



European Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: The future UK-EU relationship

Tuesday 6 December 2022

5 pm

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Members present: The Earl of Kinnoull (The Chair); Lord Faulkner of Worcester; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Lord Jay of Ewelme; Lord Lamont of Lerwick; Lord Liddle; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Scott of Needham Market; Viscount Trenchard; Lord Tugendhat; Lord Wood of Anfield.

Evidence Session No. 8B

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Questions 126 - 135

Witnesses

I: Ellie Gomersall, President, National Union of Students Scotland; Charley Robinson, Head of Global Mobility Policy, Universities UK International; AnneMarie Graham, Chief Executive, UK Council for International Student Affairs.

Examination of witnesses

Ellie Gomersall, Charley Robinson and Anne-Marie Graham.

Q126 The Chair: Welcome back to the hybrid House of Lords European Affairs Committee. We are engaged in our inquiry into the future of UK-EU relations. The panel this afternoon is focused on the movement of people and education, which is a big area all round. We are very pleased to have a strong panel. Here in the room we have Anne-Marie Graham, chief executive of the UK Council for International Student Affairs, and Charley Robinson, head of global mobility policy for Universities UK International. Online, and joining us from my home country, we have Ellie Gomersall, president of the National Union of Students Scotland. Welcome to you all.

As this is a public evidence session, we will take a transcript and send that to you. I would be grateful if you would check the transcript, because that is the basis on which we will write our report, and it is important that it is correct. We have only an hour, so I would be grateful if you kept questions and answers crisp so that we can go through the full question set, which is quite broad.

Finally, we know exactly who you are, but those watching do not, so when you speak for the first time perhaps you could briefly introduce yourselves and the organisation that you represent here.

How would you assess the overall impact of Brexit at a high level on student mobility between the EU and the UK, and vice versa? Have you noticed any change in the patterns of student mobility since the trade and cooperation agreement came into operation?

Anne-Marie Graham: I am chief executive at the UK Council for International Student Affairs, or UKCISA as we are more commonly referred to. The organisation exists to promote the interests of international students studying in the UK, which we do by providing information, advice and guidance both directly to students and to those who support and educate them. We have all UK public universities as our members, including small and specialist institutions, lots of private providers, FE colleges and corporate organisations that support international students, including the major government scholarship providers.

It is clear from the statistics calculated by the Higher Education Statistics Agency on mobility that there has been a decrease in EU students applying and being accepted in the UK since the transition period ended on 31 December 2020. We traditionally saw EU students come in more at undergraduate level; they were more likely to study at undergraduate than postgraduate level. That pattern still continues, but overall there has been quite a decline and drop-off.

UKCISA's main work is to do with immigration. The biggest impact we note is that, since the withdrawal agreement came into effect and freedom of movement across the EU and UK ended, EU, EEA and Swiss citizens and their families who are not protected by the withdrawal agreement or agreements with the EEA and Switzerland are treated the same as any other non-UK citizen for the purposes of student tuition fees and the Immigration Rules. European students who are not protected by the withdrawal agreement must go through the same visa regulations as nonEU, EEA, Swiss and international students.

It is fair to say that the rules and regulations of this immigration system are overly complex and lengthy. To give some idea of the scale of that issue, UKCISA is accredited by the Office of the Immigration Services Commissioner to provide immigration advice to international students. To date in 2022, we have handled over 1,695 calls to our student advice line alone on the topic of immigration. That line runs for three hours a day, and that works out on average to more than seven calls every business day. That is just to give you some idea of the scale of confusion and the questions that we get around the immigration system.

Given that the EU is part of the UK Government's priority areas in their international education strategy, we think it is critical that accessibility is

improved and complexity reduced for EU students coming to the UK, so that it is much easier for them. That is our priority at this point.

The Chair: That raises a lot of interesting questions, which we will come back to in the question set. Thank you very much.

Charley Robinson: I am head of global mobility policy at Universities UK International, which represents the vice-chancellors and leaders of 140 member organisations in the UK. Universities UK International is the international arm of UUK, and we are here to represent UK universities on the international stage. I work very closely on our programmes involved with international students, including outward student mobility.

On the overall impact of Brexit on high-level student mobility, it is fair to say that in general Brexit has certainly damaged the reputation of the UK as a study destination for European students. We see that impact across all study categories: for short-term mobility, for work placements and for full degree study. As Anne-Marie referenced, the latest HESA data runs through until the 2020-21 academic year, so it does not yet show the impact of ending the transition rules for European students, but our member organisations and member universities have reported very dramatic declines in the numbers of European students enrolling on degree-level provision. That is corroborated by UCAS data, which shows a 47% decline in university acceptances for the academic year 2021 on the previous year, so we expect that to be a good indicator of what we might expect to see in the HESA data release in January for the academic year 2021. We saw a decline of 18% in applications for 2022. We expect to see a very sharp decline for 2021 enrolments followed by a slightly smaller decline for 2022 enrolments.

