

# Academic co-operation between the United Kingdom and Italy:

a study on **opportunities** and challenges.

A report prepared for the British Council Italy  
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# Executive Summary

This report serves as a follow-up to a 2022–23 study that examined Italian universities' perspectives on post-Brexit collaborations with UK institutions. It expands on that research by incorporating the viewpoints of UK higher education providers and focusing more specifically on academic co-operation through double degrees and Transnational Education (TNE) partnerships. The report also addresses related topics, such as student mobility and research collaboration.

The report provides an overview of UK–Italy higher education co-operation, focusing on student mobility, TNE and research, along with the policy environment for inbound TNE in Italy. It presents findings from surveys, interviews and a workshop at the Italy–UK Pontignano Conference 2024. The report concludes with recommendations for policy measures to strengthen academic co-operation. Appendices include lists of UK TNE partnerships and UK–Italy double degree programmes, as well as case studies of UK validation and franchise partnerships in Italy.

## UK–Italy academic co-operation: a portrait

***Student Mobility:*** There has been a significant decline in Italian students enrolling in UK higher education since the UK's exit from the EU, with a 51 per cent drop overall and a 57.8 per cent decrease in first-year enrolments between the 2020/21 and 2023/24 academic years. This mirrors a broader trend of declining EU student recruitment to the UK. In the same period, there has been a 15.3 per cent increase in UK students enrolling in Italian universities, with Italy representing the fourth most-popular country under the Turing outward mobility programme. Despite these trends, the UK remains a popular destination for Italian students, and there is still a significant difference in student flows between the two countries.

***Transnational Education (TNE):*** In 2023/24, there were 2885 students enrolled in UK TNE programmes in Italy, making Italy the ninth-largest destination for UK TNE in the EU. This represents a 19 per cent growth since 2018/'19, before Covid-19 and the UK's departure from the European Union (EU). Most of these students are enrolled in bachelor and master's programmes. The majority of UK TNE in Italy is offered through distance learning, with some validation and franchise partnerships, often in niche subject areas. There are currently just over 60 known double degree programmes between UK and Italian universities, with the UK ranking fifth among countries with such agreements with Italy. Italy, in turn, is the fourth-largest partner country for double degree agreements with UK universities.

***Research:*** Italy is a key research partner for the UK, with Italian academics forming one of the largest foreign communities in the UK higher education sector. This significant presence of Italian academics in the UK has been crucial in maintaining strong academic ties between the two countries. However, recent trends show a decline in the number of Italian academic staff in the UK. Despite concerns surrounding the impact of the UK's exit from the EU, Italian researchers remain keen to continue collaborating with the UK. European funding has traditionally supported most research collaboration between the two countries. The UK's quick re-entry into Horizon Europe is regarded as crucial for preserving and strengthening ongoing research collaboration.



## The Italian policy landscape for TNE

The Italian policy landscape for inbound TNE distinguishes between two main types of foreign higher education presence: branch campuses and subsidiaries ('filiazioni'). Branch campuses allow foreign institutions to offer study programmes and award degrees recognised in Italy. Currently, only one branch campus, the French ESCP Business School, operates in Italy. Subsidiaries, on the other hand, enable foreign institutions to decentralise part of their academic programmes in Italy, primarily for study-abroad purposes. There are over 130 subsidiaries in Italy, all operated by US universities. There are legal constraints regarding the decentralisation of full degree programmes, particularly in regulated fields such as medicine, to avoid an oversupply of graduates in these regulated professions.

Recognition of TNE qualifications in Italy requires compliance with strict quality and equivalence criteria, including institutional recognition, scientific relevance, adequate facilities and faculty qualifications. Qualifications from validated or franchised partnerships are not recognised in Italy due to quality concerns. There might be potential to overcome these recognition barriers through improved co-operation in quality assurance between Italian and UK regulatory and quality assurance bodies.

## Findings from stakeholder engagement

**Fees and visa regimes:** The UK's exit from the EU has significantly hindered academic collaboration between Italian and UK universities, primarily due to increased tuition fees for Italian students and complex visa requirements, especially for stays over six months. The UK's withdrawal from Erasmus+ has further strained mobility programmes, although UK and Italian providers have tried to mitigate impacts, such as through institutional financial support, short-term options (e.g. summer schools) and virtual and hybrid models. Postgraduate programmes and co-operation with Italian private universities are less affected, while undergraduate exchanges and internships face most challenges.

**Reciprocity:** Differing fee structures and an imbalance in student mobility hinder UK-Italy academic collaboration, with far more Italian students studying in the UK than vice versa. Barriers include limited English-taught programmes in Italy, differing master's durations and UK students' reluctance to study abroad. The Turing scheme aims to support UK mobility but faces challenges such as insufficient funding for disadvantaged students and declining modern language programmes, which have traditionally driven UK student exchanges – although four of the five top destinations for Turing-funded students are EU countries, with Italy the fourth most-popular destination under the Turing programme.





**Awareness of opportunities and strategic alignment:**

Strategic misalignment and limited awareness of existing opportunities hinder UK–Italy academic co-operation. UK providers and students are often unaware of Italy’s growing offer of English-taught programmes and underestimate the quality of higher education in Italy. Perceptions of Italy as bureaucratic and less receptive to internationalisation further deter collaboration. Despite Italy’s growing internationalisation efforts, UK providers often prioritise markets with higher student volumes, although the UK’s exit from the EU has prompted some to reconsider European partnerships as part of a strategic decision to strengthen engagement with EU countries, including Italy. Both UK and Italian providers see the potential role that the British Council could play in facilitating reciprocal understanding and creating networking opportunities.

**Research:** Research co-operation between Italian and UK universities, traditionally supported by EU funding like Horizon 2020, faced challenges during the UK’s brief exit from Horizon Europe. The UK’s re-entry is seen as positive, though rebuilding trust and collaboration may take time. Both sides emphasise the importance of joint PhD programmes, research mobility and leveraging Italian academics in the UK to strengthen ties, particularly with renewed access to Horizon Europe funding opportunities

**Recommendations**

**Address costs:** The UK government should explore post-Brexit agreements with EU countries to facilitate reciprocal student mobility.

**Promote strategic priority areas:** Prioritise short-term mobility opportunities like summer schools; expand virtual exchanges; develop joint PhD programmes; increase English-taught programmes at Italian universities; leverage European University Alliances.

**Improve awareness:** UK and Italian sector bodies should facilitate a better understanding of each other’s higher education systems and opportunities for collaboration. The British Council can play a key role in these efforts.

**Address TNE quality concerns:** Establish a dialogue between quality assurance and regulatory bodies of both countries to foster mutual understanding of TNE, its quality and quality assurance, and support reciprocal recognition.

**Establish a task force:** Create a joint UK–Italy task force to address key challenges and find actionable solutions for long-term academic collaboration.



# Introduction

Higher education relations between Italy and the UK have historically been robust. Italy is one of the UK's leading research partners, with Italian academic staff forming one of the largest foreign communities within the UK higher education sector. Their presence plays a key role in sustaining collaboration with Italian institutions, either through research or collaborative academic programmes.

The UK remains a top destination for Italian students seeking international study opportunities, although as highlighted in the 2023 British Council report 'Italy-UK Co-operation in Higher Education: A Study of Challenges and Opportunities',<sup>1</sup> the UK's departure from the EU has brought a notable shift, with a decline in the number of Italians applying to UK universities. Despite this, the demand for UK qualifications persists, creating opportunities to explore TNE collaborations, such as double degree programmes and other forms of joint partnerships.

The 2023 study also noted that past research collaborations between the UK and Italy have heavily relied on EU funding programmes. With the UK's rejoining Horizon Europe, new avenues for research co-operation between the two countries are now open, including through joint PhD programmes.

Building on the previous study, the British Council has supported further research to delve into the challenges and opportunities for academic partnerships between the UK and Italy. While the 2023 study was based solely on interviews and surveys with Italian universities, this follow-up study expands on that research by incorporating the viewpoints of UK higher education providers and focusing more specifically on academic co-operation through double degrees and TNE partnerships.

The report begins by offering an overview of the current state of co-operation between the Italian and UK higher education sectors, specifically regarding student mobility, TNE and research. It also provides an outline of the policy environment surrounding inbound TNE in Italy. It then presents the findings from surveys and interviews conducted with both UK and Italian higher education providers, including insights from a workshop held during the high-level Italy-UK Pontignano Conference 2024.

In its conclusion, the report offers high-level recommendations for policy measures that UK and Italian higher education bodies and institutions should consider to enhance academic co-operation in the current context.

The appendices include a list of UK TNE validation and franchise partnerships in Italy and a list of UK-Italy double degree programmes, based on a comprehensive search of Italian university websites. They also include case studies of different UK collaborative TNE partnerships in Italy based on validation or franchise arrangements.

1 British Council 2023: Italy – UK co-operation in higher education: a study of challenges and opportunities





# 1 UK–Italy academic co-operation: a portrait

## 1.1 Student mobility

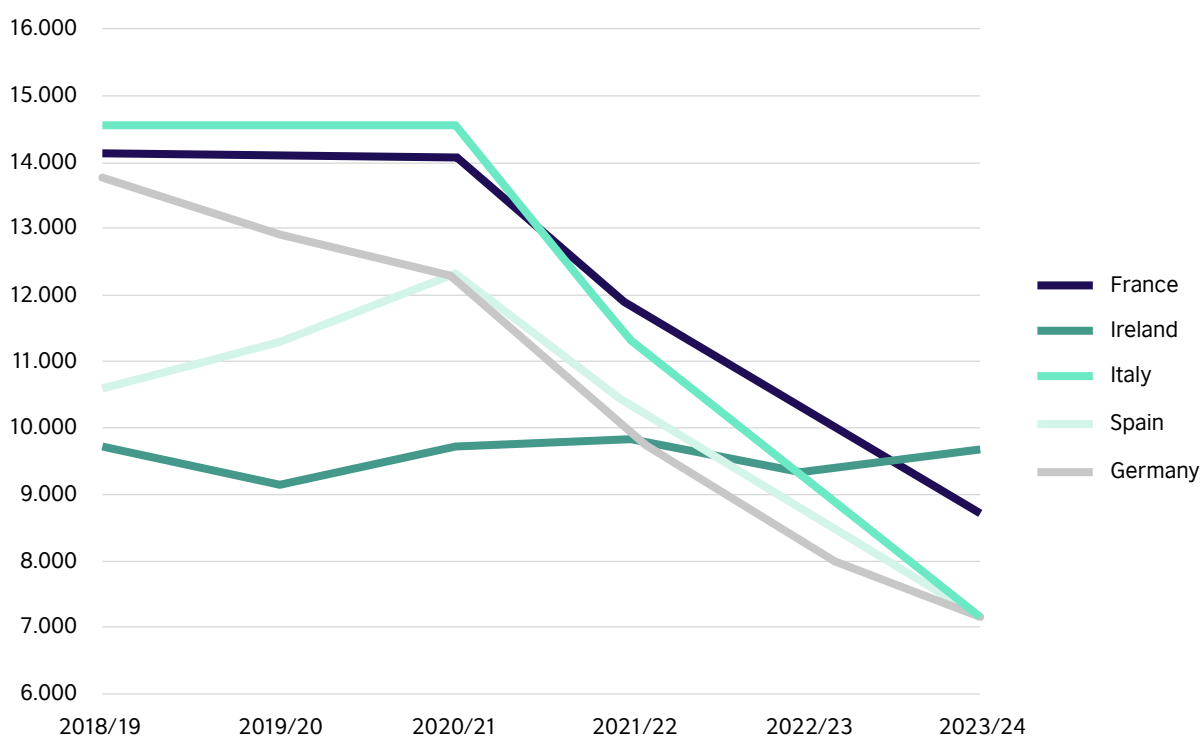
According to the latest data from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) for the 2023/24 academic year,<sup>2</sup> the number of Italian students enrolled at UK higher education providers has fallen by 51 per cent since the 2020/21 academic year – the last year EU students paid home fees – with a 22.5 per cent decrease in 2021/22 and a further reduction of 18.6 and 22 per cent reduction in 2022/23 and 2023/24 from the previous year. This decline represents a drop from 14,605 students to 7,160 over the three years.

The number of first-year enrolments has experienced an even sharper decline, dropping by 57.8 per cent

during the same period, from 6,215 in 2020/21 to 2,625 in 2023/24. However, most of the decline (50 per cent) was in the 2021/22 academic year, signalling a process of stabilisation.

This trend aligns with similar patterns in student recruitment from other EU countries following the UK's exit from the EU (except for the Republic of Ireland), as shown in Figures 1 and 2. Italy is now the third-largest EU country sending students to the UK, after Ireland and France, down from being the top sender in 2020/21, and just above Spain and Germany.

**Figure 1:** Mobility trends of the top five EU countries sending students to the UK (source: HESA)



2 HESA 2024: *Where do HE students come from?* Neither Jisc nor Jisc Services Limited can accept responsibility for any inferences or conclusions derived by third parties from data or other information supplied by Jisc or Jisc Services Limited.

