

Cross-Party Group on Colleges and Universities

Thursday 12 February 2026 1pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP

Michael Marra MSP

Invited guests

1. Professor Rachel Sandison, Deputy Vice-Principal (External Engagement), University of Glasgow. Scottish Government International Education Envoy and Vice Lead Member for International for Universities Scotland.
2. Dugaid Craig, Head of External Funding and International Activity at New College Lanarkshire.
3. Justine Pédussel, President, University of Stirling Students' Union.
4. Adam Lowe, President, Edinburgh College Students' Association.

Non-MSP Group Members

Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland
Bronagh Masterson, University of St Andrews
Chase Greenfield, Sparqs
Christopher Kennedy, Unite the Union
Claire McPherson, Universities Scotland
Gareth Miles, University of St Andrews
Garry Ross, EIS
Grant Hill, University of Dundee
Keith Robson, Open University in Scotland
Lauren Wards, Universities Scotland
Lesley Jackson, Universities Scotland
Martin Mills, University of Aberdeen
Matthew Maclver
Niall McGeechan, NUS Scotland
Philip Bale, University of Aberdeen
Rachel Currie, NUS Scotland
Stuart Tooley, University of Edinburgh

Apologies

Audrey Nicoll MSP

Dr Paul Little, City of Glasgow College

Jane Scott, Queen Margaret University

Judith McClure

Lindsey Alexander, University of St Andrews

Professor John Blicharski, University of Dundee

Sarah Collins, EIS

Susannah Lane, Universities Scotland

William Hardie, Robert Gordon University

Welcome and Introduction

Ms Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting in the Scottish Parliament, and final meeting of the CPG and introduced the topic of the meeting, association to Erasmus. Ms Smith then went on to share her reflections as a member and Convener of the CPG during her time in Parliament.

Presentations

Professor Rachel Sandison, Deputy Vice-Principal (External Engagement), University of Glasgow. Scottish Government International Education Envoy and Vice Lead Member for International for Universities Scotland.

- Professor Sandison outlined the importance of the Erasmus programme for engaging and expanding European partnerships and the benefit the programme has for students who are involved.
- She discussed the preparations universities must make ahead of reassociation such as producing Erasmus charters by 24 March 2026.
- Professor Sandison then went on to say we need to understand challenges ahead of reassociation including bureaucracy around the programme and student visas.
- She highlighted that there must be an increase in budget for Erasmus, currently sitting at £41 billion, but £60 billion is what is needed.

Dugaid Craig, Head of External Funding and International Activity at New College Lanarkshire.

- Mr Craig highlighted the importance of European partnerships within the college sector and the need to prepare now for association to Erasmus, with all aspects being welcomed, aspects which Turing and SEEP did not have, but hopes SEEP continues.
- He stressed that exchanges must happen for inward and outward mobility to ensure the success of the programme.

- Mr Craig then said cost of living grants must be increased to allow students to apply for these mobility programmes, as DfE cut the grant which in turn has led to a reduced number of student applications for Turing.
- He continued by saying there is a significant need for an efficient and knowledgeable national agency that is responsive.

Justine Pédussel, President, University of Stirling Students' Union.

- Ms Pédussel highlighted the challenges not having Erasmus has had on students, with an increased cost in going abroad and students missing out on exchange opportunities.
- She continued by stating Brexit has added to the cost of a student visa, can change year on year which has put students off going abroad. Hindering student experience as students with an international experience do better academically and in employment.
- She outlined the benefit on students of having Erasmus will be great with the most disadvantaged being able to study abroad. Must make sure it is accessible to all.

Adam Lowe, President, Edinburgh College Students' Association.

- Mr Lowe discussed the significance of Erasmus to colleges, with colleges having a higher number of students from less privileged backgrounds who are then able to study abroad.
- He went on to say that there must be awareness about the programme to students and be consistent year on year for students and student support for students to plan their applications.

Question and Answer

Liz Smith MSP

- The UK left the Erasmus programme many years ago, how do we build institutional memory back and what needs to be produced to ensure effective reassociation?

Professor Rachel Sandison

- Must formalise reassociation with an institutional Erasmus charter which states criteria for applications. Need to look at this with utmost importance and haste.

Dugaid Craig

- Some colleges need an Erasmus charter, but not all due to the EU definition of colleges. This will produce guidelines, criteria and allow for successful reassociation.

Liz Smith MSP

- Erasmus allows for increased employment among students, is that the primary reason many apply? Does it help with increased language skills?

Adam Lowe

- I think many do as they can use their international experience for employment. Broadens horizons and produces different ideas for industry development. Learn different ways of working.

Justine Pédussel

- Many universities, including Stirling, have made it compulsory for students studying a language to go and study in a country that has the native language of what they are studying, does benefit them.

Lauren Wards, Universities Scotland

- How does international students coming to Scotland benefit the learning of students studying here?

Adam Lowe

- Can creativity swap and learn other methods of learning. Can understand learning from other countries to benefit ourselves and our learning.

Justine Pédussel

- Courses with higher enrolments of international students have greater cultural awareness and the students can learn different ways of learning and different cultures.

Conclusion

Ms Smith closed the meeting by thanking the speakers for their contribution and insightful questions from members.