



UK Higher Education International Unit

UK Strategy for Outward Mobility

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Introduction

Outward mobility is essential if UK higher education is to develop graduates who are equipped to compete on the global labour market, and can promote UK business and diplomatic interests worldwide. It also enhances the international profile of UK higher education, as students on overseas placements are excellent ambassadors for the UK.

Research has shown that employers worldwide value graduates with global competences¹ and international cultural awareness². Institutions are under growing pressure to differentiate themselves from their competitors in a rapidly developing higher education market in order to attract prospective students. Furthermore, the availability of Key Information Sets (KIS)³ has given prospective students greater access to comparable data from institutions, informing their choices. As a result, as part of their marketing offer to internationally mobile students, institutions are increasingly highlighting the role of study and work placements in the development and acquisition of skills for life and work.

Whether it is a year abroad on study or work placement, a short-term study visit, volunteering or a virtual mobility project, institutions offer a range of mobility opportunities to their students. While there are costs to this, institutions recognise the value of international experience both for the student and for the teaching and research links that it creates with other institutions. While outward mobility is widely viewed by vice-chancellors and teaching staff as beneficial to the student and to the institution, it is often difficult to achieve in practice.

The need for a UK Strategy was the principal recommendation of the 2012 Riordan Review⁴, led by Professor Colin Riordan, Chair of the UK Higher Education International Unit (IU), which explored the barriers to UK outward mobility. The Review was informed by a sector-wide consultation⁵, which highlighted several challenges to increasing the take-up of international opportunities, including:

- Internal institutional barriers to outward mobility, particularly with regard to credit recognition and quality assurance of the placement;
- The diversity of higher education institutions and student populations;
- The comparative lack of data on mobility in higher education;

¹ *Global Graduates into Global Leaders*, AGR, CIHE, CFE, November 2011

² *Changing the Pace*, CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey 2013, CBI/Pearson, June 2013

³ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/whatwedo/it/publicinfo/kis/>

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<http://www.international.ac.uk/media/1515947/Recommendations%20to%20Support%20UK%20Outward%20Student%20Mobility.pdf>

⁵ *Sector-wide consultation on a UK strategy for outward student mobility: Report on responses*, UK Higher Education International Unit, October 2012

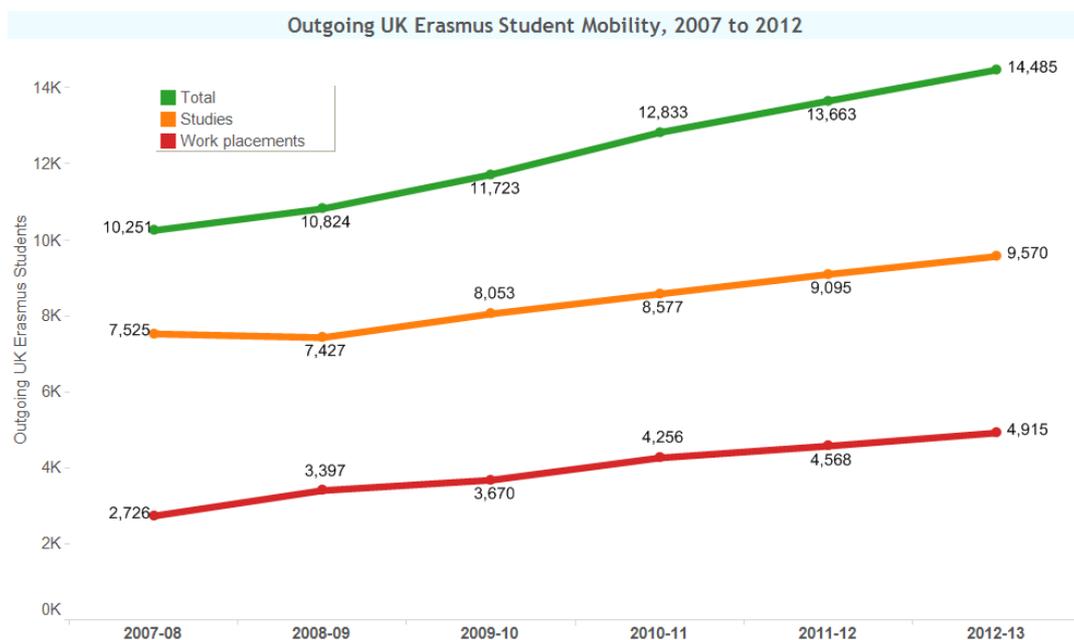
- The need for a more flexible definition of outward mobility, to incorporate mobility periods of different lengths within academic year structures;
- Language and intercultural barriers for students;
- Widening access to and participation in study and work abroad opportunities; and
- Financial barriers and portability of loans.

As a result, the Minister for Universities and Science, the Rt Hon David Willetts MP, asked Professor Riordan and the UK Higher Education International Unit to lead the development of a sector-led Strategy for outward mobility.

