



Council of  
Deans of Health

The voice of UK university  
faculties for nursing, midwifery  
and the allied health professions



Universities UK  
International

# Outward student mobility for nurse, midwife and AHP students

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# Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. Context.....	3
2.1. How many nursing, midwifery and allied health profession students go abroad?3	
2.2. Type and destination of mobility.....	4
2.3. What do students do while abroad? .....	6
3. Benefits of studying abroad .....	8
4. Regulatory requirements.....	10
4.1. NMC requirements.....	10
4.2. HCPC requirements.....	10
5. Barriers to outward mobility and facilitating factors.....	11
6. Resources and further information .....	13
6.1. University sector wide initiatives to support study abroad.....	13
6.2. Universities UK International .....	13
6.3. Erasmus + .....	14
6.4. Student support for students studying abroad .....	15
6.5. Other opportunities.....	15
7. Case study 1 - Student Mobility in the School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham 16	
8. Case study 2 - Student Mobility at Robert Gordon University (RGU).....	22

# 1. Introduction

The proportion of students studying, working and volunteering abroad (outward student mobility) varies greatly between academic disciplines. While certain subjects, like languages and business studies, have very high rates of outward mobility, students from STEM subjects are in general much less mobile, as are students from practice-based, externally accredited subjects.

Subjects allied to health, particularly nursing, have a low rate of outward student mobility. Some universities have nevertheless established successful study abroad programmes for nursing, midwifery and allied health profession (AHP) students.

This report has been produced jointly by the Council of Deans of Health and Universities UK International to analyse outward mobility for nurse, midwife and AHP students and to promote the benefits of outward mobility, signposting Council members to further resources and information.

We are grateful to staff at the University of Nottingham and Robert Gordon University for contributing detailed case studies and reflections on outward mobility.

## 2. Context

### **2.1. How many nursing, midwifery and allied health profession students go abroad?**

Universities UK International's *Gone International* series of cohort studies provides a detailed overview of outward student mobility across all subjects in three consecutive graduating cohorts. Its most recent report, *Gone International: mobility works*, explores the profiles, destinations and outcomes of mobile and non-mobile students in the 2014–15 graduating cohort.<sup>1</sup>

In the 2014–15 graduating cohort of students studying subjects allied to medicine 1.8% of students studied, worked or volunteered abroad as part of their degree programme.<sup>2</sup> In this

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<sup>1</sup> The *Gone International* series restricts its analysis to UK-domiciled, full-time, first degree students.

<sup>2</sup> Universities UK International (2016), *Gone International: the value of mobility*. Data based on UK-domiciled graduates responding to the 2014-15 Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey.

cohort, nursing had the second lowest mobility rate of all subjects in UK universities with mobility rates of only 0.8% against an average of 7.2% in the overall student population.<sup>3</sup>

The latest in-year data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency's (HESA's) Student Record survey for the 2015–16 academic year provides more detail on mobility for students studying subjects allied to medicine, in all years and at all levels.<sup>4</sup> Mobility participation rates are comparably low for these subjects, with only 1.01% of undergraduate students in their second or third year going abroad as part of their programme. When looking at all students, regardless of year or level of study, this rate fell to only 0.41%. For nursing students specifically, participation was even lower, with only 0.31% of students going abroad.

Some universities have made outward mobility an important part of their student offer. In these universities the proportion of mobile students is much higher than average. At the University of Nottingham in 2015/16 16% of graduating nursing students, 28% of midwifery students and 21% of physiotherapy students had an overseas placement.

### UK mobility participation rates in subjects allied to medicine (2015–16)

	Number of students	Proportion of all students
All students	1080	0.41%
Undergraduate students only	1010	0.49%
Undergraduate students in their second/ third year	920	1.01%

### Mobility participation by subject (2015–16)

Subject	Number of students	Proportion of all students
Anatomy & physiology	140	0.81%
Pharmacology	135	0.65%
Nutrition	50	0.93%
Ophthalmics	35	1.04%
Audiology	0	0
Nursing	460	0.31%
Medical technology	75	0.90%
Other	180	0.34%

## 2.2. Type and destination of mobility

The top two destinations for mobile students from subjects allied to medicine were outside Europe, with the United States and Australia topping the list. More generally, the top ten

<sup>3</sup> True for subjects with at least 500 DLHE respondents. Data from Universities UK International (2017), Gone International: mobility works.

<sup>4</sup> HESA Student Record data (2015–16)

destinations are dominated by Anglophone countries, with English spoken as an official language in seven of the ten.

