

Professor Christina Slade – Summary

Universities, like all cultural institutions, thrive on networks. They have always been global, they have never respected national borders. Connections into Europe fostered by the European Union have been enormously valuable for the UK.

Although the number of UK students with a period abroad has been growing at a steady rate in recent years, the UK's rates of participation, 7% in 14/15, are low by international standards.

The EU's Erasmus+ programme forms an integral part of the UK's outward mobility landscape – as much as 55% of mobility takes place through Erasmus+ and the success of the programme, at least in part, can be seen through the fact that more than two-thirds of UK student mobility takes place in an EU country. The European Commission's latest figures show that in the 2015/16 academic year, 9,836 UK students studied abroad on Erasmus+ and 6,608 UK students worked abroad on Erasmus+. The UK also hosted 30,183 students under the Erasmus+ scheme in 15/16.

Mobility enhances the prospects of all graduates, but more dramatically so for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Research published in the "Gone International: Mobility Works" report by Universities UK International shows that UK graduates who were mobile during their degree were less likely to be unemployed (3.7% compared to 4.9%) and to earn 5% more than non-mobile peers.

Erasmus+ is not simply about student mobility. 2015/16 figures show that 1,700 staff from UK institutions used Erasmus+ to teach abroad whilst 1,260 travelled abroad for training; these figures have increased 88% since 2007.

It is clear that if the UK government does not or chooses not to secure continued participation in these programmes that it could and, in my opinion, must replace the lost funding domestically. Switzerland's recent experience of creating similar programs could both provide an example and an opportunity to learn lessons for the UK and the EU in trying to do so.