

# Colleges Scotland - Turing Scheme Update for Education, Children and Young People Committee – May 2023

## Introduction

Colleges Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide the Education, Children and Young People Committee with an update on the latest progress relating to the college sector and experiences and engagement with the Turing Scheme in providing opportunities for learning and teaching for learners overseas.

For the Committee's awareness, we have also provided our views as previously submitted to the Department for Education at the UK Government regarding the Turing Scheme policy next steps in June 2021 (see Appendix 1).

## Key Points

### Transparency and Availability of Funding and Process

Responses received from the college sector to date indicated that there is a lack of transparency when applying for funding as there is no way to establish what funding could potentially be available before going through the entire process. Moreover, the funding rates, which were set pre-COVID, do not reflect the current cost-of-living crisis and are therefore dissuading some learners from applying.

Colleges have challenges concerning hidden costs which are incurred due to the inefficiencies surrounding the mobility of staff. Staff are unable to be released for a two-week period to travel with students, this results in duplication of travel costs as one staff member has to replace the other for the remainder of the trip.

Feedback is also indicating that the number of applications to travel abroad is down compared to previous years, this is in part due to the current difficult financial climate but can also be attributed to the lack of transparency surrounding Turing funding.

Compounding the current financial challenges, feedback also suggests that the application process is too complex and that more support is needed for completing of the form itself. This was found to be a common response from learners and institutions. Furthermore, change requests when submitted by learners regarding their learning destinations, that the college are required to complete, are too long and are burdensome.

### Access for Disadvantaged Learners

It is welcomed that there is an emphasis being placed on those from disadvantaged backgrounds, however, there needs to be a reassessment of the access to partial funding. The lack of partial funding is a drawback when compared to the original Erasmus programme. Partial funding is especially impactful for disadvantaged students as there is an incentive knowing that there will be at least a certain amount of funding available.

## **Administrative Areas for Improvement**

Responses to date indicate that there is a lack of templates to draw on for inter-institutional agreements which existed under Erasmus, this results in institutions finding it difficult to create a dialogue between each other concerning Turing students.

The difficulties outlined above are detrimental to the learner. A significant issue is the inability for students to go on placements longer than the 28-day limit will allow – this is in stark contrast to the Erasmus+ scheme which allowed for a much longer period. A review of these time frames is needed, as well as consideration given to the need for flexibilities that would let the student have more autonomy over their length of stay to maximise the benefits of the scheme.

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May 2023

# Appendix 1

## Turing Scheme Policy Next Steps – Colleges Scotland Comment – July 2021

### Introduction

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests and ensuring that colleges are at the heart of a world class education sector that is recognised, valued and available to all. Colleges Scotland, as the membership body, represents all 26 colleges in Scotland, which deliver both further education and around 24% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

Historically, colleges have engaged to a strong extent with the Erasmus+ scheme, with staff and students from Scottish colleges having the opportunity to participate and to learn in locations across Europe, including Ireland, Spain, Italy, France and Malta. Colleges across Scotland also hosted European students and staff through reciprocal agreements of that scheme.

### Key Points

**What are your views on the scope of the Turing Scheme and are there any changes you would recommend we consider for future years of the scheme? What do you consider to be the strengths of the scheme and where are there opportunities to iterate?**

#### Students

Looking at the scope of the Turing Scheme we would highlight the differences in the scope of the funding available to students, as compared to the financial support package that was available through the Erasmus+ scheme prior to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union in January 2020.

As it stands the living cost support is lower for students than was the case through Erasmus+, with that scheme providing up to £630 as opposed to £490 being provided by the Turing scheme. With the Turing Scheme there is no travel support, except for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (was previously up to £1315 under Erasmus+), and there is no tuition fee support/waiver compared to free tuition under Erasmus+ previously.

These differences in funding will have a significant impact on the ability of students from Scotland's colleges – often residing in areas of significant multiple deprivation – to access the opportunities to study abroad envisaged through the Turing Scheme, as colleges will not be in a position to supplement funding to top-up the insufficient levels provided by the Turing Scheme. It is those students, who have the most significantly reduced opportunities at present, who would benefit most from participation in study abroad. This impact could be further heightened by the prospect of more international destinations and increased travel costs.

