Academic perspectives on the outcomes of outward student mobility

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1 Introduction

This research project was commissioned by the UK Higher Education International Unit (IU) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in June 2014 to explore academic perspectives on the outcomes of outward mobility at undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels for UK domiciled students, and to consider how best to facilitate take-up of outward mobility opportunities among students.

While the benefits of outward mobility are widely reported, previous studies, for example International Student Mobility Literature Review (King et al 2010) and Going Mobile: Internationalisation, mobility and the EHEA (Sweeney 2012), indicate that there is a lack of empirical evidence on the impact of outward mobility on employability or degree outcome. Recent large-scale, macro-level studies of the Erasmus programme have begun to address this, gathering data in a systematic way across cohorts of Erasmus students (Jacobone and Moro 2014; Brandenburg et al 2014). By contrast, this study sets out to explore the perspectives of academic staff and identify any evidence being collected at both institutional and programme level which could contribute to an empirical evidence base for the impact and benefit of outward mobility on academic outcomes. The study takes account of all forms of student mobility in Europe, internationally and in the UK, including work and study placements, study visits, seminars and conferences, virtual mobility opportunities, summer schools and volunteering. Student mobility is defined as being of a minimum of two weeks and a maximum of one academic year in duration.

The UK recently affirmed its commitment to the European target that in 2020, 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad. However, the UK currently lags behind other European counterparts in respect of outward student mobility, being ranked only seventh in respect of the number of students participating in the Erasmus Programme. The picture is similar for mobility in other parts of the world; for example, although the US is the most popular destination for UK domiciled students outside Europe, the UK is ranked only 12th in terms of the number of students choosing the US for outward mobility\(^1\). Recent Erasmus statistics also show that a number of discipline areas are under-represented in the take-up of outward mobility opportunities. This study considers this under-representation, exploring whether there are any specific factors that can be addressed to support increased participation.

\(^1\)http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx
It is intended that the evidence provided in this study will be used by the higher education sector to further the take-up, provision and evaluation of mobility opportunities, as well as inform the delivery of the IU’s UK Strategy for Outward Mobility (2013) and HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2014) to raise awareness of mobility with academic staff. It includes examples from subject disciplines traditionally under-represented in outward mobility in order to share good practice. It is anticipated that the findings will contribute to increasing numbers of students accessing international opportunities by highlighting areas for development, sharing effective practice and informing both sector-wide and institution-specific action.
2 Research methods

2.1 Aims

This research study aims to explore the perceived outcomes, and any related institutional based evidence, of short and long-term outward mobility with academics who are teaching or have taught students who participated in an overseas placement. It places particular focus on subject disciplines which are under-represented in outward mobility.

2.2 Methodology

The research study was undertaken as follows:

i) Secondary research
   - A brief literature review considering publically-available literature published since the *International Student Mobility Literature Review* (2010)
   - Analysis of statistics publically available at the time of writing

ii) Primary field research
   - An online questionnaire to capture data from the widest possible pool of academic staff across the four UK nations from the identified under-represented disciplines (completed by 56 respondents)
   - In-depth interviews undertaken with academic staff who are teaching or have taught students involved in outward mobility, identified through the online questionnaire above

iii) Analysis
   The data gathered from the study was entered into a research management database, enabling it to be coded and emerging themes to be identified.
2.3 General limitations of the research

Although significant amounts of data were collected, the following points are recognised as limitations to this research study:

- A total of 56 survey responses from 30 different institutions across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were received and 14 interviews undertaken with staff from 11 different institutions across all UK national regions. While the methods used yielded rich data, the results may not be representative of the sector as a whole.

- Due to the spread of responses across discipline areas it has not been feasible to identify particular trends relating to specific under-represented discipline areas.
3 Review of current literature

This review takes into account a range of sources of evidence published subsequent to the HEFCE-funded International Student Mobility Literature Review by King et al in 2010. The literature review focuses on exploring staff perceptions of the perceived and actual impact of outward mobility on academic outcomes. In particular, it examines whether staff believe outward mobility results in improved degree outcomes, greater employability and better job prospects, or any other tangible results which have a positive benefit in an academic context. Using available statistical evidence, it also considers whether current trends and patterns of participation in outward mobility can provide insight into how best to increase outward mobility in under-represented disciplines.

Although there has been a steady rise in the number of UK domiciled students taking up an outward mobility opportunity, increasing by 32.95% between 2007-08 and 2011-12 (Carbonell 2013), the UK is still poorly placed in terms of the number of students who are mobile relative to its European and other international counterparts. There is also still a significant imbalance between the numbers of incoming and outgoing students - current estimates show that on average there are in excess of 400,000 international students studying in the UK each year\(^2\), while an estimate of outward mobility for 2011-12 shows that 18,649 students (Carbonell 2013) were mobile during that period. This figure includes both Erasmus and non-Erasmus study and work placements.

However, since the publication of the *International Student Mobility Literature Review* (King et al 2010) discussion and debate on the benefits of outward mobility for UK domiciled students has increased in profile. Experts continue to explore the relationship between outward mobility and employability through the development of ‘global graduates’, how more students can be encouraged to take up outward mobility opportunities, and how the benefits of outward mobility align with the internationalisation agenda in HE, with the last two years seeing an injection of pace. Three key drivers can be identified:

1 European Higher Education Area mobility target

The UK is committed to the European target that by 2020, 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad.

\(^2\) UCAS data [http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/international](http://www.ucas.com/how-it-all-works/international)
This commitment is affirmed by government policy across all UK national regions. The Government strategy for England, *Global Growth and Prosperity* (July 2013) recognises the need to ‘increase the number of UK students gaining valuable experience through overseas mobility placements, which both increases students’ employability and supports the UK’s ties overseas’. This need is echoed in policy and strategy statements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and is supported by the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility (2013).

2 **The global labour market**

As indicated above, the continued growth of the global labour market is fuelling the need for graduates to have the right skills to enter employment, including the ability to adjust to and accommodate different cultures and ways of working.

Global competencies such as cultural awareness, language skills and adaptability are valued by employers, and outward mobility is regarded as critical to the development of graduates who are able to operate in a global market place. Employers need graduates who understand and can manage international and intercultural relationships and who understand the increasingly global nature of the world of work (Diamond et al 2011).

3 **Internationalisation**

The internationalisation agenda is a UK government priority and, as identified by Sweeney (2012) ‘mobility should be a core component of internationalisation, enshrined in the university’s internationalisation agenda’. As Sweeney points out, strategic approaches to institutional internationalisation strategy have often focused on income generation and overseas recruitment, overlooking the role of outward student mobility in providing longer-term internationalisation benefits (both in terms of the institution and in the context of the global economy) and short- to medium-term benefits in respect of student experience and academic outcomes. However, there is increasing recognition of the role of mobility, as supported by the recently published *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (HEA 2014), which refers to the benefits of internationalising higher education and of global learning experiences for an institution, its staff and its students.

In support of these drivers and reflecting the change of pace, the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility, resulting from the *Recommendations to support UK Outward Mobility* (Riordan
Review 2012) submitted to David Willetts MP, then Minister for Universities and Science, was published in December 2013. It sets out a vision to increase student mobility across undergraduate, postgraduate and research programmes, together with seven strategic objectives. Implicit in all the actions it proposes to achieve these aims is the notion of a shift in ‘institutional mobility culture’ (Sweeney 2012).

This shift is reflected in the HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework*, which identifies the growing importance of internationalisation to the UK’s HE sector and articulates its purpose as: ‘Preparing 21st century graduates to live in and contribute responsibly to a globally interconnected society’. The HEA received a significant sector response to the consultation on the framework, and 91% regarded such a framework to be necessary. The growing impetus suggests that the profile of outward mobility as an aspect of the internationalisation agenda is increasing and that its value is being more widely recognised at a strategic level.

Summing up the benefits of outward mobility, the European Commission states:

> These periods of time spent abroad help young people to gain the skills they need to thrive in the labour market both today and in the future. As well as boosting job prospects, mobility also contributes to personal development by opening minds to new experiences and cultures. *(On the way to ERASMUS+: A Statistical Overview of the ERASMUS Programme in 2011-12)*

Although this relates specifically to the Erasmus programme, these benefits can apply equally well to all forms of student mobility, not just mobility within Europe. Indeed, Sweeney (2012) demonstrates that throughout the discourse on outward mobility there is general agreement that it is a good thing. He identifies that benefits accrue to students in terms of personal development, employability and enhanced degree outcome, to staff through opportunities to enhance their knowledge and practice for the benefit of UK and international students and their own research, and to institutions, for example, through enhanced reputation and international profile.

In examining the impact of outward mobility on academic outcomes for students, consideration has been given to a range of studies which examine its impact on the areas identified by Sweeney.
i) **Personal development**

In terms of personal development, a number of studies examine the benefits of mobility to students, drawn from data gathered from students themselves, for example *Modernisation of Higher Education in Europe – European Union Committee*, (House of Lords Select Committee 2012), *International Student Mobility Literature Review* (King et al 2010) and the British Council/YouGov survey, *Next Generation UK* (2012). While this evidence is valuable in demonstrating that outward mobility supports the development of what are generally regarded as ‘soft skills’ such as intercultural competencies, self-reliance and communication, they are based on self-reported evidence – there is no means of assessing whether these students would have developed these skills without the outward mobility experience. However, two recent studies have addressed this.

The first study, *Evaluating the Impact of the Erasmus Programme: Skills and European Identity* (Jacobone and Moro 2014), focuses on what outwardly mobile students acquire in terms of personal development compared to students who remain in their home country; whether participation in an exchange programme enables students to acquire more, or a different quality of human capital than those who do not; and whether they consequently have potentially better prospects in both the labour market and within the university environment. The study takes into account changes in students which took place before and after mobility and contrasts any changes with those experienced by students who had not been outwardly mobile. Personal development in this study is measured in terms of human capital and a student’s ‘sense of self-efficacy’ – the student’s belief in their own ability to face challenges and achieve their goals. It confirms that ‘a student mobility programme is … a powerful tool in developing the personalities of students’, identifying significant effects on personal growth for outwardly mobile students compared with those who remain at home and indicating that outwardly mobile students are more internationally connected:

> Comparison between two pre-Erasmus and post-Erasmus samples gave a measure of added ‘personal and European value’ deriving from a period of study abroad: the mobility programme does not only increase human capital in individuals but also their cosmopolitan orientation. (Jacobone and Moro 2014)

The second study, *The Erasmus Impact Study – Effects of mobility on the skills and the internationalisation of higher education institutions* (Brandenburg et al 2014) is a
large-scale, robust assessment of the impact of Erasmus, with a focus on skills enhancement and employability. It includes analysis of qualitative and quantitative data gathered from students, alumni, staff, institutions and employers across 34 participating countries via ex-ante and ex-post surveys in order to identify direct outcomes of mobility both in the short and the longer term. Skills enhancement and employability were identified in terms of ‘Monitoring Exchange Mobility Outcome factors’ which measured personality traits in terms of self-confidence; resilience; communication, problem solving, organisational, language and presentation skills; intercultural competency; and critical thinking.

As with the personal development identified by Jacobone and Moro, these ‘transversal skills’ increased during an Erasmus period abroad, resulting in a similar ‘self-efficacy’ impact. This then places these students in a better position to find their first job and enhances their career development (Brandenburg et al 2014).

As both studies suggest, it is the impact of developing enhanced ‘human capital’ (including intercultural competency) and ‘self-efficacy’ that provides the potential for enhanced degree and employability outcomes.

3.1 Impacts of outward mobility experience

3.1.1 Degree outcome

Analysis of available statistics did not indicate in any robust way a difference in degree outcome. The only correlation which could be discerned was from comparing the degree outcome of students who had been outwardly mobile with those who had not. The report *Attainment in higher education - Erasmus and placement students* (HEFCE 2009) does indicate that better degree outcomes are achieved by students who participated in an Erasmus placement. However, this analysis is problematic in that it is not sufficiently granular to take account of the numerous variables which might impact on a student’s degree outcome both during and after the period of outward mobility. For example the greater proportion of participating students are from higher socio-economic groups, or in terms of institution, attend Russell Group universities. It may well be therefore that these students would be high achievers even without the mobility experience (King et al 2010).
While Jacobone and Moro’s study demonstrates the potential for outward mobility to impact on degree outcome, there remains little evidence for this. This is possibly because, as the authors point out, the impacts of outward mobility are medium- and long-term effects. The majority of studies considering the benefits of outward mobility only consider student-generated empirical evidence gathered in the period immediately following the experience. Therefore to measure impact in terms of degree and job outcome, a longitudinal, pre/post-mobility approach must be employed, as demonstrated in the GLOSSARI project (Sutton and Rubin 2004), referred to by King et al (2010). This project started by recognising that it is intrinsically difficult to measure the learning outcomes of outward mobility empirically. However, using a robust longitudinal methodology looking at pre- and post-mobility performance and behaviour, it does begin to reveal a correlation between outward mobility and degree outcome.

The drawback of the GLOSSARI project (2004) is that is does not consider the reasons behind the improved degree outcome. However, consideration of the findings of the GLOSSARI project alongside those of Jacobone and Moro and Brandenburg et al may begin to answer this question. It is the short- to medium-term effect of outward mobility on ‘self-efficacy’ which creates the potential for improved degree outcome.

3.1.2 Employability

In the context of outward mobility, employability is defined across a range of studies as those skills, competencies and personal attributes which enhance graduates’ attractiveness within the labour market and enable them to successfully compete for jobs in a global environment. These include the ‘transversal skills’ identified by Brandenburg et al (2014) encompassing curiosity, problem-solving, tolerance and confidence, and which are identified by 92% of employers as essential to employment and career development.

Discourse continues to address the notion of a ‘global graduate’. Global Graduates into Global Leaders (Diamond et al 2011) focuses on what employers and institutions understand to be global competency and how such competencies can be nurtured through collaborative or individual endeavours – in other words, what it is that makes a global graduate. It identifies that multinational employers, and increasingly employers of all kinds, require their workforce to operate readily and confidently internationally, using global perspectives to deal with challenges and identify new opportunities. Therefore UK graduates, like their international counterparts, need to be able to work
across national borders, manage complex international and intercultural relationships, and understand global aspects of the world of work.

