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**International student mobility literature review**

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November 2010

# International student mobility literature review

**Report to HEFCE, and co-funded by the British  
Council, UK National Agency for Erasmus**

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### Executive Summary

1. Recent estimates suggest 33,000 UK students are studying abroad, while 370,000 foreign students are studying in the UK, an imbalance which defines the UK as primarily a destination for international students (the second most important in the world after the United States) rather than a source of such students. Nevertheless, attention needs to be paid to outward mobility because of concerns that a low rate might hamper UK graduates' competitiveness in global and European labour markets, while a high rate may signal a 'brain drain'.

2. Concentrating on research published in recent years, this report is a meta-analysis of literature and statistics focused on six areas of interest:

1. Trends in outward student mobility from the UK and what this reveals about student behaviour.
2. How international student mobility (ISM) in the UK compares with other countries' trends.
3. Causative factors in student choice to participate in mobility.
4. The economic and social status of internationally mobile students.
5. The impact of international mobility on students' employability, and employers' attitudes to ISM.
6. Policy and practice within UK higher education institutions (HEIs) which affect, positively or negatively, student mobility flows.

3. In the review, we distinguish between *credit* or within-programme mobility (such as Erasmus) and *degree* or whole-programme mobility where the student moves abroad for an entire degree course. We also distinguish mobility experiences at different levels (undergraduate, postgraduate) and of different types (study abroad, work placement etc).

4. First, regarding statistical trends, attention must be drawn to severe problems of measuring student mobility: different countries use different criteria so that a distribution map of UK students abroad can only be an approximation of the true picture. Globally, student migration grows faster than overall migration: the US and the UK are the top destinations for degree mobility; China and India are the top origin countries. The UK's main destinations for degree mobility, according to the authors' best estimates, are the US, Canada, Australia, Ireland, France and Germany.

5. Credit mobility is mainly to Europe, especially via the Erasmus programme, and to North America. A decade-long decline in UK outward Erasmus mobility between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s has recently reversed, mainly due to the introduction of the work placement scheme. Language and finance are major obstacles for UK students contemplating mobility abroad. Hence the trends, for both credit and degree mobility, are increasingly to Anglophone destinations.

6. The UK has low rates of both credit and degree mobility compared to other European countries. Its rate of growth of degree ISM – 33% over the period 1975–2006 – is also low by international standards (US 40%, Canada 207%, Germany 424%, and France 492%). On the Erasmus front, the UK has, again, the lowest participation rate and the biggest decline over the period 1994-05 to 2005-06. Other countries whose outgoing Erasmus numbers fell or stagnated over the same period – Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark – are all 'Anglophone-oriented', whereas those countries with strong Erasmus growth (France, Germany, Austria and southern EU countries) are not.

7. The third and fourth questions – about causal factors for UK ISM and about mobile students' socio-economic characteristics – are closely linked. Causative factors driving ISM exist at three levels: the macro-scale of economic and cultural globalisation and the internationalisation of HE systems (Erasmus being the main example); the meso-scale of institutional initiatives (ISM being more buoyant in the research-intensive 'pre-92' universities); and individual-scale factors such as language competence, desire for adventure and employability. For degree mobility, language constraints channel students mainly to Anglophone countries and to what are perceived as world-class universities.

8. Regarding mobile students' socio-economic and demographic characteristics, a distinction again needs to be made between credit and degree mobilities, although there are common features. Based on evidence on UK Erasmus students, credit-mobile students are disproportionately young, female, white and middle-class, and are academic high-achievers, compared to the total UK student population. Various studies show credit mobility has an income pay-off and tends to lead to subsequent career or residential mobility abroad. Studies on degree mobility also reveal academic and social selectivity – indicated by parental wealth, predominantly independent-sector school background and personal/family history of travel and international links. Some of the literature ties this into issues of cultural capital and reproduction of social privilege and class divides across generations.

9. The link between mobility and employment has been little researched. Students and mobility managers believe that study abroad brings benefits (languages, intercultural skills, flexibility of outlook

etc.) which can improve career prospects, but concrete survey evidence is scarce. Evidence from employers is mostly anecdotal.

10. Regarding policy and practice, several questions beg to be answered. The first is the balance between promoting inward as opposed to outward mobility. Most discussion focuses on the former, for its revenue-generating benefits to UK HEIs and to the wider economy. However, there is a growing appreciation of the importance of outward mobility, in recognition of the fact that UK-origin graduates with foreign experience bring greater human capital to the knowledge economy. Based on survey and interview data from various reports, as well as our own interviews conducted for this report, we identify a range of good practices HEIs can implement to foster greater outward mobility. These include: the promotion of mobility options at admissions Open Days, greater provision of clear and accurate information, greater staff mobility (since this has synergies with student mobility), highlighting the financial benefits and support available, publicising good employment outcomes from alumni and employers' testimonials, ensuring clarity of credit transfer systems, and using returning students as mobility ambassadors to prospective mobile students by involving them in promotional events, particularly for work placements as these are a growth area. For degree mobility, HEIs can do little except promote foreign universities as destinations for postgraduate study.

11. Finally, the report draws attention to wider policy issues: the relative (im)mobility of 'non-traditional' students; the long-running debate over declining language provision in UK secondary and tertiary education, which acts as a brake on the UK's mobility rate; and the relevance of the Bologna Process, which seems to be only slowly taken on board by UK academics and university administrators.

## Introduction

12. Consider two statistics. The UK Higher Education International Unit has recently estimated the number of UK students studying abroad at 33,000.<sup>1</sup> The most recent HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) data show that there are nearly 370,000 foreign students studying at UK universities. In other words, the number of foreign students in the UK is eleven times that of UK students abroad. Whilst the UK comes second (after the US) in the global list of 'receiving' countries for foreign students, it ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> as a 'sending' country. Put another way, whilst foreign students account for 15% of the student population in UK higher education institutions (HEIs), UK students abroad are only about 1.6% of the total population of UK students in higher education.

13. Whichever way these statistics are compared, the picture is clear. The UK is primarily a 'host' country for foreign students (two-thirds of whom are from non-EU countries), not an 'origin' country for international student mobility (ISM). Of course, these statistics are approximate and subject to all sorts of caveats which we will mention later. But the key question is whether we should be worried at this imbalance between student 'imports' and 'exports'. On the one hand the large number of foreign students in UK HEIs is a vindication of the quality of the UK's higher education system in the global market for HE. Moreover, overseas students' fees contribute nearly £2bn of UK universities' income. On the other hand, the UK's low participation rate as a source country for ISM might be a cause for concern, since UK-origin students are missing out on the valuable experience of an international education, and potentially reducing their competitiveness on the global graduate labour market. Then there is another question to ask – who are these UK students who choose to study abroad? Are they the 'brightest and best'? This leads to two further questions. Why do they go? And will they return? These are some of the questions that this report seeks to explore, on the basis of a synthesis of existing literature on the topic of UK outward student mobility. Given the task of reviewing and interpreting this literature as our primary objective, we also bring in two further strands of research. The first is a review of relevant statistics of UK ISM in a comparative perspective, and the second is a series of interviews with eleven key informants who are 'mobility managers' in a sample of UK universities.

14. From the point of view of academic research in the field of international migration and population movements, student mobility has not been a major focus of attention until very recently. The major texts on international migration pay scant attention to students as migrants or mobile people.<sup>2</sup> Much the same picture holds for the national and international migration policy arena, where the main concerns have been the control and management of flows of 'economic migrants' and asylum-seekers. However, over the past ten years this lack of attention to internationally mobile

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<sup>1</sup> *International Focus*, 55, 20 January 2010, p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Three of the most widely-cited textbooks on migration – Cohen's *Cambridge Survey of World Migration* (1995), Boyle, Halfacree and Robinson's *Exploring Contemporary Migration* (1998), and Castles and Miller's *Age of Migration* (1993, 4<sup>th</sup> edition 2009) – all either fail to mention students or discuss their mobility in a few lines.

students has started to change. The 2001 version of OECD's annual *Trends in International Migration* had an entire chapter on student mobility between and into OECD countries (OECD 2001: 93-117). The 2008 *World Migration* report of the International Organization for Migration likewise has a chapter on student mobility, considered within the dual context of the internationalisation of higher education and skilled migration (IOM 2008: 105-125). Also noteworthy is the fact that the most recent general academic text on migration to hit the shelves makes much more explicit and detailed reference to international student migration than any of its predecessors (Samers 2010: 26-30, 79-80, 164-168).

15. More specialised texts on ISM have also started to emerge in recent years although none of them, in our view, matches the in-depth detail and originality of Murphy-Lejeune's *Student Mobility and Narrative* (2002) which is becoming a minor classic of its genre. Recent excursions into the field of ISM have been either general statistical and policy overviews (e.g. Gürüz 2008) or edited volumes with a variety of smaller scale case studies of varying quality and significance (see Bhandari and Laughlin 2009; Byram and Dervin 2008; Dervin and Byram 2008; de Wit *et al.* 2008).

16. In presenting this report we draw on literatures of many types: key books, including those mentioned above; articles in academic journals; reports on ISM from various sponsoring bodies and stakeholders; and monitoring of the UK higher education press, notably the weekly *Times Higher Education*, and the UK Higher Education International Unit's fortnightly *International Focus*.

17. It should also be pointed out that this literature review is the latest stage in what has become an established trajectory of both primary research and literature and statistical overviews carried out by the authors over the past several years. Three studies pre-date this one:

- A study of the Year Abroad experience of a large sample of graduates from the University of Sussex (King 2003; King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003);
- The HEFCE-funded 'International Student Mobility Study', 2003-04, which likewise focused on within-programme or credit mobility (HEFCE 2004; Findlay *et al.* 2006);
- The DIUS/BIS-funded study on 'Motivations and Experiences of UK Students Studying Abroad', 2008-09, which was on whole-degree mobility (Findlay and King 2010).

From these largely empirical and policy-related studies we have also derived theoretical perspectives on framing and explaining international student mobility (ISM), initially in King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 230-232), then more highly developed in Findlay *et al.* (2005) and Findlay *et al.* (2006).

18. A fourth important programme of research to add to the above three has been the following project conducted by Rachel Brooks at the University of Surrey and Johanna Waters at the University of Liverpool:

- British Academy-funded study on 'International Higher Education and the Mobility of UK Students: Motivations, Experiences and Labour Market Outcomes', 2007-08, which asked similar questions, and found some quite similar answers, to the DIUS/BIS study (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Waters and Brooks 2010a, 2010b).

19. Finally, in this initial highlighting of key sources and research projects, we acknowledge important and useful studies issued recently by HEFCE (2009) on Erasmus students' attainment in higher education and by Joan-Anton Carbonell (2009) on up-dating UK student mobility figures.<sup>3</sup>

### **Scope of the Study and Definition of Terms**

20. The structure of the report matches the areas of interest set out in the Invitation to Tender sent out by HEFCE. These themes are listed below in the order in which they will be dealt with in this report:

- trends in ISM in the UK and what this reveals about student behaviour;
- comparative context: ISM in the UK and elsewhere;
- causative factors in students' choice to participate in mobility;
- economic and social status of internationally mobile students;
- mobile students' employability and employers' attitudes to student mobility;
- policy and practice within higher education institutions with regard to student mobility.

We review the relevant literature under each of these topics, concentrating particularly on literature produced over the past five or so years, since our last HEFCE report in 2004. However, the availability of literature is very uneven: for instance there is now quite a lot of research evidence on the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of internationally mobile students, but very little on the links between mobility and employability.

21. Next, some terminological clarifications. As the title of this review makes obvious, we opt for the term international student *mobility* rather than *migration*, even though we have used 'international student migration' in some of our earlier writings (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Findlay *et al.* 2005). Mobility implies a shorter time-frame for the movement, and a high probability of return, as in a typical Erasmus-type scheme where the student must return to base to finish the programme of study. Less easy to label one way or the other are students who move for an entire degree programme of, say, three or four years. Such longer-term moves might better fit the conventional statistical definition of

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<sup>3</sup> Just as we were about to submit the final version of this report Carbonell (2010) issued an update of his 2009 study. This update contains useful new data and analyses which, however, confirm the general line of findings of the earlier report.



international migration (often predicated on a move lasting at least one year); but, again, the probability of return might be quite high. On the other hand, an international move as a student might be a prelude to immigration after the course of study has finished. For students coming from poor countries, the wish to convert a student visa into long-term or permanent residence – so-called ‘student switchers’ (Robertson 2010) – may be a rational life-strategy. And some receiving countries, for their part, are keen to recruit good students from poor countries (or any country) in order to train them to fill key skill gaps in their national labour market (Hazzen and Alberts 2006; Gribble 2008). Even the same groups of students (by nationality) may behave differently according to the chosen destination country. Our own recent survey data on UK students studying abroad for an entire degree programme revealed that those who study in Australia are much more likely to want to become long-term immigrants in that country than those who are studying in Ireland (Findlay and King 2010: 37-38).

22. This brief initial excursion into some of the student mobility/migration profiles reported in the literature certainly makes us realise how blurred the migration/mobility divide is when we talk of students who move internationally. For our purposes here, we stick with the term mobility, not least because it can be regarded as a generic concept which subsumes migration.

23. The second area of definitional clarification concerns typologies of mobility defined in relation to criteria of stage and type of qualification or ‘credit’. In our earlier HEFCE study (2004: 11), guided by the UK Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), we identified three types of student mobility:

- mobility for an entire programme of study, termed *diploma mobility* (though we prefer the term *degree mobility*);
- mobility for part of the programme, termed *credit mobility*;
- *voluntary mobility* undertaken for a variety of personal reasons.

The fundamental difference is that between degree and credit mobility. As we shall see later, these two different types of mobility are subject to quite different constraints and outcomes as regards student choice and characteristics – although there are important similarities too.

24. A further typology refers to the stage of the higher education ‘career’ in which the mobility event takes place: undergraduate, taught postgraduate, doctorate or other qualification. A third typology is based on the type of activity: study within a university setting; work placement or internship; or taking a job as a temporary teacher or language assistant within a framework of credit mobility.

25. The report is essentially a desk review of the various categories of literature mentioned in the introduction. Although a statistical review was not part of the core brief, we have devoted some attention, within the time and resources allowed, to a critical analysis of the relevant datasets, and this is presented in the next section, followed by some comparative perspectives.

