

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

Summary

The Russell Group welcomes progress that has been made so far in the 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 end of the transition period (31 December 2020) 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 strong relationships with EU partners in higher education and research.

Our universities remain open and welcoming to students, staff and ideas from all over 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**
 - Develop and trial the promised user-friendly system for EU citizens seeking settled status
 - Incorporate relevant sections of the Withdrawal Agreement into UK legislation as soon as possible to provide the necessary legal certainty for EU citizens in the UK before the end of the transition period
 - Provide urgent confirmation of the fee and funding arrangements for EU students starting courses in 2019/20
- **Maintaining cooperation on science, innovation and higher education**
 - Support universities in communicating the message that the UK is eligible to participate in EU programmes until the end of 2020
 - Prioritise securing an overarching agreement with the EU which focusses on continued cooperation on research, innovation and education and builds on our existing links
 - Engage in development of the new 'Horizon Europe' and Erasmus+ programmes and secure future UK participation
- **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 the first phase 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. We are also pleased these rights will be extended to citizens arriving during the transition period. **We now need to see this system developed and trialled as early as possible.**

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 for those who will arrive before the end of the transition period.

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. Any changes to the immigration system after the transition period should be made in full consultation with employers, including universities. Any changes should also be communicated with as much notice as possible to allow employers in the UK, as well as prospective employees and students in the EU, sufficient time to plan and adapt to any new system.

EU students starting courses next year will already be considering whether to apply to a UK university. We need to be able to advise them on what their fee rates and access to funding will be. **We urge the Government to confirm as soon as possible that students starting courses in 2019/20 will remain eligible for home fee rates and able to access loans and grants for the duration of their course.**

Maintaining cooperation on science, innovation and higher education

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.

We welcome the agreement that the UK will be eligible to participate in EU programmes, including Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+, until they close at the end of 2020. Universities are working to reassure partners in the EU that this is the case and **would welcome continued efforts from Government to communicate this as much as possible.**

In the next phase of the Brexit negotiations we urge the UK Government to prioritise securing an overarching agreement with the EU which focusses on continued cooperation in the fields of science, innovation and education and builds on our existing links.

The Government should engage fully with the development of successor programmes to Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ and indicate at the earliest opportunity its intention to negotiate UK participation to ensure a smooth transition between the current programming period and the next. Having taken the opportunity to shape future programmes, including ensuring they focus on excellence and meet UK priorities for collaboration, the Government should seek to secure:

- **Full UK access to the new 'Horizon Europe' research and innovation programme**
- **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 to avoid a hard border and maintain continued cooperation (including on higher education). However, further details on how this will work in practice are still to be agreed. 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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