Global employability skills which take into account an international dimension are increasingly expected by many employers. The annual CBI/Pearson Education and Skills surveys (specifically 2013 and 2014) make it clear that graduates need to be able to operate in a global marketplace, although it would appear that employers are not concerned whether those skills have been acquired through a placement abroad or in another way. The most recent survey indicates that employers regard language skills as 'nice to have' but not essential. What is of greater importance is the ability to adapt to different cultures and operate in an international context.

As with impact on degree outcome, the scarcity of evidence to demonstrate the true added value of outward mobility in relation to employability, highlighted by King et al (2010), remains. However, some insights are now provided by Jacobone and Moro (2014) and Brandenburg et al (2014).

Jacobone and Moro suggest that self-efficacy and intercultural competency have the potential to contribute to graduates’ success by equipping them to work globally, as well as influencing their career development by enabling them to understand themselves better and match their interests, skills and aspirations with employment options. In the Brandenburg et al study, 92% of employers and 80% of alumni interviewed opined that ‘transversal skills’ are relevant to employability.

Brandenburg et al also consider the employment situation of graduates and identify short- and medium- to long-term benefits for employability. In the short term, after graduation 50% fewer mobile graduates take more than a year to gain their first job compared with their non-mobile peers, and in the medium to long term, the risk of unemployment is 50% lower for mobile, compared to non-mobile, students. The study also indicates that mobile students are at an advantage as their careers progress, with 20% more Erasmus alumni holding management positions ten years after graduation than students with no mobility experience.

These are valuable insights into the added value of outward mobility which suggest that there is a direct correlation between mobility experience and employability. While they deal only with the impact of Erasmus mobility, it is likely that mobility to other international destinations will yield similar impacts.
In considering the impact of outward mobility, it is worth bearing in mind that the body of evidence currently available focuses predominantly on outward mobility through Erasmus, leading to a model of outward mobility based on a period of at least 8 weeks abroad. Sweeney (2012) identified that mobility is generally 'loosely defined as a period of study or work of at least one semester in another European country as an integrated part of a UK study programme'. Specific definition of mobility is avoided in official EU documentation which generally refers to anticipated benefits. Sweeney also recognises that other models of mobility, including virtual opportunities, are being delivered as a means to include students who, for a variety of reasons, are not able to participate in the Erasmus model and as part of an institution's internationalisation strategy. He suggests that internationalisation strategies should 'promote ways to secure some of the benefits of physical mobility even where this is not practicably feasible'. This theme is developed further in Should Internationalisation begin at home? (Jones, International Focus 2013), which considers whether mobility diverts attention from the need to internationalise the curriculum at home. Jones highlights the inequity in mobility participation which will still persist, even if the 20% target for those graduating in the European Higher Education Area in 2020 to have studied or trained abroad is achieved.

Internationalisation strategies must therefore take account of the need to ensure students who are not able to participate in the Erasmus model have the opportunity to engage in appropriate international experiences and gain similar benefits to those who can. This approach is central to the HEA’s Internationalising Higher Education framework (2014) which refers to different forms of mobility as one means of students acquiring global learning experience. As Jones (2013) states, 'Mobility can be of great value, especially if it is seen as part of a broader internationalised curriculum'.

There is some evidence that forms of mobility other than the Erasmus model, for example, shorter placements or virtual mobility, are beneficial, and Sweeney (2012) advocates increasing such opportunities, as they may serve to overcome some of the apparent inequality in current participation. However, gaining insights into the value and impact of this type of mobility remains problematic, as evidence for mobility of less than 8 weeks is currently not systematically collected.
3.2 Patterns of participation

The lack of focus on different forms of mobility is largely due to the fact that the Erasmus programme was historically the main vehicle for outward mobility among students (also providing similar opportunities for staff) and is also the most easily measurable in terms of numbers, destinations and duration. It remains difficult to gauge exact numbers engaging in outward mobility due to inconsistencies in reporting non-Erasmus data, inevitably leading to variations in numbers across data sources. For the UK this situation should improve from 2013-14 onwards as a result of changes made by HESA to its data categories on outward mobility; before then, available statistical data focused on the Erasmus model of 8 weeks or more.

The most recent European Commission statistics show that the UK is now ranked seventh for the number of students participating in Erasmus study placements and third for the number of students going on Erasmus+ traineeships. The UK currently has a 34% share of these traineeships. More recently, mobility outside Europe has been taken into account in a range of statistics, for example, by UNESCO and OECD. From all the sources of data currently available, it can be seen that participation in outward mobility by UK domiciled students is increasing steadily.

In the 2013 report *Still growing after all these years. Outward student mobility in the United Kingdom between 2007-08 and 2011-12*, which provides an overview of both Erasmus and non-Erasmus mobility, Carbonell demonstrates that since the inception of the European Commission’s Lifelong Learning Programme in 2007-08, UK domiciled students’ participation in Erasmus mobility has increased by 33.3%, with mobility from the UK to other destinations increasing by 57% in the same period and with students travelling to a range of global locations. The US and Australia emerge as the top two destinations for UK students in 2011-12 (Carbonell 2013) and UNESCO statistics show that the US was the most popular destination for UK domiciled students (32%) for mobility periods of a minimum of one year in 2012.

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4 [http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx](http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx)
5 [http://www.oecd.org/education/eag.htm](http://www.oecd.org/education/eag.htm)
6 [http://www.go.international.ac.uk/content/where-do-students-go](http://www.go.international.ac.uk/content/where-do-students-go)
These increases are significant and reflect the growing profile of outward mobility as a desirable aspect of a programme of study, seen as beneficial to students’ personal and academic development.

Although the rate of increase has slowed over the last year to 6.5% for Erasmus and 7.1% for non-Erasmus mobility, it is worth noting that in the case of Erasmus, the increase in participation of students with no language in their degree was 9.2%. This is more than double the rate of increase of students with languages in their degree (4.6%). There were substantial increases in the sciences (42.2%), engineering (34.0%) and architecture (27.5%). As Carbonell points out, this indicates that Erasmus mobility is becoming less dependent on language students and is a positive indicator of the potential to increase participation.

Nevertheless, language students and those with a language element as part of their degree still make up the largest proportion of outwardly mobile students, representing 57.2% (6,962 students) of all Erasmus mobility in 2011-12, with 75.7% (5,270 students) of these coming from language specific programmes, which tend to be of four years’ duration. Of the remaining 42.8% (5,202) non-language students, 25.3% (1,315 students) came from business-related degree programmes and the rest were distributed across all other discipline areas. It would therefore seem fair to conclude that in the context of this picture, most discipline areas are currently under-represented in outward mobility.

Given this, it is no coincidence that, as previous studies indicate (Carbonell 2012; Carbonell 2013; King et al 2010; Sweeney 2012) the largest proportion of students taking Erasmus mobility opportunities are from Russell Group institutions (42%), followed by pre-1992 institutions (33%). It is in these institutions, and particularly those in the Russell Group, where language degree programmes are most common. Students studying a language degree or degree with a language make up the highest proportion of students under taking an Erasmus placement at Russell Groups institutions (72.4%), compared to 30.2% of students under taking an Erasmus placement at post-92 institutions, which are more likely to recruit students from widening participation backgrounds and for whom language learning at school is less accessible. As indicated by King et al (2010), the fact that language teaching has been sustained in independent schools in comparison to its well-documented decline in state schools can account for the typical demographic profile of students accessing outward
mobility opportunities: predominantly white, from upper-SEC\textsuperscript{7} backgrounds and from independent schools.

While there has been significant discourse on the fact that it is the most confident students (who have often had prior experience of travel abroad and tend to be from independent schools) that take up outward mobility opportunities (Ahrens et al 2010; British Council 2013; Sweeney 2012), what tends to be overlooked is that this group of students, along with students from other socio-economic backgrounds, are not taking up outward mobility opportunities in other subject disciplines at the same rate. Carbonell (2013) indicates that, in 2011-12, the rate of participation was much more evenly spread across these demographic groups in programmes of study with no language element. Of the 4,854 students with no language participating in Erasmus, students from Russell Group institutions represented the lowest proportion at 29.5%, while those from pre- and post-1992 institutions represented 35.5% and 35% respectively.

It is important to recognise that traditional factors relating to widening participation need to be taken into account in increasing outward mobility. Finance and personal circumstances are consistently identified as having an impact on students’ decisions to participate in Erasmus and other opportunities based on this model (Brandenburg et al 2014; Sweeney 2013; British Council 2013). However, the statistics presented above regarding the mobility of students with no language in their programme of study suggest there are other factors, for example degree structure, which should be explored in order to increase participation in other disciplines.

The positive trends in sciences, engineering and architecture indicated by Carbonell (2013) are encouraging and demonstrate that the change in impetus being driven by the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility (2013) will yield results.

\textsuperscript{7} National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC) – Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations
4 Overview of primary data collection

4.1 Survey responses

There were 56 responses to the online survey which were broadly representative of the HE sector across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It should be noted that nine of the responses included above were not wholly complete, with some questions relating to students who do not take up outward mobility opportunities skipped. However, these responses do contain relevant and valuable information and so have been included in the analysis.

Table 1: Response by national region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National Region</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>Number of institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As indicated in the methodology, the survey was targeted at subject disciplines which are under-represented in outward mobility. 26 of the subject-specific staff who responded had both academic responsibilities and an outward mobility coordination role, and of these, 8 dealt specifically with Erasmus. Responses were received from the following subject discipline areas:

Table 2: Response by subject discipline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject discipline</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication (including film, media and journalism)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities (including English &amp; history)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law (with and without language)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Additional responses were from staff with responsibility for outward mobility strategy and coordinating opportunities at institutional and faculty/school level, and from academic staff working in discipline areas that are largely well represented in outward mobility.

Table 3: Other responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Languages</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff responsible for outward mobility strategy/coordination</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The staff who responded to the survey represent UK, European and international perspectives. Sixteen per cent of respondents were of non-UK origin (9% European; 7% other nationality). Eighty per cent of respondents had lived, worked or studied abroad and all respondents had experience of and/or were currently involved in organising and promoting outward mobility and supporting UK domiciled students who are outwardly mobile. Survey responses to questions on the purpose and benefit of outward mobility suggest that respondents’ own experiences of outward mobility influenced their approach and engagement with promoting opportunities and supporting outwardly mobile students. This was borne out by responses received in the follow up interviews (see 6.1 below).

Eighty per cent of responses were individual and 20% representative. Representative responses were predominantly from individuals who have a strategic or coordinating role with an overview of the whole institution. However, emerging data trends were consistent across individual and representative responses. Consideration has also been given to differences in response by type of institution.
While currently available statistics indicate that a large proportion of students at Russell Group institutions take up outward mobility opportunities and the lowest numbers occur in post-1992 institutions, the data trends and emerging themes regarding impact on academic outcomes were consistent across all institutions. However, the findings demonstrated a need for approaches that have been developed contextually in terms of student cohort, location and fit with the programme of study, in order to encourage and support increasing outward mobility.

### 4.2 Interviews

A total of 14 interviews were undertaken covering all national regions, with ten interviews from seven different discipline areas and three from staff with a strategic coordination role. Interviews yielded data which supported the trends emerging from survey responses.

#### Table 5: Interviews by national region

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National region</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scotland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wales</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern Ireland</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6: Interviews by discipline area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline area</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Languages</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maths</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 7: Interviews by type of institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of institution</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Russell Group</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-1992</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-1992</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist – Creative Arts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5 Overview of outward mobility in participating institutions

This section gives an overview of the types of outward mobility opportunities available at the institutions that participated in the study. It explores the purpose of outward mobility as perceived by academic staff, how mobility is integrated into degree structures and curricula, methods of encouraging students to participate and selection procedures, with a view to identifying how these might impact on patterns of access and participation.

Throughout the study the Erasmus model of outward mobility, based on a period of at least 8 weeks abroad, was used by participants in both surveys and interviews as a benchmark for defining mobility and informing its delivery. However, other forms of mobility - for example, for shorter periods of time, experiences within the UK, virtual engagement - were perceived by academic staff as being of value, especially when worked into the context of the learning outcomes and degree structure of a programme of study.

5.1 The purpose and relevance of outward mobility

Survey respondents were asked what they regarded the purpose of outward mobility - and its relevance as part of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of study – to be.

5.1.1 The value of outward mobility

Support for the principles of outward mobility from academic staff was clearly articulated. Everyone who participated in the survey and interviews was working with students on outward mobility, with 80% having lived, worked or studied abroad, suggesting that personal experience may positively affect attitudes towards outward mobility. Indeed, one interviewee reflected, from personal experience, that the value of an outward mobility experience is not often appreciated until after some time has passed and personal reflection on one’s academic, career, personal journey has taken place. Another interviewee noted that:

‘Students have a great time – the experience and difference of being abroad. They don’t realise they are getting the benefits, learning how to cope in difficult situations, gaining confidence and independence, becoming problem solvers and developing the ability to relate to other people’s emotions.’

Prior to participating in outward mobility, students may not always be driven the same potential benefits that academic staff and future employers might perceive; Jacobone and
Moro (2014) found that decisions to study abroad are based on ‘leisure and cultural appeal and the desire for new experiences’, rather than an opportunity for academic growth. They also find that the outcome of outward mobility is personal development and self-efficacy. Similarly Brandenburg et al (2014) show that personal development through ‘transversal skills’ is a direct outcome of outward mobility. These findings are confirmed by evidence from the survey and interviews.

5.1.2 Personal development and global competence

Survey responses indicate that academic staff identify personal development and, as part of that, increased understanding of cultural diversity as central to outward mobility. Of the 45 respondents to this question, 38 (84%) identified ‘broadening horizons’ and ‘developing a global perspective’ as its primary purpose.

Free comments in the survey consistently referred to increased personal confidence, levels of maturity and understanding of different cultures among outwardly mobile students. They also identified exposure to different learning and working environments as both rationale and benefit. The purpose of an outward mobility experience was thus identified as being to challenge student’s thinking by taking them out of their ‘comfort zone’, with the consequence of enhancing their resilience, belief in their own abilities, and ability to respond to challenges – in other words, their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977) – which, in turn, can have an impact on academic and employability skills.

In the interviews the purpose and impact of outward mobility was explored further. Interview responses both confirmed and illuminated the survey results. While the greatest value of an outward mobility experience was regarded by all interviewees as enabling students to gain independence, develop global perspectives and broaden their horizons (broadly in line with the benefits articulated by the EU highlighted above) responses also hinted at a relationship between personal development and academic outcomes.