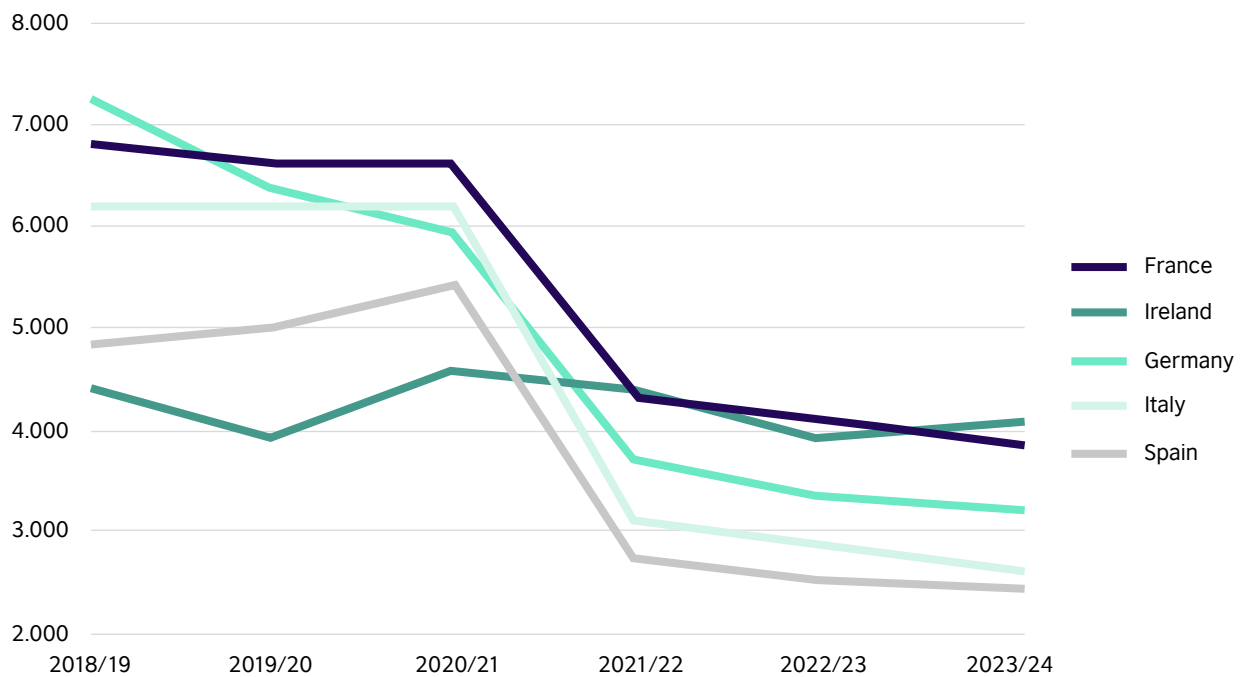
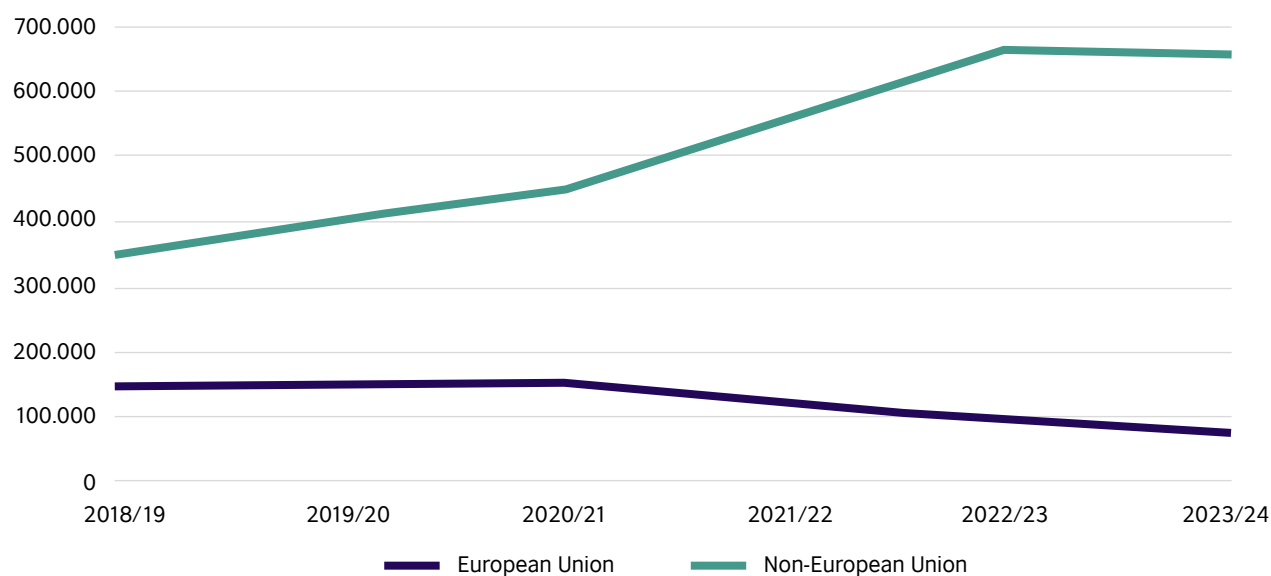
**Figure 2:** Mobility trends of top five EU countries sending students to the UK: first-year entrants (Source: HESA)

Figure 2 shows a stabilisation of the initial sharp reduction following the UK exit from the EU. The latest data on UK visa issuances for Q4 of 2024 show, in fact, a moderate growth, with a five per cent year-on-year increase in visa issuances to EU citizens in the January-to-December period, and a 4.8 per cent growth for Italy (second after Germany on 6.5 per cent and before France on 3.8 per cent).<sup>3</sup>

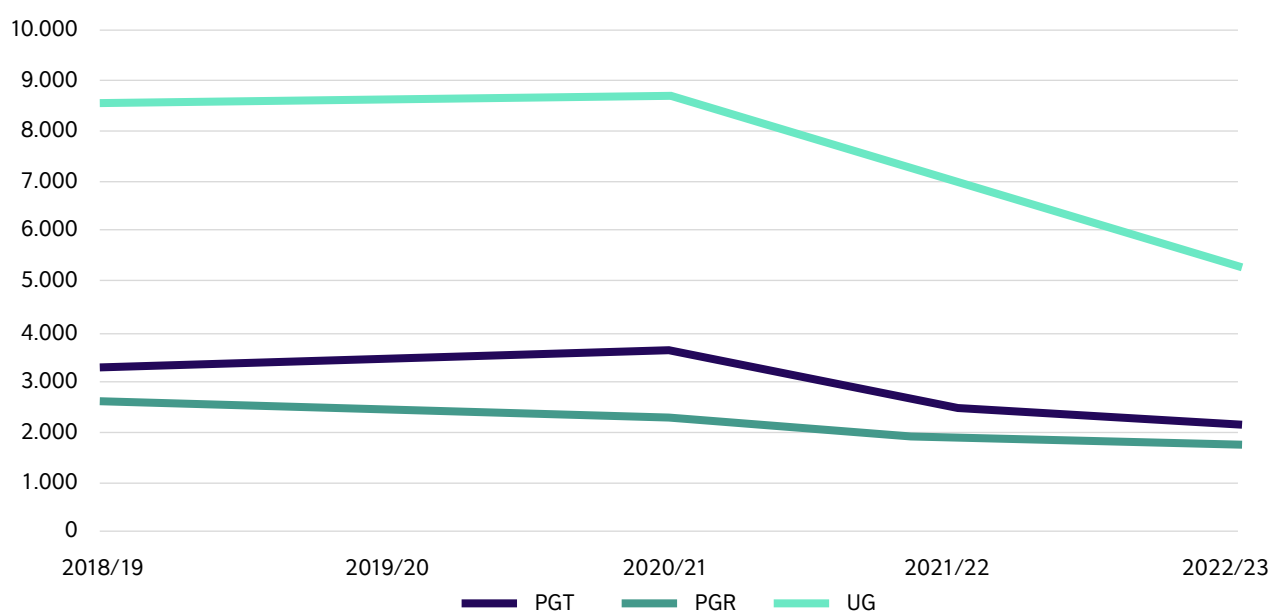
In contrast, while EU student recruitment to the UK has fallen by 50.6 per cent since 2020/21, recruitment from outside the EU has increased by 46.8 per cent during the same period (Figure 3), with a slight decrease over the last year

3 Home Office 2025: Immigration system statistics data tables

**Figure 3:** Mobility trends of EU and non-EU students' mobility to the UK (source: HESA)

Of all Italian students in the UK in 2022/23<sup>4</sup>, 5,310 (57.6%) are enrolled in undergraduate (UG) programmes and 3,905 (42.4%) are in postgraduate courses – 2,160 in taught postgraduate (PGT) courses and 1,745 in postgraduate research (PGR). Since 2020/21,

enrolments in UG and PGT programmes have dropped more significantly, by 38.6 per cent and 40.9 per cent, respectively, compared to a 24 per cent decline in PGR enrolments (Figure 4).

**Figure 4:** Italian students UG, PGT, PGR enrolment in the UK 2017/18–2022/23 (source: HESA)

<sup>4</sup> The latest year for which HESA data on level of study is available at the time of writing.

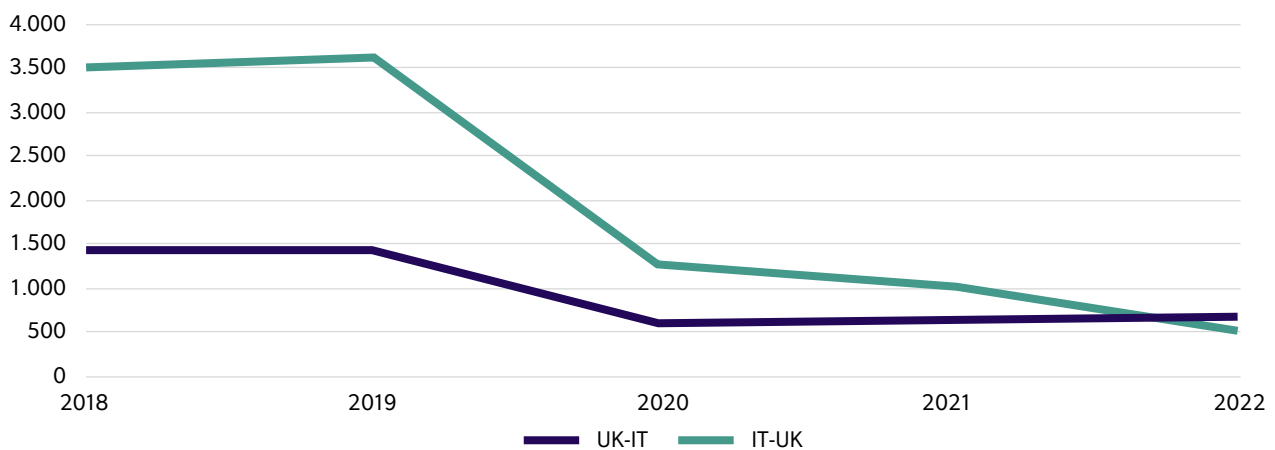
As highlighted in the 2018 biannual report on the Italian higher education and research system produced by the National Agency for the Evaluation of the University and Research System (ANVUR),<sup>5</sup> the majority of international mobility at Italian institutions has traditionally been through the Erasmus programme, accounting for 76 per cent of mobility in 2018. Given this, it is not surprising to see a sharp decline in mobility to the UK following its departure from the EU.

Data from the European Commission on student mobility supported by the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ funding programme shows a similar decline in Italian student mobility to the UK, even accounting for the impact of COVID-19. Interestingly, there is a slight increase in the number of UK students going to Italy in the final years of the 2014–2020 Erasmus+ programme (Figure 5). This trend is supported by data from the Italian Ministry of

University and Research (MUR), which shows a 15.3 per cent increase in UK student enrolment in Italy since 2020/21, with 1,100 UK students enrolled at Italian universities in 2022/23.<sup>6</sup> In this context, it is worth noticing how Italy is the fourth most-popular destination for UK students under the Turing scheme (covering both higher and further education), after France, Spain and the United States, followed by Germany.<sup>7</sup>

Despite recent opposing trends, a significant difference in student flows remains between the two countries, as illustrated in Figure 6, which combines HESA data for Italian students in the UK and MUR data for UK students in Italy. The UK continues to be a leading destination for Italian students, and, in fact, it was reported as the most popular choice for Italian students studying abroad in 2023 across various educational levels, including secondary education.<sup>8</sup>

**Figure 5:** Reciprocal HE mobility between Italy and the UK under the Erasmus+ 2014–20 funding scheme (source: European Commission)<sup>9</sup>



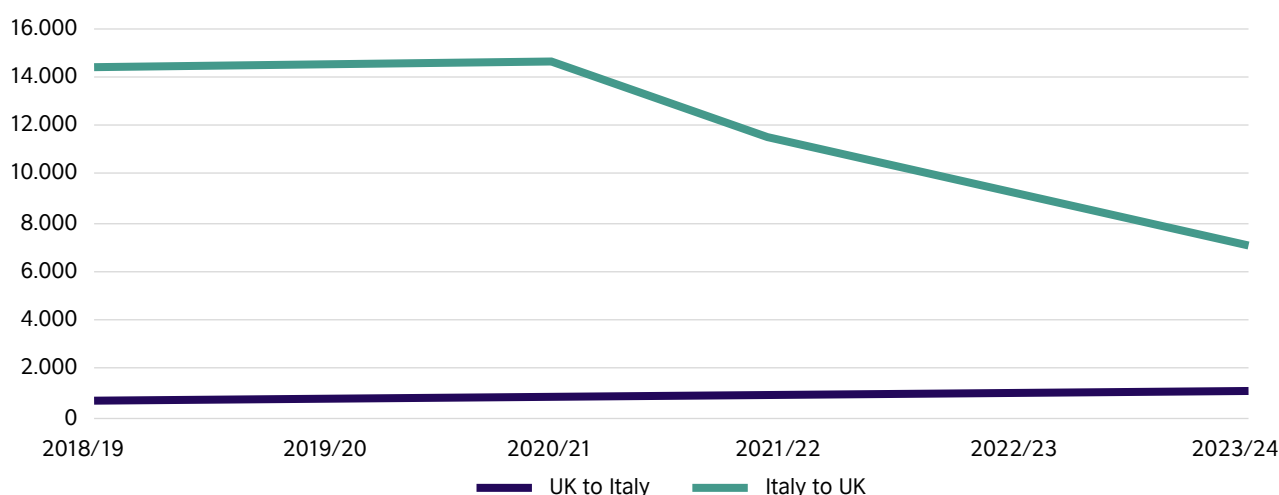
5 ANVUR 2018: [Rapporto Biennale del Sistema Universitario Italiano e della Ricerca 2018](#)

6 MUR: [Open Data](#)

7 Department for Education 2025: [Turing Scheme funding outcomes for the 2023 to 2024 academic year](#)

8 Il Sole 24 Ore, 26 August 2024: [Regno Unito prima meta per i viaggi di studio all'estero](#)

9 European Commission: [Erasmus+ mobility data 2023](#)

**Figure 6:** Reciprocal HE mobility between Italy and the UK outside of Erasmus+ (sources: HESA and MUR)

More generally, the 2023 ANVUR biannual report on the Italian higher education and research system observed that although Italian universities are trying to attract more international students, their numbers are still low compared to other European countries. In 2022, only four per cent of students in Italy were international students, compared to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average of 12 per cent, much lower than other European countries such as France (nine per cent) and Germany (12 per cent), or indeed the UK, which reported a 22 per cent share of international students across the tertiary sector in 2022.<sup>10</sup> This has resulted in a negative net migration of students, with more Italians studying abroad than international students coming to Italy.

