

# Time well spent? Temporal dimensions of study abroad and implications for student experiences and outcomes under the UK Turing Scheme

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## Abstract

This paper reflects on the importance of ‘time spent’ in understanding the international student experience. Short-term mobility programmes (involving stays of between 1 week and 2 months) attracting less privileged students, such as the relatively new Turing Scheme in the United Kingdom, have been hailed as a potential ‘solution’ to the fact that, traditionally, wealthier individuals have been far more likely to engage in study abroad. However, we do not yet know how short-term and longer duration programmes compare in terms of the *value* they confer to students (in relation to their experiences and outcomes). How likely is it that short-term mobility at undergraduate level is as valuable, according to different measures, as mobility lasting 6 months to several years (as with degree mobility)? This paper reviews some of the evidence to date on shorter duration mobility, addressing how value in international study is constructed and conferred and how this relates to ‘time spent’. The paper concludes by arguing that the picture is mixed: although short-term mobility will be beneficial to students, those engaging in longer term exchanges (usually more privileged students) are likely to derive greater benefits.

## KEYWORDS

international higher education, student mobilities, time abroad, Turing Scheme

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## Key insights

### What is the main issue that the paper addresses?

The Turing scheme, introduced in the UK in Autumn 2021 to replace the Erasmus + programme, champions widening participation whilst also supporting shorter term mobility opportunities. This paper reviews the evidence from the academic literature on international student mobility to assess the value that students can generate through shorter term mobility experiences (compared to longer ones).

### What are the main insights that the paper provides?

Evidence suggests that more disadvantaged students are likely to be attracted to shorter duration 'study abroad' placements and so it is important to ascertain the relative value of shorter mobility experiences. The paper reviews the evidence to illustrate the ways in which shorter mobility might compare to longer mobility. It argues that shorter term mobility is also valuable, although less valuable, than longer term study abroad. This has implications for the widening participation agenda.

## INTRODUCTION

'Why and how long one travels serve as the primary marker of legitimacy of transnational students' study abroad experience, thereby evincing their greater distinction....' (Lee, 2020, p. 8)

In June 2021, Universities UK published a report entitled *Short-term mobility, long-term impact: inclusive international opportunities of less than four weeks* (UUK, 2021). The report uses case studies and data comprised of 17 focus groups with 86 students across 14 higher education institutions within the United Kingdom to consider the impacts and benefits of what they term 'short-term mobility programmes'. (They define short-term mobility as a stay abroad lasting between 1 week and 2 months.) It is also concerned with identifying 'models of good practice'. In this report, shorter trips are described as 'more intensive' than longer stays and it also argues that: (a) short study abroad trips are valuable; and (b) less advantaged students are more likely to engage in shorter trips (than they are in longer ones). Consequently, the recent trend in 'short-term mobility' can potentially address equality and diversity agendas within UK higher education at undergraduate level, making study abroad more equitable and diverse.

Academic, policy and media interest in shorter trips has grown in relation to an upward trend in students engaging in shorter duration placements. According to another report (UUK, 2018), 21% of all student mobility in the United Kingdom during 2016–2017 was for 4 weeks or less, compared to 15% for the previous year's cohort. Moreover, they note that 'graduates who participated in short-term mobility programmes had an unemployment rate of 2.3% compared with 4.2% for non-mobile peers' and '86.7% of students who participated in a short-term mobility were in a graduate job 6 months after graduating, compared to 73.2% of non-mobile graduates'. Accordingly, we *could* infer from this that an overall benefit derives to students from participating in shorter term academic exchanges and placements within universities abroad, compared to non-participation. Similar conclusions could be drawn from evidence on study abroad programmes in the United States (e.g., Dwyer, 2004). UUK (2021) also concludes, however, a direct link between these shorter duration trips and widening participation:

'Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are often especially attracted to short-term mobility as, in addition to the financial implications, many are unable to go away for longer due to work or caring commitments. More generally, the fact that many short-term programmes are led by staff from the home university or facilitated by a partner institution abroad makes the visit seem more secure and provides students with a sense of security. Preparation; transparent information about funding options and overall costs; and additional support for those with needs such as disabilities, mental health or childcare are key to engaging students from a broad range of backgrounds.' (p. 86)