The loss of freedom of movement has been a major blow to mobility. We have seen the introduction of immigration barriers both for students coming in and for our students seeking to study abroad. We know that the cost of visas is a major barrier and impediment for international students.

There has been an overarching effect of destabilisation and uncertainty. We spoke recently to the Erasmus Student Network, which indicated that there is a lot of uncertainty among European students about whether they can even continue to come to study in the UK through the Erasmus programme. So that is a lack of clarity and certainty there. In essence, the UK is suddenly seen as more expensive, more complicated and less welcoming as a study destination, and it will take concerted effort to change that.

There is another dimension around diversity, because European students have always contributed to the diversity of nationalities and in the subjects that European students study on British university campuses. At a time when we seek strategic diversification on our campuses, this is another risk. We have seen undergraduate student numbers continue to

rise following the outcome of the referendum from the years 2015-16 right through to 2020-21, and we think that is because undergraduate students were still keen to make use of the transition agreement. However, postgraduate-taught students and postgraduate research student numbers have fallen since 2015-16, so there is a risk through into the pipeline for research.

We know that there is still strong interest from European students to study in the UK, which has been the No. 1 overseas study destination for European students. There will be a big drop that we cannot recover, but we are starting to see some signs of stabilisation now.

On other patterns of European mobility, we recently produced a research report, *International Student Recruitment from Europe: The Road to Recovery*, which I can share later, in which we looked at European students' search interest to the UK compared with other competitor designations. Tracking through from 2019—the last two years—student search interest that migrated away from the UK has migrated back towards other EU and EEA destinations. The increase in intra-European mobility has been conditioned by the change in regulations for the UK.

The Chair: We will come to a lot of that later. It is absolutely fascinating.

Q127 **Lord Tugendhat:** I would like to ask Charley Robinson a question. I quite understand the drift of what she said, but would she not feel that the decline in people from the EU opens up opportunities for more British students to get to university? There has been tremendous demand from home students. Universities have not been able to cope with it. We have seen all kinds of distressing stories about the inadequacy of student accommodation. I know that anecdotal evidence is notoriously unreliable, but a German great-niece of mine came to one of the establishments in London and we were quite ashamed of the way she was treated by the university there.

Charley Robinson: That is a very good question. Thank you for asking it. The relationship between supply and demand in university places is complex. It is elastic. It is not simply that universities are able to expand their course provision, or that an international student takes the place of a home student. On the contrary, the reality is that the current funding model with the cap on home student tuition fees at £9,250 does not cover the cost of teaching home students for many higher-cost subjects. International students subsidise the teaching of home students and contribute to the expansion of provision rather than a contraction.

There may be some issues with the supply of places on particularly popular subjects in particularly higher-ranked institutions, which is where there may be tensions in the supply of places, but in general I think the situation is quite nuanced and it is not simply a case of an international student taking the place of a home student. International students are

critical to expanding the supply of places, to certain kinds of course provision and to expanding opportunities for home students.

The Chair: Thank you. Ellie Gomersall now needs an opportunity to speak to the original question.

Ellie Gomersall: Thank you. I am the president of the National Union of Students Scotland, although I am here today representing the National Union of Students across the United Kingdom. We are a membership organisation of student associations representing students all across the UK.

First, I echo what Charley and Anne-Marie said. I will not dwell on the points they made very well, but I would highlight that right now we are seeing a significant drop in the amount of student mobility between Europe and the UK, in both directions.

One reason is cost. EU students previously paid in England the fees that a home student would pay. In Scotland, they did not pay tuition fees at all, as home students in Scotland do not pay tuition fees. Now we see a drastic change in the cost of studying in the UK for EU students, and there are additional costs. For instance, the cost of getting a visa is £363. One significant impact is that EU students who previously would have been able to benefit from the same help and support made available to home students are no longer eligible for it. They are categorised as international students so have no recourse to public funds. In light of the cost of living crisis, that presents a particular additional barrier to students coming to the UK to study.

NUS Scotland did some research last year that showed that 23% of students who must work part-time alongside their full-time studies—we know that is the majority of students—worked more than 20 hours a week. First, I maintain that it is wrong that students are forced to work such a huge number of hours alongside full-time studies just to financially survive at university. The challenge now for EU and other international students is that they are capped and cannot work more than 20 hours per week. That means that just to come here in the first place their financial situation must be a lot stronger, and they do not have access to things such as discretionary or hardship funds to which they were previously eligible.

