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Published online: 20 Nov 2023.

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Ensuring turing – lessons learned for international short-mobilities during a time of travel disruption

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ABSTRACT

The 'See the World – Winchester' programme was funded by the UK Turing scheme in 2021–2022 and aimed to broaden the horizons of historically marginalised students who may not otherwise have had access to extracurricular opportunities such as international travel. The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, the authors reflect on the successes, failures and challenges involved with running internationalisation activities during a time of travel disruption. Secondly, this article presents findings from a small-scale evaluation that sought to measure the impact of short-term mobility with historically marginalised or under-represented students. The paper is useful for institutions looking to run international mobilities with students during a period of travel disruption using the COVID-19 pandemic as a case study. In addition, the findings highlight the experiences and benefits to students participating in short mobilities, which include, a cultural experience, opportunity for personal growth and development, enhanced employability, and ultimately, broader horizons.

Introduction

Planning, delivering and engaging students in internationalisation activities in the 2020s will require additional planning to factor in likely travel disruption. This paper reports on the University of Winchester's Turing funded short-mobility programme 'See the World – Winchester' in 2021–2022, during a year of travel disruption due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper will have two elements, where first, the project case study is outlined (including successes and failures) and secondly, evaluation findings are presented to share the outcomes of an international excursion for participating students. The paper will end with a discussion of challenges and give recommendations for institutions planning similar activities. As travel disruption implemented by individual governments is a likely occurrence when planning and delivering internationalisation activities, this paper hopes to offer insights to inform future planning in the years ahead. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has become more predictable in regard to travel, future disruption due to climate change, regional conflict, political turmoil and natural disasters are all likely to cause future issues where this case study aims to share learnings. This paper has been written by the project team and evaluation findings from 12 students who participated.

Context

The University of Winchester has a strong history of internationalisation, with particular success working in collaboration with European, Japanese and American institutions and facilitating semester long exchanges and short one-two-week mobilities. Winchester has seen internationalisation become a key selling point for studying at the institution, where the university, based in the South of England, also receives substantial demand for return incoming exchanges from international students. In the early 2020s, the English Higher Education Regulator began a strategic priority on Student Success, where the Westminster Government emphasises that all students from all backgrounds are supported to succeed in and following higher education (Department for Education 2017). The 'following' higher education element is measured through the UK Graduate Outcomes Survey, where universities have targets to increase the percentage of graduates progressing onto professional level employment and/or further study (Graduate Outcomes 2022). The UK Turing Scheme supported an emphasis on outcomeso such as graduate outcomes, with a particular focus on historically marginalised students (a.k.a widening participation students) which includes student demographics such as disabled students, mature students and students' from a parental household with an annual income below £25,000 per year (see Turing Scheme 2023). The aim of the scheme is to increase accessibility and funding for students to access the transformative potential of internationalisation experiences, commonly known to promote

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student confidence, skills development and likelihood of future mobility in their working life (Bathmaker 2015; Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013; Clark et al. 2015). The Turing scheme has the potential to meet aims around providing valuable life experience, while also enhancing the employability of historically marginalised students in UK Higher Education, and ultimately, broadening horizons. Therefore, the evaluation part of this paper sought to explore the impact that the Turing scheme had on the group of students who participated, as well as reflect on considerations for future excursions.

Literature review

It is commonly accepted that it is no longer sufficient for students to graduate university with just a degree (Bathmaker 2015; Clark et al. 2015). As universities have become more accessible, the number of graduates competing for jobs has increased (McCaig 2010). With the ever increasingly competitive labour market, what students engage with alongside their studies is imperative to enhance employability (Bathmaker 2015; Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013; Clark et al. 2015). Offering study abroad opportunities is a primary means for students to accrue cultural and human capital, and develop valuable transferable skills, such as problem solving, teamwork and organisational skills, among others (Sisavath 2021), which are deemed to be valuable by employers (Clark et al. 2015). Sisavath (2021) has explored the benefits of international exchange on graduate employability and found that such trips are valuable for academic outcomes, and can be beneficial for attainment, graduate employability, and institutional recruitment. As tuition fees have increased, so has the pressure on institutions to deliver a better university experience, as well as ensure social mobility and employability (Milburn-Shaw and Walker 2017).

