

Written evidence submitted by the Erasmus Student Network (ESN) UK (FRE0104)

Erasmus Student Network United Kingdom (ESN UK) is a not-for-profit organisation representing the 23 local ESN sections at universities across the United Kingdom. ESN UK is affiliated with ESN AISBL, one of the largest student organisations in Europe, an umbrella organisation for 530 local sections at higher education bodies within 42 countries across the European Higher Education Area. With over 15,000 active volunteers, it offers services to over 350,000 exchange and international students studying in the European Higher Education Area¹.

The local levels consist of students at these universities, with many local board members having studied abroad either on an Erasmus programme or further abroad, to all corners of the world. ESN seeks to further 6 causes; Education and Mobility, Social Inclusion, Sustainability, Culture, Health and Well-being, and Skills and Employability.

ESN UK's responses will discuss the UK's current and future relationship with the Erasmus+ programme. We strongly believe that the UK should remain a part of the Erasmus+ programme, which has benefited 5 million young people since 1987. There are many benefits to the programme continuing within the country.

Below, we outline our thoughts regarding both outgoing and incoming exchange students.

What are the key priorities of the higher education sector in the negotiations between the UK and the EU? How do these priorities vary between different institutions and stakeholders? Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed any of these priorities? What might be the consequences of a deal which does not meet these priorities?

For exchange students, represented by ESN UK, the priorities should be:

- The UK's continued participation in Erasmus+.
- A reduction in cost and an increase in the pre-mobility tier-4 visa period, particularly for short-term exchange students so that they may further integrate with the UK, and a reciprocal agreement across the EU.

¹ ESN - <https://esn.org/news/claiming-stronger-erasmus-empowerment-future-generation-europeans>

To what extent did the UK Government consult your sector before publishing its negotiating aims and draft texts? How well does what the Government has proposed meet its needs?

The Future Relationship with the EU (CP211) mentions the consideration to participate in elements of Erasmus+. Such a commitment is welcome, but we would encourage the UK to participate in Erasmus+ as a fully participating programme country, gaining access to enhanced benefits.

ESN UK has not yet been consulted by the Government by official means. However, we would strongly encourage the UK Government to develop a closer relationship for the purpose of consultation with ESN UK. Our volunteers are largely ex-mobility and international students, so ESN UK has empathy and close contact with both incoming and outgoing international and mobility students. ESN International and counterparts in other countries have well-established connections with their own governments, and ESN International has a seat on the Advisory Council on Youth, allowing them to deliver the voice of students directly to the European Commission.

What further provisions would you have advised the Government to seek?

As one of the largest student societies in Europe close contact with ESN UK is important. ESN UK took part in ESN International's COVID-19 study², the largest study to date of how exchange and international students have been affected by COVID-19. ESN was able to rapidly gather 22,000 responses within the final twelve days of March during the peak of COVID-19 decision making. Such responses have helped shape higher education decisions across the world. Similar to the COVID-19 response study, ESN runs multiple projects and surveys throughout the year. We would welcome direct communication with the UK Government, as other ESN organisations have in their respective countries, and that ESN International has with the EU. Such contact would allow us to rapidly deliver this information to the highest decision-makers in the country to efficiently and effectively advise the Government.

In which EU programmes concerning higher education (for example Erasmus and Horizon) should the UK be seeking continued involvement? Given the UK and EU's negotiating positions what level of involvement appears possible? What would be the consequences of this for the UK's higher education sector? What alternatives to involvement in these programmes are available or may be possible?

² ESN - <https://esn.org/covidimpact-report>

ESN UK welcomes the Government's commitment to Erasmus+ made under CP211. Continued participation in the Erasmus+ programme should not harm the UK's ability to negotiate further exchange agreements with countries outside of the Erasmus+ area. Currently, universities in the UK are part of many exchange programmes including: Erasmus+, the Swiss-European Mobility Programme, and bilateral agreements with individual universities across the world. It is important that future involvement in these schemes does not affect the UK's ability to enter into exchange agreements globally. Should the UK establish its own programme it should pay heed to the resources required to set one up. It should also look to countries that left the programme, such as Switzerland, where there is a strong feeling from entities throughout the country that they should once again join Erasmus+³.

