

## The Year Abroad Fees Survey 2015

*Undertaken on behalf of UCML*

### Context

The introduction of variable tuition fees in Higher Education (HE) in UK in 2006 arguably represents one of the most debated and controversial moves that have affected both Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and students in decades. A progressive decrease in government capital funding meant that Universities had to develop a substantially-revised funding model which was self-reliant and independent from third party support. The new model would have to generate the income HEIs directly lost from government and a tuition fee system which started charging students a set yearly quota was subsequently introduced. In 2006, fees were capped at £3,000 per annum; in 2012, following more severe cuts, fee caps were raised to £9,000 per year and backed by a system of public loans for students.

The introduction of the higher fee cap in 2012 was met with concern across the whole sector and particularly by the Modern languages community. The vast majority of degree courses in Modern languages in the UK last four years and include one year of residence abroad for all students. The year abroad (YA), which represents an additional year of study compared to conventional three-year long degree courses in other subjects (with the exception of Scotland, see section 1.1 below), immediately raised a number of issues related to its funding provision. In particular, doubts were raised as to whether UK HEIs would continue to levy fees for this period of study; which HEIs would levy the highest or lowest fee; which HEI would waive the fee altogether. As a result of the increased fee cap, it should be noted that the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) set a year abroad fee cap for English Universities at 15% of the full fee for *Erasmus+* fundable activity and at 20% for activity outside of *Erasmus+* also providing additional funding to HEIs up to a maximum of 40% of the full fees (<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/cl,142013/>).

In 2015, UCML conducted a survey of UK universities to try and obtain a general picture regarding funding issues for the year abroad. The survey consisted of some 14 questions and was initially circulated in March 2015 through the UCML constituencies. A second call for participation was issued in June 2015. Overall, 28 HEIs responded. Below are results for some of the questions.

### Participants

The first round of respondents included 21 HEIs from England, 1 from Scotland, and 2 from Wales. With the second round, 4 additional Scottish universities responded. From the total number of respondents over the two rounds (28), 10 belong to the Russell Group, whilst almost twice as many do not (18).

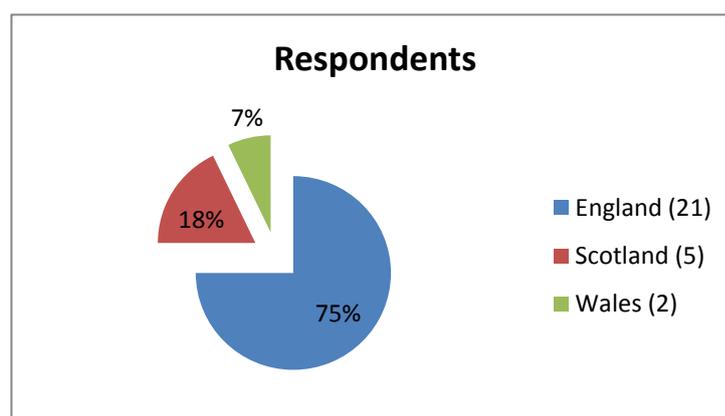


Figure 1

## Format of the survey

The 14 questions were worded to obtain a simple 'yes/no' answer, or, in other cases, another one-word answer. Other questions gave respondents the chance to add any comments and elaborate further on what was claimed.

## Results

### 1.1 The year abroad: specifications

The first question asked whether a year abroad was included in the specialist modern language programme of the HEIs surveyed. All institutions answered positively (100%): all respondents offer their students the possibility to study abroad. However, the format of the year abroad varies from provider to provider and for most HEIs (75%), the year abroad forms an integral and compulsory part of their degree in modern languages, as figure 2 below shows.

