



BRIEFING PAPER

Number 7834, 13 December 2016

The impact of leaving the EU on higher education

By Sue Hubble

Contents:

1. The higher education sector
2. Government statements on HE and Brexit
3. Leaving the EU
4. Parliamentary debate



Contents

Summary	3
1. The higher education sector	4
EU student mobility programmes	6
The Bologna Process	6
2. Government statements on HE and Brexit	7
2.1 Treasury EU Research Funding Guarantee	7
3. Leaving the EU	9
3.1 Impact on students	9
3.2 Impact on research	11
Impact on higher education staff	12
4. Parliamentary debate	14
4.1 House of Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry September 2015	14
4.2 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry January 2016	14
House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry July 2016	15
4.3 Debates	17
4.4 Parliamentary questions	20

Summary

The higher education (HE) sector is a major UK industry – it contributes £73 billion to the UK economy, including £11 billion of export earnings.¹

International and EU students play a significant role in the HE sector contributing in economic and cultural terms. Latest figures showed that EU and non-EU students were estimated to have contributed £9.7 billion to the UK economy in 2011 through tuition fees and living expenditure.²

Under EU law the UK Government must provide tuition fee loans to EU students on the same basis as UK home students – some EU students also qualify for maintenance support. In 2013/14 there were 125,300 EU students at UK universities³ and in that year £224 million was paid in fee loans to EU students on full-time courses in England - 3.7% of the total student loan bill.⁴

UK students benefit from the UK's EU membership by way of access to Erasmus+ a mobility scheme that provides students with opportunities to study in the EU.

UK HEIs also benefit significantly from EU science and research funding and the free movement of academics across the EU. The UK is predicted to receive about £2 billion from the Horizon 2020 programme in the first two years of operation and it is estimated that the 24 Russell Group universities receive about £400 million a year in EU research funds - some 11% of their research income.⁵ In addition British universities employ more than 30,000 scientists from EU countries⁶ and in some UK universities, up to 50 per cent of postdoctoral positions are held by EU citizens.⁷

The long-term implications of Brexit on the HE sector and on students is currently still unknown as much will depend on what is agreed as part of the UK's exit negotiations with the EU. However anecdotal evidence suggests that the HE sector is already experiencing an impact with regard to collaboration in EU research projects and HE staff mobility – these issues could potentially have a substantial effect on the sector in the future.

This paper gives a brief overview of the issues of concern to the HE sector as a result of the decision to leave the EU and outlines parliamentary debate in this area. .

¹ HC Deb 14 November 2016 c11

² HC Deb 27 Oct 2016 c 49818

³ Higher Education Statistics Agency SFR 210 [Higher Education Student Enrolments and Qualifications Obtained at Higher Education Providers in the United Kingdom 2013/14](#).

⁴ SN/SG/917 [Tuition fee statistics](#) 1 December 2014.

⁵ "[UK's big guns make a stand for research in Europe](#)", *Times Higher Education* 23 April 2015

⁶ "[Research head urges UK to seize Brexit opportunity](#)", *BBC News*, 2 August 2016

⁷ "[Confronting Brexit: the perks and pitfalls of plausible moves](#)", *Times Higher Education*, 6 October 2016

1. The higher education sector

Higher education (HE) in the UK is a major business and revenue generator and operates in a global market. Arguably the most significant consequences of EU membership on the UK HE sector are the flows of students across the EU and the consequent provision of support to EU students studying in the UK and access to European research funding and projects.

Membership of the EU also gives UK students access to European student mobility schemes such as *Erasmus+*. Furthermore, the UK is a signatory to the [Bologna Process](#) which aims to create a harmonised HE system across Europe.

The long-term implications of Brexit on the higher education sector and on students is currently still unknown as much will depend on what is agreed as part of the UK's exit negotiations with the EU. However anecdotal evidence suggests that the HE sector is already experiencing an impact with regard to collaboration in EU research projects and HE staff mobility – these issues could potentially have a substantial effect on the sector in the future.

1.1 Current arrangements

Support for EU students

Under EU legislation on free movement citizens moving to another Member State should have the same access to education as nationals of that Member State. With regard to HE this means that every eligible EU student pays the same tuition fees as nationals of the hosting EU country and can apply for the same tuition fee support as local home students. UK higher education institutions (HEIs) therefore charge incoming EU students the same tuition fees as home students and the Government provides tuition fee loans to cover the cost of these fees on the same basis as loans to UK home students.

In 2013/14 there were 125,300 EU students at UK universities⁸ and in that year £224 million was paid in fee loans to EU students on full-time courses in England - 3.7% of the total student loan bill.⁹ A host Member State is not obliged, however, to provide maintenance support to citizens of other EU States, although some EU nationals who have lived in the UK for five years prior to the start of their course are eligible to apply for the full package of grants and loans for maintenance support.¹⁰

⁸ Higher Education Statistics Agency SFR 210 [Higher Education Student Enrolments and Qualifications Obtained at Higher Education Providers in the United Kingdom 2013/14](#).

⁹ SN/SG/917 [Tuition fee statistics](#) 1 December 2014.