26. To the reviews of literature and statistics, we have also added a third research component – interviews with key informants. Building on (but not completely identical to) the network of contacts established as part of our previous HEFCE study (see HEFCE 2004: 21-33), we interviewed mobility managers in a sample of universities drawn from all constituent parts of the UK and from both pre- and post-1992 institutions. In order to guarantee anonymity, we do not name the individuals interviewed, nor their universities. In these interviews we asked the six key questions framing this study, namely:

1. What are the general trends of ISM in your institution over the last five to ten years?
2. How do you think UK trends in ISM compare to those in other countries?
3. What do you see as the main reasons why students choose to participate in international mobility?
4. How would you describe the socio-economic and other (demographic, academic etc) characteristics of credit-mobile students?
5. What effect do you think ISM has on the employability of students? How do you think employers regard student mobility?
6. Can you describe your institution's policy and practices regarding outgoing student mobility?
7. Other questions and comments?

Note that, given the position of the interviewees, they were mainly able to comment on credit-mobile outward UK students. Insights from these interviews are scattered throughout the report, but are especially important in the penultimate section, on HEIs' policy and practice on ISM.

### **Trends in UK International Student Mobility**

27. This section reviews the main statistical sources on UK ISM. Our focus is on outward moves from the UK. Rather than reproduce lots of tables which are readily available in other documents, including our earlier HEFCE report (2004), the useful updates on UK student mobility statistics by Carbonell (2009, 2010) and a metadata analysis produced as part of the DIUS/BIS study (Findlay *et al.* 2010), we give here a mainly qualitative summary laced with a few selected tables and key figures. We then interpret these statistics in terms of what they tell us about student behaviour in the UK. This provides a link first to the comparative commentary which follows in the next section of the report, and second to later sections where we review more detailed evidence on causal factors of student mobility and the socio-economic characteristics of the UK's internationally mobile students.

28. We start with a critical comment on data quality issues. We then move on to a brief setting of the global scene, before looking in more detail at UK trends, first for degree and then for credit mobility.

### *Sources and data issues*

29. A variety of sources offer statistical information about UK ISM. These can be summarised in a threefold typology:

- UK sources including HESA statistics (good for incoming foreign degree-mobile students, but not for the UK outwardly-mobile who are 'lost' to this dataset) and the Erasmus database (for credit mobility only);
- international sources such as UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat;
- foreign national sources for the main destination countries for UK degree-mobile students.

Inevitably there is not perfect correspondence or complementarity between these sources. Most statistics on international students published by bodies such as UNESCO and OECD (the most widely-used for comparative purposes) refer to *degree* mobility and exclude (although one cannot always be sure of this) short-term credit-mobility visiting students. However, even degree-mobile students are recorded on different bases in different countries. The most important distinction here is between those sources that define foreign students by citizenship (most countries) and those that define them by place of normal domicile.<sup>4</sup> This makes strict comparability of statistics on UK students in different destination countries impossible to achieve. We have dealt with these issues in considerable detail in our two recent reports to BIS (Findlay and King 2010: 9-16, 68-71; Findlay *et al.* 2010: 2-13), concluding that the OECD series offers the most transparent and reliable figures for international comparison.

### *The global context*

30. According to OECD data, ISM has been rising considerably faster over the last three decades than total international migration. This differential becomes increasingly marked in recent years. For instance, ISM grew by 52% over the period 1998-2004, compared to a growth of 13% for world migration (IOM 2008: 105). Table 1 sets out the top-ten origin countries for the four mid-decade points between 1975 and 2005. It shows the changing geography of the phenomenon as well as the rapidly increasing scale of the movement. Key features of this geography are the rapid rise of the developing world, especially China and India, and also more developed Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea, and the decline, relatively speaking, of the US and the UK (for further discussion see de Wit

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<sup>4</sup> This distinction becomes problematic with countries such as Germany or Switzerland which have traditionally had harsh rules regarding access to citizenship, so that German- or Swiss-born offspring of Turkish or Italian (for example) immigrant parents are recorded as 'foreign' students. In other countries, e.g. France or the UK, such students would be recorded as local citizens, following the *ius soli* (as opposed to the *ius sanguinis*) rule of citizenship.

2008a: 32-34). The position of the UK is highly revealing. In 1975 it ranked 6<sup>th</sup> with 16,866 students abroad; subsequently it dropped out of the table; by 2005 it is ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> with 22,405, an increase of 33% over three decades. Stronger increases, and better performances overall, are recorded by some other European countries such as France, Germany and Greece. For example, Greece more than doubled its outward mobility numbers between 1975 and 2005, and Germany increased its outward mobility numbers by 2.5 times between 1985 and 2005. China and India, meanwhile, have grown their study-abroad numbers by around ten times.

31. The situation is very different with regard to the UK's position in the global ranking of destination countries. Although the inflow of foreign students is outside the remit of this report, it is important just to note the contrast for the context it provides. The UK ranks second to the US as a destination for foreign students, and this time it has progressively moved up the list in terms of its ranking: 5<sup>th</sup> in 1980, 4<sup>th</sup> in 1990, 2<sup>nd</sup> since 2000 (de Wit 2008a: 35-36).

**Table 1: Top ten countries of origin of foreign students, 1975–2005**

1975		1985		1995		2005	
Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.	Country	No.
Iran	33,021	China	42,481	China	115,871	China	343,126
US	29,414	Iran	41,083	South Korea	69,736	India	123,559
Greece	23,363	Malaysia	40,493	Japan	62,324	South Korea	95,885
Hong Kong	21,059	Greece	34,086	Germany	45,432	Japan	60,424
China	17,201	Morocco	33,094	Greece	43,941	Germany	56,410
UK	16,866	Jordan	24,285	Malaysia	41,159	France	53,350
Nigeria	16,348	Hong Kong	23,657	India	39,626	Turkey	52,048
Malaysia	16,162	South Korea	22,468	Turkey	37,629	Morocco	51,503
India	14,805	Germany	22,424	Italy	36,515	Greece	49,631
Canada	12,664	US	19,707	Hong Kong	35,141	US	41,181

Source: OECD and UNESCO data compiled in de Wit (2008a: 33–34).

32. Destination patterns for ISM seem on the whole to be more stable over time than the source countries (OECD database; de Wit 2008a: 35-36). This reflects a well-known axiom in migration theory, which is that migrants tend to go to places or countries where there are already migrants of the same nationality or ethnic group: this applies to international students as well (Dreher and Poutvaara 2005). In 1980 the five top destination countries for global ISM were the US (311,882), France (110,763), USSR (62,942), Germany (61,841) and the UK (56,003). In 2004 not much had changed beyond an up-scaling of the numbers. The only substantial change was the demotion of the USSR (now reduced to Russia) to eighth place (75,786 foreign students), whilst the UK had moved up to second place (300,056).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> China does not publish reliable data on incoming students.

### *Trends in UK degree mobility by destination*

33. In this subsection we review recent data on UK outward mobility by destination country, concentrating on recent years' trends. Table 2 shows that the pattern of top-ten destinations for UK degree mobility is similar to the ranking of the destinations for global ISM, with the obvious exception of the absence of the UK in the former. North America and Europe dominate the table: the US, Canada, France, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Japan are seven countries common to both lists, with similar positions. Ireland (ranked 3<sup>rd</sup>) and the Netherlands (8<sup>th</sup>) are additions to the UK list: geographical proximity and language are obvious factors linking these countries. However, we need to be reminded of the important caveat that these figures are based on different recording systems in different countries.<sup>6</sup>

34. We also need to be reminded that these figures in general exclude credit mobility. Clearly if credit mobility were to be added to the numbers in Table 2, the overall magnitude would increase (probably to around 33,000, the headline estimate quoted at the very beginning of this report), and the regional pattern would become more skewed towards Europe because of the effect of the Erasmus exchange programme (Carbonell 2009). We deal with Erasmus and other credit mobility in the next subsection.

35. The second function of Table 2 is to compare the most recent four years' data available on the OECD database. The picture of short-term stability in mobility is clear, with the top seven ranking unchanged between 2004 and 2007. UK students numbers rose slightly in seven countries (US, Ireland, Australia, Denmark, Spain, New Zealand, Czech Republic), but fell in France, Germany, Canada, the Netherlands and Japan. The case of the Czech Republic is interesting because it represents a new tendency for some continental European universities (in this case Charles University in Prague) to offer specialist degrees in English which are in high demand, such as medicine.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For more details on these particular statistics see Findlay *et al.* (2010: 6). Just to re-emphasise this point, take the case of Canada. OECD reports Canada as hosting 2,498 non-citizen students from UK in 2004 compared with only 781 non-resident students from UK. The distinction here (as is the case in many countries that host large UK emigrant and expatriate populations) is between students whose parents have either emigrated for work or settlement purposes to Canada (but who continue to have UK citizenship rights) and UK students whose normal domicile is in the UK and who themselves have been primarily responsible for making the decision to move abroad to study. The matter is made more complex in as far as it is important to recognise that non-citizen students in Canada who hold UK citizenship may come from families who have never lived in the UK, but who may, as UK citizen passport holders, have migrated from other places in the world such as Hong Kong.

<sup>7</sup> Other examples are the European University in Florence and the Central European University in Budapest: both are postgraduate institutions offering programmes only in English.

**Table 2: Top ten host countries for international students: global total and UK-origin students, 2004 and 2007**

International students from all origins, 2004		UK international students, 2004		UK international students, 2007	
US	572,509	US	8,439	US	8,625
UK	300,056	France	2,611	France	2,595
Germany	260,314	Ireland	2,165	Ireland	2,282
France	237,587	Germany	2,154	Germany	1,854
Australia	166,955	Australia	1,652	Australia	1,687
Canada	132,982	Denmark	1,432	Denmark	1,485
Japan	117,903	Canada	781	Canada	636
Russia	75,786	Netherlands	590	Spain	447
New Zealand	68,904	Japan	403	New Zealand	431
Belgium	44,304	New Zealand	378	Czech Rep.	405

*Source:* For UK, OECD Education Database (accessed 10 February 2010); for the first column, de Wit (2008a: 36).

*Note:* The OECD figures are based on three different definitions of ISM:

1. 'Non-citizen students': France, Germany, Netherlands, Japan, Czech Rep.
2. 'Non-resident students': US, Australia, Denmark, Canada, New Zealand, Spain
3. 'Students with prior education outside the reporting country': Ireland.

36. Thus far we have taken the OECD figures at face value. In our research for the DIUS/BIS project on UK degree mobility we calculated 'best estimates' of UK student numbers in the main destination countries. For total degree mobility our best estimate for 2005-06 is 20,473, 9% lower than the OECD figure for that year, 22,405. This lower figure equates to 1.7% of all UK-domiciled students enrolled in UK HEIs (Findlay and King 2010: 16).

37. Moving to a time-series breakdown by main destination country, Table 3 gives our best estimates of degree mobility over the past decade based on the most authoritative national sources that we could access. Here we pick out the main features of this table (for more detailed discussion see Findlay and King 2010: 14-16; Findlay *et al.* 2010: 24-37).

38. The US dominates the destinations, accounting for four times more UK students than any other country. Numbers oscillate from year to year, but there is a long-term upward trend from around 8,000 at the start of the decade to 8,700 at the end. The most recent *Open Doors* report (IIE 2009) suggests that half of all UK students in the US are undergraduates and a further third are postgraduates; the remainder are involved in various other types of courses, including practical training (and may, therefore, not strictly be involved in degree mobility).

**Table 3: Best estimates of UK degree-mobile students in the main destination countries, 1999-2009**

Year	US	Ireland	Australia	France	Germany
1999-00	7,990	1,809	639	n.d.	n.d.
2000-01	8,139	1,939	888	n.d.	n.d.
2001-02	8,414	1,960	1,933	n.d.	n.d.
2002-03	8,326	2,132	2,210	n.d.	n.d.
2003-04	8,439	2,165	2,494	n.d.	n.d.
2004-05	8,236	2,254	1,966	n.d.	512
2005-06	8,274	2,119	1,709	1,713	488
2006-07	8,438	2,282	1,783	1,620	464
2007-08	8,367	2,270	1,805	1,635	445
2008-09	8,701	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.	n.d.

Source: Findlay and King (2010: 15), updated.

*Notes:*

1. n.d. indicates data unavailable or insufficient for estimation purposes.
2. US figures based on citizenship.
3. Ireland figures based on domicile in Great Britain and Northern Ireland (roughly half each).
4. Australia figures based on 'permanent residence' in the UK.
5. France figures based on citizenship.
6. German figures based on citizenship, but only for those educated at school level outside Germany; credit-mobile students removed.

39. The trend for Ireland, too, has been upward, although reaching a plateau in the second half of the 2000s. This has been due to a decline in the share from Northern Ireland. More than two thirds are on first-degree programmes; Trinity College Dublin is by far the most popular institution for UK students.

40. For Australia the pattern is more complex: an initial rapid upward trend – nearly a fourfold increase from 1999-00 to nearly 2,500 in 2003-04 – but then falling back somewhat and stabilising at around 1,700-1,800 since 2005-06. However, if vocational training is included in the mix, the figures change, rising from 2,156 in 2002 to 2,706 in 2008, a 25% increase.

41. Finally, for France and Germany the statistical runs are shorter, but nevertheless indicate decline in UK interest in both countries. As we shall see immediately below, this trend is replicated for Erasmus mobility.

*Trends in UK credit mobility*

42. The picture changes when we shift to credit mobility and especially to Erasmus. Here we concentrate mainly on evolving Erasmus trends, given that there is no single international database from which overall data on credit mobility can be extracted. Our recent update (Findlay and King 2010:

8-10) of earlier trends reported in our HEFCE report (2004: 13-15; see also Findlay *et al.* 2006: 296-298) shows both continuities over time and new features in recent years. Up until the mid-2000s, three features differentiated the UK from the general European picture:

- a low rate of outward mobility – the lowest in the EU;
- a declining rate of outward mobility – from a peak of nearly 12,000 in 1994-95 to a low of just over 7,000 in 2005-06, a drop of 40%;
- a marked imbalance of in-movers compared to out-movers – since 1994-95 the former being approximately twice the latter.

