



Impact of Brexit on travel, preparing colleges -podcast 1 transcript

Steve Frampton: I'm Steve Frampton, I'm the President of the Association of Colleges and I'm here today, with Julian Gravatt. Julian's the Deputy Chief-Executive, and Emma Meredith, the International Director at the AoC.

One of the immediate impacts of Brexit could be that of travel, and as we know, and me, especially, as an ex-geography and geology teacher and chief examiner, thousands of our UK students have benefited from travelling overseas as part of the Erasmus+ programme, on student exchanges, as staff and students, and just generally travelling overseas. So, what impact is Brexit going to have on this really important area of our provision? Emma, would you like to help?

Emma Meredith: Sure. Well, the good news about Erasmus is that if there is a deal, if the government manages to reach a deal, then nothing changes until 2020 and we'll complete the current Erasmus+ programme cycle, which started in 2014, we'll complete that as normal. If the UK leaves the EU without a deal, then the government has put in-place a guarantee; they'll underwrite all the current programmes that are actually in place. So, any Erasmus+ programme that's currently taking place or is approved, will be underwritten by the government's guarantee. So, there's a lot of information out there already to help colleges register for the government's guarantee, it's done through the Cabinet Office portal and all that colleges need to do is take a look at that information and make sure that their projects are registered.

Steve Frampton: How long might that take them?

Emma Meredith: I don't think it will take too long. It's a form that I think is designed to be fairly simple so that colleges and other providers

can get their Erasmus+ programmes registered as soon as possible. So, we'd really advise colleges to make sure they've done that before 31st October.

Steve Frampton: And what's the sort of turnaround they might expect? Is it an instant decision?

Emma Meredith: Well, I don't think there needs to be any kind of decision. What the government is actually looking for is to see which are the programmes that are out there at the moment, that's the good thing. There's not an approval process necessarily, it's about registering your project to make sure the government knows that you've got that Erasmus project and if we leave without a deal, they can continue to underwrite the funding. But as I said before, if we leave with a deal, then everything continues as normal until the end of the Erasmus cycle in 2020.

Steve Frampton: Julian, do you want to add anything to that?

Julian Gravatt: No, I mean people think Erasmus is just about university students, but it's a brilliant programme and lots and lots of students and staff are involved, and so we're really concerned to make sure that the people don't panic about the change. There is no change particularly planned for 31st October, even if there's no deal, and the important thing is to continue the good work that's already there.

Steve Frampton: And what do you see that good work as encompassing? I mean how important is it to colleges?

Emma Meredith: Well, I mean there are well over 100 colleges in the UK that have benefitted from funding through the Erasmus programme in the current project cycle, which has been running for the last five years. We know, at AoC, from speaking to colleges, both anecdotally and statistically, that 100% of them that have taken part in it rate it excellent in terms of improving student confidence. There are lots of other benefits to the programme, many colleges use it to create work placement opportunities for their students if they're not available locally. So, there are a lot of benefits, and as Julian says, it has been very important to colleges, particularly in parts of the UK that are quite monocultural and don't have many opportunities for their students to go abroad.

So, from that point of view, it has been very important, so I can completely understand that colleges are quite worried about what might happen. So, they need to get registered with the government's guarantee, and one other tip I have as well that the government is encouraging colleges to do is to sign a bilateral agreement with their European partners. So, even if they have a contract with Erasmus in place, it's good practice to get an agreement signed, just a simple memorandum of understanding or a simple document with their mobility partners in the EU, just to evidence that they have these projects in place.

Steve Frampton: And have colleges done that? Are there examples of good practice?

Emma Meredith: We, at AoC, actually sent out a sample template that colleges can use to sign an agreement or cooperation agreement with their European partners. So, there are examples out there, it doesn't have to be anything too fancy, the main thing is to just get this documentation, this registration, in place.

Steve Frampton: And have our European partners been happy to do that?

Emma Meredith: I think our European partners are just as concerned as our UK side is about what will happen with Erasmus, so yes, there is a lot of willingness to work with the UK, but it's fair to say what might cause concern, both in the UK and the EU, is what will happen with Erasmus in the longer term. So, that's been a concern that perhaps some Erasmus partners in the EU are put off from signing the long-term arrangements with the UK because they're not sure what will happen beyond 2020.

