

Universities Minister at Going Global Conference

Thank you for inviting me to speak at this year's Going Global. I'm really happy to be joining you virtually today, of course next time I hope we are able to connect in person.

It is amazing to see how we can continue to virtually unite, meaning more people than ever before have the opportunity to attend fantastic events such as this.

The past months have seen the cautious easing of the lockdown restrictions in the UK and we're now able to further imagine what the future will look like, both personally and professionally. As countries around the world face their Covid-19 journeys, this future is what we are here to talk about.

Of course, we still face challenges. We must continue to work together, to overcome the devastating impacts of Covid-19.

In the UK, we have taken a leading role in the COVID-19 global health response, both in addressing the direct health impacts, and also in keeping essential services going. We've championed COVAX, including through contributing £548m to its Advance Market Commitment to help supply 1bn vaccine doses for up to 92 of the most vulnerable countries.

We simply cannot solve the world's current problems with past solutions, and we need to work globally if we are to make real progress.

International partnerships in education have played a vital role throughout this crisis. Research is conducted across subjects, borders and continents. Scientific expertise has helped advance global understanding of the Coronavirus disease, including through genomic sequencing, therapeutics, and vaccine development.

This pandemic has brought home the value of these partnerships and now is the time to build on existing foundations and interconnectedness.

Of course, our objective for Going Global is to re-imagine international tertiary education for a post-pandemic world.

As we look across the globe, much remains uncertain. However, I think we can be sure of one thing – that the shape of higher education has been changed irreversibly. And despite the global uncertainty, amazing things have been achieved. To meet the challenges of this pandemic providers around the world have delivered fantastic and innovative examples of high-quality online and blended learning.

Take Brighton and Sussex Medical School, who securely livestreamed footage of cadaveric donors being dissected – becoming the first medical school in the UK to extend its provision of anatomy and surgical training in this way.

While the pandemic will leave scars around the world for some time to come, I do believe it is our responsibility to look at what positive lessons can be taken, including the accelerated shift towards digital learning, teaching and connectivity.

I passionately believe that the UK's high-quality offer, resilience and adaptability will ensure we are at the forefront of driving this innovation, working closely with our international partners, of course. In the UK, we have taken this opportunity to consider how we might continue to expand and diversify our provision through online to reach even greater audiences of prospective students and improve the accessibility of our learning offer.

As I'm sure you will all agree, students across the globe, as well as institutions, have demonstrated incredible resilience and flexibility over the past year.

Their response has been absolutely remarkable, and I am truly thankful.

The UK Government took early action to offer learning flexibility to ensure international students were, wherever possible, able to take up and continue their education uninterrupted.

From comprehensive visa concessions, to ensuring international students have access to additional hardship and mental health support; we have taken our moral duty to support international students seriously, and we hope that introducing these measures will demonstrate our commitment to incoming international students.

I am proud that so many international students choose to study here, in the UK, each year.

Looking to the future, we will continue to work together to make the UK as attractive as possible to international students, who will always be valued for the contribution that they make to our society, the ideas they bring, and the culture they share with us.

The Graduate Immigration Route, for example, will launch this year. This route will allow students to apply for a visa to remain in the UK for up to two years or three years after their studies so they can look for work or start work at any skill level. We are also ensuring that international students can access a COVID-19 vaccine whilst they are here.

And for students who might choose to access a UK education from their home country – there is, of course, the UK's leading transnational education, or TNE, offer. This offers a variety of models of provision, providing benefits to students, institutions, the UK and our partner countries.

With the acceleration of digital and blended forms of online learning, I see great potential for TNE – and great scope for international partnership in developing pioneering models of provision with countries around the world. As you can see, we remain committed to our aspirations to be an internationally-minded, truly Global Britain. Education, as one of the UK's soft power strengths, has a pivotal role to play in developing this ambition.

This is why, the UK government published the International Education Strategy in 2019 and why in February, I was proud to have launched the 2021 update to the strategy, together with the Department for International Trade.

Through this update we made clear that we remain an outward looking country, committed to the achievements and the ambitions set out in a 2019 document – to sustainably recruit at least 600,000 international students per year and increase the value of education exports to £35 billion per year, both by 2030.

Internationalism of education has always been – and indeed remains – absolutely vital.

We must continue to forge lasting relationships across the globe and encourage our education providers to do the same, with quality, innovation, student experience and developing global citizens at the heart of our global educational vision.

I am thrilled to be supported in this mission by Professor Sir Steve Smith, appointed last year as the UK's International Education Champion, to support the development of lasting international relationships and partnerships, and tackle barriers facing UK providers overseas.

As well as bringing global talent to the UK, and supporting UK institutions in their internationalisation, we want our own young people to become truly global citizens, too.

That is why we launched the new Turing scheme in December 2020 – named in honour of the renowned pioneering scientist, Alan Turing. He was an internationalist of global renown and also, himself, studied himself abroad at Princeton University.

Turing is known for true academic excellence and the impact of his life's achievements are still felt today. The scheme will support students from across the UK to take advantage of the benefits of studying and working abroad from September 2021.

The Turing scheme will be backed by a budget of £110m, and will provide funding for around 35,000 students in universities, colleges and schools to go on placements and exchanges across the world for the upcoming academic year.

This is a truly global programme, with every country in the world eligible as a destination for UK students. International exchanges open up new and exciting possibilities for students, enabling them to develop cultural awareness and broaden their horizons, whilst building key transferrable skills.

Mobility, and the opportunities this opens for our young people should not be limited to a privileged few. Through study or work experience abroad, we want this new generation to become more globally mobile and culturally agile.

To support the UK government's agenda of levelling up across the entire UK,

we have designed this scheme for everyone. No young person should be excluded from expanding their horizons because of their family's income or other disadvantages they've experienced in their lives. These life-changing experiences will be accessible to students across the country, whatever their background.

Offering short-term four week HE placements, which were not previously available, will ensure students with commitments such as caring for children, or relatives, and those working to support their studies, are not left out. The Turing scheme is UK-wide and we want these life-changing opportunities to be accessible to everyone, across the country.

This pioneering scheme represents a landmark step in achieving our vision of a truly Global Britain. I have been engaging extensively with potential partners around the world to discuss the opportunities that the scheme provides. This includes international government organisations and institutions, in the US, Canada, Germany, France, Spain, Switzerland, Australia, India, and amongst many more throughout the Commonwealth. It has been excellent to see such positive engagement, and I look forward to seeing how UK providers will continue to build and strengthen collaborative partnerships overseas.

The application window for Turing Scheme projects for the upcoming year has now closed. I am delighted to say that we have received a strong number of applications with an appetite for mobility across the world. I'm extremely eager to see UK students beginning to access this new opportunity and begin their international journeys and I'd like to thank the UK sector for all they have done in helping to assist the introduction of the Turing Scheme to ensure it's success.

I also want to show my gratitude for our host, the British Council, for all their work in supporting the delivery of the scheme as well as promoting it overseas to our international partners.

Despite the impact and uncertainty, we have all seen from COVID-19, I am proud to say that our collective, global efforts are supporting a new generation of young people to access and enjoy life changing international experiences wherever they study.

We will come out of this pandemic together, and stronger.

In doing so, we are changing the shape of tertiary education around the globe, informed by innovative partnerships, collaboration and learning from others. I look forward to seeing what comes from the sessions and discussions in the next days of Going Global, and stepping into the future that these ideas will shape. Thank you.