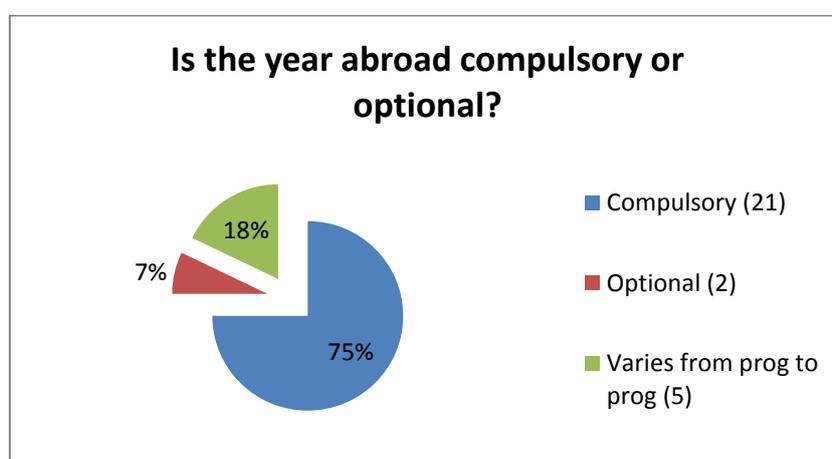


Figure 2

Some institutions, however, offer a variant on the conventional 4-year language degree course which excludes the year abroad altogether. This exclusion affects programmes in different ways depending on the institution. For example, for some providers such exclusion may depend on the students' language abilities (in one HEI, one particular course combination with a language does not include the year abroad if students are mother-tongue speakers) whereas others simply offer language degree courses that last three years. In this case, the language studied usually features as a 'minor' component of the degree programme.

For the majority of providers for which the year abroad is compulsory or optional, the period of residence in the target language(s) country(ies) adds one additional year of study to the standard length of a degree programme (three years for England, Wales and Northern Ireland); for others, the length of the year abroad depends on the type of programme selected and whether the language studied is 'major' or 'minor'. In the latter case, students are required to spend a shorter period of time abroad (for one provider, 'minor' students spend three months abroad). For Scottish institutions, the standard length of degree courses is instead four years and the year abroad does not add any additional time to the total; one provider, however, commented that modern languages

students can opt to spend six months abroad but that the majority choose to spend a full year in the target language country.

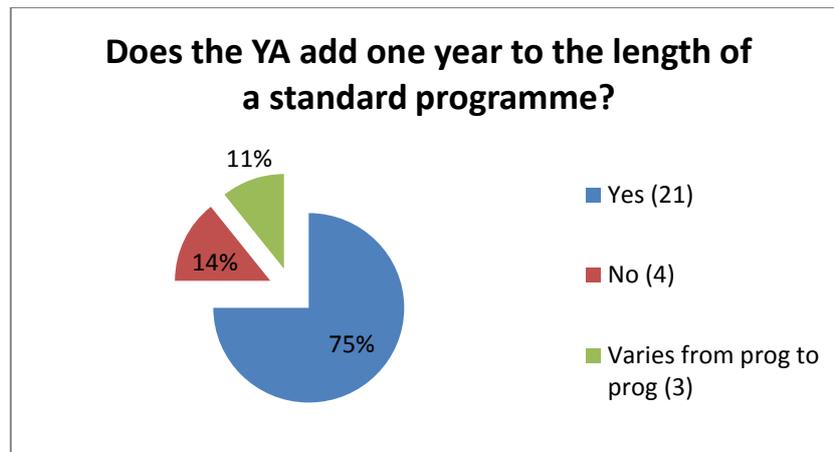


Figure 3

### 1.2 The year abroad: fees

When asked whether HEIs would levy a fee for the year abroad, the answer was overwhelmingly affirmative as figure 4 below shows. It is worth noting that 4 HEIs outside of Scotland do not charge YA fees; in Scotland, Scottish students are not charged extra fees for the year abroad and other, non-Scottish UK and EU students can instead be charged (these students can be charged for a maximum of £27,000 over the whole four-year degree programme but can apply for scholarships).

