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# **Educational Mobility in Transition: what can China, Ukraine and the UK learn from one another?**

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## **1. Introduction**

UK, Ukraine and China are countries in transition. The Chinese' paradoxical culture (Fang 2003) allows them to develop their own interpretation of capitalism under a communist party and the country turns outward to the international stage. Ukraine's diverse population is pulled in two opposite directions - East and West – with tragic results. The United Kingdom is no longer united: the Scottish referendum in 2014 came close to dissolving the union and that planned for June 2015 could force exit from the European Union. Despite very different histories, all three are searching for a new position in the world.

Our students are also in transition. Despite the higher-level debate concerning their home countries' integration in the outside world, students are increasingly, inexorably moving across borders, but not always in both directions. China's youth travel across the world in search of the best higher education, but many fewer international students seek out China's universities. Ukraine's system of higher education is going through a period of transformation at a time of economic austerity. Despite the high demand from Ukrainian students to go abroad during their studies, inward student mobility of EU nationals to Ukraine remains exceptionally low. Meanwhile, British universities are heavily subsidised by lucrative incoming international students, but famously low numbers of British students study abroad (British Council, 2016).

Uniquely, this study explores the differences in international student mobility in these three contrasting countries. Analysing the phenomenon of student mobility at national, institutional and personal levels, we attempt to discover what these three countries can learn from one another about the challenges in encouraging and managing educational mobility.

### **1.1 Context of Student Mobility**

Higher education has emerged as a universal agency, which provides guiding principles not only how to gain knowledge, but also as a means for scholars to learn how to live, realise their full potential and use their skills for the greater good, thus overcoming the disadvantages associated with the socio-economic conditions (Dewey). More recently the need for intercultural understanding and international knowledge has become an urgent priority (Bartell, 2003). International competence is now critical to a nation's health – “a *generalized necessity rather than an option for the tier of societal elites as in the past*” (p.49). The involvement of higher education institutions in international activities is influenced by a variety of external environment pressures (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Schofer & Meyer, 2005). Such internationalisation activities in higher education include student and staff mobility,

institutional cooperation and co-optation, standardisation of the curricula and adoption of the best research practices.

Dewey (1938) believed that students thrive in an environment where they are allowed to experience and interact with the curriculum, and all students should have the opportunity to take part in their own learning. A holistic approach to internationalisation offers enhanced opportunities for authentic experience and learning. Authentic-learning means that students are motivated by its relevance to their lives outside, are exposed to different settings and perspectives, learn to assimilate and connect unfamiliar knowledge and they develop the flexibility to work across disciplinary and cultural boundaries (international competence). This cannot be provided through conventional teaching methods.

In the various research studies conducted into higher education and its internationalisation, considerable attention is paid to student mobility (Guruz, 2011; Rivza & Teichler, 2007; A. West & Barham, 2009). However, scholarly controversy exists around the 'brain drain' phenomenon and commercialisation of education, as well as the risk of diminishing the quality of higher education (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). Nonetheless, advantages are generally accepted to exceed drawbacks. Student mobility can be considered a specific form of migration. In contrast to labour migration, for instance, it is not driven by economic motives, but rather by students wishing to gain experience: educational, travel, cultural and leisure (Di Pietro & Page, 2008; Van Mol, 2013).

There are two main categories of mobility: students enrolling in a full-time degree in a foreign country and those seeking to study abroad for a certain period of time through a specific programme or bi-lateral agreements. Recent studies (Gonzalez, Mesanza, & Mariel, 2011; Teichler, 2012) demonstrate that the major steps have been made by agencies at both institutional and national level in recognition of academic qualifications across borders and student mobility in general, despite the divergence in the perception of the importance of mobility initiatives. Germany, for example, strongly promotes outward mobility, facilitating recognition of curricula and continuing to provide funding for their students while abroad (West and Barham, 2009). In contrast, the United Kingdom and France focus their efforts on inward student mobility from outside the European Union in order to build an income stream (Kondakci, 2011). This is due to the intention of these two educational systems to focus on wider global market for students as well as the overall promotion of economic, political and cultural features of these countries. Sweden supports both inward and outward student mobility programmes with a number of financial support schemes in place, whereas Turkey is seen primarily as a sending country.

