

■ FOUR RECIPIENTS OF PROGRAMME SHARE VIEW ON UK'S WITHDRAWAL

End of Erasmus scheme will have damaging effect

THE UK has left the European Union and signed a new partnership deal with it. One of the most contentious issues has been the UK's withdrawal from the Erasmus scheme, which offered student exchanges as well as school links, work experience and apprenticeships across Europe since 1987. **ADAM CAILLER** spoke to people who had benefited from the scheme, and what they've made of the decision to leave it.

UNDER the auspices of the British Council, PR consultant Drew Salisbury enrolled on the Erasmus scheme's English Language Assistants programme, which offered paid teaching placements abroad.

He was given up to £400 a month financial support to cover basic living expenses.

Drew, who has a degree in French and politics from The University of Nottingham, was 21 when he was living in France.

The 26-year-old said: "This was a perfect opportunity for me to live in France — a country of which I am extremely fond — and to truly immerse myself within the language and culture, travel, teach and gain invaluable life experiences along the way.

"The financial support was made available to all students who enrolled on the ELA programme.

"I also had friends who completed apprenticeships and other vocational training placements across Europe at hotel chains and tech companies, for instance.

"Most importantly, I had a network of other Erasmus students before even landing in the country.

"What makes the Erasmus scheme so superb is the amount of support and guidance that is provided to students — both financially and culturally.

"As well as the monthly grant, I attended welcoming events held throughout the département d'Indre-et-Loire where I was able to meet other students and build a small community from the outset."

Those who partake in the scheme are given workshops and



UPSET: Sam Gershuny and Danielle Betts

handbooks on how best to prepare for the year abroad, too.

This, Drew said, helps to ease them into what could be an overwhelming experience of packing up and moving to a new country.

"The direction and assistance provided by the programme was second-to-none," he said.

When news broke of the UK pulling out of the scheme, Drew admits he was "deeply disheartened".

He said: "The Erasmus scheme allows for a depth of engagement with — and comprehension of — other countries that no peripatetic or laissez-faire gap year can equal."

The scheme will, in theory, be replaced by the Turing Scheme.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said last week that "students will have the opportunity not just to go to European universities but to go to the best universities in the world, because we want our young people to experience the immense intellectual stimulation of Europe but also of the whole world".

Drew continued: "The loss of the

Erasmus programme is, without doubt, a huge blow for British students.

"While I am pleased that the Government has promised an alternative, I fear this is going to be a watered-down version.

"At the same time, it is not yet known how much will be allocated per student, if this is equal for each person and whether it will be made available on top of student grants and loans.

"I also hope that this does not make British students feel excluded or isolated from their European counterparts."

Sam Gershuny, who read physics at the University of Leeds, spent a year in Valencia, Spain, studying the native language at the University of Valencia, and received around £320 per month in financial support from the Erasmus scheme.

The 23-year-old Londoner said: "You need a lot of support while you're out there, but without that there will be so many more who wouldn't be able to even think about it.

"Coming from England, you live

where everyone speaks English, so nobody has an aspiration of learning another language.

"It motivated me to want to learn a language and learn about other cultures.

"I didn't realise how much it means to have the ability to speak in someone else's mother tongue.

"Being able to connect with people I wouldn't have been able to connect with was incredible, and distancing ourselves could have damaging effects."

He added: "The benefit of going to a country in Europe was that it was incredibly close by, and gives you that money you need to support you. It covers your rent and food depending on where you go.

"Without that, people won't be able to have the same opportunities I had."

Edinburgh-born Danielle Bett, 31, read international relations

Replacement may be watered-down

and Spanish at the University of St Andrews and spent a year in Madrid doing a teaching programme with the British Council.

The outgoing public affairs manager for the Jewish Leadership Council (Scotland) told me: "The programme allowed me to live in Spain and improve my Spanish.

"It gave me life experience of living abroad and managing myself with support that I wouldn't have had if I just went by myself.

"For students on language courses, losing Erasmus is huge because it makes the entire living and moving process so much easier.

"It's far less stressful because of the support you get, and you don't need to worry about finding a job at pace because of the grants.

"You also get extra course points for being on Erasmus."

Danielle was dismayed by the UK pulling out of the scheme, even more so as details on the proposed Turing Scheme are scant.

She also pointed to how her non-European, mainly Israeli, friends looked on with envy as she took part in the Erasmus scheme.

She explained: "Culture and language are so tied in, and there's only so much you can do in a language setting.

"Non-Europeans look at it with envy as something they couldn't do — to lose it is a shame.

"When I was in Spain, being enrolled in Erasmus meant I was given a five-year Spanish residency/working visa permit, which I assume will now be lost because of Brexit."

