinforces the basis for institutional and subject collaboration.

In each workshop there was an emphasis on the practical aspects of grant application. This stressed comprehensive and timely preparation, effective teamwork and communication with partners. The workshop presentations and discussion focused on project assessment criteria and the factors that contribute to successful applications.

---

Student mobility (outward and inward) is essential for developing a genuine international environment and establishes and reinforces the basis for institutional and subject collaboration.





# DEVELOPING SUCCESSFUL JOINT MASTER AND DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES

The practical aspects of preparing a successful Erasmus+ Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral (Innovative Training Network) grant application, an understanding of how the application process works, how applications are assessed and what factors contribute to successful applications were covered, in a comprehensive way, in each of the workshops.

The workshops focused on Joint Masters and Doctoral programmes, because of their direct relevance to the EHEA and the EU strategic objectives, because they make a significant contribution to internationalisation, because funding is available through Erasmus+ and Marie Skłodowska-Curie and because these two programmes and the former Erasmus Mundus Joint Doctoral Programmes have established agreed European quality criteria and best practice for Joint Masters and Doctorates. The Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters specifications conform to the expectations of the UK Quality Code<sup>17</sup>.

The structure, procedures and quality requirements for Joint Masters are applicable to joint first cycle programmes.

The essential requirements of relevance, project design and implementation, quality and cooperation of the project team, the impact and dissemination of the project and the criteria for assessment were reviewed, together with the importance of ensuring that mobility is fully integrated. The European Universities Association JOIMAN<sup>18</sup> project suggests 'golden rules' for successful high quality joint programmes: institutional commitment, clear objectives, strong partnerships, long-term planning horizons and a strategy for sustainability.

Awareness of European policy and developments in Doctoral education provide a good basis for an application which reflects an understanding of current thinking (see Michael Blakemore's presentation - '*Focusing on Joint Doctorates*' (slide 3) which provides a bibliography of relevant publications).<sup>19</sup>

The Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Networks (ITN) '*aim to train a new generation of creative, entrepreneurial and innovative early-stage researchers, able to face current and future challenges and to convert knowledge and ideas into products and services for economic and social benefit.*' '*Partnerships take the form of collaborative European Training Networks (ETN), European Industrial Doctorates (EID) or European Joint Doctorates (EJD).*' The training objectives of the European Commission echo the expectations of the UK Research Councils and are fundamental to a successful application. As with Joint Masters it is essential to respond to and satisfy the expectations of the European Commission and demonstrate: institutional commitment, a strong, coherent partnership, concentrating on excellence, impact and implementation.

Joint Doctorates and Masters should utilise and acknowledge the Bologna EHEA tools, recognising that although the Salzburg II Recommendations suggest that ECTS is not generally applicable to Doctoral programmes, a number of institutions do use ECTS in these, particularly for training components as a way of providing accredited evidence of the assessment of the competences achieved in the training, for future employers.



The training objectives of the European Commission echo the expectations of the UK Research Councils and are fundamental to a successful application. As with Joint Masters it is essential to respond to and satisfy the expectations of the Commission and demonstrate: institutional commitment, a strong, coherent partnership, concentrating on excellence, impact and implementation.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.joiman.eu/default.aspx>

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/focusing\\_on\\_joint\\_doctorates\\_-\\_michael\\_blakemore.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/focusing_on_joint_doctorates_-_michael_blakemore.pdf)

# PROMOTING EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH MOBILITY

The UK Government's strategy for outward mobility is outlined briefly in the publication *'International Education: Global Growth and Prosperity'*<sup>20</sup> (July 2013). It has resulted in the establishment of the Go International programme administered by the UK Higher Education International Unit. The UK Strategy for Outward Mobility and the Go International programme provide a national perspective on the EHEA and EU strategies for mobility responding to the Bologna Process Leuven Communiqué objective of 20% of graduates having a mobility experience by 2020.<sup>21</sup>

All four UK administrations have initiatives to promote outward mobility. In Scotland the Government approach is set out in *'Developing Global Citizens'*<sup>22</sup>; in Northern Ireland in the policy paper *'Graduating to Success – a Higher Education Strategy for Northern Ireland'*.<sup>23</sup> The Welsh Assembly policy statement on Higher Education<sup>24</sup> includes a commitment to support outward mobility for students and staff. Hence the workshops were taking place in the context of increased UK Government support and growing institutional recognition of the value and importance of outward mobility complementing the existing engagement with inward mobility.