That goes both ways. A UK student wishing to study in Germany would face those same challenges; they would have to pay for a visa, and their ability to work would be capped at only 20 hours per week alongside their studies. That means that the financial situation for EU students coming to the UK or UK students going to study in the EU is a lot more difficult. That harms the reputation of the UK as a place to come and study for those students, and it adds to the huge barrier to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who otherwise would not be able to study at all or study abroad because of their situation.

The Chair: Thank you. We will come back to many of these issues in greater detail later.

Q128 **Lord Hannay of Chiswick:** Can Charley confirm my belief that Britain is basically No. 2 in the world higher-education market as an invisible exporter? We are talking about rather big quantities when you have percentage drops of the sort you talked about. Would you be able to quantify the numbers as well as the percentages? Could you confirm that there are not terribly many industries where Britain stands No. 2 in the world?

Charley Robinson: I am happy to confirm that. On your first question about where the UK sits in a ranking of preferred destinations for most overseas student source countries, the UK typically ranks second choice, just behind the US. It depends by source country: in some countries, we may be behind other regions, but overall we are typically second. Europe has bucked that trend in the sense that, if we look at the UNESCO data, the majority of European students rank the UK their preferred destination. We did a study in our Europe report and of—

The Chair: I am sorry, but we are short of time and you answered the question. Lord Liddle has an even shorter question.

Q129 **Lord Liddle:** It is a point, actually. I should declare an interest as a former chair of Lancaster University. What matters to the university is the income, not the numbers. Of course, the income has gone up from EU students because they must now pay full fees. When you look at numbers, can you tell us what impact it has had on university finances as well as on student numbers?

Charley Robinson: It is very stratified by the type of provider. Going back to Lord Hannay's question about the type of numbers, the last HESA data that we have for European students shows about 152,000 European EEA students in the UK. The latest batch of migration statistics from the Home Office shows just over 23,000 sponsored study visas issued to European applicants for the year ending September 2022, so there is a very significant drop there. Obviously, that latter figure does not include Irish nationals, who are European for the purposes of this argument.

We are looking at a very substantial drop in numbers. Yes, the transition from home fee status to international fee status significantly offsets some of that burden, but that is very stratified from different university groups. Perhaps higher-ranked institutions that can attract more international students and command higher fees might be less concerned than some other institutions, but it is very stratified. I suppose, given the early indicators, that there will be a net economic detriment to UK higher education.

Q130 **Lord Jay of Ewelme:** At least two of you answered the question I was to ask about the main causes of the recent fall in the number of EU students enrolled at UK universities. Is it possible to distinguish between the

respective impacts of Brexit and Covid on the fall in EU student enrolment? Following on from that, are there any steps you would like to see the Government take in relation to the recruitment of students from the EU to UK universities, to stop the fall or encourage the stabilisation, or even lead to an increase as time goes on? I also thank Charley Robinson for the report submitted to us beforehand, which was very helpful.

Anne-Marie Graham: As I touched on in my opening remarks, we have an international education strategy, which the Government support. Europe is a target market and a priority market in that strategy. Yet the fact remains, as discussed, that there are much more extensive requirements for EU and EEA nationals who come to the UK to study. They must go through the immigration system if they want to come in on the student route or on the short-term student route. They must meet all those eligibility requirements and, similarly if they want to stay on, on the graduate immigration route and post-study work route.

There are some particular points where information from the Home Office and other government agencies could be clearer, because EU nationals, unlike non-EU nationals from other big markets such as China or India, are permitted to use the e-gates at UK entry points. If they enter as a visitor, they do not need to apply for permission. They must apply for entry clearance only if they come in on the student route or the short-term student route. That visa may be in the form of an e-visa. Once it is issued, they can still use e-gates to access the UK.

We are aware from our members that there is still quite a lot of confusion around that. We know that some confusion arises because the student can enter the UK as a visitor before their student permission is activated. In the worst possible case, we must ask that student to return home or leave the UK and re-enter once their student permission starts, which can be detrimental to the student experience. Obviously, it is costly and stressful.

This confusion is leading to poor experience, and poor experiences tend to translate into people passing that messaging on through word of mouth. There needs to be clearer messaging from the Home Office to EU nationals about how and when to enter the country on a student visa or short-term student visa. The Home Office could also provide for more support to staff in Border Force and officials at the border, and training in that regard so that they can handle inquiries better at the border. That would help a lot in terms of information giving.