Steve Frampton: Understandably really, and as someone who had the privilege of chairing one of those Erasmus projects across eight nations, I can see why that might be.

Emma Meredith: Absolutely, and I think it's our job at AoC to work with the agencies, both in the UK and the EU, to work with the colleges, to provide as much reassurance, again, through government and through our channels to government, to help reassure colleges.

Steve Frampton: Thank you very, very much. Perhaps we can move on a little bit to have a look at the short-term disruption that you mentioned. Might we see the disappearance of this programme

and do you think there are any plans for alternative programmes to be funded by the UK?

Emma Meredith: The government certainly is looking at every option with Erasmus. I think it probably has no alternative but to consider that until a deal is worked out on our final position with the EU. So, the government is looking both at continuing Erasmus and also at a very ambitious replacement programme. At the moment, we don't have too much detail about what a replacement programme might look like, but the government is certainly considering that and AoC has been discussing with the Department for Education what the programme might look like. They've asked us for our views, so we would certainly look to engage colleges in that process, in the event that we couldn't continue as a UK fully involved in the Erasmus+ programme.

Steve Frampton: So, when we know where we are, that will develop.

Emma Meredith: That's right.

Julian Gravatt: And these sort of exchanges between colleges in the UK and in Europe, they've been going on since the 1950's, haven't they? I know they went on before Erasmus. The thing that I think that Erasmus does is it provides the infrastructure for it to happen and it provides funding to make sure that it can happen so that cost doesn't become a burden in terms of making sure that you can do these sorts of trips.

Steve Frampton: Absolutely right, and I know how much our European partners value this, because the other thing we need to consider, of course, is, it will be a huge loss to them if this doesn't happen as well.

Emma Meredith: You're quite right, the UK is the biggest receiving partner within Erasmus+ for inbound students, so that's all the students that come from other countries within the EU. Obviously, in the UK, we have the advantage of being English-speaking, English is the most taught language within the European Union, so it's natural that students from the EU will want to continue to come here. So, we need to make sure that any replacement programme does look at working with the EU to continue to offer placements for students. Because from a practical perspective, the EU is a really important partner and it's quite easy for students to get from the UK across to the EU for placements.

Julian Gravatt: It's also part of the soft power that we have within Europe and the people in other countries of Europe want to come and learn from our programmes and that's where the staff exchanges sometimes gain. But also, likewise, our staff benefit from going overseas and there are trips, for example, to work in Helsinki to support students with mental health difficulties we had back in the autumn.

Steve Frampton: Without a doubt. We've talked a little bit about staff and students, so what should colleges be doing now to ensure that those critical staff and students are appropriately prepared for any travel changes that might happen, Julian?

Julian Gravatt: So, the first thing is not to panic, I mean there may be a no deal in a couple of weeks' time, but there may be a deal. Even if there's a no deal, quite a lot of things will be done to smooth the passage across borders and when people are abroad, but there are certain things which are in the official advice and also in our advice for colleges. The most important thing is that the people who are in charge of planning in the college, have a record of the trips so that they know who is abroad and who is where, in case anything does happen, does go wrong.

Then at an individual level, it's really important that individuals make sure there's more than six months' validity on their passports, and that's both staff and students. There may well be travel insurance changes that whoever is in charge of insurance in the college needs to do, so whoever is in charge of doing the trip needs to check that that's been done, because the current E111 cards may not work anymore and so those sorts of things need to be sorted.

Steve Frampton: Do you know if that decision has definitely been made? Is that the case?

Julian Gravatt: The difficulty there is in this is that what the UK is planning for, a no-deal, is about unilaterally continuing the existing rules. So, we may have agreed on this side of the border to accept things, but on the EU side, it's left to each of the 27 member governments to make their decisions. So, you may find a situation where what's been decided in France is different to what's been decided in Germany, is different to what's been decided in Sweden. So,

there's lots of advice from government, which is now country-specific, to help people work that one out.

Steve Frampton: And where would people access that?

Julian Gravatt: Everywhere you go at the moment you see these 'Get Ready' adverts and so it's going to the 'Get Ready' website and then following things through from that.

