

Russell Group submission to the S&T Committee Brexit Science and Innovation summit

1. Summary

- 1.1 Russell Group universities generate billions of pounds every year for the UK economy.¹ After Brexit they will play an even more important role in ensuring the UK remains globally competitive by boosting jobs and growth and driving productivity through delivering cutting-edge research and innovation and providing the pool of high-level graduate and postgraduate skills our economy needs.
- 1.2 We have welcomed the Government's ambition for the UK to remain one of the world's best places to do science and innovation. An early UK-EU agreement on the future relationship for science and innovation can help reassure universities, businesses and other organisations in the UK and across the EU that science cooperation remains a top priority for both sides.
- 1.3 Progress in phase one of the negotiations has gone some way to addressing some concerns, in particular around citizens' rights and the intention for the UK to participate in EU programmes until the end of 2020. However, there are now two key concerns:
 - (a) Concerted and proactive efforts are required to communicate the outcome of the phase one agreement to EU citizens and to organisations in the UK taking part in EU programmes, as well as to European partners who may wish to collaborate with the UK
 - (b) As 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed', the Government should commit to ensuring sufficient funding would be made available - and should undertake proper contingency planning to be prepared - in case a final agreement cannot be reached ('no deal' scenario).
- 1.4 To maximise their impact and retain their competitive advantage for the benefit of the UK economy, 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. The Government can act now to address the following key priorities:
 - (a) **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
 - (b) **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 to study or work at our universities as now and that fees and finance arrangements for EU students will remain unchanged
 - (c) **Science, innovation and higher education:** The Government should 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 – this will be of mutual benefit to the UK and EU. The Government should also take the opportunity to engage fully in development of the Horizon 2020 and Erasmus successor programmes and secure future UK participation in programmes where the focus is on excellence.

¹ Analysis undertaken by London Economics shows that each year teaching and learning, research and knowledge transfer, education exports and the wider supply chain of the 24 Russell Group universities add £86.8 billion to the UK economy. (<http://russellgroup.ac.uk/news/economic-impact-of-russell-group-universities/>)

2. The Government's Future Partnership Paper 'Collaboration on science and innovation'

- 2.1 We support the Government's ambition as set out in its Future Partnership Paper to explore a far-reaching science and innovation agreement with the EU. 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. It is encouraging that these strong links are recognised in the Future Partnership Paper.
- 2.2 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. Both negotiating teams have recognised the value of ensuring science and innovation collaboration can continue after Brexit so **putting a high-level agreement on science and innovation collaboration to the top of the agenda could be a quick, win-win outcome early in the discussions and will be of mutual benefit to the UK and the EU.**²
- 2.3 Whilst the Government's statements on its ambition for the future relationship are welcome, there is a risk that complexity, slow progress and competing priorities could mean an early agreement on science and research is not reached. The Government should provide the higher education and research community with further reassurance by committing to ensuring sufficient funding would be made available and undertaking proper contingency planning with the research community in case a final agreement cannot be reached (i.e. 'no deal' scenario).

3. The issues identified in previous S&T Committee reports that have since been addressed, and which still require attention

- 3.1 We welcome the work of the Science and Technology Committee to champion the voice of science and research in the Brexit negotiations. The key message which we hope the Committee will support is the **urgency of securing the UK's future relationship with the EU and confirmation that vital EU funding for research and innovation, including collaborative projects, mobility and infrastructures, will continue post-exit.**
- 3.2 Another issue which requires attention is the movement of researchers and students in a post-Brexit immigration system. The UK Government should use our new relationship with the EU as an opportunity to design and implement a future immigration system which will:
- Enable universities to continue to attract and recruit talented staff from the EEA easily and cost-effectively
 - Prioritise highly skilled people, including academics, students, technicians and other research workers
 - Offer options for long-term migration with flexible and low-burden routes to residence
 - Effectively facilitate short-term migration of visiting academics between the UK and the EEA, for knowledge exchange, training and research collaborations.

² We have outlined some suggestions on what a science and innovation agreement could seek to address in our submission to the Wellcome Trust/Royal Society Future Partnership Project – we attach/enclose a copy of this submission for the Science and Technology Committee.

3.3 The Committee recommended the appointment of a Chief Scientific Adviser in the Department for Exiting the EU to help ensure that the impact on science and research of various models for Brexit, and the opportunities these provide, is understood and prioritised within the Department. It is positive that Chris Jones has now been appointed to this role. However, we would urge the Committee to keep in regular contact with the Secretary of State and the Chief Scientific Adviser to ensure evidence and advice are being used to their full effect in the Department.

4. The pros, cons and remaining uncertainties for science and research following the recent UK/EU agreement for an 'Orderly UK withdrawal' (the Joint Report on phase one)

4.1 The UK-EU Joint Report provided a helpful statement of intent for universities, their staff and students regarding the rights of EU citizens in the UK before the date of EU exit. However, the Report does not give the concrete reassurances our universities urgently need as 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed', meaning a degree of uncertainty remains.

4.2 The 61,000 EU students and 22,800 EU members of staff at Russell Group universities are indispensable to our world-class institutions and make a significant contribution to the UK's success in research, innovation and education. They also contribute to a diverse faculty and student body, and a thriving society, culture and economy in the UK. **To provide EU staff and students and UK universities and other organisations with the legal certainty they need, relevant sections of the Withdrawal Agreement must be incorporated into UK legislation as soon as possible.**

4.3 The financial commitment in the Joint Report which means UK universities can continue to be eligible to bid, participate and lead in all aspects of Horizon 2020 in the way they do now for the whole duration of the programme to the end of 2020 is a hugely positive step. **It is now important that this commitment is communicated effectively to all relevant individuals and institutions in the UK and across all other EU Member States.** This would encourage UK institutions to continue applying for funding under Horizon 2020 and would give EU partners confidence to continue collaborating with our universities and include them in consortia bids.

