

Erasmus+ 2028–34: Universities UK International position paper

June 2026

Introduction

Universities UK International (UUKi) is part of Universities UK, representing 142 UK member universities and supporting the internationalisation of UK higher education, including research collaboration, transnational education and global mobility.

Erasmus+ has been hugely important to European education, [changing the lives of more than 16 million people over four decades](#) and providing learning mobility and cooperation opportunities at a scale that no single country can replicate alone. The United Kingdom has a long history of participation in Erasmus+.

[UUKi warmly welcomed the agreement for the UK to reassociate in 2027](#), and we support the strengthened emphasis on inclusion, skills, democratic participation and international cooperation in the [proposed Erasmus+ 2028–34 Regulation](#).

We are committed to rebuilding UK participation in Erasmus+ and as part of this we aim to contribute constructively to shaping the 2028–34 successor programme. Our recommendations are focused on deepening the programme’s international reach, strengthening inclusion for learners of all backgrounds, and maintaining the flexibility that allows diverse higher education systems across Europe and beyond to participate equitably.

Drawing on evidence from the UK higher education sector, including UUKi research and member universities’ direct experience of delivering mobility activity, this paper sets out areas where amendments or clarifications to the European Commission’s Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) proposal for Erasmus+ could further support the Regulation’s objectives around inclusion, accessibility and global engagement.

Our recommendations

Our key recommendations for the 2028–34 programme are:

1. **greater flexibility on short-term and non-credit-bearing mobility**, to reduce structural barriers to participation and better realise the programme's inclusion ambitions across diverse higher education systems
2. **increased ambition for international mobility beyond Europe and programme countries**, including a higher indicative cap under Key Action (KA) 131, to strengthen the programme's global reach and reflect the stronger international framing of the proposed Regulation
3. **clarity on the funding and governance of the Scholarships for Excellence proposal**, to ensure it complements rather than creates pressure on core Erasmus+ mobility and cooperation funding
4. **ringfenced funding for UK institutions participating in European Universities alliances** that were unable to benefit from the most recent funding calls due to the timing of UK association, alongside continued strong funding commitments for alliances within the 2028–34 programme
5. **retention of flexible partial association provisions for all third countries**, with conditions applied as proportionate case-by-case safeguards rather than categorical exclusions based on prior association history

Recommendation 1: Greater flexibility on short-term and non-credit-bearing mobility

To maximise the accessibility and uptake of Erasmus+, UK universities recommend greater flexibility for non-credit-bearing, short-term mobility within the 'Learning Opportunities for All' pillar of the successor programme.

This should include:

- permitting non-credit-bearing approaches within both Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and other short-term mobility formats currently delivered under KA1
- promoting more flexible approaches to learning recognition appropriate to different higher education systems and programme structures

The proposed Regulation places strong emphasis on inclusion, flexibility, lifelong learning, and the recognition of skills and competences. It also recognises Europass as a tool for recognising skills, competences and qualifications within the programme's wider policy support framework.

Recitals 33 and 34 emphasise widening access to mobility and learning experiences for people with fewer opportunities, while Chapter III and Article 8 establish a duty on the Commission, Member States and associated countries to ensure inclusive access across programme activities.

Current challenge

Longer-term, credit-bearing mobility remains central to the Erasmus+ experience and to achieve many of the programme's wider objectives around skills development, intercultural learning and European identity. UUKi strongly supports its continuation and development within the successor programme. However, to widen access and participation, the programme should look to adopt greater flexibility alongside this.

The current Erasmus+ programme allows short-term, credit-bearing mobility formats, including Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and other forms of short-term blended mobility under KA131. These represent a step forward in supporting more flexible and inclusive mobility participation.

However, the proposed Regulation does not explicitly recognise and address formal credit-recognition requirements as a structural barrier to inclusion.

In some systems, including the UK, embedding short-term mobility into formal credit awarding structures can require substantial curriculum redesign and is not feasible across all academic disciplines and teaching models. As a result, compulsory credit-bearing requirements hinder the full utilisation and development of short-term mobility opportunities within Erasmus+. In turn, this can exclude those learners who most benefit from short-term, flexible mobility opportunities including learners with family and caring responsibilities, disabilities, financial barriers, employment commitments, or those studying within less flexible degree programme structures.

The UK Turing Scheme has been able to achieve extraordinarily high rates of participation of disadvantaged learners by being flexible by design and allowing shorter mobility formats without compulsory credit-bearing requirements: 55% of all higher education participants in the [2024–25 programme](#) were classified as disadvantaged. The [Erasmus+ interim evaluation](#) reported that participants with fewer opportunities represented around 15% of programme participants in 2023.