How might the new immigration regime impact the higher education sector? To what extent might any risks and opportunities be influenced by provisions on labour mobility envisaged in the UK and EU's negotiating positions? How might these affect the ability of higher education institutions to recruit and retain staff and students from EU member states? How might these affect the ability of UK staff to work with or for higher education institutions in the EU, either on a permanent or temporary basis? What wider impact might this have on individual institutions and the higher education sector in general?

It is currently very expensive for exchange students coming from outside of the EU to study on exchange, the current rates for a tier-4 general visa as of August 2020 being £348⁴. Although a moderate fee for full-degree programmes, exchange students undertaking a single-semester would find such a fee costly, adding around £20-25 per week. Arrival in the UK is only permitted one week before the course starts for courses of 6 months or less in duration, while students entering the country to study courses lasting a longer period of time are permitted to enter the UK up to 1 month beforehand. Such a visa hinders the ability of students to arrive during the summer, and undertake summer activities to further integrate and understand British culture, a task which is often easier for European students, due not only to higher linguistic and cultural similarities, but also because of the ability to be able to arrive earlier. The UK and EU would find it mutually beneficial to extend the pre-mobility arrival period.

Based on the parameters set out by the UK and EU draft legal texts, could reaching an agreement with the EU restrict the UK's ability to pursue agreements on matters concerning higher education with third countries? For example, due to differing regulatory and data standards?

There is unlikely to be any impact on agreements with third-party countries. There are currently six other Erasmus+ programme countries outside of the EU⁵. We believe that the Erasmus+ scheme should remain non-exclusive to allow the UK to freely enter into exchange agreements with such countries.

³ SEMP - <https://erasmus-ch.ch/en/petition-4/>

⁴ Gov.UK - <https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa>

⁵ European Commission - https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/about/who-can-take-part_en

Is it clear what institutions and stakeholders in your sector must do to prepare for the end of the transition period? What remains uncertain? How much progress have been made on preparations so far? What support has the Government made available? What would be the consequences if UK did not receive a positive data adequacy decision from the EU? What steps are institutions taking to adjust to the changes to tuition fees paid by EU students?

Although the Government outlined its ambitions to remain in elements of the Erasmus+ scheme within CP211, it is unclear which elements these will be.

What would happen if agreement was not reached between the UK and the EU on matters relating to higher education? What would be the consequences of this for institutions and stakeholders in your sector? What steps could the UK Government take to mitigate these consequences? What evidence is there that it has taken, or is planning to take, these steps?

Currently, credits are mutually recognised by MPRQ schemes such as ECTS credits. If this does not continue it may mean credits can not be recognised by the sending institution, thereby extending the length of a degree. This is likely to discourage students from studying abroad.

Are there existing international arrangements for cooperation in higher education that the UK could fall back on if agreement cannot be reached with the EU?

There are currently many bilateral agreements between universities outside of the Erasmus+ exchange programme. However, it is our strong preference for the UK to remain a part of the Erasmus+ scheme. The Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study⁶ found that 70% of students following an exchange came to a better understanding of what they wanted to do with their career. The study also found an increase in problem-solving, adaptability, and communication skills, and that 80% of students who had undertaken a mobility were in employment within 3 months of graduating. UUKi produced a similar study⁷ which found that students undertaking a mobility were 20% less likely to be unemployed and were 19% more likely to get a first-class degree. They also earned 7% more than their non-mobile peers⁸.

We strongly believe that the UK should remain a part of the Erasmus+ programme.