In this context, the ANVUR report underscores the need for policies that make Italian universities more attractive to international students, and as a response to demographic decline that threatens the sustainability of the national higher education systems. This is aligned with the new 'Strategy for the Internationalisation of the Italian Higher Education System 2024–2026',<sup>11</sup> recently launched by the Ministry of University and Research and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation. The strategy also emphasises the need to

enhance the international attractiveness of Italian higher education in the context of growing concerns about 'brain drain' and demographic decline threatening the sustainability of national higher education programmes and institutions (see Appendix 1 for an overview of the key points in the strategy most relevant to this study).

These considerations align with discussions held with Italian universities as part of this study, which, as detailed in the next chapter, highlights the imbalance of student mobility with UK partners and the need to look at solutions at both ends to make periods of study in Italy more attractive for UK students.

The ANVUR report further emphasises that, as part of efforts to internationalise Italian higher education and make it more attractive internationally, attention must be given to national regulations regarding the establishment of TNE in Italy, which have remained unchanged since 2004.<sup>12</sup> Chapter 3 offers a close look at the Italian policy landscape for inbound TNE, pointing out some possible areas where the UK and Italian higher education sectors can work together to unlock TNE potential and meet reciprocal strategic needs.

<sup>10</sup> OECD 2024: *Education at a Glance 2024*

<sup>11</sup> MUR 2024: *Strategy for the Internationalization of the Italian Higher Education System 2024–26*

<sup>12</sup> ANVUR 2023: *Rapporto sul Sistema della Formazione Superiore e della Ricerca 2023*



## 1.2 Transnational education

Transnational education (TNE) is commonly defined as:



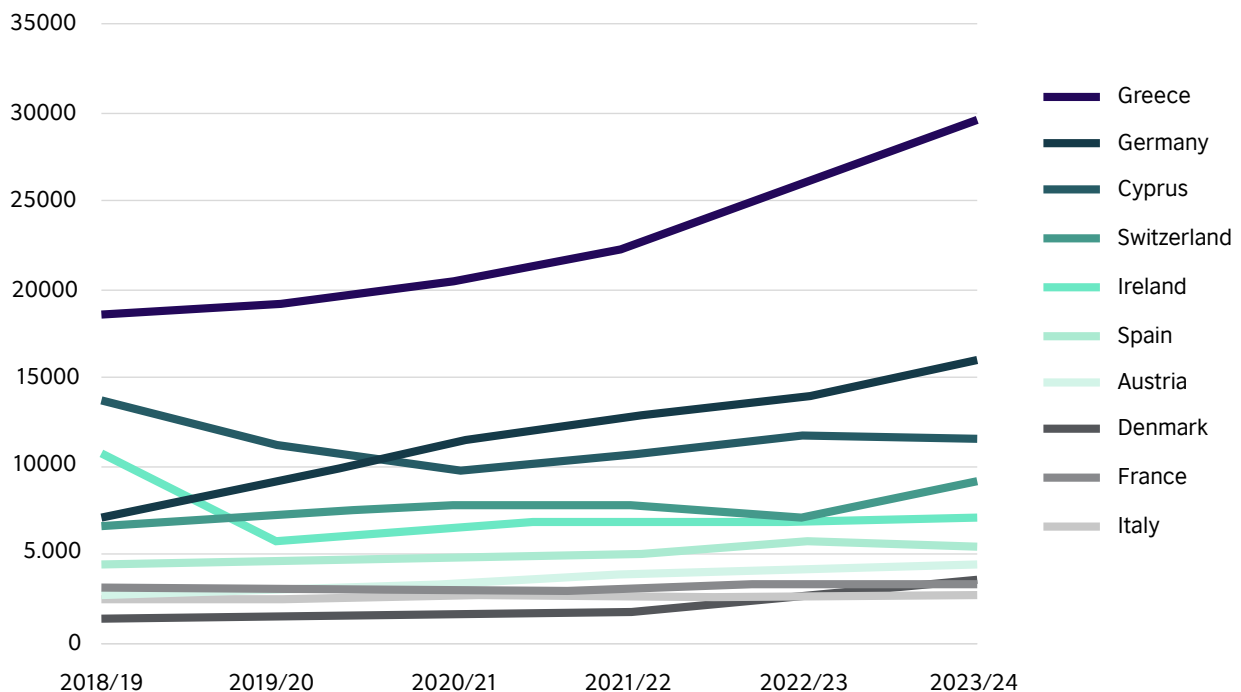
**All types of higher education study programmes, or sets of courses of study or educational services (including those of distance education), in which the learners are located in a country different from the one where the awarding institution is based (UNESCO/ Council of Europe 2001).<sup>13</sup>**

TNE refers to the mobility of education programmes or institutions, rather than that of students, although student mobility can also be a part of TNE provision. HESA collects annual aggregate data on UK TNE.

According to the latest data for 2023/24, there were 2885 students enrolled in UK degrees offered in Italy. This makes Italy the ninth-largest destination for UK TNE among EU countries (see Table 1) and the 35th-largest worldwide.<sup>14</sup>

Figure 7 shows the trends for the current top ten EU receiving countries of UK TNE over the past five years, which demonstrate some modest growth for UK TNE in Italy – 19 per cent since 2018/19, before Covid-19 and the UK departure from the EU.

**Figure 7:** UK TNE trends for the top ten EU receiving countries, based on student numbers (source: HESA)



<sup>13</sup> UNESCO and Council of Europe 2001: [Code of Good Practice in the provision of Transnational Education](#)

<sup>14</sup> HESA 2024: [Student Open Data – Transnational Education](#)

Of all UK TNE students in Italy, 53 per cent are studying through distance learning, while the remaining 47 per cent are studying through collaborative partnerships in the country. About 60 reporting TNE providers have only distance-learning students, and 40 of these providers report fewer than 20 students. Just over 15 UK higher education providers report delivering TNE provision in person through collaborative partnerships. Research of publicly available information on UK providers' websites shows that UK TNE collaborative provision in Italy generally takes the form of validated or

franchised partnerships with Italian private institutions, generally in niche subject areas where there is particular demand in Italy. (See Appendix 2 for a list of UK TNE collaborative partnerships in Italy based on a research of publicly available information).

Table 1 lists the overall top ten UK TNE providers in Italy (including distance learning) by student numbers and Table 2 the top ten TNE providers for collaborative partnerships only.

**Table 1:** Top ten UK TNE providers in Italy

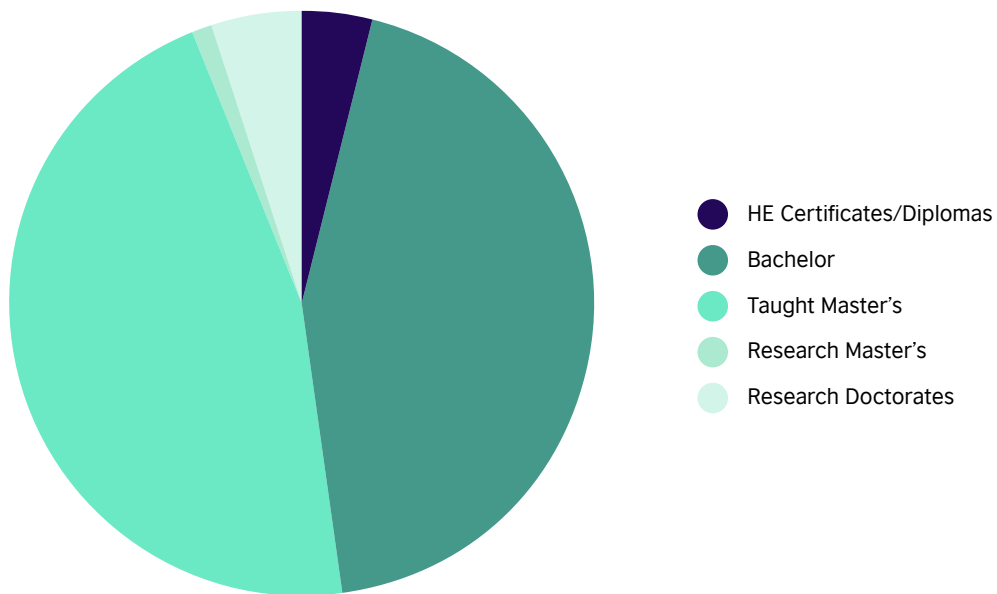
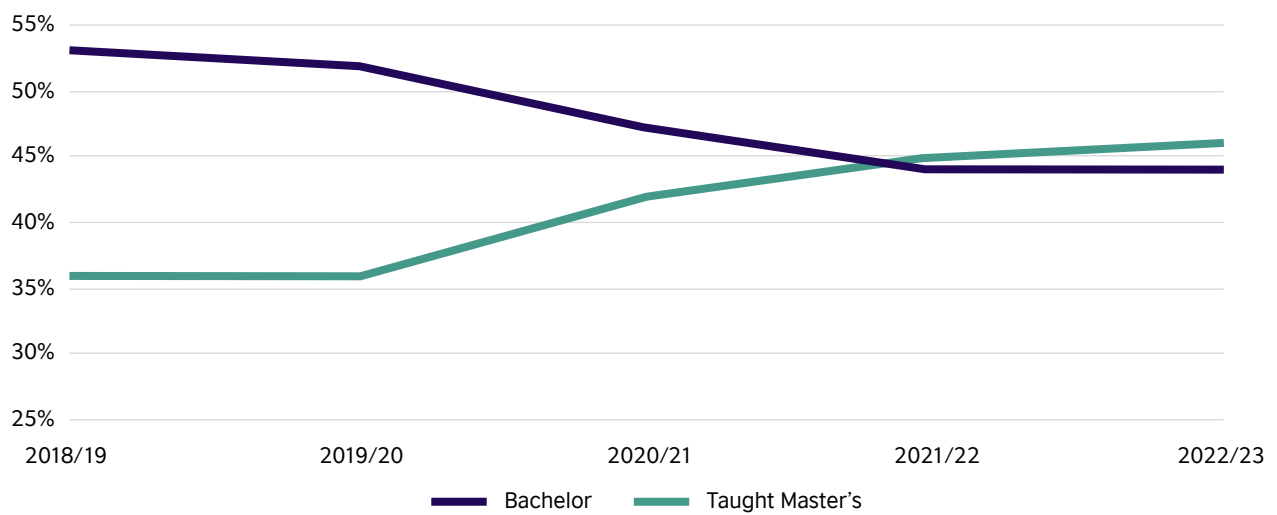
Buckinghamshire New University	350
The Open University	340
University of London	320
Health Sciences University	245
The University of Chichester	220
University of Chester	100
SOAS University of London	80
King's College London	65
The University of Oxford	65
Swansea University	45

**Table 2:** Top ten UK TNE collaborative providers in Italy

Buckinghamshire New University	320
Health Sciences University	245
The Open University	110
University of Chester	100
Swansea University	45
University of Bedfordshire	40
The University of Westminster	25
St Mary's University, Twickenham	25
Anglia Ruskin University	5
The University of Surrey	5

As illustrated in Figure 8, referring to the latest HESA data available for 2022/23, most UK TNE students in Italy are enrolled on bachelor and taught master's degrees. Worthy of notice in this context is that over the past five years there has been a nine per cent decrease

in the number of Italian TNE students studying bachelor's degrees combined with a ten per cent increase in students on taught master's degrees, while the percentage of enrolment on all other qualification types has remained relatively unchanged (Figure 9).

**Figure 8:** UK TNE students in Italy by level of study (source: HESA)**Figure 9:** Opposite trends for UK TNE bachelor and master's degrees in Italy (source: HESA)

The HESA data does not include information about double degrees, as these might be considered and reported by providers in different ways, and often they might be regarded more as credit recognition arrangements rather than TNE per se. There is no central repository for double degrees in either the UK or Italy. However, based on a comprehensive search of Italian university websites it is possible to identify 61 existing double degree programmes involving 27 UK and 24 Italian universities, excluding joint doctorate agreements. These are listed in Appendix 3.

Of the existing double degree arrangements between the UK and Italy, the vast majority – 57 in total – are

master's programmes, while the remaining four are bachelor degrees. The UK is one of the leading countries for double degrees with Italian universities. As illustrated in Table 3, currently the UK ranks fifth, just after the USA, with France, Germany and Spain representing by far the main partners of choice for Italian universities. A similar search of UK university websites reveals that Italy is similarly the fourth-largest country for double degree agreements with UK universities, as illustrated in Table 4. Please note that while Table 3 reports the number of double degree programmes, Table 4 reports the number of double degree partner institutions.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 3:** Top ten countries with double degree arrangements with Italian universities (source: Italian university websites)

France	394	26%
Germany	170	11%
Spain	141	9%
USA	62	4%
UK	61	4%
Poland	45	3%
China	45	3%
Portugal	45	3%
Netherlands	37	2%
Austria	34	2%

**Table 4:** Top ten countries with double degree arrangements with UK universities (source: UK university websites)

China	101	30%
France	36	11%
Germany	28	8%
Italy	18	5%
USA	13	4%
Australia	10	3%
Malaysia	10	3%
India	9	3%
Canada	8	2%
Chile	8	2%

<sup>15</sup> The tables for double degree agreements differ due to variations in the way double degrees are reported by Italian and UK universities. For Italian universities, the data reflects the number of programmes or awards involved in double degree agreements. In contrast, for UK universities, the data is based on the number of partner institutions with which double degree agreements exist. This distinction arises from two key factors. Firstly, some UK universities have double degree agreements with a limited number of partners in certain countries, but these agreements often encompass a large number of programmes, making it challenging to quantify the exact scale of activity. Secondly, a review of university websites revealed that information on double degree agreements is generally less comprehensive and harder to retrieve for UK universities compared to their Italian counterparts. Specifically, Italian universities tend to report double degree agreements in a more consistent and detailed manner, whereas UK universities exhibit greater variability in how such information is presented.

