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Fox, O., & Beech, S. E. (2023). International Student Mobility Options Following Brexit: An Analysis of the Genesis of Britain's Turing Scheme. *Population, Space and Place*, 30(1), 1-11. Article e27. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2727>

[Link to publication record in Ulster University Research Portal](#)

Published in:
Population, Space and Place

Publication Status:
Published online: 22/10/2023

DOI:
[10.1002/psp.2727](https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2727)

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

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International student mobility options following Brexit: An analysis of the genesis of Britain's Turing Scheme

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Abstract

This paper examines the interplay between geopolitical goals, governance and International Student Mobility (henceforth ISM). It explores how the United Kingdom's newly envisaged domestic credit-mobility programme (the Turing Scheme) is reshaping the spatiality of their outward student mobility flows to bolster a global sense of internationalisation through ISM. During its emergence, the Turing Scheme was often positioned as an antithesis to the pre-established Erasmus + Scheme which had a strong focus on European integration, instead it focused on promoting a 'Global Britain' narrative. This paper conducts a content analysis of Hansard (transcripts of debates in the U.K.'s Houses of Parliament), to reflect on ISM decision-making, debating the choices made and unmade regarding the development of the Turing Scheme. This research illuminated multiple issues, adding to the debate about the importance of ISM for geopolitical purposes, and how these can underpin credit-mobility schemes, and shape these during periods of large-scale geopolitical change.

KEYWORDS

Credit Mobility, Erasmus, Higher Education Policy, International Student Mobility, Study Abroad, Turing Scheme

1 | INTRODUCTION

Britain has long been referred to as an 'awkward partner' for European integration with a history of strained relations with the European Union (EU) (Oliver, 2015, 2016). Its geographical separation, and focus on nurturing cultural and political ties beyond Europe, has led to the existence of a Eurosceptic tradition in Britain, which views the EU as a hindrance to their global destiny (Daddow, 2013). This paper reflects on wider issues of nationalism and identity in the U.K. context through an analysis of the development of a credit-bearing education mobility programme established following Brexit—the Turing Scheme. Given that there is rising Eurosceptic sentiment

across Europe, fuelled by ideas surrounding sovereignty of nation-states and greater supra-national powers in Brussels (Archick, 2021), the analysis of the development of this programme offers a window onto how decision-making takes place in the wake of significant political upheaval. The introduction of this programme is a small part of much broader and complex post-Brexit negotiations. This has been a geopolitically difficult process, including wider political reframing and a re-imagining of the United Kingdom. Therefore, the Turing Scheme's introduction resulted from the Brexit process and post-Brexit political activity and allows us to reflect on the many considerations of decision-makers during these pivotal points for states. Consequently, this paper uses post-Brexit decision-making for

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International Student Mobility (ISM) to inform other large-scale reforms elsewhere.

The Trade and Cooperation Agreement in December 2020 precluded the United Kingdom from future manifestations of Erasmus+ (James, 2021). First developed in 1987 as the Erasmus Scheme, it provided funding opportunities to encourage staff and student mobility within Europe (Breznik & Skrbinjek, 2020; Courtois, 2018). The scheme's success is argued as one major catalyst of interest in international mobility within higher education institutions (HEIs) (Jacobone & Moro, 2015). Over 12.5 million students have participated since its inception, and in 2021 over 648,000 Erasmus+ mobility activities were undertaken (European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, 2022). However, with a geopolitical focus on creating a European citizenry and developing a generation of young Europeans (James, 2021; Quintela et al., 2022), it was a casualty of a 'Eurosceptic' enthusiasm in an emerging post-Brexit relationship with Europe (Swatridge, 2021). However, as ISM intersects wider governmental agendas in relation to economics, migration, culture, technology, education and foreign policy (Finn, 2018; Lomer, 2017), there was a clear need to establish a new U.K.-focused agenda as the Brexit process progressed, which resulted in the eventual development of the Turing Scheme.

The Turing scheme acts as a domestic alternative to Erasmus+ and enables students to study internationally in university or school exchanges or undertake industrial work placements abroad (James, 2021; Swatridge, 2021). The scheme is backed by £110 million from September 2020, with guaranteed continuity for 3 years, outlined in the 2021 spending review, however, beyond this remains unclear (Turing Scheme, 2021). It facilitated over 38,000 exchanges in 2022 (Turing Scheme, 2023b). Brooks and Waters (2023) note that the scheme attempts to address core socioeconomic and geopolitical issues. This includes that of 'Global Britain', part of a wider discourse surrounding nation-building and post-Brexit reframing, embedded in a nostalgic 'take back control' narrative. In theory, this would allow Britain to look beyond Europe and expand into markets that were potentially excluded by the EU as part of the Erasmus+ Scheme (Stephenson & Goldfinch, 2020). Turing also focuses (notionally) on widening access to students from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have engaged with other forms of ISM previously (Higgins, 2021; James, 2021).

