

Guidance on Studying Abroad

1. Introduction

Students who study abroad as part of their University experience are on one of two different models, either an Erasmus Exchange, or an International Exchange. Exchange is a fee neutral programme where an agreement is set up between partner institutions in different countries to allow their students to study at that partner institution as part of their degree. The aim is to have reciprocity at both institutions. These students come to us for one or two semesters and are non-award students.

2. Erasmus+ Exchanges

2.1 What is Erasmus+?

The Erasmus+ scheme is an Exchange programme run by the European Union (EU). It aims to promote mobility within the EU through activities in education, training, youth and sport across all sectors of lifelong learning, including Higher Education, Further Education, adult education, schools and youth activities.

Key Action 1 of the Erasmus+ programme is the section relating to individual staff/student mobility in Higher Education covered by bilateral agreements. In the UK, the Erasmus+ scheme is co-ordinated by the British Council and will run for the period 2014-2020.

- EU Erasmus website <http://ec.europa.eu/education>
- UK National Agency Erasmus website <https://erasmusplus.org.uk/>

2.2 Which countries can participate?

Members of the EU or EEA and Turkey excluding Switzerland.

2.3 What activities are included under Erasmus?

- Student Mobility – study placements between 3 and 12 months; work placements between 2 and 12 months; language assistantships for a minimum of 7 months
- Teacher Mobility – teaching visits for a minimum of 8 hours;
- Staff Training – training for academic and non-academic staff at a partner university or an enterprise for a minimum of 2 days
- Other activities: including preparatory and monitoring visits, promotional events and funding to support a wide range of activities

2.4 How are new Erasmus+ links set up and approved?

The following procedure applies to the set up and approval of new Erasmus+ links

1. Contact the International Office for details of the New Link procedure and an application form.
2. Discuss the proposed exchange agreement with the partner institution.
3. It is good practice to undertake a preparatory visit to the partner – you can apply to the International Office for funding for this.
4. Complete the New Link application form, and gain academic unit approval with sign off from the Head of Academic Unit.
5. Send the completed application to the International Office who will raise a bilateral agreement. New link applications should be submitted to the International Office between 1 September and 31 May. Any applications received outside these dates will only be processed if urgent.
6. The Study Abroad & Exchange Manager will sign the agreement on behalf of the University, and then send it to the partner for their signature.
7. All Erasmus+ agreements are notified to Academic Quality and Standards Committee on an annual basis.
8. When the signed agreement is returned, the International Office will send a copy to you and add it to the Blackboard site. Erasmus+ activities can now take place.

2.5 How do I manage existing Erasmus+ links?

Each Erasmus+ link is based on a subject-specific bilateral agreement that is signed off by the Study Abroad and Exchange Manager in the International Office and the partner institution. You should have up to date copies of all the bilateral agreements for your Erasmus links which will tell you the details of student and staff exchanges e.g. number of places, study level, length, and subject area.

Erasmus+ agreements have been renewed for 2014-2017. They are reviewed by the Faculty/academic unit each summer. Erasmus+ agreements will next be renewed in 2016 in time for the 2017-2020 academic years.

If you receive a bilateral agreement directly from a proposed partner, please forward it to the International Office, as only the Study Abroad & Exchange Manager should sign Erasmus agreements.

All Erasmus Agreements are available in the Blackboard 'Erasmus Incoming Applications (Erasmus Panel)'. Request to be added to this to erasmus@soton.ac.uk if you do not have access to it.

3 International Exchange

3.1 What is an International Exchange?

Any Exchange activity outside the European Union or European Economic Area is considered to be an International Exchange (including Switzerland)

3.2 What activities are included under an International Exchange?

Study placements with semester/full year duration.

3.3 How do I manage existing International links?

Each International Agreement can be:-

- Academic Unit specific
- Multiple academic units
- Faculty wide
- Multiple faculties
- University wide

Copies of agreements are held in the International Office and are normally for a period of 5 years.

3.4 How do I set up a new International link?

Should you wish to set up a new International Agreement, contact the Regional Marketing Manager for that country in the International Office in the first instance. This will determine the validity and appropriateness of a proposed agreement.

4 Promoting opportunities to study abroad to University of Southampton students

It is each Faculty / academic unit's responsibility to promote Exchanges to students as is most appropriate, for example by giving presentations or asking returning Exchange students or current incoming students to talk about their experiences. The Study Abroad and Exchange Team also holds promotional events and information meetings during the year. There are opportunities available in both English and other languages.

Except for bilateral exchanges, the names and email address of students who are identified as suitable to take part in an opportunity to study abroad should be notified to the International Office (erasmus@soton.ac.uk for European Exchanges and Studyabroad@soton.ac.uk for International Exchanges) by 28th March of the academic year prior to the exchange year.

For bilateral exchanges where the quota is contained within a single academic unit, academic units should notify the host university directly. Where an exchange quota is shared with other disciplines, or for institutional agreements, please contact the Study Abroad and Exchange Team for further advice.

5 Supporting students prior to studying abroad

Before students go commence a period of studying abroad, they should be thoroughly briefed about their time away, in accordance with the University's [Policy on Studying Abroad](#). Faculties and Academic Units may do additional briefings to those provided by the University's International Office.

6 Pre-departure information from the International Office

Before students leave the University of Southampton, they will be required to attend an International Office pre-departure information session. This will include the various administration a student is required to undertake, insurance information, advice on obtaining a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC), tips on managing money, and information about transitioning back to University after the time abroad.