However, ensuring internationalisation experiences are available for all students can be problematic for students from historically marginalised backgrounds who face barriers to participation. Opportunities such as short mobilities and exchanges require enhancement to increase accessibility (Breadena et al. 2023), where there are social, financial and cultural barriers to participation (Mittelmeier et al. 2022). Not all students have the time or financial capacity to engage with such extracurricular opportunities offered at university (Stevenson and Clegg 2011), and there is a need to diversify the offered internationalisation activities to cover the needs of the whole student body (Van Mol and Perez-Encinas 2022). Van Mol and Perez-Encinas (2022) continues to highlight that 'students from lower socio-economic backgrounds showed to be less likely to participate in any internationalisation

activities' (16) and that working class students are more likely to prioritise academic activities above additional enrichment activities such as short mobilities (16–17). The Turing scheme offers funding to support universities in facilitating such opportunities for students from marginalised, underprivileged and diverse backgrounds to engage with activities that will help them to accrue cultural capital and make them more employable, is both timely and necessary.

Project report

The 'See the World – Winchester' project was funded in the first year of the UK Turing scheme in 2021–2022, being the first year of the UK's alternative to Erasmus + following the UK's departure from the European Union in 2020. The scheme aimed to create accessible opportunities for historically marginalised students who represented either a lower-socioeconomic, minority or disabled demographic, as defined by the University of Winchester, who are often referred to as Widening Participation students in UK HE (University of Winchester 2023). The project aimed to to improve employability through greater self awareness of skills and open opportunities to international travel for students less likely to have experienced travel. The University of Winchester received funding to run three short-mobilities (excursions/trips) to three partner universities in India, Norway and the USA, where funding was confirmed in 2021 to take 20 students on each excursion for one week. The plan was to carry out risk assessment of these opportunities in autumn 2021 and deliver the excursions in April Spring Break in 2022. Although the funding was secured during the global pandemic with mobilities planned to run post partial/full vaccination roll out in the UK, the operations were not as optimistic as expected and will be outlined below.

Across the 2020–2021 academic year, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to spread throughout the world, with peaks and troughs in infection rates, varying country by country. Nations responded differently from reintroducing lockdowns to limiting travel restrictions, including mandatory negative testing pre and post arrival to nations, mandatory self-isolation on arrival, and the vast majority of nations having requirements to self-isolate when infected. This meant planning international travel for large groups had high risk, as at times, 10%+ of certain countries were infected with COVID-19 at any one time. Therefore, there were risk factors outlined below when organising such a project, meaning disruption to travelling as a group, or being able to travel, was high (outlined below):

- Travellers catching COVID-19 prior to travel preventing travel outgoing;

- Travellers catching COVID-19 abroad and having to self-isolate for an uncertain amount of time;
- Destination country preventing international visitors;
- Destination country mandating isolation periods on arrival;
- The home country preventing travel to certain countries internationally;
- The home country mandating isolation periods on return;
- All/any of the above causing considerable additional stress and negative impact on mental/physical health to travellers;
- All/any of the above causing additional and unpredictable financial cost as incidents occurs;
- Increased chance of any of the above circumstances occurring when travelling in large groups.

Part 1: case study

Engaging students' interest

To promote the mobilities, the project team advertised the spring trips through printed marketing materials and information stands at student events. The team also worked with careers advisers and internationalisation champions in each Faculty to spread the word and determine enthusiasm for short-term mobilities among widening participation students. The team also held information sessions for students to tell them more about each location, how they could get involved and what such a trip would entail. The mobilities were advertised through the careers opportunities system via our Study Abroad Team, Faculty Employability Advisers, Programme Leaders and Heads of Academic Department. The team followed our talks with an initial FAQs e-mail and invited students to confirm their interest by selecting which country or countries they would prefer to visit.