Widening participation is a strong element of universities' and related institutions' apparent championing of shorter term mobility programmes, exchanges and experiences. This conversation, within the context of UK higher education institutions (HEIs), has found renewed vigour in relation to the introduction of the Turing Scheme (launched in March 2021). As discussed below, the Turing Scheme has replaced the Erasmus+ programme for UK students and (unlike Erasmus) supports mobility for as short as 4 weeks' duration (reduced to 2 weeks in February 2022 for the rest of the 2021–2022 academic year). One of the main drivers of the Turing Scheme (the UK government claim) is to 'widen participation' in study abroad and—as suggested above—shorter term trips are thought partially to address this (see Brooks, 2012). Ogden et al. (2021) describe the 'unprecedented growth' in short-term academic mobility by students internationally over the past few decades, with notable schemes or initiatives operating in countries and regions including Australia, the United States, throughout Europe and within East Asia (Singapore, Taiwan, Japan and Korea). In the US context, the number of students participating in year-long study abroad programmes has been gradually declining over the past 50 years, compared to those undertaking short-term study abroad (Dwyer, 2004); in Japan, enrolment in what are called 'super-short-term' study abroad opportunities has boomed (Shimmi & Ota, 2018). This conversation around short-term study abroad is being had, albeit in different national contexts.

Back in the United Kingdom, whilst the *success* of shorter term mobility initiatives is being touted, there is no comparison available with outcomes for students who go abroad for a longer duration—for example, for a year (or even for a whole degree). The extant literature on international student mobility, which has burgeoned over the past 15 years, has generally focused on these longer trips—either through credit mobility programmes such as Erasmus (Cairns, 2019; Courtois, 2020) or degree-level mobility (Beech, 2019; Waters, 2006)—and has emphasised the substantial benefits that accrue to individuals (Waters & Brooks, 2021). Of these benefits, increased language proficiency—something that can take months or years to see any significant improvement in—is one of the most frequently cited 'push factors' (Eder et al., 2010). Other outcomes—such as cultural experiences, development of independence, global citizenship, and so on—are far more amorphous and difficult to attribute to 'time spent', specifically. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense—and one explored in this paper—that the quality of these outcomes is likely to improve the longer one spends abroad (up to a point, when diminishing returns may set in). This paper seeks to explore the implications of 'time spent' for the value of students' experiences, drawing on the evidence amassed in the academic literature on the topic of student mobility and study abroad. Methodologically, this paper provides a critical review of a selection of academic literature from within the social sciences, based on an extensive bibliographic search. It begins with a discussion of what we know about participation in more traditional (and longer duration) study abroad. It then turns to consider arguments that study abroad has 'diversified', both in terms of the options available to students and the 'types' of students that are engaging in these new initiatives. The paper then reflects upon the nature of 'value' within study abroad and how this has been conceptualised within academic scholarship. The relationship between value

and 'time spent' is drawn out. Finally, the paper considers the implications of the growth in shorter duration mobility schemes and initiatives (such as Turing) for the generation of value for students and wider concerns with equality and diversity within UK higher education.

## PARTICIPATION IN STUDY ABROAD

There is a longstanding distinction within student mobility policies enacted at tertiary level between 'credit' and 'degree' mobility: the former describing shorter overseas trips *within* a degree programme (usually lasting between one semester and a year) and the latter describing study abroad for the *whole* of a degree (three or four years for undergraduates). However, as noted above, more recently the category of short-term mobility has expanded further to include trips of shorter duration than a single semester (some only 1 week long)—these may or may not provide students with 'credit' towards their degree but are still seen as part of universities' 'study abroad' offerings.

