

# NUS Briefing: Backbench Business Debate 'Erasmus+ and Student exchange after Brexit' Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> June 2018

## About NUS

The National Union of Students (NUS) is a confederation of over 600 students' unions, representing more than 95 per cent of all higher education and further education unions in the UK. Through our member students' unions, NUS represents the interests of more than seven million students. NUS represents students and students' unions to ensure that education is transformative, skills and learning are accessible and every student in the UK is empowered to achieve their potential.

## What is Erasmus+?

Erasmus+ is a student exchange programme which offers opportunities for UK participants to study, work, volunteer, teach and train across Europe. It is available for students, apprentices, volunteers, academics and other professionals active in the education, training and youth sectors. Whilst membership of Erasmus+ is not dependant on EU membership, (countries such as Turkey and Norway are amongst existing members), there is also no guarantee that our continued membership will form part of the UK's exit agreement.

Students from EU member states are currently eligible to travel freely around the EU to study, whether for the duration or part of their course. As free movement looks set to end, the UK is likely to be shut out of this opportunity unless a new, frictionless immigration deal is reached.

The alignment of qualifications across Europe is co-ordinated through the European Higher Education Area (EHEA); whilst this is not linked to EU membership, many of the support networks that make the EHEA work are financed by the EU. After exit day the UK would no longer have access to them unless a deal is reached. These include EU research programmes, European Social Fund and Erasmus+.

**NUS believes that the opportunity for transnational education, including student exchanges through the Erasmus+ scheme, has clear benefits both for students, the UK education sector, local communities and the UK economy.**

**We are therefore urging the Government to ensure that student mobility is maintained after Brexit.** We are urging MPs to guarantee that:

- The UK remains a programme country participating in Erasmus+, and any future equivalent, after Brexit
- Students are granted special immigration status so that they can continue to study freely across the EU after Brexit

## The importance of student exchanges

UK students are currently eligible to study at any university across the EU and can expect to be treated equally to home students once they get there. The Erasmus+ scheme enables students and apprentices to work and study abroad, by funding schools, colleges and universities to provide exchange opportunities across Europe. Over the 30 years of the

Erasmus+ programme alone, more than 300,000 students from the UK have benefitted from a period of study or work abroad, this includes nearly 15,000 in 2014/15.<sup>1</sup>

A recent Universities UK International (UUKi) found that for the 2014-15 UK HE graduating cohort 55% of international exchanges were via the EU's Erasmus+ scheme. A further 37% were organised through university-led schemes; these are bilateral exchange partnerships managed by UK universities. Other types of exchange included national schemes such as the British Council's English Language Assistants and Generation UK China and India – part of the British Council's Study Work Create programme. All of these could be under threat from Brexit.<sup>2</sup>

The Government have already confirmed that the UK will continue to fully participate in the Erasmus+ programme up until we leave the European Union. The Government has also agreed in principle that this will continue until the end of the current budget plan in 2020.

**NUS recommends that the Government confirms the UK's ongoing participation in the Erasmus+ programme after 2019, and any future equivalent, after Brexit.**

Moreover, membership of Erasmus+ is also linked to freedom of movement and if this did not form part of any negotiated settlement, the UK may be forced to withdraw – as has been the case in Switzerland. Once the UK has formally exited the EU there is a long term risk that the UK will be a less attractive and less open place to study. Whilst EU students due to start their undergraduate courses in the UK in 2018/19 have been guaranteed the continuation of existing terms and support until the completion of their course, future years remain uncertain. There are already some initial signs that EU students might be deterred from studying the UK: the latest UCAS admissions data reported that applicants from the EU dropped by 4.4% to 51,185, some 2,375 fewer than in 2016, reversing a year-on-year trend that has risen since 2012.<sup>3</sup> **We are also calling for a frictionless immigration system for students after Brexit, to ensure they are able to continue to travel freely as part of the Erasmus+ programme.**

## Benefits and value of student exchanges

**Student exchanges bring vast economic benefits to the UK.** There are vast economic benefits that international students (EU and non-EU) bring to the UK, who spend money on a wide range of goods, services, and activities. In 2014–15 this included:

- On and off campus spending by amounting to £25.8 billion, contributing £13.8 billion gross value added (GVA) to UK GDP.
- This in turn supports jobs across Britain, thought to amount to 206,600 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs nationally.
- £10.8 billion of UK export earnings.
- The transport industry benefits from an additional £750 million and £690 million for the retail industry from international students annually.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/nov/27/study-abroad-is-invaluable-students-deserve-clarity-on-erasmus>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/gone-international-mobility-works.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ucas.com/corporate/data-and-analysis/ucas-undergraduate-releases/ucas-undergraduate-analysis-reports/2017-end-cycle-report>

- The economic activity and employment sustained by international students' off-campus spending generated £1 billion in tax revenues; equivalent to the salaries of 31,700 nurses or 25,000 police officers.<sup>4</sup>

**Student exchanges have a significant impact on student outcomes.** HE students who study abroad are 9% more likely to gain a 1st or 2:1 degree and are 24% less likely to be unemployed than those who don't. Similarly, exchange graduates are 9% more likely to be in a graduate job six months after graduation and are 5% higher wage earners six months after graduation.<sup>5</sup> These findings were mirrored in a 2014 report by the EU Commission which found that Erasmus+ alumni are only half as likely to be long-term unemployed and are significantly more likely to hold managerial positions 10 years after graduation and are more likely to go on to start their own company.<sup>6</sup>

### **Student exchanges improve social mobility and improve outcomes for disadvantaged groups.**

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds and low participation wards, black and disabled students and care leavers are much less likely to participate in exchange programmes. Those that do attend however experience much greater impacts than their more advantaged peers.<sup>7</sup> BAME students who participate in such programmes are 41% less likely to be unemployed than non-exchange students. Mobile students from disadvantaged backgrounds also earn 6.1% more. Shutting off the opportunity for international exchange for those students that need it most will undermine efforts to widen participation in higher education and improve upward mobility.

**Student exchanges benefit universities.** Improved outcomes for students improve a university's reputation and help institutions to reach their quality metrics. In studying abroad, students are also advocates for their home university and can build up their international reputation. Similarly, the presence of EU exchange students in our HE sector brings diverse, multi-cultural, welcoming cultures to campuses. A likely impact of the UK exiting the EU is that this culture would be jeopardised if the number of students coming to the UK from the EU (and indeed from elsewhere) reduces. What is more, if the UK hopes to be forward moving a post Brexit world it UK will need as many internationally literate graduates as possible to develop the partnerships and trade deals of the future.

### **NUS Recommends**

- That the UK remains a full member of the Erasmus+ programme until the end of 2020
- That the UK is a full member of any new student exchange programme after 2020
- That any post Brexit immigration framework allows students and academics to move freely around the EU and the UK for work and study

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/briefing-economic-impact-international-students.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/gone-international-mobility-works.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/International/widening-participation-in-uk-outward-student-mobility.pdf>

### **Suggested questions**

- What steps will be taken to ensure the views and interests of young people and students are reflected in the post-Brexit immigration framework?
- What steps will be taken to ensure that all students, apprentices and trainees are able to access exchange opportunities after Brexit, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds?
- Can the Government confirm when the Immigration White Paper will be published, and whether this will include details of future immigration policies for students and academics?

### **Further Information**

For any further information or to arrange a meeting, please contact Ayesha Ahmed, Public Affairs Officer, ([ayesha.ahmed@nus.org.uk](mailto:ayesha.ahmed@nus.org.uk))