¹⁰ Information on support for EU students is available on the GOV.UK website at [Student Finance 5.EU students](#)

European research funding

The European Research Area (ERA) was launched by the European Commission in 2000 with the aim of co-ordinating research and innovation activities across the EU. ERA initiatives are developed through periodic framework programmes; the current programme, [Horizon 2020](#), aims to allocate €80 billion for research and innovation from 2014 to 2020. Funding is allocated on a competitive basis through the European Research Council. UK universities are predicted to receive about £2 billion from Horizon 2020 in the first two years of the programme.¹¹

The 24 Russell Group universities receive about £400 million a year in EU research funds - some 11% of their research income.¹²

In addition to Horizon 2020 funding, €1.6bn of the UK's allocation of EU Structural and Investment Funds for 2014–2020 will be spent on research and innovation projects. This makes the UK one of the largest beneficiaries of EU research funding.¹³

The Royal Society summarised the position of the UK and EU research funding in a document Framework Programme period (2007–2013):

Overall the UK is a net contributor to the EU budget. Over the period 2007–2013, the UK contributed €77.7 billion to the EU (10.5 percent of the total EU income from member states), and received €47.5 billion in EU funding (6 percent of the total EU expenditure to member states).

The UK is one of the largest recipients of research funding in the EU and, although national contributions to the EU budget are not itemised, analyses suggest that the UK receives a greater amount of EU research funding than it contributes. The UK Office of National Statistics (ONS) report an indicative figure for the UK's contribution to EU research and development of €5.4 billion over the period 2007–2013. During this time, the UK received €8.8 billion in direct EU funding for research, development and innovation activities.¹⁴

In the run up to the referendum the Science and Technology Committees of both Houses of Parliament published reports on the impact of EU membership on UK science.¹⁵ The evidence received by the committees pointed to the importance of the EU as a facilitator of collaboration and as a source of funding for research. The House of

¹¹ "[Horizon 2020: UK launch for EU's €67bn research budget](#)", *BBC News* 31 January 2014

¹² "[UK's big guns make a stand for research in Europe](#)", *Times Higher Education* 23 April 2015

¹³ House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, [EU regulation of the life sciences](#), 11 June 2016, HC 158 2017-17 p6 para 3

¹⁴ Royal Society, [UK Research and the European Union: The Role of the EU in Funding UK Research](#), December 2015, p 12.

¹⁵ House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, [EU Membership and UK Science](#), 20 April 2016, HL Paper 127 2015–16 and House of Commons Science and Technology Committee, [EU regulation of the life sciences](#), 11 June 2016, HC 158, 2016-17

6 The impact of leaving the EU on higher education

Lords Science and Technology Committee's report observed that science was a "significant dimension of the UK's membership of the EU".¹⁶

A House of Lords briefing note, [Leaving the European Union: Funding for Universities and Scientific Research](#), October 2016 also gives an outline of the relationship between the EU and UK science and research.

EU student mobility programmes

The [Erasmus+](#) scheme is an EU programme open to education, training, youth and sports organisations, and it offers opportunities for UK participants to study, work, volunteer, teach and train in Europe. The scheme will allocate almost €1 billion to the UK over seven years and it is expected that nearly 250,000 people will undertake activities abroad with the programme.¹⁷

The Bologna Process

In 1999 the UK signed the [Bologna Declaration](#), which set in train a process aimed at creating a European higher education area through the harmonisation of systems across Europe in matters such as credit transfer and comparability of degrees, and by promoting academic mobility. A PQ in October 2016 stated that membership of the Bologna Process will not be affected by leaving the EU:

[Higher Education: Brexit](#)

Asked by: Gethins, Stephen

To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, if the Government plans to remain a signatory of the Bologna Declaration after the UK leaves the EU.

Answered by: Joseph Johnson | **Department:** Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy

The Bologna Process, which created the European Higher Education Area in 2010, is an intergovernmental agreement among 28 countries in the European region. It is not an EU body and therefore UK membership will not be affected by the UK's departure from the EU.

20 Oct 2016 | Written questions | 47399

¹⁶ House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, [EU Membership and UK Science](#), 20 April 2016, HL Paper 127 of session 2015–16, p 5.

¹⁷ Erasmus + [Key Erasmus+ facts and figures](#)

2. Government statements on HE and Brexit

On 28 June 2016 Jo Johnson, Minister of State for Universities and Science issued a [statement on higher education and research following the EU referendum](#) setting out the position for universities and students post Brexit. The statement said that current arrangements would apply for the academic year 2016-17, and future access to the Erasmus+ programme and research funding would be determined as a part of wider Brexit negotiations with the EU.

In October 2016 the UK Government issued a further statement confirming that qualifying EU students applying to HE or FE institutions in England for the 2017-18 academic year would also be eligible for home student fees and tuition fee support for the duration of their courses:

The decision will mean that students applying to study from 2017 to 2018 will not only be eligible for the same funding and support as they are now, but that their eligibility will continue throughout their course, even if the UK exits the European Union during that period.¹⁸

Similar announcements were made in relation to Wales¹⁹ and Scotland.²⁰

2.1 Treasury EU Research Funding Guarantee

On 13 August 2016 the Government issued a [statement](#)²¹ announcing that successful bids for European Commission research funding, including the Horizon 2020 programme, made while the UK is still a member of the EU would be guaranteed by the Treasury. This will apply even when the project continues beyond the UK's departure from the EU. A [letter](#)²² from the Treasury to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union gave the following assurances:

.. a number of UK organisations bid directly to the European Commission on a competitive basis for EU funded multi-year projects. Partner institutions in other EU countries have raised concerns about whether to collaborate with UK institutions on EU funding projects, such as universities and businesses participating in Horizon 2020, and some UK participants are concerned about longer-term participation.