Whether or not to participate in a student mobility programme is determined by a number of factors, among which Rivza and Teichler (2007) identified students' ability to access courses of higher quality than domestic education institutions can provide. Thus, academically and economically, *vertical* mobility occurs between developing countries (or countries in transition) and their more advanced counterparts, whereas *horizontal* mobility provides opportunities to experience the differences between academic environments and cultures. Students also benefit from learning a foreign language and experiencing an exciting extracurricular life during the mobility period.

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore student mobility mechanisms in the UK, Ukraine and China through the comparison of a single case study per country, producing. The authors asseverate that the lived experience of individuals and institutions can provide an epistemological advantage over other methodologies and improve understanding of the phenomenon.

For the exploratory nature of this study, we employed an inductive approach to understand real-life context via multiple case studies. According to Yin (2003), a case study investigates a contemporary and dynamic phenomenon and allows researchers to conduct an in-depth investigation of the topic (Creswell, 2003). We utilised a single case study research method in each selected country (UK, Ukraine and China), but employed the multi-case approach to analyse our data comparatively. Its inextricable connection to experiential learning makes a case study approach particularly suited for research into student mobility. The comparison and contrasting of findings from the three individual cases provided new insights into international student mobility. To collect data, the authors used participant observation and interview methods (Creswell, 2007; Gillham, 2000) which combined to form a set of evidence from multiple sources about the challenges.

Data were then processed using thematic analysis (King & Horrocks, 2010), which enabled us to conduct the analysis iteratively, revealing a set of key themes relating to the issues under investigation (Huberman & Miles, 2002). We were able to categorise and retrieve similar data, thus allowing the reduction of raw data and the subsequent categorisation of the findings into the main themes of the research.

### 2.1 Background to the UK Case

Outward mobility is recognised as essential by the UK government (British Council, 2016). British HE institutions are under growing pressure to differentiate themselves from their competitors in a rapidly developing higher education market in order to attract prospective students. Institutions recognise the value of international experience for the student, it is often difficult to achieve in practice. A sector-led strategy for outward mobility has therefore been developed, recognising internal institutional barriers to outward mobility. In 2011/12, approximately 6% of UK domiciled students undertook a mobility placement overseas (HESA). The majority of outgoing UK students access study and work opportunities overseas through the European Union's (EU) Erasmus Mobility Programme. The UK currently ranks only sixth in terms of the overall number of outgoing students taking part in the Erasmus Programme. Beyond Europe, the UK is 13th in countries of origin for foreign students in the US, for example.

The institutional case in this study is a provincial, post-1992 university where a third of students are local, a third from working-class homes and 15% from areas with little tradition of HE. 91% come from state schools. Subject to the forces of globalisation, the university was developing an internationalisation strategy. To develop international experience in 'home' students, the University sought out methods of experiential-and situated-learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in which the teacher acts as facilitator and supporter. Experimenting with integrating such students with incoming international students in various ways, none was found to be adequate to develop authentic global citizens. Instead, they set out to build students' self-efficacy

(Bandura, 1993) - the motivation and confidence - to participate in a work/study abroad programme and to provide them with appropriate opportunities. In situated-learning, achievement is attained through authentic experience of real situations (such as living abroad) and success is directly related to effort and support received. The vicarious experiences of social role models are important as motivators, as is verbal persuasion from a knowledgeable, credible supporter. The result was an increase in participation in outward mobility from 10 to 300 students.

Fundamentally, the nationwide belief that British students are reluctant to go abroad (eg in Shepherd, 2010) was rejected. This conviction came from the author's personal experiences as an exchange student and knowledge of the value they brought personally and professionally. It was also understood that the negative attitude within the school was self-fulfilling and the real barriers to mobility did not lie with the students. Such questioning of established practice may have organisational benefits when a 'step-change' is required (Blackwell & Blackmore, 2003). Going beyond the 'encouragement' of mobility so often found in HE strategy documents, this work focussed on implementation and impact.

