

Russell Group response to the Government Review of the Balance of Competences between the UK and EU: Asylum and Immigration

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The purpose of The Russell Group is to provide strategic direction, policy development and communications for 24 major research-intensive universities in the UK; we aim to ensure that policy development in a wide range of issues relating to higher education is underpinned by a robust evidence base and a commitment to civic responsibility, improving life chances, raising aspirations and contributing to economic prosperity and innovation.
- 1.2 We welcome the opportunity to comment on the balance of competences between the UK and the EU in relation to asylum and immigration, and in particular, the impact of the UK's decision to opt out of the border and visa aspects of the Schengen Protocol.
- 1.3 We are also providing a response to the Free Movement of Persons consultation particularly focusing on the impact of 'shared' competence on the free movement of persons and the coordination of social security schemes between Member States. It may be useful for the Home Office to read the responses in tandem.

2. The impact of the UK's decision to opt out of the border and visa aspects of the Schengen Protocol (Questions 1 and 2)

- 2.1 The fact that the UK has chosen not to participate in the border control elements of the Schengen Acquis, meaning that it is not part of the EU's common visa policy and borderless area, makes the UK less competitive than countries which have chosen to opt in.
- 2.2 There are widespread impacts for the UK economy, particularly in relation to tourism. Tourists from non-EU countries wishing to visit both the UK and territories within the Schengen area must apply and pay for two separate visas. Tourists may choose only to visit either the UK, or territories within the Schengen area, rather than both due to the attendant time and expense of the visa requirements, meaning that the UK is potentially losing out.
- 2.3 The UK's higher education sector is particularly affected as international staff and students from non-EU countries must also apply and pay for separate visas to the UK and territories in the Schengen area. It is reasonable to assume that there may be some international non-EU nationality students who choose to study in the Schengen area rather than in the UK as they, and any friends and family visiting them, will be able to visit a greater number of countries during their studies without the need for a separate visa.
- 2.4 Furthermore, international staff and students who have chosen to come to the UK will be restricted from travelling to territories within the Schengen area in order to undertake international research collaborations or to attend conferences in order to increase their knowledge, as they will need to apply for a separate visa. International collaboration is particularly important for the UK's higher education sector and wider

knowledge economy as accessing leading-edge expertise from abroad provides mutual opportunities for acquiring new perspectives, and areas of weakness in existing research capacity can be strengthened.

- 2.5 The strength of the UK higher education sector internationally lies in its quality and diversity, including the ability to attract the most talented international staff and students. Higher education is one of this country's most successful export industries – and is estimated to contribute more than £7.9 billion a year in overseas earnings, with international higher education students contributing at least £7 billion per annum to the UK economy through tuition fees and living expenditure alone.
- 2.6 International students are even more important to Russell Group universities as a proportion of total student numbers and income than other UK higher education institutions. Although Russell Group universities have a 23% share of the total number of students in the UK, they have a 36% share of the total number of non-EU students, and a 39% share of non-EU post-graduate students.¹ International students at Russell Group universities contribute at least £2.8 billion to the UK economy per annum.²
- 2.7 Therefore, we would welcome moves to harmonise the UK visa system with the Schengen Protocol, making it easier for those who have a legitimate reason for wishing to visit the UK and territories within the Schengen area, especially in relation to international staff and students at UK universities.

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¹ Higher Education Statistics Agency data 2011/12

² Figures for 2011/12, using multipliers from UniversitiesUK report on the economic impact of universities (2009).