43. Amongst the explanatory factors for the decline in UK Erasmus outward mobility, the major influence is generally attributed to the fall in the number of language students at UK universities over the same period. Our survey data for the previous HEFCE report (2004: 37-41, 46) also demonstrated the crucial relevance of financial factors at a time of rising fees and student indebtedness. Moreover, studying languages and doing the Year Abroad also seemed a challenge for the widening participation agenda which aimed to attract more ‘non-traditional’ students from diverse backgrounds (mature students more likely to have family responsibilities, students with a disability, students from working-class and minority-ethnic backgrounds etc.). The growing trend for students to fund their studies by taking part-time jobs also made it more difficult for them to spend time on an exchange scheme abroad.

44. These low and downward Erasmus trends for the UK could be seen as particularly unfortunate and unwelcome given the results of research on academic performance and socio-economic outcomes of Erasmus graduates. We review this evidence in more detail later on, but just two quick ‘research facts’ here, drawn from the recent HEFCE report on the attainment of UK Erasmus students who graduated in 2007 (HEFCE 2009: 4, 25). First, three-quarters of Erasmus graduates achieved a ‘good’ degree (first or upper-second class) compared to 60% of non-Erasmus graduates. Second, Erasmus students had better employment and income outcomes.

45. Since 2005-06, however, the trend of outward mobility has bounced back, reaching more than 10,000 in 2007-08 (Figure 1). This recent upsurge is strongly related to the introduction of Erasmus-funded work placements in 2007-08; these have been very attractive, it seems, to UK students. Thus we note that, whereas total Erasmus outward mobility for all countries grew by 15% from 2006-07 to 2007-08, largely due to the introduction of work placements, the increase in outward mobility for the UK was 42%. The fact that 2,756 UK students took up placements during 2007-08 meant that they accounted for one in four Erasmus students moving that year.<sup>8</sup>

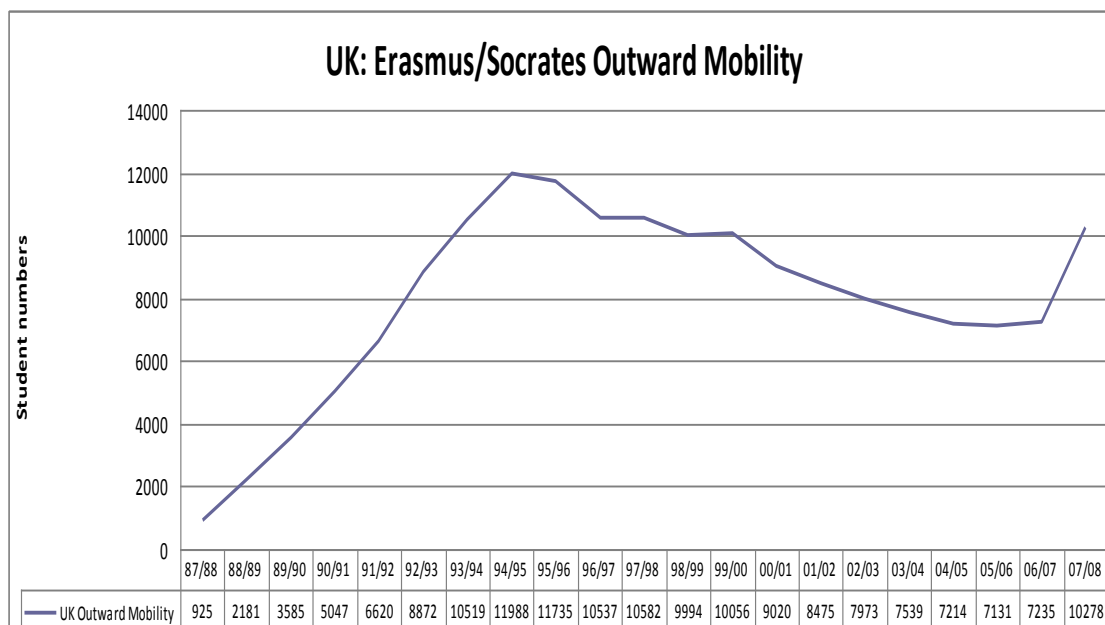
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<sup>8</sup> A note of caution about the danger of exaggerating the significance of work placements in driving UK Erasmus mobility back upwards. Key-interview insights and other information fed to the researchers by the report’s steering group suggest that at least some of the work-placement mobility that is now taking place under the Erasmus programme was already occurring previously – for instance, through the Language Assistants scheme managed by the British Council (which was not eligible for Erasmus funding previously, but now is), and through other European programmes such as the Leonardo and Comenius schemes.



46. The most recent data, just available, for 2008-09 shows that enthusiasm for work placements has grown further. During this year 3,399 UK students took this option, out of a total out-movement of 10,827, or one in three. Approximately two-fifths of all UK outgoing students to France and Germany selected the workplace route, whereas workplace students in Ireland outnumbered the study-abroad students by five times.

**Figure 1: UK Erasmus/Socrates outward mobility, 1987-08 to 2007-08**



47. Stripping out the work-placement students for the past two years, what has happened to the trend-data on ‘conventional’ Erasmus study-abroad mobility? Remember it had been consistently falling for a decade since the mid-1990s, to reach a trough of just over 7,000 during 2003-04 to 2006-07 (Figure 1). The result has been only minimal movement out of that trough – to 7,523 in 2007-08 and 7,428 in 2008-09. Later we compare these trends to those of other selected EU countries.

48. What about non-Erasmus credit mobility? There is no single database that covers this important segment of ISM. The only recourse is to generate original survey data, which is what we did as part of our earlier HEFCE study. This survey, written at a time when UK Erasmus mobility was still on a downward slope, revealed that non-Erasmus credit mobility, especially to North America and Australia, was increasing at a rate which more than compensated the drop in Erasmus numbers (HEFCE 2004: 18-20). This earlier survey, covering mobility trends up to 2002-03, was based on returns to a questionnaire to UK higher education institutions to which 80 HEIs responded (31 pre-1992 universities, 21 post-1992, and 28 other HEIs).

49. A useful update to this survey has recently been carried out by Carbonell (2009), based on questionnaire returns from 59 UK HEIs, and covering the five years 2003-04 to 2007-08. Carbonell’s

findings showed that total credit mobility increased by more than 10% over the five-year period. Both Erasmus (by 3%) and non-European mobility (by 30%) increased, though it should be noted that this survey excluded the Erasmus work placement scheme. Carbonell's data thus confirm that, even without the work experience element, Erasmus mobility has started to grow again, albeit modestly (Carbonell 2009: 5). This is backed up by the Erasmus statistics for all UK non-work-placement outward mobility, which show a 4% growth over the years 2004-05 to 2007-08 (Findlay and King 2010: 9).

50. Returning to Carbonell's study (2009: 10-17), we find substantial variations in mobility trends by destination country over the five-year period to 2007-08. Taking Erasmus mobility first, modest declines in 'traditional' destinations of France, Germany and Italy are compensated by a modest increase in mobility to Spain and stronger increases to Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Outside Europe, five-year increases were observed for the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Hong Kong.

#### *What the interviews tell us*

51. Some further confirmation and elaboration of the trends reported above comes from the eleven interviews carried out with a selection of key informants at UK universities. We stress that, although this sample was carefully constructed to cover a cross-section of institutions by type and geographical location, we cannot claim that it is fully statistically representative.

52. Of the eleven universities in this mini-survey, seven recorded increases in mobility over the past decade, three recorded decreases and one found no trend either way. Many of the increases were reported as very recent: for instance, interviewee D (post-92 university, south of England) mentioned that mobility had been dropping for quite some time, but was now growing again partly due to work placements. This interviewee also mentioned that some non-UK-domiciled European students use the work placement scheme to 'return' to their home countries and cities. A circumstance remarked upon by several interviewees was the tendency for non-UK nationals to be more credit-mobile than UK students. As interviewee F (post-92 university, London region) described it, this was a case of 'serial' mobility whereby students who had already invested in going abroad became keen to build further 'mobility capital'. In the case of interviewee A (pre-92 Scottish university), non-UK students made up 40% of the outmovers; for interviewee H (pre-92, southern England), the ratio was one in three.<sup>9</sup>

53. Beyond numerical trends, all interviewees commented on shifting patterns of mobility, as this was one of the key questions posed to them. The following were remarked upon by sufficient

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<sup>9</sup> There has been an established trend, even before the introduction of the Erasmus Work Placement scheme, of around 15% of outgoing UK Erasmus mobility to be made up of non-UK nationals.

numbers of respondents for us to regard them as potential generalisations. The role of work placements was a crucial new incentive for mobility, especially for students from the more vocationally-oriented post-92 universities. Second, there was a general shift of mobility away from the language-degree year-abroad model (especially where language enrolments had fallen or the degree programmes themselves had been discontinued) in favour of non-language mobility, which was more popular in the humanities and social sciences than in the sciences, engineering or medicine (partly due to curricular and accreditation reasons). Third, several respondents commented on the growth of interest in long-haul destinations: not just away from Europe to the 'traditional' Anglophone countries of North America and Australasia, but also to Singapore, Hong Kong, South Africa and Latin America. Within Europe, three respondents mentioned a growing interest in Scandinavia as an Erasmus destination, seen as attractive because of courses offered in English.

#### *Summing-up and further questions*

54. Setting aside the ever-present challenge of measuring ISM in a consistent way across countries, the following key points emerge from our metadata analysis.

- There is a long-term upward trend in outward ISM for the UK in terms of absolute numbers, but a downward trend as a relative proportion of total students.
- Out-moving UK students are vastly outweighed by incoming foreign students whose numbers are also growing more rapidly.
- The upwards trend in outward mobility is more easily documented for degree mobility than for credit mobility.
- For credit mobility the picture is more complicated, and different trends can be noted for Erasmus vs. non-Erasmus mobility. Erasmus mobility grew from its inception until the mid-1990s; subsequent decline was halted in the mid-2000s by an increase mainly in work-placement mobility. Data is scarce on non-Erasmus mobility, but survey evidence (HEFCE 2004; Carbonell 2009) indicates a more consistent growth pattern.
- There is a change in the geography of UK ISM. For both degree and credit mobility, there is a decline in non-Anglophone destinations (primarily in continental Europe) and a rise in Anglophone destinations (primarily North America, Australia and Ireland).
- UK ISM – both degree and credit mobility – has expanded more slowly than trends in most other advanced countries. This comparative dimension is discussed in the next section of this report

55. In addition to these six key findings from the statistics, we raise three questions that deserve further analysis. First, the statistical record suggests that the nature of UK student mobility has changed over time in relation to the opportunities available. The clearest example of this is the arrest of the long-term decline in outward Erasmus flows by the introduction of the work placement scheme.

Other destinations which have experienced growth include those such as the US and Australia which offer an element of practical and vocational training.

56. Second, the Anglophone/non-Anglophone divide is becoming blurred by the trend for non-Anglophone countries to offer programmes taught in English. The example cited above was that of medicine in the Czech Republic, but this is just one incidence of a wider trend, evident especially at postgraduate level. Within Europe, countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden increasingly offer undergraduate programmes through the medium of English which could attract UK students.<sup>10</sup>

57. Third, there are other trends that are not visible in the data presented here, such as the way in which ISM is embedded in lifetime mobility, both before and, especially, after the student years. Existing studies (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Findlay and King 2010) have noted the very significant association between student mobility and longer-term international career and residential behaviour of UK students. For instance, King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 243-244) found that graduates from the University of Sussex who had been on a Year Abroad were, compared to a control sample of non-mobile students, four times more likely to apply for a job abroad, twice as likely to have lived abroad since graduation (and subsequently returned) and three times more likely to be living abroad at the time of the survey. For German students, Parey and Waldinger (2010) found that going abroad as an Erasmus student increases the chances of working abroad by 15 percentage points. What this evidence shows is that ISM is not a transient phenomenon that involves a temporary relocation for the sole purpose of education, but that some students see this as a launch-pad for an international career, either in the study-abroad destination or in another country.

### **Comparative Context**

58. In this section, we draw out some comparative interpretations of the UK's trends in outward mobility by setting the UK data alongside that for selected other countries. With the Erasmus discussion fresh in our minds, we start with that. Our earlier study on credit mobility (HEFCE 2004: 13-16) had pointed out that the UK had uniquely low and declining rates of outward mobility compared to all other countries participating in the scheme, especially during the ten-year decline for the UK, from 1995-96 to 2005-06, the year before the introduction of the work placements. However, towards the latter part of this decade of decline, other countries started to show a similar trend, first levelling off and then falling back a bit on annual totals. As Table 4 shows, these countries were Ireland, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark; all, significantly, are countries where English is either the main language (Ireland) or where it is widely spoken and increasingly used in the university curriculum as the language of instruction. In this set of five countries, the trend index of outward mobility (2006-07

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<sup>10</sup> More significantly, such countries also attract international students who might otherwise be applying to the UK, especially if there is a fee differential against the high UK overseas student fees (Becker *et al.* 2009; Middlehurst and Olcott 2009).

measured against the base of 1995-96) is 'negative', i.e. below 100. The UK figure is lowest, at 62; the others are lesser declines, within the range 82 to 94.<sup>11</sup>

59. By contrast, for the other main Erasmus countries – France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Belgium, Austria and Finland – we observe a continuous growth in out-movers over this period. The highest growth rates, representing the most enthusiastic embracers of Erasmus, are Spain, Portugal and Italy, where numbers more or less doubled (increasing 2.7 times in the case of Portugal). But France and Germany, the other two big EU countries, also record strong growth, with numbers increasing by around three-quarters over the eleven-year period.

60. Turning to degree mobility, Table 5 sets the UK profile for 1975-2005 alongside five comparator countries, chosen from the OECD database and tabulated by de Wit (2008a: 33-34). As with Table 4 on Erasmus, we then calculate in the final column trend indices. It is seen that the pace of growth of UK outward degree mobility is roughly comparable (if somewhat below) that of the US, but it is well below that of the other comparators – all large OECD countries. Particularly notable are the high index figures for France and Germany, indicating a five- to six-fold increase, compared to the UK's 33%.

61. So, the trend of UK outward mobility is growing in absolute terms, but diminishing in relative terms, both as a proportion of all UK-domiciled students and of total global student mobility. In other words, most other countries in the world are experiencing a faster growth in outward student mobility than the UK and, in many cases, much faster. We believe that this could be a matter of concern given the increasing internationalisation of skilled and professional labour markets; the danger being that the UK will produce proportionally fewer multilingual, multicultural graduates than other competitor countries in Europe and elsewhere. This creates, in turn, two scenarios: one is that fewer UK graduates will gain key positions in European and overseas companies and institutions, and the other is that top positions in UK companies, professions and transnational corporations based in the UK will be taken by multilingual foreign nationals.