Charley Robinson: On the first question about the relative impact of Covid versus broader trends, Covid is noise in the data. Covid impacted short-term mobility where students were registered at overseas institutions somewhat more, because there is a duty of care to those students. The broader declines are a lasting, long-term trend. I do not think that is an impact of Covid.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: You say that it is a long-term trend. Is it a longterm trend that precedes Brexit or one that Brexit encouraged?

Charley Robinson: I am sorry not to be clear; I mean a trend that will not be reversed in future. It is an enduring effect of the ending of the transition agreement for European students. I should also qualify the migration statistics that I referenced in my earlier answer: those do not include all European and EEA nationals with settled status in the UK, so there would be a significant addition to that figure for Europeans already resident in the UK and still able to access home fees and student loans.

On recommendations for government, there is one thing that we would really like to see. Europe is so strategically important to UK higher education on every level. It is important to research collaboration, and incredibly important to student and staff mobility. We have expanding transnational education partnerships in Europe. Europe is the second region only to Asia for UK transnational education exports. That has been growing very rapidly. It is an incredibly important region for degree-level students seeking to study in the UK. We would like Europe to be treated as a regional priority with comparable policy focus, resource and investment compared with other international priority regions.

We would also like to see the Government recognise that visiting students contribute to the UK economy and culture, and that short mobility can also lead to longer-term mobility. As part of that, we would like to see the Government extend the standard visitor route, which has a durational limit currently of six months, to one full academic year, because at the moment it acts as a barrier not just to European students but to students from all over the world coming for these credit-only mobility periods of between six months and one academic year.

We know that larger numbers of European students in particular used to take a year abroad in the UK. The fact that they must now go for a full student visa acts as a major impediment to those students coming for a year abroad. It would be a relatively simple adaptation. The Home Office could implement this measure very easily. It is relatively low risk for reasons that our previous colleagues referenced.

We would also like to see more alignment between the student visa and the visitor visa routes, ideally integrating all study visas within one UKVI department. Visa costs are extremely prohibitive. We would like to see the Government review and keep in check visa costs for the entire student journey, not just taking into account the student visa but thinking about the post-study work visa, the graduate route visa and transitions into skilled work, and thinking holistically about costs incurred for students in the whole route. We also feel that it would be helpful to introduce a very small number of highly targeted, match-funded scholarships through the GREAT campaign targeting key EU source countries. That would be incredible for maintaining the UK's brand and

visibility at a time when we need to increase that. These offer a very high return on investment.

We would also welcome government intervention in supporting legitimate, secure alternative private finance providers to develop loan provision. For undergraduate students, the loss of access to student finance was arguably more important and detrimental than the increase in tuition fees.

Finally, on graduate outcomes data, it is now increasingly important that we are able to demonstrate the return on investment on studying in the UK, for both European and international students. Improving the quality of graduate outcomes data should be an absolute imperative. There is currently only one small-scale Home Office survey of graduates using the graduate route, so we need a much more powerful dataset to continue to make the case for European students to come and study in the UK.

Lord Jay of Ewelme: Thank you. There are a lot of good ideas there.

Ellie Gomersall: First, when we talk about things such as the barriers that students now face in coming to study in the UK as a result of the cost of living crisis, there are impacts as a result of Covid and of Brexit.

As a perhaps more wide-reaching point, when we talk about education we need to think about that as a human right, a basic right to which everyone should be entitled. When we think about barriers that EU students now face to come and study in Scotland, where they were previously able to access that education without paying tuition fees in the same way that Scottish undergrad students do not have to pay tuition fees, that was a really positive thing for those EU students.

We need to think about this issue as a wider point. Yes, EU and international students coming to study anywhere in the UK bring a huge positive economic impact, but we in the UK should be able to pride ourselves on the education that we offer. If students from around the world and in the EU want to come here and study, they should be able to do so. It is a good thing for us as a country, it is a good thing for them as students, and, actually, it is a good thing for us as home students in terms of the enrichment and the fantastic cultural impact that international students bring to our own studies. That is the point I make to you and to the Government about education: it is about that fantastic human right that we should be entitled to, not just the economic impacts.

Q131 Lord Liddle: I was to ask about the impact of free movement, but Charley gave us a full assessment of that. Your suggestions for improvement have been well noted. Is the impact due to the visa problem and the end of free movement, or is it the money? Is it the fact that EU students no longer get the domestic fee and the ability to borrow under the student loan scheme? I know that is a very difficult question to answer.

Charley Robinson: I am very happy to answer it. It is somewhat different for different student groups. Students who come for full degree programmes in the UK incur the higher tuition fee associated with international tuitions for full degrees. For those students, the additional cost of study and the loss of access to student loans to support that study is probably the largest negative factor impacting their decision to study.