The Commission have made it clear that the referendum result changes nothing about eligibility for these funds. UK businesses and universities should continue to bid for competitive EU funds while we remain a member of the EU and we will work with the

¹⁸ DfE press release, [‘Funding support for EU students’](#), 11 October 2016.

¹⁹ [‘EU nationals and student finance in Wales’](#), Student Finance Wales website article, 11 October 2016

²⁰ Scottish Government press release, [‘Swinney demands student immigration guarantee’](#), 14 October 2016

²¹ Gov.Uk, [Chancellor Philip Hammond guarantees EU funding beyond date UK leaves the EU](#), 13 August 2016

²² [Letter from the Chief Secretary to the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union](#), 12 August 2016

8 The impact of leaving the EU on higher education

Commission to ensure payment when funds are awarded. The Treasury will underwrite the payment of such awards, even when specific projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU. The UK will continue to be a world leader in international research and innovation collaboration, and we expect to ensure that close collaboration between the UK and the EU in science continues.

On 3 October 2016, the Treasury extended its [guarantee](#) to European Structural and Investment (ESI) Funds, funding will now be guaranteed up until the point that the UK leaves the EU.

Further details about Government guarantees for research funding are given in written evidence submitted by HM Treasury to the Science and Technology Committee's inquiry, [Written evidence from HM Treasury. Note on HM Treasury's funding guarantee for research and science funding \(LEA0286\)](#) October 2016.

Scotland

The Scottish Parliamentary Information Centre (SPICe) has published a briefing on the implications of Brexit for HE in Scotland: SPICe briefing paper, [Brexit: Higher education in Scotland](#), 12 October 2016.

*Please note that this briefing was published before the Scottish Government's announcement that EU students' home fee status and entitlement to tuition fee support would continue to be protected in 2017-18.

3. Leaving the EU

Universities are extremely anxious about their situation post Brexit – Universities UK have a webpage which outlines their concerns, [Brexit FAQs for universities and students](#).²³ Their concerns focus on two main areas: the impact on people (students and staff) and the impact on research (funding and collaboration).

3.1 Impact on students

Leaving the EU potentially means that the Government will not have to provide student loans, or maintenance funding for EU students, this would save the Government money. However, the loss of student funding for EU students could have an impact on the numbers of EU students coming to study in the UK and this could consequently have a detrimental impact on fee income for universities and on the culture and diversity of universities.

EU student numbers

In October 2016, UCAS published its first statistical release for the 2017 admissions cycle, covering the 15 October deadline for applications for medicine, dentistry, and veterinary degrees, as well as for courses at the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford. UCAS found that applications from EU students had declined:

Applicants from the EU to this deadline have fallen by 9 percent (-620 people) to 6,240, ending a trend of annual increases over recent years. EU applicant numbers for this 2017 entry cycle are close to where they were for the 2015 cycle, reversing the 8 percent increase seen in the previous (2016) cycle [for October applications].

Applicant numbers from outside the EU have increased by a similar amount as last year, 1 percent, to 11,510 people.²⁴

However, UCAS noted that “typically, only 10 percent of eventual applicants apply by this stage so the full picture of demand for UK higher education, including from EU students, will only be clear after the main January deadline”.

It has been suggested that a drop in EU student numbers would adversely affect the ethos of universities and the experience of students. Universities which attract a high number of EU students, such as University College London have expressed concerns:

Michael Arthur, president of University College London, said that it would be much harder to attract EU students to a country that now looked “rather insular and inward-looking”. Nearly 13 percent of all full-time UCL students are non-UK EU domiciled.

[...]

“We style ourselves as London’s global university and in that context our European students and staff are a very significant part

²³ Universities UK, [Brexit FAQs for universities and students](#)

²⁴ UCAS, [‘Applicant Numbers to ‘Early Deadline’ University Courses Increase by One Per Cent, UCAS Figures Reveal Today’](#), 26 October 2016.

10 The impact of leaving the EU on higher education

of the international profile, so it is problematic that we won't have as much interaction and profile with European students. I think it changes the very nature of a major international university in a way that is not helpful."²⁵

Impact on university funding

If Brexit reduced numbers of EU students studying in the UK, universities would lose student loan tuition fee income from those students. As previously stated in 2013/14 £224 million was paid in fee loans to EU students on full-time courses in England - 3.7% of the total student loan bill.²⁶ An article in the *Times Higher Education* stated that a drop in EU student recruitment could particularly affect London-based universities and specialist institutions:

Analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency data for 2014-15 shows that London-based universities and specialist institutions are likely to be disproportionately affected by any decline in EU student recruitment. Among larger institutions, non-UK EU nationals represented 18 per cent of full-time undergraduates and postgraduates at the London School of Economics, and 16 per cent at both Imperial College London and Soas, University of London.²⁷

Conversely it has been argued that situation post Brexit could be more nuanced than early indications suggest and that Brexit could increase places for UK students and that this could maintain institutions' fee incomes. It has even been suggested that charging EU students higher fees as overseas students could increase fee income if UK higher education continued to attract EU students

UK student mobility

The UK could also potentially lose access to the Erasmus + programme. This could be a particular difficulty for students whose degree courses include compulsory time abroad. For now UK students will continue to be allowed access to the Erasmus + programme and will be able to study overseas as part of that scheme. The UK's future access to the programme is undecided but it should be noted that some non-EU countries participate in the Erasmus + programme as partner countries.²⁸

However Nick Hillman the Director of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) has suggested that the Government could use the money that it will save by not paying tuition fee loans to EU students to fund a "new and ambitious outward mobility strategy in which UK citizens are encouraged to spend time studying abroad".²⁹

²⁵ "[UK fears 'significant' drop in EU student recruitment](#)", Times Higher Education, 24 June 2016

²⁶ SN/SG/917 [Tuition fee statistics](#) 1 December 2014.