As many academics have documented, including Netz et al. (2020), young, White and wealthy individuals are more likely to engage in study abroad programmes (whether short or 'degree' length) than are less privileged, minority groups (see also Findlay et al., 2012; Waters & Brooks, 2021). There are many obvious and some less evident reasons for this. First, of course, is the sheer financial expense. Often (but not always), the costs of study abroad must be borne by the student themselves and their families. In some countries (such as the United Kingdom), international students can pay up to three times the cost of domestic tuition fees (Tannock, 2013). Even where tuition fees are the same as—or similar to—domestic fees, there are the expenses attached to flights, accommodation, medical insurance and food, which combine to make study abroad a relatively costly option (Brooks & Waters, 2011). Second, students who engage in study abroad often benefit from 'knowledge of the system', whether that concerns an understanding of visa requirements, application demands, overseas university systems or accommodation choices in the host country (Jayadeva, 2020; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). Simon and Ainsworth (2012) explored the reasons why fewer Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) and lower socioeconomic status students engage in study abroad programmes in the United States. After analysing their qualitative data, they describe five 'causes' of this disparity: financial; habitus; social networks; cultural capital; and institutional factors. In terms of financial barriers, in addition to the costs outlined above, they also point out that many students work during the summer months to support their studies, and this is when many study abroad schemes take place, thus excluding those individuals who are, out of necessity, engaged in employment. 'Habitus' (after Bourdieu, 1984) has been shown to be important in the wider literature on student mobility, impacting the likelihood that an individual will undertake study abroad (e.g., Lee, 2021; Xu, 2017). As Simon and Ainsworth (2012) write:

'... high socioeconomic status parents possess the habitus that is most likely to encourage study abroad. These families are more likely to expose their children to international travel, foreign cultures, and materials about international experiences. It follows these children would internalize the belief that study abroad is a "natural" thing to do, and that it fits well with their educational goals.' (p. 3)

In contrast, 'Less advantaged students may misconstrue study abroad as an unnecessary luxury' (p. 3). Bahna (2018), in their research on international students from Slovakia, similarly found that familial or class background were crucial drivers in international study. International students were far more likely to come from families with 'educated' parents and a high level of cultural capital. With respect to social networks, Simon and Ainsworth (2012)

found that upper- and middle-class students were better able to access what they call 'inside information' on study abroad opportunities. This may include having relatives who are also educators, for example, or knowing people who have already studied abroad and can impart their wisdom to prospective students. Cultural capital is linked to habitus and refers to various cultural resources (including parental education, artefacts such as books and technology and 'know-how') that will make it more likely that a student will be able to study abroad. Middle-class students have an abundance of cultural capital compared to their working-class counterparts (Bourdieu, 1984). And finally, it is worth noting the *institutional* support received by more privileged students vis-à-vis their less advantaged counterparts. Elite schools often have connections with high-ranking overseas universities that they mobilise in support of their pupils (Brooks & Waters, 2009a, 2009b). Furthermore, the staff administering study abroad programmes may harbour certain assumptions about BME and working-class students, and thereby may not encourage or support them to study overseas (Simon & Ainsworth, 2012). Study abroad choices are often likely to be circumscribed and, Simon and Ainsworth (2012) suggest, 'more closely aligned to the history and interests of White, middle-class students. In short, destination choices may be determined in a biased way that results in fewer minority and/or poor students taking part' (p. 4).

## Diversification in study abroad

Traditionally, participation in traditional study abroad programmes has tended, therefore, to be limited to students in possession of financial capital, knowledge, social networks and those who are part of an institutional network (be that a school or home university) that is able to support study abroad (Brooks & Waters, 2009a, 2009b; Cranston et al., 2020). However, this is not the whole picture, and the picture is changing. As Yang (2018) has noted, 'it is increasingly recognized that educational mobilities are pursued also by youths from not strictly speaking "privileged" or "elite" backgrounds' (p. 5). Such diversification has also been noted and discussed by several other authors (Luthra & Platt, 2016; Ma, 2020; Waters & Brooks, 2021). In the next section, and in this vein, I consider the ways in which study abroad has ostensibly diversified by class.

Studies are increasingly focusing on institutional efforts to diversify, and evidence of diversity within, the study abroad student body. This includes diversification of *types* of study abroad, as 'credit mobility' has been expanded to include other forms of short-term overseas exchanges (Deakin, 2014), including summer schools, work placements or volunteering experiences, some lasting only a few weeks. To date, however, the literature has failed to assess critically the issue of the duration of time spent abroad in relation to the value attached to the experience.