Academic staff universally expressed the view that the cultural awareness and intercultural competence gained through outward mobility was not just acquired through social contexts, it also related to experiencing alternative study or work systems and situations:

‘From an academic point of view [outward mobility] adds to the richness of the programme. It deepens understanding of different cultures, values, attitudes and systems, for example in education or social work. It is part of wider learning of global and world differences.’ (Interviewee C)
The purpose of an outward mobility experience was compared by one interviewee to John Dewey’s model of education where ‘participation in meaningful projects, learning by doing, encouraging problems and solving them’ (Warde 1960) results in experiential learning. The exposure to and participation in different systems, ways of working and cultural attitudes or practices enables students to develop knowledge and experience and situate them in a global context. Thus outward mobility provides experiences for students which enable them to ‘socialise and re-socialise learning’ (Interviewee B).

Although not discussed in depth, interviewees noted that this can also apply to staff who engage in outward mobility. In this context, as with postgraduate study, it was valued as an opportunity to share knowledge and gain alternative perspectives on their discipline.

5.1.3 Relevance to different levels of study

Although questions were posed in both the survey and interviews regarding undergraduate (UG), taught postgraduate (PG) and research levels of study, the views, observations and examples given by academic staff related primarily to undergraduate students. Nonetheless, the relevance of outward mobility was identified at all levels, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The majority (77%) of the 47 respondents to this question regarded outward mobility as being very relevant to academic outcomes at undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels, while a mere 7 (12.5%) regarded it as only relevant to students’ personal development. Only one respondent considered it to have no relevance at all.
Although the numbers responding to the survey were small, it is encouraging to see that the academic staff who responded recognised outward mobility as a valuable aspect of academic study, particularly as the majority came from under-represented disciplines. This may be related to their own outward mobility experiences, as suggested above.

The free comments in the survey indicated that academic staff differentiated between the relevance of outward mobility at undergraduate and postgraduate/research levels. At postgraduate and research levels, it was seen as ‘complementing research’ and providing an opportunity to engage with a broader range of academic staff in specialist areas. With regard to undergraduate study, it was consistently identified as an opportunity to experience other learning and teaching cultures, education systems and academic values, and associated with developing confidence and self-reliance. As reported by Interviewee (A):

‘(at undergraduate level) it’s an experience which is more about gaining independence than learning in an academic sense’.

This comment reflects the perceived purpose of outward mobility expressed in both surveys and interviews. Although it could be argued that academic learning is an intrinsic aspect of any study placement (by virtue of its taking place in another academic institution and/or being driven by specific learning outcomes) it would appear that the focus of undergraduate-level ‘learning’ is perhaps less on specific discipline-related academic knowledge than experiential learning arising from living and studying in a challenging, unfamiliar environment. New experiences and challenges result in new perspectives, new attitudes and aptitudes. From the perspective of social constructivism, understanding grows from social encounters and tackling situations which move an individual beyond their ‘comfort zone’. In this context, outward mobility becomes relevant to academic outcomes as students begin to translate their experiences and apply them in the context of their programmes of study. This is what Jacobone and Moro (2014) refer to as self-efficacy.

5.2 The outward mobility offer

Given the range of outward mobility options potentially available to students, the survey and interviews explored whether the impact of an outward mobility experience is differentiated by its type, its place within the structure of a degree programme, its duration or its location.
5.2.1 The type and duration of placements offered

In examining the under-representation of students from particular discipline areas in outward mobility, the opportunities available to them were considered. Survey respondents were asked about the type and duration of mobility opportunities they offer in their discipline area. Given the small number of responses received under each subject discipline it was not feasible to identify trends showing variation in type of placement by discipline.

Table 8 below sets out the types of placements offered at institutions which participated in the survey. Although no particular trends were evident in the type of placement offered, the evidence does provide some insight into how various types of outward mobility opportunity might operate in different discipline areas and types of degree programme.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of placement</th>
<th>Number and % of respondents offering placement type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Erasmus study placement</td>
<td>41 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Erasmus study placement</td>
<td>34 (61%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study visits</td>
<td>19 (34%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Erasmus work placement</td>
<td>18 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summer schools</td>
<td>17 (30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>16 (28.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field trips</td>
<td>16 (28.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Erasmus work placement</td>
<td>15 (27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance at relevant seminars or conferences</td>
<td>11 (20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual opportunities</td>
<td>9 (16%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The survey question considered placements on offer of at least 2 weeks in duration (Figure 2). It is important to bear in mind that as there is currently no statistical data available which gives an overview of all types of mobility other than Erasmus, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about patterns of participation in relation to the duration of outward mobility opportunities.
5.2.1.1 Study placements

Erasmus study placements were found to be the most frequently offered type of outward mobility opportunity, followed by non-Erasmus study placements, and this did not vary by institution type. The survey indicated that for participating institutions, the majority of these placements last for a semester or longer, the largest number of which are offered under the Erasmus programme. 41 of the 47 respondents to the question about duration offer Erasmus study placements, with the majority of these (85%) being for a semester or longer. Non-Erasmus study placements are offered by 34 of the respondents, with 79.4% of these being for a semester or longer.

Analysis of Erasmus statistics for 2011–12 indicate that take up at Russell Group institutions was most frequent at 43%, followed by 30% at pre-1992 institutions, with the lowest being in post-1992 institutions at 22% and other (specialist) institutions at 5%. Difficulty in recruiting students was reported in some post-1992 institutions. Academic staff indicated that this may relate to the demographic of the study body in these institutions, which often have a higher proportion of students from widening participation backgrounds than Russell Group and pre-1992 institutions. These students may have greater financial constraints. It may also relate to the fact that language degrees or degree programmes with a language element are less frequently offered in post-1992 institutions.
5.2.1.2 Work placements

Although work placements did not feature significantly in interview discussions, survey responses provided some insight. The frequency of work placement offers was significantly lower, with only 18 (32%) respondents offering Erasmus and 15 (27%) respondents offering non-Erasmus work placements. Carbonell’s (2013) analysis shows that 71.4% of Erasmus work placements are taken up by language assistants, therefore it is likely that the survey reflects this trend. As with study placements, these are predominantly offered for a semester or longer (by 94.4% and 73% of institutions participating in this study respectively).

5.2.1.3 Study visits, summer schools, volunteering and field trips

It is difficult to assess whether the frequency of offers indicated in the survey are typical, as information on these types of placement is not currently collected systematically. This could be because they fall outside the recognised Erasmus model of a block of independent time away and are not readily recognised as outward mobility. This was consistently reported in respect of field trips. However, it is worth noting that a similar frequency occurs across all groups.

Study visits and field trips are predominantly offered for two weeks only. This possibly reflects the nature of the placements. Study visits and field trips at undergraduate level are more likely to be undertaken in groups with a specific study focus. Summer schools by definition take place outside the framework of an academic programme. As to the duration of volunteering opportunities, survey responses indicated that they occur for longer periods of a semester or more and for shorter periods of a minimum of two weeks, with no particular duration being common to most. However, it was not possible to explore this pattern in any detail in the interviews due to their low frequency.

A point to note from Figure 2 above is that six respondents said they offer Erasmus study placements for the minimum of two weeks. It may be that these respondents have misinterpreted the categories of placement, not recorded accurately or that their institution offers the placement on the basis that it is undertaken in a shorter block of time away. Given that this was not something indicated by interviewees, it is being regarded as an anomaly.

5.2.1.4 Virtual mobility and attendance at conferences and seminars

Virtual opportunities and attendance at seminars and conferences are the least-offered mobility opportunities. Only nine of the 56 survey respondents indicated that their institution offers virtual opportunities, seven of which indicated that these opportunities were less than
two weeks in duration and took place, for example, by participating in a one or two day conference online or undertaking Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), thus falling outside the Erasmus model of outward mobility. Free responses also indicated that there are a greater number of opportunities for students to attend seminars and conferences at postgraduate level, as was confirmed in the interviews.

With regard to virtual mobility opportunities, one interviewee situated in a central international office indicated that they did not have the expertise or resources to initiate these. Both the survey and interviews indicated that while such activity may be provided by institutions, there is not a great deal of awareness that this could be regarded as outward mobility or that it might provide associated benefits. Discussion of virtual opportunities in the interviews suggested that although staff would welcome the development of more virtual opportunities, they did not currently have the resources or the expertise to do this.

5.2.2 Integration into programme of study

As part of examining patterns of participation and determining how an outward mobility experience can potentially impact on academic outcomes, interviews explored the way in which outward mobility is integrated into programmes of study. Some common features emerged in respect of integrating outward mobility into a degree programme and as part of the curriculum.

Several models of integrating outward mobility into the structure of a degree programme emerged:

5.2.2.1 Mandatory mobility

In participating institutions mandatory mobility, as either a study or work placement, was most commonly identified as part of a four-year programme of study in languages, courses with language as an aspect of the degree, or business. It was regarded as a well-integrated and established aspect of this type of programme. Some degree programmes with language as a minor subject are also likely to have a mandatory period of study or work abroad. In both instances the period of mobility is integrated into credit accumulation and grading through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and will generally count towards the final degree award.
5.2.2.2 Elective mobility

Survey and interview responses identified a model of mobility which provides an elective mobility module as part of the programme of study in health disciplines, communications and engineering. In this instance the opportunity for outward mobility is made available to students as an integrated aspect of a programme of study. Five of the 13 interviewees were offering this option, with the length of placement varying between four weeks and a semester. Module learning outcomes are matched to the placement opportunity to ensure that the placement is appropriate and will deliver learning which is relevant and transferable, ensuring these factors do not hamper mobility. All the examples given require students to produce a reflective piece of work after their placement in order to gain credit, although this does not usually count towards their degree classification. One programme provides this opportunity as part of a five-year programme with a placement in the fourth year, as set out as the example below:

Example 1

**Newcastle University – Medicine and Surgery MB BS Honours programme**

Newcastle University offers the opportunity to undertake an eight week period of elective study anywhere in the world as part of this programme, occurring at the end of the fourth year of a five-year programme. It was identified that this is the point in the programme when students have enough medical knowledge to benefit from the experience, which should ‘set them up’ for their final year.

The placements are not offered under Erasmus but have been developed through the University’s own networks. Provision is made for students who need financial support through bursaries, fellowships and some externally donated funds.

For students who do not wish to or are not able to go abroad, UK placements are available. It was highlighted that where these take students to different cultural environments, for example in areas of deprivation or particularly diverse communities, they can also be challenging and valuable.

The placements provide students with the opportunity to experience different cultures both in a social and healthcare context. Many of those travelling to developing countries will take on significant responsibility, often being the most experienced person in a healthcare team in a challenging environment.

The reflective assessment piece here does make a minor contribution to the final year.
The other four programmes offer the mobility elective as part of a three-year degree programme with the placement occurring in the second year. One example is well established and is facilitated by the international partnerships in the US, Africa and Asia that the particular faculty has built up over a number of years. Another example is a new development within a three-year degree with a language option which provides an elective outward mobility experience in the second year. Two of the examples are from subject discipline areas which are under-represented in outward mobility and are also recent developments. They have come about as a result of developments in national professional body standards, guidance and requirements, which now include more scope for outward mobility. These examples are set out below:

Example 2

Cardiff University – Midwifery programme

New nursing and midwifery standards have provided the opportunity for a four-week observational placement outside the midwifery pathway. The university has placed this option in the second year of study, altering the structure of its programme to accommodate this.

There is provision for both overseas and UK-based placements. The overseas placements take place through established institutional relationships, with a memorandum of understanding being put in place to set out expectations and safeguard students. All the overseas placements are in English-speaking locations so that students can get the most from the experience.

Due to their short duration, these placements do not qualify for Erasmus funding. They are therefore funded internally through a scholarship scheme to which all can apply. There are no selection criteria: the placements are open to all students.

Prior to this new placement opportunity there had been no outward mobility in this programme. This development has successfully increased outward mobility from 0% to 10% in the first cohort to take up the option. This is anticipated to grow.
Example 3

University of Dundee - Education MA Hons

This development builds on the recommendations of the Donaldson Report with regard to supporting student teachers to gain broader experiences outside the classroom.

The University of Dundee reviewed their programme and developed the ‘Learning from Life’ module which takes their students outside the classroom with opportunities to access Erasmus placements as well as those in the UK.

Although it is early days for this module, take-up was described as ‘overwhelming’ and although initial participation in outward mobility through Erasmus has been small it is anticipated that this will grow over time as outwardly mobile students return and share their experiences with others.

5.2.2.3 Optional mobility

In this model mobility is not integrated into the structure of a degree in any way. Rather it is offered as an option with which students have to proactively engage. It covers the range of mobility type set out in Figure 2 above and occurs in Europe and beyond. The options are structured and facilitated in a number of ways:

5.2.2.3.1 Year-long placements

This involves topping up a three-year degree with an additional optional year which becomes a part of the programme of study in the third year. Two examples of this were identified. One provides credit through a Diploma in International Academic Studies; the other is currently university-assessed on the basis of a reflective piece but from 2014-15 will draw down credit through the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS). In both instances the year abroad is acknowledged in the degree title. The University of Manchester is currently considering this option for its Law programme, as mobility is difficult to include in the current three-year structure due to the mandatory modules required by the Law Society. A year abroad was previously a mandatory aspect of a four-year Law programme with a language element which was accredited with a Diploma in International Academic Studies.

5.2.2.3.2 Placements of more than two weeks and up to a semester long

As can be seen in Figure 2, the majority of these are study placements, followed by work placements. They do occur in other types of placements, for example volunteering or summer schools, but the numbers identified in this study were small.
Volunteering and summer schools were nevertheless explored in interviews, where it emerged that all interviewees regarded these experiences as worthwhile additions to their outward mobility offerings, with some being aware that their students accessed opportunities such as Camp America in the summer break. Although regarded as worthwhile, it was difficult to establish how volunteering and summer schools connected with programmes of study, for example, in terms of learning outcomes, assessment and credit. However one example was given of how a Health Sciences Faculty is considering integrating summer schools into a health sciences programme as an eight week Erasmus+ placement by building flexibility into the programme structure to provide an additional two weeks either before or after the six-week summer break.

