

London Higher Response to House of Lords Call for Evidence: Brexit: EU student exchanges and funding for university research.

Date: Wednesday 21st November 2018.

About London Higher:

London Higher is an umbrella body that brings together almost 50 universities and higher education (HE) colleges in the capital. We support HE institutions (HEIs) to collaborate across a range of areas by identifying opportunities and challenges within the Higher Education sector and this includes running over 15 networks which look at these issues in an interconnected way. We also have a strong track record, over many years, in successfully delivering funded projects.

London has the highest HEI concentration of any city in Europe and receives 27% of the total number of EU students studying in the UK. This is higher than its total student market share, which is 13%. London also receives almost a quarter of the total funding the UK receives from EU government bodies. It is therefore disproportionately affected by access to students and EU programmes such as Erasmus and Horizon. London also generates 22% of UK GDP with only 12.5% of the UK population and makes a net contribution to the Exchequer of £34bn, it will therefore play a crucial role in any successful post-Brexit economic plan.

Erasmus+/Erasmus

Question: What form of future association with Erasmus should the Government seek and what, in your estimation, is it likely to get?

The Government should seek to participate fully in the next Erasmus programme to ensure UK students can benefit from the culturally enriching experience of both outgoing and incoming student exchange.

If this does not happen then alternative systems could be set up, as with the Swiss-European Mobility Programme in 2014 following Switzerland's ejection from Erasmus+. However, opportunities for exchange here were facilitated by a range of bilateral agreements set up quickly, using money already ring-fenced, benefitting from a large degree of political consensus and informed by decades of Swiss experience and precedent negotiating these bilateral mobility agreements with EU countries. The UK does not have this precedent, so this mirrored system would be slower to set up and most likely less effective in maintaining exchange numbers, which was the Swiss model's main intention until it was able to re-join Erasmus+. Swiss participation through these mirrored agreements is also limited in other parts of Erasmus+, such as Knowledge Alliances. Furthermore, Swiss institutions in a consortium do not count towards the total number of partners in a project, cannot lead a project and must prove their added value as an external partner. A mirrored system does not create a desirable level of added value when compared with being an active part of a truly international system such as Erasmus.

Question: To what extent will the Government be able to influence the future direction of Erasmus/ Horizon and how important is this?

Outside of the European Union, the UK would have little direct legal influence over the direction of Erasmus. With no MEPs in the European Parliament there would be no UK representatives on the Culture and Education committee, at present the UK has six MEPs on the committee. This would be similar for ITRE Committee, which looks at Horizon2020 and after 2021 Horizon Europe. Similarly, our

education minister would not be present on the European Council's education or industrial committees. Essentially outside of the European Union we forgo any formal legislative influence over the nature of the Erasmus and Horizon programmes.

As an Associated Country, even without a formal vote, the UK would at least be part of the conversation and in a much better position to influence the programme and its annual programmes and regular calls. If the UK Government chooses to participate only as a third country, we would be reduced to having an informal lobbying role, like any other Brussels-based organisation.

On the importance of 'being in the room', the UK has played a central role in shaping both programmes into what they are today. In particular, the UK has always insisted that the Research Framework Programmes (Horizon 2020 being the 8th of these) remain anchored on excellence. In the context of the UK leaving the EU, we are already seeing some countries pushing for resources in the programme to be shared more equitably across the EU, to the detriment of backing the best projects. Without the UK at the table, it will be more difficult to keep research programmes as competitive and innovative as they have been until now. We should expect the same loss of influence to happen on picking the priorities of the annual programmes and calls, which the UK Government has been very successful in shaping to match UK researchers' strong points.

Question: What action is, or should, the Government be taking to develop relationships and partnerships with countries or institutions outside the Erasmus programme if the UK no longer participates in it?

The Government should be negotiating more bilateral exchange agreements with countries outside of the EU. These agreements should ensure a meaningful level of exchange based on a mutual recognition of certain qualifications and a visa regime that allows for frictionless exchanges. Without having these systems already in place, backed by sufficient funding, the UK will likely see a drop in both incoming and outgoing students following its departure from the EU and the end of any transition period. This would be to the detriment of the UK's world-leading higher education system, and the students and staff that study, work and collaborate with it, and also to the economy.

Question: Would it be possible for the UK to negotiate a bespoke association with Horizon Europe?

The UK's ability to negotiate a bespoke agreement depends on how much it is willing to pay for access to the programme and also the flexibility of the European Institutions and UK Government.

It's important to bear in mind that the draft text for Horizon Europe contains a method of financial rebalancing, where an associated country's participation in the programme could be frozen if there was a '[significant imbalance](#)' in the amount of money contributed to the programme and the amount won in grants. The best bespoke agreement would ensure the UK continues to contribute a meaningful amount, so the UK research community isn't frozen out of participation in a world-leading research ecosystem.

Negotiating bespoke access to certain parts of the programme and not others is still a feasible outcome, as this is already done by associated countries and there are already third countries hoping to associate to parts of Horizon Europe, such as Canada. However, it's important to consider that this programme is primarily a programme for EU member states and the economic prosperity of Europe, arguably more so than previous programmes. This is evidenced not least by the fact that it's the first framework programme for research and innovation with 'Europe' in the title. There is also significant pushback from important legislators, such as Horizon Europe rapporteur MEP Dan Nica, to opening

the programme to third countries with strong research to the detriment of Eastern countries looking to development their potential further. The UK research community is very successful in European programmes and is keen to maintain the same level of cooperation with EU Partners and so the UK Government must be prepared to 'pay as it goes' to ensure the contribution matches the potential of the research community to win European grants.

Question: What action is, or should, the Government be taking to develop relationships and partnerships with countries or institutions outside the Horizon programme if the UK no longer participates in it?

The UK Government should support UK universities to develop relationships themselves by actively promoting the availability of funds and in-kind support to take senior UK academics and senior university management to target countries (e.g. USA, China, and Japan) and foster bilateral relationships. While the British Council does coordinate this activity, considering Brexit these resources should be boosted considerably, promoted more widely and combined with state visits.

However, many universities earmark most of their funding for cooperation through Erasmus and Horizon so there is a risk that, even if the UK government makes funding available as mentioned above, there will be less availability from some universities to maintain the same level of cooperation outside of these programmes. The visa regime is also crucial here if the UK Government intends to open up UK cooperation further to non-European countries then just providing funding is not enough, it must be paired with a visa regime that support frictionless exchange of researchers and their innovative ideas.

Question: If the UK leaves the EU without an agreement on an association with Horizon 2020, the eligibility of some cross-university collaborations may be in doubt. What effect would such a scenario have on the likelihood that potential collaborators choose to work with UK-based researchers?

Many researchers rely solely on EU funding for cross-border collaboration and so if UK organisations become ineligible, they would have no option but to find other eligible partners to work with.

Despite having a continued legal basis to apply for EU funds, UK universities have already shared evidence of discrimination while in consortia. This discrimination is not only happening when a UK partner is coordinating, which is somewhat understandable considering it is the lead partner that receives and distributes the funds from the European Commission, but also includes situations where the UK a partner in a consortium.

The long-term effects of this are that, as UK participants withdraw from consortia, are asked to leave or do not get grants due to uncertainty around UK eligibility, the UK space will begin to be filled in by other EU partners and once locked out of these established groups it is much harder to step in again.

London Higher contact point for submission of evidence: Jordan.hill@londonhigher.ac.uk