Acknowledging how ISM can be a cornerstone for wider governmental policy (Finn, 2018; Lomer, 2017), this paper analyses the genesis of the Turing Scheme which replaced the long-established Erasmus programme. It aims to investigate the geopolitical rationale behind the introduction of the Turing Scheme and evaluate how these goals have impacted decisions regarding ISM funding mechanisms and the spatiality of the programme. We will also evaluate the wider value of ISM for the state, why credit mobility is a political focus, and the perceived purposes for ISM participation. The decision to withdraw from Erasmus and establish the Turing Scheme occurred during the Brexit negotiation period, a dynamic period of extensive negotiation and geopolitical shaping. This paper reveals how ISM can

be linked to wider geopolitical goals and national pressures, particularly in times of uncertainty, where there is an urgency to offer clarity. It documents how the United Kingdom's changing political goals post-Brexit are reflected through the Turing Scheme through analysis of parliamentary debates from the date of the Brexit Referendum until the end of the transition period in 2021. We outline some of the wider debate surrounding the enablement of ISM for U.K. students and reflect on the processes and decisions that led to the introduction of the Turing Scheme, the political promises, and negotiation outcomes. The paper begins with an overview of the pre-existing literature and provides insights into how ISM is viewed and constructed. This is structured around the themes of utilitarian processes of employability and skills development, experiential and personal aspirations, identity-building and personal development and how these might intersect with wider geopolitical endeavours.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

Erasmus focuses on creating a shared sense of European membership and a pan-European identity (King & Raghuram, 2013). This focused on producing the 'Erasmus Generation' of young Europeans, argued to be more supportive of European integration than previous generations (Quintela et al., 2022). This was, in part, facilitated by a range of initiatives to streamline European higher education, such as the Bologna Process, which was designed to make mobility of students easier and, therefore, could become one vehicle for promoting the European Identity (Waters & Brooks, 2011). Students usually take part in these experiences when they are comparatively young, during formative years, and are considered to be at an ideal stage in their life course to develop and construct this shared sense of European identity (King & Raghuram, 2013).

This approach to European citizenry development is debated. Work by Van Mol (2012, 2018, 2019) has been inconclusive as to whether it is the period of study abroad which is the key developer of the European outlook. He argues (2012) that identity formation is not necessarily developed through student mobility, but subjected to national and regional variations, which lead to strong senses of European identity in the everyday lives of some students (Van Mol, 2012). Consequently, participating students are perhaps already more European in their outlook or have stronger transnational aspirations which led to their decisions to become mobile during their studies in the first place (Van Mol, 2018). Therefore, the goal of Erasmus could be reconfigured to that of widening access to credit mobility which might affirm senses of Europeanism. While this questions arguments for the geopolitical and identity-building purpose of Erasmus, this is still one overarching objective of the scheme. It, therefore, comes as no surprise that a Eurosceptic Britain chose to distance itself from the scheme so completely as a result of changing political dynamics post-Brexit.

However, given that science and academic study is transboundary (Zotti, 2021), and the role ISM plays within wider diplomatic and governmental concerns (Finn, 2018; Lomer, 2017), there was always

a need to replace the Erasmus scheme with a comparable alternative in the event of Brexit. Any alternative would need to provide students with the necessary economic, social and cultural capital to partake in a global workplace (Pandit, 2009; Waters & Brooks, 2011), often associated with study abroad (Beech, 2019; Curtis & Ledgerwood, 2018; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Rachaniotis et al., 2013; Van Mol et al., 2020). Jacobone and Moro (2015) note that the internationalisation of HE has been encouraged as international experiences are important for both personal and employability skills development (Deakin, 2013; Finn & Darmody, 2017; King & Raghuram, 2013; Raghuram, 2013; Van Mol et al., 2020). Economically, these opportunities can be viewed as providing commodifiable experiences which enable students to fulfil their career aspirations in the graduate labour market (Beech 2018, 2019; Jewell, 2015; Quintela et al., 2022). However, it is important to recognise that credit-bearing schemes also tend to be utilised by students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds which questions arguments of greater social mobility (Brooks & Waters, 2023).

ISM has a dual purpose, however, as it is primarily undertaken by the relatively young it can prove to be a dynamic period of personality development (Sadeghi et al., 2022). Lesjak et al. (2015) conclude that, despite the Erasmus mobility programme having geopolitical goals associated with European identification and integration and more professionally orientated objectives, students also engage with the scheme for social or developmental motives such as 'having fun' or personal growth. This was also identified for international work placements, which are often viewed as opportunities to delay adulthood and experience international travel (Cranston et al., 2020). Prazeres (2017) argues how geographical relocation may infer a sense of going beyond one's 'comfort zone', and provides opportunities for self-exploration. While Spangler (2022) identifies that international students in Denmark expressed study abroad as heightening independence, learning practical life skills such as cooking and cleaning, through being away from 'home'. While this experience is not particular to ISM, it is one that is possibly enhanced by it. ISM decision-making with consideration for personal development and the acquiring of soft skills as dominant was cited by research from the European Parliament in 2010, with employability concerns ranking lower on students priorities for participation (Quintela et al., 2022). Furthermore, personal development narratives are often internalised as having long-term economic benefits by the students, whereby social and cultural capital become transferred to economic capital on graduation (Beech, 2019; Waters & Brooks, 2011).