### Mobile students in subjects allied to medicine by destination (2015–16)

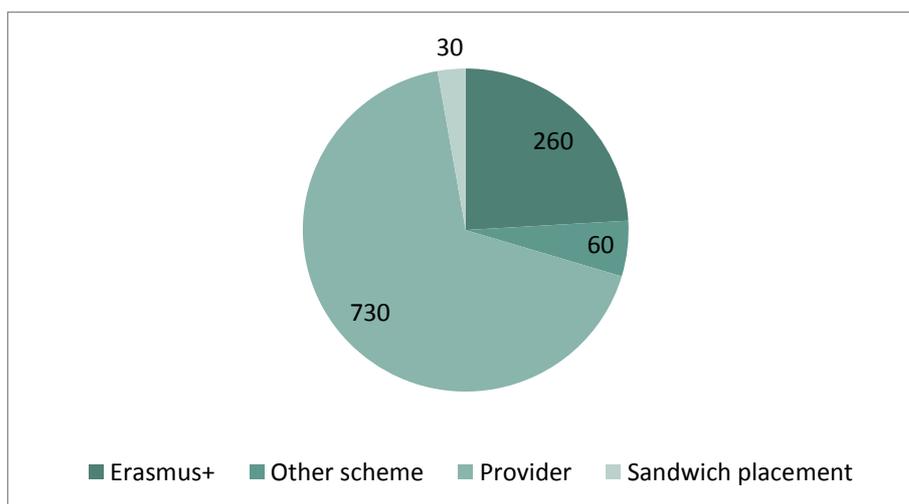
No.	Country	Number of students	No.	Country	Number of students
1	United States	105	26	Germany	15
2	Australia	70	27	Hungary	15
3	Finland	50	28	Tanzania	15
4	Netherlands	50	29	Bulgaria	10
5	Spain {includes Ceuta, Melilla}	45	30	Ghana	10
6	Ireland	45	31	New Zealand	10
7	Malaysia	45	32	Singapore	10
8	South Africa	40	33	Thailand	10
9	Canada	35	34	Austria	5
10	Malawi	35	35	Switzerland	5
11	Romania	35	36	Chile	5
12	Uganda	35	37	Grenada	5
13	Sri Lanka	30	38	Gibraltar	5
14	Nepal	30	39	Gambia, The	5
15	Sweden	30	40	Hong Kong (Special Administrative Region of China)	5
16	India	25	41	Japan	5
17	Italy {Includes Sardinia, Sicily}	25	42	Kenya	5
18	Malta	25	43	Cambodia	5
19	Denmark	20	44	Korea (South)	5
20	France {includes Corsica}	20	45	Lithuania	5
21	Norway	20	46	Morocco	5
22	Philippines	20	47	Peru	5
23	Poland	20	48	Portugal {includes Madeira, Azores}	5
24	Belgium	15	49	Cyprus (European Union)	5
25	China	15	50	Zambia	5

### 2.3. What do students do while abroad?

In common with a number of other STEM subjects, *Gone International: mobility works* finds that more students in subjects allied to medicine who graduated in 2014-15 went abroad at some point during their degree through a university-run scheme (50%) rather than through the Erasmus+ programme (40%). The same report found that across all subject areas, Erasmus+ still accounts for a high proportion of mobilities; in the 2014–15 graduating cohort the programme facilitated 55% of all international placements.<sup>5</sup>

Thanks to the Higher Education Statistics Agency's Student Record dataset, we can also look at how students go abroad within a single academic year: for example, we can look at the duration of their mobility, if they studied, worked or volunteered abroad, and what kind of mobility scheme they used. A large majority of UK-domiciled students in subjects allied to medicine (68%) across all years and levels, went abroad in 2015–16 through provider-led schemes, while 24% went abroad through the Erasmus+ programme, 3% went on sandwich placements, and 6% through 'other' schemes.<sup>6</sup>

#### Mobility scheme for students in subjects allied to medicine (2015–16)

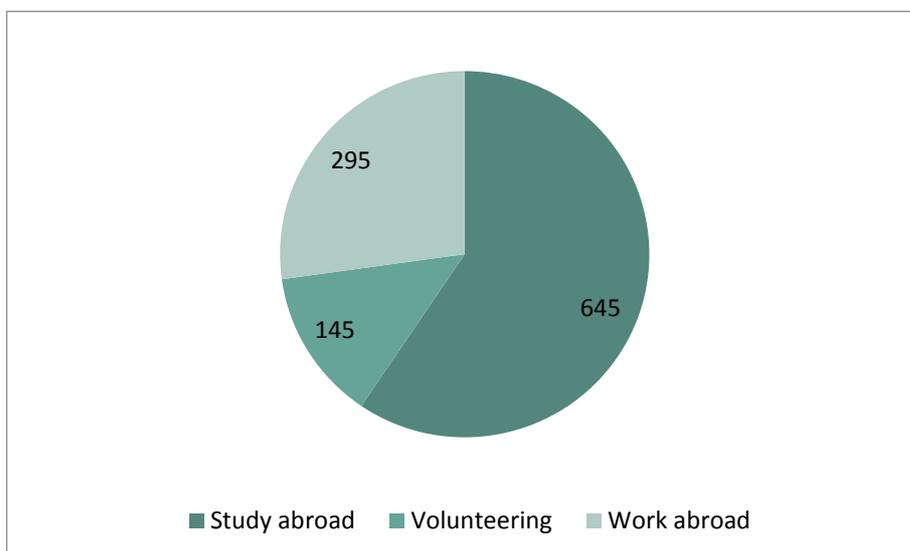


The majority of these students (59%) studied abroad, while 27% worked abroad and 13% volunteered abroad.

<sup>5</sup> Universities UK International (2017), *Gone International: mobility works*

<sup>6</sup> For example, The Society of Radiographers runs a Work the World competition which pays for two students each year to spend time working in imaging and radiotherapy departments in a variety of countries.

### Mobility type for students in subjects allied to medicine (2015–16)



The most common duration of mobility was short-term, between 3 and 10 weeks abroad, although periods of mobility between 11 and 20 weeks were also popular.

Student nurses are allowed to undertake theoretical or practice learning abroad of not more than four weeks, which can include direct care but which is not summatively assessed. Alternatively, students can go abroad for a longer period of up to six months but this would have to include summative assessment and contribute to the overall achievement of programme outcomes.

### Mobility duration for students in subjects allied to medicine (2015–16)

Duration	Number of students
1 week	150
2 weeks	115
3 to 10 weeks	410
11 to 20 weeks	215
21 to 30 weeks	20
31 to 40 weeks	80
More than 40 weeks	100

# 3. Benefits of studying abroad

The benefits of outward mobility are many and varied. At the individual level, mobility helps to build critical global skills such as intercultural awareness and foreign language competency. It also boosts students' performance across several key indicators in higher education, from attainment to employability.