India

The largest set of funding was to support 20 students and 2 staff to travel to a partner in India during April 2022. Although this was the most expensive trip, there was high student interest in the excursion. Unfortunately, the excursion could not be risk assessed as originally planned in January 2022 due to the variant of COVID-19 (Omicron) where India imposed a one-week mandatory isolation period on arrival in the country for all travellers. Even as this legislation ended, the trip could not be postponed until June (with risk assessment in March) due to higher prices for flights during peak tourism times. Unfortunately, these factors meant that the India short mobility had to be cancelled. Fortunately, The funding body permitted Turing funding to be moved to other excursions below.

USA

The second most expensive trip was to a partner university in the USA, where the team had planned a risk assessment for December 2021. This was delayed due to the same new COVID-19 variant (Omicron) and subsequent international disruption in the USA in December 2021. Nonetheless, the risk assessment did take place in February 2022, where the university and risk assessor had great success in visiting the partner and planning the short mobility. Unfortunately, the risk assessor contracted COVID-19 during their visit, which led to an unwelcome period of illness and isolation that extended their visit. The difficulties created by this experience and the high number of COVID-19 cases in the USA at that time meant that the team decided to cancel the excursion. Taking into account the potential vulnerability of student participants, it was deemed that any potential benefits would not outweigh the potential risks. This highlighted the value in running a risk assessment trip ahead of students' participation.

Norway

The final and least expensive short mobility planned to visit Norway. This excursion was delayed until the last week of May 2022, where the visit was risk assessed successfully in late April. By this time, Norway had ceased travel requirements for testing and mask wearing. With a lower population destiny and being geographically closer to the UK, the excursion passed the risk assessment. In April 2022, 15 students were recruited and planning for the trip and pre-travel sessions began in earnest.

The short mobility

The partner university developed an immersive weeklong study programme for students, which encompassed a series of sessions that included opportunities to meet and study alongside international students reading degrees in Norway, and classes that gave students a flavour of studying abroad. Sessions included history and cultural studies to give students a better understanding of Norway. Additionally, the university partner presented on Norwegian Higher Education, highlighting activities that demonstrated how the university worked with their students both in terms of student engagement, and health and wellbeing. Students were also given access to simulators where they watched demonstrations of certain disciplines, including maritime students receiving their training and first-hand opportunities to captain a ship and understand how the system worked. Students were given a full tour of the university campus and facilities and were given the opportunity to take part in 3D printing activities.

The campus is situated close to historic Viking archaeology sites, where the partner university planned visits to historical sites, including the local museum, where a guest lecturer guided students around the museum and the surrounding archeological site. As part of the study programme, our students could join international students to visit the city of Oslo or join a trip to Verdens Ende. In Oslo, students explored the city by hop-on hop-off bus, stopping at the Opera House, Royal Palace and visiting the statues at Vigeland Sculpture Park. In the picturesque location of Verdens Ende, students were encouraged to explore and walk along the jetty and enjoy lunch at the local restaurant. All tours and planned events were accessible to all students and enabled those with differing needs to join in with activities. Cultural activities were designed to immerse students in the local community and students had the chance to visit an annual festival, which provided a range of traditional activities. By immersing students in cultural activities in conjunction with their studies, the team were successful in engaging students in a variety of activities as part of the short mobility.

Part 2: evaluation

Research purpose

The purpose of the Turing scheme is to provide students from widening participation backgrounds the opportunity to travel abroad, to which they may not otherwise have access. The Turing scheme is deemed to be especially valuable for students from widening participation backgrounds due to benefits encompassed with visiting an international higher education institution, such as developing life skills, which will in turn foster employability such as articulating skills, confidence, insight into living (studying or working) abroad, which would broaden these students' future prospects (Sisvath 2021). Therefore, with this in mind, the aims of the study were to:

- Garner an understanding of what students hoped to get out of the trip, and how this compared to what they felt they ultimately gained.
- Gather insight into the students' experiences specifically relating to the aims of the Turing scheme i.e. confidence in travelling abroad, cultural experience and employability.
- Be able to make recommendations for staff running international trips with students from widening participation backgrounds.

