

NUS Submission to British Council APPG Inquiry: The UK's future in Europe: what role can Higher Education and Research play?

What are the potential barriers to collaboration for HE and Research in Europe?

We are concerned that the Government rhetoric around immigration could make the UK a less attractive partner for European collaboration in the future, with 16% of teaching and research staff in the UK being from the EU. In addition, Universities UK estimate that EU research funding generates more than 19,000 jobs across the UK and £1.86bn for the UK economy as well as contributing £1bn to GDP. In losing our close relationship with Horizon Europe, the UK risks losing these benefits to our higher education sector and wider economy. As such, we believe that the UK should seek full association with Horizon Europe after Brexit.

In the future, what role (if any) should HE and Research play in the UK's future relationships with European countries?

NUS believes that the opportunity for transnational education, including student exchanges through the Erasmus+ scheme, have clear benefits both for students, the UK education sector, local communities and the UK economy. We are therefore urging the Government to ensure that all existing opportunities for student mobility are maintained after Brexit, including maintaining full or 'programme country' membership of the Erasmus+ programme.

Whilst membership of Erasmus+ is not dependant on EU membership (countries such as Turkey and Norway are amongst existing members) we are cautious there is no guarantee that our continued membership will form part of the UK's exit agreement. In addition, the loss of free movement of people will further limit the possibility of the UK remaining a programme country. As such, we urge to Government to ensure that students are granted special immigration status, without the need to pay for a visa or meet additional eligibility requirements, so that they can continue to study freely across the EU after Brexit.

Over the last 30 years of the Erasmus+ programme alone, more than 300,000 students from the UK have benefitted from a period of study or work abroad, this includes nearly 15,000 in 2014/15¹.

A recent report by Universities UK International (UUKi) found that for the 2014-15 UK HE graduating cohort 55% of international exchanges were via the EU's Erasmus+ scheme. A further

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/nov/27/study-abroad-is-invaluable-studentsdeserve-clarity-on-erasmus>

37% were organised through university-led schemes; these are bilateral exchange partnerships managed by UK universities.²

Whilst it is hard to estimate how many students will continue to participate in Erasmus+ after Brexit those most likely to be impacted by new conditions for participating in the scheme, including the introduction of visa charges and cuts to funding, are disadvantaged students. These students particularly benefit from taking part in Erasmus+ with mobile students from disadvantaged backgrounds earning on average 6.1% more after graduation than those disadvantaged students who do not participate. Shutting off the opportunity for international exchange for those students that need it most will undermine efforts to widen participation in higher education and improve upward mobility.

We believe that the Government should prioritise action to develop relationships and partnerships with new countries in the event that the UK no longer participates in the Erasmus+ programme. As we have already identified, student mobility has benefits not only for students, but for local communities as a whole. It is important therefore that these opportunities continue to exist in some form. In the event that the UK Government fails to secure continued access to Erasmus+ new opportunities for continued mobility should be identified as a matter of priority.

We also believe that, regardless of the outcome of Brexit, the UK Government should prioritise building new relationships and partnerships to deliver increased opportunities for student mobility and with it, strengthening our already world leading higher education sector. We agree with the Government that Brexit is an opportunity to expand our international relationships.

We also believe that the Government should seek to secure the closest possible association with Horizon Europe after Brexit. The UK secured the highest proportion of European Research Grants (22%) than any other country between 2007 and 2015; Scotland's universities in particular receive almost £90m of research funding a year from EU sources, accounting for 13 per cent of the total research funding Scottish universities receive.

² <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/gone-international-mobility-works.aspx>