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<sup>11</sup> We use 1995-96 as the base year since it is a more representative staging point across the spectrum of the fourteen countries included in the table. These fourteen countries comprise all the 'old' EU countries (minus Luxembourg) which had joined by 1986. Thanks to Laura Killick, Junior Research Bursary holder at the University of Sussex, for help in assembling Table 4.

**Table 4: Erasmus outward mobility, 1994-95 to 2006-07**

	94/5	95/6	96/7	97/8	98/9	99/00	00/1	01/2	02/3	03/4	04/5	05/6	06/7	$\frac{2006/7}{1995/6} \times 100$
UK	11,988	11,735	10,537	10,582	9,994	10,056	9,020	8,475	7,973	7,539	7,214	7,131	7,235	62
Ireland	1,632	1,618	1,584	1,564	1,504	1,689	1,648	1,707	1,627	1,705	1,572	1,567	1,524	94
Netherlands	4,853	5,180	4,132	4,190	4,332	4,418	4,162	4,244	4,241	4,338	4,743	4,491	4,502	87
Sweden	2,302	2,912	2,915	3,264	3,321	3,087	2,726	2,633	2,656	2,667	2,698	2,530	2,532	87
Denmark	1,771	1,930	1,730	1,795	1,751	1,764	1,750	1,752	1,845	1,686	1,793	1,682	1,587	82
Belgium	3,480	3,978	4,101	4,233	4,446	4,404	4,427	4,521	4,620	4,789	4,833	4,971	5,119	129
France	9,844	13,336	12,505	14,821	16,351	16,824	17,161	18,149	19,365	20,981	21,561	22,501	22,981	172
Germany	12,633	13,638	13,070	13,785	14,693	15,715	15,872	16,626	18,482	20,688	22,427	23,848	23,844	175
Austria	1,801	2,301	2,384	2,442	2,711	2,952	3,024	3,024	3,325	3,721	3,809	3,971	4,032	175
Italy	7,217	8,969	8,907	9,271	10,875	12,421	13,253	13,950	15,225	16,829	16,440	16,389	17,195	192
Spain	8,537	10,547	10,841	12,468	14,381	16,297	17,158	17,403	18,258	20,034	20,819	22,891	22,322	212
Portugal	1,903	1,609	1,674	1,834	2,179	2,472	2,569	2,825	3,172	3,782	3,845	4,312	4,424	275
Greece	1,928	1,897	1,601	1,431	1,765	1,910	1,868	1,974	2,115	2,385	2,491	2,714	2,465	130
Finland	1,641	2,530	2,538	3,052	3,441	3,486	3,286	3,291	3,402	3,951	3,932	3,851	3,773	149

Source: 'Erasmus Statistics', accessed 1 August 2009

**Table 5: UK degree mobility and selected comparator countries, 1975-2005**

	1975		1985		1995		2005		$\frac{2005}{1975} \times 100$
	no.	rank	no.	rank	no.	rank	no.	rank	
UK	16,866	6	14,513	19	24,034	16	22,405	22	133
Germany	10,759	14	22,424	9	45,432	4	56,410	5	524
France	9,010	20	n.d.		32,411	12	53,350	6	592
Italy	11,251	13	17,935	12	36,515	9	38,544	13	343
US	29,414	2	19,707	10	27,749	14	41,181	10	140
Canada	12,644	10	16,254	15	28,280	13	38,847	12	307

Source: OECD data in de Wit (2008a: 33-34); authors' calculations.

62. The already-noted diminution of UK outward mobility to non-English-speaking countries in Europe, and the increase in mobility directed at Anglophone countries, or to non-Anglophone countries where some or all of the instruction in universities is in English, only reinforces the increasing monoglot character of the UK graduate population – potentially a retrograde step in an increasingly globalised world of intercultural communication. Whilst it is true that English is becoming increasingly entrenched as the global language that ‘everyone must speak’ if they want to ‘get on in the world’, the danger is that this becomes a rationalisation for English-speakers not to be interested in learning other languages, even those like Spanish, Arabic or Chinese that are spoken by hundreds of millions of people.<sup>12</sup>

### Causal Factors in Student Choice of Mobility

63. In this section of the report we draw on a much wider trawl of literature, focusing mainly on the UK case, but introducing comparative perspectives from the experience of other nationalities where this is instructive. Once again, we privilege the most recent literature; yet, when all is said and done, the reasons why students choose to move internationally are shown to be relatively stable over time, albeit with some variation between credit and degree mobility.

64. Four pieces of empirical research are particularly important in shedding light on the UK case: all have been mentioned already. They are firstly, for credit mobility, our own report for HEFCE (2004) and the partial update by Carbonell (2009); and secondly, for degree or programme mobility, our

<sup>12</sup> To be fair, there is anecdotal evidence from some universities (key interviews and steering-group contributions) of a rising interest in Asian and Middle Eastern languages, usually accompanied by a Year Abroad. Such students are not eligible for Erasmus mobility grants: hence they are not in the Erasmus database and nor, as credit-movers, are they likely to be in the OECD international students statistics. They will only become more visible once there is a more complete and robust system of recording student mobility by type and destination.

DIUS/BIS study (Findlay and King 2010), and the more or less parallel British Academy-funded research carried out by Brooks and Waters (2009a, 2009b; also Waters and Brooks 2010a, 2010b). Since these are, to the best of our knowledge, the only substantial empirical surveys which address causal factors, we structure our account around these studies, referring to others as we go along.

### *Credit mobility*

65. We start with credit mobility. In HEFCE (2004: 42) we presented a model of student mobility drivers and barriers. Although this is essentially a model of individual student decision-making (to take the credit mobility option or not), three separate levels of analysis can be recognised: international/national, institutional and individual. In terms of conventional migration theory, these are referred to respectively as macro, meso and micro scales of analysis (Hammar and Tamas 1997: 14).

66. At the international/national scale causal mechanisms are both general and specific. At the general level there is substantial recent literature on globalisation and internationalisation of higher education and the creation of the global knowledge economy (e.g. Altbach and Knight 2007; Altbach and Teichler 2001; de Wit 2008b; Gürüz 2008; Kehm and Teichler 2007; Kwiek 2001; Varghese 2008; Williams 2006). This greater interconnectedness of the world's higher education institutions is facilitated by the communications revolution, itself global in scope and instantaneous in effect, and by various processes of academic harmonisation, research networking and staff mobility which create a setting for student exchange programmes and student mobility more generally. More specific supra-national drivers include things which are familiar to those in the UK and Europe: EU enlargement, the Bologna Process, Socrates-Erasmus and other structures by which certain countries participate in mobility schemes (de Wit 2008c). Moving beyond the strictly academic realm, other features of globalisation are also possible stimulants of student mobility – general economic trends (we wait to see what the effects of the global recession are on ISM), economic and trade linkages, political affiliations (both colonial and recent), cultural globalisation, the spread of English as a global hegemonic language (especially in HE) – although multiple barriers may also exist in the form of economic costs, cultural and linguistic obstacles, visa and immigration control regimes etc. Many of these international-scale factors apply equally (in fact probably more) to degree mobility as they do to credit movement.

67. At the meso-level of institutions, credit mobility is strongly embedded in inter-university exchange schemes and other forms of academic networks. In terms of our student mobility decision-making model (HEFCE 2004: 42), the institutional level often acts to reinforce (or deter) students' propensity to study abroad for credit. So, good promotional information, institutional support, smooth credit transfer systems, preparatory language training if necessary, easy access to mobility grants, and committed and enthusiastic staff are the main causative factors at an institutional level which can boost mobility choice. Various combinations of items from this menu of good practice were also



mentioned by many of our eleven interviewees. We return to this aspect in the last main section of the report.

68. Both HEFCE (2004: 19-20, 47) and Carbonell (2009) found the institutional variable to be important in explaining credit mobility trends over recent years. Their institutional surveys, based respectively on returns from 80 and 59 UK HEIs, found that pre-1992 universities, especially the Russell Group, were the most successful in promoting and sustaining credit mobility. Generalising from quite a mass of data, the more research-intensive universities had more resources, support systems and academic partnership connections to concentrate an increasing share of credit mobility, both within Europe and beyond, over the period between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s. Others HEIs – post-92 universities and non-university institutions – were losing out.<sup>13</sup> One of the key factors in this differentiation was the success of the older universities in maintaining their foreign language programmes (which impacted especially on Erasmus exchanges), in contrast to the severe contraction of language teaching in many post-92 universities, but also in some of the smaller pre-92 institutions, including two of those recently interviewed.

69. On individual-level causal factors of outward credit mobility, there is a wealth of data, both quantitative and qualitative. On the qualitative front, the best study remains Elizabeth Murphy-Lejeune's (2002) detailed ethnographic narrative of student mobility in Europe, based on 50 in-depth interviews with Erasmus students and language assistants from many countries, most of whom were interviewed in Dublin and Paris in the mid-1990s. This study, focused above all on experiences, perceptions and evaluations of the participants, adds considerable nuance to the much more standardised findings of the more impersonal surveys reviewed below.

70. In these surveys, a distinction needs to be drawn between motivations (considered here) and characteristics of the students (considered in the next section of the report), although there are important linkages between the two, which we will point out later. A further distinction can be drawn between the motivations of credit-mobile and degree-mobile students, which we will clarify and exemplify as we go along.

71. Why, then, do students choose to study abroad? For credit-mobility students, a simple, facile answer is that they do so because it is a mandatory part of their degree programme; for others it might be an optional element in their degree. This, however, merely redirects the question to an earlier stage of the decision-making: why did they choose that degree course, with its in-built mobility opportunities? For the Erasmus programme, the 'EU discourse' promotes two main benefits and therefore motivations to students: acquisition of a foreign language and intercultural awareness; and improved employment prospects. At a macro-scale, too, these motivations have their equivalents: the

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<sup>13</sup> However, both our HEFCE (2004) report, and more recent data notified to us by David Hibler (British Council Erasmus Office), show that the Erasmus performance of several small specialised non-university HEIs is good (on the criterion of 'take-up', i.e. Erasmus outgoing students as a percentage of full-time registrations).

creation of a multilingual, multiculturally aware European graduate population; and the enhanced competitiveness of European graduates, and of the European economy, in an increasingly competitive global scenario (King 2003: 163-166). These motivations are, indeed, picked up by Erasmus students when they are questioned or interviewed about the reasons for, and evaluations of, their mobility experiences. One the whole, it seems that they are more highly motivated by the general experience of studying or working abroad, than they are by its intrinsic academic merit or even, in some surveys, by its employment pay-offs. Answers alluding to 'maturity and personal development' and 'understanding of another culture/country/language' loom very large in most surveys, whereas 'relevance to employment prospects' are somewhat less often prioritised in survey responses (see e.g. HEFCE 2004: 36). This same broad balance of findings on motivation was revealed in the University of Sussex Year Abroad survey (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003: 237) and in the much larger Europe-wide Erasmus five-year tracer study of mobile students carried out by Maiworm and Teichler (1996: 90). More recently, the 2005 Erasmus Student Network Survey on the experience of studying abroad, which achieved responses from more than 7,000 credit-mobile students from 26 European countries via an online questionnaire, found roughly analogous results (see Krzaklewska and Krupnik 2006: 14-15).<sup>14</sup> These authors found, however, somewhat different results for Erasmus students, for whom learning a foreign language was their major motivation, compared to non-Erasmus mobile students, where the career dimension and the opportunity to enjoy new experiences were more important. The chance to improve one's academic knowledge was ranked much lower, for both groups.

72. Returning to the UK situation, the recent National Union of Students' Student Experience Survey (NUS 2010: 10) naturally picked up a large quota of students who had been, or were about to go on, a study-abroad scheme. Responding to the question 'What did, or do, you hope to gain as a result of study abroad?', 76% cited 'greater confidence (yet with a marked gender split – 68% for males, 81% for females), 72% 'better employment prospects' (70% males, 73% females), 66% 'become more self-reliant' (61% males, 70% females), and 61% 'better language skills' (57% males, 64% females). Three things stand out from this NUS survey data: the greater shares of mobile females responding positively to the various (perceived) benefits, the rise up the ranking list of 'employment' as a benefit, and the failure to mention (beyond language acquisition) any direct academic pay-off.

73. We asked our eleven interviewees about the main reasons why students choose to intercalate a period abroad into their UK degree courses. We got broadly similar answers, both to each other (indeed the degree of consistency across the sector was remarkable), and to support the results of the survey research reviewed above. Here are two typical answers from these telephone interviews, carried out in June 2010.

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<sup>14</sup> Large online surveys of this kind generate lots of response data, but results may not be fully representative. Response rates vary by country and one can never be sure about possible bias – for instance, is it mainly the students who have had a 'good' mobility experience who are most likely to respond?

Students go abroad to gain a different experience, enhance their CVs, beat their competitors for certain jobs, have an opportunity to travel. On the whole there isn't much emphasis on the academic purpose of their time abroad. The students who return are on the whole more confident than their peers who didn't participate in mobility: overall the difference between mobile and non-mobile students is very marked (interviewee B, pre-92 university, English Midlands).

More and more, students are starting to understand the added value of mobility. The benefits are that it sets them apart from other students, looks good on their CVs, gives them transferable skills, the opportunity to travel, an international career, and personal development in terms of maturity and confidence (interviewee D, pre-92 university, Wales).

One distinctively common feature of the interviewees' narratives about mobility was that they stressed the employability aspect rather more strongly than some of the aforementioned surveys. This could be either because this is part of the marketing pitch to prospective students; or it could be because, at a time when graduate jobs are in short supply (more so nowadays than when the earlier surveys were administered, in the early 2000s), students are increasingly seeking that extra edge that will make the difference. We return to this issue later in the report.

#### *Degree mobility*

74. For degree mobility, where from the UK perspective, language becomes less important as a motivating force (indeed the language factor becomes a constraint, mostly directing degree-mobility students to English-speaking countries), other factors take over. Macro- and meso-level factors are broadly similar to those mentioned above for credit mobility, namely the existence of an increasingly globalised higher education system, within which particular networks of institutions, united by historical connections, common interests in research, perceived level of prestige, or by simple language considerations, function as channels along which students are sent – for example at the transition from undergraduate to postgraduate study.

