

# **Youth Mobility Engagement Session Notes (both groups)**

## **Access to Mobility Opportunities**

Participants highlighted difficulties in accessing mobility opportunities due to visa costs, lack of information, loss of EU networks, and economic burdens. The COVID-19 pandemic cut mobility opportunities short in 2020, but for students travelling to the EU, these were comparatively much simpler processes given freedom of movement still applied during this time. Some participants had experience of accessing mobility opportunities before EU exit and this was described as seamless and uncomplex. Participants on exchanges before EU exit could start studying or working without any bureaucracy relating to their right to live, work, or study in the EU.

Participants raised that universities and organisations providing internships or apprenticeships in the EU need to provide better guidance and support for students seeking mobility opportunities in the EU and further afield. There was a consensus view among participants that universities can readily suggest or advertise mobility opportunities but that advice and support for accessing and funding these is limited, with faculty or support staff being quite unresponsive, and students feeling they were left to navigate the process themselves.

## **Reasons for Considering International Exchange**

Participants considered international exchanges for various reasons, including language study, cultural experiences, academic programs, and training opportunities. Exchanges were seen as valuable for building academic networks, gaining cultural insights and immersion, including new ideas and perspectives, making friends and contacts, and enhancing post-education employment prospects.

## **Impact of EU Exit on Preferred Destinations**

EU exit has influenced participants' preferred destinations for international exchange. Participants mentioned issues faced by friends studying in other EU countries, such as Spain and Italy, where the visa process was more complicated. Some students now consider non-EU countries due to visa complications and the perceived difficulty of accessing EU opportunities. The Scholar Programme (in the US) was considered a better scheme than Saltire in terms of opportunities in finding an internship abroad. A participant indicated that it is also very much dependent on where you are seeking an exchange with some countries' policies being favourable to non-nationals obtaining right to work and employment, while others are not. The ability to work while on an international exchange and fund oneself was deemed an important factor in preferred exchange destinations.

Universities have more knowledge and experience when it comes to helping and advising students secure visas and opportunities in destinations such as Australia and New Zealand, compared to their relative inexperience advising students to

secure visas and placements in EU Member States following EU exit. Even small details could disrupt the process – e.g. the wrong stamp on a form or not having the right health insurance – and could end up costing time and money.

The visa process for the UK was noted as being relatively straightforward and efficient, with most procedures being conducted online, but expensive. Participants provided personal experiences and anecdotes from friends that the experience of international students coming to the UK is good but perhaps more guidance could be provided and employment (for those who needed to work and study) could be an issue.

Participants appreciated the ease of obtaining visas in advance. Despite the streamlined process, the cost of visas and healthcare surcharges for longer term exchanges was noted as expensive and potentially burdensome or prohibitively expensive to students from widening access backgrounds. Costs of visas were variable according to circumstances – with £200, £80 and £130 being cited.

### **Improving Access to EU Exchange Opportunities**

Participants suggested that improving access to EU exchange opportunities requires better communication and support from universities and organisations. There is a need for more transparent and accessible information about available programs and funding. It was noted that not all universities were choosing to run an exchange scheme. In terms of feedback and learning from returning students, the opportunities seemed limited, with those about to go getting more information from returning students than the university itself.

It was felt that some universities in the EU did not offer very much by way of support e.g. emails weren't replied to and in one case a course had been cancelled by the time of the visiting student's arrival – and that you were left to figure out how things worked for yourself. Trying to navigate a new university and a new culture, particularly if you might have expected more support, could be stressful. It was thought that the university here should be aware of how the system in a university in France, for example, works and be able to provide support beforehand. How marking works differently, for example, was not explained but it was suggested that perhaps the experience was more about integration in another culture than academic performance.

Participants expressed a view that many exchanges are only possible if you are able to self-fund. Many opportunities look attractive for employment skills and exposure to new sectors or industry but are advertised as unpaid internships or shadowing opportunities.

Participants expressed a view that this will change the demographic of students going on mobility exchanges. Participants indicated universities' knowledge on funding for these opportunities is variable and is often dependent on alumni or charitable support.

Participants suggested that short term visits to the EU are more manageable without the need for visas, but that funding for these opportunities is limited. It was

considered that it depends on whether the organisations hosting the opportunities can release money to conduct placements. Placements organised through the Council of Europe, of which the UK is a member, were regarded as straightforward for organising and securing funding. EU programmes were regarded as more difficult.

### **Youth Mobility Schemes and Programmes**

There was disappointment over the lack of continued association to Erasmus+ and participants suggested the need for ongoing conversations and negotiations to establish such a scheme.

The importance of youth mobility in establishing cultural links and shared understandings between countries was emphasized. Participants suggested there would be tangible benefits of mobility programs for small countries such as Scotland and Wales. The value of youth partnerships across Europe and the benefits of the co-partnership model were underlined. The ambassadorial role for your university/city/country that you took on while studying abroad was highlighted.