Universities UK International's *Gone International* research explores the benefits of studying abroad in depth. Linking two datasets from the Higher Education Statistics Agency – the Student Record and the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) – this research tracks the performance and outcomes of mobile and non-mobile students in three consecutive national undergraduate cohorts. In each cohort, students who worked, studied or volunteered abroad during their degree were more likely to earn a top tier degree and were less likely to be unemployed after graduation than those who did not. Mobile students in employment after they graduated were more likely to be in a graduate level job and earn a higher average starting salary than their non-mobile peers.<sup>7</sup>

The findings from these reports also show positive outcomes for underrepresented groups, and suggest that mobility can be an important tool in helping to address the attainment gap; students who are less likely to travel appear to benefit the most from doing so, reporting disproportionate gains from the activity. In the most recent report, black graduates who went abroad during their studies were 70% less likely to be unemployed than their non-mobile peers six months after graduation. Students from lower socio-economic backgrounds who went abroad and were employed after graduation earned, on average, 6.1% more than those who had stayed in the UK.

In addition to these individual benefits, mobility also has many other benefits at the university, community and societal levels. The international mobility of students can create positive externalities by internationalising campuses, and fostering global networks that can in turn facilitate research, knowledge transfers, and university to business engagement. These external benefits also help enhance the UK's soft power and support diplomatic relationships longer term - it is our young people who are often our best ambassadors.

The benefits of mobility in general are now well-documented, with further research already being conducted into the benefits of mobility for students from specific disciplines. For example, a study of midwifery students studying abroad in Malta as part of an Erasmus programme found that students valued the opportunity of undertaking study and midwifery practice in another culture and healthcare system, extending their knowledge and development of clinical competence and confidence. By the end of the programme they felt they had become more independent and empowered to facilitate developments in practice when they returned to the

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<sup>7</sup> Universities UK International, *Gone International* cohort studies (2015, 2016, 2017)

UK.<sup>8</sup> Another study, of nursing students, found that those studying abroad described 'an increase in confidence, self-reliance and professional knowledge and skills resulting from their international placement. There was an awareness of how healthcare roles differ between countries and a change in attitudes to others from different backgrounds and cultures'.<sup>9</sup> The impact of studying abroad on nursing students' cultural sensitivity has also been investigated.<sup>10</sup>

Healthcare students talk about their own experiences on The University of Nottingham's website: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/healthsciences/international/electives/index.aspx>

There are also student testimonies from three nursing students who worked and studied in Gambia, Lapland and Norway at <http://www.go.international.ac.uk/content/case-studies-subject-studied>.

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8 Marshall, J E (2017) 'Experiences of student midwives learning and working abroad in Europe: The value of an Erasmus undergraduate midwifery education programme'. *Midwifery* 44 (2017) 7-13

9 Green, B F, Johansson I, Rosser M et al (2008) Studying abroad: a multiple case study of nursing students' international experiences. *Nurse Education Today* 28, 981-992.

10 Ruddock H C, Turner de S (2007) Developing cultural sensitivity: nursing students' experiences of a study abroad programme. *Journal of Advanced Nursing* 59, 361-369

## 4. Regulatory requirements

Students studying on pre-registration courses must comply with regulators' requirements during any time spent abroad during the degree programme. This additional obstacle may partially account for the lower than average mobility rate for these students.

### 4.1. NMC requirements

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) allows students to undertake some learning outside the UK as part of a pre-registration nursing or midwifery programme. This includes short experiences of up to and including four weeks, or longer experiences up to a maximum of six months (or 17.5% of the programme).

The NMC requirements for student nurses learning outside the UK are set out in the [\*Standards for pre-registration nursing education \(2010\)\*](#), sections R5.3.7 and R5.3.8 (requirements) and G5.3.8a-d (guidance).

Universities must ensure that experiences are consistent with the educational intentions of the approved programme. Arrangements must also be put in place to ensure student and client safety including risk assessments, supervisory and mentoring arrangements, student support, preparation and insurance. Universities are advised by the NMC to identify a named academic or practice support person to monitor, maintain, foster and develop each partnership. A student learning agreement, a memorandum of understanding, an Erasmus+ agreement, or other form of agreement needs to confirm the arrangements and responsibilities of the partner universities, taking account of the NMC requirements and guidance.

For midwifery programmes the same NMC requirements are set out in [NMC circular 02/2011](#).

### 4.2. HCPC requirements

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) does not have specific guidance for universities or students learning abroad. In order to meet the HCPC's education standards universities placing students overseas would be expected to put in place the same level of quality assurance around learning and placements as they do in the UK and to work with partnering organisations to arrange this. The HCPC [guidance for students around conduct and ethics](#) would extend to any overseas placement.

## 5. Barriers to outward mobility and facilitating factors

Universities UK International and the British Council's Student Perspectives on Going International (2015) research looks at the benefits and barriers to going abroad as part of a degree, as viewed by students. The findings are based on an online survey of 2,842 undergraduate students in 37 institutions and focus groups in eight of these institutions.

The report found that the top four barriers as perceived by students were, in decreasing order of importance:

1. insufficient funding
2. fear of isolation
3. language skills (and training options)
4. impact on friendships and relationships.

The report found that the top six information sources and influences during decision-making were, in decreasing order of importance:

1. information about funding
2. previously mobile students
3. help with destination and application
4. encouragement and support from academic staff
5. evidence of potential impact on skills
6. peers.

Personal barriers were less important for short mobility periods, although funding and lack of knowledge opportunities were more significant concerns for these durations, with the report finding that students travelling for very short periods needed similar support to those travelling for a semester or longer. Funding and lack of knowledge opportunities were also key concerns for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Services and information offered by institutions, such as help in choosing a destination and completing an application were considered very valuable for those considering mobility, in particular for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. While students value the experiences of previously mobile students and their peers when making a decision, the encouragement of academic tutors was a more significant factor. Advice and support from academic tutors is essential to legitimise and promote all types and durations of mobility to students.

In the case studies below, staff at the University of Nottingham and Robert Gordon University reflect on the specific barriers to outward mobility experienced by their faculties and provide tips on how these can be overcome.