75. Individual-level motivations for pursuing degrees abroad have been studied by us in our recently completed DIUS/BIS research report (Findlay and King 2010) and by Brooks and Waters in their British Academy-funded research, papers from which are flowing freely (Brooks and Waters 2009a, 2009b, 2010; Waters and Brooks 2010a, 2010b). The former study included two large-scale questionnaire surveys: a school survey comprising 1,600 final-year pupils who were applying for admission to HE, and a student survey of 560 UK-national students who were studying at foreign universities. In addition, face-to-face interviews were conducted with students abroad and with various key informants or 'mobility managers' (for details, Findlay and King 2010: 46-53). The Brooks/Waters study was more qualitative, based on 85 interviews, 40 with sixth-formers and undergraduates who were contemplating going abroad for (further) university study, and 45 with graduates who had completed a degree abroad.

76. Questionnaire results from the above-mentioned school survey revealed, firstly, that only a rather small minority – 3% – were actually applying to study abroad, although a further 11% had considered the option, but not followed through. We have no way of knowing what proportion of the 3% who applied actually ended up going. Propensity to apply for university abroad – mainly to the English-speaking world (US, Canada, Ireland, Australia) – was twice as high in independent schools as in state schools. Key-informant interviews (mainly with the teachers responsible for coordinating and advising on the university application process) stressed the relatively marginal nature of the phenomenon of overseas applications and pointed out that in most cases such applications were seen as an alternative to parallel applications being made to UK universities (e.g. Trinity College Dublin as an alternative to Russell Group universities) and often reflected family connections in these countries.

77. More directly revealing were the responses to the student questionnaire and interviews with a smaller selection of UK students overseas (Findlay and King 2010: 27-34). Here the survey responses gave the following ranked answers (percentages of respondents ranking the motivation as 'important' or 'very important' in brackets):

- wanted to attend a world-class university (88.7);
- opportunity for a unique adventure (87.9);
- step towards an international career (68.7);
- limited places in UK for this course (42.5);
- high student fees in UK (33.9);
- family encouragement (27.3).

Given the different nature of degree mobility vis-à-vis credit mobility, and also the fact that the former includes undergraduates, taught postgraduates and doctoral students, it is perhaps not surprising that the sequence of factors here is somewhat different from our earlier discussion of credit mobility – in particular the importance of the destination institution in terms of its (perceived) world ranking.

78. Brooks and Waters nuance the above survey findings with insights gained from their interview data. For instance, they found that some of their respondents saw going overseas as a 'second chance' to compensate failure to get into Oxbridge (Brooks and Waters 2009b). Applicants perceived world-class universities such as Princeton, Harvard and Yale to be on a par with their target universities in the UK and perhaps easier to get into. Brooks and Waters therefore see these internationally-compared decisions about where to study as part of emerging global circuits of higher education (2009a; Hazelkorn 2009). Another aspect of the second-chance syndrome occurred with applications for postgraduate study. In this instance, failure to secure funding from the relevant research council to do a postgraduate degree in the UK was followed by applying to get a grant to study abroad, usually from the host university.

79. In other respects, Waters and Brooks give a more pessimistic interpretation of the motivations of UK students to study abroad. According to them, UK students who choose to study abroad, mainly in the English-speaking realm of the top US universities, are 'accidental achievers'. They are not overtly motivated by strategic concerns about career development or developing heightened intercultural awareness; rather they seek adventure and excitement and often use the opportunity to study abroad (especially undergraduates becoming postgraduates) to prolong a carefree lifestyle and delay the onset of a career (Waters and Brooks 2010a). On the other hand, Waters and Brooks argue, their presence in the 'Ivy League' universities is not accidental: they are guided there by parental involvement in decision-making and their access is facilitated by particular experiences of usually private schooling. Waters and Brooks (2010b) go on to argue that UK students abroad have rather limited engagements with diversity or the 'other' in their host countries and communities. Instead, whilst seeking something different in attending an overseas university, they also desire a 'knowable' destination such as the United States or, in a different geographic context, the English-speaking 'bubble' of the European University Institute in Florence.

80. The Brooks and Waters findings are interesting and insightful. To some extent, however, they stand at odds with the more survey-based research which we carried out for the DIUS/BIS project, which generally gives a more positive gloss on the phenomenon of UK degree mobility. Part of the contrast in interpretation might be due to the different methodologies used, but our project did involve, in addition to its questionnaire surveys, an extensive programme of interviews with degree-mobile students in several countries (Findlay and King 2010: 24-39). The Brooks/Waters perspective also differs somewhat from Waters' own earlier research on Hong Kong students abroad, where the theoretical grounding in social class, credentialisation and labour market competitiveness is the same as their research on UK ISM, but the students' behaviour is seen as much more instrumental and strategic (Waters 2006, 2009).

81. Overall the Brooks/Waters research points to the privileged nature of overseas study for UK students, particularly at undergraduate level. This leads into our next section, which explores in more detail the mobile students' social, economic and demographic characteristics.

### **Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Mobile Students**

82. Some hints have already been given that mobile students represent, to some extent, a 'privileged' selection from the overall population of third-level students. The evidence for this in the literature, based in turn on large-scale and therefore statistically robust surveys, as well as qualitative data, is persuasive, even overwhelming. In our analysis of research results below we look at gender, age, minority ethnic vs. 'white' status, social class and parental background, academic performance,

and the state vs. independent school origin of mobile students. We start with credit mobility, especially the Erasmus scheme, and then move later to degree mobility.

### *Credit mobility*

83. For UK outward Erasmus flows, some clear results emerge from linking the Erasmus dataset to the HESA records of all students. In this way the special characteristics of Erasmus movers can be readily identified. The first attempt to do that was a lengthy appendix to our HEFCE report (HEFCE 2004: 81-90), based on a simple comparison between Erasmus and non-Erasmus home full-time degree-level students in their second or third years in the academic year 2002-03 – respectively 4,718 and 486,373 students. Results show Erasmus students to be:

- disproportionately female (69% as against 55% for the non-Erasmus population);
- less likely to be ‘ethnically non-white’ (8% as against 16%);
- more likely to be from the three topmost socio-occupational classes (83% against 76%).

84. A follow-up study on UK Erasmus students’ attainment in higher education (HEFCE 2009) reinforced these findings and also undertook a broader analysis, based on cohort entrants in 2002-03 who graduated (first degree) within five years, i.e. by 2007-08. This survey also distinguished between Erasmus and work placement students – an important distinction as we will see.<sup>15</sup> The analysis was based on the following absolute numbers: Erasmus 4,315, other study abroad students (henceforth ‘other mobile’) 3,650, work placement (in the UK) students 14,825, non-mobile students 179,220. Key results show that:

- Erasmus students are more likely to be female (68%; ‘other mobile’ 61%), whereas work placement students are more likely to be male (55%). The ‘non-mobiles’ are 56% female.
- Erasmus movers are once again the least likely to be ‘ethnically non-white’ (9%) compared to all other groups (‘other mobile’ 10%, placement students 17%, all non-mobile 14%).
- And again, Erasmus and ‘other mobile’ students are more likely to be from social classes 1, 2 and 3 of the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (managerial, professional and intermediate occupational groups); the data strongly replicate the earlier study. Erasmus students are 82% from SEC 1-3, ‘other mobile’ 83%, work placement 70%, and total non-mobile 73%.

85. So far, then, almost an exact replication of the earlier study – as one would expect from such large-scale statistical comparisons. The HEFCE 2009 study also revealed that mobile-abroad students are younger than average. The following figures in brackets show the percentages of students aged over 21 when they started their degree: Erasmus (6%), other mobile (5%), work

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<sup>15</sup> Note that, here, ‘work placement’ refers not to the new Erasmus work placement scheme, but to students who build a work placement in the UK into their degree.

placement (7%), all non-mobile (15%). Erasmus students are half as likely to have a disability compared to the non-mobile group (3% vs. 6%), other categories have intermediate rates ('other mobile' 4%, placement 5%). Reinforcing the upper-SEC bias of Erasmus and other mobile students, HEFCE (2009: 22-23) also looked at HE participation of student origin areas. The percentages of students coming from the two lowest quintiles of local area participation rates in HE were, for Erasmus and other mobile students, both 14%, for work placement students 22%, and for all non-mobile students, also 22%.

86. We now move on to analyse the academic credentials of the credit-mobile, work-placement and non-mobile categories of students. We look at both entry qualifications and degree-class outcomes. The picture shows that Erasmus and other mobile students score better across the board than non-mobile students; work placement students have below-average entry qualifications, but above-average degree results. In more detail, for the 2002-03 entry graduating cohort (HEFCE 2009: 23-27):

- The percentages of Erasmus students getting more than 360 UCAS tariff points in A-level and A-level equivalent qualifications is 49%; for 'other mobile' students it is even higher, 53%. Much lower shares are recorded by placement students (20%) and all non-mobile students (29%).
- For degree-class outcomes, Erasmus and 'other mobile' students get, respectively, 15% and 19% firsts, and 75% and 81% firsts and upper seconds. Interestingly, the placement year students fare almost as well, with 17% firsts and 71% firsts and upper seconds. Much lower academic out-turns are recorded by the non-mobile students – 11% and 60% respectively.

87. Another revealing outcome relates to the salary six months after graduating for those who graduated in 2006-07 (HEFCE 2009: 30). The following data refer to the percentages receiving a salary in excess of £20,000 per annum, of all those receiving a known, non-zero salary. For both Erasmus and other mobile students the share is 29%, for non-mobile graduates it is 17%, and for placement graduates it is 37%. These figures perhaps exaggerate the differences, since the average salary values are somewhat closer – respectively £17,975, £16,487 and £19,530.

88. These data, on the whole, indicate significant academic selectivity into Erasmus-type mobility streams; not so for the work placement students; yet the academic and economic benefits are shared by all students who are 'mobile' in some sense (either by going abroad, or by moving during their degree into a work placement scheme for a year). Helpfully, other data are available to back up at least some of these findings. HEFCE (2004: 88) confirms the higher percentages of Erasmus students with first and upper seconds (73%) compared to non-Erasmus students (61%). And King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003: 243), based on smaller but still statistically valid samples of University of Sussex 'Year Abroad' and 'non-YA' students, found that 52% of YA graduates had incomes of over £20,000 compared to only 33% of non-YA graduates. These shares, by the way, are higher than those in HEFCE 2009 because respondents in the Sussex study were of varying ages and had graduated over

a longer span of time – though this variable was controlled for in the YA/non-YA comparison. The Sussex study also found that students who had been on a YA were more likely to have a ‘European’ as opposed to a ‘national’ identity frame, and were more likely to have lived, or to be living, abroad, thereby indicating a strong link between student geographic mobility and subsequent migration and travel behaviour.

89. Throughout the above analysis, it must be held in mind that more than 40% of the UK’s outwardly mobile Erasmus students are engaged in language degree programmes – a much higher fraction than for all Erasmus students Europe-wide (where it is around 15%). This has obvious implications for the demographic (disproportionately female and ‘white’), social (disproportionately upper-SEC and independent school) and academic (higher entry requirements) backgrounds of the Erasmus students. The same figure also underlines the UK’s ‘linguistic deficit’ in this area as well as the potential vulnerability in the UK’s participation rate vis-à-vis other countries – over-reliant on degree programmes which have shown a tendency to shrink and where the supply of good student applicants is far from buoyant.

90. Another interesting comparative dimension emerges from recently-announced results of a US study of academic outcomes of study abroad. The GLOSSARI project (the ‘Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative’) has monitored student outcomes across ten years at the 35-institution University of Georgia system. The study found that students who study abroad achieved improved academic performance overall, have higher graduation rates and improved knowledge of cultural practices, compared to the students in a non-mobile control group. Apart from the above findings, which broadly confirm the Erasmus and other mobile students’ achievement profiles, the GLOSSARI project had some innovative features. First, as a guard against the ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ syndrome of many existing studies (i.e. that mobile students do better because they are already academically and socially selected), the Georgia study’s control sampling took account of this. Second, the scale of the exercise (19,000 study-abroad students, 18,000 students in the control group) lends rigour to the results. And third – perhaps the key finding – studying abroad was found to help, rather than hinder, the academic performance of the weaker and ‘at-risk’ students: rather than ‘de-railing’ such students, it actually focuses them and keeps them ‘on track’.<sup>16</sup>

91. Finally, we draw attention to a wider range of questions which are perhaps tangential to ISM per se, but which offer valuable contextual evidence on mobility behaviour before, during and after the student years. An emerging literature on these questions yields the following insights. Firstly, our own HEFCE study (2004: 36) showed that prior mobility – such as participation in school exchanges or, especially, travelling abroad during a pre-university Gap Year – was a strong predictor of credit mobility. One statistic to illustrate this: 71% of student respondents said that taking a Gap Year

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<sup>16</sup> The full results of this just-completed project have yet to be published: the above is drawn from an announcement of some key results in the online bulletin *Inside Higher Ed*, 13 July 2010. See <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2010/07/13/abroad>



abroad increased the likelihood of taking a Year Abroad as a university student. Secondly, both Christie (2007) and Holdsworth (2009) show that the increasing tendency for UK students to live at home reflects financial pressures on students from less well-off backgrounds. Hence, 'going away to uni' is increasingly the preserve of students from more affluent families. Thirdly, Faggian *et al.* (2006) show that in terms of both going to university, and making the university-to-employment transition, non-white ethnic minorities have lower rates of spatial mobility than whites in the UK. And finally, moving to some US evidence, Mulder and Clark (2002) find a positive correlation between moving away from home to enter third-level education and parental income and education. They also discuss the 'feathered nest' (as opposed to the 'empty nest') hypothesis, in that the likelihood of returning home after graduation increases with parental income.

### *Degree mobility*

92. What, now, of the social characteristics of degree-mobile students? Here we return to our own recent DIUS/BIS study (Findlay and King 2010) and the set of papers authored by Brooks and Waters already cited.