It was, therefore, imperative to develop a new scheme that enabled students to retain the advantages that credit-bearing ISM opportunities bring, while cultivating a British identity, and maintaining the U.K. HE brand. Lomer et al. (2018) note the importance of national HE brands due to associated economic benefits and the strengthening of soft power through ISM. Marketing the U.K. HE brand results in policy and educational discourse constructing narratives that surround and modify international students and their mobilities (Lomer, 2018). These discourses, constructions and policy

are in flux and uncertain (Lomer, 2018) as a result of post-Brexit policy change and the government's new geopolitical agenda which focuses on 'global' versus 'European' outlooks (Brooks & Waters, 2023).

The Brexit outcome has been evaluated as an articulation of English nationalism (Neal & Cochrane, 2022), entrenched within a Eurosceptic interpretation of British and imperial histories, which spurred the discourse of the 'leave' campaign (Drea, 2019). The British nation-state has never existed per se, rather Britain is a collective of multiple nations, with a sharing of memories of its space and state history in which its colonial past has played a role in the imagination of a community (Galent, 2022). This imagery of past success and shared history has contributed to the conceptualisation of 'Global Britain', referred to as 'Empire 2.0' (Van Der Zwet et al., 2020), a narrative of past colonial power that exerted extensive authority and influence over other countries (Saunders, 2020). Saunders (2020) notes how the 'Global Britain' rhetoric constructs a heroic history of Britain, one of enterprise and trade, a celebration of achievement, and a sense of national pride, a possible imagination of Britain's innovative future post-Brexit. However, this narrative of global power requires knowledge of Britain's imperial history and 'success' to validate the 'Global Britain' ambitions (Turner, 2019), to reinforce aspirations that it might again become a global superpower.

This post-Brexit 'Global Britain' agenda imagines Britain's escape from the EU 'prison' toward a new global role beyond Europe (Daddow, 2019), an optimistic geopolitical approach and view that new global opportunities will arise for the United Kingdom due to increased flexibility, autonomy and changes to leadership (Molloy & Smith, 2022). This view is posited as a U.K. success as, for the first time in 40 years, it can have ownership and control over foreign trade (Gaston, 2020). The 'Global Britain' rhetoric identifies a framework for post-Brexit foreign policy (Turner, 2019) which encapsulates many facets of policy, not least trade, migration and ISM. Outcomes of these deeper narratives are argued to endure even after the rhetoric disappears from public discourse (Turner, 2019). Therefore, the geopolitical goals and aspirations of the present will likely have impact into the future as the United Kingdom reconfigures its global relations.

3 | METHODOLOGY

Data for this paper was derived from Hansard, a publicly accessible database containing transcriptions of debates from the Houses of Parliament. Content analysis of 46 transcriptions was carried out to build an understanding of the development of the Turing Scheme. Relevant transcriptions were found using a keyword search to find debates that included the terms; 'Erasmus', 'Erasmus+', 'Erasmus Plus', 'Turing', 'International Student Mobility', 'Study Abroad' or 'Exchange Scheme' from the day of the referendum (23 June 2016) until after the decision was made to withdraw from Erasmus, create Turing, and debate these decisions (28 January 2021). This data source was selected as this record of the U.K. Parliament provides

insights into how the concerns of different periods were discussed, understood and acted upon at the time of debate and decision-making (Craggs, 2016). Further, these debates are the driver behind changes as the U.K. Parliament uses these to allow Members of Parliament (MPs) and Lords to discuss governmental policy and current issues (U.K. Parliament, 2023). In these debates, MPs are encouraged to voice the concerns and interests of their constituents, with the aim of reaching an informed decision and hold a vote (U.K. Parliament, 2023). Therefore, these debates give an insight into the considerations and concerns of decision-makers, those in positions of power in government, and of constituencies across the United Kingdom. Debates are an important stage in policy introduction and reform, and so are critical for this research on post-Brexit policy change. To explain the U.K. political system further, the House of Commons (HC) is an elected house in Parliament, in which MPs bring bills forward and debate these on behalf of their constituents. Following this, the House of Lords (HL), an unelected House in Parliament, scrutinise bills and government policy. At the time of Brexit, and at the point of submission of this paper, the Prime Minister and their cabinet were from the ring-wing Conservative Party. The Governments' primary opposition was the left-wing Labour Party. We have included the locations of elected representatives to offer geographical context of those they represent and, where appropriate, any additional positions they held within Government at the point debates took place. The transcripts were analysed using NVivo and a grounded theory approach, generating analytic categories, dimensions and links, until saturation point, taken (Ritchie et al., 2003). Qualitative data collection and analysis was chosen as they are recognised as better within exploratory research (Cresswell, 2007 cited in Khan, 2014).

This approach initially resulted in a high number of codes, with 386 initial detailed codes. Through recoding and sorting, broad dominant themes arose that were of key relevance to evaluating the geopolitical, economic, spatio-temporal and utilitarian rationales underpinning the Turing Scheme. These were re-analysed and framed into three broad themes which relate to the discussion. These are namely uncertainty surrounding the future of credit-mobility funding for U.K. students; ideological policymaking and discourse and evaluating early iterations of the Turing Scheme. This method has enabled a better understanding of how geopolitical goals are sought through ISM. This type of analysis is useful and appropriate in this area of research as discourse plays an important and recognisable role, assessing policy change and response (Longhurst, 2016).

