Cross-Party Group on Colleges and Universities

Thursday 19 January 1pm

Minute

Present

MSPs

Liz Smith MSP, Scottish Parliament
Kaukab Stewart MSP, Scottish Parliament
Willie Rennie MSP, Scottish Parliament

Invited guests

Ms Susana Galván Hernández, Executive Director of Taith
Ms Alex Barker, Head of Policy, International Placements Division, Department for Education (Policy Lead for the Turing Scheme)

Non-MSP Group Members

Ms Aimee Logan, Universities Scotland
Mr Alastair Sim, Universities Scotland
Ms Beth Hall, Scotland Office
Professor Blair Grubb, University of Dundee
Ms Deborah Shepherd, Education Institute for Scotland
Mr Duncan McKay, Universities Scotland
Ms Emma Shea, University of Dundee
Ms Frances Johnson, University of Edinburgh
Mr Francis Hooton, Graduate from University of Aberdeen
Mr Jack Norquoy, Office of Liam McArthur MSP
Mr James McKean, Colleges Scotland
Ms Jennifer Anderson, University of Stirling
Ms Joanne Buchan, Colleges Scotland
Professor John Blicharski, University of Dundee
Dr Joseph North, University of St Andrews
Ms Julie Waugh, Office of Siobhan Brown MSP
Ms Kate Wane, Scottish Funding Council
Mr Kenny Harrison
Mr Kevin Stravock, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Ms Laura Chalmers, Robert Gordon University
Ms Lauren Chedgy, NUS Scotland

Mr Liam Furby, NUS Scotland
Ms Lindsey Alexander, University of St Andrews
Ms Louisa Stratton, University of Aberdeen
Professor Matthew MacIver, University of the Highlands and Islands
Mr Murdo Mathison, Universities and Colleges Union
Mr Philip Bale, University of Aberdeen
Mr Roy Gardner, City of Glasgow College
Mr Thomas Feige, Edinburgh Napier University
Mr Tom Hall, Colleges Scotland
Ms Veronica Lynch, University of the Highlands and Islands Perth
Mr William Hardrie, Robert Gordon University

Apologies

Mr Alastair Delaney, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Professor Gareth Miles, University of St Andrews
Ms Jane Scott, Queen Margaret University
Ms Maggie Chapman MSP
Mr Nathan Tyler, West College Scotland
Ms Suzy Powell, Interface Online

Welcome and Introduction

Ms Smith welcome the members to the first meeting of the Colleges and Universities CPG in 2023. Ms Smith advised members that future meetings will be held in-person in the Scottish Parliament. Ms Smith outlined online etiquette for the meeting and asked if there were any objections to a picture being taken. Ms Smith welcomed the speakers to the CPG and introduced them to the members.

Presentations

Ms Susana Galván Hernández, Executive Director of Taith

Ms Galván opened her presentation by providing context to the Taith scheme. She highlighted that the Taith scheme is a result of an announcement by the Welsh Government made in March 2021. This announcement committed £65m towards an international learning exchange programme following the departure of UK from the Erasmus+ scheme. Taith was launched in February 2022. Ms Galván shared that Taith means journey in Welsh and was a result of a public naming competition. She continued by saying that Taith is hosted by Cardiff University and is governed by a board of directors, an advisory board and by Welsh Government as the programme funders

Ms Galván continued by sharing that Taith had its first funding call in March 2022 and received over seventy applications from all eligible sectors (HE, FE, VET, Schools, Youth and Adult Education) with fifty-one projects being successful in getting funding of a total value of just over £10m. These projects will deliver over 6,000 outward and inward mobilities of learners and staff, and will benefit over 100 organisations from across the 22 local authorities in Wales. It will also involve mobility and exchanges

with over 95 countries, regions and territories across the world. She highlighted that in Autumn of 2022 Taith launched its second funding call, with a focus on strategic partnerships and collaboration. They received a good number of applications which are currently being assessed.