## **2.2 Background to the Ukraine Case**

The transformation process in Ukrainian HE encompassed a wide array of initiatives aiming to move away from the communist regime (Oleksiyenko, 2014). These included standardisation of the curriculum, shifting to a three-cycle degree framework and adoption of the best practices assuring the quality of teaching and research. Despite joining the Bologna process in 2005, seen by many as a breakthrough in gaining international legitimacy for the national higher education system, the Ukrainian system struggled to adapt to this new independent environmental reality (Oleksiyenko, 2014; Shaw, Chapman, & Rumyantseva, 2013). Ukraine lagged behind Eastern European counterparts to create attractive conditions for academic performance and support effective regulatory mechanisms that would enhance competitiveness, encouraging the adoption of the world-class standards. The recognition of qualifications is seen as one of the key pillars of student mobility (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). The transformation of the Erasmus mobility programme, through Erasmus Mundus to wider Erasmus+, enabled students from non-EU countries to study in Europe and encouraged EU students to go outside Europe, within the frameworks of wider university co-operation (European Commission, 2014; West & Barham, 2009).

The recent elaboration of the Erasmus programme enabled students outside of the European Union to participate in this mobility programme. Student mobility is seen as an extra tool for the transformation of Eastern European systems of higher education, adapting them to Western institutions. However, Western European students are historically not interested in studying in Eastern Europe (Rivza & Teichler, 2007). At the same time, Eastern European students experienced difficulties with the approval process as well as provision of financial support as stipulated in the programme.

Despite significant promotional activity and availability of funding, universities in Ukraine experience serious challenges in attracting students from Western Europe. A recent report by the European Commission (2013) shows that inward mobility from

EU to Ukraine remains low at undergraduate level (Table 1). The number of Erasmus awards available is significantly higher than the number of students wishing to travel to Ukraine.

**Table 1:** The number of European Erasmus students in Ukraine

Year	Number of students
2007	6
2008	5
2009	1
2010	10

Source: European Commission (2013)

### 2.3 Background to the China Case

Educational migration from China has attracted considerable attention from both international business and pedagogical researchers since the Chinese government introduced the ‘open door’ policy in 1979. According to the UKCISA (2012), Chinese students entering the UK in 2011-12 totalled 78,715. The Royal Institute of International Affairs (2004) predicted that the total number of mainland Chinese students in the UK will reach 130,900 in 2020. Numerous studies have claimed that outbound Chinese student migration has brought enormous benefits for the host countries’ economies and enhanced students’ cross-cultural learning (Oleksiyenko, date? Cheng and Yip, 2013; Dall’Alba and Sidhu, 2015).

However, with continuously increasing outbound mobility, the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) has started to focus on how to ‘diversify the higher education markets’ in China instead of ‘one-way direction (outbound)’. This strategic decision by the Chinese MoE reflects the Chinese Yin Yang philosophical paradox identified by Fang (1999; 2003). Given the uneven development of outbound and inbound education migration in China, other forms of mobility in Chinese higher education markets emerged, including Chinese staff outbound mobility (Pearce & Quan, 2015) and international students inbound mobility (Robert & Li, 2014).

Statistics indicate that the first group of 33 students from East European countries studied in China in 1950. Between 1979 and 2000, the total number of international students studying in China reached 407,000. These international students are from more than 175 countries and are accepted by 353 Chinese universities (Chinese MoE, 2015). In order to encourage more inward international students, the Chinese MoE released a new policy relating to inbound students: “increase the number, raise the level, guarantee the quality and regulate management.” (Chinese MoE, 2015).

## 3. Findings

On comparing the three cases, a number of broad areas were identified as themes revealing the differences in the challenges to international student mobility in these three contrasting countries.

