

Session 1: chaired by Claire Gorrara

Professor Colin Riordan (Cardiff University): Q&A: Why the Turing Scheme and What Can it Deliver?

Main points:

- The Turing Scheme is the UK's own flexible student mobility scheme with global reach; the domestic alternative to Erasmus +, applicable to Europe and beyond, focused on students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- It provides greater opportunities than any other schemes,
- It enables the forging of new global agreements.
- The responsibility is on us to make the scheme as successful as possible, so the Treasury is persuaded of its value for money.
- Institutions need to support the scheme and help DfE show that Turing can deliver and that it is a success, so that the scheme can continue to develop.

Questions:

1. Turing is open to all subjects. We must therefore assume that any institutions will run a level playing field, and therefore cannot presume that institutions will allocate money to Modern Languages to cover current mobility activities. Does Turing mean that MLs may be left out in the cold?

Turing is for all students. Institutions are unlikely to downgrade Modern Languages students when residency abroad is a compulsory element in the degree. As a result of Brexit, there is now ample recognition of the real value of student mobility and, as a result, the scheme will be very supportive of ML schools and departments.

2. Will there be an emphasis on working not only with multilingual countries, but also the anglophone world? Might there be a premium on the Anglo-sphere?

There will not be a premium, though it is important to recognise that the scheme is not just about learning languages. Supporting students who go to anglophone countries does not equate a lack of support for students going to countries where other languages are spoken. Flexibility is a key element at the core of the scheme.

3. Should an increase in year abroad tuition fees be considered as a way to offset any eventual increased costs as a result of Erasmus+ withdrawal?

The hope is that there will continue to be no tuition fees as part of exchange programmes. Quite a lot of bilateral work will be entailed, and it will be up to universities to negotiate with partners to set up the programmes. Partners are already very willing to work to establish exchanges.

4. What is the long-term plan? Universities are already having to manage expectations about the year abroad for incoming students next year. Is there any sense that Turing is a long-term commitment?

Funding is available for one year initially; institutions need to make a strong case that Turing is essential by making full use of it, and also by providing feedback and suggestions for improvement. It is also essential to make the government understand that institutions need some reassurance regarding the availability of this scheme for the future, to include the YA in their planning.

5. What arrangements are there for evaluating Turing?

No information yet on evaluation but applications should highlight not only the scheme's value for money and its benefits to the economy, but also its softer benefits. This will probably be one of the key things in the overall evaluation of the scheme.

6. What should we make of Wales announcing they are setting up their own mobility scheme? Will this undermine Turing?

The government will be supporting both schemes to the greatest of their ability; it is also important to support Turing, for the sake of our institutions and of our students.

Turing is in development; it is not set in stone. We must use every opportunity to shape it through making a strong case to the government.

The new Welsh scheme will run from 2022 so student mobility in the coming year will be covered by Turing.

7. Until now institutions have received a "targeted contribution" equivalent to 25% of fees of last year's outgoing population (on top of 15% direct fees from students). Will that continue or has it been discontinued?

No news that it will be discontinued.

8. Where Erasmus+ funding has been held over for 2021-22, do universities even need to apply for Turing?

It is not compulsory if institutions can manage without Turing funding. Strategically, though, it would not be sensible to disregard Turing because of the message that that sends to the government (i.e., that Turing is not needed). It will be important to make a strong case to support the programme and give as many students as possible the opportunity to work and study abroad. The Turing scheme is very flexible so creative applications are very welcome; institutions do not need to feel that they must cover the same number of activities as were available within the Erasmus programme.

9. How central has Widening Participation been in discussions about Turing?

Historically, widening participation students have not always been able to access opportunities to spend periods abroad. The Turing scheme aims to help redress the balance; WP has been a very important part of discussions and this is another reason for embracing Turing.

10. We have been told that there cannot be any double-funding (e.g., by Erasmus and Turing), so how best should languages departments make a case for the demand for Turing next year? Some institutions are planning to apply for Turing for different activities - so leaving languages exchanges out in this round. But this would seem to go against the 'demand' argument.

If an institution has Erasmus funding, it would not be wise to apply for Turing to top up existing funding. The advice would be to use Turing for additional or complementary activities. There is certainly no problem with aligning different kinds of funding to support activities that are complementary.

11. Are there any suggestions of strategic UK collaborations with relevant partners?

The intention will certainly be to establish collaborations with partners like Instituto Cervantes, Goethe Institute, etc. in the longer term.

12. But will the non-bilateral nature of Turing not mean most EU students choose to go to Ireland (and get Erasmus funding), thus potentially threatening exchange partnerships in the UK?

It would be tactically impossible for Ireland to receive around 30,000 EU students. It is also worth remembering that Erasmus funding can support students going to non-EU countries.

13. Is there any governmental thinking about the expected balance between UG and PG mobility expected to be covered by Turing? In particular, is there more interest in mobility for PhD students?

