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Executive Summary

We write as key stakeholders in the higher education sector to express our concern at the potential impact of higher fees on study abroad. Studying abroad provides a number of lifelong benefits to UK students and is one of the key components of UK universities' internationalisation strategies. We feel that the impact of higher fees on studying abroad should be considered carefully in light of the current situation and within the wider context of student financial support. We are looking for concrete decisions to be made that will protect study abroad and provide the necessary financial support for students in order to ensure that the UK can produce the high-calibre graduates who are able to compete successfully in a global market.

Background

UK student mobility is becoming increasingly important in institutional and UK internationalisation plans. Study abroad (including work placements abroad) is usually undertaken for a semester or academic year as part of a 3 or 4-year degree programme, includes a wide range of subject areas and encompasses opportunities across the globe.

It is estimated that approximately 15,000 UK students spend a period overseas as part of their studies, with approximately 6200 participants in receipt of an Erasmus tuition waiver in 08/09.¹ In order to encourage future students to go abroad in similar or greater numbers, consideration needs to be given to the impact of higher fees on mobility to ensure that UK students are incentivised to take part whilst institutions are able to adequately resource the activity.

There are a variety of benefits both for students, for HE institutions and for the UK associated with students spending a portion of their academic studies abroad.

Benefits

- Students who study abroad are often more employable and have a competitive advantage when entering a globalised workplace²
- Research indicates that students who study abroad have improved degree outcomes compared with their peers³
- Provision of study abroad opportunities acts as a recruitment tool domestically for UK universities, by adding value to existing programmes and providing a way for institutions to

¹ UK Student Mobility: A New Update in Figures from 2004-05 to 2008-09, Carbonell, J.A. 2010

²Global Horizons and the Role of Employers, CIHE, 2008. "Graduates who have international experience are highly employable because they have demonstrated that they have drive, resilience and inter-cultural sensitivities as well as language skills. They are a self-selecting elite. If UK graduates are not to be disadvantaged against their internationally more mobile peers, they must appreciate how the recruitment bar has been raised. Their universities must encourage them to gain overseas study experience and facilitate this through increasing the number of strategic partnerships with overseas universities".

³ The Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative, 2010

differentiate their courses to UK students. Study abroad students also play a role in international recruitment, representing their institutions while abroad

- Study abroad often underpins broader institutional international partnerships and collaborations
- Study abroad enhances individual students' and graduates' linguistic and intercultural competencies, which are essential to the UK's economic competitiveness and national security
- Study abroad students contribute to the UK's public diplomacy agenda, acting as ambassadors for the nation while abroad. They also form long-standing personal and professional links to enhance international cooperation between nations and businesses, as well as developing an understanding of global citizenship

Current situation

- UK student outward mobility has always lagged behind other peer countries. This is evident in statistics reported by European countries in the Erasmus scheme but is likely to be the case beyond Europe, notably compared to the USA and Australia⁴
- Employers have expressed the view that British students lack key competencies, including those often acquired when spending a period abroad, when entering the workplace⁵
- Fewer students are graduating with the ability to speak a second language or to function easily in an intercultural environment⁶
- Many students from less-well off backgrounds struggle to cover the additional costs associated with studying abroad
- Some students are choosing funded destinations (e.g. Erasmus in Europe) based on affordability rather than academic suitability
- Study abroad is becoming more prominent in a number of UK universities' internationalisation plans

The potential impact of higher fees

- Optional and compulsory 4 year programmes may become less popular, given the increased cost from a maximum of £13,160 in tuition fees in 2010/11 for a four-year course to a maximum of £31,500 from 2012
- There is a risk of closure of area studies and language degree programmes
- Participation may widen in universities, but will likely not for study abroad - spending a period abroad will increasingly become an activity accessible to only those students who feel comfortable taking out larger loans (either due to family support or anticipated earnings) and those students with family support to cover additional costs of studying abroad (unless top-up loans become available)
- Students spending a period abroad will expect a greater level of service and a clearer articulation by home institutions of value for money and skills acquisition
- The UK government has clearly stated its aim to increase the number of UK students spending time abroad as part of their degree, but unless the current funding structures are maintained, this goal will not be realised, and numbers are likely to decline⁷

Possible scenarios

- Decreased international mobility would have a negative effect on the skill set of the UK workforce⁸

⁴ The future of UK student mobility – a Europe Unit analysis, 2008

⁵ Chartered Management Institute 2011 "Nine out of ten managers feel that young people often need training in basic skills when they enter the world of work, and while communications skills are seen as the most important skills for young people when they start work, current levels are viewed as poor or very poor by 51 per cent."

⁶ Review of Modern Foreign Languages Provision in Higher Education in England, 2009

⁷ The Telegraph, August 2010, David Willetts – "One of my aims is to try to encourage our undergraduates and postgraduates to study abroad . . . it would enrich the outlook of British students and make them more employable."