93. In many respects the story is similar to that described above for credit mobility, especially as regards academic and social selectivity. For instance, Findlay and King (2010: 17-23) surveyed large samples of final-year school pupils, asking them about their study-abroad intentions. Statistical analysis of the results showed that those who were applying to do their degree abroad had significantly better qualifications (GCSE grades) than those who were not applying abroad. Pupils applying abroad were also disproportionately concentrated in independent-sector schools, as noted earlier, and they were more than twice as likely to apply to university abroad if their parents were university educated (Findlay and King 2010: 72). A personal and family history of mobility (school exchanges, frequent travel, family members abroad etc.) was also shown to be correlated to the decision to apply to study abroad. Finally, whilst the school survey data did indicate that females were more likely than males to apply to study abroad, and 'whites' more than 'non-whites', the differences are not statistically significant. To sum up, those who apply for university abroad are: academic high-performers, from the higher social-class backgrounds, disproportionately concentrated in private schools and have 'mobility network' connections abroad. But note that, because of the nature of the survey data, we have no way of knowing how many who applied were accepted, or how many have actually moved. Aspirations or intentions are not necessarily matched by mobility outcome – an important analytical point which resonates throughout the scientific study of migration (Boyle *et al.* 1998).

94. Turning now to the survey of the UK students who did move (Findlay and King 2010: 26-39), we find, again, strong academic selectivity – 71% of respondents had three or more A grades at A-level. At first sight, evidence of private-school selectivity is less strong, since 54% of the survey

respondents had a state education, but bearing in mind that in England only 11% of pupils in their final year of schooling (Year 13) are in independent schools, this still represents a disproportionate concentration from the private sector (2010: 18, 25). Other findings which are consistent with the school survey are the social-class selectivity of those studying abroad – as measured by parental occupation, parental higher education and the ability of parents to finance their children’s education abroad (less common for postgraduate students because of the availability of scholarships from host institutions).<sup>17</sup>

95. Based on more qualitative research, Waters and Brooks (2010a) see UK students who study overseas as the bearers of privilege and class reproduction. Without quoting any figures, they say (Brooks and Waters 2009a: 197): ‘The vast majority of our respondents... came from high socio-economic groups, had attended private secondary schools and had achieved high levels of academic attainment’. Buoyed financially by their families, such students – often strongly guided by their parents in a form of ‘parentocracy’ of education (cf. Brown 1997) – are concerned to acquire the ‘right’ credentials and other embodied life and travel experiences, which can ultimately be converted into social status and economic capital (Waters and Brooks 2010a). In this way, and following Bourdieu’s notion of ‘forms of capital’ (Bourdieu 1986), students who move to study in an international arena, especially if they attend high-prestige universities, accumulate multiple and mutually-reinforcing forms of capital – mobility capital (cf. Murphy-Lejeune 2002), human capital (a world-class university education), social capital (access to networks, ‘connections’), cultural capital (languages, intercultural awareness) and, eventually, economic capital (high-salary employment).

96. Yet, ironically, as Waters and Brookes stress (2010a), these achievements are ‘almost accidental’ in the case of privileged UK students. The UK evidence seems to challenge conventional wisdom in other studies of international student behaviour, for instance based on East Asian students (cf. Waters 2006, 2009), which suggests that such students (and, again, their families) are carefully strategising to achieve ‘positional advantage’ in a crowded and increasingly ‘credentialised’ graduate labour market. This suggests, in turn, that there is something unique in the UK case, based partly perhaps on the position of the UK in the global HE system, but probably more particularly on the UK (especially English) class system and the way it is reproduced and even increasingly polarised through the state vs. private educational divide. International student mobility merely adds another layer of privileged access to this polarised system.

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<sup>17</sup> For those who do not have parental financial support, scholarships or means-tested bursaries, obtaining finance to pursue a degree abroad can be a substantial barrier. Anecdotal evidence suggests that more UK students would study abroad if they had access to student loans (i.e. no repayment during their studies) from either a government or a private-sector source, similar to those available to US students or in some European countries. Currently, international students in the US must have a US citizen to co-sign on loans from a US bank, and many UK students find it difficult to secure a private loan from a UK bank to study abroad. Even if they are able to, they have to start making payments during their studies, as these are ‘personal’ rather than ‘student’ loans. Personal communication, Lauren Welch, Fulbright Commission UK Office, 13 July 2010.

97. The Brooks/Waters *oeuvre* draws extensively on notions of cultural capital and habitus set out in the classic sociological texts of Pierre Bourdieu (see especially Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1996; also Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). This, perhaps, indicates that our stress on the specificity of the UK's class system is exaggerated, since similar effects are observable elsewhere (e.g. in France and Germany; Hartmann 2000). For instance, Waters and Brooks (2010a: 226) attribute the tension between 'strategy' and the 'accidental' accumulation of capital (in its various forms) as part of the 'aesthetic disposition' and 'taken-for-grantedness' of the habitus, in which 'excitement' and 'adventure' are merely expressions of the reproduction of privilege which is firmly grounded in social networks of family and friends (Brooks and Waters 2010). The notion of ISM as an experience geared primarily to travel, adventure and enjoyment, rather than to academic achievement or career planning, which also comes through strongly in some students' narratives (Murphy-Lejeune 2002), suggests a productive theoretical link to studies of tourism (cf. Battisti and Portelli 1994; Huang 2008). Interestingly, some of our interviewees stressed this perspective, saying that returning year abroad students' hardly mention the academic experience (interviewee A), and that prospective students who enquire about specific destinations for the Year Abroad 'strike me almost as though they were booking a package holiday' (interviewee D).

### **Mobile Students' Employability and Employers' Attitudes to Student Mobility**

98. To a large extent the relationship between mobility and employability is the missing link in the story, at least for the UK. Evidence from the previous section would suggest that there is a link, in that credit-mobile students get better degrees and higher salaries. This might indicate that mobility creates added value for the student, except that we also know that mobile students are academically selected from the start, and to some extent socially selected too, through the social-class and travel experiences of their family backgrounds. There is also evidence from the previous section that students *think* that the experience of studying abroad, either on a conventional Year Abroad or for an entire degree programme, will give them an edge in the employment stakes, especially if they have attended a prestigious foreign institution. This view is reinforced, and perhaps reified, by the 'Erasmus discourse' and by enthusiastic study-abroad officers in universities and HEIs the length and breadth of the country (HEFCE 2004: 27-29; NUS 2010: 23).

99. Our interview data give further support to these generalisations. Interviewee B gives the standard story, echoed by others: ISM 'greatly increases employability: on return the students are more confident, perform better at job interviews, are used to dealing with different people, and learn to adapt to different situations'. Interviewee G (representing a large civic pre-92 university in the north of England) had just carried out a survey of year-abroad alumni, asking them about the importance of their student international mobility experience for them later in life. Results showed that:

- 75% said that their current employer would be more likely to employ someone who had studied abroad;
- 87% said their experience abroad had made their interview more successful;
- 86% used evidence from their study abroad in their CV;
- 98% said that their time abroad had improved their cultural awareness.

Interviewee G also stressed that, nowadays, students have employability on their minds much more than they did in the past. We suggest that, in a national and international graduate job market which is getting increasingly competitive, and in the last year and a half increasingly depressed because of the recession, the Year Abroad (especially if it produces a four-year degree) acts rather like a one-year Master's or MBA as an additional differentiating factor which can boost the chances of some students who have this extra element of educational capital and life experience (cf. Waters 2009).

100. So much for the interviewees' impressions of how students evaluate ISM in terms of improving their employability. Regarding interviewees' impressions of the employers' side of the graduate market, evidence was speculative since, as K pointed out, 'we are at one step removed from the employers'. Like G above, K had also administered questionnaires to alumni who had participated in study abroad. She reported that 'some students are surprised at the strong interest that employers show in their Year Abroad. At times, interviewers pick out this experience from their CV and focus on that for the entire interview – students believed that this is what swayed it for them and got them the job'. Interviewee A had attended a meeting where a chief executive from Lloyds TSB explained that their company actively seeks out mobile students, and that it does not matter where or what students studied abroad, it is the way that it makes the students think and the way they communicate which is important. However, although there is plenty of anecdotal evidence on employers giving preference to internationally mobile students, 'what is curious is that companies in the UK do not make their views on study abroad that apparent in public debate' (D). Several other interviewees bemoaned the lack of evidence on how employers view ISM in terms of their recruitment policy for graduates. According to L this 'missing data' should 'not just be collected from mobile students, but also from a control group of non-mobile students to see whether mobility really does make a difference in the job market'. She suggested that 'it would be worthwhile conducting a big survey amongst graduate employees in international companies to see what they say about ISM. [It would also] be good to interview employers themselves'.

101. When we look at the published literature on this topic, evidence on the true added value of study abroad remains extremely scarce, to be replaced by generalised statements such as the following: 'Study-abroad programmes enjoy prestige mainly because they enhance one's academic credentials, offer better-paid employment opportunities and provide entry to influential professional networks' (Varghese 2008: 24). Varghese then goes on to revealingly state that 'the advantages (employment and prestige) are higher in developing countries than in developed countries' (2008: 24). Where does this leave a developed country like the UK? Apart from the indications referred to in the

previous paragraph, parts of which come close to a self-fulfilling prophecy, the missing evidence pertains to employers' views. The suspicion here is that, when employers are asked to list the qualities and attributes they look for in graduate employees, international experience does not come high on the list, if it is mentioned at all (Fielden *et al.* 2007: 14). Results from a small survey of 'over twenty large companies' revealed that:

- around 60% of the country's top employers indicate that experience of international study enhances employability;
- the rest indicate that they recruit on the basis of individuals' strengths;
- the majority commented that studying overseas makes an applicant well-rounded in terms of skills, experience and personal development.

Amongst comments from this online survey of HR heads of major global companies were the following (Fielden *et al.* 2007: 15):

- 'The value of any study would depend on what was studied and where and for how long, but most importantly, the value that employers will put on it depends on how the graduates themselves articulate the added value that overseas study has given them'.
- '[Name of company] greatly values international experience in the students we recruit. An individual with a track record of different cultures, different working methodologies and different life experiences almost inevitably displays greater cross-cultural sensitivity and greater adaptability, which means that recruiting them is lower risk and they make a positive contribution more quickly'.
- 'Given the globalised environment in which we operate, we are looking for people with an international perspective. We are very focused on increasing mobility within our organisation as we see this as being an invaluable experience and one which can only benefit our organisation and our people in the longer term'.

Note that these three are from a subsample of global corporations with offices and premises in many countries of the world: therefore graduate-level employees may well need to move internationally, yet within the firm's internal labour market, for career advancement. Contrast the above with the following three representatives of more modest-level national and regional companies, whose mobility horizons are obviously much more limited.

- 'Of course we value international experience in applicants very highly, but our decision to recruit does more depend on the applicant themselves'.
- 'If two candidates were identical I would speculate that we would be more in favour of the international study graduate. But this is not in any way a decision tree tool'.
- 'Our main consideration is whether a graduate is well-suited for the role. Study abroad could then I suppose help with this by making an individual more developed as a person'.

102. Finally, we report some results from a broader study of the professional value of Erasmus mobility across the EU – the VALERA study (Bracht *et al.* 2006).<sup>18</sup> This study was not only large in scale and scope,<sup>19</sup> but was conducted in a way to make results comparable to two previous surveys of Erasmus graduates.<sup>20</sup> Key findings are set out in Table 6. The figures are self-explanatory given the detailed specification of each response variable listed, so we do not comment on each in turn. Overall, the picture is quite mixed, with markedly different levels of positive response from one item to another. What is most noticeable is that there appears to be a clear decline over time in the level of positive linkages perceived between the Erasmus experience and professional life five years later.

103. Why should this be? Bracht *et al.* (2006: xxii) suggest that, as time passes and European labour markets become more globalised and international work-tasks more commonplace, the specific qualities of an Erasmus experience have less value, also because there are many more Erasmus and other mobility-rich students around now than in the past. Triangulating the responses of graduates, university leaders and employers reveals that, compared to the latter two groups, the graduates have less positive views. The authors are unsure whether this is because the graduates retrospectively undervalue the Year Abroad, or whether the other two respondent categories overestimate the value of student mobility. Particularly interesting is the reaction of employers (but bear in mind the relatively small size and the very low response rate) who ‘consider the internationally experienced graduates superior to other graduates as far as many competences are concerned, and many of them believe that formerly mobile students will be more successful in their long-term career’ (Bracht *et al.* 2006: xxiii).

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<sup>18</sup> VALERA stands for VALue of ERAsmus

<sup>19</sup> Questionnaires were sent to more than 10,000 former Erasmus students of the academic year 2000-01; 4,589 replied, a response rate of 45%. In addition questionnaires were sent to 1,437 university leaders of Erasmus-connected institutions; 626 replied, a 44% response rate. A third questionnaire, sent to 6,000 employers in Erasmus-eligible countries, yielded a much lower return – 312 or just 5%.

<sup>20</sup> In addition to the VALERA study, which surveyed the Erasmus 2000-01 student cohort five years later, reference was also made to surveys carried out in 2000 of 1994-95 Erasmus students, and in 1993 of the 1988-89 Erasmus cohort.

**Table 6: Relationship between Erasmus Year Abroad and subsequent professional life: summary results from three surveys**

	1993 survey	2000 survey	2005 survey
% of respondents affirming positive impact of study abroad on employment	71	66	54
% of respondents affirming highly positive link between course of study and subsequent employment	67	44	61
% expressing high level of satisfaction with current work	52	74	67
% expressing positive impact of study abroad on type of work subsequently done	49	44	39
% expressing positive impact of study abroad on income	25	22	16
% who use the host-country year-abroad language	47	41	38
% using knowledge of the host country professionally	30	25	25
% who travel to their host country for professional reasons	17	18	14

Source: after Bracht *et al.* (2006: xiv-xviii).

## Policy and Practice within Higher Education Institutions

### *Setting the scene: promoting inward and outward mobility?*

104. There is no doubt that the priority, at both national level and within HEIs, is to maximise the recruitment of international students coming in to the UK HE system, rather than to boost the outflow of UK students. This sharp contrast in strategy is often masked underneath generalised mission statements about internationalisation of the student experience, but the concrete evidence for this prioritisation of the recruitment of overseas students from outside of the EU is overwhelming.

105. The most detailed evidence for this judgement remains the institutional survey data contained in our earlier HEFCE report (2004: 21-33, 51-57, 71-73, 91-94, 99-101). To be precise about the scale of that research and the diversity of research techniques involved, we monitored all HEIs' websites for mission statements, administered a detailed questionnaire survey to all UK HEIs (yielding 80 returns, or 48% response rate), and carried out face-to-face interviews with 46 mobility managers (at various levels from principal and pro-vice-chancellor down to departmental Erasmus coordinators) in ten selected HEIs. We refer to some of this evidence further below.