The University of Nottingham offers the following recommendations based on its experience of student mobility:

- Appoint a strategic lead for student mobility
- Appoint an administrative lead for student mobility
- Develop and implement a robust cross School academic and administrative infrastructure for managing and supporting all aspects of student mobility, recognising and accommodating differing course & Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements
- Embed internationalisation within the curriculum, of which student mobility is part
- Develop a proactive and dynamic strategy to support, encourage and enthuse student mobility. Students are very keen to undertake an international elective at the beginning of the course but pressures of the curriculum can lead to apathy. The University of Nottingham implemented an elective fare which introduces students to the elective programme and is followed up with emails and 'elective surgeries' to help maintain enthusiasm and support them in navigating their way through any potential obstacles
- Develop a group of champions who will support and promote elective opportunities
- Develop a menu of international opportunities including attendance at international conferences, study tours, attendance at summer schools etc.
- Advise and support students in applying for travel scholarships.

Related advice from Robert Gordon University can be found in the table in case study 2. This includes tips on finding time for outward mobility and supporting students before and during their time away from the university.

Case studies from St. George's, University of London on the provision of clinical placements abroad, and from Glasgow Caledonian University on study visits for health professionals can be found here: <http://www.go.international.ac.uk/content/good-practice-0>.

# 6. Resources and further information

## 6.1. University sector wide initiatives to support study abroad

In 2013 the UK Strategy for Outward Student Mobility was launched in response to the growing evidence base on the benefits of mobility. Universities UK International's Go International programme was set up to deliver this strategy, with government support, at the request of the then Minister for Universities and Science, the Rt. Hon David Willetts MP. The strategy's sole goal was to increase the proportion of UK students accessing an international experience as part of their UK higher education programme.

Since the Outward Student Mobility strategy was launched, the number of students going abroad has increased year on year, and outward mobility has gained increased status within UK universities, in many cases benefitting from increased resource. Mobility now features prominently in many universities' international strategies, and institutional targets for mobility are becoming more and more common.

The second phase of the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility, beginning in 2017, has been revised to include a new national target for mobility: to double the percentage of UK-domiciled, full-time, first degree qualifiers who access an international placement as part of their UK degree by 2020. To meet this ambitious target, the strategy also has a renewed focus on reaching underrepresented groups in mobility.

## 6.2. Universities UK International

Universities UK International's [Go International](#) programme helps implement the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility. It works with UK higher education institutions, the Erasmus+ National Agency for the UK, sector agencies, careers services, employer representatives, overseas governments and professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to achieve the strategy's objectives.

- Representing the UK higher education sector collectively, Go International works to increase participation in outward student mobility by:
- providing an annual overview of [mobility data and trends](#) among UK participants, including the type and length of mobility being accessed, the demographics of participation and the most common destinations
- supporting higher education staff to promote and deliver outward mobility programmes through a range of professional development events around the UK and an annual conference

- delivering a diverse programme of [research](#) in collaboration with other sector agencies, providing quantitative and qualitative evidence of the benefits of mobility to UK higher education students
- sharing knowledge and good practice across the sector through a biannual [Mobility network](#), involving over 70 higher education institutions and related organisations

See [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/international](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/international) for further information on Universities UK International, <http://go.international.ac.uk> for more on the programme or email the programme team at [outwardmobility@international.ac.uk](mailto:outwardmobility@international.ac.uk)

### **6.3. Erasmus +**

Erasmus+, which turns 30 this year, is currently the single largest source of funding for UK student and staff mobility. It is an extraordinarily well-designed outward mobility scheme, with every legal and academic barrier removed across a bloc of 28 countries, and with funding for students, from any discipline, participating in it. It has played a vital role in supporting the UK university sector to increase the number of students benefitting from international experiences, not just across Europe, but now worldwide under the International Credit Mobility strand. Over half of trips undertaken by the UK's 2014–15 graduating cohort were via the Erasmus programme.

Erasmus+ also supports students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and disabled students through the provision of top-up grants. It funds higher education reform and capacity-building projects, fosters institutional cooperation, and develops strategic partnerships that are quality assured and protected by the Erasmus University Charter. It has a strong and recognisable brand, and an unparalleled network of hundreds of thousands of alumni from the UK alone.

Further information: <https://erasmusplus.org.uk/> and <http://go.international.ac.uk/content/erasmus>

**Brexit and Erasmus +**

As the UK prepares to leave the EU, the UK government has indicated a need for the country to become even more global and internationalist in action and spirit. Student mobility should form a key part of this agenda. Mobility helps graduates become more globally engaged, open-minded, and culturally aware and helps us reassure the rest of the world that we still promote these values.

At a time when the UK's place in the European Erasmus+ mobility scheme is uncertain, Universities UK is calling for continued engagement in Erasmus+ and for this to be confirmed in the UK government's negotiations with the EU.

The benefits that the Erasmus+ programme, and mobility more generally, can provide students – and universities' employability offers – are clear. We must continue to enable future generations of students to access these valuable mobility opportunities and ensure that there remains sufficient funding for them to do so.

**6.4. Student support for students studying abroad**

Information for UK students on financial support for study abroad can be found on the Go International website: <http://go.international.ac.uk/content/funding-it-0/uk-funding>

**6.5. Other opportunities**

Information on other sources of funding, including British Council-run schemes such as Generation UK India and China, open to students from all disciplines, can be found here:

<http://go.international.ac.uk/content/funding-it-0/mobility-opportunities-and-funding-around-world>

# 7. Case study 1 - Student Mobility in the School of Health Sciences, University of Nottingham

Contributed by Dr Derek Chambers & Dr Catrin Evans, University of Nottingham

## **Background to the School of Health Sciences**

The School of Health Sciences (SHS), University of Nottingham offers courses in Nursing, Midwifery, Physiotherapy and Sport Rehabilitation and Exercise Science (SRES). The aim and purpose of the School is to educate and nurture the best and brightest students who will go on to transform the lives of individuals and communities locally, nationally and internationally. The School has three Divisions (Nursing, Midwifery, and Physiotherapy & Rehabilitation Sciences), with 1,732 pre-registration students and 177 academic staff split across three sites.