Member States operate within highly diverse higher education systems and qualification structures. Greater flexibility in recognition approaches would better support equitable participation across different national contexts. Where short-term mobility can be a useful 'stepping stone' into longer, credit-bearing mobility, this also creates an important route into longer mobility for disadvantaged learners.

Without greater flexibility around non-credit-bearing short-term mobility and broader recognition approaches, there is a risk that the programme's inclusion ambitions cannot be realised consistently across all learner groups and participating countries.

Proposed amendment

We propose continued recognition of credit-bearing mobility within Erasmus+, while encouraging greater flexibility in how learning outcomes and mobility experiences are recognised across different national systems.

The future programme could support a range of recognition approaches appropriate to different institutional and national contexts, including where formal credit recognition may not be feasible for short mobility formats, including within blended intensive programmes and other short-term formats delivered under KA1.

While credit-bearing mobility should remain a key and valued pathway within Erasmus+, positioning it as the default for short-term mobility risks reinforcing structural inequalities between learners and systems with differing levels of curriculum flexibility.

Supporting a wider range of recognition approaches would reduce structural barriers to participation, support shorter and more flexible mobility formats, strengthen inclusion objectives, and reflect the diversity of higher education systems across Europe.

Recommendation 2: Increased ambition for international mobility beyond Europe and Programme Countries

To strengthen the global relevance and impact of Erasmus+, UK universities recommend greater ambition for global mobility beyond Europe and Erasmus+ programme countries within the 'Learning Opportunities for All' pillar of the successor programme.

Current challenge

The 20% cap on mobility to non-programme countries within the current programme's KA131 limits mobility outside Europe and Erasmus+ programme countries, a component of global impact that has been a key strength of the UK Turing Scheme.

The proposed Regulation (recitals 15 and 16) adopts a substantially stronger international framing, including explicit reference to global co-operation, talent attraction and strategic external engagement. A clearer commitment to increase mobility beyond the EU and programme countries will better support these ambitions. It will also increase the global relevance of the Erasmus+ programme and make it more outward facing at a time of rising geopolitical tensions and growing multipolarity. For Europe's higher education sector, it can strengthen global partnerships and support institutional diversification strategies.

Proposed amendment

Increasing the cap on international mobility beyond the 20% limit under KA131 would strengthen the programme's global mobility outside Europe and better reflect the stronger international framing set out in [recitals 15 and 16 of the Commission's proposed Regulation](#), while maintaining global eligibility for third-country destinations.

Additionally, in streamlining KA171 and KA131 actions under this pillar, we would also want to ensure that funding for international non-EU mobility becomes less – not more – complicated to administer, and enables greater assurance and continuity of funding for mobility partnerships over multi-year periods.

Recommendation 3: Clarity on the Scholarships for Excellence proposal including funding sources

To ensure the successor programme's investment in excellence and global attractiveness delivers maximum impact without compromising its core mission, greater clarity is needed regarding the proposed Scholarships for Excellence initiative, including the source of funding and relationship with existing EU flagship programmes.

Current challenge

The proposed Regulation introduces a Scholarships for Excellence scheme but does not identify how these scholarships will be funded or how they will interact with existing Erasmus+ and wider higher education funding structures.

At the same time, the proposed successor programme significantly expands expectations on Erasmus+ to support:

- inclusion and widening participation
- mobility and co-operation
- competitiveness and skills
- global engagement and strategic partnerships

Erasmus+ funding is already under significant pressure across mobility and cooperation actions, particularly with the integration of additional programme priorities and activities. Without greater clarity, there is a risk that Scholarships for Excellence could reduce funding available for existing Erasmus+ mobility and cooperation activity or create additional pressure on wider higher education and research funding streams.

There is also a potential strategic and reputational risk in expanding Erasmus+ into additional flagship scholarship activity where this may dilute the programme's established role as Europe's flagship programme for learning mobility and institutional cooperation.

Proposed amendment

The successor programme should provide greater clarity on the funding source, governance and intended interaction between Scholarships for Excellence and existing EU flagship programmes.

Additionally, we propose that any such initiative should:

- avoid reducing funding for core Erasmus+ mobility and cooperation actions
- avoid creating additional pressure on wider higher education and research funding streams
- complement rather than duplicate existing Erasmus+ and Framework Programme 10 objectives
- preserve Erasmus+ as the EU's flagship programme for learning mobility and educational cooperation

Erasmus+ funding should remain prioritised for mobility, student exchange and institutional cooperation that supports international learning and collaboration across Europe and beyond.