<b>Theme</b>	<b>UK (Outbound)</b>	<b>Ukraine (Inbound)</b>	<b>China (Both)</b>
<b>National &amp; Institutional Policy</b>	Government strategy. Mandatory international experience.		Government financial incentives (inbound) Student support initiatives (inbound)
<b>Process Familiarity</b>	Scaffolding, peer-to-peer learning. Campus community.	Unfamiliar process for sending & host institutions, and students.	
<b>Communication</b>	(Technology-enhanced) scaffolding. 'Open-door' policy. Retro-marketing. Social media. Peer-to-peer learning.	Problems between sending & host institutions. Problems between host institution and inbound students.	
<b>Educational Culture</b>	Authentic assessment of adjustment.	Limited facilities and services for students. Difficult adjustment for inbound.	External Chinese environment as pull-factor (inbound).
<b>Opportunity Value</b>	Credit-transfer programmes. Double-degrees. Experiential education.		Short-term mobility programmes eg mini-MBA (outbound).
<b>Personal Development</b>	Authentic-learning for additional critical global competences. Self-reflection.		Social capital, soft employability-skills and confidence-building (inbound). Cultural awareness, critical-thinking (outbound).
<b>Family Support</b>			Financial and emotional (outbound)

### **3.1 Government and Institutional Policy and Support (UK & China)**

In the UK, a semester abroad was made mandatory for students studying international business management, which boosted recruitment to that programme. This was then extended to two mandatory semesters abroad. Senior management in the school were persuaded by the team that a new attitude and communication approach were worthwhile (described in Section 3.2). As the programme snowballed, academics were brought on board. The challenge of scaling up, as well as improving quality over a broader range of L&T innovations throughout the process was met by increasing involvement of a greater number of colleagues from a wider range of departments, functions and external partners, creating challenges in consistency and focus. As attitudes changed, it had a positive impact on the school's confidence and work/study abroad opportunities were opened across the UG portfolio. A much larger number of programme leaders and directors were involved. Regular updates to formal management meetings and attended committee meetings with student representatives took place. Applying the 'scaffolding' approach to this wider team, support points for academic staff were identified the core team acted as mentors as they became more involved in promoting study abroad at open days, dealing with students' concerns and developing initiatives with partner institutions. As the programme has now become institutionalised and developed in other faculties,

Our China case shows that the motivation of inbound student mobility in China is closely related to institutional support from the Chinese government: it released a series of policies to encourage Chinese HE institutions to recruit overseas students. For example, the Chinese MoE provides financial support for HE institutions if they recruit a certain number of foreign students from overseas. Encouraged by the Chinese MoE, many Chinese universities restructured their organisation and created a new school called *the School of International Education* which is regarded as '*the school of international students*'. The number of overseas students recruited has been used as an indicator to measure the internationalisation performance of HE institutions by MoE in China.

Overseas students studying at Chinese universities are provided with enhanced services than local students, such as better accommodation, student well-being services, language learning and cultural visits. Staff involved in the support of overseas students emphasised this improvement as a key driver. Professors from other faculties within universities are invited to deliver a wide range of lectures to overseas students in addition to language studies. A famous professor from a prestige university in Beijing recalled her experience working with overseas students:

*'I have taught many overseas students in our university. I have paid extra*

*Staff Member (interviewee - China)*

It is evident that institutional support is influential in attracting more overseas students to studying at Chinese universities.

### **3.2 Communication Challenges**

The second theme emerging from our case comparison concerns communication. In Ukraine, this involves communication between sending and host University, as well as internal communication between the departments of the host university.

*'In my opinion, a lot in this programme depends on the support from the co-ordinating institution and host institution. I didn't know who to communicate with in the co-ordinating institution. Nobody ever asked me about my satisfaction and the level of the fulfilment of my expectations'.*

*Student Applicant (interviewee - Ukraine)*

In Ukraine, staff at the host department were not aware of the Erasmus programme, its rules and requirements. The only point of contact for the student was the university's department of international affairs. Thus, any information requested by the student had to be passed through this department, which often caused delays and late responses.

*'Even the social events which took place within the university... I become aware of them from the students, but not from anybody from the coordinating department or host department. Often the information about the event came through when the actual event is over.'*

*Inbound Student (interviewee - Ukraine)*

Because participation in the Erasmus scheme was limited to a single student, he experienced some disconnectedness from the wider student community. This impacted on his participation in the social life of the faculty and the university. Although the student union was effective in arranging various events at both the university and the faculty levels, communication with the Erasmus student was difficult as he belonged to various groups of student at various levels and to no specific programme. Belonging to a smaller student group was not possible for practical reasons.