On that basis, looking ahead to future years of the scheme, we would strongly recommend that the funding packages in place for students are enhanced, to provide increased opportunities to college students in Scotland that will enable them to experience the benefits of studying abroad via the Turing Scheme.

## **Staff**

Our current understanding is that the Turing Scheme, at the present time, does not provide for placement funding for members of staff and is currently for students only; Erasmus+ provided colleges in Scotland with the opportunity to gain funding that enabled staff to take up placements with institutions in Europe, supporting knowledge exchange and technical training.

This absence of funding will have a direct impact on the ability of Scotland's colleges to access resources, such as shareable expertise and high standards of vocational training, meaning students across Scotland may be placed at a disadvantage against their European counterparts.

## **Institutional Partnerships and Collaborative Projects**

It is our understanding that, formerly, where Erasmus+ funding was available to support institutional partnerships and collaborative projects, this will also be unavailable through the Turing Scheme. Colleges in Scotland were previously able to partner with institutions across Europe to take forward new ideas or new resources and these opportunities, currently, are no longer available as it stands.

Taking these factors into account we would also advise that, in terms of changes for future years of the Scheme, funding should be made available to support partnership approaches for institutions, as well as to support corresponding staff placements, to support that knowledge exchange activity and provide benefit to colleges across Scotland.

## **Looking at the strategic objectives (described as 'policy principles' in Programme Guidance) of the scheme (i.e. Global Britain, Levelling up, Developing key skills, Value for UK taxpayers), what are your reflections on how the scheme works to achieve these objectives?**

In terms of how well the Turing Scheme is working to achieve the strategic objectives identified above, there is an immediate caveat in our response in that we would need to see a baseline of how the Turing Scheme has actually delivered for students, staff and institutions in Scotland, following the conclusion of the first year.

In the first instance it would be helpful to identify how the scheme will deliver against the historical benefits of Erasmus+ and whether it will maintain those links and opportunities as previously available. Without such evidence it would be difficult to ascertain how well the Scheme is contributing to the delivery of the strategic objectives identified above and whether it is achieving expectations.

Given our concerns as expressed above in relation to inclusivity and the cost challenges that are placed upon students, we would question how well the Scheme in its current iteration will level up in terms of delivering equal opportunities for students regardless of their social background.

In terms of delivering against the objective of 'Developing key skills' we would, again, highlight the need to see the finalised evidence of year one of the Scheme to identify the added value and future potential it may have delivered.

Looking more closely at the 'Value for UK taxpayers' we would suggest that, unless the funding package is enhanced to match the provision to students as was available through Erasmus+ – whilst also facilitating opportunities for staff and institutional partnership – that it may be difficult to evidence the benefits of the Scheme for institutions and wider economies. Going forward, in order to deliver the equivalent value as Erasmus+ did, in the form of knowledge exchange and shared learning, with greater value for taxpayers in the process, the funding and wider resourcing available for stakeholders through the Turing Scheme should be improved.

## **Conclusion**

Colleges across Scotland have developed strong working relationships with EU partners through

the Erasmus+ scheme, benefiting students, staff and communities in doing so. To support both the social and economic recovery from Covid-19 those relationships should be maintained as much as possible through the Turing Scheme.

We believe that the Turing Scheme has the potential to deliver for students but in order to truly maximise its role there must be an enhanced level of resource allocated to allow students, staff and institutions to benefit as they did through Erasmus+; the intentions for global impact through the international dimension of the Turing Scheme can then be realised.

We have welcomed the opportunity to provide comment on the questions as outlined and to offer our views on where we believe the Turing Scheme can be enhanced, to enable it to support the work of the college sector in Scotland moving forward. We would suggest that a similar consultation exercise is carried out after the first year of the Turing Scheme, so that the evidence can be analysed to inform next steps for the Scheme.

As the Department for Education takes this activity forward, we look forward to continued engagement and would welcome the opportunity to participate in ongoing discussions in line with developments relating to the Turing Scheme; this will ensure the voice of the college sector in Scotland provides valuable input to the future evolution of the Scheme.

Colleges Scotland  
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