Alongside the diversification of study abroad options there has been diversification in the 'type' of students engaging in international mobility. Despite the ongoing propensity for more privileged, wealthy and White students to study overseas, the evidence suggests that less financially privileged students, as well as BME students, are accessing shorter term mobility options. There do not exist robust data on why this is likely to be the case, although we can draw upon the academic literature on short-term mobility from elsewhere (e.g., the United States) to inform an opinion on this. Synthesising this scholarship, I would like to suggest four primary reasons why 'less privileged' students are increasingly considering shorter term educational mobility: (1) it is seen as less 'risky' than longer stays; (2) less time is spent away from 'home' (and other responsibilities); (3) the undertaking is less expensive; (4) there is less need for personal contacts and know-how (social and cultural capital).

Academic literature, especially on the sociology of higher education, has discussed the importance of conceptions of 'risk' for working-class students (Archer & Hutchings, 2000;

Reay, 2001). The same idea is likely to underpin students' views towards study abroad. Compared to a more traditional domestic degree path, for example, undertaking degree-level study abroad could (for some students) be seen as exceptionally risky. Middle-class students are far more likely to be willing and able to 'take the risk' (or to evaluate the risk differently). Compared to degree-level international study, however, credit mobility, taking place *within* a domestic degree structure, is ostensibly far 'safer'. The responsibility for the exchange is shouldered by the institution rather than the individual student and their family (as with degree mobility). It is far more 'contained' (e.g., within a semester). And the shorter duration means that there is less time for things to go wrong.

Second, it has been mooted that working-class students are less likely than their middle-class counterparts to 'leave home' to attend university in the United Kingdom (Holdsworth, 2009). It therefore follows that working-class students are more likely to avoid study abroad. For some students, this may relate to an avoidance of risk (discussed above), but it might also indicate other factors, such as caring responsibilities making it difficult for students to travel overseas (Brooks, 2012). Although those engaged in full-time child care might still find it impossible to study abroad for even a short period, those with less regular responsibilities (perhaps wanting to stay close to a sick parent) might conceivably consider shorter term mobility whilst ruling out a term or a whole year spent away.

As has been widely noted, students undertaking a degree abroad are usually relatively wealthy because international student fees are often expensive and students are typically self-funded (Findlay et al., 2012). Compared to degree-level mobility, however, credit-mobile students face less expense (Smith & Mitry, 2008). Under the Erasmus+ programme, for example, students have fees waived and receive a grant for living. Although the financial incentives under the UK Turing Scheme are different from Erasmus+, students will still receive travel expenses and a cost-of-living grant. Even under non-Erasmus exchanges, students often faced reduced or no fees during their time abroad and (I have been told, anecdotally) some were able to *save money* during that year from the additional funds they were able to acquire through part-time, relatively well-paid, work.

Finally, credit mobility and summer schools, and so on (unlike degree mobility) are arranged through and by the student's home university (HEI). Exchange arrangements are already in place and HEIs provide information sessions to support students in the decision to study abroad. Consequently, students are far less reliant upon personal knowledge and expertise and social connections when it comes to shorter term educational mobility. The need for prior cultural and social capital is significantly reduced. This may have the effect of making these short-term schemes more widely accessible (Parkinson, 2007; Woolf, 2007).

However, it is important also to consider the differences that occur *within* short-term mobility and not just the differences between short-term and degree mobility (Courtois, 2018), or mobile and non-mobile students (Leung & Waters, 2017). Courtois (2018) has described the 'massification' of 'credit' mobility, which has occurred, in part, as a consequence of changes in the study abroad model, away from what is termed the 'original Erasmus model', with 'high curriculum integration' and voluntary participation. In contrast, Courtois describes the 'elite programme model', which contains a mandatory year abroad; the 'gap year' model, where participation is voluntary and the curriculum study abroad matches only loosely with the home programme; and the 'mass participation model', where exchange is mandatory while the language or module requirements are 'weakened'. This, consequently, allows students 'with no second language, or who study courses for which no equivalent is readily available, to have an academic justification for their year abroad' (p. 106). Courtois (2020) found that the 'mass participation' and 'gap year' models (more likely to appeal to less privileged students) exhibited a number of problems. These related to, for example, the quality of teaching, accommodation difficulties and even hostility by local lecturers. Students' experiences compared negatively with those (more privileged) students on programmes requiring