We know from looking at other data and research on international student motivation that the cost and the difficulty of obtaining a student visa is another major criterion for international students in seeking a study destination. For students who come for shorter periods of mobility and for all the students we continue to exchange on a fee waiver basis in UK universities through the Turing scheme and through the remainder of Erasmus funding, the student visa is critical. Those students do not incur international tuition fees and still come in on fee waivers. That goes back to my point about the need to create more flexible visa routes for low-risk, short-term students who are registered at overseas providers.

We also critically lack an inbound internship visa route, which is another major problem with the loss of freedom of movement. The impact of the loss of freedom of movement means that European students coming to the UK now no longer have an internship visa route. That is a really huge problem. We send about 6,000 UK students into Europe for internships and we do not have a reciprocal visa route. That causes a lot of tensions for our European partners. Looking at an appropriate route to facilitate work placements and internships for European students should be a priority.

The Chair: Are these people you are talking about all youths—that is, as we heard before, people under the age of 35—who would be affected by that internship visa?

Charley Robinson: The 6,000 figure I think concerns students going out who are registered students from UK higher education.

The Chair: You were calling for a visa system here, but the people who will be affected will all be youths—that is, people under 35.

Charley Robinson: Broadly, that is right.

The Chair: That is very helpful.

Lord Liddle: I come back to free movement and the visa requirement. Again quoting my Lancaster experience, we put an enormous amount of effort into aiding Chinese students to get their visas, making sure relations with the Home Office were good and that people did not have that obstacle. It seemed to work very well and is still working. Of course, the worry is now this dependence on Chinese students, given the political risks associated with that. Are British universities starting to put a big effort into helping European students overcome the visa difficulties as a result of the end of free movement?

Anne-Marie Graham: That is a really important point to raise. Obviously, prior to the transition period, international students within institutions essentially could be treated differently from EU nationals, because EU nationals were subject to home fees and therefore did not have to receive immigration advice or the same degree of counselling and advice that was needed. Of course, universities have had to expand that provision. Now, they must provide the same advice and support to an EU national as they would to a Chinese national. We note from our members who predominantly work in international student advice and immigration compliance that that workload has increased dramatically since the change. There is definitely a resource implication for institutions.

Q132 **Viscount Trenchard:** I am interested in asking further about the impact of our withdrawal from Erasmus on both universities and students. If you compare 2019 entry with 2022 entry, what percentage change has there been in the numbers of students entering from EU and from non-EU/rest of the world, applying to and studying at British universities? Charley commented on the fact that certain types of courses popular with EU students might no longer be viable in future.

Charley Robinson: Just to clarify the question that we are looking at, you asked about the change in inward mobility of students coming in and out.

Viscount Trenchard: The inward mobility from the EU and from nonEU/ROW. In a previous answer, you said that certain courses that were popular with EU students might no longer be viable, or I thought you said that.

Charley Robinson: I would not go so far as "might not be viable", but certainly European students contribute to the diversity of students in the classroom. They typically come for a very broad spread of subjects. They are much more widely distributed than non-EU international students, who are typically concentrated in engineering and business subjects. There is a diversity impact in the classroom from declines in the number of European students.

Going back to your question on patterns of inward and outward mobility from the European Union, if we look at patterns of mobility from the UK to Europe funded by Erasmus+ in the years prior to Covid-19, where the years 2015 to 2018-19 are the most recent for which we have data, an average of 15,500 UK students went out to Europe. Sorry, is this helpful?

Viscount Trenchard: I was asking about coming in.

Charley Robinson: I am sorry. I also have the data for European students coming into the UK.

Anne-Marie Graham: I can help here. In 2019, we had 53,085 undergraduate applicants from the EU, and in 2021 that dropped down to

31,670. It was a decrease of 37% in applications and 47% in acceptances, according to the UCAS data.

Viscount Trenchard: What about non-EU/rest of world?

Anne-Marie Graham: I do not have as accurate a figure, but the increase has been significant. We have seen a particularly significant increase in the Indian market, in which we had lost quite a lot of market share over the years since the introduction of the graduate work visa and the recent MoU in terms of recognition of qualifications. Lots of work has been done to rebuild that relationship with India. The non-EU/rest of world acceptances and applications have increased dramatically. We can come back to you with actual data on that. Charley may even have it.

Viscount Trenchard: That would be helpful. Ellie, does the previous discrimination in fee paying faced by English students at Scottish universities no longer exist? English students had to pay more than either Scottish or EU students.