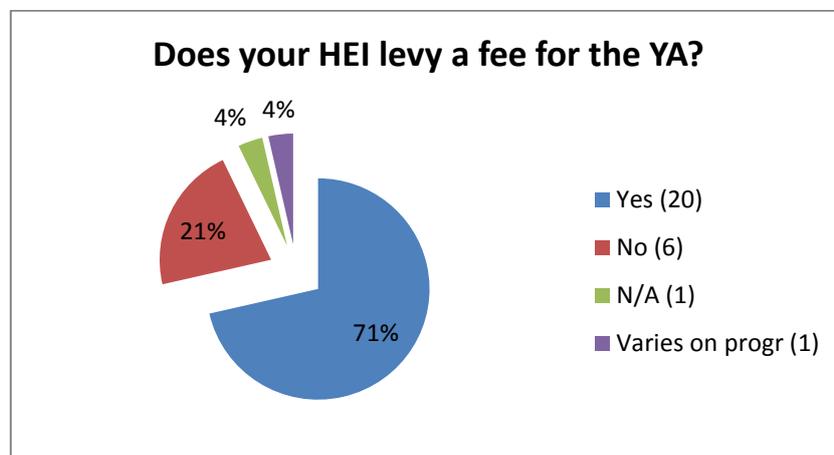


Figure 4

On the matter of how much institutions charge their students for the year abroad, most providers have followed the model set by HEFCE's regulation in respect to English HEIs, which caps fees at 15% (*Erasmus+* activity) and at 20% (non-*Erasmus+*) for home and EU students: fifteen respondents indicated that UK/EU students are charged £1,350 (15% of the standard full-time UG tuition fee) for a full academic year abroad spent undertaking *Erasmus+* fundable activity. Three other respondents indicated fee levels of 10%, 12% or 20%.

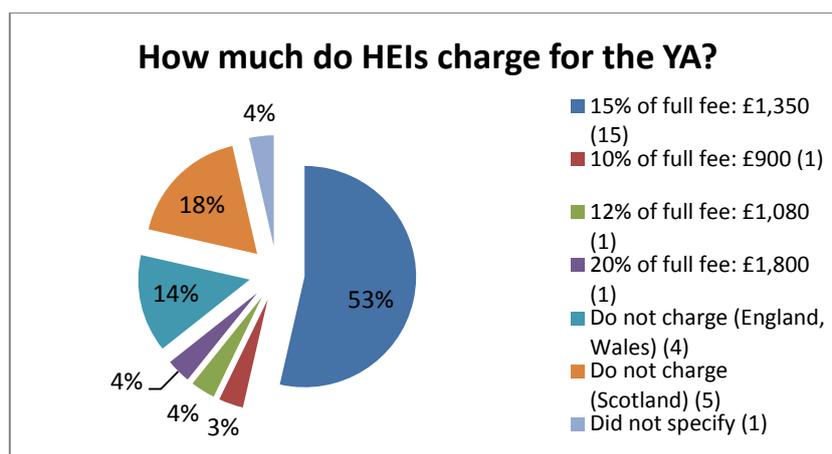


Figure 5

For non-UK/EU students or for non-*Erasmus+* fundable activity (for which fee levels are not regulated), different fee levels were indicated by half of the respondents, e.g., the full standard tuition fee, 50% of the standard tuition fee, 20% of the standard tuition fee. Three respondents indicated their fee for non-UK/EU students, viz. £4000, £6995, or the full standard tuition fee. One respondent indicated that, while a year abroad tuition fee is usually levied, no charge is made for students travelling to the Arab World who have to pay tuition fees directly to their host institution.

### 1.3 The year abroad: additional support

Question 8 asked whether institutions provide modern languages students with financial support when they take a year abroad as part of their degree programme (and irrespective of whether HEIs levy a tuition fee for that year or not). This question was intended to reference financial support provided by the student's institution itself, rather than EU monies made available to students from the *Erasmus+* scheme via the institution. From the responses given to question 9, it was clear that this had not been understood. Taking this into account and based on the additional comments respondents provided for this section, it emerges that only a minority of providers (5, 18%) offer students extra financial support beyond the funding available through the *Erasmus+* scheme. In 82% of the HEIs surveyed, students rely solely on the monies made available through the *Erasmus+* scheme instead.