a year abroad who tended to opt for study in, for example, the United States (who reported very good educational experiences). Consequently, research on the diversification of internationalisation of higher education is *also* suggesting that students are receiving highly differentiated experiences (Waters & Leung, 2017). It may be the case that less privileged students are in fact receiving a lower quality (and hence, less valuable) international education, despite access to these experiences having been 'opened up'. Correspondingly, as Waters and Brooks (2021) have recently argued, diversification in the student body engaging in study abroad does not necessarily, then, indicate greater *equality of outcomes* for these students. In fact, as study abroad has (on some levels) become 'democratised', so different measures of value in study abroad have emerged, resulting in a hierarchy of study abroad experiences (Lee & Waters, 2022). Indeed, one of the aims of this paper is to encourage some reflection on the extent to which such a hierarchy might be based (amongst other things) on the duration of 'time spent' abroad.

## 'AN INVESTMENT OF TIME': CONCEPTUALISING VALUE IN STUDY ABROAD

Abdullah et al. (2017) described student experiences of outbound mobility as 'life-changing'. This begs the question: can life-changing experiences be accrued in a matter of weeks? It is difficult to conceptualise study abroad as a singular 'event'; rather, it would seem to represent a *process* that unfolds *over time*. If we consider further what is meant by 'life-changing', this includes: better employment prospects; increasing confidence; enhanced skills (e.g., communication skills and intercultural competencies); and propensity for future travel (either for work or leisure) (Ogden et al., 2021). In the next section, I reflect upon what the academic literature tells us about the benefits of study abroad and how this is generally conceptualised in terms of 'value' (Yang, 2018), musing on how this value is generated (or not) *over time*.

## Accumulation of capital and 'becoming' over time

In part, our understanding of the benefits of short-term educational exchanges is constrained by the way in which study abroad has been conceptualised within the extant literature—that is, as either a form of 'capital accumulation' or as a means of 'becoming' (i.e., self-development through experiences). Both suggest extended temporal elements. With regard to capital accumulation, Yang (2018) has written: 'the dominant narrative about ISM is as a strategy used by relatively privileged social actors in rationalistic and calculative ways to convert different capitals across borders for the ultimate purpose of maintaining and maximizing social advantages' (p. 5). As the word 'accumulation' in relation to capital suggests, this is not an immediate acquisition but a process that unfolds over time. It can be slow and even imperceptible. In his discussion of the accumulation of embodied cultural capital, Bourdieu (1984) has suggested: 'The accumulation of cultural capital in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of what is called culture, cultivation... presupposes a process of embodiment, incorporation, which, insofar as it implies a labor of inculcation and assimilation, costs time, time which must be invested personally by the investor' (p. 107).

In a similar vein, Tran (2016) describes international student mobility as a process of 'becoming'. Becoming does not happen 'overnight', but rather indicates a gradual process of change. A small number of studies have conceptualised this within a quest for 'adventure' through study abroad—a relatively prolonged, not short and fleeting, experience (Findlay & King, 2010; Waters & Brooks, 2010). Likewise, Marginson (2013) has discussed international students' 'self-formation', arguing that study mobility involves 'becoming different':

'... whether through learning, through graduating with a degree, through immersion in the linguistic setting, or simply through growing up. Often there is a kind of person they want to become, though none can fully imagine that person before the transformation. Some respond to change only when they must. Many let it happen. Others run to meet it. This experience of self-directed agency during the foreign sojourn—of the joys and terrors of making a self amid a range of often novel choices—is under-recognized in research on international education, yet widely felt.' (p. 7)

Marginson (2013) goes on to argue that the literature on student mobility overemphasises the need for international students to 'adjust' to a host society and conterminously downplays the role of 'self-formation', 'self-cultivation' and 'self-improvement' within students' experiences (this includes the accumulation of cultural capital and social capital). Both perspectives on student mobility (capital accumulation and 'becoming') hint at—although rarely explicitly discuss—time. The only mention of time by Marginson (2013) is the observation that students undergo these changes in relatively 'compressed time periods'. Yet we know, from research on migration (e.g., Gordon, 1964), that migration 'adjustment' and 'adaptation' (including, one would assume, 'self-formation' and 'becoming') take a while to achieve (Allen & Turner, 1996). What does this mean for how we interpret short- and very short-duration study abroad opportunities, such as offered through the Turing Scheme in the United Kingdom? Can study abroad be *as valuable* (or even valuable at all) when it involves significantly reduced time spent in 'incorporation' and 'labor of inculcation and assimilation' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 107)?