Meanwhile, in the UK, an important change introduced initially was a reversal of the way in which 'study abroad' opportunities were communicated to students. Using 'retro-marketing' (McCole, 2004) communication techniques, the 'year abroad' was presented as straightforward, aspirational and competitive, replacing the previous apologetic tone, in which it was a second-rate inconvenience into which students must be pressured. Retro-marketing was developed to appeal to a complex, post-modern world overwhelmed by choice and information and cynical of marketing messages, efficiently using new technology. For study abroad, this included an interactive e-learning site with a database decision tool, a suite of country-specific, student-led Facebook Groups and a Twitter feed.

Combining 'retro-marketing' and a psychographic segmentation of student motivations with the 'scaffolding' L&T approach (Bruner, 1960), the dedicated team designed and implemented a new promotion, recruitment and allocation process, informed by the work of Kruse & Brubaker (2007) and other best practice. This pinpointed a series of 'support points' required by a student in the process of application / preparation and identified the importance of guidance from a teacher or more competent peer as students entered their 'zones of proximal development' (Vygotsky, 1978) to consider and manage living abroad. The new process introduced detailed briefing events of increasing specificity with enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff, alumni and incoming exchange students, 'buddying' events, personal consultation opportunities and careful destination-matching on a wide range of criteria. It started with pre-application Open Days and continued through Years 1 and 2, as students made applications, and into Year 3, when students were abroad. An important element was the introduction of 'Pre-departure Briefing' sessions, including cross-cultural exercises, dealing with culture shock and opportunities to meet incoming students as recommended by Kruse & Brubaker (2007). These responded to a small but growing number of students who returned early, culture-shocked and homesick, causing serious problems personally and for the institutions. In the last three years we attained a "zero return" rate, maintaining 'technology-enhanced scaffolding' (Pea, 2004) beyond the student's arrival abroad through the use of social media.

Initially faced with cynicism (at worst) and apathy (at best) from many academics, a policy of ‘working with the willing’ was adopted by the team in the UK. Developing an area from scratch meant there were no formal roles defined so experimentation and innovation were not only desirable but necessary. Peer-to-peer learning was increasingly effective and efficient: students and interested academic colleagues were organised into communities-of-practice from Year 1. Returning students in Year 4, working with incoming students and interested staff, volunteered to co-ordinate meetings, social events and to run social media groups which could then include alumni and students currently abroad. Developing peer-to-peer learning allows students and staff to provide up-to-date detail and colour to a briefing and support process. (Pearce, Powell & Burns, 2016). These democratic groups – a campus community - impacted the learning of students and staff alike. The resulting confidence in implementing an ‘open-door’ policy for advice was so successful that team members were interchangeable as self-efficacy supporters, providing high accessibility for maximum impact on a growing number of students.

*The most important thing for me was having a connection to people back home, such as lecturers, who were there to offer support and gave me the strength to get through the hard parts in Hong Kong.*

*Outward bound student (interviewee - UK)*

### **3.3 Process Familiarity**

The Ukrainian case identified the lack of the transparency of the entire mobility process and its particulars. Despite numerous attempts by the student to obtain information about application and submission of the supporting documents, it was not provided by the co-ordinating institution. The information that was available at the time of considering the mobility option was scarce: less than that needed to participate in the programme. Furthermore, without clear guidance about the timescales of the various milestones of the programme, actions were often taken in a rush, thus leaving limited time for evaluation to be made by the student, his parents and the staff at home university.

*‘I would say that a potential Erasmus student would withdraw from the programme at this stage. In my case it was different, because I really wanted to participate in this student mobility programme and I was enthusiastic. Even when the process was not explained in details, I said to myself, that it is worth of trying to get things sorted. But if you ask other students at my university, they certainly would not be so much committed and very likely that they give up at this stage.’*

*Inbound Student (interviewee - Ukraine)*

In the UK, applying the ‘scaffolding’ concept to administrative staff colleagues, operational expertise was developed in a focussed team and extended to students, creating a campus community with process experience (Pearce, Powell & Burns, 2016). They were involved in the management of the area as the challenge of scaling up from ten to three hundred students was met.