Research design

The small-scale study utilised a mixed method survey design which included a combination of rating scales to measure students' opinions and confidence, and open text questions to garner more in-depth responses around students' thoughts, feelings, and experiences relating to the excursion and what they gained from it (Fowler 2014). The survey also asked specifically about participants' backgrounds in relation to widening participation characteristics which were part of the eligibility criteria for the trip, and helped the authors to decipher the value of the trip for students from diverse backgrounds.

Sample/participants

All participants who went on the excursion were invited to complete the pre and post-mobility survey. Of the 15 students who went on the excursion, 11 participants completed the pre-mobility survey, and 10 participants completed the post-mobility survey. To preserve anonymity, participants were asked to provide a 6-digit unique identifier so their responses could be removed if they decided to withdraw.

Methods of data collection

The surveys included rating scale questions, so the responses could be compared between pre and post mobility. These included questions relating to what students hoped to get out of the trip compared to what they felt they got out of the trip. This was accompanied by an open text answer so participants could expand, as well as a question around what motivated them to apply, and what excited them about the trip, which could be thematically analysed. Other questions asked students rate on a scale of one to five, their confidence relating to: travelling abroad, knowledge of the culture of the country they were visiting, likelihood to live (work or study) abroad, and confidence in discussing their strengths in an employability setting. These questions were designed to measure how far the excursion met its aims which were around broadening horizons for underprivileged students, which includes life experience as well as employability. Open-text responses were also available for students to expand on their strengths and weaknesses, so the researchers could compare responses to decipher whether any growth in confidence was actualised, i.e. if their ability to report their strengths improved following the excursion. Finally, participants were also asked about any challenges that they experienced, for trip organisers to consider to improve the students' experience of the trip next time.

Data analysis

Quantitative questions were analysed through comparing pre and post-mobility answers given. For the questions where students were asked to rate their confidence, an average response was used to

compare pre and post-mobility answers. Qualitative questions were analysed through thematic analysis, and themes emerged based on the frequency of occurrence, as well as if themes seemed significant based on the researchers' interpretations, as well as connection to the literature (Braun and Clarke 2012). The reliability of findings drawn from the thematic analysis was ensured through investigator triangulation whereby three researchers were involved in the study and thus offered different theoretical perspectives to challenge or corroborate themes (Flick 2007).

Ethical considerations

The study received ethical clearance from The University of Winchester's Research Ethics Committee. Ethical considerations included being considerate and valuing of the students' time who were taking part in the trip, therefore a pre and post-mobility survey was deemed the most efficient way of gathering participant feedback with minimal effort from participants.

Research limitations

With more time and resources, it would be valuable to hold follow-up focus groups with participants to expand on and add context to their survey responses (Creswell and Clark 2018). Also, not all participants who took part in the trip completed the survey, meaning there could be potential for bias in the findings. For example, it is possible that only those who had either positive or negative feedback decided to complete the survey. Nevertheless, the findings reported in the surveys tended to show a balanced view, which indicates that these results are not skewed by bias in responses. Another potential limitation to the survey data was that a different number of students completed the pre and post-mobility surveys, however, this was overcome as the average response rate was calculated for these questions to ensure parity in comparisons. Furthermore, while the small sample size does make findings hard to generalise beyond this excursion, the open-text answers help to corroborate themes from the scales, and clearly demonstrate themes around the value and impact that the trip had for these participants, as well as offering some insight into lessons learned that could be useful for others who are running an international trip with students from widening participation backgrounds. Results and findings from the mixed method pre and post-mobility surveys are presented below.

Findings

Out of the 15 students who took part in the Norway short mobility, 12 responses were submitted for the pre-mobility survey and 10 responses for the post-mobility survey. The students were initially asked which eligibility criteria for the Turing project they met, which are summarised below. The key finding demonstrates that the majority of respondents met at least one widening participation criterion.

