Impact of current EU mobility arrangements on Scotland's universities

Summary briefing for the Constitution, Europe, and External Affairs Committee

January 2024

Key Points

- Youth mobility within the EU can be long term - for example, to undertake study or employment under the free movement principle - or short term, generally through an organised exchange programme such as Erasmus+. The UK's exit from the EU has impacted both the outward mobility of Scottish students and graduates to the EU, and the inward mobility of EU students and graduates into Scottish universities.
- This is concerning given the demonstrated benefits that youth mobilities can bring. For example, a 2015 Universities UK International (UUKi) analysis of the benefits of mobility on the 2012/13 cohort of graduates[1] noted that:
  - o Scottish students from the 2012/13 cohort were the most mobile across the four nations of the UK, with 6.2% of graduates having undertaken a mobility compared to 5.4% in Northern Ireland, 4.4% in England, and 3.4% in Wales.
  - o Unemployment was lower amongst those who had participated in a mobility scheme than those who had not.
  - o Graduates who had participated in a mobility programme were earning more in 40 out of 67 subjects (with available data), with disparities as high as £3,000 in some cases.

- We expect, by 2026/27, that the number of EU students studying in Scotland will have decreased by at least two thirds compared to the pre-Brexit period. The percentage of EU nationals amongst academic staff is also falling.
- The UK's decision not to join the Erasmus+ programme has significantly reduced the funding available for outward student mobility at Scottish universities. Between 2014 and 2020, Scottish universities were awarded on average €12.1 million (approximately £10.2 million) per year through Erasmus+. Scottish universities are currently awarded less than half of that value (£5.03 million) through the Turing Scheme, the UK's replacement for Erasmus+. They are also becoming less competitive at securing funding for mobility from the Turing Scheme, with a -28% decline in award since the scheme was introduced.
- The Scottish Government's Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP) has provided funding for staff mobilities that were covered by Erasmus+ and not replicated in the Turing Scheme, which the sector has welcomed. However, short deadlines have made it difficult for some universities to access SEEP support.

Long term mobility – Full-time students and staff at Scottish universities

Impact of Brexit on EU students at Scottish universities
- The withdrawal of the UK from the EU has severely impacted the number of EU students studying in Scotland. This is largely due to the change from home fee status to international fee status, coupled with the requirement for a study visa.
- Following the Brexit referendum EU student numbers at Scottish universities continued to increase, reaching a peak in academic year 2018/19 at 21,505 students. By 2022/23 that number had fallen to 13,130, a reduction of -39%.[2]
- Most EU students in Scotland (~70%) study undergraduate degrees, followed by taught postgraduate degrees (~20%) and research postgraduate degrees (~10%). Numbers have fallen significantly across all three cohorts since Brexit – undergraduates are down 37%; taught postgraduates are down 50%; and research postgraduates are down 26%.
- This decline is set to continue, as current data includes many EU students who began studying 4 year undergraduate degrees prior to Brexit. EU students in the first year of a degree fell by -66% between 2018/19 and 2022/23, with the biggest decline amongst undergraduates (-72%).

Impact of Brexit on EU staff at Scottish universities
- In 2022/23, there were 6,075 EU nationals working at Scottish universities, representing 13.5% of total staff. Despite Brexit, EU staff have grown both in number (from 5,290) and proportion (from 13.1%) since 2018/19.[3]
- The number of EU nationals within the academic workforce specifically has also grown, albeit at a more limited rate (from 3,675 in 2018/19 to 3,895 in 2022/23). However, that represents a decrease in the proportion of EU academics within the total academic staff (from 20.3% to 19.2%).

Academic Year	2018/19	2022/23	Difference
Total Staff – EU	5285	6070	+14.9%
Total Staff - All Nationalities	40235	45150	+12.2%
Total Staff - % EU	13.1%	13.4%	
Academic (Research/Teaching) Staff – EU	3675	3885	+5.7%
Academic (Research/Teaching) Staff - All nationalities	18085	20200	+11.7%
Academic (Research/Teaching) Staff - (% EU)	20.3%	19.2%	

- Although there has been an increase in total and academic EU staff under the age of 25 (+24% and +19% respectively), growth has been much higher amongst those aged 41 or over (+39% and +28% respectively).
- Total EU staff aged between 26 and 40 show little change between 2018/19 and 2022/23 (-0.2%). However, EU academic staff aged between 26 and 40 fell 9% between 2018/19 and 2022/23, with the largest fall in the 31 to 35 age group (-19%).