### 1.3 Research

As highlighted by the UK Science and Innovation Network (UKSIN):

Italy is one of the UK's top research partners, and there are many ties linking the two countries. Italian academic staff make up one of the largest foreign communities in the UK research sector and contribute to maintaining co-operation with Italian institutions.<sup>16</sup>

According to HESA 2022/23 data on academic staff, Italy ranks as the second-largest source of international academic staff in the UK, following China and ahead of Germany, Ireland and the USA. For the past 20 years, these five countries have been the top origins for international academic staff, with Italy holding the top position for the previous five years. However, for the first time since HESA began collecting data, the number of academic staff from Italy has begun to decline, a trend in line with similar decreases from other European countries since the UK left the EU. In contrast, the number of academic staff from China has increased by over 15 per cent in just the past year. Table 5 lists the top ten countries of nationality for international academic staff in the UK for 2022/23.<sup>17</sup>

**Table 2:** Top ten countries of nationality for international academic staff in the UK (2022/23) (source: HESA / UUKi)

China	7,165
Italy	6,460
Germany	5,155
Ireland	4,775
United States	4,675
India	4,525
Greece	3,910
Spain	3,335
France	3,075
Nigeria	1,835

<sup>16</sup> Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and Department for Science, Innovation & Technology 2024: [UK Science and Innovation Network summary: Italy](#)

<sup>17</sup> UUKi 2024: [International staff data](#)



A recent analysis of joint publications produced by researchers from Italy and the UK,<sup>18</sup> focusing on the top 14 ranked universities in each country, revealed the following:

- The top 14 Italian universities produced 12.9 per cent of their publications in collaboration with UK universities, with 82.4 per cent of these publications co-authored with the UK's top 14 universities.
- The top 14 UK universities produced 6.6 per cent of their publications in collaboration with Italian universities, with 72 per cent of these publications co-authored with Italy's top 14 universities.

The UKSIN's Italian team recently conducted an analysis of research collaborations between Italy and the UK in the aftermath of the UK's withdrawal from the EU. The study, which included surveys of stakeholders from both Italy and the UK, reveals that Italian researchers continue to view the UK as a key strategic partner and are keen to maintain these collaborations.<sup>19</sup> However, it also highlights concerns shared by researchers on both sides regarding the lasting effects of the UK's exit from the EU – concerns that align with the findings of the 2023 British Council study on UK–Italy academic co-operation, as well as with observations shared by UK and Italian stakeholders as part of this follow-up research (reported in Chapter 3).

A major driving force for bilateral collaborations has traditionally been the significant presence of Italian

researchers in the UK, who have maintained strong ties with colleagues and universities back home. However, post-Brexit challenges associated with increased tuition fees for EU students and the introduction of visa requirements have created important barriers to mobility for students and researchers from Italy to the UK, which might affect future scientific co-operation between the two countries.

Historically, most research co-operation has occurred within large, multilateral collaborations funded by programmes like Horizon Europe. While bilateral agreements between Italian and UK universities offer a complementary avenue to sustain scientific relations, these agreements are often light-touch and underfunded. The UK's re-entry into Horizon Europe as an associated country is, therefore, crucial for maintaining and strengthening ongoing research collaboration between the two nations.

The UKSIN study also suggests that attracting more British researchers to Italy could further boost scientific co-operation. However, it does highlight several challenges Italy faces in appealing to British students and researchers, including a perception of limited competitiveness among Italian universities, a shortage of courses offered in English and a highly bureaucratic social system that foreign students might find unwelcoming.

<sup>18</sup> Roberto Buizza 2022: *Analisi delle co-pubblicazioni tra università italiane e britanniche nel periodo 2011–2020*

<sup>19</sup> British Embassy Rome and UKSIN2023: *UK–IT Best + Shape Project*



## 2 The Italian policy landscape for inbound TNE

Foreign higher education institutions operating in Italy can be categorised into two main distinct types, depending on the purpose of their presence in the country.<sup>20</sup>

### Branch campus

Foreign higher education institutions may establish a branch campus to offer study programmes in Italy, enrol students and award academic degrees that can later be recognised in Italy on a par with degrees awarded by the main university campus in the home country. This type of TNE provision is regulated by Ministerial Decree No. 214/2004 (implementing Article 4 of Law No. 148 of 11 July 2002).<sup>21</sup>

Currently, there is only one foreign institution operating in Italy under this category: the French ESCP Business School in Turin. ESCP has also branch campuses in Berlin, London, Madrid, Paris and Warsaw. ESCP London is, in fact, the third-largest and the fastest-growing recruiter of Italian students in the UK, according to the latest HESA data.<sup>22</sup> Another foreign institution, the German Macromedia University, has gone through the required approval process for opening a campus in Milan; however, after nearly ten years it has yet to commence academic activities in Italy, which might lead to the revocation of the authorisation granted.

### Subsidiary (or ‘filiazione’)

A subsidiary (filiazione) allows foreign higher education institutions to decentralise part of their academic or research programmes in Italy to students enrolled at the main university campus in the home country. This type of TNE provision is regulated by the Ministerial Directive of 23 May 2000 (implementing Law No. 4 of 14 January 1999).<sup>23</sup> Currently, there are over 130 subsidiaries in Italy, all of which are study-abroad campuses of US universities.

### The European University Institute

An additional special type of TNE provision accepted in Italy is represented by the European University Institute, a research and postgraduate studies institution located in Florence, which offers doctoral, master's and executive programmes in history, law, economics and political and social sciences, established under an agreement signed in 1972 by the six founding countries of the European Communities and funded by the EU, including the UK government at the time.

20 MUR: Università straniere e filiazioni

21 DECRETO 26 aprile 2004, n. 214

22 HESA 2024: Where do HE students come from?

23 Direttiva Ministeriale 23 maggio 2000

## 2.1 Branch campuses

Ministerial Decree No. 214/2004 sets out the criteria and procedures for the recognition of the qualifications issued by foreign higher education institutions operating in Italy. It draws on Article VI.5 of the Lisbon Convention, which states that:



**Each Party may make the recognition of higher education qualifications issued by foreign educational institutions operating in its territory contingent upon specific requirements of national legislation or specific agreements concluded with the Party of origin of such institutions. (Council of Europe 1997)<sup>24</sup>**

According to the Decree, foreign higher education institutions operating in Italy wishing to have their qualifications recognised must meet the following requirements:

- a. They must be recognised institutions that are part of the higher education system of their own country
- b. They must be institutions of higher education with particular scientific relevance at the international level
- c. The location(s) in Italy where teaching activities are conducted must have adequate facilities, equipment and educational-scientific resources, and sufficient services for students
- d. The teaching activities carried out must be included in the study programmes of the foreign higher education institutions in their country of origin
- e. The criteria for admission to study programmes and the assessment of students' preparation must be equivalent to those adopted by the foreign higher education institutions in their country of origin
- f. Teaching activities must be conducted by faculty members who possess professional qualifications equivalent to those of faculty members of the foreign higher education institutions in their country of origin
- g. The qualifications awarded in Italy must have the same value in the country of origin as those awarded by the foreign higher education institutions in their own country.

In addition, foreign higher education institutions must submit a request to the Ministry of University and Research and send the application, for information, to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, along with documentation certifying compliance with the specified requirements.


Following an evaluation by part of ANVUR to ensure that these requirements are met, and a favourable opinion from the National University Council or the National Council for Higher Artistic and Musical Education, and the Ministries of the Interior and Foreign Affairs, the qualifications awarded by the applying foreign education institutions will be accepted as eligible for recognition. The Decree further stipulates that the Ministry conducts inspection checks at least every four years to ensure continued compliance with the established requirements.

## 2.2 Subsidiaries ('filiazioni')

Ministerial Directive of May 23 2000 sets out the procedures for the authorisation of the establishment of subsidiaries (filiazioni) in Italy by foreign higher education institutions.

Foreign higher education institutions wishing to establish subsidiaries in Italy must submit a formal application to the Ministry of Universities and Research, and simultaneously to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The application must be accompanied by the following documentation:

<sup>24</sup> Council of Europe 1997: [Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region](#)

- 
- a. A certified copy of the statute of the foreign institution of origin
  - b. A certified copy of the act by which the competent authority of the institution of origin has approved the establishment of a branch in Italy. This act must certify: the non-profit nature of the branch's activities; that the subjects studied at the branch in Italy are part of the teaching or research programmes of the institution itself, and that the related courses are taught at the branch exclusively to students enrolled at the respective university. Additionally, the act must include a clear commitment to send, through the legal representative of the branch, at the beginning of each academic year, to the three aforementioned ministries, a list of the names of the students who will be attending the Italian branch, including their respective nationality and the courses they will be taking
  - c. A copy of the most recent approved financial statement of the institution of origin, approved by the competent statutory body and signed by the legal representative
  - d. A list of the teaching programmes of the home university and a list of the subjects, which are part of those programmes, that are intended to be taught in Italy.

In order to verify continued compliance with the requirements, the foreign higher education institutions with approved subsidiaries must inform the competent authorities, at the end of each year, of the subjects, part of the programmes of the institution of origin, that have been taught at the decentralised branch, as well as the list of enrolled students.

Since subsidiaries are not intended to offer full degrees in Italy, but rather to allow students from foreign institutions to acquire, through a period of study in Italy, additional skills that they would not acquire by studying the same subjects either in the home country of the institution or elsewhere, degrees obtained through these study periods in Italy are recognised as foreign degrees through standard qualification recognition processes.

More recently the Ministry of Universities and Research has raised concerns about possible ambiguities in the formulation of Article 2 of Law No. 4/1999 that regulates the practice of establishing subsidiaries in Italy,<sup>25</sup> which has given rise to requests aimed at decentralising entire degree programmes of foreign institutions. The concern, expressed in a Senate hearing,<sup>26</sup> is that in the hypothetical case where a foreign university were allowed to decentralise an entire degree programme or the core subjects of a degree programme in Italy, this would circumvent the constraints imposed by Law No. 148/2002 (which ratified the Lisbon Convention) and Ministerial Decree No. 214/2004, which regulate the establishment of a foreign university in Italy.

Specific concerns have been raised in connection to the decentralisation of entire degree programmes in disciplines under planned access (e.g. medicine, dentistry, health professions), which would violate legal constraints concerning the respect for planned professional needs, allowing the entry of a number of professionals exceeding the actual demand, with significant consequences for students (who could not be guaranteed entry into the labour market). Because of these concerns, it is understood that subsidiaries are now not allowed to offer degrees in subject areas under planned access.

25 LEGGE 14 Gennaio 1999, n. 4

26 MUR 2016: Filiazioni di Istituzioni universitarie estere in Italia - Audizione alla 7a Commissione Senato del 6 aprile 2016.



## 2.3 Validation and franchise partnerships

Current guidance on the recognition of international qualifications in Italy, as outlined by the Italian Information Centre on Academic Mobility and Equivalence (CIMEA), indicates that qualifications obtained through validated or franchised partnerships between a foreign degree-awarding institution and an Italian institution without national degree-awarding authority in Italy should not be recognised. This advice is specifically formulated by CIMEA with regard to the common UK practice where degree-awarding bodies (also known as recognised bodies) offer higher education degrees through partnerships with institutions that do not have the right to award degrees themselves (formerly referred to as 'listed bodies').



**The degrees awarded by a 'listed body' not present in the United Kingdom, and particularly those operating within our system, cannot be recognised in Italy due to a lack of control over the quality elements of the course and, therefore, the failure to obtain accreditation in accordance with Decree 214/2004.<sup>27</sup>**

In this guidance document, CIMEA emphasises that the denial of recognition is based on the principle of verifying quality elements by national competent authorities. According to CIMEA, there is no evidence that any foreign national quality evaluation agency conducts accreditation checks on programmes offered outside its national territory. As a result, these TNE programmes offered in Italy lack the accreditation verification that would apply to the same courses conducted within the foreign country's territory.

Given that the lack of recognition in Italy of validated or franchised degrees offered in the country appears to be primarily due to quality concerns, it is worth exploring whether enhanced co-operation between Italian and UK authorities on quality assurance could help address these challenges. By fostering a shared understanding of how quality and standards are maintained in TNE operations, both countries could work together to overcome the current recognition barriers. In particular, considering that Decree 214/2004, which regulates TNE provision in Italy, does not appear to explicitly exclude validated or franchised operations that meet the recognition requirements set by the Italian Ministry.

The idea that TNE qualifications offered through franchised or validated partnerships could be recognised, provided there is adequate assurance that these partnerships meet the Italian authorities' quality requirements, was already expressed in the opinion of a 2002 European Court of Justice case. The case examined whether the lack of recognition of a UK franchised qualification awarded in Italy violated EU law.<sup>28</sup> It is worth reporting in full the relevant part of the motivation of that historical court case as it still seems to be relevant, even after the UK's exit from the EU:



**47. The Italian Government puts forward justifications [for not granting recognition to the franchised degree] based essentially on the need to ensure high standards in university education and to guarantee the authenticity of qualifications awarded by foreign universities [...]**

<sup>27</sup> CIMEA Linee guida per il riconoscimento dei titoli esteri in Italia, p.9

<sup>28</sup> Opinion of Advocate General Jacobs delivered on 10 April 2003 CaseC-153/02 Valentina Neri v European School of Economics

“

**48. The concern of the Italian Government can clearly form the basis of an overriding requirement in the public interest, given the importance of subjecting the quality of university education and qualifications to public verification and control [...]**  
The Italian authorities are particularly concerned by the existence of certain degrees awarded by complaisant procedures in the context of private, commercial arrangements beyond any state or public control [...]

“

**49. However, even assuming the existence of such a justification, any such verification and control must be exercised on a case-by-case basis. By contrast, the administrative practice described in the order for reference appears to preclude as a general rule any recognition of degrees awarded in the circumstances I have set out in paragraph 30 above.<sup>29</sup> It leaves, apparently, no scope for verification of the content or quality of the education leading to the award of those degrees...**

<sup>29</sup> Paragraph 30 reads as follows:

There is no suggestion that the Italian authorities systematically refuse to recognise all degrees awarded by Nottingham Trent or any other university in the United Kingdom or another Member State. The practices described do however appear to mean that recognition is automatically refused – that is to say without any examination of the nature or content of the course of study to which the degree attests – when three factors are present: (i) the awarding university is outside Italy, (ii) the course of study was followed in Italy, or at least not in the country of the awarding university, and (iii) the student is an Italian national.’