### 3.3 Differences in Educational Culture

The third theme, centred on the learning process and institutional facilities, was developed by combining learnings from the Ukrainian and British cases. The adaptation to the host country and institution environment is of great importance for Erasmus students. Various challenging differences are evident through the analysis of the cases, including compulsory attendance in Ukraine with extensive attendance monitoring and an inability to obtain feedback from tutors about assessed work. The opening hours of the library and other buildings, as well as little availability for individual studying and team working, are limited in Ukraine. A very small number of the wireless internet 'hot-spots' and lack of IT support in the University necessitated adjustment from incoming students.

*'I have experienced the lack of space where I can study or sit. The places are very limited. If you are not at the class, but still would like to study, you don't have any opportunity because there is no space at all. What if a student needs to work on the assignment after the classes? The library is open only till 5. How can you visit it if you've got classes in the afternoon?'*

*Inbound Student (interviewee - Ukraine)*

This illustrates a considerably broader challenge faced by the integration of higher education systems. Staff and student respondents questioned the ability and readiness of Ukrainian universities to integrate into the European 'system of knowledge creation' as a result of the Bologna initiatives but this issue is more complex and multidimensional.

In the UK, the 'authentic-learning' circle, actively engaging students in higher-order thinking to analyse their own real-world experience and apply it outside the classroom. The learning outcomes cannot be pre-determined but can be focussed on global citizenship.

Inspired by the concept of 'authentic assessment' (Scheurman & Newman, 1998), the team in the UK case developed an integrated preparation and reflection assessment strategy using on-line portfolio technology, with appropriate interventions from that team pre-departure, in-country and post-return. Giving students the opportunity to reflect upon and monitor progress is essential to authentic-learning's metacognition: assessment is integrated seamlessly into the learning task (working/studying abroad) in order to reflect 'real-world' assessment. Much of what students learned while abroad is unintended and so setting learning outcomes was challenging and flexibility was allowed to accommodate students' experiences.

For incoming students to China, it seems clear that the institutional environment is a key driver when selecting a country for study abroad. It was indicated that the social environment, political stability, and rapid economic growth in China have played important roles encouraging international students to study in Chinese universities. A student who was born in France, graduated from a British University as an undergraduate student, now studying in a Chinese university in Beijing, explained:

*I really wanted to go to China, it is  
an interesting country to know more*

*Inbound student (interviewee - China)*

### **3.4 Opportunity Value**

In the UK case, the first ‘credit-transfer’ scheme was introduced in 2009, allowing students to study abroad for a semester in their second year (rather than adding a sandwich year) and opportunities were made available to all undergraduate students. This allowed students on three-year programmes and those with a UK work placement in their sandwich year to participate in the study abroad programme. To develop the credit-transfer programme, a flexible, semester-based module structure was proposed and a single trusted partner chosen to introduce an English programme for students with no foreign language. Members of the UK-based team worked at the French partner for six months (funded by Erasmus) to implement the new programme and have delivered a module on it every year since. An increasing number of students now complete three semesters abroad, sometimes on three different continents. An important extension of this strategy was a focus on the development of ‘double degrees’, in which students join the final year of a partner institution’s degree and graduate at the end of this year, before returning to their home institution to graduate a second time. This provides a tangible outcome valued by students and lends credibility to their activities, particularly important as tuition fees increased. To further widen the appeal of ‘study abroad’, internships were introduced into exchange schemes as ‘experiential education’ (Steinberg, 2002). Students were originally forced to choose between studying abroad or gaining work experience in the UK. Now, almost half of students on “exchange” are on a scheme combining work and study. This was achieved by working with existing international partners to develop new schemes and selecting new partners for the internship opportunities they offer.

In China, in addition to large numbers of Chinese students studying at Western Universities for degrees as long term academic sojourners, short-term mobility increased as well, such as summer schools for university students (especially in the first and second year), short training programmes (e.g. mini MBA) and one-semester exchange students. As a new trend, outbound Chinese student mobility tends to be more short-time oriented and more diversified than before. The evidence suggests that, for this short-term oriented outbound student mobility, the main purpose is to develop inter-cultural awareness and enhance awareness of global citizenship. For example, in our one Chinese Mini MBA programme delivered in the author’s institution, none of the students had been to the UK before. One Mini MBA student claimed that: ‘*Seeing is believing....many things I saw are different from what I thought (about British culture) before. I wouldn’t know that if I did not come here to the UK*’. China is the country with largest population in the world. There are still large numbers of Chinese students (their family) cannot afford the expensive tuition

fees studying abroad. Such short-term student mobility programmes have provided great opportunities which enable and encourage more Chinese students developing their inter-cultural knowledge and enhancing their employability skills, such as communication skill.