4 | ERASMUS TO THE TURING SCHEME: THE GENESIS OF AN ISM SCHEME

This discussion considers three interlinked themes which evaluate the essence of the Turing Scheme, its development and future. It considers the factors that led to the changing of credit-mobility schemes by the U.K. government, and how this was supported or opposed by the Houses of Parliament. These themes evaluate the

scheme through determining its purpose, both utilitarian and ideological, its spatiality, the timeline of its development, and the geopolitics associated with these decisions. The first section evaluates the uncertainties faced by MPs and the government, uncertainty surrounding the next manifestation of Erasmus 2021–2027, and how this was accompanied by contingency planning for a replacement scheme, all of which meant uncertainty for students planning credit mobility at that time. The next section reflects on the ideological decision-making surrounding the Turing Scheme, the rationale behind withdrawal from Erasmus, and the importance of Turing within the wider 'Global Britain' agenda. The final section evaluates the initial iterations of the Turing Scheme and how this scheme may be improved in the future.

4.1 | Growing uncertainty for ISM in the United Kingdom following Brexit

A period of intense debate and discussion regarding future participation in the Erasmus scheme ensued following the Brexit vote in June 2016. During this period, there was an overwhelming sense of uncertainty, partly due to the established nature of U.K. membership (Allen, 2018). Uncertainty regarding ISM was the dominant theme throughout debates, referenced 403 times in total. It is worth noting that the outcome of the Brexit referendum led to much consternation in HE circles, creating uncertainty about the recruitment of international staff and students from the EU and the ability of U.K. students to study abroad (Mayhew, 2022). This raised questions surrounding the future of exchange and student mobility soon after the referendum, reflective of its importance. Jeff Smith, Labour MP for Manchester, Withington asked in December 2016 about plans to ensure continuing exchange opportunities (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 1 December 2016, Vol. 617, Col. 1660). At the time Robin Walker, Conservative MP for Worcester and then Parliamentary Under-Secretary for the Department for Exiting the European Union (A department which liaised directly with the EU and negotiated on the Prime Minister's behalf) offered reassurances that:

There is no change for those who are currently participating in, or about to start, Erasmus+ ... Post-exit access to Erasmus+ will be a matter for the negotiations that will follow the triggering of article 50. The Erasmus+ programme has proved to be a valuable tool that helps organisations and citizens to achieve their potential through international education, training and collaborative opportunities. As part of our vision for the UK as a global nation, I am sure we will want to look at how such an approach can be perpetuated in the future. (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 1 December 2016, Vol. 617, Col. 1660).

While this granted short-term clarity, it noted that this would be a matter for the Article 50 negotiations, and further guarantees

would be offered in the future. However, this uncertainty endured. In May 2018, during Prime Minister's Questions, Gordon Marsden, Labour MP for Blackpool South, noted there was still no commitment to keep Erasmus+ beyond 2020, and that the benefits of the programme were 'one thing that unites both leave and remain' and ought to be a 'top-line item' for ministers (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 16 May 2018, Vol. 641, Col. 277). There is a shared concern for the continuation of post-Brexit study mobility as these schemes serve utilitarian purposes, and so unite politicians across political parties who want to ensure these opportunities continue for their constituents.

At various points, there were senses of hopefulness that Erasmus participation would continue, buoyed by the participation of other non-EU nations such as Switzerland, which was a member until 2014 (James, 2021). In January 2019, Kwasi Kwarteng, Conservative MP and The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union strengthened this hope, exemplifying how other states that have never been members of the EU, such as Israel, participate in Erasmus. This suggested that continued participation was plausible, and inferred a sense that this was a governmental goal (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 24 January 2019, Vol. 653, Col. 322). Therefore, at this stage, there was evidence to support stronger geopolitical relations in the case of Erasmus continuation as other third-party states were able to participate. However, by February, the narrative shifted toward greater uncertainty around EU-funded programmes with Conservative MP Chris Skidmore, the then Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, noting that:

Leaving the EU with a deal remains the Government's top priority and that has not changed, but as a responsible Government we are preparing for every eventuality. We are considering how exiting the EU might affect tertiary education. (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 4 February 2019, Vol. 654, Col. 11)

Debate surrounding Erasmus participation reflected on the impact of Brexit on students' aspirations, future opportunities, and planning if the United Kingdom would not participate as a third party. Just 1 month later, in March 2019, there was still a strong sense of unrest and concern that the government was failing to secure a 'good deal' for students. Diana Warwick, a Labour member of the HL, expressed this concern:

We are just two weeks away from a potential no-deal Brexit and the Chancellor has still not confirmed that he will redeploy money that we would have routed through Brussels to fund opportunities for study abroad (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 11 March 2019, Vol. 796, Col. 831).