106. Beyond this survey data, we draw attention to the following as indicators of the real priorities in operation. First, and most important as the framing context for driving policy, there is the ongoing restructuring of the UK's HE system. This received a major redirection under the Thatcher government by the requirement for institutions to be more entrepreneurially diverse in securing outside income sources. The same trend continued under subsequent Labour governments, and will undoubtedly sharpen further as the new coalition government wrestles with the huge public deficit that has developed as an effect of the national and global financial crisis.

107. Under the first phase of the so-called Prime Minister's Initiative (PMI) launched by PM Blair in 1999, the British Council was tasked with leading the campaign to promote the international quality image of the UK HE system and thereby attract more foreign students.<sup>21</sup> A target of 271,000 foreign students enrolled by 2005 was exceeded by some margin, with enrolment that year reaching 318,000 (Gürüz 2008: 192-193). The second phase (PMI 2) saw a shift from revenue-generation through overseas student recruitment to a somewhat broader policy designed to create a 'world-class university system' to attract the 'brightest and best from across the world' (quoting then Home Secretary Charles Clarke). This policy shift to a more explicit 'international branding approach' (Gürüz 2008: 194) includes offshore delivery of courses to branch and partnership campuses in various 'high-demand' parts of the world (India, China, Malaysia, the Gulf etc.) and some reference to outward mobility (Tang *et al.* 2009).

108. This dominant framing context of increasing recruitment of high-fee overseas students as a way of shoring up university balance-sheets at a time of downward pressure on core public funding is inevitably reflected in the higher education literature and press, and especially in a plethora of reports. As a result there is a tendency in this 'report literature' for the phrases 'international student mobility' or the 'internationalisation of higher education' to automatically and only mean the in-movement and recruitment of foreign, and especially non-EU, students. Two examples of this are the HEPI (Higher Education Policy Institute) report on *Internationalism in Higher Education* (Hatakenada 2004) and the British Council-sponsored *Vision 2020: Forecasting International Student Mobility* (Böhm *et al.* 2004), both of which are exclusively about in-movement and fail to mention outward mobility.<sup>22</sup> For the UK, a key indicator is the market share it achieves out of the broad group of countries known as the Main English-Speaking Destination Countries (MESDCs) – US, UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand (see especially Böhm *et al.* 2004).

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<sup>21</sup> Launching the PMI, Tony Blair said: 'Our universities and colleges are second to none. Their world-class reputation means that they are among the most popular for international students. I am determined to build on this strength with a long-term strategy to attract many more. The institutions, their students and the economy will reap considerable rewards' (quoted in Gürüz 2008: 192-193). And again: 'Wherever I travel I meet international leaders who have studied in Britain. Dynamic, intelligent people who chose Britain because we offer high-quality education and training. This is good news for the UK. People who are educated here have a lasting tie to our country. They promote Britain in the world, helping trade and democracy' (quoted Böhm *et al.* 2004: 4).

<sup>22</sup> This is not a uniquely UK phenomenon – see for instance Suter and Jandl (2006) and Hawthorne (2008) for reports which focus on other highly-developed countries and only talk about incoming students.



109. A final indicator of the *realpolitik* of ISM in the UK is the way that the pages of the UK HE's *International Focus* bulletin favour statistics and stories of international recruitment, with very little attention devoted to UK outward mobility. In almost every issue (there have been 60 to date) there are one or more of the following: descriptions of overseas recruitment initiatives or partnership ventures by individual UK universities; statistical updates from HESA on overseas students coming to the UK or on foreign students' applications via UCAS; market surveys of countries and regions of the world thought to hold potential for expanding international student recruitment;<sup>23</sup> and op-ed pieces about immigration and visa issues relevant to international students coming to the UK.

110. However, *International Focus* issue 40 contains an interestingly critical and dissenting view from the Director of Student Recruitment at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen. Gavin Douglas (2009) challenges the mantra of increasing the number of overseas students as the financial 'get out of jail free' card for UK universities. He draws attention to the constant juxtaposition of the terms 'overseas students' with 'revenue' and 'market share', and admonishes universities for being 'too blinded by fee income' to seek alternatives. He goes on to point out some of the dilemmas and inconsistencies in the association between recruiting foreign students on the one hand and the often iniquitous effects it has on immigration policy and development on the other. Particularly where high-fee students are recruited from developing countries, there is a transfer of wealth from poor to rich countries, which is exacerbated if those students, upon graduation, stay on to enrich the labour market and production of wealth in the advanced countries (cf. Gribble 2008). Meanwhile, the argument that international students contribute to an international, multicultural atmosphere at UK campuses, to the benefit of home-grown students (who, it might be suggested, have no need to go abroad, since they enjoy virtual mobility) is likewise overstated; in Douglas's view, this is like treating foreign students as 'rare birds of paradise imported for our fascination and delight' (2009: 6). The alternatives swing the debate back to the theme of this report: teach more languages, internationalise our curricula and teach global studies, set up more overseas exchanges, get our own students to go abroad more and provide more institutional support for them to do so.<sup>24</sup>

111. Several institutions and sponsors have recognised the important yet undervalued nature of UK outward student mobility. Aside from HEFCE, these include the National Union of Students (NUS 2010); ESIB (the National Unions of Students in Europe – see Brus and Scholz 2007); CIHE (the Council for Industry and Higher Education – see Fielden *et al.* 2007); the UK Higher Education Europe Unit (see Europe Unit 2008); UKCISA (UK Council for International Student Affairs) and PMI 2 (see Tang *et al.* 2009); and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (Findlay and King 2010). Responding to our own recent report on degree mobility, BIS issued the following statement:

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, the series of 'market share' pieces on Sub-Saharan Africa (*International Focus*, 57, 12 May 2010, p.4), South Asia (58, 26 May 2010, p.7) and East Asia and the Pacific (59, 18 June 2010, p.7).

<sup>24</sup> Douglas is not the only dissenting voice. As an example of many others, see the recent article by Masheter (2010) in *Times Higher Education*. Masheter argues that 'there is a danger that overseas fees will be seen unrealistically as the saviour of a system under threat. We could kill this golden goose [of internationalisation] by recruiting only with money in mind'.

'Reluctance to study abroad is a genuine and long-standing concern of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, because such international experience is assumed, rationally, to bring with it a confident ease with other languages and cultures that manifests itself as greater employability in the knowledge economy'.<sup>25</sup> It is also the case that some of the above-mentioned reports rely extensively on our own prior research.<sup>26</sup>

### *Solving the outward mobility conundrum*

112. What recommendations regarding policy and practice do these reports and other studies make beyond the general affirmation that mobility is a 'good thing'? Solving what has been termed the 'outward mobility conundrum'<sup>27</sup> involves numerous challenges which operate on various levels. The CIHE report – probably the most cogent and focused attempt to diagnose this problem in the UK context – structures its analysis at three levels. These are institutions and their leaders, academic staff involved in administering and encouraging mobility, and students. Six questions are asked (Fielden *et al.* 2007: 17-40), which are worth listing as signposts into our subsequent discussion.

1. Is the leadership of the university committed strategically to increasing the number of students who study abroad?
2. If the university believes that some study abroad is an essential part of all home students' experience, should it be actively promoted (rather than merely just 'offered')?
3. Can the number of exchange arrangements be increased by focusing them on existing strategic partners abroad and increasing the number of departments involved with each partner?
4. Do the senior management team and central administration persuade academic staff of the value of outward mobility? Do they also provide help to academic staff by minimising the workload of getting study abroad arrangements and exchanges up and running?
5. Can the university do more to make students aware of how valuable study abroad is to them academically and personally?
6. Has the university got consistent policies for removing as many of the barriers to mobility as possible?

113. These questions are quite general and the CIHE report proposes a range of more practical and helpful solutions for UK HEIs to foster ISM, drawing evidence from a range of case studies:

- encourage the promotion of mobility opportunities at university Open Days;

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<sup>25</sup> In *International Focus*, 50, 20 January 2010, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> This is especially the case for Europe Unit report, much of which recycles findings from HEFCE (2004) and Findlay *et al.* (2006).

<sup>27</sup> *International Focus*, 50, 20 January 2010, p.1.

- encourage greater staff mobility – this has been shown to have positive synergies with levels of student mobility (cf. Byram and Dervin 2008; O’Hara 2009);
- highlight the financial support available for students under the Erasmus programme so that students appreciate that, at a time when general student financial support is reduced, there can be financial advantages to taking the Erasmus route;<sup>28</sup>
- collate and disseminate the views of international employers towards mobility, and distribute messages from successful alumni who have benefited from overseas study career-wise;
- ensure recognition of study-abroad credits by making straightforward, transparent arrangements with partner HEIs, and make sure outgoing students understand these credit and assessment arrangements;
- use returning students to promote study and work placements abroad;
- put particular emphasis on work placements, since this seems to be the sector of ISM that is most in demand by UK students.<sup>29</sup>

114. Since the CIHE report, the only other study which makes UK outward mobility its specific focus is that by Tang *et al.* (2009) from Sheffield Hallam University’s Centre for Education and Inclusion Research, which goes one step further in offering practical suggestions for promoting and improving access to international mobility amongst UK students. Tang *et al.* found that, based on a questionnaire survey of 1,715 Sheffield Hallam students, one third wanted to undertake some form of study abroad, the figure rising to 45% in the case of foreign work placements. The preferred length of stay exhibited a bimodal distribution between a full year away and much shorter stays of 1-2 months. The top four destination preferences were the US, Australia/New Zealand, Europe and Canada.

115. Tang *et al.* also surveyed ‘good practice’ case studies in four universities in England through student and staff interviews and discussion groups. Their key recommendation, as indicated by the title of their report, is about creating synergy by linking inward and outward mobility. Specifically, this means:

- employing incoming Erasmus and international students in events and activities to promote student mobility – for instance to talk about their home universities and countries, and cultural differences;
- employing return students as peer advisers and mentors – typically this means third- and final-year students advising first- and second-years who are the (prospective) outgoing students.

These are only two in a long list of ‘good practice’ ideas suggested by Tang *et al.* (2009: 13-16) which include: study abroad fairs for prospective mobile students; pre-departure courses and conferences

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<sup>28</sup> Other mobility schemes and exchanges may also have scholarships and bursaries which should likewise be well publicised.

<sup>29</sup> For evidence see HEFCE (2004: 42) that this (and combined study abroad and work placement) was the mode of mobility most desired by prospective mobile students. The expansion of work-placement numbers under Erasmus over the past two years is further vindication of this.

devoted to particular destination countries; country-themed social events; Facebook network groups to bring together prospective mobile students with those who are, or who have been, abroad to particular destinations (countries, cities, universities etc.); and a 'buddy' system which brings together individual pairings of students who are engaging in reciprocal mobility.<sup>30</sup> The NUS add to this list by suggesting (and giving examples) that 'Erasmus societies' should be set up in UK universities (NUS 2010: 13-16).

116. Two further reports, which are more student-centred rather than consultant-authored, make a series of recommendations from the students' perspective, enlarging their frame of reference to European credit mobility rather than just the UK situation. Their suggestions, however, are equally relevant to our discussion here.

117. Bracht *et al.* (2006: xxiii) make a call for improvements in the basic logistics of the credit mobility process: more intensive preparations prior to departure; more academic and administrative and financial support for the students whilst abroad; better means of assessment and credit recognition; closer links between higher education and the employment market (like the new work placement scheme); and more financial support and less bureaucracy on the part of the organising bodies (such as the European Commission for Erasmus).

118. Specifically regarding the Erasmus programme, there are several recommendations set out by Capecchi (2006) in the conclusion to the Erasmus Student Network Survey of 2005. Many of these repeat the recommendations already mentioned, but three are worth stressing since they represent the consumer views of the students and not so much those of educational planners:

- concentrate on the quality of the Erasmus experience rather than being beguiled by quantitative targets (such as attaining a total of 3 million Erasmus students by 2012);
- make a dramatic improvement in provision of information about the reality of what to expect in the host country, including more information about the programme in general, the nature of academic life, as well as help with providing inexpensive and decent accommodation;
- create mechanisms and tools for limiting the barriers between Erasmus and local students in order to achieve quicker integration of the former, and avoid the situation whereby Erasmus students only or mainly socialise with each other.

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<sup>30</sup> Conceivably this could be a 'buddy triangle' consisting of a first- or second-year 'pre-mobile' student from country x (the UK) going to country y (say Spain), a third- or final-year student from x who has returned from y, and an exchange student from y who is currently in x.

## *Interview insights*

119. Some existing literature gives a lot of interview evidence on the difficulties of promoting outward student mobility, and suggestions for overcoming the barriers. A substantial part of our 2004 HEFCE report was devoted to getting the views of mobility administrators and academic staff through 46 in-depth interviews (HEFCE 2004: 21-33). Two very brief interview clips from that earlier report, the first from a senior administrator and the second from a head of school.

Here's our strategic plan... I think... it shows you, essentially that we have no strategy in this area [of outward mobility].

I have to say that, speaking as a head of school, I really have not seen a need to get more students to go abroad... there are other pedagogic processes which are much more important for the 95-97% who are staying behind.

120. Interview data from the CIHE report (see Fielden *et al.* 2007: 13, 22, 27-28, 31-34, 38) and from the PMI 2 report by Tang *et al.* (2009: 9-13) give much more positive examples, many of which involve putting into practice some of the guidelines listed in the previous subsections, as well as pointing out the frustrations and the barriers. One of the greatest obstacles lies internal to the university system, in the way that many degree programmes, especially in Science subjects, require students to take compulsory core courses for benchmark purposes and as necessary prerequisites in order to proceed to the subsequent year. Even where this curriculum straightjacket does not operate, academic staff may actively discourage students from going abroad (see Fielden *et al.* 2007: 26 for a detailed example). From our own recent round of interviews, B went on record as saying that in his university some academics are reluctant for students to go, whilst other academic staff have concerns that the students might not cope academically and therefore damage the reputation of the university. Other interviewees (also Tang *et al.* 2009: 8-16) contrast the different strategies of managing and encouraging mobility – centralised within one office, often headed by a senior manager reporting to a pro-vice-chancellor for international affairs, or devolved to individual departments where the networking initiatives and proselytising activities of single colleagues were important.