Steve Frampton: I've certainly seen a lot of them. I mean every motorway I drive on at the moment seems to have these, don't they, really? So, as you say, sometimes though there can be a plethora, but that's the key place for them to go.

Julian Gravatt: Yes, and the thing is, is that there's so much advice out at the moment, there's probably more than a thousand notices have gone out. And it's really important for people to think 'well, what do I actually need to know for this particular trip that I'm going to be doing in November or December with this group of students?' and so focus down to specific things. So, it will be specific things to do with health and insurance, I guess, will be the two things for somebody involved in an Erasmus programme or somebody involved in a student exchange would need to think through.

Steve Frampton: But that's always been the case, really, hasn't it?

Julian Gravatt: Yes.

Emma Meredith: Yes.

Steve Frampton: So really, it's best practice continues.

Julian Gravatt: Yes, and most of the no-deal planning is basically doing what you probably always should have done and making sure you're actually doing it just under slightly different rules. There could be certain unexpected things happen. So, there's been quite a lot of publicity about the fact that there may be some changes at airports or ports and the Home Office has said that they're going to create a different channel for EU nationals. And, of course, you could have that in the other EU country that you're going to, so passport lanes. A thing that could immediately affect lots of people is the fact that mobile phone charges may suddenly go up, so that's something that the staff, students and our parents need

to know as well, and families.

Steve Frampton: Very, very much so, because those lines of communication could be even more critical, because there could be, potentially, I guess, delays at immigration points?

Julian Gravatt: Yes, and so build that into planning. We're at a time of year when there is less disruption and fewer delays, but it's worth anticipating that that could be something that happens. You can't completely anticipate, if it's a no-deal scenario, what individual organisations may do, what individual customs authorities or airlines or ports may do. But I think that is a worst-case scenario, I think most of these things, on the short-term, it's a keep calm and carry on message.

Steve Frampton: Absolutely, and presumably, we'll be able to give people the most up-to-date information from our website as well as from the government channels as well.

Julian Gravatt: Yes, so we've produced some guidance and some information which we put out last week and we'll be updating it again this week. As we get to key decision points, we will update it, but likewise, there's a flood of information coming out from government and I think it's an important thing to filter down to what actually makes a difference and what affects you as a member of staff doing the planning.

Steve Frampton: And making sure in individual colleges exactly who has got responsibility for which bit, is probably never going to be more important, isn't it?

Emma Meredith: Yes, that's right.

Steve Frampton: And I think that sort of clarity, governing bodies will want to know as well as senior teams, and also parents, as you said, absolutely that. Can I move on to have a look at college staff working in international departments? Because there may be some specifics there that it would be useful for you to comment on, I think, particularly if you're travelling overseas for exhibitions or fairs, what about the impact on that sort of travel?

Julian Gravatt: Yes, this is a pretty technical area where, again, it will depend on the approach of the specific country that people are going to. But,

there are a number of rules about people making visits to other countries and bringing along equipment and so, business equipment. So, it's the most visible in a way when you have touring groups of musicians and they have to do things like they have to register the equipment they're using. I can't think of many colleges where they're necessarily going to be taking across the whole orchestra to another part of Europe, but it could happen. If you think what needs to be done there, then what could happen if we have a no-deal is that any other sorts of equipment that people take across, it might be necessary to have the right documentation.

There's quite a bit of information on the official websites on this, and a particular thing that people need to do is to get a thing called an ATA Carnet, which avoids having to pay duty when taking this equipment across. There's quite a lot of discussion about this among the creative arts and entrepreneurs of community about what it is that might be required. And it seems to be considered that if you're just taking across like one laptop, it will probably be fine, but if a college was, for example, taking across an exhibition stand ... colleges are such great places, you never quite know what people are doing and you never quite know what issues may arise. But the key thing is to make sure, again, that they look up on the 'Get Ready' website and check what it is that may be required.

Steve Frampton: I've put myself in my position there, I chaired an international conference of eight countries around ILT and the future of learning. A lot of equipment had to go, so do you think it's very important that those colleges would register?