Go International<sup>25</sup> has commissioned research on the academic and employment outcomes of mobility and the student perspectives on mobility, which allied with the European Commission's *Erasmus Impact Survey 2014*<sup>26</sup> and the *CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2015*<sup>27</sup> indicate the benefits, in academic achievement and employment opportunities, for mobile students in comparison with non-mobile students.

Erasmus+ and the Erasmus Charter for Higher Education establish a code of good practice in the management of student and staff mobility. The award of the Charter is a pre-requisite for funding in this area. The workshops explored the potential opportunities of the various actions in the programme which support student and staff mobility including opportunities for the funding of vocational education and training and of graduate traineeships.

Effective employer engagement is an ongoing concern for institutions and for Erasmus+ as a whole. Identifying and securing appropriate employer participation in the workshops proved challenging. However, the employer representation in all workshops was excellent, providing an insight into the perspectives of employers on the value of mobility.

---

Effective employer engagement is an ongoing concern for institutions and for Erasmus+ as a whole ....however, the employer representation in all workshops was excellent, providing an insight into the perspectives of employers on the value of mobility.

The experiences of the employer and recent graduate who attended the Belfast workshop were particularly inspiring. Both would make excellent UK champions for outward mobility demonstrating the real added-value of the competences acquired through mobility, the urgent demand for these competences in employment and a requirement for more effective institutional engagement in the promotion and support of mobility especially in the STEM subjects.

The recent graduate in Engineering attributed his employment directly to his study and work abroad. In his words mobility 'increased the chance of beating the competition'. He was concerned that in his experience there was no academic staff encouragement for mobility and consequently virtually none of his peer group had either a study or work experience abroad. As he expressed it, university departments need to 'get more into the classroom on mobility opportunities'.

The employer was looking virtually exclusively for STEM graduates with a pre-requisite that they should have the outlook and ability to operate in an international environment and be willing to 'travel'. He employs about 200 graduates each year and has to recruit outside the UK because there are too few UK graduates with the attributes which he needs and which he stressed are acquired through an effective mobility experience. In his view universities are too slow in responding to market needs and equipping their graduates with relevant competences and actively promoting and integrating mobility in the curriculum. He echoed the concern, referred to above, that, UK graduates

<sup>20</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/340600/bis-13-1081-international-education-global-growth-and-prosperity-revised.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/340600/bis-13-1081-international-education-global-growth-and-prosperity-revised.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Leuven\\_Louvain-la-Neuve\\_Communique%C3%A9\\_April\\_2009.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/Uploads/Declarations/Leuven_Louvain-la-Neuve_Communique%C3%A9_April_2009.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/DevelopingGlobalCitizens\\_tcm4-628187.pdf](https://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/Images/DevelopingGlobalCitizens_tcm4-628187.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/del/graduating-to-success-the-strategy-for-ni.pdf>

<sup>24</sup> <http://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/130611-statement-en.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.go.international.ac.uk/>

<sup>26</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <http://news.cbi.org.uk/business-issues/education-and-skills/gateway-to-growth-cbi-pearson-education-and-skills-survey-2015/>

---

The recent graduate in Engineering attributed his employment directly to his study and work abroad.

are less successful in appreciating and articulating the generic competences which they have acquired – in marked contrast to American graduates and some from other EU countries. In this context he pointed out that employers are actively looking at the social media profiles of applicants.

The majority of UK Erasmus+ outward mobility participants are female and there is a low representation of students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups and ethnic minorities. There is, thus, a need for a proactive policy to promote and support greater social inclusion (widening participation) in mobility and a gender focus to secure a more balanced representation.

The data on mobility produced by 'Go International'<sup>28</sup> reveals that, although there has been growth in outward student mobility, the UK still lags behind its counterparts in the EU Erasmus+ programme. New measures for recording mobility, which will include short-term mobility of one week, will increase the total but in the author's opinion it seems likely that if

other comparator countries collected similar short duration mobility data, their mobility figures would increase in parallel. It remains the case that while UK institutions are becoming more proactive in support of outward mobility, the integration of mobility windows in the general curriculum of all students is still an exception and the support and recognition of staff (particularly academic staff) engaged in promoting and supporting mobility may need to be reviewed.

Anecdotal and other evidence suggests that for UK students and institutions mobility outside Europe and hence links with non-European Higher Education Institutions is more attractive, exotic and international than Erasmus+, and yet the backbone of UK mobility and Joint Masters degrees remains European within Erasmus+, whilst at Doctoral level there is considerable engagement in the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Innovative Training Networks.



