

Russell Group universities and Brexit

Summary

Leaving the EU will have a significant impact on our universities, our students and our staff, as well as on the wider communities, business and other partners they work with. We welcome the Government's reassurances so far on EU students, Horizon 2020 and regional EU funding. After Brexit universities will play an essential role in boosting jobs and growth and driving productivity through delivering cutting-edge research and innovation. To maximise their impact, universities must be able to continue to attract and retain talented EU staff and students and a strong relationship between the UK and the EU on higher education and research must be maintained.

Our universities remain open and welcoming to students, staff and ideas from all round the world. It is through collaborative working that Russell Group universities and European partners have made huge breakthroughs in medicine, engineering and any number of other fields and our universities will continue to work with their European partners as closely as possible.

Key priorities for the UK Government in the negotiations with the EU should be:

- Guarantee the continued rights of current EU nationals (and their dependants) at UK universities through a simple system that minimises the burden and cost for individuals
- Ensure the UK's full access to Horizon 2020 from the date of EU exit to the end of the programme
- Enable the UK's full access to and influence over future EU research and innovation programmes (and infrastructures) with a focus on excellence and support universities' international collaborations
- Secure a good deal for future UK participation in the Erasmus+ programme
- Reach a rapid and satisfactory arrangement for the land border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to sustain and enhance current north-south collaboration.

EU nationals: staff and students at Russell Group universities

Russell Group universities' number one priority is to give certainty to their EU staff and students. We value them highly and want them to stay, but they need solid guarantees about their future. There are around 25,000 members of staff and 61,000 students from other EU countries at our universities. They are indispensable to our world-class institutions and make a significant contribution to the UK's success in research, innovation and education, as well as contributing to a diverse faculty and student body and a thriving society, culture and economy.

We have welcomed the reassurances Government has provided for current EU students and those starting courses in 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19. These announcements have been very helpful to provide students with the certainty they need when considering studying in the UK, as well as giving our universities clarity to plan ahead.

However, a significant degree of uncertainty remains concerning the rights of EU nationals. We are asking the Government to:

- Guarantee the continued rights for current EU **staff** (and their dependants) at UK universities so that they retain the same rights to stay and work without a visa that they have now (with no time limit placed on this).
- Confirm the immigration status of existing and prospective EU **students** and their right to remain in the UK for work or postgraduate study
- Confirm at the earliest opportunity the fee rate and other financial support EU undergraduates and postgraduates might be eligible for from 2019/20 onwards. If there are changes to the system, indicate when any changes might come into effect as soon as possible
- Ensure that any new system for EU nationals is simple and minimises the burden and cost for individuals with no additional requirements beyond the residency requirements
- The cut-off date should be the date the UK leaves the EU. This will allow organisations and individuals to plan accordingly
- In the longer term we want an immigration system which actively supports our universities to recruit talented staff and students from all over the world without burdensome visa requirements

Research funding and collaboration

Ensuring the UK remains the best place for science and innovation is one of the Government's 12 key Brexit principles – we want to ensure this remains a priority in the negotiations.

Participation in EU Research and Innovation Framework Programmes brings significant added value for UK research that extends far beyond the funding itself through the networks, opportunities for mobility, scale and a common framework for multi-lateral collaborations. It is also increasingly valuable for supporting collaborative and interdisciplinary research. Between 2007 and 2014, EU research funding supported UK organisations to make over 150,000 collaborative links with EU partners.

To help sustain the UK's standing as one of the best places in the world to do science:

- The Government should secure the UK's full participation in Horizon 2020 to the end of 2020 as part of the financial settlement, as well as an appropriate arrangement for Euratom. This would be a pragmatic way to avoid a cliff-edge for research and would give vital reassurance and continuity to UK researchers and their European partners
- The Government should prioritise negotiating the UK's full access to and influence over future EU R&I programmes and infrastructures with a focus on excellence
- We welcome the Government's commitment to increasing R&D investment to 2.4% of GDP by 2027, with a longer-term goal of 3%. This increased investment will be particularly important to support universities' international collaborations post-Brexit and to replace any lost EU funds

Erasmus+

We hope the Government will secure a good deal for future UK participation in the Erasmus+ programme to enable continued valuable academic and cultural exchange for UK and EU students and staff.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland the land border with the Republic of Ireland is a unique and important issue. It is vital that a rapid and satisfactory agreement is reached so that freedom of movement across both jurisdictions continues unimpeded in order to sustain and enhance current north-south collaboration.

August 2017

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