In the institutions represented in interviews, the process of organising optional study or work placements is student-led. Students are largely responsible for organising the placement, as well as their own funding and accommodation. In most instances, these students are assessed through a reflective piece of work undertaken after the placement and awarded credits for the time abroad. Where assessment takes place as part of the placement itself, students need to pass the assessment. Grades are generally not converted but credit is awarded. While students need to identify their placement, the importance of having appropriate international partners in place was emphasised by several interviewees. This facilitates module mapping and ensures that students will achieve comparable learning outcomes. Interviewee N outlined how this might work:

‘There is matching of modules and some negotiations with regard to ensuring learning outcomes are covered so the programme is mapped out beforehand. This is all student-led with support and mentoring from academic staff.’

The importance of strong international partners in this context is particularly highlighted in the example below from Glasgow School of Art, which has achieved an increase in outward mobility on the undergraduate architecture programme.
Example 4

Glasgow School of Art – Bachelor of Architecture

Glasgow School of Art has changed its approach to outward mobility on the Bachelor of Architecture programme, making it more structured and academically rigorous in order to ensure that outwardly mobile students are able to benefit from the experience while not compromising their professional qualification. This approach has been achieved by:

i) Taking a more robust approach to working with international partners to ensure that the School of Architecture has the right partners in place to provide appropriate outward mobility placements for their students. This has included both developing new relationships and revalidating existing partners. Institutional visits are used to map the curriculum and identify learning outcomes for outward mobility opportunities.

ii) The length of placement offers has changed from one year to one semester in the third year of study. The opportunities are promoted as part of the programme and why and how they fit with the overall programme of study is clearly articulated so that students who access the placements better understand their responsibilities in terms of their course. Since this new approach has become established, participation in outward mobility has increased and currently stands at 18% on this programme.

Students receive credit for their time abroad rather than a grade transfer.

5.2.2.3.3 Mobility for a two week period

As indicated in Figure 2 mobility opportunities of less than a semester are largely offered as a study visit or field trip, attendance at a seminar or conference, or through virtual mobility. From interviews it emerged that study visits and field trips are not necessarily perceived in the context of outward mobility, as they are often long-established aspects of a programme of study. As previously indicated, it would appear that opportunities to attend seminars and conferences are more likely to be offered to postgraduate or research students and relate to specific areas of research enquiry. By their very nature they are short-lived. With regard to virtual mobility, interviewees recognised its potential to enhance their outward mobility offerings; however, as highlighted earlier, it is not an opportunity that is currently well developed in their institutions. It should be noted that two survey respondents indicated that they were involved in virtual mobility opportunities which ran for a semester or longer. Unfortunately it was not possible to explore this further as the respondents did not take part in interviews, but it is possible that this related to MOOCs.
5.2.3 Location

There are three aspects of location which are worthy of note:

5.2.3.1 Language

While the benefits of enhancing language skills through outward mobility are desirable, the survey and interview responses raised a number of issues on the relationship between language and outward mobility relating to levels of language skills, subject discipline and widening participation.

Carbonell (2013) highlights the significant role that language plays in the choices students make about where to undertake their placement; indeed, the Home or Away Survey (British Council 2013) identifies this as a factor which impacts on whether students participate at all. Evidence from this study supports these findings. The influence of language proficiency was identified as being a good predictor of destination. It was reported in the free survey responses that ‘fear of language difficulties is massive’ and that ‘foreign language is an issue for [increasing participation in] Erasmus study placements in European countries’. Consequently ‘students chose locations where teaching is in English and where good English is spoken generally’ (Interviewee D). Interviewees reflected that if students are able to do this they can to participate more fully in their placement; having to ‘grapple with basic communication rather than understanding and absorbing different cultural perspectives’ (Interviewee B) could represent a hindrance in respect of both the subject discipline and national and social culture.

This is also likely to be a factor in increasing participation in work placements. Without a good working knowledge of the host language, a student may find it difficult to gain value from the experience. The importance of being able to communicate effectively in maximising the benefits of an outward mobility opportunity is particularly relevant in subjects where placements are clinically focused, for example health sciences and social work. For placements where the purpose is for students to experience different healthcare systems and develop their own practice, it is important that they are able to understand the nuances in practice and approach when dealing with complex personal social issues and clinical practice. Therefore placements in locations which require other language skills may not be practical or appropriate.
Language support was identified by survey respondents and interviewees as being critical to encouraging students to broaden the opportunities available to them by accessing non-Anglophone destinations. Language support was evident in some institutions where interviews took place, for example, in the form of free generic ‘Language for All’ classes or language courses geared towards mobility preparation. Interviewee H highlighted the benefit of providing funds towards a language development course in France in advance of the mobility placement. Two interviewees identified that an institutional language strategy, delivered as an integral part of internationalisation, would help to break down the reliance on English in outward mobility. This suggestion can be placed in the context of the HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework (2014)*, which suggests that effective intercultural engagement can be enhanced through understanding of ways of interacting, communicating and working with other people.

Survey and interview responses suggest reticence in both students and some academic colleagues to engage in outward mobility where a student has no relevant language skills. One survey respondent suggested that ‘Language deficiencies could slow down their progression to completion of the degree’ and Interviewee E observed that ‘we are a monoglot country and this makes a difference to the outlook of students going away’. One interviewee also suggested that students are more inclined to prefer international placements in the US or Australia, not only because they are Anglophone counties but also because students feel they have a greater level of familiarity with these countries from the media, film and television. Such views were expressed across all institution types.

Survey responses and interviews also highlighted a potential widening participation issue related to language, which is reflected in Carbonell’s analysis of 2011-12 statistics (2013). It relates to the fact that the largest proportion of students who take a language at A-level come from the independent sector and are more likely to progress to Russell Group institutions. These students are also more likely to have experienced travel abroad as part of family holidays or gap years.

5.2.3.2 *Distance from home institution*

A number of interviewees identified that often the further away from home an outward mobility placement is, the more rewarding it has the potential to be. Interviewee F stated:
'I would argue that many of the benefits of studying abroad come from facing and learning from problems ... certainly we face more and more 'You can't expect me to look for accommodation in Iowa by myself from both students and parents ... whereas, in reality, they don't really benefit or learn from the experience unless they do, and find it really hard work and really rewarding when they do it themselves.'

This, of course, is relative. For some students a placement in another Anglophone country or even within the UK can be just as challenging.

5.2.3.3 UK-based mobility

On some degree programmes discussed in interviews, students were provided with the option of a placement in another part of the UK. These were regarded as providing a valuable tool for facilitating the development of different and globally-orientated perspectives for students who choose not to or are unable to travel abroad. Interviewee B commented:

'UK placements are valuable and need to be examined in the context of the individual. A placement in Scotland, for example, can provide a student with an opportunity to develop their practice in a different environment which is more accessible than going to Canada for example. And it is right for that student.'

Interviewee E reflected that, in relation to social work programmes, more mature students tend not to take up outward mobility opportunities abroad. However, a placement in the UK in a location which contrasts with their own, for example, a multicultural inner city or isolated rural environment, can support the same personal development and enable students to apply different cultural perspectives to their practice. This is compliant with the HEA’s Internationalising Higher Education Framework, which proposes various ways of achieving a global experience in line with an inclusive approach to internationalisation.

Responses also reveal that students may opt for a UK-based experience for very pragmatic reasons:

'Many students consider work placements in the UK as the best way to secure a job after their degree.' (Survey respondent)
The reasons students chose to take a UK-based placement are many and varied. Taking advantage of the diversity of the UK both culturally and geographically can provide a challenge which is relative to the individual and appropriate to their circumstances and personal development at that particular point in their academic programme.

5.3 Facilitating and encouraging participation

This section considers how students become engaged with outward mobility and the processes that they must navigate to access their placement. It also includes the views of respondents on how to encourage more students to participate in outward mobility.

5.3.1 Promotion

All institutions use a range of methods to make students aware of the opportunities on offer and encourage participation:

![Figure 3](image)

What mechanisms are used to promote opportunities for outward mobility to students?

- As part of programme of study: 77.6%
- Centrally: 79.6%
- Faculty/departmental coordinators: 73.5%
- Academic staff: 69.4%
- Peer recommendation: 59.2%
- Students' Union: 12.2%
- Unsure how they are promoted: 4.1%
- Not aware of any opportunities: 0.0%

The main methods of promoting outward mobility, as indicated in survey responses, are through the programme of study and via the central international office, with contributions being made by both academic staff and peer recommendation from returning students. This mixed method approach was confirmed in interviews. In addition, two notable factors supporting the promotion of outward mobility opportunities to students were identified:
5.3.1.1 Inspirational tutors

Interviewee G stated that she observed colleagues encourage and support students in accessing outward mobility opportunities. It was clear that all those interviewed are committed to and understand the benefit of outward mobility and are indeed champions for outward mobility themselves. Several interviewees hoped not only to inspire their students but also to influence their colleagues as to the potential of outward mobility in an academic context.

5.3.1.2 Strategic commitment at institutional level

Where outward mobility is regarded as a key aspect of an institution’s internationalisation strategy, it can act as a driver for increasing outward mobility. Interviewee F, an employee of a central international office, noted that embedding outward mobility at an institutional strategy level ensured buy-in and acted as a lever to engage the unengaged.

The following is an example of successfully increasing participation in outward mobility, drawing on both these factors:

**Example 5**

**University of Southampton – MEng Civil Engineering**

For the first time in many years outward mobility has been achieved on this programme, albeit with just two students in the first instance. This is now providing a platform for engaging more students in outward mobility.

The breakthrough was achieved as a result of several factors:

- Institutional drive from the international office who took a proactive approach by attending lectures to talk about mobility and by providing good quality, timely information and support.

- Commitment and interest of the recently-involved programme exchange coordinator.

- A concerted effort to bring international and UK students together to build relationships and increase familiarity with the potential host countries. This was achieved by mixing students, for example, in group activities.

- Developing flexible options within the degree structure – students have the opportunity to undertake the second half of their third year or the whole of their fourth year abroad.
As a result, demand has now increased for outward mobility placements and further opportunities are being investigated in order to provide the right modules.

5.3.2 Selection

Survey respondents were asked how students are selected for the different types of programme on offer. Answers to this question were given as free responses.

Other than where outward mobility is compulsory, such as programmes with a language element, all survey responses and interviews indicated that students are self-selecting in the first instance. This was the case even where the mobility opportunity is built into the structure of the degree programme, for example, as an elective. Where this is the case, in some instances students have the opportunity to access placement opportunities within the UK.

After self-selection, whether Erasmus or non-Erasmus, academic performance was the primary method identified by respondents for selection for study placements.

Of the 41 survey respondents offering Erasmus study placements, 35 (85%) use academic performance to select students, as do 15 (52%) of the 29 who offer non-Erasmus study placements. The criteria cited most frequently was that students had to gain a pass for the year of study preceding the placement.

For those who did not specify academic criteria, the methods for selection include a written application and interview defending the relevance of the placement to the subject discipline. Two interviewees indicated that an expression of interest is required, setting out the student’s expectations of the placement and what they regard as its value. In one institution where academic performance is not a criterion, students are streamed academically so that there is a spread of students in each location, since outward mobility opportunities are over-subscribed.

With regard to work placements, it would appear from survey and interview responses that selection is less likely to be based on academic performance and more likely to be driven by an application and interview process. In a number of instances it was stated that the student will find and organise the placement themselves. They therefore have to be resourceful and have a reasonable level of confidence at the outset.
For **study visits**, the survey and interviews indicated no predominant method. In participating institutions academic performance is relevant, but this has parity with application processes, and is often a compulsory part of the programme of study. Similarly, responses indicate that **field trips** are regarded as part of a programme of study rather than outward mobility per se. In both instances this may be because such trips are shorter, or that they are established traditional aspects of programmes and therefore perceived in a different way by both staff and students.

With regard to **attendance at relevant seminars or conferences**, as previously suggested, this appears to be most prevalent at postgraduate level, where selection criteria relate to the submission of research papers and available funding.

There was little information provided about access to **virtual opportunities**. However, responses indicated that this type of opportunity is most likely to occur within a module and be undertaken individually on a self-selecting basis (no criteria) or as a cohort with academic staff engagement.

The survey also explored **summer schools** and **volunteering**. Again, students self-select for these opportunities but do not appear to be subject to any further criteria, possibly because they are often regarded as extra-curricular rather than linked to a programme of study.

Although not a formal aspect of the selection process for any outward mobility opportunity, several interviewees identified personal factors at play in terms of self-selection, namely resilience and self-reliance. Interviewee N observed that:

> ‘The process of accessing the exchange opportunity is part of self-selection – it requires resilience. Resilience is an important part of selection and although not an actual criteria it is a factor in self-selecting through the process. Students have to make all the arrangements themselves.’

This assertion is also echoed by Interviewee F (see 5.2.3.2 **Distance from home institution**) in relation to the challenging nature of organising the placement. Students may start the process but then withdraw. There is a range of possible reasons for withdrawal, including that it is not the right thing for the student at that point in time or, as interviewee L pointed out, the student realises the financial implications.
5.3.3 Increasing participation

An important aspect of this study is to ascertain what, from academic staff members’ perspectives, can be done to encourage greater participation in outward mobility. Survey respondents were asked two quantifiable questions on this, with an additional question for free responses.

When asked what factors might deter students from accessing outward mobility opportunities, finance and personal circumstances emerged as the most significant (Figure 4). These were identified by 40 (85%) of the 47 individuals who responded to this question and explored in more detail in interviews.

The second question in this section asked about key factors to take into account when trying to increase the number of students taking up mobility opportunities (Figure 5).
As can be seen, the most significant factor highlighted was degree structure and flexibility in the curriculum. Again, this was explored further in interviews and the key themes emerging from both questions are discussed below.

### 5.3.3.1 Finance

All of those interviewed identified finance as a significant factor in increasing participation in outward mobility. One survey respondent stated that:

‘The [most common] reason for pulling out of the scheme is that students do not have the finance to take a year out and wish to try to finish their degree in three years [in order to] start earning sooner’

Another stated that:

‘Most of our students who do not choose to participate in Study Abroad opportunities do so because of perceived financial risk.’

