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## **PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)**

**Project Title: The impact of study abroad on ways of thinking and practising in the disciplines**

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**Principal Investigator: Robert Mason**  
**School / Department: HCA**

**Team members: Stephan Malinowski (HCA); Chris Perkins (LLC)**

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Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report at the conclusion of their project which outlines briefly the following : nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages.

### **Brief Report (maximum 500 words)**

#### **What did you do?**

This project explored the implications of study abroad, especially involving a foreign language, for the academic progress of students in history. Although the cultural aspects of study abroad, together with its implications for language acquisition, have attracted scholarly attention, this is not so true of other dimensions of the academic experience that it involves. There was a series of four interviews, starting before the departure for study abroad and ending in fourth year, with seven students (both single Honours students and language joint degree students), on the academic experience of study abroad. Complementing the interviews were two surveys, one before study abroad and one after, among all students participating in study abroad both in the School of History, Classics and Archaeology (HCA), and in the School of Literatures, Languages and Cultures (LLC).

The information-gathering phase of the study began during the summer of 2019, involving students about to enter third year, and finished during the summer of 2021. The studies of these students, therefore, unfortunately experienced disruption because of the pandemic.

#### **What did you find out?**

- The study confirmed that, generally speaking, students who participate in study abroad find this period of university studies highly valuable and interesting.
- Although it was not uncommon for students, in advance of study abroad, to experience concern about the implications of absence from Edinburgh for their non-language studies in fourth year, on their return they did not consider this absence to have been disadvantageous.



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- The students found that the learning environment, including the ways in which courses were run, was different at the foreign university. Even if they often preferred Edinburgh's learning environment, they usually found it beneficial to work in a different way.
  - Students still believed that the cultural aspects and the language-related dimension of study abroad were the more important, but the experience of a different learning environment represented a major benefit for them.
  - Use of a different language did not prove to be an obstacle to academic progress, instead expanding the range of viewpoints and topics available to them.

### **How did you disseminate your findings?**

Preliminary findings were disseminated at a conference in September 2021 (the Year Abroad Conference, Keele University and Regent's University London). A report was created for those involved in study abroad in HCA and LLC. It is intended, when the principal investigator returns to the university following a fellowship elsewhere, that student-facing material will be developed, to provide information to students considering and participating in study abroad.

### **What have been the benefits to student learning?**

In the shorter term, the project has helped to inform work on study abroad at a time of change in this area (with the end of UK participation in the Erasmus programme).

### **How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?**

The principal investigator would welcome opportunities to share the findings with others and to participate in other work on study abroad.

### **Who can be contacted for further details?**

Robert Mason (HCA): [robert.mason@ed.ac.uk](mailto:robert.mason@ed.ac.uk)



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**Financial statement:**

This project has utilised the funding awarded to it by the PTAS adjudication committee and the Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trusts who may require it for auditing purposes.

**Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:**

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