---

<sup>28</sup> [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the\\_uk\\_strategy\\_for\\_outward\\_mobility.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/the_uk_strategy_for_outward_mobility.pdf)

# INNOVATIVE STUDENT LEARNING & ERASMUS+ STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS & CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECTS

The third series of workshops on Innovative Learning concentrated on the potential of Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building projects. This was in response to strong demand from the sector echoed by the UK HE International Unit. The workshops were designed to foster a sense of joined-up thinking in Internationalisation and to provide practical guidance and help for academics, International Office staff and those responsible for developing, delivering and supporting international partnerships and collaboration in project development.

Both Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building projects must address the EU policy agenda, which is in line with and supports the objectives of the European Higher Education Area, in seeking to make life-long learning and mobility a reality; improve the quality and efficiency of education and training; promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; and enhance creativity and innovation including entrepreneurship in all levels of education and training. Of particular relevance is the 2013 Communication – *Opening up Education: Innovative Teaching and Learning for all through new Technologies and Open Educational Resources*.<sup>29</sup> The action should also be set in the context of the Paris Declaration, March 2015, proclaiming the need to protect freedom of expression, foster social inclusion and respect and tackle all forms of discrimination and the new focus on refugees, asylum seekers and migrants and the refugees' crisis in Europe.

The overview of policy emphasised the requirement to understand and assimilate European policy and priorities for student centred learning in all cycles and to identify fields in which UK HEIs might share and/or develop good practice and work with others in developing innovative

projects. Strategic Partnership and Capacity Building Projects will only be successful if they show an understanding of, and acknowledge and incorporate the policy context into a genuinely European and international project and have full commitment from all the partner institutions to an interdisciplinary approach which is innovative, creative, joined up and coherent. Capacity Building and Strategic Partnerships projects must also accommodate the Bologna Process / EHEA tools.

The presentations on Capacity Building and Strategic Partnerships were practical and examined the criteria for assessment. They encouraged lateral thinking about potential projects demonstrating the flexibility of the two funding streams and the diverse activity which can be accommodated. Innovative curriculum development and reform is a key strand in Capacity Building Joint Projects and can be mutually advantageous for programme and partner country institutions. Equally there is potential in a Strategic Partnership project to reinforce institutional collaboration through innovative learning projects and sharing good practice, which promotes the internationalisation of the partner institutions. As with the other themes the student dimension is integral as illustrated by representatives from the European Students' Union project on Peer Assessment of Student Centred Learning.<sup>30</sup>

The level of interest in Strategic Partnerships manifest in the workshops is, however, not matched by the allocation of funding. It was suggested in one workshop that this is an issue which the National Authority and the National Agency for Erasmus+ might wish to pursue further with the European Commission and other member states.

In a similar way it is recognised that, in the UK context, the funding for



Strategic Partnership and Capacity Building Projects will only be successful if they show an understanding of, and acknowledge and incorporate the policy context into a genuinely European and international project and have full commitment from all the partner institutions to an interdisciplinary approach which is innovative, creative, joined up and coherent.

Capacity Building projects does not meet standard criteria for project funding insofar as a project does not generate sufficient overheads to cover the financial expectations in UK Higher Education.

For this reason institutions need to recognise the wider benefits of Strategic Partnerships and Capacity Building projects, the mutual learning that can take place, the potential for spin-offs from such projects for research, other collaboration and reinforcing mobility and internationalisation. Projects need to be set in a wider internationalisation strategy, recognising the benefits of a bottom-up approach that exploits the specific interests and commitment of individual members of staff.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.eunec.eu/european-heartbeat-news-eu/opening-education-innovative-teaching-and-learning-all-through-new>

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/pascl\\_-\\_an\\_introduction\\_to\\_scl.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/pascl_-_an_introduction_to_scl.pdf)



## RECENT UK POLICY INITIATIVES

The agenda for Internationalisation, outward student mobility, widening participation (social cohesion) and emphasis on employability, are all policy objectives of the UK Government and the devolved administrations, reflected in a range of policy statements which echo the priorities of the European Union and the EHEA.

The Bologna Process and the development of the EHEA are not only highly relevant but of critical importance to the Internationalisation Strategies of Higher Education Institutions in the UK. The EU, which supports the process, represents the largest single resource for promoting and funding mobility, joint programmes, institutional partnerships and international credit mobility on a global basis, through the Erasmus+ programme, with an overall budget for the duration of the programme of €14.7 billion. The UK is expected to receive almost one billion euros over seven years (2014-2020), the largest percentage of which will be allocated to Higher Education. The total budget for Marie Skłodowska-Curie over the lifetime of the programme is €6.16 billion and the annual allocation for ITNs is over €400 million.