7 Blackboard Site

The University's Exchange and Study Abroad office runs a Blackboard site for each year's students embarking on outgoing studying or working abroad activity. Once students have been identified as potential outgoing students, they will be added to this site. This contains pre-departure information, forms relating to Erasmus Mundus, and, for staff, signed copies of Erasmus+ Agreements.

8 Insurance

It is now a requirement that before a student goes on a placement they take out personal travel insurance and give a summary of the policy to the Exchange Coordinator for the Academic Unit. Proof of purchase also needs to be uploaded by the student to the Exchange and Study Abroad Blackboard site.

Information for students about Insurance is available on the [Finance Intranet](#)

9 Learning Agreements and Assessment

Before students start on their period of studying abroad, they should confirm with their Personal Academic Tutor, or Exchange Co-ordinator, what they should be studying. The Faculty or Academic Unit should confirm with the student how marks from the period of study abroad will be treated and converted back to the student's record of assessment held by the University of Southampton (see the University's [Translation of Marks Policy](#)). Students are required to sign a Learning Agreement, and have it countersigned by the student's Personal Academic Tutor or the Exchange Coordinator before they start their placement, which they can download from the relevant Blackboard site for Exchange and Study Abroad.

10 Health and Safety briefing

The International Office includes information in its Health and Safety briefing. Details are also available on the [Health and Safety Website](#):

11 Supporting students studying abroad

11.1 Emergencies

All students should be given information about what to do in an emergency. Students who face an emergency situation in the course of their study may be covered by their host institution's emergency protocols. However, it is important that students make contact with the University as soon as possible in an emergency situation, particularly if it is likely to have long term impact on the exchange experience. Students should be encouraged to keep their student card with them, as it contains contact information for the University on the reverse.

11.2 Staying in contact

Regular contact is recommended throughout the time a student is studying abroad. A minimum expectation is that students should be contacted at least once each semester by their Personal Academic Tutor during their time away. The best practice is to ensure that the student receives a visit during their period study abroad, supported by regular email, telephone or skype conversations. Contact with students can take the form of

- Regular email communication
- Planned skype conversations
- Communication with their Personal Academic Tutor
- Blackboard sites for specific modules (for example, the Year Abroad Research Project for students of Modern Languages).

Example

In the Faculty of Humanities, there is a minimum expectation that Personal Academic Tutors, the Project Supervisors, and the Student Office will be in contact with students throughout their time abroad. Many students in European countries will be visited once during their time abroad.

11.3 Record Keeping

The Faculty is responsible for maintaining records of students who are studying away from the University. In particular, information should be maintained on

- Student contact details at their host institution
- The name and address of the student's host institution
- The expected start and end date of the student's time at their host institution
- Contact details for a key contact at the host institution.

Some of this information may also be maintained by the International Office.

It is important that records are accessible by more than one person.

11.4 Problems and Emergencies

In an emergency, students should be encouraged to contact local emergency services as appropriate. Students should, where possible, make contact with their insurers (students have the opportunity to take out insurance through the University's insurers) before receiving medical treatment in their country of study. Students may need to be supported by their Personal Academic Tutors and other staff and may, at times, be advised to return home.

Example

Whilst studying abroad, a student developed a mental health issue which was exacerbated by studying abroad. The student's academic unit kept in regular contact with the student, and when it was clear the student would not be able to make a quick recovery, the student was advised to return home as soon as possible.

12. Assessment and Achievement of Learning Opportunities – Studying Abroad

12.1 Credit

At the programme design stage, care should be taken to articulate the credit contribution of a period of studying abroad.

Existing practice in the University include the following models

- A period of studying abroad may be a mandatory part of the programme, and completion meets a learning objective, but the period of studying abroad itself does not carry a credit value
- Students need to complete a certain number of ECTS modules at their host institution. Grades obtained from these modules are translated back into the University of Southampton grading structure (see the Translation of Marks policy) and contribute to the final degree classification.

- A period of studying abroad is a mandatory part of the programme, but credit is obtained from a project completed either during or after the period of study, mapped against FHEQ levels, and assessed by the University of Southampton. This credit contributes to the degree classification.
- Combinations of the above models

Where studying abroad is a required part of a programme, either in contributing credit and/or meeting a learning outcome, care should be taken to ensure that it meets existing programme regulations, or that an appropriate application for an exemption from University's progression regulations are made to the University's Academic Quality and Standards Committee.

Erasmus agreements insist on a learning agreement completed prior to the beginning of a period of research. This model is now used for international exchanges arranged by the International Office. The learning agreements are uploaded to the relevant Blackboard site for students studying abroad.

12.2 Learning Outcomes

When a period of studying abroad contributes toward learning outcomes of a programme, the learning outcomes must be clearly articulated in accordance to the University's usual standards for [programme structure and design](#).

12.3 Assessment

When students complete assessment at a host institution which is then converted or translated into University of Southampton marks and contributes to the final degree classification, the University of Southampton is effectively delegating responsibility for assessment of its awards to another institution. In these cases, it is particularly important that background checks on the suitability of the host institution and its academic quality and standards are done and repeated on a regular basis. It is also important that students receive appropriate guidance from their contacts at the University of Southampton on curriculum choice. Reference should be made to the [University's Translation of Marks Policy](#).

12.4 Regulations

If separate regulations apply to a period of studying abroad, these should be clearly stated in programme regulations within the [University Calendar](#).

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