Students at any level of study are eligible for support. The Turing scheme will respond to the needs that the sector expresses so it is worth developing ideas that involve PG students and putting in applications.

14. What is the top tip for Modern Languages Departments?

The top tip for Modern Languages departments is to be supportive and to generate public support for Turing. It has been a great achievement to have obtained governmental support for the scheme, as there was (and still is) a lot of scepticism. The more public support we can generate, the better the scheme will be.

Session 2: chaired by Jonathan Long

British Council (Sion Jones) and Department for Education (Martin Cunliffe): Applying to the Turing Scheme: Practical Guidance

Questions:

1. Would it be fair to assume that applying for both Erasmus and Turing for different activities would be the most sensible thing to do in case we are not successful with the Turing application?

Erasmus funding should continue to be used. Turing can be used to match the length of an activity or for activities that Erasmus will not be funding.

2. Can we therefore bid for funding to support students going to e.g., Latin America and Russia? Once Erasmus funding runs out in '23, is this something that Turing is likely to continue to support?

Turing has no geographical restrictions. The scheme is global and more permissive than Erasmus. There is a great amount of freedom to prepare the project you wish for; there is no list of countries or destinations.

The first year of Turing will be a platform to build on, to set out the scheme, to see what is possible. It will allow us to understand if there need to be further considerations.

3. Erasmus is obviously underpinned by bilateral agreements between universities. Given the short notice, could a student be funded via Turing to study in e.g., Morocco or Argentina without a formal agreement with their home university?

The scheme is very flexible with regards to agreements. It will be up to the institutions to express their needs and explain whether or not they are putting agreements or partnerships in place (and, if so, what they might look like).

4. There are fewer restrictions under Turing on geography, PG as well as UG, and on who applies (HEIs, FEIs, Schools). But there are greater restrictions on money! If we follow Prof. Riordan's 'Go for it!' approach, isn't there a danger of individual institutions 'over-asking' and having their bid this year turned down?

No one will be penalised for expressing an ambitious programme in the application! The reason why the scheme has not got caps is to encourage participation and innovation; institutions have a chance to express their needs and express what they can do with Turing funding.

5. My concern is around WP. If funding is a mechanism for encouraging widening participation, how can we flag this to students when there is no guarantee that our bid will be successful? There is an issue about managing student expectations.

It is a matter of being realistic. Funding is not guaranteed; applications need to be strong, as this is a genuinely competitive scheme. Turing is a flexible scheme for everyone across the UK; there is no demarcation by nation and no targets to hit.

6. Related to aims and objectives of projects, is the compulsory nature of modern languages study/work abroad likely to be a factor in assessing application?

Due to the fact that the year abroad is a compulsory part of a Modern Languages degree, MFL projects are expected to be strong projects as there is an obviously demonstrable need. Applications should make very clear the connection between the compulsory nature of the year abroad and the value and importance for the students to undertake such activity. This can be an advantage over other applications.

7. What are the provisions in Turing to replace the staff mobility that was covered by Erasmus?

As this is the first year of Turing, the emphasis has been on student mobility. This does not mean that the scheme will not include staff mobility in the future, but it depends on how the scheme develops in the near future. It also depends on the type of projects that we see on applications and whether good arguments are made towards proposals that may include staff mobility. The fight is not with us but with Treasury, so we need to be given strong evidence to get what is required.

8. Will the competitive nature of the scheme not widen already existing inequalities in the HE sector? Certain universities will be better-placed to draft stronger applications simply because they have more resources they can devote to this.

There is clear understanding of the very short period of time that institutions have to prepare the application this year. The advice is for providers to work to their strengths and look at the criteria. Every provider should be able to find their own particular strength and narrative. Everyone should be able to emphasise what they bring to the scheme and what their project can do.

9. Are you expecting to see some element of means-testing of students in order to address the WP aspects of the scheme? Or is WP to be understood in less obviously financial terms?

The scheme would be looking at the extent to which the programme would make contact with target groups - how people are targeting WP and what provisions are being put in place. It would be up to HE institutions to demonstrate how they would like to evaluate that.

10. Will work placements abroad, both paid and unpaid, be covered under Turing? There was a concern raised in the last Year Abroad UCML meeting over whether low-paid internships and work placements, for which students currently receive E+ funding, would be covered.

Turing supports work and study and accepts internships on any basis (paid or unpaid); furthermore, it is interested in the outcome for that particular individual i.e., how the funding ties in to help them further their professional development.

11. Post-Brexit visa regulations are having the opposite effect of WP for international opportunities. Can DfE advocate with other departments that the UK Government should go back to negotiate some more mutually beneficial arrangements to facilitate the process for (in- and outbound) students?

If the student meets the WP criteria, the scheme will cover the costs of passports, visas, etc.