Julian Gravatt: It's worth checking what the official advice is, coming up to the time. Again, this is one of these things where some rules will get decided and some decisions get decided at an EU level and some rules and some issues get decided at a country level, so it may depend on which country it is you're going to. If it's an area where there are lots of UK to that country travel, like France, it would probably be more prepared than if, for example, you were going to Latvia or Romania or somewhere that they might particularly have decided to be a bit bureaucratic or a bit awkward, I guess.

Steve Frampton: Of course. You mentioned, specifically, musicians, but what

about sports teams with international commitments? What about overseas residential trips for geographers and taking equipment with them as well? Do you think there are any implications there?

Julian Gravatt: I think that we'll be okay on those ones, but it will be one that will be worth checking. More generally, any questions or information that people have who are listening to this podcast, we have a dedicated email advice line, which is brexit@aoc.co.uk and it will be possible to ask on that and we can then follow up specifically on those types of issues.

Steve Frampton: I think colleagues are going to find that really useful and, presumably, we would also like to know from them what's happening on the ground as it happens. So, if they've got any top tips they can share with us, particularly in those first few weeks, I'm sure we'd find that really useful.

Emma Meredith: That would be really helpful because the experience of one college is something that we can then take and put information around for other colleges. Particularly if colleges are finding things out, as Julian has just described, about maybe some slight differences between EU and country-specific rules. We can find that information and put it into guidance and put it out to more colleges, so it's very helpful if colleges let us know about their experiences.

Julian Gravatt: But a really key thing is, is that we're planning now on the basis for there may be a no-deal, but it may be, of course, there's a deal, in which case, we have a transition and everything continues, pretty much, for a period until December 2020. Or there may be an extension and so we don't leave quite when we expect. The important thing is for people to know that there may be issues and to keep a watch out and then to focus on the things that they need to worry about as it comes up.

Steve Frampton: Julian, all the way through, we've made an assumption about deal or no-deal and even, possibly, a transition period in-between. So, how do you think it could work that way?

Julian Gravatt: It's impossible to predict exactly what's going to happen and, at the moment, we're anticipating there may be a no-deal, so we're

effectively planning for a worst-case scenario. And then, in that case, everything depends on the rules of the specific country that people are travelling to, as well as the more general EU rules and whatever arrangements are made between the UK and the EU. But it could be that we have a transition if there's deal and then, effectively, everything carries forward as it has at the moment until December 2020 or even a bit later.

Or it could be that we have an extension so nothing changes at all for the next few months. What's really important is that people anticipate the fact that things may change, there may be rule changes in the areas we've described and it's really important that then, as they come up to the particular event, the particular trip or the particular exchange, that they've worked out exactly how things are going to affect what they're going to do.

Steve Frampton: Thank you, and, of course, we can't know that today, but we will shortly.

Julian Gravatt: Yes.

Steve Frampton: What I'd like to do, perhaps in conclusion, is just perhaps to summarise the top tips that you would give people, for very busy people in colleges, and we understand that they've got a lot of other things to consider at the moment. So perhaps Emma, what's your top advice, do you think?

Emma Meredith: Keep calm and carry on, to start with, I think, just carry on business as usual, that's the first tip, but the second tip is, be prepared by looking at the information that we can put out at Aoc, but also on the government's 'Get Ready for Brexit' website. So, be aware that things might change and, particularly, our third tip, keep an eye on any staff and student trips going out to the EU. Because this is what we're looking at, the travel side, and we want to make sure that staff and students can travel safely and securely and that they've made any adjustments that might be necessary.

Steve Frampton: Well, I knew that was going to be your top tip, Julian, 'keep calm and carry on', but do you have anything new to add?

Emma Meredith: I stole your thunder.

Julian Gravatt: I think it's talking to people, isn't it? It's making sure that the people who are in charge of exchanges or trips have talked to the other people within their college who are then in charge of things like insurance and then mobile phones and other such things. Also, that they're talking to their European partners as well so that people are alert to the fact that this is an area of life that may be changing as a result of external events and government policy.

Steve Frampton: Thank you very, very much indeed.

Emma Meredith: This podcast focused on travel and we have two other podcasts on people and running the college in addition to AoC's webinar on Brexit and getting prepared for Brexit and our Brexit readiness pack. At any time, if you've got any queries, you can email us at brexit@aac.co.uk.