“

**51. There appears to be nothing in the nature of the agreement between Nottingham Trent and ESE which might prevent the Italian authorities from exercising such quality control in order to allay their concerns about the nature and standards of the degrees provided through ESE, or generally about the commercialisation of education.**

This opinion was subsequently upheld by EU Court of Justice,<sup>30</sup> which observed how the lack of recognition of these types of collaborative academic partnerships ‘goes beyond what is necessary to secure the objective pursued’, that is ‘ensuring high standards of university education’, in particular ‘given that the Italian legal order appears to allow, pursuant to Article 8(1) of Law No 341/90,<sup>31</sup> agreements between Italian universities and other Italian establishments of higher education which are comparable to the agreement entered into between NTU and ESE.’

30 Judgement of the Court (Fifth Chamber) 13 November 2003

31 Article 8(1) of Law No 341/90 reads as follows:

‘For the implementation of study programmes as well as cultural and educational activities referred to in Article 6, universities may make use, according to methods defined by each institution, of the collaboration of public and private entities, with the option to establish consortia, including private law consortia, and to enter into specific agreements.’

# 3 Stakeholder engagement findings

As part of this study, a survey was distributed to universities in both Italy and the UK, with support from the Conference of Italian University Rectors (CRUI) and Universities UK International (UUKi). The primary aim of the surveys was to explore the nature of engagement between Italian and UK universities, with a focus on academic co-operation such as joint programmes and double degrees, and to identify perceived challenges and opportunities for strengthening co-operation between the two countries. To further enrich the findings, the surveys were supplemented by structured interviews with representatives from individual Italian and UK universities.

Interviews and surveys with Italian and UK universities were carried out between December 2024 and February 2025. In total, the study gathered feedback from 23 Italian universities and 15 UK universities, representing a range of experiences with international collaboration. Additionally, a focus group was conducted during the 2024 Pontignano Conference, which brought together higher education providers and other key stakeholders from both Italy and the UK to discuss and reflect on these issues.

Section 3.1 presents the perspectives of Italian and UK higher education providers on the main challenges and opportunities for academic co-operation between the UK and Italy. These are structured around the key recurrent themes that have emerged from the survey and the conversations. Drawing on the main opportunities identified through the discussions that informed this study, the chapter concludes with a set of strategic suggestions designed to enhance academic co-operation between Italy and the UK.

## 3.1 Challenges and opportunities for academic co-operation

### 3.1.1 Fees and visa regimes

The UK's exit from the EU emerged as a central consideration for all the Italian and UK providers consulted in this study. The UK's exit from the EU is widely regarded as having introduced significant barriers to academic collaboration between Italian and UK universities. These barriers are primarily linked to increased tuition fees for Italian students wishing to study or participate in mobility programmes in the UK, and more complex visa requirements, particularly for stays longer than six months, which have impacted mobility in both directions.

As two interviewees from Italy and the UK respectively observed:

*A major issue raised by many of my colleagues, who have extensive experience collaborating with the UK, is the difficulty of obtaining visas for stays longer than six months, coupled with the financial burden of not being able to rely on Erasmus funding.*

and

*There is an issue about affordability that has become much worse since the UK's exit from the EU with the complexity of navigating the visa systems in different European countries [...] students, for instance, that do joint honours degrees in modern languages [...] need to spend six months in one country, six months in another country, in Europe. And the visa requirements are really quite complex [...] sometimes, it also means that they need to come back into the UK.*

As highlighted in the 2023 British Council report, the vast majority of student mobility for Italian universities occurs through the Erasmus+ programme, which provides essential funding and simplifies administrative processes. Given this, the UK's decision not to remain involved in Erasmus+ as an associate third country is seen by Italian universities as a significant obstacle to closer co-operation with the UK in higher education, particularly concerning student and staff mobility. This was also confirmed in our conversations with UK universities, as illustrated by the observation of one interviewee:

*We did a lot of work through Erasmus [...] around international credit mobility that dropped off. So, in terms of our engagement, we relied on the European sources of funding. Since that disappeared, we've done less in terms of our active engagement with Europe.*

Supporting mobility remains a challenge despite efforts by many Italian universities to allocate 20 per cent of Erasmus funding designated for third countries, along with additional institutional funding, to support the ongoing demand for mobility to the UK. Many UK universities also adopt discounted fee structures in an attempt to continue to attract students from the EU, in particular as part of pre-Brexit joint programmes agreements or multilateral agreements, such as European alliances. As interviewees from the UK and Italy, respectively, put it:

*If our partners in Europe with whom we have worked for many years on the basis of home fees ask [...] why do you need them to now pay international fees [...] it's a very valid argument [...] some faculties can provide internal funds because they see clearly the benefit [...] but this is very, very rare [...] and this is caused directly by the UK's exit from the EU.*

and

*We were able to maintain an agreement [with UK universities] where students pay a discounted fee, but it is still high compared to double degree programmes with other European countries which do not involve any additional fee [...] this makes the programmes politically problematic because only students from medium-high economic backgrounds can afford them.*

The growing disparity in tuition fees and funding models between the UK and Italy, with European students studying in the UK now having to pay considerably higher international student fees, is therefore seen by both parties as a key obstacle to establishing both student exchange programmes and double or joint degree programmes.

Differential fee structures, however, tend to impact undergraduate programmes more than postgraduate ones, as the latter have traditionally been fee-paying (42.3 per cent of all Italian students in the UK are postgraduate, as reported on page 9). Indeed, an Italian interviewee based in the UK observes how

*for postgraduate programmes the interest is surely there, and I think it may, in fact, be growing, as there is still much focus on learning English and having a British degree is still regarded very well in Italy.*

Short-term mobility options, such as summer schools, have also been less affected by the rising fees and visa complexities post-Brexit. In fact, providers in both countries have identified these programmes as a key area to focus on in the short to medium term, aiming to support reciprocal co-operation and mobility.





*It is increasingly difficult to send students in the UK [...] we are therefore sending them for summer schools or a week.*

*What might seem to work is short-term summer schools that might be more attractive to British students. I think European countries also tend to be quite happy to come and do that semester, exchange.*

*Unless they're language students, there is definitely resistance from British students [...] But I do feel that the short-term, one-week, two-week summer schools, they seem to go down pretty well as an option.*

*We're looking not only in terms of traditional exchange but also at summer schools as well [...] summer school is something that perhaps British students may prefer, maybe are more attracted than the longer mobility periods.*

Some interviewees also referred to the opportunities to foster collaboration at low cost by leveraging virtual exchange and virtual and blended approaches to teaching and learning, as well as the opportunities to leverage TNE to reach out to European students no longer coming to the UK:

*Virtual exchange or hybrid models could attract a larger number of students*

*The recruitment numbers have suffered a lot not only for degree-seeking students, but also for students who used to come on articulation agreements as well [...] we used to have a high number of students from Germany, Spain, Italy who used to come articulation agreements and finish the degree here [...] that fee increased significantly so we don't really have a lot of activity there anymore [...] however, that created quite a few opportunities for TNE [...] our TNE activity is quite big.*

It is also important to observe how the rising costs associated with the UK's exit from the EU have not affected co-operation with Italian private universities in the same way, as these adopt a similar commercial model to UK providers; they recruit students who can afford a mobility period in the UK, and are generally more flexible and internationalised. As two Italian private universities and a UK university, respectively, confirm:

*The UK's exit from the EU has had less of an impact on us because we have always charged fees.*

*[The raise in student fees post-Brexit] is not a problem for us because we already charge fees to students [...] and we look to select partners that have a similar commercial profile to ours.*

*Private institutions are usually more flexible, have more autonomy to make decisions [...] They tend to have more provision in English, they're more international.*

However, as an interviewee from an Italian private university observes:

*The problem is that they [the UK] are no longer in the European Union, which requires a visa [...] and this has affected the possibility to undertake internships in the UK, which have always been very attractive to our students.*



### 3.1.2 Reciprocity

The challenge posed by differing fee structures is further compounded by an imbalance in student mobility. Despite the recent increase in UK students studying in Italy,<sup>32</sup> there remains a significant disparity, with far more Italian students studying or considering studying in the UK compared to the relatively small number of UK students opting for Italy. This lack of reciprocity is usually attributed to a range of factors, including:

- lack of English language provision in Italy, or lack of awareness of available courses offered in English, given that the number of programmes offered in English at Italian universities has been growing significantly
- differing durations of master's programmes in the two countries, with Italian master's programmes typically lasting two years and UK programmes only one year
- lack of appetite for Italian degrees on the part of UK students, who might not appreciate their quality and market value
- a traditional reticence on the part of UK students to study abroad.

Two Italian interviewees, for example, observe that:

*It is called double degree but it is more for our students going to the UK than for UK students to come to Italy, as it is at master's level [...] in Italy the 'Laurea Magistrale' is two years, while in the UK, a master's is one year only [...] the structure [of the double degree] is that the Italian students do the first year of the Laurea Magistrale in Italy and the second one in the UK following the UK one year master's, at the end they will receive a double degree. This is not possible for UK students*

*The demand for double degrees for our students is associated with having more opportunities in the job market, as a qualification from the UK can be easily spent in other countries, the challenge is having reciprocity with UK universities as I do not think that many UK students believe that Italian qualifications can be spent internationally.*

Other interviewees representing different UK universities observe:

*Italian institutions prefer to start with exchange programmes to build trust before considering fee-paying models like dual degrees. They seek reciprocal arrangements where student exchanges are balanced [...] and this is a challenge for us.*

*To give you an example there is an Italian university with which we wanted to do a double degree [...] but they have asked us for a reciprocal exchange of students, and this is a problem for us because we do not have enough students to send out [...] we cannot reciprocate because our number of outgoing students is much lower than that of other European universities [...] and often there aren't many courses offered in English [...]*



The Turing grant scheme, introduced by the UK government following the UK's exit from the EU to support UK students to go on study or work placements abroad, has the potential to help UK institutions meet Italian universities' requests for reciprocity, whether through student exchange agreements or joint degree programmes. However, UK interviewees have pointed out several challenges in using Turing funding to support UK mobility to Italy. Notably, it was perceived that the scheme has initially prioritised non-European markets (although the latest report on Turing-supported destinations across all sectors for 2023–2024 shows that four of the five top destinations for Turing-funded students are EU countries, Italy being fourth – considering both higher and further education – just after the USA and before Germany),<sup>33</sup> and that it does not provide sufficient funding to support disadvantaged students, although they are a key priority of the programme.

*At the very beginning of the scheme, the way it was conceived was very much, and still is to an extent [...] in line with the strategic priorities of the UK, and that meant really particular markets that were not the European market.*

*Turing has very large funding that is ring-fenced for students from more disadvantaged backgrounds. Now this is an excellent thing. The drawback is that the level of funding available still leaves a fairly substantial shortfall in the actual total amount of money that you need in order to actually support yourself while you're abroad. So even if the funding has a kind of special top-up for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and who have other kinds of challenges, it still only goes some way.*

However, others see Europe as ideal for providing affordable opportunities for more disadvantaged students through the Turing scheme:

*Our main objective with the Turing scheme and exchanges, in general, is to support the social justice and social mobility agenda of the government [...] having more opportunities in the EU makes it easier for the [disadvantaged] students to participate [...] European partners are key for that for us.*

A significant consideration related to UK outward mobility is that the majority of UK student mobility has traditionally been linked to foreign language degrees. The ongoing decline in the availability of modern language programmes, often driven by financial pressures within UK universities, is having an impact on the number of UK students undertaking study-abroad periods. As different UK interviewees reflect in conversation:

*A lot of the European activity in terms of exchange focused around languages. So now we've just cut a lot of that provision in the last round of voluntary redundancies [...] That's had a big impact.*

*What has changed quite dramatically, this was changing also before the UK's exit from the EU, is the number of students studying modern languages in UK universities [...] and within modern languages, obviously, also the percentage of students studying Italian.*

33 DfE 2025: Turing Scheme funding outcomes for the 2023 to 2024 academic year



### 3.1.3 Awareness of opportunities and strategic alignment

Another challenge to improved co-operation that emerged from conversations with UK and Italian stakeholders can be attributed to strategic misalignment or divergent priorities, as well as a lack of awareness or appreciation of available opportunities for co-operation. One UK interviewee did notice in relation to delivery of courses in English how:

*I don't think that Italy is amongst one of the European countries that are associated, rightly or wrongly, in the minds of our own students, with the fact that the teaching will be done through the medium of English.*

While another UK interviewee emphasised how the capacity to teach in English was a key criterion for selecting partners:

*We're looking for partners that can actually teach in English. That's the key, I think [...] we have kept all the ones that could teach in English [...] there were some that we have closed which were only teaching in Italian.*

On this specific point, Italian interviewees have raised the issue of misperception about the Italian higher education sector, with regards to both its capacity to offer education in the English language, as well as more broadly about its quality. Some have also specifically called on organisations like the British Council and other sector bodies to play a role in providing a more accurate portrayal of the opportunities available for studying in Italy and co-operating with Italian universities.

*It is difficult to make [British students and potential partners] understand that even if we are a small university [...] we offer many courses in English [...] which are of comparable quality to those offered in Italian, and that they would not have problems to live and study here even if they do not speak Italian.*

*Several universities are starting to offer not only courses but whole programmes of study in English. Therefore, I think that the British Council could help raise awareness about this.*

A similar point was raised about the perception of the quality of Italian higher education:

*It is important to change the narrative about the quality of Italian higher education [...] Italian universities are not only good, but have changed the way they teach, lessons are participative now [...] and many teachers have been educated and trained internationally.*

*In BA courses lectures might still be old style, but in master's courses most lecturers have PhD from the USA or the UK, and the level of teaching is completely different [...] all students are carefully selected, and all lecturers have foreign PhDs and know English well.'*

Some UK interviewees also raised the point of the potential role that the British Council could play in facilitating reciprocal understanding and creating networking opportunities:



*The British Council has been being quite active encouraging relationships with Spain, and we've attended a few events in Spain and then in the UK [...] opportunities for people to do networking and discuss [...] strengthen your partnerships or meet new partners [...] that could be something that you could welcome British Council to do with Italy as well.*

*There's not much awareness of opportunities existing there [...].we just sort of rely on word of mouth through somebody who has a small collaboration with someone, and that may not give us the full picture [...] So if we could get some support from the British Council in Italy around doing that, that would be grand.*

The limited recognition of the opportunities and potential for collaboration with Italian counterparts has significant implications for UK providers' assessment of Italy as a strategic priority. Interviewees from the UK also highlighted how a lack of familiarity with Italy's regulatory environment, a perception that it is overly bureaucratic, and that Italy's broader operating environment is not welcoming to internationalisation, has further deterred some institutions from pursuing double degree programmes or TNE collaborations with Italian counterparts.