Participants

Pre-mobility respondents: eligibility criteria

2	Prefer not to say
3	Low household income or low socio-economic status
3	Disclosed a disability to the University
3	Low household income or low socio-economic status, Disclosed a disability to the University
1	Low household income or low socio-economic status, A young person who is or has been, in care

Post-mobility respondents: eligibility criteria

1	Prefer not to say
2	Low household income or low socio-economic status
3	Disclosed a disability to the University
3	Low household income or low socio-economic status, Disclosed a disability to the University
1	Low household income or low socio-economic status, A young person who is or has been, in care

Motivations for applying

When asked why students applied for the opportunity, the findings largely related to broadening horizons, visiting the country for personal and professional development. For example quotes included: 'Because I have never been abroad before on an aeroplane and wouldn't be able to afford it as I require two carers. I want to see the world though so this is amazing', 'I have always wanted to study abroad but due to my disability this is not possible. I thought that this was a good chance to travel while in education', 'because I wanted to experience university education in a different country and this trip is a great opportunity for me to gain confidence', 'I really wanted to widen my horizons by travelling by myself as I've never done that before', and 'seemed an amazing opportunity to gain a different cultural perspective on student life and an opportunity to experience another culture with fellow students' (student quotes). These quotes collated from the pre-mobility survey help to demonstrate the value of the excursion in facilitating students who may have diverse needs or come from under-privileged backgrounds, and therefore may not otherwise have the opportunity or confidence to travel, to experience travelling to another university in a supported, structured and safe way.

Hopes for the trip

Prior to the excursions, the students were asked what were their hopes and aspirations for the mobility ahead. In large, these related to cultural and life experiences, relating to the mobility, where almost all the

participants referenced hopes for 'experience and knowledge of the culture and life' as well gaining 'cultural awareness and learning', 'study/work abroad onsite', 'possible ideas to carry forward at home' and 'I hope to get a hands-on experience with Norwegian student life and how it's different to our own. Also the day-to-day life of Norwegian residents and why it is such a popular place to live' (student quotes). Therefore, the key themes regarding motivations for the trip included overcoming barriers, life experience/skills, cultural experience, insight into studying abroad and having the opportunity to travel, to which these individuals may not normally have access. Thus, these findings are especially valuable as they align with the intentions for running the trip.

Benefits from the excursion in relation to expectations

In terms of what students hoped to gain from the excursion, the pre-mobility survey, responses were thematically organised into the following categories: cultural experience, life experience and insight into living (studying or working) abroad. In the post-mobility survey, 60% of respondents felt they gained life experience, 80% reported gaining a cultural experience, 50% gained insight into living abroad (either studying or working) and 20% gained other skills and gave examples such as independence, organisation and confidence. These findings demonstrate that students' expectations for the trip were not only met, but they gained a greater breadth of skills and experiences than initially anticipated, thus students' exceeding expectations for the trip. Examples of elements that students were particularly excited about included meeting new people, seeing a new place, and gaining experience that previously has not been available to them and therefore, the prospect of travel excited them. Key findings for students include expanding their social network, new cultural experiences, and insight into study/education.

The mean score for the Likert scale questions are summarised below:

How confident are you in travelling abroad? (Likert Scale 1-5)	
Pre-Mobility Questionnaire	Post-Mobility Questionnaire
3.8	4
How well do you know the culture of the place you are going to? (Likert Scale 1-5)	
Pre-Mobility Questionnaire	Post-Mobility Questionnaire
2.4	3.5
How likely are you to work/study abroad? (Likert Scale 1-5)	
Pre-Mobility Questionnaire	Post-Mobility Questionnaire
3.09	3.4
Confidence in identifying strengths in an employability setting? (Likert Scale 1-5)	
Pre-Mobility Questionnaire	Post-Mobility Questionnaire
3.26	3.8

Key findings from the pre and post Likert scales are noteworthy as while the increase in confidence appears marginal, the open-text answers provided really encouraging answers around participants' increased confidence as a result of the excursion. For example, 'it taught me that I am resilient and able to face my fear of flying' (student quote). Additionally, the sharpest increase was when students were asked how likely they were to study or work abroad, showing the hopes for increasing the potential for internationalisation were met with this group. The increase in confidence in travel is particularly encouraging and demonstrates the value of the excursion in improving horizons, as this means students feel more confident and able to travel in the future, where previously they did not. This increased confidence in travel is key given the purpose of the trip was to broaden the horizons for these students, and thus, this finding helps to demonstrate that this aim for the trip was met.