## Short-term mobility programmes and value

The Anglophone literature on short-term mobility programmes (most of which refers to outgoing students from the United States studying abroad for a semester or less) does not make a direct comparison between longer and shorter time periods but *does* indicate that short-term study abroad *can* be valuable (and involve the accumulation of capital) in different ways. Links can also be drawn with parallel but related literatures on overseas 'gap years' (especially in the UK context) (Heath, 2007; King, 2011) and overseas youth 'volunteering' (Jones, 2011), both of which are assumed to be beneficial to students (e.g., in enhancing CVs and providing formative experiences).

Humphreys and Baker (2021) have looked at short-term study abroad in Japan, with trips ranging from 10 days to 1 month in duration. They interviewed students before and after their sojourn and concluded that there was some evidence for 'some effective intercultural learning having taken place' (p. 272) (see also Koyanagi, 2018). Research by Nomizu and Nitta (2014; cited in Koyanagi, 2018) indicated that such short programmes can also impact 'other competencies such as independence and flexibility'. They found that 'self-evaluated ratings by students who went abroad for 3 months or less were the same as those among students who participated in longer (3- to 12-month) programmes'.

There is literature, however, also pointing to the possibility of valuable 'personal development' occurring over shorter periods. As noted by Wiers-Jenssen (2003) in relation to her study on the mobility (shorter and longer) of Norwegian students: 'In countries that are linguistically and culturally close to Norway, the adjustment process is fairly rapid. Most students in Scandinavian countries report that they adapt in a matter of a few weeks' (p. 399). Time taken to 'adjust' was seen to relate to 'cultural similarities' with the 'host country'—thus geography (i.e., where students chose to study) could be an important consideration. When students have faced numerous 'problems' after initially moving overseas, 'they seemed to interpret these problems positively, as challenges from which they had gained personality



development' (p. 408). In both cases, then (ease of adjustment and problems encountered), shorter term mobility was seen as 'beneficial' for students, albeit in different ways.

Studies have also pointed to the *educational* or pedagogic value of shorter term trips, providing 'experiential learning opportunities' (Coker et al., 2017; Ritz, 2011) and a 'transformative learning environment' (Perry et al., 2012). The implication is that through exposure to a different classroom experience, even for a short period, students are made aware of the value of different approaches to education, which may, in turn, transform their thinking about and approach towards their own education. A case for the value of short-term placements (2–3 weeks) has even (unexpectedly) been made for language students, arguing that whilst they may not 'accumulate' a great deal in terms of 'fluency' and expanded vocabulary, they do benefit from the development of 'cultural and pragmatic competence' and an understanding of region-specific linguistic features that will facilitate language learning down the line (Reynolds-Case, 2013).

One particularly interesting observation, emerging from work on the Japanese trend in 'super-short-term' study abroad programmes (1 week to 1 month duration), suggests that the *time spent abroad* is only part of the picture (Shimmi & Ota, 2018). In Japan, there has been increasing recognition that students need to be provided with opportunities to 'continue developing their global competencies after returning home' (Shimmi & Ota, 2018, p. 14). This is a very interesting point—that short-term study abroad may 'spark' something in an individual that may result in a longer term interest (e.g., in a foreign culture or language, or future travel) or mind-set change. Thus, it is perhaps inappropriate to measure study abroad simply in terms of the time spent away from home as it may form part of a more extended (and lifelong) *process*, regardless of students' actual physical location.

Focusing on temporality, Simpson and Bailey (2021) discuss specifically men's experience of short-term study abroad in Spain, coming from the Midwestern United States. Of particular interest was the way in which the men in this study viewed their *short* sojourn abroad as a 'narrow window of opportunity' to be 'maximised' as efficiently as possible. Participants in their study described being 'exhausted' by the pace at which they felt the need to socialise and experience life abroad—'an overwhelming feeling of limited time' and a 'once in a lifetime narrative framing the experience' meant that men engaged constantly and energetically in a range of experiences (p. 394). Thus, it is possible to conclude from this study that shorter term experiences can be impactful, especially when students are acutely aware of their time-limited nature and attempt actively to mitigate this.