Owen and Durrant (2019) evaluated the U.K. Government's preparations for a no-deal Brexit, noting the short timescale that was devoted to contingency planning. They cite priorities such as

legislating the EU Withdrawal Act, migration and citizenship, healthcare, customs and trade, and a number of other key considerations (Owen & Durrant, 2019), however, the lack of mention of ISM in any context supports the argument that ISM and Erasmus+ participation were low priorities for policymakers, rather an issue to be decided during the transition period.

After extensions to the negotiation period, the United Kingdom left the EU on 31 January 2021, and only at this point was it announced that ISM would now be enabled through the domestic Turing Scheme (Mayhew, 2022). The introduction of this replacement was positioned by Claire Tyler, a Liberal Democrat¹ member of the HL, as the government redacting on its word, despite providing clarity with the Scheme's introduction:

last January the Prime Minister told MPs that there was "no threat to the Erasmus scheme." [Official Report, Commons, 15/1/20; col. 1021.] What a difference a year makes. (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 8 January 2021, Vol. 809, Col. 375)

One reason for deciding to end participation in Erasmus+ focused on uncertainties regarding the 2021–2027 programme and the associated financial implications of ongoing membership. Nonetheless, John Bassam, Labour Member of the HL, noted in January 2020 that the repeated lack of clarity created substantial issues for students and universities as they attempted to plan programmes of study post-Brexit:

The Minister also repeatedly reminded us that the outline of Erasmus+ for 2021 to 2027 has yet to be finalised, so that there is not yet a programme to sign up to, but we know that the programme is set to double its expansiveness and cost over that period ... The start date for the next programme is 2021. We are now less than 12 months away from it kicking off. This is precisely when institutions make programme commitments and students begin to plan their study schedules. Both my daughters began to plan well in advance of their university exchange schemes. I hasten to add that they were not Erasmus+, but were programmes involving US universities. I know from experience that these things take time to set up and carry through and that the last thing that participants, whether they are institutions or students, want is uncertainty (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 20 January 2020, Vol. 801, Col. 1010).

Overall, the years following the Brexit referendum were characterised by uncertainty and changing mileposts. Analysis of political debates suggests a continued political desire to participate in

¹The Liberal Democrats are a centrist political party in the United Kingdom.

Erasmus+, due to the perceived utilitarian benefits of ISM for U.K. students, and a strong concern about an adequate replacement. However, coupled with a lack of urgency to finalise plans, perhaps as a consequence of the widespread disarray that leaving the EU brought and a need to renegotiate across the political sphere, broad senses of uncertainty contributed to a lack of contingency and the subsequent introduction of the Turing Scheme. The Turing Scheme was rolled out at the end of the transition period, following lengthy discussions about the final decisions to withdraw from Erasmus. Therefore, this section evidences how large-scale geopolitical reframings, like Brexit, lend themselves to much broader disarray, of which 'smaller' contingencies, like enabling ISM, might be considered an afterthought.

4.2 | Ideological policymaking and discourse

James (2021) argues that a superficial logic of ideology, consistent with the drivers of the original pro-Brexit campaign, led to the introduction of the Turing Scheme. Erasmus, focused on fostering European citizenry and identification, was, therefore, victim to a 'Eurosceptic' enthusiasm for withdrawal from European institutions (James, 2021; Quintela et al., 2022; Swatridge, 2021). As early as 2017, the theme of ideological decision-making by HM Government, across multiple policies, was argued by Gillian Finlay, a Crossbench² member of the HL:

... as is increasingly the case in a number of areas pertaining to Brexit, the government would appear to be willing to jeopardise the security of our own medicines, drugs and medical devices for our citizens, and the prosperity of industry, for the sake of an ideological inclination (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 26 February 2018, Vol. 789, Col. 441)

Unpacking this draws connections to the 'Brexit means Brexit' mantra which reiterated the legitimacy of the Brexit Referendum, and the necessity for severance from the EU, the supposed wish of the U.K. electorate (Allen, 2018). This political opposition to a seemingly dominant geopolitical approach to post-Brexit negotiation is evident here, with pro-Brexit sentiment accused of overlooking wider issues to 'get Brexit done'. This perhaps led to a failure to recognise the multifaceted considerations of the Brexit negotiations, including the continuation of the Erasmus+ programme post-2020, illustrating how ISM has become intertwined with complex geopolitics. Here, the utilitarian benefits of continued Erasmus participation are argued to have been trumped by a geopolitical inclination which aims to sever the United Kingdom from the EU where possible.

