

Cynulliad Cenedlaethol Cymru | National Assembly for Wales

Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg | Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i Effaith Brexit ar Addysg Uwch ac Addysg Bellach: Cylch Gorchwyl | Inquiry on the Impact of Brexit on Higher and Further Education
IB-10

Ymateb gan: Deoniaid Gwyddoniaeth y DU
Response from: UK Deans of Science

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?

In addition to the specific issue of ERASMUS+ (please see response to Question 2) there are potential consequences for employability. For example, if the Brexit settlement were to lead to the UK no longer having an involvement in the European Qualification Framework (EQF) it could mean that, whatever the future arrangements are for UK nationals to be given work permits in the EU, they may find that their qualifications are not recognised.

Associated with the EQF is the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) that ensures ease of transfer between study programmes in different countries based on learning outcomes, workload, etc. While relatively few UK students take advantage of this facility those who do gain an experience that makes them very attractive to employers in the UK and beyond.

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the Bologna Process (http://media.ehea.info/file/Ministerial_conferences/02/8/1999_Bologna_Declaration_English_553028.pdf) have led to much of the collaboration across Europe which is now under potential threat from Brexit. Very importantly, a major pillar of the Bologna Process, of which the UK was a founder signatory in 1999, is *mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff*. While the Bologna Process now has 48 members and is therefore not dependent on membership of the EU we have concerns that actual mobility of learners may be seriously limited by the outcomes of the Brexit agreement and the UK Government's intention to reduce net migration.

Science is a borderless. All the above issues have the potential to harm the large number of collaborations that have been developed over many years between Higher Education Institutions in Wales and those on the European mainland. However, mitigation of the effects can be achieved by

- members of the Welsh Government, other National Assembly members and Welsh MPs at Westminster continually lobbying the UK's Brexit negotiating teams to emphasise that involvement and

commitment to ERASMUS+, the ECTS, EHEA and the Bologna Process should continue unchanged

- in particular, the three Welsh MPs who are members of the Exiting the European Union Committee lobbying as actively and constructively as possible for the need to ensure that there is appropriate mobility of students and staff between European higher education institutions to enable the UK to remain a full and proper member of the Bologna Process, EHEA, etc
- encouragement and support to Welsh Higher Education Institutions to continue to collaborate with European universities including exchanges of staff and offering programmes in science that include a year in Europe.

On these matters and others mentioned below it is important to note that the Department for Exiting the European Union (DExU) repeatedly states that 'nothing is agreed until everything is agreed'. This was confirmed in December 2017 in the *Joint Report from the Negotiators of the European Union and United Kingdom Government* (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/665869/Joint_report_on_progress_during_phase_1_of_negotiations_under_Article_50_TEU_on_the_United_Kingdom_s_orderly_withdrawal_from_the_European_Union.pdf). While this is true of agreements made within the negotiations the issue of mobility of students and staff between the UK and Bologna countries after Brexit could be removed from any element of the Brexit negotiations by a simple decision by the UK to maintain the current system. This has sometimes been suggested as giving up a strong negotiating card that should be used to win other concessions from the EU negotiators. Nothing could be further from reality. HEIs are dependent on income from EU students and on recruitment and retention of excellent EU researchers who staff STEM research laboratories and fill many STEM academic and technical posts. There is evidence that many of these individuals are considering their position post-Brexit. It can only be to our advantage in respect of the science and innovation agenda that, outside DExEU, the statement is continually made that these individuals are welcome, will be allowed to remain after Brexit and that our borders will stay open to the best researchers and those who wish to study here.

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?

If negotiations with the EU were to leave the UK outside the ERASMUS+ scheme there would be serious consequences for ERASMUS-sponsored opportunities for students in Welsh (and other UK) universities, especially where study in Europe is an important part of the course (for example, for

languages and related courses). The current ERASMUS scheme offers the opportunity to STEM students to extend their horizons and increase their international knowledge and employability.

