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**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT  
MOBILITY WITHIN EUROPE:  
RESPONDING TO NATIONAL,  
REGIONAL AND GLOBAL  
CHALLENGES**

**ONLINE EVENT  
WORKSHOP PROGRAMME**

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1-2 July 2021

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## INTRODUCTION

In many European nations, governments have placed considerable importance on processes of internationalisation within the higher education sector and, in particular, on further enhancing international student mobility (ISM).

Attracting inward mobility (through both 'whole degree' as well as short-term or 'credit' mobility) is seen as an effective means of: developing more diverse campuses, furthering the inter-cultural experiences and skills of 'home' students; bolstering the financial position of higher education institutions (HEIs) through the fees paid by incoming students; and exerting 'soft power' when graduates return home.

Indeed, challenging targets have been set in the UK and elsewhere to increase the number of incoming students. Outward mobility has also increasingly come to be prioritised (primarily through credit mobility) as a means of enhancing the inter-cultural skills of students (and thus, it is assumed, their employability).

Such governmental objectives have tended to be taken up enthusiastically by individual HEIs, many of which have developed their own mobility schemes in addition to making use of established schemes such as Erasmus.

Nevertheless, at the present moment, ISM within Europe faces a number of important challenges associated with:

- the changing political context – related to, for example: Brexit; the growing significance of China as an increasingly popular destination for mobile students; and the emergence of various 'regional hubs' which offer a cheaper international alternative than Europe to prospective students;
- increasing awareness of the environmental costs of physical mobility and the responsibility of HEIs with respect to climate change, alongside the impact of global health concerns, brought into sharp relief by the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- the socio-economic characteristics of mobile students – despite some initiatives to widen participation, those who move remain more likely to be from socially privileged families and, where opportunities have been opened up more broadly, they have tended to become stratified, with those from lower income families clustered in lower quality schemes.

This seminar will engage directly with these challenges.

# PROGRAMME

## DAY 1 – THURSDAY 1ST JULY

(UK TIME)

12:30 - 12:35

Introduction and welcome— Prof Rachel Brooks

12:35 – 13.05

Keynote talk: Robin Shields, University of Bristol, UK  
*European mobility as a public good for sustainable societies*

13.10 – 14.10

### Session 1: Geo-political challenges

Vassiliki Papatsiba and Alex Hetherington, University of Sheffield  
*Institutional representations of European students in UK higher education in response to Brexit*

Betul Bulut Sahin, Emrah Emrah Söylemez and Şavas Zafer Şahin, Middle East Technical University, Turkey  
*A network analysis of the geopolitical structure of Erasmus+ student mobility in European Higher Education Area*

Tamsin Hinton-Smith, Emily Danvers, Fawzia Haeri Mazanderani and Rebecca Webb, University of Sussex, UK  
*International doctoral students' writing practices: mobility, transitions and translations across writing and knowing*

14.10 – 14.15

Break

14.15 – 15.15

### Session 2: Health and environmental challenges

Suvi Jokila, University of Turku, Finland and Charles Mathies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland  
*Silence during a pandemic: how crisis communication constructs international students' position in Finland*

Miguel Lim, Hanwei Li, Jingran Yu, Katja Levy, Ammeline Wang, Boya Li and Xueting Ban, University of Manchester, UK  
*COVID and Chinese and East Asian university students in the UK: safety, security, and communication*

Yun Yu, Rui He and Xuemeng Cao, Shanghai Normal University, China  
*The "chosen" UK? Re-imagining of international education mobility for prospective Chinese master students during the Covid-19 pandemic*

## DAY 2 – FRIDAY 2ND JULY

(UK TIME)

10:00 – 10.30

Keynote Talk: Georgiana Mihut, University of Warwick  
*Skills, happiness, and democratic attitudes among international, migrant, and domestic graduates. A socio-economic analysis of risk and protective factors using Eurograduate pilot data*

10.30 – 11.30

### Session 3: Socio-economic challenges

Karla Lopez-Murillo, UCL, UK  
*Diverse socio-economic backgrounds and international pathways. Mobility opportunities through a scholarship programme for Mexican doctoral students*

Nicolai Netz, Fine Cordua and Frauke Peter, DZHW (German Centre for Higher Education Research), Germany  
*Does the effect of studying abroad on labour income vary by graduates' gender?*

Christof Van Mol and Adriana Perez-Encinas, Tilburg University, The Netherlands; Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain  
*Going beyond mobility: do different (social) groups of students need different internationalisation activities?*

11.30 – 11.40

Break

11.40 – 12.40

### Session 4: Policy responses and concluding reflections

Panel discussion with:

Annett Kratz, Outward Student Mobility Lead, Universities UK International

Michael Hörig, Head of Strategic Planning Division, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)