The review of the extant literature reveals few direct comparisons of the value of study abroad in relation to time spent. One exception to this is Coker et al. (2018), who directly compared the 'outcomes' for students on semester abroad exchanges and those who studied abroad for (a shorter) 3 weeks. Whilst both were valued by students, the researchers concluded that the students on the semester abroad exchange had a 'more valuable' experience on a number of fronts, such as:

'... contributing to class discussion, including diverse perspectives in discussions and assignments, synthesis of ideas, less rote memorization of course material, empathy, acquiring a broad general education, critical thinking, and working effectively with others... Likewise, other studies suggest that longer study abroad duration has more benefits in developing intercultural sensitivity, global perspective, linguistic ability, lifelong friendships with host-country nationals, and many other outcomes.' (p. 101)

Perhaps, most importantly for gauging the equity dimensions of shorter study abroad opportunities, however, it is worth reiterating that *both* the semester and short-term mobility were deemed to some extent *valuable* by students.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UK TURING SCHEME

The Turing Scheme, initiated in 2021, represents the United Kingdom's latest student mobilisation programme. It is (according to the Department for Education) worth £110 million in funding and is designed to support students attending UK HEIs, Further Education colleges and schools in overseas placements, lasting between 4 weeks and 12 months. UK institutions had to bid for a share of this funding for 2021–2022 and again in 2022–2023, with financial support for subsequent years dependent on 'future spending reviews' (UK Government, 2020). The discourse surrounding this scheme clearly aligns with the content of the government's recent international education strategy (2019, updated in 2021), which emphasises the United Kingdom's 'global ambition' and desire for 'global success'. The government explicitly pits the Turing Scheme against the 'old' Erasmus+ programme in marketing materials, claiming it to be 'superior' on several fronts: global rather than EU focused; targets 'all students' (data show that more privileged students were more likely to take advantage of Erasmus placements); and facilitates travel 'anywhere in the world' (Erasmus was limited to 'partner countries'). The Turing website and associated documents stress one aim above all others, however: to provide opportunities to study 'anywhere in the world' to those from *less advantaged backgrounds* (defined by the government as those with an annual household income of £25K or less). Widening participation is a key message, based on the assumption that Erasmus+ favoured already privileged students.

One of the ways in which the Turing Scheme 'targets' those from less advantaged backgrounds is through its support of shorter duration placements of 4 weeks (as noted above, this was reduced to 2 weeks for the rest of the 2021–2022 academic year). In comparison, the minimum time abroad allowed under the Erasmus scheme was 2 months (for work placements). So how, then, do HEIs ensure that short-term mobility is *still valuable*, even if this value is inevitably diminished compared to the experiences of a student undergoing 'cultural immersion' over several years in an unfamiliar, exotic location?

Here, universities need to take a more active role in supporting students undertaking shorter placements. It cannot be enough to secure the placement and send them on their way. HEIs need actively to encourage students to use the time they have productively, without (as was the case in Simpson & Bailey's, 2021 study) exhausting themselves. HEIs can ensure that students have suitable courses available to them—that their degree and their experiences overseas match up or complement each other (cf. Courtois, 2020). Deakin (2014) noted that working-class students were more likely (than middle-class students) to engage in Erasmus *work placements*; driven by the need to avoid debt and do something financially productive whilst overseas. Universities could, therefore, also support less privileged students to find work during their sojourn. This may alleviate some of the financial pressures such students feel. And, finally, they can encourage students, as was the case in Shimmi and Ota (2018), to continue developing their international sensibilities even *after they have returned home*. All in all, whereas the evidence would seem to suggest that 'longer is better' when it comes to study abroad, there are things that HEIs can and should do to support less privileged students to get the most out of these shorter experiences.