Financial risk is a factor identified in the *Home or Away Survey* (British Council 2013) which includes the cost of living abroad and the financial implications of taking longer to complete a programme of study. In interviews, academic staff reported that it is generally the more financially secure or ‘well off’ students who readily access outward
mobility opportunities. Where students rely on part-time jobs to support themselves through their studies, it is unlikely that they will give these up in favour of an outward mobility opportunity that might cost them more than a bursary will cover. Interviewee K observed that:

‘Students are working part-time so it’s hard to undertake to commit to a semester to go away – it’s a big ask.’

Interviewee E highlighted how upfront costs, such as travel and accommodation, can be particularly problematic for students from lower income backgrounds. Although there is some financial assistance available through institutions, it was broadly felt that this was not always adequate to cover any shortfall in finance.

The issue of financial risk was also raised in relation to length of a degree programme where the opportunity for mobility is provided as an optional year abroad. It was again broadly agreed that ‘students are concerned about how quickly they can complete their degree. Therefore to take on additional debt and/or increase the amount of time they need to be studying is a real barrier.’

Concern was also expressed with regard to the new Erasmus+ funding arrangements for this year which resulted in some institutions having to meet the shortfall in grant allocations for some students. All interviewees identified that robust funding mechanisms are important to support and facilitate outward mobility. This issue is also identified as an area for development. As one survey respondent put it in relation to the Erasmus based model of outward mobility:

‘Most barriers can be overcome if students have the money and are without responsibilities at home; otherwise, all the institutional support in the world will achieve nothing.’

However, evidence suggests that consideration of a broader range of outward mobility opportunities might alleviate this, for example, shorter placements, virtual opportunities or UK-based placements. However, funding is not available for these through Erasmus or other specific sources.
5.3.3.2 Personal circumstances and background

A number of factors emerged relating to students’ personal circumstances and backgrounds which may act as perceived or real barriers to mobility.

**Family and/or caring responsibilities** were consistently identified by respondents as a factor preventing students – particularly mature students – from accessing outward mobility based on the Erasmus model of a block of time spent abroad. One survey respondent commented:

‘Students who don’t travel overseas for their elective are generally those who have family commitments in the UK or who are financially constrained.’

It was highlighted that under such circumstances other types of opportunity, including placements in another part of the UK, are very valuable. Promoting an approach which presents different, but equally valued, models of outward mobility could serve to align practice with the HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2014) by offering a broad range of opportunities integrated into curriculum design and delivery which are available to all students.

**Disability** was mentioned by three interviewees who highlighted the fact that it is potentially problematic for disabled students to access mobility opportunities outside the UK. Although disabled students may be eligible to receive additional funding support, the level of practical support provided to meet the needs of disabled students in UK higher education institutions is not consistently replicated elsewhere. Therefore, as above, a range of opportunities must be offered to mitigate this potential disadvantage. In this regard, institutions need to ensure that internationalisation strategies and activities deliver the public sector equality duty – advancing equality of opportunity for all groups of people – in the context of internationalisation.

**Disposition of students** was also highlighted by a number of survey respondents and interviewees who perceived the narrow foci of some students to be a factor in the take-up of mobility opportunities:

‘It is difficult sometimes to support students and staff to be less parochial and think that only experience in Scotland will get them a job at the end of the [professional] programme’ (Interviewee G).
Survey respondents and interviewees frequently suggested that such a narrow focus often relates to social background and related life experience, for example, a lack of experience of travel and consequent anxiety about leaving familiar territory (home, family support and local networks of friends). One interviewee from Northern Ireland reflected that for some students 20 miles is a long way away and a real challenge.

Therefore, it is necessary to consider how confidence can be fostered in students who are reluctant to participate. This may require some creative thinking, but suggestions from respondents included tasters or small engagements early on in a degree programme; a greater profile for virtual mobility, for example, by sharing live classes via the internet, running joint projects or assessments with partner institutions; and greater integration with international students. This exposure to the potential of mobility might ‘sow the seeds’ for greater international engagement among UK students. However it is done, it is important to articulate the value of mobility:

‘For non-language specific study abroad, there is a need to build more awareness on the part of the students that, although not directly connected to their immediate field of study, a period of time spent living, studying abroad will help develop employability skills, transferable skills, communication, confidence’. (Interviewee M)

5.3.4 Degree structure and flexibility in the curriculum

Interviews revealed creativity across all subject disciplines in terms of how opportunities for outward mobility are provided within the structure of degree programmes, even where professional bodies have an input into degree structures and contents. Nevertheless there was a universal call for greater flexibility in how curricula are developed so that outward mobility, as part of internationalisation strategy, can be embedded. As suggested in the HEA’s Internationalising Higher Education Framework (2014), a key question to ask at both strategic and operational levels is ‘To what extent are international and intercultural experiences, partnerships and collaborations encouraged within relevant institutional policy and curriculum structures?’

A number of key points were raised with regard to degree structure and flexibility in the curriculum. In particular, there was general agreement across all interviewees that programmes of four years or longer offer the most flexibility for outward mobility. Where the
opportunity is an additional year to a three year programme, it is problematic as makes the
degree longer.

It was also generally accepted that while accrediting outward mobility via additional
qualifications is useful, greater flexibility in credit transfer built into programmes of study
would facilitate mobility opportunities.

Both of these points were articulated by five interviewees, who highlighted the need for the
culture of programme and curriculum development to change:

‘We need to get rid of the givens and the “holy grails” of programme development
– what they have and haven’t got to include. Programmes have to abide by
standards, but there is the flexibility to put in and take out and people don’t like
change. It’s what people feel comfortable with – they won’t let go of what’s been
there forever.’ (Interviewee G)

Taking this approach to breaking down perceived institutional and subject discipline barriers
will provide the opportunity to develop the types of outward mobility placements that
students need and are able to participate in. This should result in a greater diversity of
opportunities across all degree programmes and encourage participation in all discipline
areas. Examples gathered for this study indicate that it is possible to achieve both.

5.4 Institutional strategy and support

The role of the institution at both strategic and operational levels was consistently raised in
survey responses and interviews by staff in central international units and those in academic
roles.

5.4.1 Strategy

Strategic and visible commitment at the highest level was highlighted as critical to
successfully increasing participation in outward mobility. Views on the positioning of outward
mobility in institutional strategy are collated below:

- Outward mobility should be a strategic issue embedded and valued in all areas of an
  institution. It should enjoy strategic policy support, senior staff support and adequate
  resourcing in order that it is both visible and credible internally and externally.
• Study abroad should be embedded operationally rather than occur as a ‘bolt on’:

‘If there is an institutional expectation of participation, students will buy into it: both coercive and mimetic isomorphism are strong components of mainstreaming mobility’. (Interviewee F)

This assertion supports the creation of a critical mass which will reframe the practice of outward mobility as the norm.

• It is critical to engage all academic staff in outward mobility since they design and deliver courses and have the most exposure to students. They therefore need to foster and value outward mobility opportunities and understand how they can tailor a programme of study to encourage participation.

• Institutions should offer opportunities which are relevant to students’ needs and which they are interested in. Institutions should not regard established methods of delivering outward mobility as inviolable or rely on them too heavily. By taking account of the range of students’ needs, provision of outward mobility has the potential to be more inclusive and increase participation.

5.4.2 Institutional support at a practical level

Both survey responses and interviews consistently identified that students (and staff) find the process of accessing mobility opportunities difficult and onerous in terms of the application process, understanding and accessing funding mechanisms, and appreciating their fit with the degree programme.

To overcome these hurdles, institutional strategies include early publicity targeted at freshers – for example, making use of social media and peer endorsement – and providing clear information on how to access finance. However, to support student-targeted action, the importance of good communication with academic staff was also highlighted:

‘The key considerations are to make programme and application processes very clear [and] offer clear communication with both students and staff about opportunities….. Many academic staff don’t understand the programmes and
options so they either don’t promote the programmes or make them sound overly complicated to interested students.’ (Survey respondent)

Seven interviewees identified the importance of ensuring students are supported when they return from an outward mobility experience. This support should encourage students to capitalise on what they have gained in terms of personal development, apply what they have learned about the academic and social environment in which they lived and worked, and successfully integrate the experience into their academic and daily life.

5.5 Summary of outward mobility in participating institutions

The evidence emerging from both the literature review and responses in this study indicate that the challenge of a placement abroad which takes a student out of their ‘comfort zone’ can be a transformative experience, with the potential to deepen understanding of different cultures, values, attitudes and systems of education and ways of working. While the distance away from the home environment is often important, it is also relative, and for some students placements in the UK can be equally transformative.

Academic staff participating in this study emphasised the importance of outward mobility in ‘broadening horizons,’ observing the positive effects of such experiences on students in terms of personal development, building personal confidence, levels of maturity and increased understanding of different cultures. The purpose of an outward mobility experience was identified as being to challenge students’ thinking by taking them out of their ‘comfort zone,’ enhancing their resilience, ability to respond to challenges, and belief in their own abilities.

Other than for language degrees or those with a language component, there appears to be little differentiation in the balance of participation in Erasmus and non-Erasmus opportunities across Russell Group, pre- and post-1992 institutions, or in different subject disciplines. While four-year programmes - such as language degrees, Scottish undergraduate degrees or integrated Masters programmes - provide the greatest flexibility for mobility, examples demonstrate that creative thinking and a proactive approach by institutions can facilitate mobility participation in three-year programmes, even in subject disciplines which must meet professional body requirements (for example, midwifery, engineering and architecture). These examples demonstrate what is possible, providing insight into innovative practices that can increase participation in both Erasmus and non-Erasmus programmes. These insights are transferable to other discipline areas.
Strong international partners were identified as important to ensuring a quality placement, and participation increased where this had been established (see Examples 4 and 5). In these cases and in the survey and interviews, awarding credit for time spent abroad was not highlighted as an issue, although grade transfer was not used by any of the non-language subject disciplines represented in interviews.

Finance and personal circumstances, such as family or caring responsibilities and disabilities, were highlighted as significant factors in relation to increasing participation in outward mobility. Although the institutions participating in this study offer a range of outward mobility opportunities, evidence suggests that shorter period or alternative types mobility, for example, virtual mobility and UK-based placements, are underutilised. These models could also help to encourage students who are more reticent about leaving their home environment, potentially providing a stepping stone towards mobility abroad in the future. With regard to finance, it was found that students and staff were often unaware of funding mechanisms and how they fit with the programme of study.

Increasing participation in outward mobility requires a greater effort on the part of institutions at both strategic and operational level to promote the opportunities available and make information on all aspects of finance and support clear. Interviewees placed particular value on visible strategic commitment at the highest level within the institution, identifying the importance of an approach which embeds outward mobility as an expectation across all programmes of study, engaging all academic staff and students.
6 The outcomes of outward mobility

This section sets out to explore evidence of the benefits of outward mobility in relation to degree outcome, employability and personal development. It also considers benefits to staff and to the institution.

6.1 The result of outward mobility for students

Survey respondents were asked to identify, from their own experiences or observations, the outcomes for students of outward mobility (Erasmus and non-Erasmus). The question included reference to both employability and personal development, in line with the aforementioned benefits identified by the European Commission\(^8\). It is interesting to note that the benefits defined by Erasmus do not include any reference to degree outcome. This was, however, included as an option in the question, given the tentative evidence (HEFCE 2009; GLOSSARI Project 2004) suggesting outward mobility may impact positively on final degree classification. As can be seen in Figure 6 below, 98% (48 of the 49 respondents to this question) perceived personal development as an outcome of outward mobility, with 85.7% identifying enhanced employability skills and 61.2% improved degree outcome. With regard to the ‘other’ outcomes identified, these included increased personal confidence, maturity, initiative and communication skills. There are attributes which can be regarded as aspects of personal development.

Given these responses, it seems reasonable to argue that the rationale for and outcomes of outward mobility opportunities are understood in terms of the Erasmus programme which focuses on personal development and employability. However, responses here would appear to indicate that there is also an aspect of outward mobility, observed and valued by academic staff, which has specific relevance to academic achievement. As identified in the previous chapter (5.1.3: Relevance to different levels of study) at undergraduate level an outward mobility experience is often regarded as being more about gaining independence than learning in an academic sense. The following survey question further explored any links between enhanced degree outcome and outward mobility.

### 6.2 Factors affecting the outcomes of outward mobility for students

The survey asked respondents to identify what factors they believe facilitate improved degree outcome, enhanced employability skills and personal development, providing options relating to personal attributes and academic skills. Forty-nine respondents answered this question.
The highest-rated responses related to attributes associated with personal development. 46 of the 49 respondents (94%) observed that increased personal confidence had an impact on degree outcome, employability and personal development. This was closely followed by self-reliance (43 responses); increased understanding of cultural diversity (42); increased cultural competence (39); a greater degree of engagement (37) and motivation (36).

Skills more associated with academic development – enhanced understanding of the subject discipline, critical thinking and language skills – were highlighted less frequently although not insignificantly. With regard to language acquisition, this is obviously a mandatory aspect of any programme which includes a language element. Three respondents (10.1%) of the 31 who highlighted improved language skills were from language or language-related programmes, so this result may not give an accurate indication of the significance of language acquisition.

Based on these figures, it would appear that personal development can be regarded not only as an outcome of outward mobility in its own right but also as a facilitator of other outcomes, namely, enhanced employability and improved degree outcome.

Survey respondents were also asked whether they observed any variance in benefits depending on the type of placement undertaken, for example whether it is for study or work, its location and its duration.

Figure 7
Areas of development which facilitate outcomes of outward mobility
The majority of respondents (60.9%) identified that they have observed some correlation between the type, location and duration of the placement and benefit accrued to students. Respondents were also able to provide free-text information to illuminate their answer. Their responses highlighted a number of variables which were considered likely to have an impact on the extent of the benefits accrued by students who engaged in outward mobility opportunities:

**The type and duration of a placement**: The longer a study or work placement lasts, the greater the impact for students. A longer placement allows the student to become more immersed within a culture, whether in Europe or further afield. Interviewees indicated that this applies equally to Anglophone and non-Anglophone locations.

‘Spending time with people means that you are better able to understand and relate back.’ (Interviewee B)

**The location of a placement** was also cited as a factor, together with personal circumstances, language skills, and who the students go with – as one respondent noted, ‘individual placements are more effective than group visits or field trips.’ Some of these factors have been discussed in some detail in section (5). However, it is difficult to draw specific conclusions with regard to the impact of location without a systematic comparison with other types of placement, for example virtual mobility or UK-based placements.