## **Global engagement in the School of Health Sciences**

The School has a comprehensive Strategy for Global Engagement that sees internationalisation embedded into all of its activities. The overall goal of the School's work around Global Engagement is to enhance the international reach, significance and impact of its teaching, research and knowledge exchange activities, and to be known for its commitment to global health. Providing opportunities for study abroad is an intrinsic part of the School's approach to offering students a globally relevant transformative educational experience. To this end, the School has created a role for a senior academic who is 'Student Mobility Lead', it has a Student Mobility Strategy and a Student Mobility Committee made up of Academic Leads from each of the Divisions. These are supported by an administrator.

## **Student mobility strategy**

In 2013 the School of Health Sciences developed and implemented a specific Student Mobility Strategy which set out a vision to '...create vibrant and distinctive learning opportunities, (for both outgoing and incoming students), which students utilise to critically interrogate their practices and knowledge. The goal is to prepare graduates to (i) consider health care practices within a global context (ii) deliver more effective and culturally sensitive care to increasingly diverse populations.'

The main aims of student mobility are to:

- ensure that the School provides students with high quality and safe international experience;
- enable students to understand what it means to be a global citizen and its implications for them as health care professionals;
- promote an understanding of the political and economic dimensions of health education and social development embodied in a greater movement of peoples and increasingly diverse global populations;
- better prepare students to deliver care to increasingly culturally diverse groups by preparing graduates to work in a multi-cultural diverse environment, to deal with new health challenges as a result of globalisation
- engender a greater appreciation and understanding of international scholarship and research.

### **Proportions of students undertaking study abroad**

All pre-registration undergraduate midwifery, physiotherapy and nursing students are offered an opportunity within their programmes to undertake an international placement.

In 2015/16 (the last period for which complete figures are available), 17% of graduating students had an overseas placement. These figures vary from 16% for Nursing, 28% for Midwifery and 21% for Physiotherapy.

### **Length and nature of placements**

Overseas placements can be for varying periods from 2 weeks to 2 months with the majority being 4 weeks. The focus of the international experience is clinical practice. Currently the school provides two main opportunities for students choosing to undertake a placement abroad. These are our Erasmus + and our wider 'international elective' programmes.

Erasmus+ and Memorandum of Agreements (MoAs)

The School developed its Erasmus programme in 2008. Since then it has grown with the school now having 12 agreements in 12 countries. Erasmus placements are for 2 calendar months which include an induction week. Erasmus+ is the only funded programme and places are limited. It is therefore very competitive. Each country has an academic 'placement link' who: liaises closely with their partner institution(s) and placement area(s) and supports both outgoing and incoming students. The programme is supported by administrative staff who, together with the relevant academic, are closely involved in organising student exchange/placements for both outgoing and incoming students. Erasmus+ placements are predetermined and so students will undertake their placement in designated areas. In addition to Erasmus+ the school has developed a number of MoAs which function similarly to Erasmus+ in that there is dedicated academic liaison and placements are predetermined/arranged and are usually for 4 weeks duration. However, there is no funding available for MoAs.

The contribution of the Erasmus+ scheme to the School's overall student mobility options is relatively small but significant, and as the only funded programme, it provides an important option for students who would otherwise be unable to afford an experience overseas.

## The Wider 'International Elective' Programme

The international elective programme is a 2-4 week programme which enables students to go to practically any country. There are relatively few restrictions on where students undertake their international elective placement. What restrictions do exist, primarily relate to student safety. All proposed destinations are assessed using The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) travel advice web site. All students are required to undertake a detailed risk assessment of the proposed destination including: personal safety; immunisation requirements; local customs and beliefs which must be assessed and approved by a member of academic staff. Students are responsible for (i) organising their own placement under the supervision of a member of academic staff and (ii) ensuring they have the correct level of insurance including work place insurance.

### Student destinations

For some students, choice of international elective destination is influenced by the development/economic status of a country. Often, those who want to experience healthcare systems in countries with limited resources are more likely to choose African, Asian or South American countries as their destination. For example, one student said:

*I'm going to Bangalore in India and I'm assuming that the healthcare is going to be very different to what we have in England and they're probably going to have fewer resources so it would be quite interesting (Physiotherapy student)*

Others choose to compare the UK's healthcare system with other high-income countries, hence their preference for countries such as the USA:

*Looking at healthcare systems that were better than the US and then I saw that UK is better than the US and I just wanted to finally compare the differences between the healthcare systems (Nursing student)*

The table below identifies some of the destination countries where students have undertaken an elective.

### Selected Destinations of Health Sciences Students

	Nursing	Midwifery	Physiotherapy
Destinations	Malta, Spain, France, Sweden Norway, Ghana, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Germany, Portugal, USA, Tanzania, New Zealand, Angola, Philippines, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Cape Verde, Peru, Australia, Jamaica, India, Romania, Seychelles, Barbados, South Africa	Malta, Ireland, Italy Milan, Denmark, Toronto Canada, New Zealand, Greece, Nepal, Norway, Tanzania, Guernsey, Morocco, Barbados, Haiti, Poland, Ghana	France, Turkey, Malaysia, Malawi, Uganda, India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, New Zealand, Spain, Guernsey

## Benefits & challenges of international placements

In 2015 the School undertook a study of the factors that influenced students' decisions to undertake an international placement (Chambers et al 2015). The study identified that in general, students were very interested in studying abroad and were mostly motivated by their desire to travel and to learn from experiencing other cultures and healthcare settings:

*We've had quite a lot of clinical experience in the NHS and in the UK so for me I felt like I'd benefit more from doing something abroad in a different environment, in a different health system (Physiotherapy student)*

*So we can appreciate when families come here and don't speak English, the communication difficulties from their point of view and understand them better (Nursing student)*

Some students explained that they had aspirations of working abroad in development or humanitarian settings and having an opportunity to do an international placement would help prepare them for potential future roles. Below are a selection of quotes from students who have returned and have reflected on their experiences:

*This experience truly opened my eyes to see how grateful I am for the NHS and the care it provides to everyone, regardless of income, race, gender, age or anything and challenged me to make a little bit of difference to anyone each day because we have so much. This is the EU can you believe it? Thank you for giving me this experience.*

*'This is Africa' was heard frequently during my elective placement in Ghana. Resources are few and far between compared to the NHS - consequently, ingenious thinking is required to overcome the many challenges in healthcare delivery. As a result of spending our elective in Ghana with the wonderful NGO Dream Big Ghana, a compost toilet was built in the local village from our deposits. This would have huge effects on the sanitation and health of those using it (diarrhoea is the 6th largest cause of death in children under-5) - but also produced compost that could be used on crops. Witnessing the links between health, sanitation and economic status was an incredibly eye-opening experience that has increased my interest in global health nursing.*

*I loved experiencing new cultures seeing new places meeting new people.*

*I completed the Erasmus in the Republic of Ireland, Cork and found it a life changing experience. I loved being immersed in the Irish culture and meeting different people from all over the world. I really enjoyed my nursing placements and definitely got a lot out of the experience. I would recommend it to anyone.*

*I would definitely recommend ERASMUS to any student, as it allows you to see how maternity services differ and personally learn about the pros and cons of maternity care and how it can be improved in order to provide high quality care for women. Alongside working life, I was able to have a social life which gave me the opportunity to make new friends and travel to explore the city and neighbouring towns.*

## Some of the challenges

Our research has identified a number of challenges that determine whether or not a student will undertake an international elective including cost, family commitments and language (Chambers et al, 2015; Brown et al, 2016).

### Cost

Unless students are undertaking an Erasmus+ exchange, there is no funding available to students. Cost is, therefore, by far the biggest impediment to students undertaking an international elective. In addition to the obvious cost of travel, food & accommodation health care students have the additional cost associated with practice including insurance and immunisations (where necessary). To help offset the cost of an international elective some students choose countries where they have family and/or friends. Others have successfully applied for scholarships.

### Family/carer commitments

For some mature students with families travelling abroad is not really an option.

### Language

Language is frequently cited as a reason for students not undertaking an international elective to countries where English is not widely spoken and we have also found this to be the case. The majority of our students select countries where English can be understood.

## A 'menu' of international opportunities

In addition to our elective/Erasmus+ programmes, the School provides a number of other international opportunities, encouraging and supporting students to attend:

- international summer schools such as the Universitas 21 annual summer school
- international student workshops and conferences

These can also be transformative experiences, as illuminated below:

*I feel incredibly fortunate to have been given the opportunity to go on this year's U21 Health Sciences Summer School in Santiago, Chile. Not only have I been able to learn in greater depth other fields of practice, I have also been able to enhance my existing knowledge regarding early preventative interventions in healthcare. From getting first-hand experience talking to mothers about their attitudes towards breastfeeding, to learning more about the history of Chile's public health system, I have gained invaluable insight into the culture and workings of a healthcare system within an entirely different country to my own. I could not have asked for a better group of students and teachers to take me through this unforgettable experience, so thank you! (BSc Nursing Student).*

## New initiatives

We are currently working with international colleagues to develop a 1-2 week 'study tour' option. In addition, in 2011, the School initiated and implemented the concept of *Virtual Mobility* (Todhunter et al 2013; Wharrad et al 2014) and is currently leading on this initiative with colleagues from The University of Auckland (New Zealand); University of Texas Health Science

Centre (US) and Sheffield Hallam University (UK). The Virtual Mobility programme utilises communication technologies to allow students from different countries and cultures to study together. Clearly a web based application could not replace traditional direct study exchange and this was not our aim. What it does offer is alternative dimensions to obtaining some of the benefits as one would have with physical mobility but without the need to travel.

## Recommendations and tips

The following recommendations are based on the School's experiences of student mobility:

- Appointment of a strategic lead for student mobility;
- Appointment of an administrative lead for student mobility;
- The development and implementation of a robust cross School academic and administrative infrastructure for managing and supporting all aspects of student mobility, recognising and accommodating differing course & PSRB requirements;
- Embed internationalisation within the curriculum of which student mobility is part;
- Develop a proactive and dynamic strategy to support, encourage and enthuse student mobility. Students are very keen to undertake an international elective at the beginning of the course but pressures of the curriculum can lead to apathy. We have implemented an elective fare which introduces students to the elective programme and is followed up with emails and 'elective surgeries' to help maintain enthusiasm and support them in navigating their way through any potential obstacles;
- Develop a group of champions who will support and promote elective opportunities;
- Develop a menu of international opportunities including attendance at international conferences, study tours, attendance at summer schools etc.
- Advise and support students in applying for travel scholarships.

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# 8. Case study 2 - Student Mobility at Robert Gordon University (RGU)

Contributed by Carol Jackson, International Exchanges Co-ordinator, Robert Gordon University

## **Personal introduction**

I first became involved with outward student mobility in 2005, attending the European Network of Nursing in Higher Education (ENNE) Intensive Programme (see below) in Finnish Lapland on behalf of the then European Co-ordinator for the School. I was a relatively new teacher, with little knowledge of the opportunities or challenges offered by the Learning Abroad Programme, but was keen to immerse myself in any new experience. I had little time to prepare and was given very little information on what to expect, but was reassured that I would be working with experienced lecturers, facilitating a group of European nursing students, using a problem-based approach to learning .....and "don't worry, it's in English". I was to accompany a diverse group of RGU students and we were to become ambassadors for ourselves, for our University, for our Profession and for our Country. Little did I know then how positively life changing this first 'ambassadorial' experience would turn out to be, on both a professional and personal level. The programme was certainly intensive; we found ourselves immersed together in a unique, multicultural learning experience from which we emerged as an enlightened and empowered group of motivated nursing professionals, whose shared experience had transformed our understanding of each other and of nursing in a European context.