In 2011/12, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) reported that approximately 6%, or 15370, of UK domiciled students, undertook a mobility placement overseas in 2011/12. Of this total, 13250 were studying and 2120 were working on a programme abroad for all or part of the year. The majority of outgoing UK students access study and work opportunities overseas through the European Union’s (EU) Erasmus Mobility Programme⁶.

There has been a steady increase in the number of UK students participating in Erasmus exchanges, in particular the number undertaking work placements. Statistics published in 2013 report the highest number of participants from the UK since the Programme was introduced in 1987.

Figure 1: Outgoing UK Erasmus Student Mobility, 2007-2012⁷



Despite this increase in European mobility, the UK currently still ranks only sixth in terms of the overall number of outgoing students taking part in the Erasmus

⁶ <http://www.britishcouncil.org/erasmus.htm>

⁷ This is the total number of mobilities, not total number of students.

Programme, behind Germany, France, Spain, Italy and Poland⁸. Beyond Europe, the UK is only 13th in countries of origin for foreign students in the US, behind Turkey and Germany⁹, yet it is the most popular study abroad destination for US students.

As a result of this imbalance, the UK still needs to stimulate and facilitate participation in outward mobility so that our students and institutions can continue to compete in a global market. As part of Her Majesty's (HM) Government's commitment, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) are funding the IU to deliver a UK Strategy for Outward Mobility.

The UK Strategy for Outward Mobility is a key element of HM Government's International Education Strategy, *Global Growth and Prosperity*¹⁰. It will also complement:

- The Scottish Government's *Developing Scotland's Global Citizens* initiative, which aims to support the mobility of Scottish students through scholarships, funding and research. This includes its new portability pilot, which enables a small number of students to obtain bursaries and student loans for a degree in Europe;
- Northern Ireland's Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI)'s Higher Education Strategy, *Graduating to Success*, which aims to enhance Northern Ireland's international HE activity by increasing the number of overseas international partnerships in teaching and research, and increasing the inward and outward mobility of staff and students;
- The Welsh Assembly Government's 2013 *Policy Statement on Higher Education*, which calls on universities to enhance the acquisition of employability skills for graduates and sets out a commitment to support the outward mobility of students and staff; and
- The European Commission's 2013 White Paper on internationalisation, *European Higher Education in the World*¹¹, which clearly states the value of internationalisation for employability and competitiveness and emphasizes the global dimension of higher education, looking beyond the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to the rest of the world. Its new programme for education, training, youth and sport - Erasmus+¹² - will continue to fund study and work placements in higher education, and also includes a new pilot Erasmus Student Loan Guarantee Facility to provide loans for students pursuing Masters-level study in another European country, as well as a new funding stream for mobility outside of Europe.

⁸ *Erasmus: Facts and Figures at a Glance*. British Council, 2013

⁹ <http://www.iie.org/Research-and-Publications/Open-Doors/Data/International-Students>

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/229844/bis-13-1081-international-education-global-growth-and-prosperity.pdf. July 2013

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/doc/higher-education-in-the-world_en.pdf. July 2013

¹² <http://erasmusplus.org.uk/>

By increasing the proportion of students benefiting from international experience as part of their studies, the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility will:

- Help to ensure that UK graduates are able to work across different cultures and within a diverse workforce, in the UK and internationally;
- Facilitate an increase in academic collaboration between UK higher education institutions and their international counterparts;
- Facilitate collaboration between higher education institutions and business to increase the number of work placements;
- Contribute to the academic outcomes and employability of UK domiciled students; and
- Reiterate the UK's commitment to the European target that, by 2020, 20% of students across the EHEA have an international mobility experience as part of their studies.

The IU will work with higher education institutions, HM Government including the devolved administrations, sector organisations, employers and professional bodies to implement the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility, building on existing initiatives in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It will:

- Promote all forms of outward mobility and raise awareness of its benefits;
- Help address institutional and financial barriers;
- Widen participation in and access to outward mobility;
- Build capacity in the higher education sector to increase outward mobility activity; and
- Provide a collective voice for institutions on outward mobility policy.

UK Strategy for Outward Mobility

HM Government, through BIS and HEFCE, has committed funding until 2016 to support the UK Higher Education International Unit (IU) to lead on the implementation of the Strategy.