Ava Cohen, 20, is currently between two Erasmus placements. She has just finished her placement in Catania, Italy, and is about to go to Limoges, France.

This makes the daughter of the PR Office chairman Shimon and Jessica Cohen one of the final students in the country to take part in the programme.

Her placement is safe as it works on academic years, rather than calendar years.

Ava, who is reading French and Italian at Durham University, said: "For any modern language programme, you do have to go abroad, and Erasmus is good for language students.

"It makes it so much easier to settle in to a new country. It's not just the money you get, it's pretty much a scholarship, and the money I got covered my rent.

"I would still have gone out there without it, but it would have been hard to live there."

Ava cites the support you get from the day you sign up to it as "vital".

She explained: "The second you register with the programme, you go on a list that goes to people who have previously done the programme.

"You can contact them for support at any point, which this year has been invaluable.

"A lot of people in Europe will go somewhere they don't speak the language.

"I don't think the UK pulling out is a good idea, at all — the reasoning behind it is that the UK is taking more European students than they are sending abroad, but that's the fault of the universities, not the programme.

"In the UK, it's not seen as something you can do if you're not a language student.

"Some of my friends who are doing engineering are doing UK internships — they didn't know they could do it abroad. It's bad marketing.

"Pulling out has also shown we are as bad at languages as many people think, and there will be students who will lose their placements because of this."

Remainer Sir Malcolm is upbeat about Brexit

SIR Malcolm Rifkind has a unique perspective on the Brexit deal, which was approved by parliamentarians this week, writes **ADAM CAILLER**.

The 74-year-old served as Minister of State for Europe from 1983 to 1986 under Margaret Thatcher, Scotland Secretary for the four preceding years, and Foreign and Commonwealth affairs secretary from 1995-1997.

And, he voted to Remain in the referendum. So one would be forgiven in thinking that he would be downhearted about the deal going through and the Brexit saga being over. However, he is far from it.

"I don't see why I shouldn't be upbeat," he told the *Jewish Telegraph*. "We are the fifth largest economy in the world, London is and remains the biggest financial centre apart from New York, and here we are, now we've left the EU, the huge exodus of jobs from the City of London, which was predicted by some people, has turned out to be rubbish.

"There have been a few jobs that have been lost, but as a percentage of the total

it's tiny.

"It's not just about finance, it's about all the expertise and professionalism that's built to run the financial centres, in law and accountancy, and banks and in a whole series of other occupations and professions and the fact that trading in euro derivatives — which sounds a pretty obscure subject — it's worth hundreds of millions of euros, which takes place mainly in London."

Edinburgh-born Sir Malcolm, who served as the Conservative MP for Edinburgh Pentlands from 1974-1997, had almost predicted that the UK would one day leave the EU. He called it "an accident waiting to happen".

Sir Malcolm, father of Caroline and journalist Hugo, said: "What was unique about the UK was for the whole 43 years we were a member, most of our main achievements were things that we had opted out of.

"When the countries went for a single currency, we said we will not be in it. The Schengen Area, we are not part of it. A European army one day, forget it.

"So it becomes quite difficult to get people enthusiastic about remaining part of an association when you have been determined not to be sucked in to some of its most important achievements.

"The big exception was the internal market, which we had been one of the pioneers of, and that has been the one that most of the negotiations in the last 12 months have been made more difficult.

"I am less critical than some of the way that Theresa May and Boris Johnson's governments operated, because, through no fault of their own, they were a minority government at the time."

The negotiations, which took more than four years, only finished last week — just days before the New Year's Day cut off point for the transition period. Many political experts predicted this would happen.

Sir Malcolm, who was one of those, said: "Nobody wanted it to be right to the wire, but it was always inevitable, because this is not peculiar to this negotiation.

"In any serious negotiation of that kind, each side keeps in his pocket certain final

concessions they are prepared to make which it knows it can carry with its own domestic audience.

"I'm no great admirer of Boris Johnson, but to be fair to the Government, very few people thought they could achieve a negotiation of this skill involving £600 billion worth of trade in 12 months, but they did. Normally trade negotiations take several years."

There was, for almost the entire four years, threats of no deal at all from both the UK side and the EU side.

But was this just political posturing?

Not quite, as Sir Malcolm states, because neither side wanted no deal, but could still have ended up with it.

He explained: "We got really close to having no deal. If the EU and Johnson hadn't budged significantly in the last week, then that's exactly where we would have ended.

"Even if there was no deal, the extreme likelihood would have been that we'd have left with no deal, but within a month or so we'd be back in negotiations to resolve outstanding points."