Soon after this experience, I was given the opportunity to join the Erasmus team, first as Link Teacher for Belgium and the Netherlands, and later as the International Exchange Co-ordinator for the Nursing and Midwifery School. I form part of a small team of dedicated academic staff who promote and support the Learning Abroad Programme as part of their academic role within the School. Each designated Link Teacher is responsible for managing both outgoing and incoming student exchanges between RGU and all Partner Institutions in a particular country, including undertaking biannual visits and auditing clinical placements. This strengthens the collaborative agreements, enhances the relationship with each of our partners and ensures a level of country-specific expertise within the team.

## **Overview of outgoing mobility opportunities at RGU**

Students are introduced to the outward mobility opportunities available at RGU through our website and as part of the initial interview process. These opportunities are promoted throughout the year at student fairs, international office events, in class discussions and in individual interviews. Pre-application presentations are delivered at various times in stage 2 for all outgoing mobility opportunities.

In Stage 1, nursing students undertake a summative module: Cultural Competence and Global Health Care Challenges. This enables students to discuss the impact of globalisation on health and to develop knowledge, awareness and sensitivity in providing culturally competent healthcare. These attitudes, values and beliefs are also embedded within the modules of the midwifery curriculum and help prepare the students for future mobility opportunities.

In Stage 2, nursing students can apply for opportunities to participate in the ENNE Intensive Programme, in an International Week hosted by one of our ENNE partners or in a two week observational exchange with our Partner Institutions in Houston or Tennessee, with whom we have a formal and established Memorandum of Understanding. In addition, at the end of Stage 2, nursing students undertake a 5 week elective placement. It is possible for students to undertake this clinical placement with one of our established Erasmus partners. Stage 2 midwifery students can also apply to undertake a 2 week elective placement overseas. The Houston Exchange is currently funded by the Grampian-Houston Association for 2 students. For all other opportunities, the students are self-funded.

In Stage 3, both nursing and midwifery students can apply to undertake a 13 week Erasmus + Study Exchange for their first clinical placement. The School has agreed mobility under Erasmus + programme for 32 student exchanges and 12 teacher exchanges each year. We currently have inter-institutional agreements with 10 international partners in 7 European countries: Belgium, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Spain. This opportunity is available to third year students from any of the 3 fields of nursing: Adult, Mental Health and Children and Young People. In addition, there are opportunities for 6 midwifery students to participate in a similar exchange with our partners in the Netherlands, Belgium and Italy. Students undertaking the Erasmus + Exchange can apply for a European Funding Grant, administered by the British Council. Although strict criteria apply, almost all our students accepted for an Erasmus+ outward mobility exchange receive this financial support in addition to any SAAS funding they may already receive. Students are also encouraged to seek additional funding sources and to organise fundraising events to supplement their resources.

Post-registration student mobility experiences are rare and are negotiated on an individual basis within our established network of partners. Funding may be available to support these exchanges.

Completion of an outward mobility experience is reflected in the student's Higher Education Achievement Record (HEAR).

### **Application process**

Students are invited to apply formally in Stage 2 for all outward mobility opportunities. A rigorous selection process is maintained, which generally involves the Learning Abroad Team, the students' personal tutor and, if necessary, the Programme Leads. Students submit a notification of interest, a CV and letter of motivation in the first instance. A report is sought from their Personal Tutor as to their suitability to participate in the programme and their attendance, academic grades and clinical placements are reviewed. Students must demonstrate the potential to perform the 'ambassadorial role' throughout their mobility period and suitable applicants are selected for interview by the Learning Abroad team. Following selection, individual students are supported by a Named Link Teacher for each Country, both in RGU and at the Host Institution, throughout their mobility experience.

## **Erasmus + exchange**

Once selected for the Stage 3 Erasmus exchange, it is made clear to the students that they must continue to maintain good progress throughout second year before they can progress to the final application stage to their Host Institution. Selecting these students early appears to motivate them to perform well, provides time for them to prepare for the 13 week experience and gives early notification to the Host universities to enable them to select the most suitable placement opportunities and mentors. Students are allocated to particular Host Institutions partly by choice and partly by the availability of field specific opportunities. On successful progression to Stage 3, students selected for the Erasmus + exchange programme attend a fortnightly preparation class facilitated by the Learning Abroad Team and a mandatory pre-departure session by the International Office. During this time, the formal application procedure to the Host Institution and Learning Agreements are finalised.

Students participate in an orientation programme with their Host Institution, followed by clinical practice in one or more clinical areas which have been agreed as suitable learning environments. A close relationship is maintained between the RGU Link Teacher, the Responsible Person in the Host Institution and the student to ensure that any assessment issues or concerns are addressed promptly and effectively. Students engage in a variety of additional academic, cultural and social activities, depending on their Host's expectations and availability. This may include participation in Language Lessons or International Student tutorial group sessions at the Host Institution. Students are also encouraged to join the local Erasmus/ European Student Network (ESN) and are provided with "buddy" contacts in each country if available. Most students take advantage of opportunities to travel in their days off.

## **The European Network of Nursing in Higher Education (ENNE) Intensive Programme**

The European Network of Nursing in Higher Education (ENNE) was founded in 1998, with the main purpose of promoting teacher and student mobility. The network consists of representation from nursing departments in HEI's in 14 European countries and the School of Nursing and Midwifery at RGU was one of the network's earliest participating members.

The five day 'intensive programme' is held in one of the participating countries in April each year and provides an exciting opportunity for approximately six second/third year nursing students and teaching staff from each participating institution to deepen their knowledge and understanding of health care systems in different European countries. It also enables students to develop their intercultural competencies and experience the professional values embedded within the NMC Code.

Students prepare presentations to introduce themselves, their nursing curriculum, their own health and social care system and general cultural characteristics of their country. The students work together in multi-national tutorial groups using patient case scenarios to share knowledge, practice and experiences in planning patient care and outcomes are shared with all participants. Collaborative group work is interspersed with visits to health and educational providers and participation in social activities, all designed to promote intercultural understanding.