Each of the UK Devolved Administrations emphasises the importance of participation in Erasmus+ and other EU programmes while, at the same time, giving support for wider international engagement with bursaries and other support for students to experience mobility outside the Erasmus+ programme. Universities have been particularly active in sponsoring volunteering and summer placements, a proportion of which are international.

On May 17 2016 the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills published a White Paper *“Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice”*.<sup>31</sup> The White Paper presages radical changes in the central management structure (Regulatory Framework) for Higher Education in England.

---

Each of the UK Devolved Administrations emphasises the importance of participation in Erasmus+ and other EU programmes while, at the same time, giving support for wider international engagement with bursaries and other support for students to experience mobility outside the Erasmus+ programme.

As the sub-title suggests two objectives are to focus on ‘*Excellence in Teaching*’ and ‘*Social Inclusion*’. The first will be achieved through implementing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) which will seek to measure the quality of teaching and will include employment rates following graduation. The White Paper refers to the goals established by the Prime Minister on Widening Participation in Higher Education “*to double the proportion of people from disadvantaged backgrounds entering university in 2020 compared to 2009 and to increase the number of black and minority ethnic (BME) students going to university by 20% by 2020*”. The TEF will be constructed to support “*The Government aims in widening participation. It will explicitly look at the extent to which the provider achieves*

*positive outcomes for disadvantaged students*” At the same time institutions will be monitored on the basis of the number of disadvantaged students they admit.

Both of these policy objectives are in harmony with EHEA and European Union commitments to social cohesion and social mobility and an outcomes approach to learning. The devolved administrations have been consulted about the Teaching Excellence Framework and consultation will be ongoing, with the desire “*to preserve the comparability of teaching quality across the UK*”.

The three themes for the workshops reflect UK priorities including those of the Devolved Administrations, as well as the priorities established by the EHEA and the European Union. In the last three years the UK has embraced a commitment to increase outward mobility as a key component of Internationalisation Strategies, which has meant that the workshops were highly relevant and timely. However, it was evident that even among experienced practitioners participating in the workshops the level, knowledge, understanding and engagement with the EHEA is surprisingly low, with a significant number of participants indicating that virtually all the information in the workshops was completely new to them and all participants indicating that they had learned a considerable amount.

<sup>31</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/523396/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/523396/bis-16-265-success-as-a-knowledge-economy.pdf)

## FEEDBACK

The feedback from participants reveals a strong sense of the value of the workshops, which allowed active university staff the opportunity for a focused, developmental, expert-led experience over an extended period of time, to learn about the European and EHEA policy context and its relevance to the national and institutional agendas. They commended the attention to practical issues in particular, the focus on the quality criteria for the assessment of projects and the group discussions which facilitated interchange and networking with other institutions. Participants would welcome an application preparation workshop and more contact with experts to help develop ideas.

For many of those attending, the workshops were a genuine learning experience, which suggests an on-going need for a nominated list of accredited experts to whom HEIs can turn for support to gain a wider understanding of EU policy and funding initiatives.

Specific areas of limited knowledge and understanding related to the revised Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA, the new ECTS Guide, and the new Quality approach for joint programmes. In the revised Standards and Guidelines student centred learning is now reinforced as an explicit objective requiring the engagement of students in curriculum design and quality assurance. Section 1.3 of the Standards and Guidelines, states that *“Institutions should ensure that the programmes are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and that the assessment of students reflects this approach”*.

---

The feedback from participants reveals a strong sense of the value of the workshops, which allowed active university staff the opportunity for a focused, developmental, expert-led experience over an extended period of time, to learn about the European and EHEA policy context and its relevance to the national and institutional agendas.



## CONCLUSION

---

They indicated the interest and enthusiasm for meetings of this nature with experts, and welcomed the potential for networking and sharing good practice, which has been made possible only with the support of the European Commission and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

A significant number of UK institutions and staff were involved in the workshops. They addressed key issues and reflected the different emphases of the four UK countries. They indicated the interest and enthusiasm for meetings of this nature with experts, and welcomed the potential for networking and sharing good practice, which has been made possible only with the support of the European Commission and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

If the UK is to strengthen its institutional engagement in the EHEA process, there remains in the author's opinion a need for such workshops, reinforced where possible with participants from other countries. These workshops benefited particularly from the contribution of colleagues from Lithuania, the Republic of Ireland and two students from the European Students' Union.