Juliette Hussey, Vice President Global Relations, Trinity College Dublin

Amelia Hadfield, Dean (International) and Head of Department of Politics, University of Surrey

# ABSTRACTS AND PRESENTERS

## THURSDAY 1ST JULY

### European Mobility as a Public Good for Sustainable Societies

*Robin Shields, University of Bristol, UK*

Globally, international student mobility is often conceptualized in terms of human capital development, with mobile students investing in international education to prepare for future careers in skilled occupations. This perspective implicitly invokes a frame in which the costs and benefits of mobility are considered at the level of an individual, who is often assumed to follow rational strategies to maximise their benefits relative to costs. The European higher education space extends this frame, with overlapping mobility programmes and opportunities that combine public and private interests (e.g. Erasmus, the European Higher Education Area) providing a more nuanced way to think about public and private benefits. This presentation will analyse mobility in Europe as a mixed (public and private) good, which also carries a complex set of external costs and benefits. It focuses on how this mix of public and private costs and benefits relates to the challenges of sustainable social development, and the ways in which the European context might inform discussions on mobility globally.

### Institutional representations of European students in UK higher education in response to Brexit

*Vassiliki Papatsiba and Alex Hetherington, University of Sheffield, UK*

Since 2005 the UK higher education system has hosted a steadily increasing number of European students from outside the UK. EU students hold a widespread reputation of being capable and driven, and these qualities have made them desirable to UK universities. While their participation varies between institutions, and between the hierarchical layers of the sector, they have become recognised as a vital contributor to the diversity of the student fabric on UK campuses. However, following the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union (commonly referred to as Brexit) EU students will soon pay higher fees in the UK and lose access to the UK's pay later tuition loans. Additionally, they will be subjected to visa requirements and their poststudy stay will be constrained by migration rules. Consequent to these changes, among others, it is anticipated that the amount of EU students opting to study in UK universities may decline by up to half of their pre-Brexit numbers. These projections provide a window through which we can examine what the potential loss of European students would mean for institutions across the UK.

To that end, this paper examines interviews conducted in 12 UK universities with 127 participants pre-Brexit, predominantly senior

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executives and members of academic leadership.

The analysis uncovered a number of institutional representations of EU students that arose in response to Brexit, most often concerning: student numbers and income; diversity; and quality. Representations varied geographically across the different nations of the UK, largely due to the differences in funding regimes unique to each but also institutional hierarchies within a stratified higher education system. The specificities of institutional representations within each nation highlighted the differential impacts the loss of EU students may have on universities across the sector, with notable implications for: future recruitment strategies; intra- and international competition; the breadth and nature of subject and study programme offerings; the creation and maintenance of collaboration networks; and interactions between students, funding, and research.

### A Network Analysis of the Geopolitical Structure of Erasmus+ Student Mobility in European Higher Education Area

*Betul Bulut Şahin, Emrah Söylemez and Şavas Zafer Şahin, Middle East Technical University, Turkey*

The European Union (EU) Erasmus+ program is the most common student exchange schema in European Higher Education Area (EHEA). The program included member states of the European Union, members of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein), and candidate countries (the Republic of North Macedonia, Republic of Turkey, and the Republic of Serbia).

The universities awarded with Erasmus+ program funds do not have any country restrictions to send or receive students since Erasmus+ is seen as a means of unification under the EHEA and the Bologna Process. However, over the years, specific mobility patterns emerged between countries that reciprocally exchange students based on the universities' inclinations to sign mobility agreements predominantly with other universities in certain regions in Europe. These patterns portrait not a unified higher education area in Europe but a fractured one.

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It can be argued that these patterns heavily reflect the geopolitical positions and pragmatic preferences of individual countries involved in the Erasmus+ Program. These sub-regions and hubs in the EHEA are usually constrained by sectoral, practical, and historical positions and relations of universities involved in the Erasmus+ program. Hence, this research aims to analyse the network properties of the Erasmus+ student mobilities between these countries based on official statistics provided by the EU to determine a general account of the geopolitical hubs and sub-regions concerning the EHEA.

### **International Doctoral Students' Writing Practices: Mobility, transitions and translations across writing and knowing**

*Tamsin Hinton-Smith, Emily Danvers, Fawzia Haeri Mazanderani and Rebecca Webb, University of Sussex, UK*

The idealised internationally mobile student is presented as seamlessly transitioning across space, translating and neutralising themselves within a globalised higher education (HE) sector. We argue, however, that enacting 'coming to know' and writing for doctoral students is a practice which often reinforces 'otherness.' We draw on research funded by the UK Council for International Student Affairs, involving running a writing group for international doctoral students in two UK HE institutions and interviewing the participants about their UK HE experiences of academic writing in English. We identified the challenge for doctoral students of transitioning into an educational landscape whereby they feel 'caught between places'. Academic writing in this context emerges to produce sensibilities of misinterpretation and (un)belonging, occupying a position characterised by 'translating cultures.' As such, the 'mobile' international student occupies a precarious position. Drawing on a writing workshop pedagogy we are evolving, we explore the cultivation of spaces for academic writing that might traverse the tight borders of what constitutes legitimate knowledge, such that ideas might flow across the confines of space.

