

## **Parliamentary Briefing – Erasmus+**

### **1. Introduction**

Colleges Scotland is the collective voice for the college sector in Scotland, representing its interests with the aim 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 28% of the provision of all higher education in Scotland.

Ahead of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Relations Committee's debate on Erasmus+ scheduled for Wednesday 16 May 2018, Colleges Scotland wishes to provide you with key points pertinent to the college sector.

### **2. Broad Implications of Brexit for the College Sector**

Colleges in Scotland have a history of attracting staff and students from around the world and leading on key overseas projects, and we want to maintain this work and relationships with our European partners at all levels. It is important to ensure that opportunities and funds are available to continue to allow the college sector to work internationally, including attracting students and staff. The impact of Brexit is already being felt with anecdotal evidence suggesting that invitations to participate in multi-country European projects are reducing.

Since the UK has been part of the EU for over forty years, the relationships and impacts are both deep and extensive, therefore considerable work will be required to ensure the unpicking of these relationships is done in the most thorough and sensitive way. It is also important that any potential financial impacts on the college sector as a result of Brexit such as the loss of significant European funding are carefully considered and mitigated to ensure the college sector is not adversely affected and can continue to provide high quality and effective learning opportunities, in the inclusive manner for which colleges are renowned.

The key areas of concern that the sector has in relation to Brexit are around the uncertainty in relation to:

- Funding
- Students
- Staff
- Non-financial benefits e.g. cultural exchange programmes.

Colleges Scotland is engaging with the UK and Scottish Governments on behalf of the sector and is seeking positive solutions to deal with the repercussions of the UK withdrawing from the EU, including in areas of funding as well as training and educational programmes like Erasmus+.

### **3. European Exchange Programmes**

Colleges Scotland considers programmes such as Erasmus+ to be extremely beneficial and it would be a considerable loss if some equivalent arrangements are not introduced as the UK leaves the EU.

The opportunity to participate in training, educational, and exchange programmes within Europe provides a range of positive benefits for those staff and students – it enriches their learning experience, enhances their employability, and promotes a greater understanding and respect of different people and cultures. It is a great chance to experience life and learn in another country, particularly for those people who may not otherwise have the opportunity to travel outside their local community.

Around 1,600 Scots go abroad to European countries with Erasmus+ every year and the number of students taking up opportunities for outward mobility through Erasmus+ has doubled over the last seven years.

Consideration should be given to whether any negotiated settlement would allow continued participation in programmes like Erasmus+ for our staff and students to be able to study abroad, and to facilitate EU staff and students to continue to study in the UK. Erasmus+ provides opportunities for participants to undertake exchanges around volunteering, sport and work placement. This would reinforce inequality and remove these transformational social and cultural experiences for future generations. For the UK or Scotland to be a programme country, they have to be part of the European Economic Area or the European Free Trade Association.

Alternatively, a replacement structure should be set up to allow the benefits of exchange programmes to continue to be available to Scottish students and staff. It should be noted that Scotland's colleges serve learners from the most deprived circumstances, for whom such provision made available through the education setting may be their only opportunity for travel outside of the UK.

#### **4. Conclusion**

We are extremely keen for Erasmus+ to continue and want to see any negotiated settlement allow continued participation in programmes like Erasmus+ for our staff and students to be able to study, train and volunteer abroad and also to facilitate EU staff and students' ability to continue studying in the UK.

Colleges Scotland  
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