



The UK's future in Europe: what role do Higher Education and Research play?

Summary note

13 March 2019, 13.00-15.00, IPU Room, Houses of Parliament

The conversation covered student mobility, research collaboration, immigration and visas, student fees, the relative benefits of multilateral and bilateral programmes, the role of languages and models for future collaboration with Europe.

Participants agreed that student mobility and research collaboration were beneficial to the UK's relationship with European countries.

Going forward, participants argued for:

- More clarity on future immigration and fee status of EU students
- Continued access to and participation in Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020
- Continued mobility for students both inbound and outbound
- Continued association with existing European networks such as the European University Institute (EUI)
- Continued engagement with the European Higher Education Area
- Better integration between HEIs and local businesses on trade with Europe
- The promotion of Modern Foreign Languages
- Continued support and resourcing for multilateral networks

Student Mobility

The roundtable began with a discussion of student mobility. Participants called for more clarity regarding the future of the Erasmus+ programme. It was noted that UK students may have plans to go abroad with the programme in the 2019-20 academic year, but that there is still uncertainty over whether UK participation to the programme will continue and whether UK students will be eligible to participate.

Questions were raised over the validity of the underwrite guarantee for existing participants in the programme. Participants raised the issue that UK universities needed bilateral letters signed with the European hosting universities to qualify for funding, but that European universities are not always willing to provide these letters given the current uncertainty. Also, non-EU nationals sent by the UK are not covered by the underwrite. One participant argued that the underwrite was not so much an underwrite as 'mitigating finance', and another argued that the underwrite was hard to trust as the technical notice was recently modified.

It was argued that one of the 'hidden costs' of the uncertainty regarding Erasmus+ was that Universities felt forced to develop their own bilateral agreements to ensure their students are not adversely affected if we are no longer able to participate. One participant expressed concern that this could become a 'race to the bottom' for bilateral arrangements, and that this would put a huge administrative burden on universities. They argued that Erasmus+ works because there is a 'clearing house' and the administrative structures in place to facilitate multiple agreements.

There was some discussion of the benefits of Erasmus+ in terms of social mobility. It was argued that Erasmus+ provides support for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds, and that those who participate have better outcomes in terms of their career and academic results. It was argued that all



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students who go abroad have better outcomes in terms of careers, academic results, employability, so without Erasmus+ students from disadvantaged backgrounds will be held back – whereas advantaged ones still be able to go abroad and reap the benefits – so will be even more advantaged. The value of the Language Assistantship programme, which allows students to teach English abroad was also mentioned.

It was noted that the UK is one of the top hosting countries for Erasmus plus and has consistently been a net benefactor of Horizon 2020 funding. However, concern was expressed that Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 applications for collaboration with, or mobility projects in, the UK have gone down due to the current uncertainty. It was noted that if the UK does not continue to participate in the existing Erasmus+ programme, it would take at least 2 years to create a national UK replacement programme.

Research Collaboration

There was some concern that the Government did not have the full picture in terms of what research was being funded by the EU in the UK, particularly in the case of post-doctoral research. This means that there is uncertainty over the funding that needs underwriting should there be a 'no-deal' Brexit. According to the participant, there is no national replacement funding for such post-doctoral research, unlike Horizon 2020 funding which has some replacement funds in place.

However, whilst existing Horizon 2020 funding is covered by an underwrite, some projects may be in danger of losing their funding. In order to be eligible for funding, there needs to be a minimum of three EU partners in each project. If there are three partners, and the UK is one of them, once the UK leaves the EU, the collaboration would become ineligible for funding.

There was concern expressed about ERC and MCSA grants, as eligibility in a 'no-deal' scenario has not been clarified. Not being able to participate in ERC funding was highlighted as one of the biggest short-term risks.

Institutional Collaboration

The importance of institutions such as the European University Institute (EUI) were mentioned. It was argued that we did not have to withdraw from our current arrangement of the EUI, even if we left the EU, but that statutory instruments for our withdrawal were currently being laid in Parliament. The British Council was cited as a possible linking institution, should the UK be unable to continue in EU multilateral arrangements.

The Bologna process and European Higher Education Area were mentioned. It was argued that this process of aligning quality and standards across the forty eight participating countries had built both trust and confidence in the UK, and that the UK should continue to resource this.

Immigration, visas and student recruitment

The conversation turned to visas and immigration. Participants were concerned that in the event of a 'no-deal', EU postgraduates wishing to study in the UK in the 2019-2020 academic year would have to apply for temporary leave to remain and for a non-extendable 36 month visa, and then for a Tier 4 visa as they will not have completed their course within the fixed 36 month visa. They will therefore need to complete a two-step immigration process in order to complete their course. Some participants argued that this administrative burden and lack of certainty regarding visas could put potential post-graduates off choosing the UK as a study destination.

In terms of recruiting international students, one participant argued that the issue of lack of mutual recognition of professional degrees is also holding the UK back. Postgraduates are faced with the dual issue of not being able to finish the program within the visa that they are given and that the qualification



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they gain may not be recognised in their country of origin. The participant argued that 'this is putting EU applicants off and will put off EU applicants off in the future, and this will be a loss for the UK'.

The conversation moved on to private providers. It was argued that many private providers do not have Tier 4 licences and are unable to obtain them. The Royal Academy was given as an example. This is a problem for specialist independent higher education institutions, as in general they provide vocational or applied learning with an industrial focus. Some courses require students to undertake a work placement, and EU students may not be able to undertake a placement without a Tier 4 visa in the future. Architecture was given as an example of a discipline facing this issue. Even if institutions were able to obtain a Tier 4 license it would be a huge administrative burden.