Age	Total Staff – EU			Academic (Research/Teaching) Staff - EU		
	2018/19	2022/23	Difference	2018/19	2022/23	Difference
25 years & under	270	335	+24%	105	125	+19%
26 - 30 years	810	855	+6%	545	520	-5%
31 - 35 years	1225	1085	-11%	880	715	-19%
36 - 40 years	1135	1225	+8%	785	780	-1%
41 - 45 years	770	1040	+35%	570	675	+18%
46 - 50 years	515	695	+35%	365	485	+33%
51 - 55 years	310	440	+42%	235	290	+23%
56 - 60 years	170	255	+50%	130	180	+38%
61 - 65 years	65	110	+69%	50	90	+80%
66 years & over	15	30	+100%	10	25	+150%

- The restriction of free movement, coupled with visa costs, is likely to have played a role in deterring younger academic staff from the EU from seeking employment at Scottish universities. That said, uncertainty over the UK's participation in the Horizon Europe research and innovation programme between 2021 and 2023 is also likely to have contributed.

Short term mobility – exchange programmes

Erasmus+
- Erasmus is the flagship EU student exchange programme for education, training, youth and sport mobility, which began in 1987.
- The UK was a member of Erasmus (latterly Erasmus+) from 1987 to 2020. Following Brexit the UK decided not to participate in the current Erasmus+ programme, which runs from 2021 to 2027.
- Between 2014/15 and 2021/22, 2,200+ staff and 18,000+ students from Scottish universities benefited from the Erasmus+ programme.[4] That accounts for ~16% of the UK total, for both groups - equating to around 279 staff and 2255 students per annum.
- The University of Edinburgh had the highest number of both student and staff mobilities in the UK across the 2014-2020 Erasmus+ programme. The University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde were 6th and 12th in the UK respectively for outward student mobilities.
- Between 2014 and 2020, Scottish universities were awarded an average of €12.1 million per year from Erasmus+ (€169.3 million in total), representing 16.3% of the total UK award to higher education.
- Despite Brexit inward mobility from the EU is still possible, as 20% of Erasmus+ funding can be spent on third countries. Whilst data is not available for Scotland, 33,799 students took part in inward higher education mobilities to the UK through Erasmus+ between 2022 and 2024 (2.34% of all higher education mobilities during that time period).[5]

The Turing Scheme
- The Turing Scheme was launched in the UK in 2021, following the UK Government's decision not to join Erasmus+. The Turing Scheme allows education providers (higher education,

further education, and schools) to apply for outward mobility funding for education or work placements abroad. It does not fund inward mobility.

- A key aim of the Turing Scheme is advancing social justice and providing mobilities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- The Turing Scheme differs from Erasmus+ in that it offers outward mobilities worldwide, whereas 80% of Erasmus+ awards had to be within Europe. Scotland specific data is unavailable for the Turing Scheme at present. However, at a UK level, planned mobilities in 2023/24 slightly favoured those for the rest of world compared to EU destinations.[6]
- 16 Scottish universities were awarded Turing Scheme funding in 2024/25, up from 14 universities in 2023/24. However, the total funding awarded (£5.03 million) was the lowest that Scottish universities have received since the start of the Turing Scheme, accounting for only 8.2% of the funding given to higher education institutions in the UK.[7]
- Scottish universities have seen diminishing returns from the Turing Scheme, with a fall of -28% in award since the beginning of the scheme.

Year	Turing Scheme HE award	Proportion of UK total HE award	Number of Scottish Universities awarded
2021/22	£6.95 million	10.4%	17
2022/23	£5.8 million	9.3%	14
2023/24	£5.6 million	9.3%	14
2024/25	£5.03 million	8.2%	16

- Turing Scheme funding awarded to Scottish universities is significantly lower than the average awarded through Erasmus+ to Scottish universities per year between 2014 and 2020, which as noted above was €12.1 million (16.3% of the UK total).
- Guidance for the fifth year of the Turing Scheme was published on 20th January 2025[8] and includes a reduction in the minimum time for higher education mobilities from 4 weeks to 2 weeks. The extent to which this will impact Scottish universities is yet to be determined.

The Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP)
- In 2023/24 the Scottish Government launched the Scottish Education Exchange Programme (SEEP) as a "Test and Learn Project", with a budget of £1million[9].
- SEEP aimed to:
    - Maintain, as far as possible, the Erasmus+ approach.
    - Address key gaps between the Turing Scheme and Erasmus+, to encourage the development of partnerships between universities and colleges that could enable inward exchanges (match funded by reciprocal countries).
    - Align with the Scottish Government's three priority missions outlined in the Programme for Government, including supporting disadvantaged groups and delivering a skilled workforce to meet new market opportunities[10].
- By focussing on staff mobility and partnership development, the first year of the SEEP "Test and Learn Project" did address a key component of mobility lost from Erasmus+ and not replicated through the Turing Scheme.
- Projects eligible for funding through other sources, for example the Turing Scheme, were not eligible for SEEP funding. This meant that no student mobility projects were admissible to

SEEP, and it could not be used to top up partially funded Turing Scheme projects or provide funding to universities that were unsuccessful in obtaining Turing Scheme funding.

- Twenty projects were funded in the first year of SEEP "Test and Learn Project"[11]. As the maximal project value was £25,000 (or £35,000 if cross-sectoral)[10], there would have likely been a significant underspend against the budget initially allocated by the Scottish Government.

- The Scottish Government has indicated they are in the process of evaluating the first year of SEEP. However, no further details on projects are publicly available at present.

- A second year of the SEEP "Test and Learn Project" was launched in July 2024.[12] Changes to the programme included the addition of student mobility (for projects lasting less than two weeks – the minimum duration available through the Turing Scheme), and a requirement to demonstrate how the project contributes to the Scottish Government's International Education Strategy (published in February 2024).

- All 18 of Scotland's universities that were eligible for the second year of SEEP were awarded funding, as were 10 Scottish colleges.[13] Of the 36 projects listed across the 28 institutions, those projects that specifically mention engaging with European partners are broadly equal to those mentioning non-European partners.

- Timelines remain a challenge for both universities and colleges to take advantage of SEEP. For example, in the second year of the SEEP "Test and Learn Project", institutions were given only six weeks to develop and submit applications. In addition, the timeframe for spend (between October 2024 and end of March 2025) does not map well to the periods in which students can be mobile, which often fall during the summer break.

- To date, no plans have been published for how long SEEP will remain as a "Test and Learn Project", and/or whether a full programme will be developed.

ENDS

[1] www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/UUKi%20reports/gone-international-mobile-students-and-their-outcomes.pdf Please note that an updated analysis with a more recent cohort is due to be published by UUKi in March 2025.

[2] data from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) www.hesa.ac.uk

[3] data from the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) www.hesa.ac.uk

[4] data from webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20240206172454/https://erasmusplus.org.uk/results-and-statistics.html

[5] data from the Erasmus Public Dashboard https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/eacdashboard/sense/app/c553d9e9-c805-4f7a-90e4-103bd1658077

[6] data from https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20241115122143/https://www.turing-scheme.org.uk/

[7] data from www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-funding-and-assessment-outcomes-2024-to-2025/turing-scheme-funding-allocation-and-assessment-outcomes-for-the-2024-to-2025-academic-year

[8] www.gov.uk/government/publications/turing-scheme-international-placements-2025-to-2026/overview-of-the-turing-scheme-2025-to-2026

[9] https://www.parliament.scot/-/media/files/committees/education-children-and-young-people-committee/correspondence/2023/scottish-education-exchange-programme-test-and-learn-project.pdf

[10] 2023/24 SEEP "Test and Learn Project" Application Guidelines circulated to Universities via Universities Scotland.

[11] https://www.parliament.scot/chamber-and-committees/questions-and-answers/question?ref=S6W-25681

[12] www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-education-exchange-programme-test-and-learn-project/

[13] www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-education-exchange-programme-test-and-learn-funded-projects/