Ms Hernández outlined five unique features of Taith:
1. Sector led programme
   - By being a sector led programme, this allows for Taith to be flexible and adaptable.
2. Reciprocity
   - Reciprocity is embedded within Taith, allowing for mobility out from Wales and into Wales.
3. Partnerships
   - Partnerships within the scheme allow for the mobility of students and staff. In addition, there are two strands of funding for the HE sector, traditional mobility funding and funding for the mobility of researchers.
4. Inclusion and widening access
   - Taith has a strong focus on inclusion trying to reach out to as many participants from disadvantaged background as possible. Funding allows for hybrid mobility and shorter mobility arrangements.
5. Alignment with wider international strategy for Wales
   - Taith has put Wales on the global map as a welcoming country for all and one that values international connections and exchanges.

Ms Alex Barker, Policy Lead for Turing at the Department of Education

Ms Barker opened her presentation by providing context on the Turing Scheme. The scheme was introduced in the 2021/22 academic year and provided funding for 40,000 placements all around the world. This academic year, Turing has provided funding for 38,000 students all across the UK to go to 160 different countries including 3,300 Scottish students. Ms Barker continued by highlighting that Turing is a wide ranging scheme with study and work which also includes volunteering. Placements also do not have to be credit bearing. She then outlined that there is a key focus on widening access and inclusion. Half of the opportunities that the Turing Scheme has provided funding for are for people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Ms Barker continued by sharing the aims of the Turing Scheme. The first aim is that the Turing Scheme wants all projects that universities, colleges and schools deliver are providing great experiences for their students. She conveyed that there is a lot of flexibility built into the scheme for education providers to determine what kind of placement would be best for their students. Ms Barker illustrated that there are key principles that the Turing Scheme is framed around. The first principle is around Global Britain. This is to ensure that Turing is an international and outward facing mobility scheme and to have a worldwide reach. The second is widening access; Turing will encourage as many people as possible to take these opportunities. The third is developing key skills. Turing allows for students to develop skills while on placements that will support their attainment and future employment prospects in the UK.

Ms Barker continued by outlining the support Turing will provide to applicants. She said that Turing provides funding towards the cost of administering the placement to the education provider. This might include recruiting students and marketing the scheme. For participants, depending on sector, Turing will provide funding towards the cost of travel, cost of living and other costs that may occur such as gaining a passport and costs associated with location, such as winter clothing if they are going somewhere cold.

Question and Answer

Ms Smith opened the question and answer session following both presentations.

Liz Smith MSP: (to Alex) You mentioned about young people going across to China, is this application open for senior school pupils also?

Alex Barker: Yes absolutely. We do not have any age limits for the Turing Scheme as long as you are above four years old.

Liz Smith MSP: Can I just come to Roy Gardener who wishes to give some perspective from the college sector.

Roy Gardner: The college sector uses the Turing Scheme for enhancing skills, work based learning, employability and internationalisation. The college sector was successful last year in gaining 942 places for Turing. City of Glasgow College gained 340 of those places where we will be sending students to eight countries. I believe the college sector will be increasingly applying for Turing come February when applications open again. At City of Glasgow College, 40% of participants are participating in a mobility scheme for the first time and are from deprived backgrounds where we have helped students gain their passports as Alex mentioned. Once participants reach their destination, they undertake language training, employability training related to their studies and get a fantastic cultural experience.

Liz Smith MSP: In comparison to the Erasmus scheme, have you noticed a difference in the backgrounds of applicants to Taith and Turing?

Susana Galván Hernández: As the Erasmus scheme is still active until later this year and Taith is a brand new programme, it is difficult to make comparisons. We have seen a large interest from all sectors in the Taith programme. Those who apply to Taith do have widening access targets and so, the successful projects will have participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Alex Barker: We haven't compared any data yet as Erasmus is still ongoing. We have had applicants from all backgrounds going all over the world.

Francis Hooton: Why is the Turing Scheme called Turing?

Alex Barker: Named after Alan Turing as he did some study abroad in the US and we wanted to incorporate this into the scheme. Wanted to ensure we were paying tribute to someone who has left a great legacy to the country.

Murdo Mathison: What uptake has Taith scheme had on staff applying?