### 3.5 Personal Development

Self-driven motivation played an important role motivating foreign students to go to China. According to students' narratives, self-motivated drivers for inbound student mobility are connected to personal development, including 1) gaining cultural and social capital; 2) seeking personally rewarding experiences; 3) maximising educational and employment opportunities. Our findings show that studying overseas gave students a global mindset, as well as a sense of intellectual awareness of their career development. Many multi-national enterprises are present in China so language-learning and inter-cultural competencies certainly enable students to understand Chinese culture and business management practices. Those are regarded as '*advanced soft skills when competing with other graduates, especially those who intend to work for multi-national companies*'. One professor recommended his French student for a part-time job, working for a French company located in Beijing. His main job was to file French documents. Although it is a simple job, he claimed that he developed his business networks (as social capital) and gained soft employability skills, such as communication and team work. He felt '*much more confidence*' about finding a job on completing his studies in China. For him, studying in China was transformative: it changed his life. '*That is what the higher education about*', he stated. In addition to the benefit of studying abroad, the student also mentioned the extra financial costs, family concern and language barriers he faced when studying in China. These barriers may need to be taken into consideration and students who are intending to study abroad may need to plan well in advance.

For outbound Chinese students, studying abroad brings them educational and personal benefits in relation to the acquisition of knowledge, cultural awareness, English language proficiency and development of skills such as communication, critical thinking and problem solving. Our findings indicate that the majority of Chinese students become more confident and their ability to get on with people is enhanced. They manage unpredictable situations better and become more mature. The following quotes illustrate the mobility benefits for Chinese students studying abroad:

*I rarely spoke to foreigners when I was in China. Now I won't be afraid to talk to foreigners. Opening a bank account, cooking and shopping, washing clothes... I had to deal with all those things after I came here. They used to be my parents' business-tough at the beginning, but you will learn eventually. Critical thinking: I knew very little about it before I came here. If I had not studied in this University (in the UK), I would not know about this.*

*Outbound student (interviewee - China)*

The majority of Chinese students believed that studying abroad had brought many benefits for their career development. They felt more confident and thought they had a better ability to cope with difficulties and solve problems. It was also clear that, as a

whole, students felt that studying abroad helped them in finding jobs and enhances their employability skills.

Similarly, study abroad students in the UK were encouraged to reflect deeply on their management of such experiences. To enhance the 'authentic-learning' approach, post-return 'Maximising Employability' sessions, as recommended by Kruse & Brubaker (2002) were organised. Some students struggled to realise the value of challenges they had overcome, slipping into negativity because they had not entirely enjoyed their experience abroad. Students who had thoroughly enjoyed themselves could find it even more stretching. These sessions helped students to 'unpack' (Gardner et al, 2009) their experiences, positive and negative, and translate them into evidence of the 'additional critical global competences' employers seek (Diamond et al, 2011), such as adaptability, resilience, self-reliance and an ability to work internationally with many different people. Students were then guided in improving their job applications and interview preparation, using this evidence.

Students are transformed by their international exposure, which is a life-affirming learning experience. The students demonstrated positivity and willingness to act as self-efficacy role-models to younger students. They wished to remain engaged in the programme long after they returned to the UK and graduate. The tangible effects on their confidence, global outlook and employability are marked:

*Before my placement in Germany, I was content to finish university and find employment within my hometown, Newcastle. Returning from the placement, I knew that there was no going back to a simple life in Newcastle for me. I moved to London to find a job in the corporate world. My international experience allowed me to obtain long term secondments within my company's offices in Zurich and Miami. Six years later, I have transferred my life to Switzerland where I work internationally for the world's largest Corporate Insurance Broker.*