Recommendation 4: Continuity of funding for participation across European Universities alliances cycles

The European Universities alliances initiative is strategically important within Erasmus+, supporting long-term institutional cooperation, mobility innovation, Blended Intensive Programme development, transnational curriculum collaboration, joint programme delivery and wider KA2 collaboration. The strategic value of the alliances is demonstrated by continued UK participation without funding eligibility where there was a strategic case to do so. With the UK now reassociating, there is appetite to expand participation further, but this requires equitable access to funds from the first year of association.

We seek ringfenced funding in 2027 for UK institutions participating in European Universities alliances and unable to benefit from the most recent funding calls due to timing of UK association, alongside continued funding commitments for alliances within the 2028–34 programme period.

Current challenge

A structural misalignment exists between the UK's 2027 association date and the funding cycles of alliances established under early calls. Alliances apply for top-up funding in years tied to their founding call, making applications outside those cycles very difficult. Alliances from Call 1 (2019) applied for top-up in early 2026 (before UK association). Seven UK universities from Call 1 are at risk of being unable to access any alliance funding until 2028

or later, depending on how European Universities alliance funding will be structured in the next programme, and it will deter those interested in establishing an alliance.

A further barrier exists for UK universities seeking to join existing alliances as new full partners. Under current funding structures, adding a new partner requires the existing consortium to split its funding allocation across more institutions, reducing the share available to existing members. This creates a disincentive for alliances to welcome new UK partners, regardless of the strategic value they would bring. Ringfenced funding for newly joining UK partners would remove this disincentive and create a genuine incentive for alliances to expand their partnerships with UK institutions.

Proposed solution

Funding should be set aside in 2027 for UK universities whose alliance founding date means they would be expected to have used the 2026 funding call. Additionally, ringfenced funding should be made available for UK universities joining existing alliances as new full partners, removing the current disincentive for consortia to expand their membership. This would ensure that no institution is excluded from applying for alliance funding during the period for which the UK is associated and support the continuity of UK-EU alliances into the successor programme.

The successor programme should also maintain strong funding commitments for European Universities alliances within the 2028–34 programme period.

Ensuring access to alliance funding will protect long-term institutional cooperation, strengthen Erasmus+ delivery capacity, maximise the value of existing alliance expertise and infrastructure including to the successor programme, and support deeper participation across all participating countries in BIPs, KA2 projects and wider transnational collaboration.

Recommendation 5: Maintaining flexible partial association provisions for all third countries in line with EU interests

The European Commission draft proposal (Article 13) establishes a flexible framework for third-country participation which distinguishes between third countries associated to the programme and third countries not associated. It allows for association arrangements to be negotiated case by case and, importantly, it does not explicitly define or restrict ‘partial association’ in prescriptive terms leaving significant discretion for the EU to determine modalities of participation in line with EU interests. We welcome this approach.

Current challenge

Our strong preference would be for full association to the successor programme. However, the [Council Presidency's revised text in March 2026](#) introduced new language stipulating that third countries previously fully associated to predecessor Erasmus+ programmes 'should not be considered for partial association' to the 2028–34 programme. This was carried into the [Council of the European Union's partial general approach](#), adopted on 11 May 2026, giving it formal status as the Council's position entering trilogue negotiations. While not naming specific countries, the practical effect of this language is to exclude countries such as the UK from partial association and bears directly on how Article 13 of the Commission's proposal would be applied in practice.

The proposed limitation on partial association risks unduly constraining the flexibility of the Erasmus+ programme's external dimension. The Commission's proposal appropriately preserves a degree of openness in defining association modalities, allowing the EU to pursue arrangements that best serve its strategic, educational and international objectives. Introducing a prescriptive exclusion for countries that have previously participated in Erasmus+ may limit the EU's ability to respond pragmatically to evolving partnership opportunities and risks reducing the overall reach and impact of the programme.

Proposed amendment

The interests of the European Commission, UK and associated countries are best served by proportionate, flexible partial association provisions that allow for arrangements reflecting strategic, educational and international objectives. Where conditions for partial association are specified, these should be applied as proportionate, case-by-case safeguards, rather than as categorical exclusions based on prior association history.

Where additional safeguards are considered necessary, these should instead focus on:

- EU interest and strategic programme objectives
- balance of contributions and benefits
- proportionality and governance arrangements

Maintaining a flexible partial association framework would better support long-term cooperation, future programme adaptability, and broader European higher education collaboration across a wide range of partner countries.