²⁷ "[UK fears 'significant' drop in EU student recruitment](#)", Times Higher Education, 24 June 2016

²⁸ [Erasmus + Programme Guide](#) version (2) 2016

²⁹ Higher Education Policy Institute, [HePi director: Brexit may bring 'new opportunities' in sector](#), 12 July 2016

3.2 Impact on research

There is widespread concern among academics that UK HE may lose access to EU research funding post Brexit. Some universities are anecdotally already experiencing difficulties with grant applications and UK researchers are being dropped, or excluded from funding bids. Concerns have also been expressed about the position of EU staff in HEIs and the future recruitment of EU researchers.

The impact of Brexit on science research is discussed in library briefing CBP 7237, [Support for Science](#), 23 November 2016.

Impact on research funding

HEIs are concerned that they will lose access EU research funding after Brexit. This would result in a major loss of funding to some institutions.

However it has been suggested that it might be possible to negotiate retaining access to funding by acquiring associate country status - non-EU member states such as Norway, Turkey and Israel currently take part in Horizon 2020 as associated countries:

On research and innovation, the UK's best response is to seek associated country status. Most forms of Brexit would allow this, with a UK co-investment in the European research budget. Indeed, the strength the UK adds to pan-European research, which is valued by many other EU countries, could actually help in the UK's Brexit negotiation.

It is also extremely likely that the UK's higher education sector will be an asset in any negotiation of trade deals and markets beyond the EU. A 21st-century deal will not be like a 20th-century one, focusing only on trade in goods and services. Successful deals with major emerging countries could depend on the UK offering access to its higher education sector through an appropriate student visa regime and greater collaboration. Since ancient times, trade and knowledge assets have played key roles in diplomatic negotiations. Brexit is not any different, and higher education is one of the UK's best assets.³⁰

But concerns have been raised that access to funding would be contingent on the UK continuing to allow free movement of people:

The UK could seek to remain part of the European Union's research programmes, including prestigious European Research Council grants, after Brexit. But there have been suggestions that the EU might make associated country status contingent on the UK continuing to subscribe to free movement of people, which Ms May has signalled is unlikely to happen.³¹

Switzerland was knocked out of Horizon 2012 in 2014 when it restricted free movement, but later regained limited access.³²

Theresa May, Prime Minister, 28 July 2016

"I would like to reassure you about the government's commitment to ensuring a positive outcome for UK science as we exit the European Union. While we negotiate a new relationship with our European partners, we are not turning our backs on European scientists."

³⁰ ["Confronting Brexit: the perks and pitfalls of plausible moves"](#), *Times Higher Education*, 6 October 2016

³¹ ["Academics 'turning down UK jobs' after Brexit vote"](#), *Times Higher Education*, 24 October 2016

³² ["UK could miss out on EU science grants post-Brexit"](#), *Telegraph*, 5 November 2016

Impact on collaborative projects

UK research may be damaged if the UK is less able to work collaboratively on international projects, this issue was discussed in an article in the *Guardian* in July 2016:

Britain's vote to leave the EU has unleashed a wave of discrimination against UK researchers, with elite universities in the country coming under pressure to abandon collaborations with European partners.

In a confidential survey of the UK's Russell Group universities, the *Guardian* found cases of British academics being asked to leave EU-funded projects or to step down from leadership roles because they are considered a financial liability.

[...]

One leading university said anecdotal evidence that UK applicants were being dropped from EU bids came almost straight after the vote. Since then they had witnessed "a substantial increase in definitive evidence that EU projects are reluctant to be in collaboration with UK partners, and that potentially all new funding opportunities from Horizon 2020 are closing".

Incidents reported by the universities suggest that researchers across the natural sciences, the engineering disciplines and social sciences are all affected. At least two social science collaborations with Dutch universities have been told UK partners are unwelcome, one Russell Group university said in the survey.³³

Stephen Dorell Chairman of the NHS Confederation and former Health Minister has pointed out that even if the Government plugged the funding gap that would be "missing the point", as the UK needed to be part of collaborative projects:

we don't just need the money we need to be part of these European scientific programmes otherwise that 8.8 bn euros is money badly spent³⁴

Impact on higher education staff

British universities employ more than 30,000 scientists from EU countries³⁵ and in some UK universities, up to 50 per cent of postdoctoral positions are held by EU citizens.³⁶ There are concerns that the movement of staff and researchers could be affected by Brexit and that researchers would be less likely to come to the UK if they were unable to access European funding, or work on international projects.