For the HEIs which offer additional financial support to their students on the YA, often such support is limited in nature and to a number of cases. For one provider, support is available where students pay (or contribute to) a tuition fee to their host institution abroad or are visiting a particular country. One respondent referenced a cap of £400 for students travelling long distances; another referred to a condition around the non-availability of *Erasmus+* funding. One provider mentioned a small number of available scholarships and general funds for students experiencing hardships.

Question 10 asked whether the same tuition-fee and financial support arrangements for students in other subject areas (i.e. not specialist linguists) who undertake an optional year abroad were also in place. The majority of HEIs responded positively (63%), and only a small minority of providers (2%) mentioned that they do not offer the same support for non-specialist students. In particular, one respondent indicated that modern languages students were alone in spending a full year abroad and

therefore alone in being under these financial arrangements, while another was unaware of the same financial arrangements being in place for students in other subject areas.

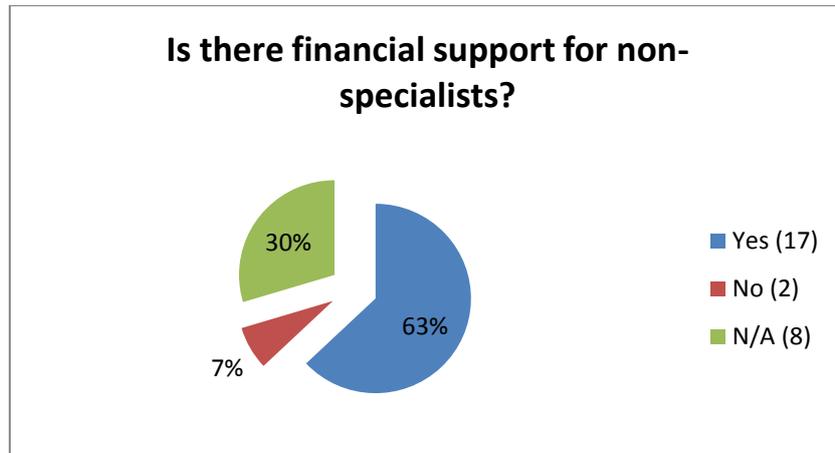


Figure 6

The last question in the survey enquired whether for modern language students who spend their year abroad as a student at a university outside the *Erasmus+* area, tuition fees are payable to that host university. Answers to this question were fairly balanced: in equal number, respondents indicated that fees both do and do not have to be paid to the host HEI as figure 7 below shows:

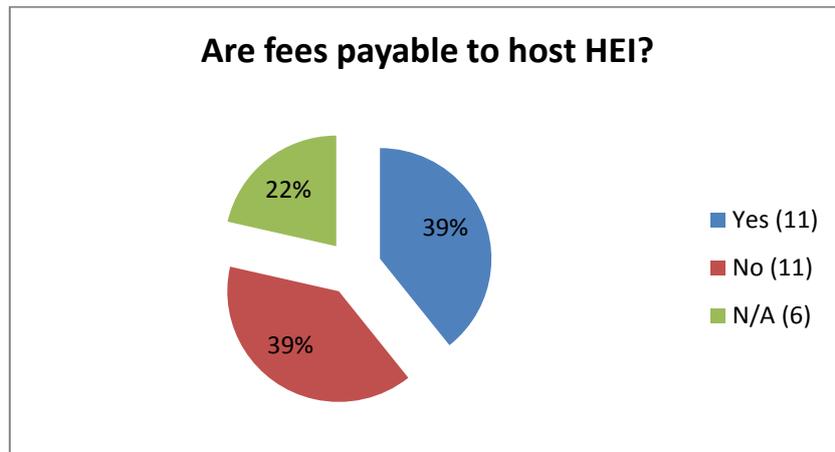


Figure 7

For the host institutions to which fees have to be paid, this financial cost befalls to the home institution (58%) more often than it does to students (42%).