Ellie Gomersall: Indeed. In fact, I am English, so for my undergraduate degree I paid £9,250 a year, while the Scottish and EU students on my course did not. English students still pay those fees, and I maintain that that is the wrong approach and that we should not charge any students fees for their education. That is the situation now.

Viscount Trenchard: Thank you. I have another supplementary question, but I will ask it after Lord Lamont's question because it also brings in Turing, and I do not want to queer his pitch.

Q133 **Lord Lamont of Lerwick:** Gosh, I cannot wait. As Lord Trenchard revealed, my question is about the differences between the Turing scheme and Erasmus. What are the relative pros and cons of these? What are the main differences? We heard, of course, that Turing concentrates much more on British students going abroad. It is not a reciprocal scheme. There must be other differences. What changes would you like to see made to the Turing scheme?

Charley Robinson: Just to be clear, Universities UK welcomed the Government's very quick action to design and launch the Turing scheme in 2021. In principle, the Turing scheme creates very good opportunities for UK students to go abroad and creates a vehicle to allow UK institutions to continue partnerships with European institutions. We also welcomed the confirmation that funding will be covered until the 2024-25 academic year. That assurance was incredibly important for UK institutions in continuing their European partnerships.

We welcomed the implementation of key recommendations that came from the outward student mobility working group that UUK convened with DfE when we looked at alternatives to Erasmus or provisional arrangements. UK universities appreciate the fact that Turing is global in scope. We also appreciate that it has increased flexibility, and in

particular the reduction in the minimum duration of mobility down to four weeks has been incredible in creating opportunities in new parts of the world, new types of mobility and exchange opportunity and reaching new student demographics. It has been incredibly helpful to widen participation and to be able to send students on shorter and non-credit-bearing mobility. That is a major departure from the Erasmus scheme.

We welcome the additional funding in Turing for disadvantaged students and students with disabilities. There are now 38,000 planned mobilities in the second year of the Turing scheme, with 52% of that funding allocated to students who fulfil the widening participation criteria. That is a really big step change in the volume of students that the UK sends abroad through Turing. We used to send roughly half that number through the Erasmus scheme, with significantly fewer students from disadvantaged groups. Those factors are real achievements and very positive aspects of the Turing programme.

However, a number of challenges in the way the scheme operates can affect the long-term planning, sustainability and quality of the partnerships that UK institutions establish. One major challenge is the fact that it operates on an annual project cycle. UK universities must re-bid annually for funding, often for very similar projects and programmes, which is incredibly burdensome. The multiyear funding model as part of Erasmus was much better. The annual project cycle makes Turing quite hand-to-mouth and makes it quite difficult for UK universities to do that strategic planning and strategic partnership development. It makes it harder to broker new relationships both globally and within Europe.

Widening participation is also impacted because students from disadvantaged backgrounds need more support and longer lead-in times. We feel that the annual project cycle impedes universities' ability to support students from disadvantaged backgrounds and impacts negatively on that policy parameter for Turing. Having to bid on an annual basis basically reduces the efficiency of funding utilisation. The Turing project year is based on the UK academic calendar and students go abroad internationally, but the academic calendar of overseas institutions often does not map on to that 12-month period. This means we have the very unwelcome situation that some students miss out on funding for part of their mobility simply because of the way the academic calendar is mapped. Multiyear funding would diminish that problem dramatically.

Lord Lamont of Lerwick: One point of clarification: when you spoke previously, you referred to funding under the Erasmus programme. Between 2015 and 2018, there were 15,500 students. Was that per annum?

Charley Robinson: That was the average number of UK students' mobilities to the EU.

Lord Lamont of Lerwick: Per annum.

Charley Robinson: Yes. It was not funding; it was head count of mobilities, sorry.

Lord Lamont of Lerwick: Thank you.

Anne-Marie Graham: Charley covered the main points very adequately. The other thing to remember about Erasmus+ is that we moved away from that at a point when the budget was significantly increased. Although we generated quite a lot of mobilities from Turing, that lack of reciprocity when there was an exponential budget increase had an impact on EU mobility. Through Turing we do not have things such as staff mobility, which was also funded through the Erasmus programme. Staff from UK universities across all disciplines—academics and professional services staff—could benefit from funding through the Erasmus+ programme, which is not offered through the Turing scheme. There are other examples in the UK. The Welsh Government fund the Taith programme, which is reciprocal—I am sure colleagues mentioned that earlier—and has a longer funding and planning lead-in time. There are models across the UK that we can learn from.

Ellie Gomersall: Anne-Marie and Charley eloquently covered the vast majority of the points I would have made, but there are a couple more on the cost of living funding that students can receive while on the programme. Money for the most disadvantaged students does not quite match up to what was offered under Erasmus+, with a maximum of €725 a month—that is about £630—whereas the maximum they can receive under Turing is £490 a month.