### **Silence during a pandemic: how crisis communication constructs international students' position in Finland**

*Suvi Jokila, University of Turku, Finland and Charles Mathies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland*

European Commission along with its member states are targeting to attract and retain an increasing number of international students. Much of the earlier focus has been in what happens within the higher education context or in the public policy sphere while less attention is targeted on the communicative practices and how they (re)produce and position international students in the society. Communication forms the basis of social practices and the creation and continuation of social institutions like society (Voss & Lorenz, 2016) and higher education institutions. By taking the ongoing COVID19-pandemic as an example, we analyse the crisis communication targeting higher education students. The aim of the paper is to analyse and compare actors, channels and content targeted at the international HE students in Finland during the pandemic time. The focus is particularly on the communicative practices of the national level actors. The main research question is how the communicative practices targeting higher education students differ between Finnish and international students. Using communication inequality (Ramandhan & Viswanath 2008, Viswanath 2006) as a theoretical framework, we specifically focus on the linguistic choices to differentiate these two student bodies. The data consist of ministerial documents and news pieces that are digitally provided at websites and social media sites. In a preliminary observation, we find some discrepancies among the actors in terms of the information provided and channels used supporting governments' failing to communicate all different groups of people during a crisis.

### **COVID and Chinese and East Asian University Students in the UK: Safety, Security, and Communication**

*Miguel Lim, Hanwei Li, Jingran Yu, Katja Levy, Ammeline Wang, Boya Li and Xueting Ban, University of Manchester, UK*

This presentation will summarise the preliminary findings of our study which aims to document and analyse the experiences and well-being of Chinese and Chinese-presenting international students in the UK. The important contextual factors of this study include (1) the rise in hate crimes against East Asian communities in the early part of the COVID pandemic and (2) the continued increase in the number of Chinese students, who comprise the largest group of international students in the UK. Earlier research suggested that concerns around safety - both in relation to the COVID pandemic and racist incidents could affect student mobility from China. Our study draws together data from freedom of information (FOI) requests, an online survey and semi-structured interviews to investigate (1) perceptions and experiences of aggression and (2) students' informational practices during the pandemic. The latter refers to how students may have communicated their experiences of aggression and with whom.

We employ insights from media studies, law and criminology, cultural sociology, and sociological studies of 'resilience' and social capitals to interpret our data. Our findings are intended to establish an evidence base to enable university staff and local communities to improve strategies and practices of safety and well-being of these students.

### The “Chosen” UK? Re-imagining of International Education Mobility for Prospective Chinese Master Students during the Covid-19 Pandemic

*Yun Yu, Rui He and Xueming Cao, Shanghai Normal University, China*

International student mobility has been increasingly affected by politics, culture, economics, natural disasters and public health. The Covid-19 pandemic caused unpredicted disruption to international students’ movement, which has challenged the primary host and sending countries, including the UK and China. This study focuses on UK’s prospective Chinese master students who have, reluctantly, suspended their studying abroad during the Covid-19 pandemic, and explores how these students strategically reimagine their overseas education in the future. A mixed-method approach was adopted, utilising survey and semi-structured in-depth interviews to investigate prospective Chinese international students’ experience and reflections in their deferral of overseas degree education. Besides the influence of health crisis, findings highlight the geopolitical situations, such as the somewhat tense relations between mainland China and the US, Australia, or Hong Kong has confined students’ overseas education destination to the UK as the “choice of no choice”. Regardless of parents’ pressure or suggestions in pursuing master’s degrees in Chinese universities as a safe alternative, students in this study demonstrate their strong agency and careful considerations on their education destination choices (e.g. academic climate, education quality, intercultural experience, etc.).

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UK universities are further suggested to better understand and support prospective international students who may face more unpredictable and even overwhelming challenges during and post the COVID-19 so as to facilitate better preparation for these students’ international education mobility in the future.

### FRIDAY 2ND JULY

#### Skills, happiness, and democratic attitudes among international, migrant, and domestic graduates. A socio-economic analysis of risk and protective factors using Eurograduate pilot data

*Georgiana Mihut, University of Warwick*

While studies comparing the experiences and outcomes of international and domestic students are common, research on international students and migrant students remains stubbornly separate. Contrasts between international and migrant students and graduates have the potential to highlight systemic risk and protective factors that may help address inequalities across multi-dimensional outcomes. This study discusses how self-reported competency levels, happiness, trust in others, and political participation compare between international, migrant, and domestic graduates from eight European countries, using Eurograduate pilot data. Findings suggest that migrant graduates have lower self-reported competency levels, are less likely to trust others, and more likely to engage in political participation than domestic and international graduates. In contrast, international graduates exhibit higher self-reported competency levels and are more likely to report being happy. Uniquely across the personal and institutional characteristics included in the analysis, study abroad served as a protective factor across all outcomes considered. First generation graduates and graduates supported financially by family during their studies exhibited lower levels of trust in others.