Fees

Another issue that was raised in terms of student recruitment was the fee status of EEA and EU students. It was argued that universities were unable to decide the fee status themselves, as this was a Government decision. One participant called for the Government to clarify the status as soon as possible, as universities are starting their recruitment cycle now and don't know the status or fee status for 2020 for admission brochures.

Modern Foreign Languages

The importance of language learning in the UK was raised several times during the session. The British Council was praised for promoting the third year abroad for both language students and non-language students. It was argued that this year abroad was crucial to the learning of other languages and a programme needed to be put in place to ensure our linguists could continue to complete a year abroad.

Multilateral or bilateral?

One participant questioned whether there was a binary choice between multilateral and bilateral relationships with European higher education institutions. Other participants suggested it was not, and that multilateral programmes should provide the basis of Universities' collaboration and mobility offers, which could be supplemented by bilateral programmes.

The administrative burden of creating multiple bilateral, or multilateral partnerships was highlighted. Participants argued that the 'red tape' was prohibitive if you wanted to do a partnership involving several countries outside of existing programmes. Though the participant admitted the EU is not always the most efficient or effective institution, they argued that it is more efficient and effective to create multilateral partnerships through the EU's current structures than having several bilateral agreements with several separate institutions. The cost of an administrative burden of such collaborations, if done by the university alone, is problematic.

One participant stated that although the EU is important, it's also crucial not to overstate the importance of the EU. One of our biggest research partners is the USA, and China, Japan and Canada are also crucial to our research. Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020 are of huge importance, but they are not the only funding programmes that UKHEI's participate in.

The future

There were several suggestions for the future role that education and culture could play in the UK's relationship with Europe.



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Several participants argued for continued access to EU structures or systems necessary to build multilateral partnerships, even if the funding was no longer available, and all argued for the continued participation in Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ if politically possible. Many participants stressed the need to support mobility for students both ways. They also argued for UKHEI's role in the promotion of the value of language-learning, particularly European languages, as an important part of rebuilding trust in Europe.

Several participants mentioned the need to link Higher Education and Research to trade, exports, economic growth and the industrial strategy. The Midlands Science Park, where Higher Education and manufacturers work together to export, particularly to Europe, was highlighted as a successful programme. Participants argued to ensure higher education and research can contribute to growth and called for adequate funding for 'expert based growth'. It was argued that more 'joined up thinking' was needed in terms of linking Higher Education and Research to economic priorities.

One participant called for more strategic partnerships, which they defined as smaller numbers of deep partnerships alongside multilateral arrangements. They argued for the multilateral collaboration through other existing networks if it was not possible through the EU.

One participant argued that a gateway model could be used for the UK's collaboration with Europe, similar to the model they had recently seen the British Council use in Pakistan, which was collaborative and had buy-in from the local Government. The opportunities associated with the prosperity fund for UKHEIs were also briefly cited.

The discussion finished on an optimistic note, as one participant assured the table that there was still an appetite in the EU to collaborate with the UK. They envisaged that this would continue after the UK leaves the EU as it is a reciprocal interest. They argued that alternative arrangements could and would be found. Another expressed his conviction we had not yet unpicked 40 years' worth of relationships, and that we could now work on rebuilding confidence and trust.



Participants

British Council Hosts:

Maddalaine Ansell, Director Education Policy Unit, British Council

Jane Racz, Director, Erasmus+ UK National Agency

Almut Caspary, Higher Education and Research Coordinator, British Council

Emma Skelton, Policy and Parliamentary Relations Officer, British Council and Secretariat, British Council APPG

Sector Representatives:

Title	First Name	Last Name	Position	Organisation
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Ms	Fiona	Crozier	Head of International	Quality Assurance Agency
Prof.	Maggie	Dalman OBE	Vice President (International)	Imperial College
Ms	Joy	Elliott-Bowman	Policy and Public Affairs Manager	International Higher Education
Mr	Bobby	Mehta	Director of International	University of Portsmouth
Prof.	Catherine	Montgomery	Academic Director of International Partnerships	University of Bath
Mr	Beer	Schroder	Advisor to the Nuffic Board of Directors	NUFFIC
Dr.	Uta	Staiger	Pro-Vice-Provost for Europe at UCL and Director of the European Institute	UCL
Ms	Vivienne	Stern	Director	Universities UK International
Prof.	Mary	Stiasny	Pro Vice Chancellor International and Chief Executive	University of London Worldwide
Dr.	Tony	Strike	Secretary	Sheffield University
Prof.	Paul	Vangardinggen	Pro-Vice Chancellor	University of Leicester
Mr	Benjamin	Yates	Advisor to John Baron MP	



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Ms	Anna	Connell-Smith	Commons Education Select Committee Specialist	
Dr.	Nigel	Culkin	Professor of Enterprise and Entrepreneurial Development	University of Hertfordshire
Dr.	Dianna	Beech	Advisor to Higher Education Minister	
Mr	Alex	Miles	Director of Global and Political Affairs	Nottingham University
Mr	Nicholas	Wright	Advisor to Shadow Higher Education Minister	

Parliamentarians

Full Name	Current Position	Party
Lord Watson	Shadow Education Spokesperson	Labour
Dr Rupa Huq	Officer, Universities APPG	Labour
Gordon Marsden	Shadow Higher Education Minister	Labour
Baroness Garden	Deputy Chairman of Committees	Liberal Democrats