

Scottish Government continuing to explore possibility of rejoining Erasmus+

The Scottish Government has joined with The Welsh Government in setting out their stall on Erasmus+. They have today issued a joint statement.

Both governments have always been united in their view that taking part in the Higher Education programme is in the best interests of all students in the UK. But it was lost in the Brexit deal, despite earlier protestations from the Prime Minister that it was safe.

Both the Cardiff and Edinburgh governments will now investigate how the Erasmus+ programme might continue here.

This is the text of the statement by Further and Higher Education Minister Richard Lochhead and Welsh Minister for Education Kirsty Williams:

Joint statement between Scottish and Welsh Governments on Erasmus+

The Scottish and Welsh Governments have always been united in our view that participation in Erasmus+ is in the best interests for the whole of the UK. The UK Government's

decision not to associate to the programme is therefore deeply disappointing: a decision that will see support for our most deprived communities cut, and opportunities for all our learners reduced.

Our participation in Erasmus+ has helped transform the lives of thousands of our students, schoolchildren, teachers, adult learners and young people, from all across the UK. In Scotland proportionally more participants have gone abroad through Erasmus+ than from anywhere else in the UK, while proportionally more visitors from the rest of Europe have visited Scotland in return. Schools in Wales have led the UK in winning Erasmus+ funding for strategic partnership projects on innovative topics such as green energy, artificial intelligence, and promoting inclusivity in the classroom.

Erasmus+ is about so much more than just university exchanges. In fact, when taken together, more Erasmus+ funding is set aside for further education, schools, adult education and youth groups than for universities. Participating in an Erasmus+ exchange has proven to increase people's self-confidence, cultural awareness, second-language learning ability, and employability. What's more, these benefits are most pronounced for participants coming from the UK's most deprived areas, and those furthest removed from traditional education.

The UK Government's proposed alternative, by comparison, is a lesser imitation of the real thing. The Turing Scheme, funded at £105 million for one year, pales in comparison to Erasmus+, which has now had its budget for the next seven years increased to €26.2 billion. Turing will offer no funding to the international partners that are needed to allow mobilities to take place unlike Erasmus+, where both parties are awarded funding to facilitate the exchange of learners from one country to another. Turing will also fail to support any of the strategic partnerships currently supported by Erasmus+, which help to build relationships with partners in

Europe.

Furthermore, Turing will offer no support whatsoever for our adult education or youth work sectors, while support for our colleges, schools and vocational education and training sectors will be significantly reduced, with limited amounts of funding being made available to each. In doing this the UK Government is sending a message that only universities are deserving of full support, and that those in other forms of education – often from our most deprived communities – are not. They are taking away opportunities from our most vulnerable learners, and in doing so reinforcing pre-existing inequalities.

It is all the more unacceptable then that the UK Government is looking to impose this inadequate scheme upon Scotland and Wales through new legislation that overrides the devolved nature of education. We have been clear that what they are proposing is simply not good enough, and that instead any replacement funding for Erasmus+ should be given in the first instance to the Scottish and Welsh Governments, to allow us to exercise our right to deliver educational services within our respective nations.

We will carry on making these arguments, and continue to advocate for those sectors who once enjoyed the benefits of Erasmus+, and who have been abandoned by the UK Government.

We have been heartened by the outpouring of support from across Europe for our continued participation in Erasmus+. This is something that Wales, Scotland, and Europe all want; the UK Government stands isolated in its opposition. We want the whole of the UK to stay, but we will now explore how Scotland and Wales can continue to enjoy the benefits offered by Erasmus+.