Papatsiba (2005) identifies that the European commission implied its political and civic rationale for Erasmus as growing

European consciousness through exposure with new cultures and societies. Through constructing students as future decision-makers, it becomes important to consider how geopolitical predilections might be instilled during their formative years, with Erasmus attempting to train a future elite 'who advocate the economic and political project of the EU' (Papatsiba, 2005, p. 177). This link between academia and society makes clear how governments may modify education provision in times of geopolitical change to shape the political and national outlooks of citizens. For example, leading students and young people away from senses of common European citizenship. David Davies, Conservative MP for Haltemprice and Howden argued in January 2020 that:

Our nation now faces a reset moment ... Thatcher's revolution, controversial as it was, was above all a revolution of expectations, in which the United Kingdom once more realised it was able to stand on its own two feet. (*Hansard*, HC Deb 14 January 2020, Vol. 669, Col. 924–925)

Here, the post-Brexit moment is illustrated as a pivotal point for the nation through comparison with the widespread neoliberal reforms of the 1980s which also had significant impacts on higher education (Beech, 2019). This identifies the reframing of the British ideology, outlook, and aspiration which allows the United Kingdom to enter the global arena, more in-keeping with the historic British identity through introducing the 'Global Britain' rhetoric (Saunders, 2020). Brexit is argued to have granted the United Kingdom an opportunity to enter the global sphere, squashing arguments of Brexit as a nationalistic, inward-looking process. Rather, this suggests that a 'Global Britain' is now possible, through new relationships beyond the EU (Clarke, 2020). This identifies Britain's post-Brexit geopolitical reframing in which, like the neoliberal reforms of the 1970s, many aspects of society will engage with the processes of change to meet new governmental goals. 'Global Britain' dominated throughout analysis, with 75 references in 28 debates. In 2018, Theresa May, the then Conservative Prime Minister, outlined how this global agenda was gaining traction:

we have already started to extend our partnership to countries around the world where we have not had the same extent of partnership as a member of the European Union (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 22 November 2018, Vol. 649 Col. 1116)

The first objective of Turing, outlined in the programme guide, in line with the U.K. Government's wider vision, is to encourage 'Global Britain' (Turing Scheme, 2023a). The quotation below further evidence anti-European sentiment, constructing the EU as a road-block to British goals, identifying how, without the confining boundaries and regulations of the EU, Britain might reach its global aspirations and achieve a new national identity (Turner, 2019). The Turing Scheme is posited by Jacob Rees-Mogg, Conservative MP for

²Crossbench members of the HL are of no party affiliation.

North East Somerset, and then Leader of the HC, as one key source of this:

the Erasmus programme is being replaced with a better programme, one that encapsulates what we are looking at. We are leaving the European Union and we thought that participation in the Erasmus programme would not be in the interests of the United Kingdom, but we are going to be looking globally ... we are taking our eyes from the narrow European focus and lifting them up to the horizon of the globe. (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 30 December 2020, Vol. 686, Col. 649)

Isentyeva and Abdel Kafi (2021) note that the 'take back control' narrative was first penned by the 'Leave Campaign', which raised concerns surrounding U.K. sovereignty. 'Global Britain' became the basis of a 'Eurosceptic twist' on Britain's global ambition, of which the EU was framed as a hindrance (Daddow, 2019).

There is some significance between participating in intra-European credit mobility and holding positive views of the EU, albeit with an argument that those aspiring to partake in these experiences already think about Europe more positively (Öz & Praag, 2022; Wilson, 2011). Therefore, through coupling Euroscepticism, Brexit itself, and a drive for a more 'Global' Britain, some of the ideological drivers supporting the Erasmus withdrawal are evident. This geopolitical decision to reduce experiences that spur pro-European sentiment is essentially a prerequisite for the introduction of the British-born Turing Scheme. However, as the previous section shows, there were many calls for continued engagement with Erasmus. Nicolas Trench, a Crossbench Member of the HL, argued for continued engagement with Erasmus for multiple reasons, including academic benefits and:

sport, apprenticeships, schools and even budding entrepreneurs—and, significantly perhaps, for the intercultural skills that all study, work and travel abroad at their best develop. (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 30 April 2018, Vol. 790, Col. 1956)

Due the wide scope and accepted benefits of ISM, Erasmus+ was not exclusively viewed in ideological senses, rather a utilitarian process that granted students opportunities to garner greater employment outcomes, an argument widely accepted in literature (Courtois, 2017; Deakin, 2013; Jacobone & Moro, 2015; Waters & Brooks, 2011). Similarly, the concept of forging new global collaborations was not unanimous, with further arguments supporting the European dimension of HE and research. Robert Winston, a Labour member of the HL argued:

we are still culturally and scientifically closer to Europe than to any other national bloc. Erasmus nurtured this and we must replace it with bilateral and reciprocal collaboration. Currently it seems very unlikely that

Turing will do this. (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 8 January 2021, Vol. 809, Col. 386)

He emphasises European assimilation and culture, arguing that British HEIs are culturally and scientifically more 'European' than 'global', or 'American', illustrating that there is a cultural dimension supporting Erasmus participation to foster a close future relationship with Europe for the benefit of U.K. HE. Despite a seeming acceptance that Erasmus+ is no longer possible, suggestions of how Turing could reflect this sharing of science is offered through a recognition that this is particularly strong across Europe, and attributes to the success of British HE (James, 2021; Zotti, 2021). Overall, this concept of ideological decision-making emphasises the central nature of education provision in meeting states' wider political objectives. Geopolitical friction between the United Kingdom and EU has led to a growing reluctance for the United Kingdom to participate in an array of European activities, rather engaging in a form of nation-building which reframes the state into a more global success while constructing the EU as a bureaucratic hindrance. In this sense, the geopolitical rationale for the Turing scheme is clear, it would sever ties with EU integration programmes, and enhance the global spatiality of international credit mobility to build global partnerships and extend the United Kingdom's soft power.