⁸ International Mobility Survey 2010, HEFCE, King and Findlay "The market for skills and talents is global, and more opportunities need to be provided for young people in the UK to gain international experience through work and study placements in other countries. Not only does this build cultural fluency,

- UK graduates will become less employable when compared with other nationality groups who have higher rates of mobility and linguistic competence
- The UK will be unlikely to meet the 2009 Leuven Communiqué target stating that 20% of graduating students in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad by 2020
- A continued decline in graduates with language and intercultural skills
- A decline in outward mobility leading to a decline in the number of incoming exchange students who help to diversify the UK campuses and who may return to the UK for full degree postgraduate study
- A decline in partnerships that have been established to support mobility including those developed as part of PMI2 and EU initiatives
- Increased student expectations resulting in the need for a more professionalised and adequately resourced study abroad sector

We urge the government to do the following:

- Demonstrate support for an activity that helps produce internationalised, culturally aware and ultimately more employable UK graduates
- Take steps to ensure that opportunities to study and work abroad remain attractive to and are affordable for all eligible participants
- Continue fee compensation to UK institutions for students spending an Erasmus year abroad as a recognised part of their programme and ensure that the amount of compensation takes into account the higher fee structure
- Extend fee compensation and subsidies to incentivise mobility beyond Europe
- Ensure that loans will cover the additional costs of studying abroad as part of a UK degree
- Retain travel bursaries available to UK students who need additional support for airfare, insurance, etc. beyond their current loans and bursaries
- Note how other countries have incentivised international mobility and made it more affordable⁹
- Ensure that the continuation of the Erasmus tuition fee waiver for students entering university in the 2011 and 2012 cohorts is undertaken by July 31 2011
- Indicate whether legislation limiting institutions to charging a maximum of 50% for a year overseas will remain in place by July 31 2011
- Confirm the continuation of government funding for the Language Assistantships scheme by July 31 2011

Signed by:

Angela Turton/Elizabeth Harris - Chair/ Vice-Chair, British Universities Transatlantic Exchange Association

Professor Martin Halliwell - Chair, British Association for American Studies

Dr Steve Hewitt - President, British Association of Canadian Studies

Professor James Coleman - Chair, University Council of Modern Languages

Professor Michael Kelly - Director, Subject Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies

the ability to work in differing environments, but more importantly it will allow the UK to develop a workforce that can drive forward our knowledge economy.”

⁹ In the USA *Gilman scholarship for low-income students* and *Boren scholarships for language and area studies* deemed critical for US national security; in Australia the *OS-Help loan scheme* to assist eligible undergraduate students to undertake some of their course of study overseas which can be used to for expenses such as airfares, accommodation, and other travel or study expenses. Also in Australia DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Work Place Relations) funding supports the *Endeavour* and *UMAP* schemes which allow Universities to bid for scholarship funding to promote specific destinations

Professor Mary Bryden - President, Association of University Professors and Heads of French
Professor Frank Finlay - President, Association for German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland
Dr Peter Howarth - Chair, Association of University Language Centres (UK and Ireland)
Professor Philip Davies - Director, Eccles Centre at the British Library
Professor Susan Harrow - President, Society for French Studies
Professor Richard G. Whitman - Chair, University Association for Contemporary European Studies
Professor Stephen Hutchings - Head, British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies
Professor Philip Swanson - Head, Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
Dr Susan Hodgett - Chair, UK Council for Area Studies Associations
Dr Niamh Thornton - Head, Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies
Annette Strauss - Chair, the Association of UK Higher Education European Officers
Penny Egan - Executive Director, US-UK Fulbright Commission

Supported by:

Professor Colin Riordan, Vice-Chancellor, University of Essex and Chair of the International and European Policy Network of Universities UK

"All the evidence shows that international student mobility, where students spend a period of time studying, working, or volunteering abroad, confers an immense advantage.

Experience of another country improves student achievement, increases the chances of high-level employment and accelerates the process of intellectual and personal maturity so essential to a university education. Students who have spent time abroad are more confident and independent, and often acquire linguistic and intercultural skills that cannot easily be developed in any other way. This document clearly sets out the issues surrounding international student mobility under the new funding regime and I am delighted to offer it my full support".

Simon Williams, Director, Erasmus National Agency, British Council

"The British Council sees support for international student mobility as a very important element of its work in cultural relations. The benefits of a period of mobility, in terms of students' academic and personal development, are significant. They bring with them enhanced employability for students and enrichment of universities' international dimension, and thus make a substantial contribution to the development and growth of the UK and its economy. The Council would stress the importance of encouraging more UK students to undertake a period of study abroad, not only as of direct benefit to students, UK institutions and the UK economy, but also as making a valuable and lasting contribution to our objective to improve understanding between the UK and other countries. We offer our full support to this paper and its review of the issues regarding international student mobility."