Erasmus Student Network UK

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⁶ European Commission - https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/resources/documents/erasmus-impact-studies-factsheet_en

⁷ UUKi -

https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/Documents/Gone%20International_expanding%20opportunities_digital.pdf

⁸ <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/International/go-international/stand-out/Documents/GoIntl%20ally%20organisations%20pledge%20form.pdf>



Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union

House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA

Email: freucom@parliament.uk Website: <https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/366/committee-on-the-future-relationship-with-the-european-union/>

27 July 2020

Kostis Giannidis
President
Erasmus Student Network UK

Dear Mr Giannidis,

The House of Commons Committee on the Future Relationship with the European Union is inquiring into the progress of the negotiations between the UK and the EU. Under normal circumstances, the Committee holds regular oral evidence sessions in Westminster. However, measures to prevent the spread of the coronavirus make this difficult.

The Committee is keen to gather as much evidence as possible to inform its deliberations so I am writing to you to ask whether you would be willing to help us with our work by making a written submission. We welcome general responses to our [call for evidence](#), which was published on 4 March. We also hope that you would be willing to answer some of the more specific questions set out below on issues that fall within your area of expertise. Submissions need not address every bullet point and can include other matters that you think are relevant to the negotiations and should be drawn to the attention of the Committee.

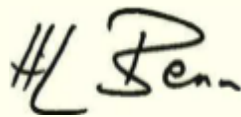
- What are the key priorities of the higher education sector in the negotiations between the UK and the EU? How do these priorities vary between different institutions and stakeholders? Has the Covid-19 pandemic changed any of these priorities? What might be the consequences of a deal which does not meet these priorities?
- To what extent did the UK Government consult your sector before publishing its negotiating aims and draft texts? How well does what the Government has proposed meet its needs? What further provisions would you have advised the Government to seek?
- How do the UK's and the EU's negotiations positions compare on matters relating to higher education? On which areas are the UK and EU's aims farthest apart? Where do their positions align? What is your assessment of the level of technical detail the negotiators have grappled with on this topic to date?
- In which EU programmes concerning higher education (for example Erasmus and Horizon) should the UK be seeking continued involvement? Given the UK and EU's negotiating positions what level of involvement appears possible? What would be the consequences of this for the UK's higher education sector? What alternatives to involvement in these programmes are available or may be possible?
- How might the new immigration regime impact the higher education sector? To what extent might any risks and opportunities be influenced by provisions on labour mobility envisaged in the UK and EU's negotiating positions? How might these affect the ability of higher education institutions to recruit and retain staff and students from EU member states? How might these affect the ability of UK staff to work with or for higher education institutions in the EU, either on a permanent or temporary basis? What wider impact might this have on individual institutions and the higher education sector in general?
- What provisions is your sector seeking on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications? What impact might an agreement on MRPQ based on either the UK or EU negotiating positions have? To what extent have institutions and stakeholders in your sector engaged with your counterparts in EU Member States to progress mutual recognition

of qualifications on a bilateral basis, outside the framework of a future UK/EU agreement; and if you have, what progress has been made?

- Could you sketch out a possible compromise between the UK and the EU on matters related to higher education and how it might be achieved?
- Based on the parameters set out by the UK and EU draft legal texts, could reaching an agreement with the EU restrict the UK's ability to pursue agreements on matters concerning higher education with third countries? For example, due to differing regulatory and data standards?
- Is it clear what institutions and stakeholders in your sector must do to prepare for the end of the transition period? What remains uncertain? How much progress have been made on preparations so far? What support has the Government made available? What would be the consequences if UK did not receive a positive data adequacy decision from the EU? What steps are institutions taking to adjust to the changes to tuition fees paid by EU students?
- Has leaving the EU and entering the transition period affected the ability of institutions and stakeholders to access projects with EU partners or successfully apply for support from EU funding streams? What experiences have staff in the sector had in relation to the implementation of the UK's settled status scheme?
- What would happen if agreement was not reached between the UK and the EU on matters relating to higher education? What would be the consequences of this for institutions and stakeholders in your sector? What steps could the UK Government take to mitigate these consequences? What evidence is there that it has taken, or is planning to take, these steps? Are there existing international arrangements for cooperation in higher education that the UK could fall back on if agreement cannot be reached with the EU?

The Committee staff will be happy to discuss the inquiry, any issues raised, or the process for submitting written evidence. You can contact them at freucom@parliament.uk.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H Benn'.

Hilary Benn
Chair of the Committee