4.3 | Turing: Early iterations

Irrespective of the withdrawal from the next iteration of Erasmus+, previous discussion identified an almost unanimous consensus within the Houses of Parliament regarding the necessity of government intervention to enable ISM. As a result of agreement surrounding the utilitarian purpose of study abroad, David Davies, Conservative MP for Monmouth, offered the following reassurance:

whatever the future of Erasmus, I and my colleagues are determined to enable young people to be able to travel and study not just in the European Union (*Hansard*, 8 July 2020, Vol. 678, Col. 960).

Many countries endorse ISM through policy and funding programmes (Wang et al., 2020). Throughout the data set, the importance of ISM for students was a core issue when discussing future education policy. It was argued in 2018 by one Crossbench Member of the HL that:

Consideration for the young people of this country should be a major—perhaps even, it could be argued, the major—consideration of the negotiations, because young people are the future of the country. (Nicolas Trench, *Hansard*, HL Deb, 30 April 2018, Vol. 790, Col. 1956).

This illustrates the construction of students as future leaders, argued as a fundamental end of elite HEIs (Marginson, 2013), and

notes the importance of ensuring they gain international experiences. The benefits of ISM are widely accepted (King et al., 2010), and emphasised throughout the debates, and provide the rationale to initially aim to participate in Erasmus, and then later offer the Turing Scheme as an alternative contingency. Sir Gavin Williamson, Conservative MP for South Staffordshire (then Secretary of State for Education), reiterated this importance in 2020:

We do truly understand the value that such exchange programmes bring all students right across the United Kingdom, but to ensure that we are able to continue to offer that we will also develop our own alternative arrangements (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 14 January 2020, Vol. 669, Col. 912)

Preparing to replace Erasmus through a domestic scheme reflects the necessity of ISM as the state becomes more involved through its spending roles and power (Newman, 2021). Social class plays an enduring role in mobility. Therefore, programmes which may enable social mobility and widen access, so that all students have this opportunity (Finn & Darmody, 2017), are in-keeping with wider endeavours of 'levelling up'.

Throughout the negotiations, due to complex and differential geopolitical considerations, it became apparent that the UK was unable to strike agreement with the EU on continued Erasmus participation. Stephen Parkinson, a Conservative Member of the House of Lords, offered some evaluation of negotiations and the new Turing Scheme:

Unfortunately, the ideas that we advanced in the spirit of compromise to try to reach a deal that was good value for money fell on deaf ears. The Government see the Turing scheme as bigger, broader and global in outlook, allowing students to avail themselves of opportunities beyond 27 other countries. (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 5 January 2021, Vol. 809, Col. 12)

The Turing Scheme is positioned as a replacement for Erasmus, marketed as 'better' through its global scale, aligned with the ideological goal of embedding the concept of 'Global Britain'. The Turing Scheme was, therefore, positioned as offering students more choice in contrast to the limited geography of Erasmus.

Positive discourse surrounding the scheme has been debated, with the programme's development timeline questioned. It has been regarded as a last-minute plan, as reflected by Alyn Smith, SNP³ MP for Stirling, when he questioned the last-minute and rushed nature of Turing, and how this compared poorly with its predecessor:

The Turing Scheme that has been suddenly created on the back of an envelope to replace Erasmus is a pale shadow of those real rights. (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 11 January 2021, Vol. 697, Col. 81)

Therefore, some MPs constructed Turing as a skeleton of Erasmus which offers fewer opportunities and utilitarian benefits. This concept is part of wider post-Brexit policymaking that aims to reduce socio-spatial inequalities through restoring national economic growth (Hudson, 2022). The Turing Scheme is purported to enable 'levelling up' (Turing Scheme, 2023a) through widening access to these beneficial periods of study abroad. However, this does not acknowledge the wider scope that Erasmus+ offered. This questions pledges of contingency planning and constructs Turing as an inadequate scheme that limits student opportunities and does not aptly meet goals of 'levelling up'. Alec Broers, a former Crossbench Member of the HL, shares this disappointment and elaborates on how the scheme could be improved to ensure maximum benefit for future U.K. students:

the Turing scheme as presently proposed will not be an adequate replacement. If our advancement of these crucial technologies is to succeed, the Turing scheme will have to be either expanded to include two-way exchange and this broader group of people or completed by other schemes that do this (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 8 January 2021, Vol. 809, Col. 385).

The development of the Turing Scheme was, therefore, shrouded in concerns surrounding the speed at which the scheme was conceived, and whether it did offer enhanced opportunities for U.K. students. The temporality of the scheme's development is important to reflect on. Initial concerns about this arose in 2016 and were resolved over 4 years later. This identifies a low prioritisation of study abroad, with decisions made during last-minute negotiations. The long negotiations also identify the complex and differential geopolitical factions between United Kingdom and EU negotiators, which in the case of ISM seemed unable to reach a compromise. Significant debate was given to the value and benefit of Turing, while also reflecting on its wider implications and comparing this to Erasmus+, argued by many as a scheme with wider benefits and scope, despite its limited geography. Therefore, framing the purpose of ISM schemes in more utilitarian terms points to Erasmus+ having a more favourable impact, despite its more geopolitically unwelcome underpinnings for the U.K. government post-Brexit.

