

15 January 2021

To Marie Knox, Welsh Government, Deputy Director of Brexit Transition

We, at the University Council of Modern Languages, are writing to you to express our concerns at the withdrawal of the UK from the Erasmus+ programme. We urge the Welsh government to consider seeking associate membership of the scheme. The First Minister has made it clear that people in Wales will be enormously disadvantaged by withdrawal from the Erasmus+ programme. In a debate on the 30th December 2020, he decried the 'cultural vandalism' of cutting people in Wales off from 'the largest international exchange programme in history, which people from Wales have done so much to shape and foster'. The First Minister noted how the new system will be English in focus with little regard for Wales – 'a scheme made in Westminster and administered in Whitehall, with all the responsibilities that this Senedd holds for further and higher education in Wales not simply side-lined but written out of the script altogether'.

The Erasmus+ programme offers Welsh students, trainees and organisations **unparalleled access to education, training, youth, and sports personal and professional development**. According to the European Commission's Factsheets on UK participation, from 2014-18 alone, 7,081 participants in 684 Welsh projects benefited from mobility in higher education, vocational education and training, school education, adult learning and youth for a total grant amount of € 40.4 million. Whilst we write to you from the perspective of Welsh Higher Education, the Factsheet makes clear that Erasmus+ funds educational and training projects across all education and youth sectors. Welsh Higher Education makes up just 57 of the 285 projects funded in in 2014-18, followed by Schools Education, Vocational Training and Education, Youth and finally Adult Education.

The Erasmus+ programme offers students, scholars, and educational professionals studying and working in Wales **highly valued global mobility opportunities with 190 countries, within and beyond the EU**. The outward-bound benefits of the programme are matched by the rich contribution of incoming Erasmus students to research and vitality on our campuses, not only in modern languages but also in science innovation and partnership. While this cultural and intellectual benefit may not be measurable in concrete terms, the contribution of Erasmus+ students to the overall Welsh economy is. This is estimated at £243m for the whole UK per annum by Universities UK International.

Whilst we have highlighted here national and institutional benefits, we would wish to focus on the **real difference the Erasmus+ scheme has made to individuals**. Personal testimonies on social media and in the UK press attest to the impact of Erasmus on the young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as Hashid Mohamed, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/erasmus-was-no-gap-year-lark-it-was-my-passport-to-the-world-w7lnbq85d>. It is this diversity and accessibility of funding across all sectors for young people from a range of backgrounds that must be sustained in future.

Should the UK government proceed to withdraw from membership of the Erasmus+ programme, we would **urge Welsh government colleagues to consider associate membership** and/or forms of sponsored participation as is likely for Higher Education students in Northern Ireland.

Finally, we would **urge the Welsh government to press the UK government to extend the scope and ambition of the Turing scheme** which is in preparation to replace the UK's participation in Erasmus+. We are concerned that the outline proposal, made available on the UK government website, will not offer the same or increased opportunities for study, and work abroad for Welsh young people. We are concerned on three fronts: firstly, *reciprocity* is not built into the current proposals. This will significantly inhibit UK sending institutions from maintaining or building global opportunities; mutual benefit is key to sustainable global mobility, such as fee waiver agreements. Secondly, the scheme does not appear to support *staff mobility* essential for building partnership and trust. Inter-institutional agreements are complex; take time to develop and mature, as well as seeding further opportunities. Thirdly, it is most concerning that the Turing scheme is being funded on an annual cycle. It is the *multi-annual funding*, over 7 years for Erasmus+, that allows for sustained collaboration and development. Commitment to long-term funding is required to build faith in the Turing scheme as a recognised UK programme, worthy of investment from our partners.

As an organisation that supports modern languages across Higher Education, we have extensive experience and deep belief and commitment to global mobility for young people in Wales. We urge Welsh government to work with us and the education and training sector as a community to retain Erasmus+ in Wales or provide a truly exceptional equivalent. We would be happy to meet with you or the Minister for Education and Skills and/or the First Minister to discuss and review.

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