Vision

The *UK Strategy for Outward Mobility* will facilitate an increase in the proportion of UK domiciled students who undertake international placements as part of their undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes, and help to address institutional barriers to participation in outward mobility in UK higher education

Strategic Objectives

In order to achieve its strategic vision of increasing the proportion of UK domiciled students accessing international opportunities, and contribute to the European Higher Education Area's mobility target of 20% of graduating students with an international mobility experience as part of their studies by 2020, the *UK Strategy for Outward Mobility* has the following seven objectives:

Strategic Objective 1: Promote the Benefits of Study and Work Abroad

- Co-ordinate a UK wide campaign - linked to research evidence - to raise awareness of the benefits associated with study, work and volunteering abroad, and highlight the range of opportunities available.
- Channel higher education institutions' marketing and communications expertise on outward mobility into the campaign, collating evidence of the benefits of overseas placements for UK students.
- Promote outward mobility to pre-university students, distributing campaign messages via relevant channels, including UCAS communications and school outreach programmes.
- Publicise existing initiatives that aim to increase outward mobility, including higher education institutions' own campaigns, Erasmus+, NUS Scotland's Scotland Goes Global programme, ThirdYearAbroad.com and the British Council's Study, Work, Create portal.
- Work with programmes and organisations promoting language learning in schools and universities, including HEFCE's Routes into Languages programme, to disseminate the benefits of outward mobility and stimulate interest in language learning and intercultural awareness.
- Collaborate with stakeholder initiatives that meet the objectives of the Outward Mobility Strategy, including country-specific programmes that promote academic exchange or work placements, such as the British

Council's Generation UK China and US-UK Fulbright Commission's awards programme

- Work with the Confederation of British Industry, British Chambers of Commerce, the Association of Graduate Recruiters and professional bodies to demonstrate the value of international experience to student employability and academic attainment.
- Collect further evidence, including case studies, of the benefits of study and work abroad to students, UK higher education institutions, business, society and the economy.

Strategic Objective 2: Monitor Trends in Student Mobility

- Analyse annual HESA data returns to track mobility trends for each UK nation.
- Provide analysis of other relevant data trends on outward mobility to provide qualitative and quantitative data for use by institutions and policy makers.
- Work with HESA to maximise the outward mobility data that is returned for statistical purposes.

Strategic Objective 3: Build Capacity in UK Higher Education to Facilitate Outward Mobility

- Develop a toolkit for outward mobility in higher education, bringing together sector expertise to create resources that will support diverse institutions in offering a range of placement opportunities for their students. The toolkit will help articulate the benefits of, and increase participation in, outward mobility programmes.
- Work with UKCISA, the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), the Higher Education Academy (HEA), and other stakeholders to provide support and guidance on international opportunities for UK domiciled students unable to travel, ensuring that all students have the opportunity to access an international experience, regardless of their personal circumstances.
- Work with the QAA and outward mobility associations such as the Association for UK Higher Education European Officers (HEURO) and British Universities Transatlantic Exchange Association (BUTEX) to provide guidance on interpreting and applying quality assurance frameworks related to student placements overseas.
- Provide evidence-based resources to facilitate outward mobility activity within institutions at management, operational and teaching level.

Strategic Objective 4: Address Financial and Institutional Barriers to Outward Mobility

- Promote existing sources of funding for outward mobility, including Erasmus+ and country-specific scholarships.
- Identify and secure additional sources of funding, including scholarships, sponsorship funds and bursaries from higher education, overseas governments, business, industry and the third sector.
- Work with the UK higher education sector to widen participation in and access to international opportunities for a diverse student population.

Strategic Objective 5: Create a Flexible Definition of Outward Mobility

- Work with higher education institutions to support institution-wide recording mechanisms for all outward mobility opportunities in UK higher education, from the year abroad to short-term or virtual mobility.
- Consult with academics, student and employers to define employability and academic outcomes for all types of outward mobility opportunities.

Strategic Objective 6: Share Best Practice in UK Higher Education

- Establish a *Mobility Community of Practice* to provide a forum for the UK higher education sector to discuss developments in student mobility in higher education and to support the implementation of the UK strategy for Outward Mobility.
- Build capacity for a *peer support network* to enhance continued professional development for higher education staff, drawing on the expertise of HEURO, BUTEX, and experts on the Bologna process.
- Collate a range of *case studies* to inspire institutions to explore new working methods or partnerships.

Strategic Objective 7: Provide a Collective Voice for UK Higher Education

- Create a comprehensive online information hub, which signposts to all relevant information and resources for outward mobility.
- Support UK higher education institutions in campaigning for institutional and national policies on outward mobility.
- Promote institutions' expertise and resources in the UK promotional campaign.
- Provide support for building partnerships and reciprocal agreements with new markets.

Implementation

Implementation of the Strategy will be steered by an internal Programme Board and an external Strategy Board with representatives from the four UK nations. The Outward Mobility Strategy Board incorporates higher education institutions, the devolved administrations, BIS, HEFCE and sector organisations active in student mobility, including the British Council, National Union of Students (NUS) and UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA). The Board will review the Strategy and its action plan regularly to ensure that the objectives remain relevant to the needs of the UK higher education sector.

In implementing the Strategy, the IU will engage with stakeholders to inform its priorities and help achieve its outcomes.