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report in April 2016 stated that free movement of academics and students was of "critical importance" to UK science and "must be protected":

The researcher mobility afforded by the EU's fundamental principle of freedom of movement is of critical importance to the UK science community, including academia, businesses and charities. It is vital that the flow of researchers—both coming to

³³ "[UK scientists dropped from EU projects because of post-Brexit funding fears](#)", *The Guardian*, 12 July 2016

³⁴ "[UK could miss out on EU science grants post-Brexit](#)", *Telegraph*, 5 November 2016

³⁵ "[Research head urges UK to seize Brexit opportunity](#)", *BBC News*, 2 August 2016

³⁶ "[Confronting Brexit: the perks and pitfalls of plausible moves](#)", *Times Higher Education*, 6 October 2016

the UK and UK nationals working overseas—is not restricted. We conclude that researcher mobility must be protected if UK science and research is to remain world-leading.³⁷

Articles have also suggested that post-Brexit researchers may re-locate other EU countries:

UK universities could lose leading research talent to rival European institutions in the wake of Brexit, senior figures believe, with Germany, the Netherlands and the Republic of Ireland among potential beneficiaries.³⁸

Impact on the status of UK HE and research

It has been suggested that quality of UK research would be detrimentally effected if the UK cannot continue to attract high calibre individuals from across Europe and participate in collaborative projects. This could lead to a decline in the status of UK higher education.³⁹

However in July 2016 the Prime Minister stressed her support for UK science in a letter to Sir Paul Nurse director of the Francis Crick Institute in London⁴⁰ Also Sir John Kingman chairman of the newly created UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) body has suggested that research could be at the heart of Britain's post-Brexit industrial strategy.⁴¹

³⁷ House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, [EU Membership and UK Science](#), 20 April 2016, HL Paper 127 of session 2015–16 p52

³⁸ ["UK warned of brain drain to rivals if it exits EU research"](#), *Times Higher Education*, 3 November 2016

³⁹ ["Post-Brexit uncertainty and long-term funding issues hit UK higher education. university rankings show"](#), *The Independent*, 7 September

⁴⁰ ["PM wants positive outcome for science in Brexit talks"](#), *BBC News* 28 July 2016

⁴¹ ["Research head urges UK to seize Brexit opportunity"](#), *BBC News*, 2 August 2016

4. Parliamentary debate

Several parliamentary inquiries have been conducted on the impact of Brexit on HE and on science, the reports identify similar issues of concern around the impact on: research funding, movement of people, collaboration on projects and regulation. Below is a brief overview of these inquiries.

4.1 House of Lords Science and Technology Committee inquiry September 2015

In the run up to the referendum the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee conducted an inquiry into the impact of EU membership on UK science. The summary to the report published in April 2016, [EU Membership and UK Science](#),⁴² stated that “the overwhelming balance of opinion” from the UK science community greatly valued the UK’s membership of the European Union. The Committee said that particular aspects of EU membership were highly prized:

The ease with which talented researchers can move between EU Member States and the UK, the EU’s fertile environment for research collaboration, harmonised regulations, access to EU research facilities and the availability of substantial funding for research combine to make EU membership a highly prized feature of the research ecosystem in the UK. Furthermore, the UK plays a leading role in the development of EU policies and decision-making processes that relate to science and research.

However the report did flag up some issues with EU membership around regulation and harmonisation:

While the UK science community was enthusiastic about EU membership, we have uncovered some qualifications. We heard mixed views on the impact of EU regulations. The benefits of harmonisation were widely recognised but some specific areas, such as genetic modification and clinical trials, were highlighted as causing UK business and research to be disadvantaged compared to competitors outside the EU.

4.2 House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry January 2016

The Commons Science and Technology Committee looked specifically into the impact of EU regulation of the life sciences. The report published in June 2016, [EU regulation of the life sciences](#), 11 June⁴³ noted that the UK “benefit[ed] significantly from access to EU science

⁴² House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, [EU Membership and UK Science](#), 20 April 2016, HL Paper 127 of session 2015–16

⁴³ House of Commons, Science and Technology Committee, [EU regulation of the life sciences](#), 11 June⁴³ 2016, HC 158, 2016-17

research budgets” but also identified some drawbacks to EU membership with regard to regulation:

Research in the life sciences, and the innovation flowing from such research, is subject to an EU-wide system of regulation. In our inquiry we have examined the pros and cons of that regulatory regime and what needs to be done to make improvements irrespective of whether the UK votes on 23 June to remain or to leave the EU. The EU can be an enabler of collaboration among member states, not least in the area of clinical trials: here, robust conclusions require large cohorts which cooperation between member states can provide. This can make a vital difference, particularly for rarer diseases. Our predecessor Committee’s inquiries had showed some resistance from the European Commission to evidence-based policy making and science, including the hostility to GM Organisms (along with an arbitrary and unscientific use of the precautionary principle), the dilatory approach to revising the Clinical Trials Directive and the Electromagnetic Field Directive, as well as the sacking of Professor Anne Glover.

