

Russell Group universities and Brexit: maintaining UK-EU cooperation & collaboration

Summary

The Russell Group welcomes progress that has been made in phase one of Brexit negotiations. The UK-EU Joint Report provides helpful reassurance and clarity for universities regarding the rights of EU citizens in the UK before the date of EU exit and confirms the UK's full participation in EU programmes, such as Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+, until they end.

Russell Group universities generate billions of pounds every year for the UK economy. After Brexit they will play an essential role in boosting jobs and growth and driving productivity through delivering cutting-edge research and innovation. To maximise their impact and retain their competitive advantage, universities must be able to continue to attract and retain talented EU staff and students and maintain a strong relationship with EU partners in higher education and research.

Our universities remain open and welcoming to students, staff and ideas from all around the world. It is through collaborative working that Russell Group universities and European partners together have made huge breakthroughs in medicine, engineering and technology, including in the Grand Challenge areas identified in the UK's industrial strategy.

Russell Group key priorities for UK Government:

- **EU citizens**: Relevant sections of the Withdrawal Agreement must be incorporated into UK legislation as soon as possible to provide the necessary legal certainty for EU citizens in the UK before the date of Brexit
- **Transition period**: A transition period should be agreed as soon as possible to provide stability and clarity. During the transition we want to ensure EU citizens can continue to come and study or work at our universities and fees and finance arrangements for EU students should remain unchanged
- **Science, innovation and higher education**: Prioritise securing an overarching agreement with the EU on science and innovation which focusses on collaboration and builds on our existing research and innovation links. Engage in development of Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ successor programmes and secure future UK participation in excellent programmes
- **Irish border**: 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 citizens

We have welcomed the progress made in phase 1 of the Brexit negotiations which will enable EU staff and students currently at our universities to register for settled status using a fast, user-friendly system.

Relevant sections of the Withdrawal Agreement must be incorporated into UK legislation as soon as possible to provide the necessary legal certainty for EU citizens currently in the UK and those who will arrive before the cut-off date.

In the longer term the UK should use its new relationship with the EU as an opportunity to develop an immigration system which will support UK universities to attract and retain academics and other research workers, including technical experts, from anywhere in the world without burdensome visa requirements.

Transition period

The Russell Group supports the principle of a post-Brexit transition period to ensure our universities, their staff and students have the clarity and certainty they need to plan for the future, avoiding a damaging cliff-edge scenario:

- EU citizens arriving in the transition period to work or study at our universities should be eligible for temporary status and able to accrue five years' continuous residency for settled status
- EU students arriving in the UK during a transition period remain eligible for home fee rates and able to access loans and grants for the duration of their course

The transition period for EU citizens arriving in the UK should remain in place at least until new migration arrangements with the EU and/or the UK's future immigration system are implemented.

Maintaining cooperation on science, innovation and higher education

In Phase 2 of the Brexit negotiations we urge the UK Government to prioritise securing an overarching science and innovation agreement with the EU which focusses on collaboration and builds on our existing research and innovation links.

Participation in EU Research and Innovation Framework Programmes brings significant added value for UK research that extends far beyond the funding itself through networks, opportunities for mobility, project scale and a common framework for multi-lateral collaborations. The Erasmus+ programme also enables valuable academic and cultural exchange for UK and EU students and staff.

The Government should engage fully with the development of successor programmes to Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ and indicate at the earliest opportunity whether the UK intends to negotiate participation to ensure a smooth transition between the current programming period and the next.

Having taken the opportunity to shape future programmes, the Government should seek to secure:

- **The UK's full access to the next EU Research and Innovation Framework Programmes and infrastructures**
- **Future UK participation in the next Erasmus programme.**

Irish border

In Northern Ireland the land border with the Republic of Ireland is a unique and important issue. We welcome the commitment in the phase 1 agreement to avoiding a hard border and maintaining continued cooperation. However, further details on how this will work in practice remain to be seen. It is vital that a rapid and satisfactory agreement is reached so that freedom of movement across both jurisdictions continues unimpeded to sustain and enhance current north-south collaboration.

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