



Rolling Out the Turing Scheme: Evaluating the decision-making and geopolitics of a domestic international student mobility scheme

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Introduction

- The UK has a history of strained geopolitical relations with the EU (Oliver, 2015, 2016)
- The post-Brexit geopolitics and the 'Global Britain' agenda (Molloy & Smith, 2022)
- 'Global Britain' as a 'soft-power superpower' (Saunders, 2020)
- Brexit as an opportunity for the UK to re-frame its geopolitical (Fox & Beech, 2024)

Higher Education as a Space of Geopolitical Power

- Geopolitics and Higher Education are argued to share a symbiotic relationship (Nguyen, 2020, Moisiu & Kangas, 2016; Moscovitz & Sabzalieva, 2023)
- Inbound student mobility has been argued to have an impact on enhancing the UK's soft power with key partner countries (Lomer, 2017)
- HE can be seen as a vehicle for steering for training a future elite (Papatsiba, 2005)

Research Aim and Methods

- This aimed to explore the geopolitics and post-Brexit decision-making of the introduction of the Turing Scheme
- This presentation looks at UK governmental decision-makers and UK HE Institutions using:
 - A Critical Discourse analysis of Parliamentary debates
 - Semi-Structured interviews with key stakeholders at the institutional level

Constructing the purpose of study abroad

Utilitarian Constructions:

“Apart from anything else there's proven research about degree outcomes being better, graduate outcomes being better...we're in a very saturated market now, with a lot of graduates coming out of university, and people need to have a way to make themselves stand out.” (Cristina – Study Abroad Coordinator)

Constructing the purpose of study abroad

Widening Participation and Access:

“we will always look at our disadvantaged students first...we have a lot of [disadvantaged students], I think 77% are disadvantaged. So, out of those that apply to study abroad, we will look at the disadvantaged students first” (Sarah – Study Abroad Coordinator)

Constructing the purpose of study abroad

Personal benefits of study abroad:

“I think the most important thing is to convey a message that study abroad is something that empowers you. It makes you more competitive, but also, it empowers you to become a better person. So, for me it's about also the moral values and the ethical development attached to it.” (Cristina – Study Abroad Coordinator)

The Geopolitics of the Turing Scheme

Soft Power:

“The soft power of Britain has been increased by our being on the Erasmus programme. With inward mobility, students who participate gain a better understanding of and affinity for the UK. These are all priceless benefits” (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 1 April 2019, Vol.797, Col.87)

The Geopolitics of the Turing Scheme

Embodying Britain's outlook:

“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, HC Deb, 30 Dec 2020, Vol.686, Col.649)

The Geopolitics of the Turing Scheme

Modifying mobility flows and institutional partnerships:

“Will it just focus on the English-speaking world and further distance us from our European friends?” (*Hansard*, HL Deb, 30 Dec 2020, Vol.808, Col.1867)

Conclusions

- Study abroad decision-making as entrenched within wider neoliberal constructions of Higher Education
- The Turing Scheme as re-negotiating dominant mobility flows
- Decision-making primarily focused utilitarian concerns, then geopolitical agendas and outlook, and finally on the personal value of study abroad

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