

UUKi COVID-19: Impact on student mobility for 2020-21 survey summary

Universities UK International (UUKi) is providing information and resources for universities on the impact of Covid-19 on international activity. This includes answers to [frequently asked questions](#) and [data collected from a range of partners, alongside further research from the UUKi team](#) on a range of topics, including student sentiment, student search behaviour, online learning and TNE, the global response to the pandemic, and student mobility.

From 9-29 April 2020, UUKi circulated a survey to members of [UUKi's Outward Student Mobility Network](#). The findings represent a snapshot at a specific moment in time of discussions on, and anticipated practice in, student mobility for summer 2020 and academic year 2020-21. Readers should be aware that discussions on academic year 2020-21 will likely move on quickly, given the fast-moving nature of events and the timelines for decisions that institutions are working towards. The survey findings aim to inform discussions within the sector about best practice in responding to the outbreak, approaches to supporting students, and the alternative arrangements that could be put in place should the lockdown arrangements continue and international travel be impacted in the medium to long term.

The survey received 53 responses from 52 participating universities, including responses from 39 universities in England, ten universities in Scotland, and three universities in Wales. Where a percentage is given, this relates to the percentage of respondents to the survey. Universities were able to select multiple options to each question e.g. "cancelled some mobility" and "going ahead as planned".

Key findings

Approach to decision making and timescales

- Most respondents (62%) are considering a variety of different models for next academic year depending on several factors including start dates, partner cancellation, degree structure, mandatory mobility, and capacity in home modules. A blanket decision was in place or being considered at 15% of universities.
- For the majority of respondents, decisions for mobility scheduled for Autumn 2020 need to be taken before end of June 2020. For mobility starting in Semester 2 there is a slightly longer deadline on decision making, with decisions being made in the Autumn term.

Status of mobility programmes

- The survey found that the majority of respondents had cancelled some (25%) or all (46%) of their Summer 2020 mobility programmes. Some respondents had postponed mobility until next summer (15%) or were switching to virtual mobility options (15%).
- For Semester 1 (Autumn 2020) programmes the majority of respondents are going ahead as planned (42%) or the decision is on hold pending progress of the outbreak (36%). 34% of respondents are actively discussing the cancellation or postponement of programmes starting in Semester 1. A small number of respondents have cancelled programmes or delayed until Semester 2.

- This pattern held for Academic Year 2020-21 programmes with 42% of respondents planning for programmes to go ahead as scheduled and 31% of respondents putting the decision on hold pending progress of the outbreak. The cancellation or postponement of mobility programmes is actively being discussed by 31% of respondents, including half of those universities that are planning to go ahead with programmes.
- The majority of respondents (69%) were planning on continuing as planned with Semester 2 (Spring 2021) programmes. For some universities the decision was on hold pending the progress of the outbreak or cancellations and postponements were being discussed.

Student communications

- Universities have been working hard to ensure that students are kept informed on the status of and changes to their mobility opportunities. 67% of respondents have informed students that mobility is going ahead unless they are told otherwise and advised that they should continue with their application process. 50% of respondents have explicitly advised students not to make any financial commitments at this time. Universities are also delivering online sessions and webinars for students and providing website FAQs to keep students informed.

Partner cancellations and communications

- 60% of respondents reported partner cancellations as follows: 14 universities had less than 5% of partners cancel, 11 universities had between 6% and 10% of partners cancel and. Six universities had between 11% and 20% of partners cancel. Universities noted that they expect these numbers to increase in the coming weeks. Australia, the United States, Singapore, and Canada were the main countries reported where partners had cancelled programmes.
- 31% of respondents reported that they were in discussion with partners on contingency planning, while 29% of respondents reported that they had not yet contacted partners.

Contingency measures

- 77% of respondents were considering postponing mobility to the second semester. 63% of respondents were asking students to enrol on UK modules as a back-up, 62% of respondents are considering blended mobility by starting programmes online, and 62% of respondents are considering postponing mobility to next academic year.
- Universities reported a number of challenges to the proposed contingency measures which included staff resource and capacity, funding and pressure on budgets to introduce alternative arrangements, the balance of students on programmes in the UK and abroad, the complexity of solutions proposed, and the continued uncertainty around the impact and duration of the Covid-19 outbreak.

Funding

- 42% of respondents reported challenges related to funding for students undertaking mobility next academic year, with a lack of clarity on financing – the student finance package, the fee limits and institutional allocations and the Erasmus+ grant - making it difficult to advise students. Additionally, universities suggested challenges were raised by the potential for increased costs in combination with depleted personal finances for students, as well as funding challenges and new visa costs related to Brexit.



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- 52% of respondents reported establishing a funding pot or grant to support students or staff following the Covid-19 outbreak. Funding provided included general Covid-19 support pots, mobility specific pots, crisis funding, waiving fees and redistributing allocated funding.