**The support students receive from the host** institution or employer and the quality of the experience were highlighted by five survey respondents and six interviewees. While these numbers are not large, it is important to consider that if these things are not in place it could result in a negative experience. This was illustrated by one interviewee who described a student on placement in Australia who needed support which could not be provided at a distance.

From these responses, it can be seen that the type, duration, location and quality of the placement all have an impact on students’ gains from outward mobility. The degree of challenge depends on where the student goes and for how long. An experience which pushes personal boundaries inevitably results in a greater personal impact. However, if it is not situated within appropriate support structures, the benefits of this personal challenge may be negated, as illustrated above.
6.3 Non-mobile students

Respondents were also asked about non-outwardly mobile students, to ascertain whether there were any discernible differences in terms of academic outcomes and to identify whether they accrued any positive benefits as a result of their peers’ mobility (in other words, does anything ‘rub off’?).

As can be seen from Figure 8, almost half of the 45 respondents to this question could not identify any benefit to non-mobile students. However, 16 respondents shed some light on how the benefit might accrue in their free text answers:

- Seven survey respondents indicated that rather than a mobility placement abroad, their students had a placement elsewhere in the UK. A similar trend also emerged from the interviews, as discussed in 5.2.3.3 above, where the value of a UK-based placement is highlighted.

- Five respondents suggested non-mobile students accrue benefits related to international exchange through the inward mobility of international students coming to study in their department. This provides an opportunity for non-mobile students to develop increased intercultural skills by mixing with students from different cultural backgrounds.
In a similar format to the question asked about factors influencing outcomes for mobile students (see Figure 7), survey respondents were also asked what factors they thought might enhance outcomes for non-mobile students.

As might be expected, the responses to this question were from the 23 respondents who had identified benefit as indicated in Figure 8. Their responses broadly reflect the discussion above.

6.4 Benefits for staff

The potential benefit to staff as a result of outward student mobility is clearly articulated by Sweeney in *Going Mobile* (2012) and Brandenburg et al in the *Erasmus Impact Study* (2014). Both highlight the opportunity to develop international relationships through negotiations with new mobility partners, ensuring the quality of the student experience on a placement and fresh opportunities to build partnerships for scholarly activity. Survey respondents were asked if they could identify with any of these benefits, as well as any benefits to their continuing professional development (CPD) and learning and teaching (L&T) practice.
The majority of the 48 respondents to this question agreed with Sweeney's identified benefits. The ‘other’ responses illuminated benefits such as setting up partnerships for new exchange opportunities and professional development in a global context. Respondents also confirmed the need to ensure a quality student experience:

‘Sometimes the host institution is not as supportive as you would expect and this can diminish the opportunities for the students’. (Survey respondent)

### 6.5 Benefit to the institution

Survey respondents were asked to identify any perceived benefit to their institution as a result of outward student mobility. The survey and interview responses indicate that staff see outward mobility as a valuable asset in the process of internationalisation. The strategic benefits of internationalisation to a HEI are well rehearsed, but most recently the HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2014) confirms its importance and the sector’s commitment to taking it forward.
Of the 48 respondents to this question, 41 perceived the benefits as improved brand perception and increased international collaboration, closely followed by student retention and success and the recruitment of international students. Again, as above, the comments in ‘other’ confirm that there is general recognition of the benefit of UK-based placement to the home institution.

What is not mentioned in the context of internationalisation is that the process of both students and staff being mobile, developing global perspectives and bringing these back to the institution and applying them in the context of their work, supports embedding outward mobility from the ‘bottom up’ as well as through institutional strategy and policy.

6.6 Summary of outcomes of outward mobility

Based on the Erasmus model of mobility, survey and interview evidence indicates that academic staff often regard outward mobility experiences as being more about gaining independence than learning in academic sense. Identified benefits focused primarily on enhanced personal attributes such as confidence, self-reliance, an increased understanding of cultural diversity and cultural competence. In addition, responses indicated that there may be a correlation between outward mobility and degree outcome and employability. Outward mobility appears to facilitate a process of personal development, resulting in self-efficacy (Jacobone and Moro 2014) and intellectual autonomy, which can potentially lead to improved course marks and an enhanced degree outcome. Personal development can also
be linked to improved employability skills, defined by Brandenburg et al as ‘transversal skills’, leading to better job and career prospects.

Respondents identified a range of variables which may have an impact on the gains students make from outward mobility, including the type, duration and location of the placement, as well as the support received from the host institution. Responses from academic staff suggested that an experience which pushes a student’s personal boundaries results in greater personal impact.

The impact of a broader range of placement opportunities – for example, those which are much shorter length, in Anglophone counties abroad, within the UK or virtual – is less well quantified, although in interviews academic staff placed value on the benefits of UK-based placement for those students who required an alternative to placements abroad.

Some benefits to non-mobile students were identified, relating to increased intercultural skills acquired by mixing with international students from different cultural backgrounds.

Positive impacts were also identified for both staff and the institution which reflected benefits articulated in other studies (Sweeney 2012; Brandenburg et al 2014) and are in alignment with the HEA’s Internationalising Higher Education Framework (2014).
7 Evidencing the impact of outward mobility

This section considers whether and how the impact of outward mobility is monitored and measured in respect of degree outcome, employability and personal development.

Survey respondents were asked about the methods they use to measure impact. Discussion of their responses, laid out in Figures 12, 13 and 14, can be found after Figure 14.

Figure 12
Evidence used to demonstrate the impact of student outward mobility on degree outcome

Figure 13
Evidence used to demonstrate the impact of outward mobility on employability skills
Both survey and interviews confirmed that there is little being done formally or systematically to assess the impact of outward mobility on degree outcome, employability or personal development. Interviewees were unanimous in their view that more should be done, both at programme and institutional levels, to identify impact in a more systematic way. Respondents also noted that methods to assess impact need to be well thought through as demonstrating causation is inherently difficult. However, studies such as the GLOSSARI project (Sutton and Rubin 2010), demonstrate what can be done.

Other than for language degree programmes, where academic outcomes related to language development are a formal aspect of assessment, responses indicate that the main method currently used for assessing the impact of outward mobility is student reflection through feedback on their return. Respondents identified the potential to use this feedback to provide a more systematic method of assessing impact by linking it with a set of defined learning outcomes and/or accreditation as a formal aspect of a programme of study, which could be included in the parameters used to track students’ progression throughout their programme. This could be applied equally well to students who undertake placements within the UK, with students who did not undertake a placement providing a control group to establish a benchmark.
With regard to other sources of evidence of impact, interviews revealed these are likely to be anecdotally based rather than coordinated at any level. However, they provide some interesting insights, as detailed in the next three sections.

7.1 Measuring the impact of outward mobility on degree outcome

Attempts to measure the impact of outward mobility on degree classification were reported as being problematic due to the number of variables involved, not least the duration and location of the placement. Causation is very difficult to prove. However, 10 of those interviewed suggested a better measure might be comparing overall marks pre- and post-mobility. This would go some way to mitigate the fact that students who participated in outward mobility may have achieved a higher degree classification than their peers anyway:

‘(Outward mobility) students are self-selecting and so they may well have been stronger students anyway and usually achieve higher degrees. What would be useful would be some data to show a comparison between level 3:2 grades.’
(Survey respondent 10)

Examples of where this has been anecdotally observed and positive impacts identified were given in interviews:

\[\text{Comparison between grades achieved in year 2 pre-mobility and year 3 post-mobility}\]
Example 6

Examples of anecdotal evidence of improved grades

1) In a programme with a language elective it has been observed that grades in both language and non-language areas of study for the cohort of students undertaking outward mobility increased by three grade points, taking many up from a potential 2:2 to a 2:1

2) Comparing second and fourth year grades for students on a marketing programme where students have the opportunity to access an outward mobility placement in their third year showed that students who have been abroad out-perform those who have not.

3) It was found that the overall grades of students on a law programme who undertook an optional Erasmus placement in their second year leapt by approximately 10%, potentially moving their final degree up by a classification. It was also noted that a significant number of these students were in the top 5% of the overall year cohort.

In all these cases, the argument could be made about whether the student would have been as likely to achieve a high degree outcome regardless of mobility. However, given the time gap between going on the placement and assessing impact is little more than the duration of the placement itself, there is less scope for other factors to influence the result. The comparison of pre- and post-mobility marks could therefore provide a mechanism to measure the immediate impact of mobility and provide evidence for its direct academic impact. This method could also be applied to students who undertake placements in the UK, using students who did not undertake any placement as a control group. This would provide a similar methodology to that used by Jacobone and Moro (2014).

One survey respondent commented that it may never by truly possible to ascertain the impact of mobility on degree outcome as ‘you are often looking at a group who are maturing through their degree, so things change in any case’. However, the examples above and the findings of the GLOSSARI project (Sutton and Rubin 2010) indicate that more formalised, systematic methods could potentially yield better results that we currently have.
7.2 Measuring the outcome of outward mobility on employability

Apart from the Brandenburg et al study, in terms of employability, there appears to be little formal evaluation of whether outward mobility has a positive impact on students’ post-graduation destinations and careers, or on the skills and personal attributes, such as confidence, needed to gain employment. A small number of survey respondents and interviewees indicated that they are investigating HESA’s Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) data as a tool to help identify correlation between outward mobility and job outcome. Anecdotally, the view expressed by the majority of survey respondents and interviewees is that outwardly mobile students are more likely to work abroad, which is also indicated by Brandenburg et al.

As with degree outcome, respondents noted a range of other variables which may impact students’ career trajectories between undertaking an outward mobility opportunity and gaining employment:

‘We assume an improvement in employability skills but we do not measure this – it is very hard to prove as those that go abroad are already the more assertive, adventurous, independent students who are able to cope with change and uncertainty etc.’ (Interviewee L)

While Brandenburg et al (2014) are able to demonstrate that outward mobility has a positive impact on employability skills, their evidence also shows that, as observed by Interviewee L above, students who are more confident and resilient are the most likely to take up an outward mobility opportunity.

Building on Brandenburg et al’s Erasmus Impact Study, further engagement with employers is needed to achieve a clearer picture of recruitment, but other measures could include the range of jobs graduates apply for, whether they have a degree level job and, as mentioned above, whether they work abroad.

7.3 Measuring the impact of outward mobility on personal development

The identification of personal development as a result of outward mobility is assessed through student reflection. 30 out of the 39 respondents to this question (77%) indicated that this is used as a formal method. Evidence from interviews indicates that this is often part of an assessed reflective piece after the mobility placement is completed. However, as
suggested earlier, it may be that the real benefit of outward mobility is not appreciated by the student until some time has elapsed.

7.4 Summary

Within the institutions represented in this study there appears to be little formal or systematic work being undertaken to assess impact other than through student feedback. However, anecdotally and notwithstanding the fact that causation of improved degree outcome is difficult to evidence, Jacobone and Moro (2014) and Brandenburg et al (2014) demonstrate what is possible in terms of robust measurement of the impact of outward mobility.

Informal impact measures have been applied by some academic staff to compare pre- and post-mobility marks, identifying definite improvement. Formalising this comparison in a systematic way could provide a good short-term measure of the impact of an outward mobility experience and could be applied equally well to all forms of mobility.

Although it may be difficult to demonstrate direct causation between outward mobility and degree outcome and employability, embedding processes of evaluation similar to those applied in the GLOSSARI project (Sutton and Rubin 2010) as a matter of routine could help. One survey respondent stated that ‘Degree outcome, employability and personal development are pretty much indistinguishable for students on our programmes’. It is perhaps the interrelationship between all three that the greatest benefit of outward mobility.
8 Conclusions and findings

8.1 Understanding the impact of outward mobility

In developing an empirical understanding of the benefits of outward mobility and how they are accrued, it is necessary to consider what the mobility placement is intended to achieve (its purpose), what is actually achieved and how this comes about. This can be done by assessing how mobile students change as a result of their experiences, identifying how mobility contributes to their academic progress and its effect on their academic outcomes. The developmental nature of mobility placements was reflected by one interviewee who observed that:

‘Something is different about students when they return’. (Interviewee E)

This study found that academic staff regard the purpose of mobility at undergraduate and postgraduate levels differently. At postgraduate and research levels, academic staff focus on research and knowledge acquisition in a global context, while at undergraduate level it is the experience itself that is seen to be of value. However the outcomes can be just the same, providing a global perspective through experience. It is important to consider the context of the individual student, the extent to which their outward mobility experience is challenging, and how it provides opportunity for the development of intercultural competencies.

In the context of academic outcomes, it is useful to ask whether an outward mobility experience has an impact on:

i. Degree outcome – do students improve their degree grade though outward mobility?
ii. Employability – do outwardly mobile students find it easier to access globally-focused higher-level jobs?
iii. Personal development – does increased confidence, resilience and self-efficacy contribute to (i) and (ii) and if so how?

Respondents indicated that there is little systematic evidence being collected in order to answer these questions. Understanding the medium- to longer-term impact of outward mobility on degree outcome and graduates’ jobs and career paths requires a systematic approach such as that employed in the GLOSSARI project and recent Erasmus evaluations (Jacobone and Moro 2014; Brandenburg et al 2014). With regard to personal development,
however, the evidence suggests that this is not only an outcome of outward mobility in its own right, but one which has the potential to facilitate enhanced academic outcomes.

Returning to Dewey’s model of experiential learning (Dewey 1938) ‘problem solving’ and ‘learning by doing’ result not only in the acquisition and retention of knowledge, but also in personal development, which includes individual initiative and critical intelligence:

Learning is more than assimilating; it is the development of habits which enable the growing person to deal effectively and most intelligently with his environment. And where that environment is in rapid flux, as in modern society, the elasticity which promotes readjustment to what is new is the most necessary of habits. (Dewey cited in Warde, 1960)

It is these aptitudes – the ability to deal effectively and intelligently with one’s environment and the flexibility to adapt to change and the requirements of different environments – together with the development of transversal skills described by Brandenburg et al (2014), which provide the link between personal development and enhanced academic outcomes as a result of outward mobility. These aptitudes are described by Interviewee P in terms of ‘intellectual autonomy’: the ability to think independently and be confident in one’s own intellectual capacity to understand and apply different perspectives in problem solving and critical thinking. Figure 16 below sets out this relationship, showing the developmental trajectory which an outward mobility experience can potentially provide.
To understand how such ‘intellectual autonomy’ or self-efficacy (Jacobone and Moro 2014) might potentially impact on degree outcome and employability, it needs to be seen in the context of ‘socialising and re-socialising’ an academic experience. In other words, outward mobility has the potential to enable students to develop their understanding of difference, not just in terms of culture but in respect of systems of education, different teaching methods and different professional practices. As interviewee D noted, to ‘experience another academic culture and way of doing things is important in order that students develop’ (Interviewee D).