4.4 As noted above, the Government could provide an additional safety net in case a final agreement cannot be reached with the EU by committing to ensure sufficient funding would be available in the event that the UK cannot continue participating in Horizon 2020 after the date of Brexit.³

5. The consequences of any short-term uncertainty during the negotiation period, and how these can be addressed.

5.1 For as long as there is uncertainty (real or perceived) about the UK's participation in Horizon 2020 and future framework programmes, the UK risks becoming a less attractive collaborative partner for leading researchers (and research organisations) and our universities risk losing top academic talent and funding as a result. Consortia bids for EU funding can take months, and sometimes more than a year, to prepare and agree, so it is important that the reassurances in the Joint Report about UK participation in Horizon 2020 are communicated widely and as soon as possible.

³ The Government has committed to underwrite funding for Horizon 2020 projects bid for before the point of exit, even if they continue after Brexit, which is helpful. However, in a 'no deal' scenario there are currently no guarantees for new projects after the date of Brexit.

- 5.2 Early data from our members has shown that numbers of new students from the EU appear to be holding steady: in 2017/18 enrolment of EU nationals increased by 0.5% across all levels of study compared to the previous year. However, the change varies by level of study: 0% change in undergraduate students; 4% increase in postgraduate taught (PGT) students; 9% decrease in postgraduate research (PGR) students.
- 5.3 The decrease in enrolment of PGR students is a concern as these students play a significant role in helping the UK maintain a healthy and diverse research ecosystem. Recruiting EU PGR students allows UK students to work alongside the brightest minds from all over the Continent and allows the UK to develop our own pipeline of talent by ensuring courses remain financially sustainable and can be offered to home students. Many PGR students who come to the UK build their careers here, taking up skilled jobs after graduation and making an important contribution to teaching and research in our universities. We cannot say for sure what the cause of the 9% decline is. However, since these students are likely to consider building their research careers in their chosen location of study, prospective students may well have been concerned over their longer-term rights in the UK and their ability to access important EU funding (especially European Research Council Starting Grants), which will have been uncertain at the time of application. Providing a clear message that EU PGR students are welcome in the UK and communicating that there is a long-term career path for them here is essential.
- 5.4 Our universities have provided support and legal advice to EU members of staff, sending positive messages that they are valued, and we want them to stay. We currently do not have evidence that there has been a significant impact on EU staff recruitment so far, but our members have reported an increase in concern from staff about future rights to work and a survey across the UK higher education sector has shown that uncertainty has been damaging to staff morale.⁴
- 5.5 To address short-term uncertainty during the negotiations we support the principle of a **post-Brexit transition period** to allow adjustments to be made in a smooth and orderly fashion. Key components of a post-exit transitional period for Russell Group universities are:
- **Mobility of EU nationals:** 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
 - **Finance arrangements for EU students:** 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
 - **Employer guidance:** Appropriate guidance for transition measures applying to EU nationals should be developed with employers at the earliest opportunity
 - **Research and collaboration:** Full UK engagement in planning for the successor programme to Horizon 2020 on research and innovation and the Erasmus+ programme

6. The UK's future participation in Horizon-2020 and its successor programmes

- 6.1 Russell Group universities' research collaboration with EU partners is undertaken extensively through the EU research and innovation Framework Programmes. The UK made over 150,000 collaborative links with EU partners over the course of FP7 and received a total of

⁴ Higher Education Workforce Survey 2017, UCEA (31 July 2017): <http://www.ucea.ac.uk/en/publications/index.cfm/hews2017>

€7 billion in FP7 funding, and over €4 billion under Horizon 2020 so far. EU Framework Programmes also bring significant added value far beyond the initial research income, resulting in key collaborations, creating networks, and driving excellent research which brings enormous benefits to the UK and enables us to remain a globally-competitive research leader.

- 6.2 The Russell Group is urging the UK Government to negotiate a deep and lasting UK-EU agreement on science that builds on our existing research and innovation links and opens the door to UK participation in future European programmes. The Russell Group will be engaging fully with the development of FP9 and we urge UK Government to do the same.
- 6.3 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.** We would urge the Government to be ambitious in securing the best possible association agreement reflecting a balance of access, influence and return on investment (not just in monetary terms), and the UK's agreement should reflect the quality of the UK research base, the size of its expected financial contribution and the existing strength and volume of excellent research collaboration.
- 6.4 Negotiations on the terms/model of the UK's association to FP9 post-exit should be separate from the overarching Brexit negotiations. We support the recommendation in the Lamy Report⁵ to open FP9 to the world, which would increase flexibility to work with a wider pool of international researchers and also ensure the door is open for UK association post-exit. The current rules on eligibility for association to Framework Programmes would need to be changed to open this opportunity to countries such the UK, Canada and others.

7. About the Russell Group

- 7.1 The Russell Group represents 24 leading UK universities which are committed to maintaining the very best research, an outstanding teaching and learning experience and unrivalled links with business and the public sector.

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⁵ 'LAB-FAB-APP: Investing in the European future we want', Report of the independent High Level Group on maximising the impact of EU Research & Innovation Programmes:
http://ec.europa.eu/research/evaluations/pdf/archive/other_reports_studies_and_documents/hlg_2017_report.pdf