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The results offer a complex picture of inequality between international, migrant, and domestic graduates on multi-dimensional outcomes with implications for social integration.

**Diverse socio-economic backgrounds and international pathways. Mobility opportunities through a scholarship programme for Mexican doctoral students**

*Karla Lopez-Murillo, UCL, UK*

Mexico is the main Latin American country sending students abroad for international education. In 2018, there were 34,000 Mexican students enrolled in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) outside their country of origin. From those, over 12,000 thousand (36%) studied in a European country. One of the most longstanding sources of funding for International Student Mobility (ISM) in Mexico has been the National Science and Technology Council (CONACYT) scholarship programme. This has funded graduate ISM since 1970 for the training and consolidation of human resources. In 2018, 58% of awardees studied in Europe. Some debates suggest these types of scholarships mainly benefit students with privileged backgrounds and reproduce inequalities in HE. This paper examines the socio-demographic profiles of former CONACYT scholarship doctoral awardees along with their different previous HE trajectories and decisions to study abroad. This paper is drawn from my doctoral research using transformative learning theory concepts and the capabilities approach, exploring the transformative nature of ISM associated with individual meanings of the mobility experiences, capabilities developed, and implications for social change. In this paper, I present findings of the socio-demographic data collected through a cross-sectional survey and qualitative data from in depth semi-structured interviews.

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The findings show significant participation of students from less privileged backgrounds and a complex mix of drivers for outward mobility linked to previous educational opportunities and future life aspirations. This paper brings insights from a human development approach, showing how these scholarships are instrumental in increasing ISM opportunities, contributing to social mobility and facilitating career development.

**Does the effect of studying abroad on labour income vary by graduates' gender?**

*Nicolai Netz, Fine Cordua and Frauke Peter, DZHW (German Centre for Higher Education Research), Germany*

The past years have witnessed an increase in the number of studies examining the effects of studying abroad on labour market outcomes using advanced methods of causal inference. On balance, these studies suggest that studying abroad can positively affect graduates' labour market performance. Only recently, the debate has shifted towards a systematic examination of heterogeneity in the returns to studying abroad. While this research has highlighted social inequalities in the returns to studying abroad depending on graduates' social origin, we do not know whether returns to studying abroad differ by gender. However, such an analysis is highly relevant not only for the study abroad literature and higher education policy, but also for sociological and economic research addressing gender gaps in labour market performance more broadly. Does studying abroad constitute a mechanism which increases or decreases the gender wage gap? Drawing on the social role theory of sex differences, human capital theory, and signaling theory, we develop theoretical explanations for the existence of gender-specific effects of studying abroad on graduates' labour income. We test these explanations using data from the Germany-wide 2005 DZHW Graduate Panel. These data allow us to examine the development of gender inequalities in the returns to study abroad during the first ten years of graduates' careers.

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To model selection effects and approximate causal effects, we employ matching techniques, that is, both propensity score matching and a Heckman correction. We have concluded our data preparation phase and are currently producing our first set of results.

**Going beyond mobility: do different (social) groups of students need different internationalisation activities?**

*Christof Van Mol and Adriana Perez-Encinas,  
Tilburg University, The Netherlands;  
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, Spain*

For a long time, internationalization strategies of higher education institutions across the world focused was on mobility abroad. However, international student mobility is a socially selective process, whereby students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are less likely to participate. Consequently, in recent years ‘internationalisation for all’, ‘inclusive internationalisation’ and ‘internationalisation at home’ have become prominent terms in internationalization strategies, aiming to provide internationalisation activities to all students, including those who remain at home. To our surprise, however, existing scholarship today did not investigate whether offering a broader array of internationalisation activities also reaches the objectives of such new internationalisation strategies, namely to reach a broader group of students, including those from traditionally disadvantaged backgrounds. To this end, in this paper we investigate the likelihood of different (social) groups to participate in different internationalisation activities, both at home and abroad, through an online survey conducted in 2019 at three institutions in two countries (hidden for peer review, n = 2,567). Our findings clearly indicate that the social composition of student populations needs to be taken into account when designing internationalisation strategies.

Our results indicate that simply broadening the type of activities is not sufficient, as students from lower socio-economic backgrounds showed to be less likely to participate in any internationalisation activity.

Overall, the findings suggest that inclusive internationalization might best be reached through integrating internationalization into the formal curriculum, in order to circumvent the barriers that might exist to participate in activities outside of the formal study schedule.

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