The other point that I do not think has been raised yet is that funding for the Turing scheme is very heavily weighted towards higher education and not so much towards further education. We saw a much greater parity of support to higher and further education under Erasmus+. In Scotland, only four colleges now receive Turing scheme funding.

My understanding is that there is a significant workload for the institutions bidding for that funding, particularly for colleges that are already quite underfunded and underresourced and do not have that additional capacity to manage the scheme. That means that there are significantly fewer opportunities for college students under Turing than there were under Erasmus+. When you then consider the demographics of college students compared to higher education and university students, particularly from a widening access perspective, you see that there is still quite a significant disparity in what is offered under Turing for students from less advantaged backgrounds.

Viscount Trenchard: You told us that roughly 15,500 students have been studying at EU universities under Erasmus. What is the average length of course? Is it two, three, or three and a half years? How many years on average is it? How many students is Turing expected to fund at EU and non-EU universities in future? You said that it is only an annual

programme so it is apples and oranges, but does Turing already show an increase in the number of students studying in rest-of-the-world universities?

Charley Robinson: I will answer the second question first. In relation to the distribution between non-EU and EU destinations funded through Turing, in the first year of the scheme we saw a rapid explosion in applications for mobilities to the key English-speaking destinations where language is no longer a barrier for UK students. There were quite significant funding bids for the US, Canada and Australia. There were also increases in funding bids for east Asia, particularly China and Japan, but that was in the context in which UK institutions still had access to leftover Erasmus project funding. That project funding will run out in May 2023. In the second-year funding results we see almost a reversal of that trend, with steep increases in Turing funding for key EU destinations, a big increase in funding for Europe and a corresponding decrease in funding for the Englishspeaking destinations and for east Asia.

When we think about this over the long term, we need to argue that Turing is an incredibly successful programme. It has been massively oversubscribed. Ellie referenced that. Different sector segments are in competition for that funding. There is a tension between bids for Europe and for the rest of the world. A priority should be to ensure the adequacy of future funding to meet the scale of demand so that we do not have competition between funding European mobility versus funding rest-ofworld mobility.

Q134 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Would you welcome the Government trying to negotiate some kind of reciprocal student exchange scheme with either the EU or its member states, or both, bearing in mind of course that Turing does not offer anything for inward mobility? If something like that is a good idea, how easy would it be to negotiate? Could Turing and Erasmus+ potentially be linked in some way? Does the Welsh Government's Taith programme provide a possible model that could be replicated elsewhere?

Perhaps in answering those questions you could also pick up the fact that quite a lot of non-EU European countries are actually in the Erasmus+ scheme. To what extent does that put us at a disadvantage?

Charley Robinson: That is a very good question. In short, yes, it would be very helpful to develop bilateral mobility programmes. Unfortunately, the UK now falls within the Erasmus/rest-of-world budget envelope, which is relatively small, and we are now in competition with other major host destinations such as America. The other policy parameter around Erasmus/rest-of-world funding is that it should constitute no more than 20% of the overall Erasmus funding bid. All our European partners expect to send fewer European students to the UK through the Erasmus programme because of those constraints. That in turn restricts exchange

opportunities for us to send UK students to Europe through Erasmus exchanges.

Given the European focus of the Erasmus scheme, it is unlikely that the European Commission will want to change the fundamentally European nature of the Erasmus programme. In that context, we need to seek to develop these kinds of bilateral arrangement, not just in Europe but outside Europe, as you cited. We have had some quite positive discussions already with countries such as the Netherlands and France. There is real willingness to seek to develop these kinds of bilateral arrangements, but we need highlevel, government and system-to-system engagement. That is one issue with the Turing scheme as it currently stands. Even a small pot of inward funding could really help to oil the wheels and broker these kinds of discussions internationally. All that strategic partnership development is very devolved down to institutions in the Turing programme as it currently stands. A small pot of funding for reciprocal inward mobility, particularly for countries that do not have deep pockets, plus some kind of high-level engagement and an international engagement strategy, would be a real benefit and would complement the Global Britain policy parameters for the scheme.

Anne-Marie Graham: Charley covered that well. As I mentioned, we have an international education strategy, and one thing that would work quite well is to look at the priority markets in that strategy and use them as a model for expanding the Turing scheme on a reciprocal basis. As Charley mentioned, reciprocity brings much to the UK in bilateral partnership building. It is also a great showcase for our UK education system. We know that students who come here on an exchange or short-term programme, particularly at undergraduate level, might come back, spend their money on a postgraduate course and come through that visa immigration system. There are lots of benefits to derive from that. There are some ways in which we could target and pilot that. Taith is definitely a model that we could look at. It is still quite early days for Taith, and it is still very much finding its way and evaluating its effectiveness, but all of us working in the sector follow its progress very closely. The Government could probably learn a lot as it develops and builds and there is more data to reflect on.