The impact of EU-wide regulation of the life sciences can be assessed in terms of the balance between the benefits of harmonised and responsive regulation and the compromises needed to achieve this. By harmonising the procedures under which research is conducted, and intellectual property protected, EU regulation often helps to foster EU-wide cross-border collaborations. Harmonisation in the life science innovations, products, processes and treatments that flow from that research brings with it access to the EU market, and in the process attracts inward investment into UK life sciences. The EU life science regulatory regime may well be more costly for researchers and businesses than individual national systems, but it does at least provide the potential to access a proportionately greater EU-wide market, except in highly politicised sectors like GM.⁴⁴

The report also noted that if the UK left the EU new funding could potentially come from collaborations outside the EU, but it urged the Government to conduct a risk analysis of future collaboration scenarios:

Under current arrangements the UK benefits significantly from access to EU science research budgets. If, despite the clear attractiveness of the UK as a research location, EU research funding was withdrawn after the exit negotiations, new funding could come from research collaborations outside the EU and from the Treasury reallocating funds previously sent to the EU. The Government should therefore conduct a risk analysis of the science and innovation funding and collaboration scenarios in the event of Brexit and put in place immediate contingency plans to protect our science and innovation sector from any adverse consequences and to consolidate any benefits.⁴⁵

House of Commons Science and Technology Committee inquiry July 2016

On 28 July 2016 the Commons Science and Technology Committee launched an inquiry to examine the implications and opportunities of

⁴⁴ House of Commons, Science and Technology Committee, [EU regulation of the life sciences](#), 11 June⁴⁴ 2016, HC 158, 2016-17 Summary p3

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p4

leaving the EU for science and research. At the start of the inquiry the Chair of the Committee, Nicola Blackwood, wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer “to highlight Brexit issues for science and research in the UK that should be addressed during negotiations with the EU.”⁴⁶

On 18 November the Committee published its report, [*Leaving the EU: implications and opportunities for science and research*](#). The report identified the main issues around Brexit for HE as the impact on funding, people, collaboration, regulation and innovation and infrastructure. The summary to the report said that the Committee was not convinced that the needs of science and research were at the heart of Brexit negotiations:

The science and research community is understandably concerned about the implications and opportunities of the UK leaving the European Union. The Government has provided some helpful and welcome short-term reassurances in relation to underwriting EU funding for research and maintaining access to student loans, but the Government’s strategy for communicating these recent announcements is insufficient. Speeches and high-level meetings with stakeholder representatives will not be enough to ensure that messages are received at all levels and by audiences around the world.

The consequences and opportunities for science and research of wider decisions relating to the UK’s new relationships with the EU need to be fully fed into Government at the highest levels. The Government is meeting with stakeholders and assembling a high level forum on science and research, but we are not convinced that the needs of science and research are at the heart of the Department for Exiting the European Union’s (DExEU) thinking and planning for Brexit. Science should have a strong voice as part of the negotiations. DExEU needs a Chief Scientific Adviser urgently. The Government should also involve the interim Chair of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) as a bridge between the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and DExEU.

Planning for exit negotiations is still underway, and there remains uncertainty about the future model of the relationship we will have with the EU. Nevertheless, the Government should now act to reduce uncertainty by setting out a vision for science. This should include commitments to raise science expenditure as a percentage of GDP (as we have previously urged).

It should also include measures to attract skilled researchers and students, to be taken forward in Brexit negotiations separately from immigration controls more broadly, and should include an immediate commitment to exempt EU researchers already working here from any wider potential immigration controls.

The Government must also seek to capitalise on the opportunities of Brexit, including in terms of setting regulations to facilitate accessing markets and research collaborations beyond the EU.

⁴⁶ Science and Technology Committee letter, [Protecting and promoting science after the EU referendum result](#), 28 June 2016

Education Committee inquiry

The Education Committee is also conducting an inquiry, [The impact of exiting the European Union on higher education](#), the Chairman of the Committee made the following comment on the inquiry:

"This written evidence from university leaders, academics, businesses and others highlights the degree of concern about the fate of UK universities post-Brexit. The evidence raises a variety of issues relating to freedom of movement, including the prospects for recruiting EU students post-Brexit and the future rights of EU staff to live and work in the UK. Concerns are also raised about how to maintain the UK as an attractive destination for EU and international students, about the financial viability of universities, and the need to ensure Britain can continue to compete on the international stage as a provider of world-class university education.

In our inquiry, we are determined to examine the opportunities for higher education post-Brexit and consider what the Government's priorities should be for the sector going into the negotiations with the EU. It's crucial that we don't allow Brexit to become a catastrophe for our university sector. We look forward to testing the evidence and questioning university leaders, academics, students, unions, and Ministers in our public evidence sessions in the New Year." ⁴⁷

4.3 Debates

Several debate have been held on the impact of Brexit on the HE sector and a debate "Exiting the EU science and research" will be held on 19 December 2016.

Other debates:

[Effect of exiting the EU on higher education](#)

HC Debate 23 November 2016 cc332-354WH

The Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, Jo Johnson, gave the following statement in summing up the debate:

The debate is timely, because the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and its possible effects on higher education affect all Members in the Chamber and institutions across the country. This matter is of great importance, and the Government are giving considerable thought to its management, as hon. Members would expect. Higher education is clearly one of our great national assets. Hon. Members who served on the Higher Education and Research Bill Committee will be aware of how keenly the Government feel about this question and how strongly we want to help the sector through these times so we can move to calmer waters and continue to strengthen what is undoubtedly a world-class system.

