

Blended teaching and student mobility: how Italian and UK Universities are planning for re-opening in the autumn semester.

Round Table organised by CRUI and British Council Italy

Thursday 16 July, 14:30-16:00 (Italian time), 13:30-15:00 (UK time)

Presentation

The first Round table organised by the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and the British Council-Italy (BC) aimed at bringing together UK and Italian university representatives to share the innovative responses on teaching and mobility implemented to counteract the effects of the Covid-19 crisis and to enhance the university sector resilience for the short and medium term.

The participants also discussed on how to support the HE sector in planning for the near future, and especially for re-opening for the Fall semester against this extraordinary context.

Main items

The round table focussed in particular on:

- Blended teaching: the coronavirus crisis accelerated an already ongoing modernization of academic teaching and learning through digitalization. The sudden and massive transition to online courses has highlighted strengths and weaknesses of distance learning. Blended teaching could represent the right balance between a complete remote teaching/learning approach and the traditional in-presence methodology. A right balance in approaching the new methodologies, and the results gained, will help in finding the best solutions for institutional enhancement.
- Blended mobility: during the pandemic many mobility activities were suspended or cancelled. In order to counteract the discomfort of lockdown, many universities offered new opportunities of “virtual” mobility to students. Now the new blended model is combining on-line courses and physical mobility. The whole concept of mobility must be rethought, and also the Erasmus+ programme will have to move to a new paradigm of mobility.
- Challenges and opportunities for the Autumn semester: the pandemic situation is stabilizing in Europe and countries’ borders are slowly reopening. Our universities are now facing new challenges on how to guarantee safety measures, how to manage students’ and researchers’ mobility in a context of asynchronous reopening of borders, how to organise the autumn semester, how to cope with the economic crises and the loss of revenues. Sharing concerns and ideas is helpful in developing appropriate solutions and follow-up activities.

Opportunities and Challenges emerged from the discussion

Opportunities

The approaches have been and still are different in the various European countries (focus on Germany, France, Spain, Italy and UK). Recognising the importance of face-to-face teaching and the added value of personal interaction among students and teachers, some opportunities of online courses are:

- blended approach and dual approach;
- flexibility in policies and approaches of teaching (methodologies and length of degrees) and assessing;
- accessibility to learning paths, and flexible working for teachers and students;
- better performing of many students (maybe because they feel more comfortable and relaxed when following lessons from their home);
- many examples of transformative possibilities:
 - virtual traineeships and virtual semesters overseas
 - new teamwork possibilities (both for students and for professors)
 - virtual staff exchanges teaching in each other's universities
 - online teaching with the opportunity of a short-term familiarisation visit.

Challenges

Sometimes opportunities and challenges are two sides of the same coin...

- Accessibility and growing the divide between the advantaged and disadvantaged: a challenge for levelling up.
- Workload and worklife balance for staff: more subject matter is covered online as more intense than face-to-face.
- Students really want to be with each other, and international students want to experience living in the other country: there is no replacement for this.
- Psychological wellbeing of students who don't have the contact of 'being together' and particularly the sense of 'isolation' for international students: dedicated services with specialized staff are needed.
- Psychological wellbeing also for staff: specific training courses necessary to learn how to look after themselves before looking after others.

Recurrent key words:

- Resilience;
- Flexibility and Agility;
- Opportunity for change;
- Challenges.

Next steps

CRUI and the British Council will consult on what the next steps might be for this knowledge exchange. Some ideas (to be verified):

- ✓ to disseminate the results of this first round table to Italian and British universities;
- ✓ to present the key messages of the present discussion at Pontignano 2020 (on 1-3 October) as a starting point for further insights on issues of common interest;
- ✓ to evaluate the effectiveness of the new methodology of teaching and learning and sharing the results;
- ✓ to propose pilot projects among Italian and UK universities following the good practices presented (e.g. between the universities of Glasgow and Firenze on short onboarding visits).

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Programme

14.30 Opening and introduction to the round table

Maurizio Tira, Rector University of Brescia, CRUI Delegate for International Affairs

Welcome by **Rachel Launay**, Director British Council Italy

14.40 European context

Bianka Stege, Director of Education and Society for the EU Region at the British Council

14.50 **Giovanni Betta**, Rector, University of Cassino e Lazio Meridionale, CRUI Delegate for academic teaching and learning

15:00 **Anthony Muscatelli**, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, University of Glasgow and **Miss Rachel Sandison**, Vice-Principal at the University of Glasgow

15.10 **Giorgia Giovannetti**, Vice-Rector for Internationalization, University of Florence

15.20 **Dr Uta Staiger**, Pro-Vice-Provost for Europe and Director of the UCL European Institute

15.30 Moderated discussion – finding the recommendations

Moderator: Maurizio Tira

16.00 Wrap-up and close of the session

British Council representative

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Italian Participants

Prof. Maurizio Tira
Rector - University of Brescia
Delegate for International Affairs – CRUI

Prof. Giovanni Betta
Rector - University of Cassino e Lazio Meridionale
Delegate for academic teaching and learning – CRUI

Prof. Giorgia Giovannetti
Vice President for International Relations - University of Firenze

Dr. Emanuela Stefani
Director – CRUI

Dr. Marina Cavallini
Head of International Relations Office - CRUI

Dr. Maria Antonietta Ciclista
International Relations Office – CRUI

Dr. Massimo Carfagna
Laboratory on teaching & learning - CRUI Foundation

Dott. Mario Santamaria
Press and Communication Office – CRUI

UK Participants

Bianka Stege
Director of Education and Society for the EU Region at the British Council

Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli,
Principal and Vice-Chancellor - University of Glasgow

Miss Rachel Sandison
Vice Principal, External Relations - University of Glasgow

Dr Uta Staiger
Pro-Vice-Provost for Europe and Director of the UCL European Institute

Dr Florian Mussnug
Associate Professor in Italian and Comparative Literature
School of European Languages, Culture and Society - University College London

Dr Sam Evans
Director of the UCL Global Engagement Office

Rachel Launay
Director, British Council Italy

Jane Costello
Director Programmes, British Council Italy

Almut Caspary
HE and Research Coordinator, EU Region - British Council

Jacqui Jenkins
Global Relations Manager - British Council

Filomena Casamassa
Partnerships and Projects Manager - British Council Italy

Helen Marais, Political Attaché - British Embassy in Italy

Mariastella Ruvolo, Communication Manager - British Council