*Italy was not a priority in our portfolio for engagement and dual degree development [...] Italy was perceived before as extremely bureaucratic; it was classified as a challenging operating environment.*

*Our understanding is that TNE in Italy is heavily regulated. It would take many, many years. So, the cost-benefit equation would come in negative.*

*Lack of recognition has been a challenge [...] where students have wanted to then go on and study at master's level in Italy [...] even if students are clearly qualified in terms of their professional practice and they have got an undergraduate degree with us, the degree is not being recognised by some Italian institutions [...] I wonder if Italy was to make that change [around recognition], they could see an increase [of TNE].*



*The perception I have of Italy is that [it hasn't] necessarily been as receptive to the international markets, has not been very outward looking, in terms of student mobility, in terms of welcoming international students [...] when you set up a TNE programme, you don't necessarily only want to service the Italian population or European population. You want to try and see whether you can also bring some international students [...] So if you could offer a dual degree or a franchised degree in Italy to a local student, to a European student and to an international student, it is a recipe for success.*

And again, it was indicated how there might be a need for raising awareness about the opportunities to partner with Italy and its openness to academic co-operation:

*Italy's got everything going for it [...] I think it's more about promoting Italy's openness to doing TNE, and potentially that they haven't had as much promotion.*

*I think if there was an active call from the Italian sector, whether that be governmental level or higher education sector level [...] I think there would definitely be appetite from the UK [...] it's a no-brainer in terms of exchange [...] in terms of research and academic connections.*

Considering the growing number of courses and degree programmes offered in English by Italian universities, and the recent Italian government commitment towards internationalisation expressed in the 2024–27 *Strategy for the Internationalisation of the Italian Higher Education System*, it appears that there is scope for raising UK providers' awareness and improving their understanding about current trends and opportunity in Italy.

There is, however, also a perception among some UK providers that Italy is not very familiar with TNE, or that the country does not need TNE to meet the demand for education and training as with many of the traditional receiving countries of TNE *'that are up and coming and developing [...]'*. As different UK interviewees observed:

*I think that there's an assumption that Italy is well established. They're doing fine. They don't need us. Its systems are developed, defined. They don't necessarily need TNE [...] supporting capacity-building and upskilling. When you think of Italy as a country, you don't think of it as needing development, and it doesn't instantly leap to mind as a place of opportunity for TNE.*

*The Italian higher education sector seems relatively well contained, well maintained, well serviced and comfortable on its own doing what it's doing [...] If there were opportunities and if those opportunities were to come to the surface and if they were to be flagged and there was appetite from the Italian university side, I think, UK universities will be very receptive to that.*

*We were approached about some good programmes, but they didn't come off at the end, the institutions were fairly new to the concept of TNE. [...] Ultimately it was in terms of numbers for those particular programmes, just viability-wise [that the TNE partnerships did not go ahead].*

Indeed, commercial considerations around viability and market size, as hinted to in excerpts of interviews reported above, emerged as critical factors influencing UK higher education providers' engagement with Italy. As several interviewees from the UK have highlighted:

*Unless you can prove that you're going to recruit at least 50 or plus students from that agreement alone why would we do it? it is related to financial returns, to concerns about financial returns.*

*About two years ago, we fully rationalised the European portfolio, and we let some of our exchange partners go because we just weren't getting the numbers going over.*

*Something that we would often consider would be the likely volume of students. And I suppose what my perception tends to be with mainland Europe is that sometimes the volume doesn't particularly seem to be there in the way that it might be in, you know, Southeast Asia for example.*

*Our partners in, let's say, Asia [...] might have 600, 700 students per year, which is a number that I don't think European institutions are able to meet [...] so in order to invest a lot of time and effort and resource to develop these relationships, the initial proposal usually asks what their projected numbers might be, and when they're quite small, people tend to rethink those relationships.*

*While Europe would be of interest to us, in terms of having a more strategic partnership there [...] Italy never meets any of those metrics that we look at [...] all of those metrics which then gives us an indicator of whether there is an opportunity there to do something of size and scale.*

The UK exit from the EU has, however, made some UK providers reconsider and reprioritise their engagement with European countries, signalling how Italy might be a strategic priority for some UK universities as part of their broader new engagement with Europe:

*We were pretty much focused like many universities on India and China, and now we've tried to branch out. So now, what do we do with Europe? I think it's kind of what we're grappling with at the moment. We would very much like to engage, and we've been perhaps a little reactive to approaches. So far, we haven't had an approach or an opportunity to talk about Italy.*

*I think it's a strategic priority to have relationships within Europe with all countries, actually, and perhaps even more so with the UK's exit from the EU [...] we've kept as many partnerships as we can being active within Europe even though most of our students actually go outside of Europe.*

*Post-Brexit, we were quite keen to do everything possible, and I'm sure a lot of universities are in the same position to fight the degradation of those links and those relationships. And so we started looking sort of with a vengeance at Europe at what we could do and where we could maintain those active links.*

*It has been a barrier in terms of kind of a mental block, actually, and so we're finding ways to get past through that. I'm really keen to use our membership of two European alliances as a kind of added value and a distinguishing feature of ourselves as a very Europe facing, very internationally oriented university.*





### 3.1.4 Research

As the 2023 British Council study on Italy–UK co-operation in higher education highlighted, research co-operation between Italian and UK universities has traditionally taken place primarily in the context of the EU framework, even if there are collaborations that take place outside of EU funding programmes, often originating from direct connections established by individual academics. Horizon 2020 was the main source of funding before the UK exit from the EU, and it is, therefore, not surprising that the UK rejoining the Horizon Europe programme is seen as very positive by both parties and as a key enabler for continued and closer collaboration between the two sectors.

*Reassociating to Horizon has been really positive, I think, and we're starting to kind of gather our strategy around that and how we approach that going forward.*

*While the UK's exit from Horizon Europe shocked collective research groups, luckily, they [the UK] re-entered Horizon quickly enough, minimizing the negative impact.*

Some concern has been raised about whether that 'hiatus of about two to three years [...] might have compromised relations [...] and [whether] people [in Europe] have retained confidence to have UK universities as important partners in large European projects.' The short-term impact is unavoidable, and stakeholders interviewed tend to believe that it may take some time to restore research collaboration to pre-Brexit levels.

*It's definitely dropped off compared to what we were doing before, even now that we have rejoined Horizon [...] I think it's just the news around it [...] people start looking elsewhere. They've got to plan in terms of workload and things like that in their research [...] particularly early-career researchers, it narrows things down a bit for them, and they tend to think a bit shorter term.*

*We have been significantly impacted by leaving Horizon [...] we used to be the leads of some projects which we cannot be anymore, not even now having rejoined as associate.*

Collaboration in research with the UK is regarded as of strategic importance and as a priority for Italian universities, and both parties see that there is scope to do more in joint research activity now that the UK is back in Horizon Europe, in particular leveraging the important role that the Italian academic community in the UK has played and can continue to play in strengthening academic co-operation between the two countries. As different interviewees from Italy and the UK observed:

*Strengthening research collaboration with UK universities will be very beneficial for us as they are very strong in research.*

*There is significant interest by part of Italian academics to strengthen research co-operation with the UK through dedicated strategic programmes, there are already many research projects going between individual academics.*

*We publish a lot with Italian cover collaborators with many institutions in Italy, but these somehow don't translate into grant applications [...] there is potential for growth, and we need to try to understand how come these collaborations don't then develop into grant applications.*

*The connections that Italian academics here in the UK have maintained with Italy and their universities of provenance have been critical in developing co-operation.*

*I think a fairly large contingent of Italian scholars that were working in the UK has certainly helped [in maintaining relations] because people tend to have really quite sort of deep connections with Italy.*

*If I think about all of my PhD students, the vast majority have been Italian nationals. I think that probably frames a little bit – that kind of supply-and-demand aspect.*

Co-operation in joint doctoral programmes and PhD mobility is viewed by institutions in both countries as a key area to prioritise in order to strengthen relations and foster further research collaboration. This is particularly significant given the UK's renewed participation in Horizon Europe, which opens up opportunities to leverage Marie Curie doctoral funding schemes.

*Joint PhD models are something that we're really interested in and joint research activity in general it's something that we'd like to grow in partnership with lots of European partners.*

*I think we could start with a joint PhD [...] even in terms of academic regulation it is easier than other double degrees.*

*Mobility is already embedded in our regulation for doctoral students, every Italian PhD student must spend between three and six months abroad [...] this can be leveraged to strengthen relations with the UK in particular– now that they are back in Horizon.*

### 3.1.5 Pontignano Conference 2024

In November 2024, a workshop focused on Italy–UK academic co-operation took place as part of the Pontignano Conference,<sup>34</sup> a key annual event strengthening the UK–Italy bilateral relationship by bringing together delegates from diverse fields. The session involved representatives from both the UK and Italian higher education sectors, offering a platform to explore challenges and opportunities for deeper collaboration. The discussion, chaired by the author of this study, highlighted several of the key themes that emerged from interviews and surveys conducted with Italian and UK universities as part of this study.

The workshop centred on three closely interconnected areas of co-operation: student mobility and exchange; research collaboration; and academic co-operation through joint degrees and innovative delivery models. The discussion emphasised challenges and solutions associated with three key areas: funding; awareness of opportunities; and regulation.

Participants universally acknowledged the solid foundation of UK–Italy co-operation in higher education, pointing to Italy's longstanding position as one of the largest European sources of students for the UK. The Italian academic community in the UK also stands as one of the largest foreign groups, playing a vital role in nurturing ties between the two nations' higher education sectors.

Despite the expected decline in student mobility from Italy to the UK post-Brexit, both sides recognised continued demand among Italian students for UK higher education, as reflected in the recent modest growth of UK TNE students in Italy.

While acknowledging the challenges posed by the UK's exit from the EU and the ongoing financial pressures within the UK higher education sector, workshop participants emphasised the opportunities for further co-operation, sharing a range of possible solutions. Funding mobility to the UK post-Brexit and encouraging more UK students to study in Italy were highlighted as key challenges. There was also broad consensus on the need to raise awareness of the opportunities and benefits of studying at Italian institutions. In this regard, innovative approaches to mobility, such as short-term exchanges, summer schools and virtual mobility, were discussed as potential solutions.

The discussion also revealed a strong mutual interest in expanding research co-operation, with participants agreeing on the importance of increasing joint grant capture and developing joint PhD programmes as a means to deepen research collaboration. The UK's return to Horizon Europe was seen as a particularly positive development, especially as it facilitates access to Marie Curie doctoral fellowships, which can further support joint research initiatives.



34 <https://pontignanoconference.it/>

Finally, there was widespread agreement on the potential for innovative models of academic co-operation to foster both mobility and research collaboration. Ideas included collaboration through TNE via the establishment of outposts on each other's campuses, the use of online platforms and the development of study-abroad centres similar to those operated by American universities in Italy. Participants also noted the importance of engaging in broader policy discussions on the value of these innovative models and their implications for regulation, quality assurance and qualification recognition.

Delegates expressed a strong commitment to continuing the dialogue and recognised the British Council's vital role in supporting mutual understanding and facilitating further co-operation opportunities.

## 3.2 Recommendations

While challenges persist, there are also clear opportunities to adapt and develop new strategies to enhance academic ties between the two countries. Based on the insights presented in this report, which draws from both desk-based analysis and stakeholder engagement, several key suggestions emerge for strengthening academic co-operation between the UK and Italy.

### 3.2.1. Addressing mobility costs

While UK higher education providers might consider adopting, where possible, a more flexible fee system for EU exchange students, to address the financial implications for UK providers the UK government should consider establishing post-Brexit agreements with EU countries to facilitate reciprocal student mobility. These agreements could include provisions for streamlining visa processes on both sides, reducing bureaucratic hurdles and making it easier for students to move between the UK and EU institutions.

### 3.2.2 Quick wins

UK and Italian universities should consider a number of strategic priority areas to strengthen academic collaboration, aiming to enhance student mobility, foster joint academic programmes and promote collaborative research initiatives. These include:

- Promoting short-term mobility opportunities, such as summer schools, to encourage more students to engage in international exchanges, both ways.

- Leveraging digital technology to facilitate virtual mobility exchanges, broadening access to international learning experiences.
- Developing joint PhD programmes using Marie Curie funding to support long-term research co-operation and academic partnerships.
- Exploring deeper co-operation through European University Alliances, creating opportunities for enhanced academic collaboration, potentially leading to successful Horizon applications.
- Increasing the number of English-taught programmes at Italian universities, making them more attractive to international students, particularly from the UK.

### 3.2.3 Promoting and facilitating opportunities for co-operation

UK and Italian sector bodies should consider initiatives aimed at promoting a better reciprocal understanding of each other's higher education sectors, priorities and opportunities for collaboration.

While the value of studying in the UK is widely recognised and appreciated by Italian students, and Italian universities also generally understand the benefits of partnering with UK counterparts, there is a clear opportunity to do more to promote Italy as an attractive study destination for UK students and emphasise Italy's importance as a valuable partner for academic and research collaborations with UK universities.

In this context, initiatives that facilitate dialogue between UK and Italian higher education providers and help identifying new opportunities for collaboration should be actively pursued. These might include reciprocal higher education missions and study visits, publications and information workshops or webinars. The British Council is particularly well-positioned to lead these efforts, working alongside key sector bodies such as Universities UK International (UUKi) and the Conferenza dei Rettori delle Università Italiane (CRUI) to co-ordinate and support these initiatives.

### 3.2.4 Addressing quality concerns about TNE

To support access to UK higher education for Italian students at a lower cost, in particular in specific areas where there might not be supply in Italy, and also address the Italian authorities' concerns about 'brain drain', consideration should be given to finding shared solutions to the quality concerns that affect the recognition of TNE models based on collaborative partnerships with local private institutions through franchise or validation agreements.

Specifically, efforts should be made to establish platforms for ongoing dialogue between the quality assurance and regulatory bodies of both countries to foster a mutual understanding of how the quality of collaborative TNE partnerships is maintained and assured, devise agreed solutions meeting reciprocal quality assurance needs, and ultimately support reciprocal recognition of TNE and its growth for the mutual benefit of the two countries.