In global league tables, four UK universities are in the world's top 10 and 18 are in the world's top 100. Those universities are home to world-class teaching and research, and we want that to continue in the years ahead. I am sure that hon. Members will have welcomed the Prime Minister's announcement at the CBI

⁴⁷ Commons Education select committee Brexit impact on higher education: Committee publishes evidence

18 The impact of leaving the EU on higher education

conference on Monday that the Government plan to commit an extra £2 billion a year by 2020 to support research activities across the country in our university system. I hope that hon. Members will acknowledge that that underscores this Government's determination to put science and innovation at the forefront of the new industrial strategy. We promised that we would do that, and we are delivering on that. I hope that in his speech this afternoon, the Chancellor will provide further details that will give hon. Members even greater confidence that the Government are clearly putting their money where their mouth is—behind our universities.

Research and innovation are key drivers of this country's global competitiveness and key sources of economic advantage for us. Our HE sector can be proud not only of UK science: the universities across our nations are also leaders in social sciences and the arts and humanities. But we are not complacent about our success. We recognise that the EU referendum has brought uncertainty for our universities and their students and staff, particularly the non-UK EU nationals among them. We have taken steps to mitigate that uncertainty where we can, be it in relation to the terms on which EU students can access finance or the terms on which we can underwrite research funding.

[...]

It is important for hon. Members to recognise that we already have a strong offer. We are second in the world after only the US in terms of the number of international students who come to study in this country—according to Home Office figures, the number of students coming here has risen by 14% since 2010—and we continue to be successful in attracting international students. We should not create an impression that we have closed off as a country, because that is clearly not borne out by the facts. It is not borne out by the successful recruitment of many institutions in this country. I would not want to create an impression that we were closed, because we are not; we welcome international students and we want to continue to do so.

As I said, the quality of the staff at our institutions is central to the UK's outperformance, and we want them to feel welcome and that the Government appreciate their contributions to our institutions. We want to give them the assurances that they need to feel confident that they can continue to embed the richness that they bring to our institutions.

We also derive benefits from EU students. Hon. Members have referred several times to the contribution that EU students make to our institutions' health. We want those students to continue to study here. We are extraordinarily successful in that respect. In 2013, 20% of EU students who chose to study overseas chose the UK—the greatest proportion of any country. We also welcome those who choose to study for a short time under the Erasmus programme. The hon. Member for Sheffield Central (Paul Blomfield) asked what the Government's plans were for future involvement with Erasmus. Post-exit access to Erasmus will be a matter for the negotiations that he knows will follow the triggering of article 50. We will work through the implications for future years as part of those wider negotiations.

[...]

In the remaining minute or so, I will skip forward to deal with the points that were raised about research, which is clearly of great

importance. My hon. Friend the Member for Harwich and North Essex (Mr Jenkin) and the hon. Member for Sheffield Central asked what relationship we will have with future Horizon 2020 programmes. The short answer is that it is too early to speculate about the UK's future relationship with those programmes. There are already several models for co-operation by non-EU countries on research with the EU and EU member states, and there may be areas where the benefits of collaboration to both sides provide a case for ongoing co-operation. Again, that will be a matter for the negotiations about our future relationship. We are keenly aware that the matter is of great importance to the university sector, and it is fully represented in the thinking of the Cabinet Committee on Brexit, on which the Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy sits.

[Next Steps in Leaving the European Union](#)

Parliamentary proceedings 10 Oct 2016 cc39-69

[UK Exit from the European Union](#)

HC Debate 17 Oct 2016 cc197-238WH

[Brexit: Domestic and International](#)

HL Debate 27 Oct 2016 cc330-377

[Brexit: Impact on Universities and Scientific Research](#)

HL Debate 03 Nov 2016 cc771-824

[Higher Education and Research Bill Second Reading Debate](#)

HC Debate 19 July 2016 cc703-797

Many contributors to the *Higher Education and Research Bill* Second Reading debate referred to the impact of Brexit on the HE sector and questioned the timing of a major HE bill.⁴⁸ Mr Zeichner expressed the views of several contributors to the debate when he said:

In facing the Brexit challenge, it is absolutely clear that the sector is suffering from instability and uncertainty. I echo the suggestion of many of my hon. Friends that now might not be the time for undertaking more major reforms. Our research institutions and universities currently face a real challenge to maintain our global reputation, and we should not make it any more difficult for them.⁴⁹

Mr Johnson, Minister for Universities, Science, Research and Innovation, in wrapping up the debate said that there was a "very strong consensus that our universities rank among the very best in the world"⁵⁰ and that it was right to "press ahead with the Bill":

It will provide stability for the sector, putting in place a robust regulatory framework. The sector has been calling for this legislation since the tuition fee changes were put in place during the last Parliament, and it welcomes the stability and certainty that the Bill will provide.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Mr Marsden c725, Mr Carmichael c732, Mr Byrne c744, Mr Lammy c751, Ms Churchill c760, Mr Blomfield c764, Mr Zeichner c771.

⁴⁹ [HC Deb 19 July 2016](#), c771.

⁵⁰ [HC Deb 19 July 2016](#), c785.

⁵¹ [HC Deb 19 July 2016](#), c787.

4.4 Parliamentary questions

Issues around HE and Brexit have been raised in a large number of PQs, below are some examples:

[Higher Education: Finance](#)

Asked by: Eagle, Ms Angela

To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, what discussions he has had with the university sector on the level of future additional sources of Government funding after the UK leaves the EU.