121. Most interviewees said their university had an international mobility strategy on outgoing students, and several mentioned that this was currently under revision. Here is a typical up-beat statement (interviewee A):

We are in the process of completing our latest internationalisation strategy. It will have distinct strands: student experience and study abroad will now jointly formalise their commitment to promote this mobility experience to students. In our employment strategy, not only academic achievement, but also transferable skills now matter. Plus we have our senior vice-principal in charge of internationalisation, and a vice-principal in charge of European matters, also an internationalisation manager. Plus marketing, recruitment and admissions are all part of the overall strategy. We have former internationally mobile students present at meetings with prospective students at Open Days. Currently we send between 500 and 600 abroad per year on straight exchanges, not including postgraduate level. Exchanges have been in place for a long time – at a low level in the past but now with more healthy numbers.

Less positive, but from a similar university size and status-wise (large civic pre-92), was E, a study abroad and exchanges manager:

We do have an international strategy and mobility features as part of that, but not as prominently as I would like. Most academic schools participate in Erasmus, and there is also a push to increase academic mobility to the US. There is a generally very positive attitude towards mobility in the university which isn't necessarily stated in policy as such. There is, however, a great imbalance in terms of the incoming and the outgoing Erasmus students. This has so far not been discussed as something negative or that will be cut back on, but this may change in the future. The academic staff often like having international students in their seminar groups because they offer different perspectives. Nevertheless, there is not a great push as there is in other universities to internationalise more of the degree programmes through mobility.

Finally, both our interviewees and the voices that are represented in interviews included in other survey research alluded to a range of wider issues, dealt with as follows.

#### *Wider issues*

122. We identify four wider issues which are largely exogenous to the HEIs' internal policy system, but which have major implications for mobility and how it is planned and carried out. The first is the way that ISM seems to run counter to, or at least across, the agenda for widening participation. International mobility demands a certain freedom to move which many 'non-traditional' students may not have, for instance due to their family responsibilities or their social and cultural embeddedness in their own communities which inhibits their agency over the mobility decision. Particularly in post-92 universities, the social mix of students now includes more from backgrounds where an international mentality does not really exist and where overseas travel is uncommon. There is, according to Fielden *et al.* (2007: 29), a perception that mobility schemes such as Erasmus are elitist and are designed for full-time students who can afford to study abroad and who have the language and cultural capital to cope. This first point leads directly into the next two, which are about foreign languages and class (in)mobility in the UK.

123. Much has been written about the relationship between language and ISM, especially that directed to Europe. In both of our prior research reports – on credit mobility (HEFCE 2004) and on degree mobility (Findlay and King 2010) – language was an essential part of the story, especially in the case of credit mobility to Europe and the decade-long decline of UK outward mobility. Increasingly, as we have seen, UK ISM is favouring Anglophone channels which lead either to Anglophone destinations such as North America and Australia, or to places which offer English-language degree teaching despite this not being the host-country language. In this way, ISM behaviour is negotiating its way around the language barrier, rather than putting in place direct measures to overcome it. Given the well-established nature of this literature on the declining competence in foreign languages

amongst the UK's school and student populations,<sup>31</sup> we do not review it here, but merely note that it is a continuing and quite fiercely contested debate, partly because of a lack of a coherent policy.<sup>32</sup>

124. There is a further link between languages and social class, in that the teaching of foreign languages at secondary-school level, especially at GCSE and A-level, is increasingly the preserve of the independent sector (Fielden *et al.* 2007: 29; Shepherd 2010). The issue of social class and access to HE in the UK has also generated a substantial literature, some of which has been quoted earlier in our discussion of the socio-economic background of mobile students, where we saw how access to mobility is often filtered through layers of privilege associated with wealth, parental cultural capital and foreign language competence. Of course, ideally policies and incentives should be put in place to broaden the constituency of mobile students, but a more fundamental problem is the restricted access to third-level education, and especially to the top universities, of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. This requires a level of social engineering and radical restructuring of the school educational system which lies beyond the scope of this report, and is unlikely in the short or medium term given the prevailing political and social climate.

125. Our fourth broad issue of policy and practice is the relationship between UK ISM and the Bologna Process. Bologna was launched in the city of that name in 1999 when higher education ministers from 29 countries signed a declaration to create a European Higher Education Area – a competitive higher education zone encouraging mobility of students, researchers and academic staff. Since 1999 it has expanded to 46 countries with a combined student population of 30 million. In addition to the 27 EU countries, other significant members include Russia and Turkey. The creation of a 'European space' for HE, alongside the European Research Area, are linked objectives of the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Strategy, which some see as less about altruistic and student-friendly academic principles and more as a neoliberal project to develop a higher education market and research area to challenge that of the United States (see Corbett 2010; de Wit 2008c: 177-178).

126. Promoting student mobility was one of the six objectives of the 1999 Declaration, to be facilitated by the harmonisation (not uniformisation) of the HE structures and the portability of

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<sup>31</sup> A caveat here: while this is true for the traditional modern foreign languages such as French and German (not to mention Latin and Greek!), we should not overlook the tremendous linguistic richness that immigrant and second-generation children may bring with them (Arabic, Chinese, Turkish, various South Asian languages etc.) but which are not capitalised by most schools and therefore do not feed into university course options and potential onward mobility opportunities, although there are now the first signs that this is changing, especially with reference to Arabic and Chinese.

<sup>32</sup> As an example of the rumbling debate over languages and the inconsistencies in government and university policies, see the article by Matthew Reisz in *Times Higher Education*, 2 July 2009; also the associated leader by Ann Mroz in the same issue; as well as extensive follow-up correspondence in the subsequent issue, 9 July 2009, p. 28. Amongst the policy inconsistencies noted, there is a withdrawal of compulsory foreign languages at key stage 4 (GCSE) combined with its introduction into the primary curriculum; and the simultaneous withdrawal by Cambridge University of its GCSE foreign language entry requirement and introduction of such a requirement (minimum grade C) by UCL. Nationally, the decline in the number of pupils taking A-level French has been 47% over the period 1996-2007; for German 44%. Over the years 2001 to 2006 the proportion of pupils doing no languages at all at GCSE has soared from 22 to 56%. It is alleged that well over 90% of UK graduates leave university with no more than survival skills in one or more foreign languages (Reisz 2009: 32).

mutually recognised qualifications and courses via the currency of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). As the Bologna Process has 'matured', the aim of mobility has become more important, linked to the growth of Erasmus which, at the end of 2009, celebrated its 2-millionth student (Baty 2009). In practice, however, the Bologna initiative has been a bit of a double-edged sword, smoothing mobility for some, but creating obstacles for others, due to a combination of bureaucratic rules and the rigidity of national HE systems (Shepherd 2007). Its progress towards the 'Leuven target' of 20% mobility<sup>33</sup> will depend not just on the continued concrete success of Erasmus and other reciprocal mobility schemes, but also on the collection of relevant data.

127. It is probably fair to say that the UK has not been one of the most enthusiastic participants in the Bologna Process, and is much less engaged with its principles and structures than other countries. Most UK academics are barely aware of its existence and are unfamiliar with its implications for HE policy and student mobility (Shepherd 2007). Whilst the UK HE system has had less adjustment to make to conform to the 3+2+3 model (bachelor, master and doctoral level) than other countries,<sup>34</sup> greater problems have arisen with the operation of ECTS. According to the UK Higher Education Europe Unit, problems with the recognition of credits across the European Higher Education Area created by Bologna remain 'stubbornly high' (Europe Unit 2008: 7). Both Brus and Scholz (2007: 11) and Krzaklewska and Krupnic (2006: 7) report cases of students leaving their study abroad period without credits that could be meaningfully incorporated into their degree. Findlay *et al.* (2006: 306), in their study of credit mobility, found that this fear of non-compatibility or delayed transfer of credits is a strong disincentive for UK students to become mobile.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

128. It is difficult to succinctly round off a literature review since the plethora of diverse findings and detail overwhelms the key points, which, in any case, we have tried to sum up as we have gone along. We therefore conclude by making some general observations and recommendations for further work.

129. In migration and mobility studies, international students are undoubtedly an under-researched phenomenon. Indeed, they are almost a blind-spot on the research map of social sciences. Yet, quite apart from their sheer numbers, they are important for several reasons. They lie at the heart of a tension between, on the one hand, the opening up of all kinds of mobility (of people, goods, capital,

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<sup>33</sup> 'In 2020, at least 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad' (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué, para. 18). Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve was the latest (28-29 April 2009) in a series of biennial meetings of education ministers of the participating countries. These meetings keep track of progress and plan further targets, bearing in mind that Bologna is a legally non-binding intergovernmental process.

<sup>34</sup> Although, at first sight, the one-year British Master's seems not to conform to the Bologna model, a compromise formulation which takes a flexible approach allows it to continue. A wider problem is the extreme diversity of Master's degrees in the UK (MA, MSc, MRes, MPhil, MLitt etc.) which comprise one-year, two-year, taught, research and honorary degrees, as well as four-year undergraduate degrees. See Olcott (2010) for a lively discussion on this.



mass media, ideas) in a globalised world increasingly based on a knowledge economy and, on the other hand, the reflex action of closure towards foreigners, 'others', suspected terrorists etc., leading to increasing controls over immigration. The 'fictive student' – the clandestine worker, the illegal immigrant, the terrorist – is the demonised component of this tension as regards the otherwise benign phenomenon of ISM from the host country's point of view. From the sending-country perspective, the downside is brain drain.

130. A second concluding remark is about data, or rather the lack and inconsistency thereof. The very different criteria for recording 'foreign' students threaten attempts to harmonise data. We attempted to overcome this with some of our 'best-estimate' tabulations; and the 'Eurodata' project of Kelo *et al.* (2006a, 2006b) is another useful initiative. A further double challenge is to differentiate, and then combine, data on degree as opposed to credit mobility, and where to draw the line between credit mobility of a year or semester and other shorter-term visits which may or may not be credit-bearing (e.g. summer schools, study trips, field courses etc.).

131. Thirdly, we observe that the nature of student mobility has changed over time, and will no doubt continue to do so. We see a switch away from the language-based Year Abroad stays in the classic foreign-language destinations in Europe (France, Germany, Italy, Russia etc.), driven by the decline in single-honours language degrees, and a rise in other forms of mobility (work placements etc.) and in other destinations (North America, Australia, the Far East etc.).

132. Fourth, we highlight the divergence between the number of UK students travelling abroad for study and work purposes and employers' demands for graduates with a global and intercultural perspective. Solid evidence on employers' perspectives on ISM is a major lacuna in research.

133. Fifthly, we want to re-emphasise the association between ISM and other forms of mobility, particularly those that convert students into high-skilled economically active migrants, and the notion of ISM as a sort of apprenticeship for career and lifetime mobility which may take in many other destinations beyond the one which was the focus for the student programme.

134. Next, in speculating about explanatory factors for UK students' low participation in outward mobility, we want to think beyond the conventional discriminating factors which are usually invoked to 'explain' mobility, such as the ones we have reported on here (*viz.* language, socio-economic and ethnic background, age, sex, course of study, institutional setting etc.). Two further thoughts seem relevant. The first relates to the quality of the home country's HE system. One of the reasons why so few UK students want to go abroad to study, especially at undergraduate level, could well be that they (and their parents and teachers) know they would have to give up the chance of studying at some of the best universities in the world – especially Oxford, Cambridge, and others of the Russell group of large, research-intensive universities. Whereas in Italy (for example), students are keen to study

abroad not just because they want to study abroad *per se*, but because they want to escape what is widely regarded as an inefficient and overcrowded university system in their own country.

135. The second thought is to ponder whether there is something innately xenophobic about the British character which derives from a history of colonial mastery and insularity. This, it could be hypothesised, translates down to the cultural and motivational attitudes towards mobility at the level of the individual student and his/her family. Studies of white, working-class attitudes towards immigrants, foreigners and the wider world outside the UK (e.g. Rogaly and Taylor 2009) confirm this rather depressing perspective and make it even less likely that students from this background will be candidates for studying abroad.

136. We round off with three specific recommendations for areas where particular knowledge gaps exist, and where we see obvious potential for further research. These are the links between mobility and employment and between mobility and degree outcomes, and the need for better data on UK student mobility.

137. What kind of evidence is needed to solve the missing link between mobility and employment? So far we only have some very broad statistical indicators, plus anecdotal evidence from interviews with employers. What is needed, we suggest is a more scientifically rigorous study of the views and practices of employers and recruiters, plus a more 'controlled' survey of (mobile and non-mobile) graduate employees, including those hired into similar job-tracks in the same or comparable firms and employment sectors.

138. Along the same lines, we suggest further research on the impact of mobility on academic results. Existing research tends to fall into the trap of the self-fulfilling prophecy since mobile students are an academically and socially privileged group, on the whole. Following the lines of the aforementioned GLOSSARI project in the US state of Georgia, or, on a much smaller scale, the Sussex University study carried out by King and Ruiz-Gelices (2003), we suggest that more carefully composed control samples (i.e. standardised by academic level and entry, social class background, and prior mobility history) be constructed in future survey research into this relationship.

139. Finally, and perhaps inevitably in a study of this kind based ultimately on numbers and trends in mobile vs. non-mobile students, a plea for better data. This is a challenging request which, ideally, requires action at a number of levels, from international bodies such as OECD, through national statistical organisations which continue to record international and mobile students on different criteria (not always successfully distinguishing between credit and degree mobility), down to individual institutions and their need, too, to harmonise mobility recording systems. At all levels, accurate absolute numbers are not the only idealised target; also required are meaningful measures which allow mobility as a proportion of the total eligible student body to be identified.

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## Appendix: List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

BIS	-	(Department for) Business, Innovation and Skills
CIHE	-	Council for Industry and Higher Education
DIUS	-	Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills
ECTS	-	European Credit Transfer System
EU	-	European Union
GCSE	-	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GLOSSARI	-	Georgia Learning Outcomes of Students Studying Abroad Research Initiative
HE	-	Higher Education
HEFCE	-	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	-	Higher Education Institution
HESA	-	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IIE	-	Institute of International Education
IOM	-	International Organization for Migration
ISM	-	International Student Mobility
MBA	-	Master's in Business Administration
NUS	-	National Union of Students
OECD	-	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PMI	-	Prime Minister's Initiative
SEC	-	(National Statistics) Socio-Economic Classification
UCAS	-	Universities' Central Admissions System
UNESCO	-	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
USSR	-	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VALERA	-	Value of Erasmus (Study)
YA	-	Year Abroad