## CONCLUSIONS

'A primary reason for the existence of short-term study abroad continues to be increasing access for students that would not or could not study abroad otherwise (Coker & Porter, 2016). Our data suggest that this is entirely appropriate,

since short-term programs do lead to better outcomes than not studying abroad.’  
(Coker et al., 2018)

Shorter duration mobility programmes and opportunities are being loudly hailed as the solution to the fact that study abroad has been, for many years, the preserve of more privileged (wealthy and ethnic majority) students. Not only have privileged students been engaged in study abroad opportunities, but they have also been clearly *benefiting* from them (Findlay et al., 2012; Waters & Brooks, 2010), securing the most prestigious and well-remunerated jobs (Waters, 2008). A recent report (UUK, 2021), however, has found that the diversification in the kinds of mobility programmes on offer (see Ogden et al., 2021) has also resulted in diversification in the kinds of students taking up these opportunities, as less wealthy as well as BME students have started to undertake shorter duration educational mobility. As I have argued in this paper, we do not really know, as yet, how shorter term overseas trips (of a few weeks to a few months) compare with longer stays away (6 months to the whole of a degree) when it comes to both UK students' experiences and outcomes. Universities UK and others describe study abroad as 'life-changing', but it can be quite hard to imagine how a stay of 4 weeks can be as life-changing as three years living in another country as an international student. The paper considers what we know, from the Anglophone academic literature, about how value is generated through study abroad (for individual students) and how this is likely to relate to *time spent*. If time/duration is a factor in the generation of value, then perhaps shorter term programmes that appeal to less privileged students will be less impactful on their lives and more wealthy and privileged students who can *afford the time* to undertake longer sojourns will, inevitably, benefit the most (once again).

However, perhaps one of the more important findings of the UUK (2021) report is this:

‘... respondents (94%) said they were interested in further travel following their mobility period. 82% were more likely to consider working in another country after graduation, and two-thirds (69%) were interested in doing an internship abroad.’ (p. 6)

In other words, whilst a short period abroad may not be enough in and of itself to facilitate the development of meaningful cultural capital, it may encourage and enable future mobility (as suggested by Shimmi & Ota, 2018). The value attributable to study abroad may be deferred but still, somehow, present, or it may unfold as a longer term process over time, within the life-course (see Findlay et al., 2012), irrespective of where (geographically) the student is located.

The intersections of time and geography are also important aspects of this story. Context intersects with time to create value (i.e., how the *quality* of time spent is generated). For example, when Schwieter et al. (2021) consider language learning, they also point to the importance of *where* students stay when abroad—for example, in an isolated accommodation block versus a homestay with a local family. These different setups result in qualitatively differing degrees of language ‘immersion’ during the time spent. Likewise, whether students are taught on the ‘main campus’ or off-campus in a downtown office block will impact the quality of their learning experience (see Waters & Leung, 2017). And the countries that students choose to study in might also be impactful—as at least one study has suggested, students ‘adjust more quickly’ to countries that are deemed culturally similar. The meso- and micro-geographies of time spent overseas will significantly impact the value such experiences generate.

And finally, it is also worth considering that there may be other, cultural, social or political reasons why students may wish to spend longer (even as long as possible) overseas. Gender can be a decisive factor in this. Martin (2021), in *Dreams of Flight*, considers why study abroad would seem to be more popular amongst young women than young men (in

this case, amongst those students travelling from China to study in Australia). Participants in this research mentioned that daughters were seen as 'more reliable' than sons and therefore were more likely to be supported by parents to study abroad. There was also seen to be more pressure on sons to develop a 'successful career' 'as fast as possible', affording women more time over their higher education (including time to spend abroad). The women international students from Kazakhstan in the United Kingdom, described in Holloway et al.'s (2012) study, sometimes sought study abroad as a way of prolonging their freedom from marriage and childbearing. Sondhi and King (2017) found similar pressures placed on male international students (to get married and have children) from India. International student mobility is complex and certainly not only about 'value' in the sense of capital accumulation. Time may be 'well spent' away from overbearing social and cultural expectations. In fact, it maybe makes more sense to think of the temporality of student mobility in terms of the life-course (Collins et al., 2014; Findlay et al., 2017; Xu, 2021). It is only by reflecting back on students' lives as a whole that we can truly understand whether a period abroad was 'time well spent'.

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The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

### DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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