We know of no alternative mobility schemes that could possibly reach the same numbers of students as ERASMUS+ with its intended budget of around €2B Euros per annum over 7 years. However, we would urge use of similar mitigating factors that are given in answer to Question 1, with the added point that Wales needs to lobby for some of the assumed net savings from leaving the EU to be spent on exchange schemes and to further support delivery of the innovation agenda in *Science for Wales* and Professor Graeme Reid's *Review of Government Funding of Research and Innovation in Wales*.

Financial Sustainability and Investment Opportunities

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

It is for each HEI to decide whether to give the Committee its own prediction, which it may consider to be commercially sensitive. Our expectation is that there will be a net reduction of students from EU countries of at least 60% after Brexit. Our qualitative reasoning for this are given in paragraph 7.1 below. The change will immediately impact on numbers on Masters programmes and might make some STEM courses unviable. The effect on overall EU undergraduate numbers will be spread over three years so will be easier to accommodate within the planning process.

The financial effect on research funding will depend on whether the Brexit negotiations contain an agreement that the UK is able to be a full member of Horizon Europe (FP9). The opportunity for HEIs to share in the additional post-Brexit research and innovation funding of an extra £2.3B announced in the UK Government's 2017 Autumn Statement needs to be recognised as a helpful boost to their budgets. However, it remains to be confirmed what criteria will be applied to allocating this extra funding and how much will reach universities. The Welsh Government must press its case for its skilled workforce in order to receive a significant boost from this funding.

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?

No substantive comment. It is for HEIs to decide whether to release this information in confidence or otherwise as far as it is in publicly available documents.

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?

Again it is for individual HEIs to decide whether they release this information. Horizon 2020 funding is now mostly integrated into HEI budget forecasting but there are indications that universities in all parts of the UK are beginning to be less welcomed into new initiatives. The loss of access to Horizon Europe (FP9), without any substitute funding would have a close to catastrophic effect on some universities' research and innovation budgets and, of equal importance, may jeopardise their ability to collaborate fully with their current EU partners.

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?

Many subject-based STEM organisations have been liaising and working with other EU colleagues to press the case for continuing collaborative working and funding. These range from the STEM National Academies (Royal Society and Royal Academy of Engineering) to subject-based groups such as EuCheMS (European Association for Chemical and Molecular Sciences).

Any other relevant issues

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

UKDS has raised in other forums how the rhetoric used by politicians and others can seriously affect the recruitment of EU and other international students. For example, in 2010 the political message given out was that there was an intention to 'reduce net immigration to tens of thousands' and to clamp down on 'bogus students'. This was followed by more than a year of almost monthly changes in changes in immigration rules. The message that was given was that non-UK students were not welcome. Recruitment to postgraduate programmes of non-UK EU students which had increased by 9% and 12% in 2008 and 2009 dropped to an increase of 5% in 2010 and to a decrease of 2% in 2012. International student recruitment from a range of countries to STEM subjects also decreased similarly during this period. By 2013 there was evidence that some postgraduate STEM programmes had lost so many EU and other international students that they became unviable. Between 2010-11 and 2015-16 recruitment from India, where the anti-immigration message was heavily publicised in the press, dropped by over 50%. The apparent anti-immigration stance given by the outcome of the Brexit Referendum and the expected removal of student support to EU students is why we predict a reduction in EU students of at least 60%. It is essential that Wales, through its politicians and others, makes clear its welcome to EU students and STEM academic and technical staff. Even those

politicians who are supportive of the notion of immigration being reduced to tens of thousands must make their case in such a way that they recognise the importance of EU (and other international) students to HEIs and welcome their presence. Of course, the Welsh Government could make the decision that Student Finance Wales will continue to operate a loan system for EU students for 2019-20 and beyond, albeit with a different means of collecting repayments.

The ongoing lack of clarity on post-Brexit arrangements is creating anxiety and affecting decision making by students, academic staff and university managers. It is essential that all those with influence in Wales press the case for clarification as a matter of urgency.

The UK Deans of Science is a body that seeks to represent the individuals, often formally designated as Deans, who are responsible for science in HEIs across the UK and who generally hold the budgets for science, including any research budgets. Its primary aim is to ensure the health of the science base through the promotion of science and scientists and of scientific research and science teaching in all parts of the UK.