Susana Galván Hernández: I currently do not have a breakdown on this data but can get this to you after the meeting. *Susana sent this information to Mr Mathison via email following this meeting and this information is published on the Taith website.*

Willie Rennie MSP: Compared to Erasmus, what is the scale of Taith and Turing? What has been the most difficult challenge to setting up the scheme?

Alex Barker: Turing is currently set to fund more placements than Erasmus in the UK. It was designed this way to ensure there was broadly equivalent levels of mobility as Erasmus. It is possible this may shift once Erasmus concludes. The greatest challenge I would say is the pace it was set up at. The challenge going forward to ensuring the scheme is the best it can be and participants are getting all the benefits possible.

Susana Galván Hernández: Difficult to compare as we're working within a set budget of £65m over a four year period which also covers the cost of running Taith. There are targets from the Welsh Government on the mobilities we would like to see which are 15,000 out and 10,000 in. There is also a maximum amount we can spend on running the scheme. The measure of success is the interest of all the sectors and the diversity of the participants and of the funded projects. The biggest challenge has been the pace of setting up the scheme and balancing the funding in a way that we meet our objectives as a programme.

John Blicharski: Can Educational Trusts / charities apply as providers?

Alex Barker: You can apply but you do need to show if you are not a direct education provider that you have a partnership or agreement with a direct education provider. This way, we know the funding is going to learners.

Francis Hooton: How would you define a disadvantaged background?

Susana Galván Hernández: We are guided by the Welsh Government on the definition.

Alex Barker: Similar to Susana, our definition is based on looking across the UK at the different measures to determine what is a disadvantaged background.

Kevin Stravock: Is there any evidence so far to how both schemes are contributing to more sustained partnerships between colleges and universities in the UK and internationally?

Susana Galván Hernández: It is difficult to get evidence right now as the first projects just started in September of 2022 and some are beginning later this year. However, in addition to the open funding calls, Taith also funds Global Wales which has been running for a number of years. Global Wales is a scheme that supports Welsh higher education and further education sectors internationally and aims to create long term partnerships in key international markets.

Alex Barker: As we are a new scheme only in its second year, this is difficult to provide evidence on at this stage. In applications, we do see people writing about partnerships that they are forming. As time goes by, we will continue to see education providers form and develop partnerships.

Liz Smith MSP: I would like to ask Alastair Sim if he has any observations about what is currently happening with student exchange programmes?

Alastair Sim: Currently, we are making the most of Turing after coming out of Erasmus+. This has helped sustain student mobility across the UK and in Scotland. By introducing short mobility exchanges, this has allowed the scheme to broaden and allow more students to participate. I still think there are issues as there are still many partnerships we are operating under through Erasmus which can make it difficult to build new partnerships. We do receive feedback from members that the application of Turing can be difficult so we hope to see this become more smooth.

Roy Gardner: We have had three new partnerships as part of the Turing Scheme in Canada, Greece and Finland. College sector does have many partnerships from Erasmus but we are now building more through Turing.

Liz Smith MSP: A question for Susana, on the research aspect, what criteria is Taith using to determine whether the application is successful?

Susana Galván Hernández: We provide mobility for existing research projects. This brings researchers together to collaborate together on research. Supports the mobility around research, not research itself.

Alex Barker: We don't have a research specific strand, but students of all levels including PhD can travel through Turing.

Jennifer Anderson: Within Turing, there was the opportunity for a two week mobility scheme. Will the minimum exchange be reduced to two weeks rather than four weeks this year?

Alex Barker: The reduction to two weeks was due to the impact of Covid and was introduced as a contingency measure. This is not intended to happen this year and is

a four week minimum for this year and the 2023/24 academic year. There are no plans to reduce this at this stage.

Conclusion

Ms Smith thanked the speakers on behalf of members within the meeting. She also thanked Roy Gardner and Alastair Sim for providing their perspective from the higher education and further educations sectors.

Ms Smith stated that future meetings are likely to take place in-person within the Scottish Parliament. She said that will advise members of this as soon as we can.