Open text responses relating to confidence in identifying strengths

Identifying strengths pre-mobility

Through comparing qualitative pre and post-mobility responses to the question that asked students to identify their strengths, it was clear that students gained confidence in a variety of areas. Before the excursion, students were able to identify strengths such as 'reliable, able to work both in a team or independently successfully, hardworking', 'professional, confident and knowledgeable'. Notably, there was a shift in the areas that participants were able to identify following the trip. Examples included: 'the ability to make good eye contact to ensure I am giving the right impression, not afraid to speak up and say I do not understand what is being asked and asking for the question to be rephrased, and ability to make relationships quickly', 'working in a team, listening, and negotiating', and 'ability to effectively communicate in a range of ways, adaptability and ability to make good relationships quickly' (student quotes).

Identifying strengths post-mobility

Themes developed from strengths that students were able to identify post-mobility were categorised in terms of communication, problem solving, adaptability, and rapport building. Following the trip, there was a shift in the types of strengths that individuals were able to identify such as verbal communication, developing rapport and relationships, and empathy as students had benefited from the experience of having to put these skills into practice during the trip. Moreover, post-mobility, students articulated

more detailed responses in relation to social networking and relationship building with different types of people. This finding not only demonstrates students' ability to identify their strengths, but highlights the value of travelling to a university abroad in helping them to develop soft skills relating to communication and relationship building, which are transferable employability skills explored in greater detail in the discussion.

What the excursion taught participants about their strengths and weaknesses

Further details relating to what students gained from the excursion was evident in the open-text question where students were asked what the excursion taught them about their strengths and weaknesses. Example quotes include: 'it taught me that I am resilient and able to face my fear of flying', I was able to put myself out of my comfort zone', the excursion taught me that I need to be more confident in myself and that people like talking to me as I have a trustworthy face', 'that I am better at socialising and making friends than I thought', 'meeting new people and discussing parts of cultures in relation to my own', and 'I'm good at working to a schedule and keeping myself organised'. It was clear from findings that students were grateful for the opportunity to be pushed out of their comfort zone, and develop their networking and organisational skills. This finding again shows that students gained more than expected, such as resilience and facing their fears. These themes are discussed in further detail in the discussion below.

Discussion

While it must be noted that the increases were marginal, there was still an increase in all areas measured including; confidence in travelling abroad, cultural knowledge of the country visited, likelihood to live (study or travel) abroad, and finally, confidence in recognising and discussing strengths and weaknesses in an employment related setting such as a job interview. It is also clear from the findings of this study that participants gained more than they initially expected from the trip. Skills gained included networking, organisation, teamwork, and coping with situations calmly when under pressure, to name but a few. Also, participants notably identified more strengths and were more confident in discussing them as demonstrated in the open-text responses. This shows that participants gained a number of soft employability skills as a result of the trip which are recognised as valuable to potential employers (Teng et al. 2019).

Reflections from participants such as 'it taught me that I am resilient and able to face my fear of flying'

is not only heartwarming, but demonstrates the value of the trip in providing students the opportunity to step out of their comfort zone and overcome fears. What is more, resilience is recognised as being valuable for employability, particularly among disadvantaged adults (Rainey 2006), demonstrating that the excursion met its aims in terms of providing life experience, as well as enhancing employability skills. It is also clear from findings that participants would be more likely to consider living (studying or working) abroad, as well as gaining confidence in travelling and overcoming barriers post-mobility, which demonstrates that overall the trip did succeed in broadening the horizons of those who attended.