### 3.2.5 Establishing a UK–Italy higher education 'task force'

Consideration should be given to establishing a 'task force' comprising representatives, practitioners and experts from both UK and Italian higher education sectors, aimed at facilitating discussions on the most effective strategies for strengthening academic co-operation between the two countries. This task force would focus on discussing and finding solutions to the key challenges to UK–Italy co-operation in higher education, as outlined in this report, ensuring actionable progress and fostering long-term collaboration. The British Council in Italy would be ideally placed to facilitate the establishment of such an initiative.



# Appendix 1: Strategy for the Internationalisation of the Italian Higher Education System 2024–2026

The Italian Ministry of University and Research and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation have recently adopted a new internationalisation strategy for the period 2024–2026 to promote and enhance the competitiveness of the Italian higher education system within the global landscape. The strategy acknowledges the impact of globalisation on higher education, emphasising the need for international collaboration, cultural exchange and the development of global competencies.

It emphasises, in particular, the need for national-level systemic interventions to transform potentially negative movements of talent across borders, which have led to the phenomena of brain drain and brain gain, into virtuous cycles of growth, sharing and interconnection between educational systems. It also highlights how the demographic decline across Europe, particularly in Italy, will have a significant impact on academic systems posing sustainability challenges for academic programmes.

The strategy has four macro-objectives:

- **Promoting and supporting international co-operation, both bilateral and multilateral.** This includes supporting joint study programmes and strengthening international mobility of students and staff, including through improved and simplified systems and practices for the recognition of international credit and qualifications, including in the context of the UNESCO Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education.<sup>35</sup>
- **Reinforcing European co-operation as a tool for internationalisation outside the EU.** This involves supporting joint programmes at all levels of higher education, attracting international academics and researchers to Italy and leveraging digital innovation to inform blended approaches to teaching and learning.
- **Strengthening the culture of internationalisation and expanding the range of skills.** This includes promoting interdisciplinary and intercultural approaches in study programmes, increasing the number of courses offered in English and facilitating the development of double or joint degrees.
- **Promoting mobility and attractiveness.** This involves increasing scholarships and incentives for both national students to study abroad and international students to study in Italy, as well as supporting the inclusion of international students.

35 UNESCO 2019: Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education



## Appendix 2: List of UK TNE offered in Italy

Based on information published on UK higher education providers' websites, it is possible to identify the following existing TNE arrangements based on

validation and franchise partnerships. This may not be a comprehensive list of all existing UK TNE collaborative partnerships in Italy.

UK TNE awarding institution	Italian partner institution	Programme of study	Type
Buckinghamshire New University	Istituto Superiore di Osteopatia (ISO Milan)	BSc (Hons) Osteopathic Principles – Conversion	Validation
		PG Dip Advanced Osteopathic Practice – Conversion	
		MSc Advanced Osteopathic Practice – Conversion	
		MSc Osteopathy – Conversion	
Coventry University	Music Academy (MPDA)	MA Applied Contemporary Music (Musical Direction and Leadership)	Validation
		MA Applied Contemporary Music (Music Production and Sound Design)	
		MA Applied Contemporary Music (Professional Arrangement and Composition)	
		BA (Hons) Music Production BA (top-up)	
		BA (Hons) Popular Music Performance and Songwriting (top-up)	
De Montfort University	Università Bocconi	MA Management, Law and Humanities of Sport	Validation
Goldsmiths, University of London	Florence Institute of Design International	BA (Hons) Graphic Design	Validation
		BA (Hons) Internal Design	
Health Sciences University	Accademia Italiana Medicina Osteopatica	BSc (Hons) Osteopathic Science	Validation
		BSc (Hons) Osteopathy – Conversion	
		Postgraduate Certificate: Healthcare Education	
		Master in Osteopathic Medicine	
Regent's University London	Domus Academy Milano	MA Fashion Design	Validation
		MA Fashion Styling and Visual Merchandising	



UK TNE awarding institution	Italian partner institution	Programme of study	Type
Richmond, The American International University in London	European School of Economics	BSc (Hons) Global Political Science	Validation
		BSc (Hons) Business Administration: Marketing	
		BSc (Hons) Business Administration: Finance	
		BSc (Hons) Business Administration: Management	
		BSc (Hons) Business Administration: Media and Communication	
		BSc (Hons) Business Administration: Sport Management	
		MSc in Business Management	
		MBA Entrepreneurship and Leadership	
		MBA Film Production	
St Mary's University, Twickenham	Pontifical BEDA College	BTh Theology, Graduate Diploma Theology	Validation
Swansea University	Accademia per lo Sviluppo dell'Osteopatia e della Medicina Integrativa (ASOMI)	BSc (Hons) Osteopathy 'top-up'	Validation
Teesside University	Plena – Ferrari Fashion School	BA (Hons) Fashion Business and Digital Marketing	Validation
		BA (Hons) Fashion Business and Psychology	
		BA (Hons) Fashion Design	
		BA (Hons) Fashion Styling and Communication	
		MA Fashion and Luxury Management	
		MA Fashion Design and Creative Direction	
	Scuola Politecnica di Design	BA (Hons) Automotive and Transport Design	Validation
		BA (Hons) Communication, Culture and Business	
		BA (Hons) Design	
		MA Communication Design	
		MA Designing Digital Cultures	
		MA Event and Exhibition Design	
		MA Food Design	
		MA Interior Design	
		MA Product Design	
		MA Transportation and Car Design	

UK TNE awarding institution	Italian partner institution	Programme of study	Type
The Open University	Fondazione IRCCS 'Istituto Nazionale dei Tumori' (INT)	Collaborative Research Degree	Affiliated Research Centre
	IFOM Fondazione Istituto FIRC di Oncologia Molecolar	Collaborative Research Degree – Affiliated Research Centre	
	International Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (ICGEB)	Collaborative Research Degree	
	IRCCS Istituto Clinico Humanitas (ICH)	Collaborative Research Degree	
	IRCCS Istituto di Ricerche Farmacologiche Mario Negri	Collaborative Research Degree	
	Stazione Zoologica Anton Dohrn	Collaborative Research Degree	
	Istituto Italiano di Tecnologia (IIT)	Collaborative Research Degree	
University of Chichester	Sonus Factory	BA (Hons) Popular Music	Validation
		MA Composition for Film, TV and Games	
		MA Sound Design in Visual Media	
		MA Music Education	
	H-Farm	BSc (Hons) Digital Economics and Finance	Validation
		BSc (Hons) International Business Studies	
		BSc (Hons) Management with Business Analytics	
		BSc (Hons) Business Creation and Entrepreneurship	
		BSc (Hons) Marketing and Global Commerce	
		BSc (Hons) AI and Data Science	
		BSc (Hons) Information Systems Management	
		BSc (Hons) Software and Cloud Architecture	
		MA Digital Marketing and Data Analytics	
		MA Digital Transformation and Entrepreneurship	
		MA Design and Communication	
		MA International Business –Validation	
University of Hertfordshire	SAE institute	BA (Hons) Music Business	Validation
University of the West of Scotland	MAST	BA (Hons) Commercial Music	Franchise
		BA (Hons) Performance	
		MA Music (Songwriting)	Franchise



## Appendix 3: Double degrees between UK and Italian universities

Based on published information on Italian university websites cross-referenced with information from UK university websites, it is possible to identify the

following existing double degree arrangements between UK and Italian universities. These exclude collaboration at the doctorate level.

UK University	Italian University	Programme
Bangor University	Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore	BA (Hons) Business and Finance
Bangor University	Università di Padova	TRANSatlantic FORestry MA (Transfor-M)
Bangor University	Università di Padova	MA Sustainable Forest and Nature Management (SUFONAMA )
Birkbeck, University of London	Università di Udine	MA Film Audiovisual Studies
Birkbeck, University of London	Università Roma 3	International MA in Audiovisual and Cinema Studies
Cardiff Metropolitan University	Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione (IULM)	MA Strategic Communication
City University of London	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	MA Corporate Finance
City University of London	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Data Analytics for Business and Society
City University of London	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Economics and Finance
City University of London	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Economics, Finance and Sustainability
City University of London	Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore	MA Banking and Finance
Cranfield University	Università di Bari	MA Thermal Power
Cranfield University	Università di Pisa	MA Engineering and Management of Manufacturing Systems
Durham University	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	LLM
King's College London	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	MA Policies and Governance in Europe
King's College London	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	MA International Management

UK University	Italian University	Programme
King's College London	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	LLM
King's College London	Università Bocconi	LLM Law, Innovation and Technology
King's College London	Università di Bologna	Integrated MA Law
King's College London	Università di Roma 'La Sapienza'	MA Law (European Law School Network)
Kingston University London	Università Roma 3	MA Economic Policies in the age of Globalisation (Erasmus Mundus)
Lancaster University	Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore	BA (Hons) European Management
Lancaster University	Università di Pavia	MA in Finance
Lancaster University	Università di Pavia	MA International Business
Lancaster University	Università di Pavia	MA Economics, Development and Innovation
London School of Economics	Università Bocconi	MA Politics and Policy Analysis
London School of Economics	Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore	MA Banking and Finance
Nottingham Trent University	Università di Brescia	MA Management (International Business)
Queen Mary University of London	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	LLM
Queen Mary University of London	Università di Milano Statale	LLM International Economic Law
Queen Mary University of London	Università di Milano Statale	LLM Environmental Law
Queen Mary University of London	Università di Milano Statale	LLM Energy and Natural Resources Law
St. Andrews University	Università Roma 3	International MA Audiovisual and Cinema Studies
St. Mary's University Twickenham	Università Europea di Roma	MA Economic
The Robert Gordon University	Università Carlo Cattaneo (LIUC)	MA Economics
The Robert Gordon University	Università Carlo Cattaneo (LIUC)	MA Engineering
The School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London	Università di Roma 'Tor Vergata'	MA European Economy and Business Law
University College of London	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	BA (Hons) Humanities
University of Dundee	Università di Bergamo	MA Accounting and Finance
University of Essex	Università del Salento	MA Technical Translation and Interpreting
University of Glasgow	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	LLM
University of Glasgow	Università di Trento	LLB

UK University	Italian University	Programme
University of Glasgow	Università di Trento	LLM
University of Glasgow	Università di Bologna	BA (Hons) Statistical Science
University of Hertfordshire	Università Carlo Cattaneo (LIUC)	MA Economics
University of Hertfordshire	Università Carlo Cattaneo (LIUC)	MA Engineering
University of Hertfordshire	Università della Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli'	MA Pharmacovigilance and Pharmacoepidemiology (EU2P)
University of Huddersfield	Libera Università di Lingue e Comunicazione (IULM)	MA Strategic Communication
University of Reading	Politecnico di Milano	MA International Business and Digital Transformation
University of Reading	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Data Analytics for Business and Society
University of Reading	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Economics and Finance
University of Reading	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Economics, Finance and Sustainability
University of Reading	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Global Accounting and Finance
University of Reading	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA Innovation and Marketing
University of Reading	Università 'Ca Foscari' Venice	MA International Management
University of Reading	Università di Torino	MA in Business Administration
University of Suffolk	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	LLM
University of Southampton	Politecnico di Torino	European MA Embedded Computing Systems (Erasmus Mundus)
University of Southampton	Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore	MA Actuarial Sciences, Risk and Data Analysis
University of York	Università di Bologna	MA Modern American and European Languages and Literature
Warwick University	Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali Guido Carli (LUISS) University	LLM





# Appendix 4: Case studies of UK collaborative partnerships in Italy

## University of Chichester's partnerships with Sonus Factory and H-FARM College

The West Sussex Institute of Higher Education was formed in 1977 as a result of the merger between two colleges (Bishop Otter College and the Bognor Regis College of Education). Initially, degrees were awarded by both Sussex and Southampton universities and eventually it became an accredited college of the University of Southampton. In 1995, the Institute changed its name to Chichester Institute of Higher Education, gaining degree-awarding powers in 1999 and becoming University College Chichester. In 2015 it obtained university title by the Privy Council. Chichester holds TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework) Gold.

The University's mission is 'to provide outstanding education, advance knowledge and benefit the world'. As part of this mission, it engages in academic partnerships in the UK and internationally. The University of Chichester has two TNE partnerships in Italy: one with Sonus Factory and the other with H-Farm College.

Sonus Factory is a UK-inspired school of music and music production, located in Rome, offering a range of professional courses as well as a Bachelor of Arts in Popular Music and a suite of three Master of Arts (Composition for Film, TV and Games; Sound Design; and Music Education) validated by University of Chichester.

These validated courses are offered fully in-person and are taught in English by Sonus Factory staff. BA degrees are also assessed in English, while the MA programmes are assessed in Italian. This partnership was established in 2015 and currently there are just under 30 students taking University of Chichester validated degrees.

H-Farm College, located in Venice, offers executive courses as well as bachelor's and master's degrees validated by international and Italian universities, focusing on digital transformation, entrepreneurship and business. The mission of H-FARM Education is to help students develop the much-desired skills required by new professions and business demands through dynamic teaching, the development of transversal skills and the use of new technologies.

There is a focus on entrepreneurship and innovation, fostered by H-Farm's own ethos. Depop, the second-hand fashion app, was created in 2011 at H-Farm and is now the second unicorn company<sup>36</sup> in Italian history and the highest for exit valuation. This result, unparalleled in Europe, makes H-Farm one of the most important accelerators in the world. The profit generated by the sale of Depop is being used to further support their strategic plan and the Edutech development of its Education business unit, whose focus is on their DNA key traits: innovation, entrepreneurship, digital transformation and new technologies

The courses currently validated by the University of Chichester include BSc (Hons) in Digital Economics and Finance; BSc (Hons) International Business Studies; and BSc (Hons) in International Business Studies, as well as master's degrees in Design and Communication; Digital Marketing and Data Analytics; and Digital Transformation and Entrepreneurship. The portfolio is under expansion, with MBA provision to be added.

<sup>36</sup> A unicorn company is a startup company with a value of over \$1 billion.

Courses are offered face to face, online or in a blended version and are taught in English by H-Farm staff. This partnership was established in 2021 and currently there are about 140 students studying University of Chichester validated degrees.

