

Learner Outcomes and Employability

Question 1: What are the potential challenges to learner success and employability post-Brexit, and what is and could be done to meet these?

The learning environment in Wales has been immensely enriched through international mobility and international research collaboration, particularly within the EU. If EU staff and researchers are not allowed to stay, and if immigration controls limit recruitment from other member states, then Welsh universities will suffer if deprived of the ability to recruit the best students and staff. Moreover international collaboration has driven the advancement and application of knowledge. Mobility has been essential to the development of science and has fed much of the progress of technology and engineering. Similarly for the humanities and social sciences. Welsh universities risk being poorer, and research and teaching diminish. This would impact the benefit to the learner, including obvious restrictions on learner employability opportunities across Europe. In the wider economic sense, it remains to be seen whether there is an economic benefit to the UK from Brexit. We shall see but it's apparent that Wales will face particular economic challenges which are likely to adversely affect employment in Wales, at least in the short term. These disadvantages can be mitigated by providing a positive environment for the creation of sustainable knowledge-based employment opportunities in Wales.

Question 2: To what extent would any loss of the EU ERASMUS+ mobility scheme impact on the sector and what are the opportunities for alternative mobility schemes which currently exist or could conceivably be developed?

In Wales 2014-2017 Erasmus+ has provided €29.3m to a total of 187 projects and 7,595 participants. Of this, the mobility scheme provided €21m funding to 144 projects.*

Erasmus has been an outstanding success. Interchange has benefitted the intrinsic nature of our institutions as well as providing life changing experience for students who study abroad for some of their time. More students have come to the UK than have gone from the UK, partly because of the quality of UK universities, the attraction of the English language, and the lack of foreign language proficiency in Britain. These advantages would be lost if the UK no longer participated in Erasmus. Creating a new British/EU scheme would require bureaucracy and funding. Would universities in the 27 think the hassle was worth it? Language degree programmes would be particularly badly hit with the requirement that the third year of study is spent in the country where the foreign language is spoken. Language skills are particularly important for international collaboration, mobility and job opportunities.

Financial Sustainability and Investment Opportunities

Question 3: What potential challenges might Brexit pose to the financial sustainability of Further and Higher Education institutions?

Higher Education institutions currently face a challenging environment financially where student recruitment is crucial. EU Structural Funds have been a real boon to the sector in Wales. As these dry up and with uncertainty over continued participation in EU research programmes, the sector in Wales is entering a difficult period. Whatever arrangements result from decisions of government, it's certain that access to whatever funds are made available will be on the basis of intense competition. There will be no guaranteed share for Wales. Support should be provided so that Welsh institutions can compete successfully in that environment. If Welsh institutions do not win sufficient grants, the research base and capacity in Wales will diminish to the detriment of the whole of society.

Question 4: How dependent are Further and Higher Education institutions investment plans on European funding and what are the opportunities for alternative sources of investment funding?

EU Structural Funds, EIB lending, and research grants have benefitted the sector in Wales. This has been demonstrated by the Learned Society in its publication 'Wales and the World'. Continuity of participation in EU research programmes after 2020 is desirable. But participation or not, access to UKRI funding will be vital. The amount of funding by HMG post 2021 is unclear and it will be distributed competitively. We do not know the extent to which UKRI will take account of devolution and the aim of ensuring that post Brexit benefit is distributed across the whole of the UK. Nor do we know what replacement funding will be available from government when EU Structural Funding has ended.

Research and Innovation Funding and Collaboration

Question 5: To what extent do Further and Higher Education institutions rely on future EU research and innovation funding?

Such funding has produced substantial benefit to Welsh universities. It has been a vital source of revenue for both institutions and individual researchers. This is one reason why continued participation is favoured.

Universities Wales found that "published data for 2015/16 shows that universities in Wales received in particular £29.3m in ERDF income and £16.5m in ESF income to support regeneration programmes. They also received £48.6m for collaborative research from the EU. Together these accounted for £94.4m, just over 6% of total income."^{*}

However, this is not the complete picture. The Welsh higher education sector has been successful in winning funds from the EU's Horizon 2020 research fund. Cardiff University, Swansea University, Aberystwyth University and Bangor University have received a total of £20.8m since 2014.

However there is already anecdotal evidence that future support is inhibited, both by some reluctance of continental researchers to include British teams in applications,

and by hesitation to apply in present circumstances. Hence the importance of an early unambiguous agreement to maintain participation. HMG's decision to guarantee funding at least until 2021 is welcome, but continuing uncertainty about what will come after that is disruptive to the sector as a whole.

* http://www.uniswales.ac.uk/wp/media/Replacement-EU-Funding-Inquiry-Unis-Wales-response-v.final_.pdf

Question 6: What is currently being done, and what might be done to safeguard EU research collaborations and networks in preparation for and after Brexit?

Hopefully the British Government is taking account of the views of the sector and of the academies and the negotiating brief is to press for participation. But the issues involved are complex and views of other member states and the European Commission mixed. Moreover R & D is but one issue in an overall negotiation which is the most difficult that the UK has faced in generations. The academies have actively presented their arguments within the UK and the EU, using their networks to underline why continued participation, perhaps along the lines of the Norwegian and Swiss agreements, and not just cooperation is of mutual benefit to learning and scholarship. Mobility is an important factor in collaborative research and care must be taken to ensure that it is not impeded by adverse visa restrictions. The UK is often currently perceived as a hostile environment to non-British citizens, and this perception needs to be reversed or inevitably, the UK will be unattractive for future projects.

Any other relevant issues

Question 7: Are there any other matters relevant to this inquiry?

The Committee's enquiry is welcome. Brexit will affect individual learners and Higher Education institutions. Those institutions are essential elements of Welsh life, in terms of education, economics, culture, employability, reputation and much more. It is vital that their sustainable future is ensured. That is all the more important as Wales risks being particularly damaged by Brexit. The universities' contribution to the economy, to technological development, to developing the nation's skills, and to promoting Wales externally will be all the more vital.