5 | CONCLUSION

When the Secretary of State opened the debate, he spoke about the importance of Erasmus, but does my Hon. Friend find the Government's warm words about Erasmus bizarre, given that they voted against the amendment to the Brexit legislation last week that would have committed them to working with Erasmus? (*Hansard*, HC Deb, 14 January 2020, Vol. 669, Col. 924)

³The SNP (Scottish National Party) is left-wing and currently the largest party in Scotland.

This final quotation from David Linden, SNP MP for Glasgow East, summarises the complex path that ISM has taken throughout the Brexit negotiations. There was, for the most part, strong support for continued participation in the Erasmus scheme, with concerns surrounding what opportunities an alternative domestic scheme may provide in terms of quality (Brooks & Waters, 2023). Despite this support, enshrining the goal of negotiating and guaranteeing continued participation as a third party in the Withdrawal Agreement was not agreed. This lack of concern for offering further guarantees is argued to reflect a political indifference or low prioritisation of credit mobility. The lack of contingency noted in Owen and Durrant (2019) supports this, that despite credit-mobility schemes being of importance to meet utilitarian and geopolitical ends, it was not a key priority that the U.K. government had an urgent focus on negotiating, with other issues appearing to take precedence. Consequently, uncertainty ensued as negotiations continued, with the final decision of withdrawing and introducing Turing in 2021, following guarantees of existing Erasmus+ exchanges lasting until this point.

This paper identifies some of the contested conceptualisations of how the Turing Scheme came to exist, identifying numerous rationales that stem from geopolitical, political, economic and utilitarian perspectives, the uncertainty of how study abroad would be enabled, and of what future schemes may involve. The Turing Scheme was first positioned as a contingency for a no-deal Brexit, then, as an option if the next manifestation of Erasmus did not sit well with U.K. decision-makers. The adoption of the Turing Scheme presents several key geopolitical considerations, that the spatiality of student mobility flows are subject to change for the United Kingdom as the scope of a key mobility scheme has a global outlook, in-keeping with the United Kingdom's geopolitical goals, and how the place of the United Kingdom has been reconstructed through attempts to re-enter the global arena after decades, arguably constrained within the EU (Daddow, 2013).

Further, this paper also provides insight into wider postreferendum decision-making, evaluating how governments navigate uncertain landscapes and negotiate their futures (Allen, 2018). Caiani and Conti (2014) note the strong negative attitude of right-wing radical parties toward European integration. These parties have, in recent years, been more successful in European elections, with a growing Eurosceptical rhetoric and sentiment among voters (Caiani & Conti, 2014). Martill and Staiger (2018) note arguments that Brexit is representative of a broad general dissatisfaction with European politics across the continent, basing this in arguments of economic, geopolitical and democratic concerns. Therefore, if Brexit is foreboding of the European Union's future, it is important to understand the implications of this process on all societal aspects that might be subject to renegotiation. This paper sheds light onto how the U.K. government made decisions during this period of political upheaval, exemplifying the multiple arguments presented in support, opposition or indifference to Erasmus+ participation. The widespread acceptance of the necessity of credit-mobility schemes reiterates the central importance of ISM to society, HEIs, and students, with this paper identifying the multifaceted ways in which this is the case, namely employability and personal development. Despite the importance of ISM being reiterated by

this paper, it also notes the disconnect between how policy constructs students, and how the central aim of HE policy can be impacted by 'big-picture geopolitics' to varying degrees (Brooks & Abrahams, 2020). This paper identifies how ISM is experiencing a period of post-Brexit adjustment, explaining how geopolitical considerations can shape policy and the spatiality of mobility flows to meet ideological goals. These have their basis in ideological and nation-building concerns, through attempts to sever ties with the EU. Further, the concern surrounding what the next manifestation of Erasmus might look like became entrenched within geopolitical concerns of the United Kingdom's decision-making power within the scheme as a third-party participant.

Overall, this paper provides conceptualisations of the impact of geopolitical change, political goals, economic considerations, and the utilitarian needs of students, and how these interact and provide clarity and opportunity for ISM following large-scale political changes. This will fuel future research to evaluate further the impact of these ideological considerations and to assess how mobilities change in the aftermath of the adoption of the Turing Scheme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors thank Sara McDowell for feedback and suggestions on drafts of this paper. We would also like to thank the editors and anonymous peer reviewers for their insightful comments and input during the development of this paper. We would also like to thank the DfE for Odhran's funded PhD studentship which has enabled this research to be undertaken.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in Hansard at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/>. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: Hansard, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/>.

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How to cite this article: Fox, O., Beech, S. E. (2023). International student mobility options following Brexit: An analysis of the genesis of Britain's Turing Scheme. *Population, Space and Place*, e2727. <https://doi.org/10.1002/psp.2727>