Ellie Gomersall: First, I echo the points that have already been made, particularly the real importance and significance of the two-way exchange nature of the Erasmus and Taith programmes. In fact, when I think back to my university experience and how much richer I was for the friends I was able to make who had come to Scotland to study through the Erasmus programme, that is hugely important. The Taith programme, Erasmus+ and some of the other things that they cover which the Turing scheme does not cover quite so well, particularly in further education, vocational education and youth work in the Taith scheme, offer real opportunities for students in Wales. I am aware that the Scottish Government are also working on their own scheme.

It is good that both the Scottish Government and the Welsh Government are working on these schemes. As they are funded by the Welsh Government and the Scottish Government rather than the UK Government, particularly given the Taith programme in Wales and the funding that the Welsh Government lost as a result of Brexit because of the EU grants they received, there are some worries about the long-term funding of such programmes. There is then the disparity that creates where different students across the nations of the UK will have different opportunities from one another. I do not think there was any significant reason to pull out of Erasmus in the first place. In replacing it with the Turing scheme, we tried to reinvent the wheel and did not necessarily succeed. A UK-wide programme like Erasmus+ or the Taith programme would bring significant opportunities, with students around the world able to come here and students here able to go and study internationally.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: I assume that the fact that students from Northern Ireland are still covered by Erasmus means that if nothing is done of the sort that we have talked about, the gap will widen.

Ellie Gomersall: Absolutely.

Q135 **Lord Faulkner of Worcester:** This question is about the Government's youth mobility scheme, which we have not talked about before. What is your opinion of it? Is it worth the British Government trying to involve EU member states in the operation of the scheme? What do you see as the main barriers to having that extended to the EU?

Anne-Marie Graham: We would welcome the extension to EU nationals. In fact, I understand that UKVI is working on that, but of course the need for reciprocity slows things down a bit. Iceland joined the scheme earlier this year. It is certainly one of the more user-friendly immigration routes. It permits study and work. We discussed earlier the challenges with internships. Individuals coming in on that route do not require a sponsor. Yet it still brings with it some limitations.

That is not to say that we should not extend it to EU nationals, but we need to be aware of those. It is not a route that those individuals can switch in and out of. They cannot move to another immigration route from it. You cannot bring in dependants. It covers people up to the age of 30 but not beyond that. Somebody coming in aged 28 may have a family and may not be able to come in and do that. In fact, they cannot apply at all if they have children. There are some limitations on that, and they would, of course, still need entry clearance. It would not necessarily solve the problem that I guess this committee seeks to address in stemming the fall in EU nationals coming to the UK, but it is certainly a tool that we could use to address some elements of that.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: It is not doing any harm.

Anne-Marie Graham: No, of course not.

Charley Robinson: We would welcome exploration of expanding the countries eligible for the youth mobility visa to European and EEA countries. One challenge is that this would not be a quick fix. Developing those bilateral agreements will take a long time. It could be very useful to plug a gap that we currently have in the lack of an internship and work placement route for European students. It could be helpful in that respect, notwithstanding the fact that it will not be a quick fix.

On student mobility, if you are looking for ways to really increase and protect short, credit-only mobility from Europe coming to the UK, the best way to do that is to extend the standard visitor route for students from six months to one academic year. That would protect all those European students coming for their year abroad. For study, that would be a relatively simple and straightforward policy fix. That obviously does not address the work placements and internships issue, but maybe we could do both.

Lord Faulkner of Worcester: Thanks very much. Ellie, is there anything else you would like to see the Government do?

Ellie Gomersall: It is not something that the NUS has any particular expertise on, so I defer to my colleagues on the panel for that question.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We all felt the passion that the three of

you have for the subject, which came through very fiercely. We are immensely grateful to you for coming along this afternoon and helping us.

There are one or two things to add. First, Charley, thank you for your written evidence. You referred to lots of statistics that I think are in that evidence and in your report, of which we have a copy. If anything is not there, you could send that to us. Anne-Marie, you kindly offered Lord Trenchard some figures. If it were possible to send those through to the clerks, we will make sure that we take account of those in the eventual report. Ellie, if you had anything you wanted to send through, please feel free to do so and we will consider that as well.

On behalf of all my colleagues, this has been a thoroughly enjoyable time, if slightly longer than was scheduled. I learned a lot and we are very grateful.