Responses from academic staff suggest that it is the challenge represented by an outward mobility placement which facilitates the learning and development opportunity. As a result, students are better able to reflect on ‘how they fit into the world’ (Interviewee B). This contributes to their preparation as ‘global graduates’.

Although interviews indicated that immersion in a different culture for a year can be highly beneficial, this is not always the most appropriate or accessible option for all students. As indicated in the survey and interviews, challenging students to move outside their comfort zone is relative to each student – what could be easy for some may be impossibly challenging for others. The prevailing dominant Erasmus model tends to squeeze students into an established model which does not necessarily meet their needs. Personal
circumstances, including finance and family responsibilities, are also seen as significant factors affecting participation in outward mobility.

However evidence suggests that other types of mobility, for example UK-based opportunities which draw on the diversity of the country’s geography and communities, can provide similar benefits to international mobility, an approach which is supported through the HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2014) which examines different ways of acquiring a global learning experience. Providing a range of options, as highlighted by Sweeney (2012) and Jones (2014), offers students greater opportunity to participate and take up challenges appropriate to their circumstances, potentially facilitating more ambitious challenges, for example, placements abroad, further down the line.

**Key findings:**

- Academic staff identified that it is the challenge of participating in a mobility opportunity, relative to the individual student, which is central to its value. This challenge develops the student’s ability to think independently and have confidence in their own intellectual capacity, resulting in ‘intellectual autonomy’ and ‘self-efficacy’.

- Academic staff regard mobility at undergraduate and postgraduate levels as having different purposes. At postgraduate and research levels a focus on research and knowledge acquisition in a global context was highlighted, while at undergraduate level the experience itself was identified as of value.

- Outward mobility is generally discussed in the context of Erasmus. As a result, certain types of outward mobility are not regarded as such, for example field trips. Staff identified that a clearer and broader definition of outward mobility as part of an institution’s internationalisation or learning and teaching strategy could increase buy-in and engagement, raising expectations of mobility among staff and students by demonstrating how different types of mobility enhance a student’s experience and academic progress.

- Staff participating in the research placed a high value on intra-UK mobility. This model presents an opportunity for students to challenge themselves and develop cultural awareness, drawing on the diversity found within the UK. It can be applied to
a range of programmes as a means to provide various opportunities which meet the needs of students.

- Some academic staff were able to identify the immediate impact of outward mobility in improved course marks by comparing pre- and post-mobility grades.

### 8.2 Measuring the outcomes of outward mobility

Formally demonstrating the impact and benefit of outward mobility seems critical to understanding and promoting its continuation. While studies undertaken by Erasmus and the British Council are useful in evaluating the immediate output of the Erasmus programme, they are limited in what they reveal and do not cover non-Erasmus models of mobility.

There is currently little in the way of systematic analysis or measures for assessing the impact of outward mobility at programme or institutional levels other than informal observations made by academic staff, although staff interviewed were interested in developing sustainable approaches to doing so. However, with the IU’s *UK Strategy for Outward Mobility* (2013) in place and the UK committed to the European target that in 2020, 20% of those graduating in the European Higher Education Area should have had a study or training period abroad, it seems timely to reach agreement on some standard methods for measuring the success of all outward mobility placements.

Evidence gathered for this study suggests that the dominance of the Erasmus model means that academic staff do not necessarily associate study visits and field trips with outward mobility, possibly because it is not recorded or funded as outward mobility. Demonstrating the relevance of such opportunities through a clearer definition of outward mobility as part of an institution’s internationalisation or other strategies could serve to increase staff buy-in, raise expectations of mobility among staff and students, and support an increase in participation.

In designing methods to measure impact, the limitations of current approaches should be taken into account. These limitations include over-reliance on self-reported impact by students, as well as the effect of variables which hamper the attribution of causation, such as the type, duration and location of a mobility placement. The collection of more comprehensive mobility data through the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) from 2013-14 should support more robust analysis of mobility statistics in terms of academic
outcome. Assessing the impact of mobility on job and career outcomes would need to involve employers themselves and involve keeping in touch with graduates, hence may be more challenging to systematise. While we have a clear picture of the types of skills employers are seeking in their employees from the annual CBI Education and Skills surveys (2013; 2014) only graduates and employers can confirm that outward mobility made a difference to an individual's career path.

**Key findings:**

- There is currently no formal or systematic collection of evidence of the impact of outward mobility at institutional level. However, academic staff are keen to see more done at an institutional level to measure the impact of outward mobility on academic outcomes.

- Some academic staff have applied informal impact measures by comparing pre- and post-mobility marks, revealing a definite improvement. It was felt that formalising this comparison in a systematic way could provide a good short-term measure of the impact of an outward mobility experience and could be applied equally well to all forms of mobility.

- Measuring employability by means other than reported personal development of the skills employers are seeking remains problematic. Academic staff would welcome further discussion and agreement on appropriate and accessible measures of employability, for example exploring the use of DLHE data.

**8.3 Increasing participation**

The wide range of variables identified as potentially affecting whether or not students decide to participate in outward mobility suggest that institutions need to take certain measures to ensure that participation is accessible to all. A multi-pronged approach to widening participation in outward mobility is required if all students, whatever their background or identity, are to access appropriate outward mobility opportunities that meet their needs.

As discussed in Chapter 3, attitudes to mobility can often be formed prior to entering higher education. Ahrens et al’s 2010 survey of school leavers found a disproportionate number of independent school leavers intending to take up opportunities to study abroad in comparison
to state school pupils, with a ratio of 3:1. This disparity is further underlined by the proportion of students from Russell Group institutions taking up mobility opportunities (King et al 2010; Sweeney 2012). It may be that the strategies currently being employed to attract underrepresented groups of students need to be revisited and examined in light of the IU's UK Strategy for Outward Mobility (2013) and the HEA's *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2014).

The evidence suggests that language skills should also be taken into account in widening and increasing participation. Language is a significant challenge which may prevent students from choosing mobility options or restrict where they can go. As with the predisposition to mobility indicated above, language skills are predominantly found in young people with a private or grammar school education, who are also more likely to have had opportunities to travel abroad, for example on family holidays, prior to entering higher education (Ahrens 2010). In recognising this, almost all of those interviewed made reference to both national and local strategies to change the position of and attitude toward language learning. Some HEIs already offer language learning as an extracurricular activity or in preparation for placements, and one interviewee suggested that this could be further enhanced by providing all students, whether outwardly mobile or not, the opportunity to undertake a module in another language as part of their programme of study. This aside, recent data demonstrate that mobility in non-language degree programmes is increasing (Carbonell 2013).

Another significant factor is that the outward mobility opportunities currently on offer are generally framed by (a) established practice or ‘heredity’ within a degree programme and (b) by the outward mobility programme (for example, the Erasmus model), rather than on the basis of what students want or need. The examples provided demonstrate that it is possible to integrate mobility into the structure of a programme to provide appropriate opportunities, for example shorter periods away, which take account of both the requirements of the programme and what is possible for students.

The value of intra-UK mobility was emphasised in both the survey and interviews. As highlighted in section 5.2.3, for some students a UK placement can be as challenging as going abroad. Such placements also provide alternative opportunities for students for whom travel abroad is not an option due to personal or financial circumstances. The value of UK placements in enabling students to gain insights into culturally diverse communities and experience different ways of working can be related to employability. The 2013 and 2014 CBI surveys indicate that employers identify global competencies as being important but, as identified by Diamond et al (2011) these competencies do not necessarily have to be gained
from international experience. As the evidence demonstrates, UK-based placements are a valued part of programmes as they provide the opportunity for students who are unable or do not wish to travel abroad to enjoy some of the benefits of outward mobility.

Cost was identified as a critical factor in deciding whether to take up a mobility opportunity. This is clearly a widening participation issue which impacts on students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some students cannot afford to leave their job and/or do not have funds for ‘up front’ costs such as accommodation and travel. It is important that students are given clear information on the amount of funding available and how to access it, so they can plan accordingly.

**Key findings:**

- Although there has been an increase in the number of non-language students taking up outward mobility opportunities, evidence suggests that language skills are still limiting participation. Staff reported that this could be because students do not know about the language support on offer or are unaware of opportunities to study in English-speaking areas as part of Erasmus or other outward mobility programmes. However, staff from institutions which take a strategic approach to language support - for example, making ‘Language for All’ modules available to all students and promoting them widely - reported a positive impact on mobility.

- Academic staff identified finance as being a significant concern for students, acting as an obstacle to mobility particularly in relation to (i) extending the period of study, and (ii) the upfront costs of longer periods of mobility.

- Intra-UK mobility is regarded as a valuable addition to institutions’ outward mobility offer and academic staff were keen to include this as part of a range of mobility options to engage students. Respondents believed that a more rigorous approach to developing and promoting a range of both Erasmus and non-Erasmus opportunities may support an increase participation in outward mobility.

- Although it would appear that shorter periods of mobility are not offered as frequently as those of eight weeks or more, responses in both the survey and interviews indicated that academic staff are interested in exploring the potential of small interventions, such as virtual opportunities, made early in the academic programme,
as these may have the potential to encourage more students to participate in longer periods of mobility in subsequent years of study.

### 8.4 Institutional and discipline approaches

Sweeney (2012) suggests that institutional approaches to structuring degree programmes, timings and the achievement of learning outcomes hamper the delivery of outward mobility to a wider cohort of students. Apart from language and business programmes which provide for a period of study abroad, this results in a tendency to ‘shoehorn’ outward mobility into established degree structures rather than strategically reviewing and revising a programme in order to embed it in the curriculum. Both survey respondents and interviewees recognised this blockage, and while some negotiate the system as best they can, others take a creative approach to incorporating outward mobility as an integral aspect of programme delivery. As Sweeney points out:

> Module descriptors should not be straightjackets … for a variety of sound practical pedagogical reasons they and the programme documents should allow for amendments and even quite substantial modifications so long as the headline programme learning outcomes are not unduly compromised (Sweeney 2012).

As Examples 1, 2 and 3 referred to in 5.2.2 above demonstrate, it is possible to develop outward mobility in a way which supports both programme learning outcomes and student need, for example, by shorter periods of study or work abroad, or through UK-based options such as virtual mobility which ‘can provide a rich seam of opportunities for interaction across borders’ (Sweeney 2012).

What Examples 1, 2 and 3 have in common is that they are driven by committed staff who work to engage both colleagues within their home institution and international partners, in order to lay the foundations for effective outward mobility opportunities. This includes ensuring that the right placements are established based on the course learning outcomes, promoting opportunities as part of a programme of study from the outset, and providing returning students with support which enables them to translate their learning experience into positive academic outcomes, which in the short to medium term will mean improved course marks. Professional body requirements are often cited as a ‘problem,’ but examples gathered from law, midwifery, social work, education and engineering demonstrate that this does not have to be the case (see Examples 2, 3, 5 and 6) With regard to credit
accumulation and transfer, most institutions participating in the survey and all those represented in interviews dealt with this in a variety of ways, including awarding credit on the basis of a reflective piece of work post-mobility, setting up independent learning units and special projects. Other than for language courses, there was little evidence of grade transfer, although some interviewees indicated that they are currently considering this.

Taking a holistic approach which promotes a range of outward mobility opportunities in a coordinated rather than an ad hoc way, as an integrated aspect of a programme of study which draws on the knowledge, expertise and commitment of academic staff, can raise the profile of outward mobility at institutional and faculty/department levels, increasing student interest and participation.

**Key findings:**

- The much higher take-up of outward mobility opportunities in language and business-focused programmes of study means that all other subject disciplines can be regarded as under-represented.

- Participation in outward mobility increases where committed academic staff act as champions and engage in partnerships across their department or faculty, promoting outward mobility as part of a programme of study from the outset and providing support to students on their return. Academic staff who have taken this proactive approach have successfully increased participation by providing the right opportunities for students and engaging other colleagues in outward mobility.

- Evidence demonstrates that where staff have taken an innovative approach to developing outward mobility opportunities as part of a programme of study, the possibilities of studying or working abroad have been opened up to a wider cohort of students. Examples provided by academic staff demonstrate that degree structure and professional body requirements need not present obstacles to outward mobility – creative thinking and good international partnerships make mobility possible across all subject disciplines.

- Where academic staff reported that they have taken a collaborative, rather than an ad hoc, approach - for example, by working with their institution’s international office or engaging students who have completed a placement as advocates – outward mobility opportunities have become an integrated aspect of the study programme,
their profile at institutional and faculty/departmental levels has been raised, and participation has increased.

8.5 Internationalisation and outward mobility

It was found that institutions with a visible and strategic commitment and a drive for internationalisation which looks beyond recruiting international students, the development and delivery of outward mobility is still proving challenging but is being taken forward faster and with greater engagement than in those where this is not the case. For institutions where outward mobility is of lower priority, it is the staff at grassroots level who, as committed champions, are taking this agenda forward in order to enhance their students’ experience.

Generally speaking, there does appear to be an increasing profile for outward mobility, not least due to the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility. Together with the HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* (2014), this has the potential to change institutional approaches. Internationalisation is not just one dimensional, as Jacobone and Moro (2014) point out:

Higher education prepares students for performing in a global society, yet, at the same time, by offering international programmes and attracting international students, it forms a global and multicultural profile of society.

It is a two-way process in which encouraging outward mobility should be a central aspect of an institution’s internationalisation or equivalent strategy if it is to secure and maintain its position and relevance in a globally competitive environment.

As demonstrated by Jacobone and Moro and Brandenburg et al, embedded approaches to systematically measure the impact of mobility could help to consolidate and further develop the evidence base to demonstrate the significance of the internationalisation agenda.