*Outbound student (interviewee – UK)*

### **3.6 Family Support**

Outbound Chinese mobility was driven by family support. Financial support from parents is vital for Chinese students choosing to study abroad. Due to fast economic growth in China, living standards have improved dramatically. Increasing numbers of Chinese families, especially the middle class, are willing and can afford to send their children to study overseas. As opposed to European countries, where students can seek financial support from different institutions and special programmes such as Erasmus, Chinese outbound mobility is largely financed by their parents. Chinese parents have realised that their children face more challenges than ever before in the job market. Foreign companies enter Chinese markets from all over the world. Many parents have realised that sending their children to study abroad, especially in Western countries, will prepare their children for a globalising world. Although Chinese parents dearly want to stay with their Children, they are willing to support their children in studying abroad financially and emotionally in order to improve their prospects for the future.

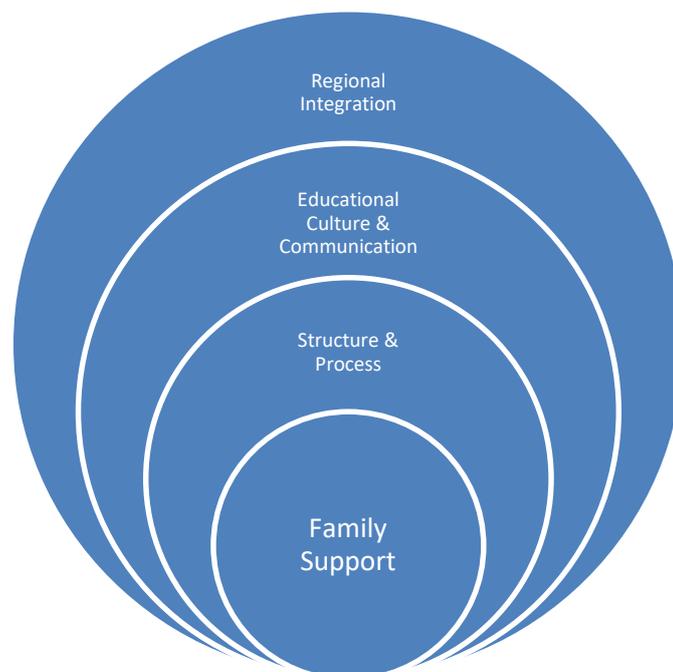
One student explained:

*Studying at British University is quite expensive compared to (studying in) Australia and other Western countries. I was lucky as my parents are running the family business, they can support me studying here (the British University). As far as I know, the majority of Chinese students studying overseas are self-financed .... When I say 'self' I meant our 'parents'.*

*Outbound student (interviewee – China)*

#### 4. Conclusions

Analysing our findings on an individual, institutional and national level, three broad conclusions can be drawn about what these transitional countries can learn from one another.



Firstly, the potential influence and value of family support is clear from the Chinese case, the only one in which it emerged as an explicit theme. Inbound student mobility responds to a combination of Chinese government support, Chinese HE institutional support and students' self-motivation. However, outbound mobility is most influenced by family support. We suggest that the individual benefits of studying abroad – personal development, enhanced employability etc - can in turn drive support from the family, both financial and emotional. These can be maximised through the development of valuable opportunities providing credit transfer, a double degree and other employability enhancements and also

an educational culture which helps students identify their learnings from challenging experiences. Both the UK and Ukraine could consider more the role of the family in supporting internationally mobile students.

In the UK case, the growth in outward mobility was driven by institutional policy behind the structure and process of recruiting and supporting students, which in turn produced a focus on building the valuable opportunities for individuals described above and highly motivating communication. While Chinese universities focus on incentives to attract inbound students, they are less concerned with supporting 'exchange' mobility as part of home studies. Most outbound students are self-funding and engage in full-time study abroad on their own initiative. In Ukraine, a lack of institutional structure undermines the experience and integration of incoming students, effecting their reputation abroad.

Finally, Ukraine clearly demonstrates the influence of government policy, the value of regional and wider international integration. Outbound mobility is mostly within the Erasmus+ programme now its scope is broader than the European Union but inbound mobility is undermined by a lack of institutional focus, support and engagement. Both China and the UK should consider this aspect of closer international integration when deciding their future.

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