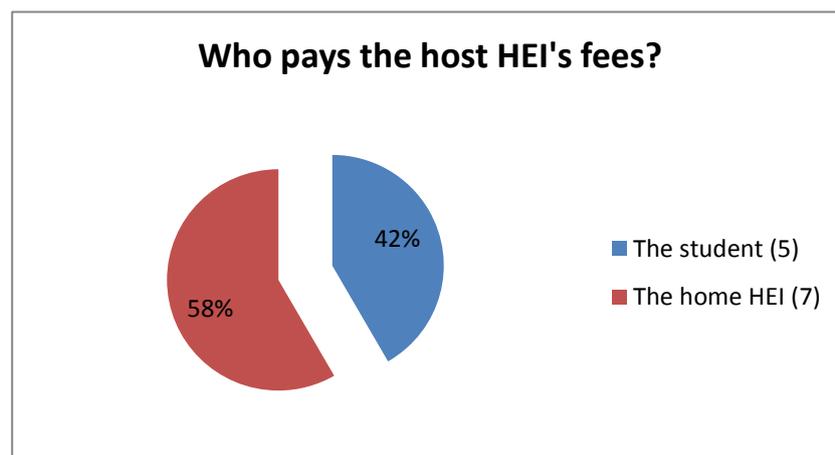


Figure 8

## Additional comments

An additional area of the survey was reserved for those respondents who wished to add supplementary information regarding their institutional practice of levying a tuition fee and providing financial support to students for the year abroad. In this respect, two respondents indicated that no tuition fee was payable for modern languages students undertaking an exchange within a (non-EU) partner institution. Another respondent referred to newly created competitive bursaries available for non-specialist linguists to allow them to undertake a short period of overseas study/work/volunteering.

## Useful documents and weblinks

- 'How much does it cost to study in the UK?'  
<http://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/student-finance/how-much-does-it-cost-study-uk>
- 'Where student fees go', published by Universities UK  
<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2013/WhereStudentFeesGo.pdf>
- *Erasmus+*  
<http://erasmus-plus.ro/?gclid=CKa775ebgckCFUQ6GwodJgMFdw>
- *Erasmus+* funding 2015-2016  
<http://www.thirdyearabroad.com/before-you-go/money-matters/item/1020-erasmus-funding.html>
- HEFCE policy on year abroad  
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/cl,142013/>
- Redding survey of university tuition fees  
<http://www.thecompleteuniversityguide.co.uk/university-tuition-fees/reddin-survey-of-university-tuition-fees/>
- UCML  
<http://www.ucml.ac.uk/>

This survey was carried out on behalf of UCML by Dr Elena Polisca and Prof Paul Rowlett.

The authors wish to thank all participating institutions.

## APPENDIX

### Survey questions

Q1: Do your institution's specialist modern language programmes include a year abroad?

Q2: If Yes, is the year abroad compulsory or optional?

Q3: If you answered 'Varies from one programme to another', please elaborate.

Q4: If your institution's modern language programmes include a (compulsory or optional) year abroad, does this add one year to the standard length of a degree programme at the relevant level in your institution (e.g. in England the standard duration of an honours degree is three years, but programmes with an additional year abroad take four years to complete)?

Q5: If you answered 'Varies from one programme to another', please elaborate.

Q6: Where your institution's students take the (compulsory or optional) year abroad, does your institution levy a tuition fee for this year?

Q7: If you answered Yes or Varies from one programme to another, what level of tuition fee is charged? If your institution levies a different tuition fee to different categories of student (e.g. to students from different parts of the UK, from other EU states, or from outside the EU), please provide details.

Q8: Where your institution's modern language students take a year abroad as part of their degree programme (and irrespective of whether your institution levies a tuition fee for that year or not), does your institution provide them with financial support?

Q9: If you answered Yes, please provide details of the level/nature of the financial support provided, and of any conditions attached to that support.

Q10: Are the same tuition-fee and financial support arrangements in place for students in other subject areas (i.e. not specialist linguists) who undertake an optional year abroad?

Q11: If you answered No, please elaborate.

Q12: If your institution's modern language students spend their year abroad as a student at a university outside the *Erasmus+* area, are tuition fees payable to that host university?

Q13: If you answered Yes, who pays those tuition fees?

Q14: Please provide any further information you feel it would be useful for us to have to fully understand your institutional practice in respect of levying a tuition fee and providing financial support to students for the year abroad.