**Key findings:**

- Evidence suggests that the profile of outward mobility as part of internationalisation or equivalent strategies needs to be increased at institutional and programme levels, so that academic staff can understand and engage in its delivery and it becomes an expected and embedded aspect of all programmes of study.
9 Recommendations

Policy makers:

- A clearer, broader definition of outward mobility should be agreed by those writing policies at sector level and/or within institutions. Such a definition can be included as part of an institution’s internationalisation and/or learning and teaching strategy to take account of a variety of mobility opportunities such as study visits, field trips and virtual opportunities.

- Policy development at sector level and within institutions should take account of how different types of mobility can enhance the student experience, academic journey and employment outcomes across all discipline areas in order to raise expectations of mobility among staff and students.

- Policy development at sector level and within institutions should support the implementation of systematic, formalised approaches to measuring the academic and employability impact of outward mobility

Institutions:

- The development and implementation of systematic, formalised approaches to measuring the academic and employability impact of outward mobility at institution and programme levels should become an embedded aspect of delivering outward mobility. Account should be taken of qualitative and quantitative evidence before and after mobility has taken place, for example pre- and post-mobility course marks.

- Academic champions or coordinators should be identified who can promote the benefits of outward mobility across all discipline areas, work with the institution’s international office to signpost information to students, act as a resource and provide leadership in the development of innovative, creative practice. This could help to facilitate a greater understanding, engagement and participation of both staff and students, particularly in under-represented discipline areas.

- Institutions should ensure that there is greater promotion of and support for access to Erasmus and institutional grants or other streams of funding, increasing staff and student understanding of what is available in order to ensure that, wherever possible, finance does not present a perceived or actual obstacle to outward mobility.
• Institutions need to continue to establish and consolidate effective partnerships for mobility, not only for the purpose of international recruitment but also to ensure that all students studying UK programmes have the opportunity to access high quality outward mobility placements which will deliver appropriate learning outcomes.

• It is recommended that institutions apply the IU’s UK Strategy for Outward Mobility and the HEA’s *Internationalising Higher Education Framework* to shape their strategies, processes and the development of embedded approaches to outward mobility. Such national strategies can help to demonstrate the relevance and value of mobility in a global academic context to students, as well as engage staff in developing, delivering and evaluating a range of high quality outward mobility opportunities.

### 9.3 Academic staff:

• Academic staff, especially in under-represented discipline areas, should take responsibility for the development of creative, flexible pedagogic approaches to embed a range of outward mobility opportunities into programmes of study. Providing a range of opportunities is part of inclusive learning and teaching practice, helping to ensure all students are able to access and participate in mobility in a way which is appropriate to their needs.

• Academic staff should take responsibility for demonstrating how outward mobility is being integrated into programmes of study at programme approval, revalidation and annual review stages, and for aligning mobility opportunities with learning outcomes.

• Academic staff should ensure that systematic approaches to measuring the impact of outward mobility are applied at programme level.

• Academic staff should work in partnership with their international offices and their identified academic champion or coordinator to ensure they are taking a coordinated approach to developing and promoting a range of outward mobility opportunities and providing clear, transparent and timely information about the finance and support mechanisms available to students in preparation for mobility, while they are on their placement and when they return.
10 References and bibliography


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Annex A - Participating institutions

**England**
- Bath Spa
- Brighton
- Essex
- Exeter
- Hull
- Kent
- Kings College, London
- Kingston University, London
- Liverpool
- London Met
- Manchester
- Newcastle
- Queen Mary London
- Sheffield
- Southampton
- St Georges University, London
- Surrey
- University of the West of England

**Scotland**
- Aberdeen
- Dundee
- Edinburgh Napier
- Glasgow School of Art
- Robert Gordon University
- Stirling
- University of the West of Scotland

**Wales**
- Bangor
- Cardiff
- Swansea

**Northern Ireland**
- Queens University, Belfast
- Ulster
## Annex B – Survey questions

**Academic Outcomes of Student Outward Mobility**

Thank you for taking the time to access and complete this research survey, your input will be very valuable to the research output.

This research project has been commissioned by the Higher Education International Unit (IU) and the Higher Education Academy to explore the impact of outward mobility on academic outcomes at undergraduate, postgraduate and research levels for UK domiciled students as well as the considerations that need to be taken into account in facilitating students to take up outward mobility opportunities. Whilst the academic benefits of outward mobility are widely reported, previous studies indicate that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support these assertions [Sweeney (2012); King et al (2010)]. This study therefore sets out to build an empirical evidence base of the impact and benefit of outward mobility. It is intended that research outputs can be used by UK HEIs and policy makers to promote and develop opportunities for outward student mobility.

The research will provide evidence of the academic outcomes and impact of student outward mobility which will help HEIs to develop their practice in respect of mobility opportunities. It will also be used to inform the implementation of the Higher Education Academy’s strategic framework, Internationalising Higher Education, and the UK Strategy for Outward Mobility, contributing to the delivery of its strategic objectives, including raising awareness of mobility with academic staff and building institutional capacity to increase the proportion of UK students who benefit from an international experience. It will generate examples from disciplines which are traditionally under-represented in outward mobility, helping to share good practice in these subject areas. The report will include recommendations for HE staff. Additionally the research outputs could also contribute to increased numbers of students accessing international opportunities by informing career guidance and institutional marketing campaigns.

The research will include desk based analysis of HESA data, a short literature review and analysis of empirical data. The empirical data will be collected through an online survey questionnaire targeted at academic staff from 50 institutions across the four UK nations in discipline areas where the take up of mobility is identified as low in comparison with other discipline areas. This will be followed by in-depth interviews with a number of respondents.

Please indicate if you would be willing to participate in the interview phase at the end of this survey.

This research will be carried out in line with the Higher Education Academy’s Research Ethics Framework. All data will be handled so as to protect confidentiality and anonymity and participants are free to withdraw from the project without prejudice at any time. All data generated will be kept securely and the Data Protection Act (1998) will be observed at all times.

**Conditions of Consent:**

In agreeing to be involved in this project, your interests will be protected in the following ways:

- The information you provide will be used solely for the purposes defined by the project.
- At any time, you may decide to withdraw from the project without prejudice to yourself and to request that any data provided by you be destroyed.
- All data will be handled so as to protect your confidentiality. Therefore, no names will be mentioned and the information will be coded.
- All data will be kept securely and destroyed at the end of the project.
- If you have any concerns about your involvement in, or the conduct of, the project, you should contact Anne Marie Graham, Head of Programme, Outward Student Mobility, AnneMarie.Graham@international.ac.uk
- Any new data arising from the research project will be destroyed after 5 years.

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Academic Outcomes of Student Outward Mobility

4. Consent

☐ I agree to participate in this project, subject to the conditions outlined above
Academic Outcomes of Student Outward Mobility

Demographics

5. Please indicate:
   - Female
   - Male
   - Transgender
   - Prefer not to say

6. Please indicate country of origin:

7. Is this an individual or representative response?
   - Individual
   - Representative

8. What is your own experience of outward mobility? Please indicate all that apply.
   - Study
   - Work placement
   - Lived abroad
   - None
   - Other (please specify)

9. Are you, or have you previously been, involved in outward mobility activities? Please indicate all that apply.
   - Recruiting and teaching international students
   - Developing outward mobility opportunities for UK domiciled students
   - Marketing outward mobility opportunities for UK domiciled students
   - Recruiting UK domiciled students to outward mobility opportunities
   - Facilitating and supporting the outward mobility of UK domiciled students
   - Teaching UK domiciled students who have participated in outward mobility opportunities
   - I am not involved in outward mobility activities
## Academic Outcomes of Student Outward Mobility

### Overview of outward mobility opportunities

10. What do you regard as the academic purpose(s) of outward mobility?

11. In the context of your faculty or department, what mechanisms are used to promote opportunities for outward mobility to students? Please indicate all that apply and provide additional information where necessary.

- [ ] As part of their programme of study
- [ ] Centrally through international unit or academic support office
- [ ] Faculty / departmental co-ordinators
- [ ] Academic staff
- [ ] Peer recommendation
- [ ] Students Union
- [ ] I am unsure how they are promoted
- [ ] I am not aware of any relevant opportunities
- [ ] Other (please specify below)

Additional information:
### Academic Outcomes of Student Outward Mobility

#### 12. What types of outward mobility opportunities are available to your students? Please indicate all that apply.

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<td>Non Erasmus work placement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study visit</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attendance at relevant seminars or conferences</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual opportunities (eg seminars, conferences; networking)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Volunteering</td>
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<td>Summer schools</td>
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<td>Field Trips</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>

#### 13. How relevant to you consider these opportunities? Please indicate which statements apply at each study level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>UG Level</th>
<th>PG Level</th>
<th>Research</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very relevant to academic outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Some relevance in an academic context</td>
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<tr>
<td>Only relevant in respect of personal development</td>
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<tr>
<td>No relevance</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Additional information:
14. How are students selected for outward mobility opportunities? Please indicate selection criteria used.

- Erasmus study placement
- Non Erasmus study placement
- Erasmus work placement
- Non Erasmus work placement
- Study visit
- Attendance at relevant seminars or conferences
- Virtual opportunities (eg seminars; conferences; networking)
- Volunteering
- Field trips
- Other outward mobility opportunities

15. What factors might deter students from accessing outward mobility opportunities? Please indicate all that apply and provide additional information where necessary.

- Lack of relevant opportunities
- Accessibility of opportunities
- Lack of institutional support
- Finance
- Intercalation
- Degree structure
- Personal circumstances
- Other (please specify below)

Additional information:
16. From an academic perspective, what are the key considerations to address when working to increase the number of students who take up mobility opportunities? Please indicate all that apply and provide additional information where necessary.

- Degree structure / flexibility in the curriculum
- A curriculum which reflects cultural diversity
- Intercalation
- Programme learning outcomes
- Lack of administrative time
- Lack of resources
- Other (please specify below)

Additional Information:

17. What would help to encourage more students to take up outward mobility opportunities?
Academic Outcomes of Student Outward Mobility

Outcomes of outward mobility

18. For students who access outward mobility opportunities:
   Based on your own experience or observations, what outcomes accrue to individual
   students who access outward mobility opportunities?
   - Improved degree outcome
   - Enhanced employability skills
   - Personal development
   - None
   - Other (please specify below)

   Additional Information:

19. For students who access outward mobility opportunities:
   What specific areas of development do you consider facilitates these outcomes?
   Please indicate all that are relevant and provide additional information where
   necessary.
   - Enhanced understanding of subject discipline
   - Improved critical thinking skills
   - Language skills
   - Increased understanding of cultural diversity
   - Increased intercultural competence
   - Increased personal confidence
   - Self reliance
   - Greater degree of engagement
   - Other (please specify below)

   Additional Information:
20. Based on your own experience or observation, do benefits to students vary depending on the type of outward mobility opportunity accessed?

- Yes
- No

If yes, please state how:

21. For students who are NOT outwardly mobile:
Do any of the outcomes for outwardly mobile students accrue to their non outwardly mobile peers?

- Improved degree outcome
- Enhanced employability skills
- Personal development
- None
- Other (please specify below)
22. If any of these outcomes do accrue to students who are NOT outwardly mobile, please specify how this happens

23. For students who are NOT outwardly mobile, what specific areas of development do you consider facilitates these outcomes? Please indicate all that apply.

- Enhanced understanding of subject discipline
- Improved critical thinking skills
- Language skills
- Increased motivation
- Greater degree of engagement
- Increased understanding of cultural diversity
- Increased intercultural competency
- Increased personal confidence
- Increased self-reliance
- Other (Please specify below)

Additional information:

Page 10
24. Staff

Do you consider there to be benefits to staff as a result of student outward mobility?

- Professional development - research
- Professional development - learning & teaching
- Development of curriculum which reflects diversity and/or global perspectives
- Staff exchange opportunities
- Involvement in international collaboration or partnership working
- Opportunity to draw on intercultural experiences in learning teaching practice
- Other (please specify below)

Additional information:

25. Your institution

Do you consider there to be benefits to your institution as a result of student outward mobility?

- Enhanced reputation/brand
- Increased international collaboration with other HEIs
- Increased international collaboration with employers
- Increased international student recruitment
- Increased international staff recruitment
- Greater engagement with the Bologna Process
- Retention and/or success of students
- Retention and/or development of staff
- Other (please specify below)

Additional information:
26. What evidence do you and/or your institution use to demonstrate the impact of student outward mobility on DEGREE OUTCOME? Please indicate all that apply and provide additional information where necessary.

- Progression benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Individual attainment benchmarked against performance prior to participation
- Degree outcome benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Evidenced increased levels of involvement in seminars and tutorials
- Student reflection through feedback
- Post graduate destination (please provide details below)
- Other (please specify below)

Additional information:
27. What evidence do you and/or your institution use to demonstrate the impact of outward mobility on EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS? Please indicate all that apply and provide additional information where necessary.

- Progression benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Individual attainment benchmarked against performance prior to participation
- Degree outcome benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Evidenced increased levels of involvement in seminars and tutorials
- Student reflection through feedback
- Post graduate destination
- Other (please specify below)
- Other (please specify below)

Additional information:
28. What evidence do you and/or institution use to demonstrate the impact of outward mobility on a student’s PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT? Please indicate all that apply and provide additional information below where necessary.

- Progression benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Individual attainment benchmarked against performance prior to participation
- Degree outcome benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Evidenced increased levels of involvement in seminars and tutorials
- Student reflection through feedback
- Post graduate destination
- Other (please specify below)

Additional information:

29. What evidence do you and/or your institution use to demonstrate the impact of student outward mobility on any other outcome? Please indicate all that apply and provide additional information below where necessary.

- Progression benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Individual attainment benchmarked against performance prior to participation
- Degree outcome benchmarked against students who did not participate
- Evidenced increased levels of involvement in seminars and tutorials
- Student reflection through feedback
- Post graduate destination
- Other (please specify below)

Additional information:
30. What action at institution, faculty or department level would help you to best evidence the impact and benefits of student outward mobility?
31. We would be pleased if you are able to share any examples of good practice and successful outward mobility activity in your discipline area here, for example encouraging take up of mobility opportunities; achievements and outcomes of mobility; monitoring the impact of mobility:

32. Please indicate if you would be willing to take part in the interview phase of this research
   - [ ] Yes, I would be willing to take part in the interview phase
   - [ ] No thank you
33. Please provide your contact details so we can contact you to arrange a convenient interview date and time.

- **Names:**
- **HEIs:**
- **Email Address:**
- **Phone Number:**