Both these partnerships are seen by the University of Chichester as being of strategic importance and as adding value, as they help to:

- strengthen the university's identity as a premium higher education institution, through a collaboration with international institutions with a reputation and standing in their sectors
- create opportunities for the university to be more visible and have a greater positive impact in education internationally
- support growth in exchange and study-abroad activities, as well as supporting other partnerships such as between Sonus Factory and Platform One, another university partner based on the Isle of Wight, and the creation of a joint Master's of Fine Arts programme with H-Farm
- offer programmes of study that are different from its own and are very innovative
- produce capable graduates with excellent subject-specific knowledge and employability skills.

The UK's exit from the EU and the withdrawal from Erasmus+ are seen as the main challenges for the partnerships, making it problematic for students wishing to have a period of study at Chichester, even though some funding is available to H-Farm students to support student mobility. The lack of academic recognition of these validated degrees has also occasionally presented a problem, in particular for students who are looking to go on to an Italian 'Conservatorio' to pursue further studies.

Interesting and positive features of these partnerships include the establishment of a relationship between Sonus Factory and another validated partner of the university, Platform One, located on the Isle of Wight. Platform One now uses Sonus Factory for their own students' European tour module, while Sonus Factory's students are invited back to Platform One, where they may have the opportunity to attend or participate in the Isle of Wight Festival.

Similarly, by drawing on their reciprocal strengths, the University of Chichester and H-Farm have been working to create a joint Master's of Fine Arts, and H-Farm students have been actively engaging with the university's activities, such as its research conference.



## Goldsmiths, University of London with Florence Institute of Design International

Goldsmiths' history dates back to 1792, when the Counter Hill Academy opened its doors in New Cross in south-east London. In 1891, The Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths acquired the school and reopened it as The Goldsmiths' Company's Technical and Recreative Institute, which became part of the University of London in 1904. Over the years, Goldsmiths has built a global reputation and is renowned for its pioneering programmes in arts, media, social sciences and humanities.

In 2024, Goldsmiths partnered with Florence Institute of Design International (FIDI) to offer validated programmes in BA Graphic Design and BA Interior Design. Under this arrangement, students who study these programmes at FIDI will have the opportunity to graduate with a UK undergraduate degree awarded by Goldsmiths.

The programmes have been redesigned from FIDI's existing BA Design programme, which offered two pathways (graphic design and interior design). The new curriculum promotes a more progressive understanding of the creative process behind design as students delve deeper into theoretical frameworks while maintaining a focus on interdisciplinary approaches, practical applications and real-world problem-solving. The new degree programmes are structured to give deeper levels of study in theory and materiality while maintaining the same practical skills and objectives of the previous BA programmes.

The programmes are delivered by FIDI with Goldsmiths keeping responsibility for their quality assurance. The course content builds upon Italy's rich culture, fusing modern and traditional design concepts. The programmes are taught entirely in English. Located in the historical centre of Florence, with classes held within decorated baroque spaces, students are learning through a unique approach to international design.

The teaching methodology caters to the diverse student body yet focuses on the personalisation of studies. FIDI's philosophy is to provide a first-class facility offering the highest level of personalised education, with small group sizes and ample contact hours. Students explore diverse cultural perspectives and historical influences.

The validation of these programmes represents a commitment to upholding rigorous academic standards and ensuring a world-class educational experience for students pursuing their passion in design disciplines. It further underscores the alignment between Goldsmiths' commitment to nurturing creative talent and FIDI's dedication to excellence in design education.

## The University of the West of Scotland with MAST Italy

The University of the West of Scotland (UWS) is one of Scotland's largest modern universities with four Scottish campuses (Paisley, Ayr, Dumfries and Lanarkshire) and a campus in London. The university prides itself on career-focused teaching, world-leading research and an international outlook. Additionally, its approach to technology and innovation can be traced back to its origins as The Paisley Technical College and School of Art, later the Paisley College of Technology, becoming the University of Paisley in 1992 before merging with Bell College and becoming the University of the West of Scotland in 2007.

The Division of Arts and Media sits within the School of Business and Creative Industries and offers honours courses (four years in Scotland) in: Graphic Arts and Moving Image; Commercial Music; Performance, Television, Radio and Podcast Production; Filmmaking and Screenwriting; and Journalism. It also has MA courses in Creative Media Practice, Songwriting, Sound Production and Filmmaking. The programmes of study are strongly rooted in creative practice and professional practice, taking advantage of the strong level of industry experience and locus of its academic staff. Similarly, a significant part of the research output of the staff is based on creative practice.

Partnership is an important part of the UWS business model and is also strongly rooted in the widening-access focus of its work. UWS offers advanced entry to courses at Level 8 and Level 9 of the Scottish Credits and Qualification Framework (SCQF)<sup>37</sup> and also franchises and validates courses within the UK college sector itself, building a distinct tertiary space that creates opportunity. UWS aims to mirror that approach in its TNE partnerships.

UWS TNE provision within arts and media has largely been focused on the partnership with Music Recording Studio (MAST), located in Bari in Puglia, Italy. The partnership commenced in Rome in 2014 by franchising BA Commercial Music to Roma Contemporary Music College, part of the Music Academies Network (Italy), extending to include other partners in the network, with campuses in Bologna and Bari. The TNE partnership was expanded to include the MA Songwriting in Rome from 2017 and BA Performance in Rome from session 2023/24. UWS's agreement now sits with MAST studios, who manage the Bari and Rome campuses, where the delivery has settled on BA Commercial Music at both Rome and Bari and BA Performance at Rome (temporarily paused).

The programmes are taught in English by MAST staff who apply to become registered teachers of the university, demonstrating academic and professional qualifications to assure parity with UWS home-based lecturers and to ensure an appropriate experience for students. The programmes are franchised, and so follow the structure and assessments as delivered at UWS. Localisation is encouraged, with MAST following the learning outcomes and assessment types in full alignment, while varying some of the teaching content to fully support the students in developing careers within the Italian creative industries. This is overseen by an assigned UWS link tutor and assured throughout the academic year via a collaborative annual report which feeds into our school-based and institutional annual monitoring process.

The TNE partnership adds huge value to the UWS offer and there are excellent practices within the partnership, including:

- The facilities at Bari and Rome are of extremely high quality, easily at the same level as is offered on UWS home campuses.
- The industry locus of staff across both franchised programmes is high level.
- Opportunities for exchange – in each academic year we welcome students from Bari to study (since commencing the partnership around 100 Italian students have travelled to Scotland for our intensive songwriting week) and more recently Scottish students have travelled to Italy to play in live events (around 30 since 2021). This opportunity will be rolled out for Performance students in due course.
- Opportunities for staff exchange – there have been lectures delivered reciprocally by staff of both partners to the advantage of students and the institutions. In one case this fed into the REF2021 submission of the UWS link tutor who held workshops disseminating research in Bari.
- The development of new modules specific to the Italian delivery. This is necessarily limited in the context of programmatic learning outcomes but is comfortably accommodated to the advantage of students.
- The extension of strategic partnership – an example is the widening of post-Erasmus activity to include less-formal mechanisms, such as week-long exchange that now includes ex-Erasmus partners in Holland, Germany and Belgium, and bringing the Italian TNE partnership within some of that activity.

37 Level 8 and 9 of the SCQF are equivalent to levels 5 and 6, respectively, of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Scottish Qualifications Authority: Comparing qualifications levels





There are also some ongoing challenges in the partnership, including:

- The UK's exit from the EU effectively closed off an opportunity for Italian students to travel to Scotland and join either L10 or the MA course, with fully paid fees. This was a rich opportunity that resulted in one case of a student coming to Scotland and completing honours and master's, before returning to Bari to contribute to the management of BOBO and the link tutor role.
- Challenges with gaining recognition from the Italian Ministry of Education. This has hampered some students going on to study master's degrees in Italy where the university will not automatically recognise the UWS award.

However, UWS views the value of the partnership principally in the extension of opportunities to both home-based Scottish and TNE Italian students, the opportunities for cultural and academic exchange and the development of the subject areas – music and performance – in a contemporary European context. In concrete terms, this means developing further campus delivery locations (two locations are currently in progress for music and performance); striving to gain better recognition for the degrees within Italy itself; continuing to develop new and/or refreshed UG/PG titles; and creating further opportunities for meaningful staff and student exchange.

## Health Sciences University with Accademia Italiana Medicina Osteopatica

Health Sciences University (HSU), formerly University College of Osteopathy (UCO) and the British School of Osteopathy (BSO), is a specialist university based in London and Bournemouth which focuses on the education of health professionals. It has played a significant role in championing osteopathy and furthering the profession both in the UK and internationally over the last 100 years.

The BSO was established in 1917 by John Martin Littlejohn, a former student of Andrew Taylor Still, the founder of osteopathy. BSO obtained UK degree-awarding powers in 2015 and its university title in 2017. UCO was the only osteopathic education provider in Europe to be granted the power to award its own degrees. UCO merged with

AECC University College in 2024 and subsequently rebranded as Health Sciences University.

In 2017 UCO established a partnership with the Accademia Italiana Medicina Osteopatica (AIMO), an Italian osteopathic school located near Milan, to offer UCO-validated undergraduate and postgraduate courses. Currently the validated courses consist of a BSc (Hons) in Osteopathic Science (with the possibility of a top-up progressing from a recognised Diploma in Osteopathy), an MSc in Osteopathy and a Postgraduate Certificate in Health Care Education.

The partnership is aligned with HSU's strategic commitment to work collaboratively with others to bring valued additions to the university's portfolio, and to broaden and enrich staff and student experiences through educational and scholarly activity. Through this partnership AIMO is able to offer internationally recognised degrees in osteopathy in Italy, where there are currently no equivalent qualifications, thus contributing to the development of the profession in the country and the professional development of its students. AIMO is the only international school of osteopathy offering degree courses validated by HSU.

The courses are developed in partnership and delivered by AIMO's lecturers and also involve external lecturers from Italian universities in the region. Delivery is in English. A modified programme is delivered in English by AIMO at the Swiss International College of Osteopathy (SICO), partly on-site and partly online. There are currently approximately 200 students registered on AIMO courses validated by HSU.

Having been set up after the UK's exit from the EU referendum, the partnership has not been affected by the exit of the UK from the EU. Sharing good practice with regards to teaching, learning and assessment is regarded as a particularly important aspect of this partnership. Communication across cultures, although more challenging than with UK partners, is managed well with regular meetings, remotely and in-person, including the attendance of key staff at graduation ceremonies.

AIMO students generally progress to private osteopathic practice. Legislation is underway to regulate the profession in Italy and AIMO are liaising with the Italian Ministry to ensure that their courses will gain the required accreditation that will enable HSU/ AIMO graduates to enter onto the Italian register of osteopaths when it is eventually set up.

## University of Hertfordshire and SAE partnership (SAE Milan)

The University of Hertfordshire (UH) is a modern, dynamic and enterprising university. From early beginnings in 1952 as a technical college, and then Polytechnic, to achieving full University status in 1992, the University is now a thriving community of nearly 35,000 students from over 110 countries. Students have access to more than 700 career-focused degree options and a chance to study at more than 170 universities worldwide, using outstanding, true to life facilities. The University was the only university to be awarded a King's Award for Enterprise in 2024, in recognition for how it has grown its international community, and an extensive overseas partner network delivering the University's education.

Established in 1976, SAE Creative Media Institute provides creative media programmes to over 10,000 students across 40+ campuses globally. SAE is recognised for providing students with access to the best industry equipment and facilities, employing teaching staff with strong industry experience, and delivering hands on teaching and learning in small class environments. Their programmes are informed by a high level of engagement with industry, and industry requirements and standards, and are designed to provide graduates with advanced skills suitable to a career in the creative industries.

As of 2021, SAE has organised its global operations into business units, two of which SAE GSAN (Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Netherlands) and SAE UK and South-West Europe offer UK-validated degree programmes. In addition, there are a small number of campuses operated by third parties under a SAE licensing agreement. Some of these licensed campuses also deliver UK-validated degree programmes and have a binding agreement to meet the same quality assurance framework as SAE owned campuses.

In the UH-SAE relationship, University of Hertfordshire validates the Bachelor's and Master's degrees offered by SAE Institute, with oversight and awarding authority resting with the University. In addition, individual SAE centres are subject to an institutional approval process in order to establish that they meet the standards appropriate for the delivery of UK degree programmes. Each degree is then subject to the full scrutiny of the University of Hertfordshire's quality assurance systems, relating to quality of teaching and learning, academic standards and assessment. Among the annual reporting mechanisms to ensure that the degree awards are of a comparable standard to other UK degree programmes both academically and in terms of the student experience, are a rigorous Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report, and reports from the University-appointed External Examiners. The structure of the validated programmes, and the content of these programmes are developed by SAE, in consultation with the University of Hertfordshire, but are unique to SAE. The programmes are entirely delivered and managed by SAE.

SAE Milan, (in line with the rest of the SAE campuses in South-West Europe) operates in some regards independently under local management (each campus has a Manager and an Academic Manager to lead non-academic and academic functions, respectively). Increasingly, however, the campuses are linked at every level through a matrixed management structure. Support functions are for the most part coordinated centrally, while faculty are as much a part of regional programme teams (through participation in Programme Committees and other forums) as they are a part of the local campus team. This dual approach ensures that local campuses have a welcoming, collegiate atmosphere and provide an engaging environment for students, while simultaneously ensuring academic quality, comparability, and the sharing of best practices across the campuses. The development of a Blended Learning strategy from 2020 has further tightened links between campus teams, with cross-campus collaboration on programme and module delivery now further facilitated through online synchronous and asynchronous elements of learning and teaching.

The current UH validated degree awards running at SAE Milan, are BA and BSc (Hons) in Music Business. These awards are delivered and assessed in Italian, and represent a forward looking programme of study towards both the business of music and emerging technologies, and away from more conventional offerings relating to traditional music. Students embark on modules where they gain insight into the music industry as a whole, and cover areas relating to legislation, contracts, business fundamentals and marketing, before moving on to study profiling and content management. From the second year of study, students develop their specialisation through engaging with industry and business workflows and through collaboration, before defining both an advanced specialised project and major project in their final year. The course primary connects graduates to key music business and industry roles, particularly in the areas of artist management, digital strategy, marketing, PR management, social content management, account management, music journalism, tour promotion, A&R management, and tour and event management.