Answered by: Mr David Gauke | **Department:** HM Treasury

Treasury Ministers and officials have meetings with a wide variety of organisations in the public and private sectors as part of the process of policy development and delivery. Details of ministerial and permanent secretary meetings with external organisations on departmental business are published on a quarterly basis and are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmt-ministers-meetings-hospitality-gifts-and-overseas-travel>

The government is committed to maintaining the position of our world-class universities. The Chancellor stated in August that, to ensure stability in the period leading up to our departure from the EU, we will guarantee: multi-year contracts from the structural and investment funds signed by government before we leave and successful bids from competitive EU funds, for example Horizon 2020, submitted while the UK is a member of the EU. The Treasury will underwrite these payments even when specific projects continue beyond departure from the EU.

In addition, the government has announced that it will guarantee access to loans and grants for EU students starting in the academic year 2017-18. These will be available throughout the duration of their course.

17 Oct 2016 | Written questions | 47547

[Higher Education](#)

Asked by: Elliott, Julie

To ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, what steps he plans to take to consult representatives of the higher education sector as part of his Department's preparations for the negotiations on the UK exiting the EU.

Answered by: Mr Robin Walker | **Department:** Department for Exiting the European Union

The Department for Exiting the EU has engaged with a number of higher education institutions and groups including Universities UK. Over the next few months the department will continue to engage with key stakeholders in business and civil society, including universities, through a series of roundtables, bi-laterals and visits across the UK.

We have been clear that we want to create an environment in which the UK as a whole can continue to be a world leader in research, science and the tertiary education sector more broadly.

21 Oct 2016 | Written questions | 49137

[Higher Education](#)

Asked by: Cunningham, Mr Jim | **Party:** Labour Party

To ask the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, what steps he is taking to ensure that the UK leaving the EU does not have a deleterious effect on the operation of UK universities; and if he will make a statement.

Answered by: Mr Robin Walker | **Department:** Department for Exiting the European Union

The Department for Exiting the EU has engaged with a number of higher education institutions and groups including Universities UK and Royal Academies. Over the next few months the department will continue to engage with key stakeholders in business and civil society, including universities, through a series of roundtables, bi-laterals and visits across the UK.

We have been clear that we want to create an environment in which the UK as a whole can continue to be a world leader in research, science and the tertiary education sector more broadly. The government has already announced that UK researchers can still apply for Horizon 2020 projects and the Treasury will underwrite the payment of such awards, even when specific projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU. Equally, EU students applying for a place at an English university or further education institution in the 2017 to 2018 academic year will continue to be eligible for student loans and grants – and will be for the duration of their course.

24 Oct 2016 | Written questions | Answered | House of Commons | 49429

[Universities: Competition](#)

Asked by: Debbonaire, Thangam

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps she is taking to ensure that UK universities remain globally competitive after the UK leaves the EU.

Answering member: Joseph Johnson | **Department:** Department for Education

UK universities are home to both world-class teaching and life-changing research, and exiting the EU will not change this. The Government has already announced that EU students applying for a place at an English university or further education institution in 2017/2018 (or before) will continue to be eligible for student loans and grants for the duration of their course, even if the UK exits the EU during that period. To support research and innovation, we have also announced that HM Treasury will underwrite funding for approved Horizon 2020 projects applied for before the UK leaves the EU, including where specific projects continue beyond the UK's departure.

Future arrangements for EU students and staff, funding and also UK students studying abroad will need to be considered as part of wider discussions about the UK's relationship with the EU. The Government is

22 The impact of leaving the EU on higher education

fully committed to ensuring that we get the best possible outcome for the higher education sector from its negotiations with the EU.

04 Nov 2016 | Written questions | 51362

[Higher Education: Finance](#)

Asked by: Timms, Stephen

To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans she has to provide extra funds to higher education institutions after the UK leaves the EU in the event of a reduction in income from tuition fees paid by students from other EU countries.

Answering member: Joseph Johnson | **Department:** Department for Education

The publicly-funded higher education sector currently receives 2% of its total income from the fees of EU students, with some individual institutions receiving higher levels of funding. EU students make an important contribution to our universities and we want that to continue. Future arrangements for EU students and any effects on higher education institutions following the UK's exit from the EU will need to be considered as part of wider discussions about the UK's relationship with the EU.

07 Nov 2016 | Written questions | 51575

About the Library

The House of Commons Library research service provides MPs and their staff with the impartial briefing and evidence base they need to do their work in scrutinising Government, proposing legislation, and supporting constituents.

As well as providing MPs with a confidential service we publish open briefing papers, which are available on the Parliament website.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in these publicly available research briefings is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware however that briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.

If you have any comments on our briefings please email papers@parliament.uk. Authors are available to discuss the content of this briefing only with Members and their staff.

If you have any general questions about the work of the House of Commons you can email hcenquiries@parliament.uk.

Disclaimer

This information is provided to Members of Parliament in support of their parliamentary duties. It is a general briefing only and should not be relied on as a substitute for specific advice. The House of Commons or the author(s) shall not be liable for any errors or omissions, or for any loss or damage of any kind arising from its use, and may remove, vary or amend any information at any time without prior notice.

The House of Commons accepts no responsibility for any references or links to, or the content of, information maintained by third parties. This information is provided subject to the [conditions of the Open Parliament Licence](#).