## **Observational mobility**

Students undertaking current observational mobility opportunities engage in a two week bilateral exchange programme consisting of organised visits to academic and health care settings and a

variety of cultural and social events and activities in each country. Outgoing and incoming students are expected to act as “hosts” for the visiting students, with the support of the Named Link Teachers at each institution.

### **Some of the many benefits of studying abroad**

Every member of the Learning Abroad Team and many of the personal tutors report that their students appear to ‘grow up and transform before their eyes’!

Study abroad:

- Provides a unique opportunity to experience work and life in another country.
- Gives students an opportunity to make life-long friendships and professional contacts for future networking.
- Increases confidence, self-belief and assertiveness.
- Allows students to:
  - a. formulate more realistic expectations of working abroad once qualified
  - b. explore and debate health issues and policy from a different perspective
  - c. share best practice; gain appreciation of what we do well and recognise what we can improve
  - d. advance communication skills, especially through non-verbal means
  - e. gain greater appreciation of how it feels to be unable to communicate and be understood
  - f. enhances their ability to question, understand and formulate new ideas.
- Increases ability to respond positively to challenges and adapt to change.
- Empowers students to facilitate change through greater self-confidence and communication skills.
- Influences future practice with enhanced knowledge and understanding gained by experience.
- Enhances future employability, through increased confidence, knowledge and experience.
- Increases resilience, self-reliance and ability to recognise and ask for help when required.
- Enhances ability to work collaboratively and respect the contributions of individuals within teams.
- Provides greater knowledge and understanding of different cultures and social practices.
- Makes students less insular, more accepting of diversity and less judgemental (sometimes!).
- Contributes to greater awareness and appreciation of the concepts of ‘global citizenship’.

Students achieve many of the NMC competencies and gain a clear understanding of professional standards of practice and behaviour through direct experience.

## Obstacles to outward mobility for student nurses and midwives and possible solutions

Obstacles	Possible solutions
Restrictive NMC regulations	Hope for greater flexibility in the new standards!
Formal arrangements with overseas host partners – negotiating Inter-Institutional Agreements or MOU's can be time consuming and complicated.	Develop patience and ask for help! Our International Office provides excellent support and advice.
Mobility periods longer than 4 weeks must be summatively assessed with unfamiliar documentation.	Ensure Host Institutions are familiar with and prepared to use the NMC approved Ongoing Achievement Record for student assessments – building close collaborative relationships facilitate this.
Inflexibility of the Nursing and Midwifery Programme Structures – eg. the ONLY time midwifery students can achieve the necessary 13 week Erasmus Study period is to undertake their Erasmus Exchange over their Christmas and New year holidays. The 5 week elective opportunity for outward mobility falls in the summer holiday period for most Host Institutions, making it difficult/impossible for students to be supported by University Staff at their Host Institution.	Consider and build in greater flexibility in pre-registration programmes to accommodate this. Collaborative working and negotiation with academic and clinical staff in Host Institutions/ clinical areas to facilitate this.
Loss of clinical hours when observational mobility takes place during clinical placement time or loss of annual leave time to accommodate this.	Students can 'make up' lost clinical hours over the course of their programme. Building in accredited, flexible elective experience time within programmes
Competing demands on staff resources to undertake visits and work required to nurture international relationships and support students.	Recognition of the fundamental importance and value of learning abroad opportunities to student achievement and the development of our future workforce in an increasingly intercultural environment.
Managing unrealistic expectations and inaccurate assumptions eg inability to communicate	Personal knowledge and experience are powerful attributes to reassure and motivate others. Encourage, promote and reward participation in language learning. Providing clear, concise information materials to help level different expectations
Direct Entry Midwifery Programmes – In most	Discussion and clear, shared understanding of

European countries, Midwifery and field specific nursing are part of a post-registration programme. This makes it difficult to organise reciprocal exchange of students.	requirements and willingness to provide 'field' appropriate learning experiences outwith the usual arrangements.
Requirement for 'sign-off mentors' in midwifery makes it difficult for midwifery students to get their competencies 'signed-off' by mentors.	Students are encouraged to be proactive in achieving competencies prior to and following their Erasmus Exchange. Post-Erasmus placements occasionally require to be adjusted to compensate for this. Greater acceptance of professional differences and recognition of the expertise of European mentors to assess students would facilitate this.
Requirement to audit clinical placements.	Collaborative partnerships with academic and clinical colleagues in Host Institutions helps to facilitate this. Recognition of importance of regular Teaching Mobility and Organisational Visits vital.
Different application procedures and health requirements	Close collaboration between partner institutions helps with this.
Clear understanding of specific requirements of each Partner Institution and acceptance of differences.	Requires flexibility.
Language challenges.	Agreement with Host Institution to provide clinical mentor and University Link Teacher with sufficient working knowledge of English to support RGU students. Supportive relationship within Learning Abroad Team is vital.

### Our hopes for the future

- An equivalent of ENNE for midwives
- Increasing participation in International Weeks
- Increasing flexibility within programmes
- Expand outward mobility opportunities to facilitate RGU Vision of giving all students the opportunity to benefit from this experience
- Return to Practice: opportunities for increasing participation for post-registration students!
- Seeking opportunities for alternative funding sources post-Brexit.
- Limited Capacity - but where there's a will we will find a way!

### **Final comment and advice**

Outward mobility is like Orienteering. First you must learn to interpret the signs on the map to help inform your route choice. Second you must set your compass and orientate yourself to the environment. Know where you are, identify the barriers in your way and work out what to do to get there. Third you must navigate the terrain and overcome the challenges. Enlist the help of an experienced navigator if you can! Fourth find and unlock the controls through lateral thinking and persistent perseverance. Remember to wear a protective skin to protect against the thorns that get in your way. And finally...enjoy the success of your achievement. Your students certainly will!

**For further information**

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