One other theme that came through from triangulating findings between the survey and staff reflections from the trip, was around meeting new people. This was both a hope for the trip and an outcome that was far more impactful than participants may have initially expected. Meeting new people not only pushed students out of their comfort zone, but meant they gained a newfound confidence in talking to new people, which is highly valued by employers (Teng et al. 2019), and an important life skill to develop. Networking with international people who students met during the trip was perhaps an unsurprising positive outcome that contributed to the cultural experience, but what participants did not expect was the meaningful connections developed with fellow Winchester students, through the unique experiences shared, which will provide a valuable support network as they pursue their degrees (Stewart, Lim, and Kim 2015).

Findings from the present study corroborate findings from Sisavath (2021) who also found that the value and impact of an international excursion to an international university can broaden the horizons of students for many reasons, and ultimately, enhance employability due to the soft skills gained. As mentioned in the literature review above, study abroad opportunities can enhance the human and cultural capital of students (Sisavath 2021), which is especially valuable for students from widening participation of diverse backgrounds (Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013). Therefore running such schemes helps higher education institutions to provide valuable life experience and enhance the employability of students. What is more, while there are considerable financial and time investments to consider for the smooth running of an international excursion, findings in this study demonstrate the value in such activities are well worth the institutional and staff investment. Findings demonstrate that the international excursion not only provided expected benefits such as a cultural experience and insight into living and studying in another country, but unexpected outcomes relating to overcoming fears,

growing in confidence, and a valuable and memorable life experience, and it is hard to put a price on the value of these types of experiences, especially for students from diverse or underprivileged backgrounds who would not otherwise have access to such opportunities.

Future research could also consider the role that such international activity has on employability through asking graduates who took part in such activities to reflect on how it may have influenced their employability several years on. Future research could also consider follow-up interviews with participants to garner a more detailed understanding of what students felt they gained from the trip. Finally, it would be valuable to conduct a similar study with follow-up interviews on a bigger scale across multiple higher education institutions to enhance the reliability and generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, this small-scale study has been able to provide insight into what participating students at this institution gained from the trip, as well as make recommendations for staff who are running similar trips in the future, demonstrating the study has met its original aims. Conclusions and recommendations are presented below.

Conclusion

The above case study and findings highlight that there is student demand for, and benefits from, internationalisation activities such as short mobilities. It is clear that the Turing scheme at the University of Winchester met many of its targets, such as increasing confidence to travel and study abroad, giving students from historically marginalised backgrounds opportunities to travel internationally, as well as offering valuable life experience and ultimately, enhancing employability skills. The COVID-19 pandemic has not simply disappeared, with the only difference being mass vaccination in many countries. Disruption for international travel will likely continue and the pandemic offers multiple lessons learned for those tasked with outward mobility in the years ahead for future disruption, whether related to global pandemics, natural disasters or global conflict.

Recommendations international short-mobilities during a time of travel disruption

The research team recommend that international teams continue their efforts; however, there are stages that will require careful consideration. To support student engagement, prioritising early expectations management for students involved in mobilities where there may be potential disruption, as well as offering additional support to students and staff who may have heightened concerns regarding travel.

In terms of locations, it is important to factor in additional time for flexibility in visit dates due to disruption, with both the hosting location and students, which will include monitoring both home nation travel regulation, and destination travel regulations. Another consideration may be to select more accessible destinations where there are multiple travel options and greener routes, such as rail travel to nations on the same continent. Finally, for funders, it is important to increase the flexibility in funding models for disrupted timeframes and additional funding for unanticipated costs relating to pre/post-travel tests, and increased costs due to changing flight schedules. Increasing flexibility will have a positive impact on the student experience, support safety and deliver project success.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Notes on contributors

Maria Moxey is a Research Associate at the School of Management at the University of Bristol. At the time of this study, she was a Teaching Fellow in Student Engagement at the University of Winchester, where she acted as the external evaluator for this project.

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