



# CENTRE FOR BRITAIN AND EUROPE

UNIVERSITY OF SURREY



Analysing Brexit's Impact on  
**UK HIGHER EDUCATION**

# Higher Education

One of the most important sectors in the UK is that of higher education. Universities, institutes and learned societies alike have made clear that the impact of Brexit, and in particular an unmanaged or hard Brexit, will present particular challenges for staff and students alike. This CBE Briefing Note explores the potential outcomes of leaving the European Union for those in academia: investigating the short, medium - and long-term impacts on students, lecturers, researchers and the academic sector as a whole.

## Overview

For more than thirty years, Europe has provided British, European and international students and lecturers with the opportunity to study, travel and work within EU countries. By 2020, the Erasmus programme will have involved more than 5 ½ million students, with the original concept of the programme dating back to 1976<sup>1</sup>. Furthermore, the Jean Monnet Activities supports many modules, university chairs, networks, projects, centres of excellence and associations taking place in 30 European Programme Countries and 69 countries inside and outside Europe. Across the UK, Erasmus funding has helped support more than 4,700 separate projects, involving 128,000 participants since its inception<sup>2</sup>.

### Erasmus

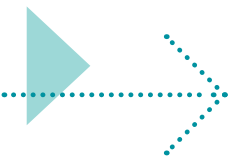
The goal of the Erasmus programme is to support students in spending part of their overall studies at another European university through visa-free mobility arrangements and financial support. Approximately 50% of British students who study, work or volunteer abroad in their time at university do so through the Erasmus scheme (UUK, 2019a). The Erasmus program provides undergraduate and graduate students alike with opportunities to travel, live and study not only in Europe, but in any one of up to 33 other countries around the world. University staff are also included in exchanges, allowing them to visit a guest institution to lecture in their area of expertise, provide masterclasses or workshops to students and/or staff, and then establishing a reciprocal visit from that institution at their home university.

Erasmus is geared at improving British, European and international teaching and learning collaboration, boosting the quality of academic insight provided to students, and generally enriching the learning experience by ensuring a diverse range of staff. However the programme also “extends opportunities to study, work, teach or train abroad to other groups, including vocational students, education

staff and youth workers”, helping to boost employment chances, support economic growth and “increasing opportunities for people from disadvantaged backgrounds and those with special needs.”<sup>3</sup>

**Do British universities that offer Erasmus benefit from the programme?** Available data suggests that universities participating in Erasmus are regarded by students as more attractive education destinations, boosting their domestic revenue (UUK, 2019a). Erasmus students themselves enjoy increased prospects in terms of employment. British and European higher education institutions (HEIs) have observed a “significant impact” on the students’ post-graduation employability: 80% of Erasmus+ graduates were hired within three months after they completed their formal education, of which 40% of the participants in an Erasmus+ were offered a job by the companies for which the internship was carried out, while another quota of participants established their own form of employment (Kostaki, 2019). Brexit therefore poses a number of challenges to the UK’s overall ability to present itself as a possible and/or desirable Erasmus destination depending on the outcome of the final UK-EU negotiations.

A recent House of Lords report suggested that Erasmus managers and participants “were extremely concerned about the prospect of a ‘no deal’ Brexit and the fact that the underwrite guarantee would be contingent on reaching a further agreement with the EU.” The general view was that “an unmanaged or hard Brexit would cause “inevitable disruption”, which the Government could only seek to mitigate.”<sup>4</sup> Evidence provided from the University of Surrey to the Lords indicated that “the Erasmus+ UK National Agency should manage the distribution of underwrite funds and highlighted the importance of ensuring there was continuity in the timeframe of grant payments and in reporting systems.”<sup>5</sup>



### Jean Monnet

The Jean Monnet Activities are a critical part of the Erasmus+ Programme and aim at enhancing excellence in teaching and research in the field of European Union studies worldwide. They consist of actions (teaching and research, supporting associations and institutions, fostering the dialogue between the academic world and policymakers) and operating grants to specified institutions. Jean Monnet Activities are generally directed towards improving Studies on European Integration through different action types. A typical feature is teaching a Module or a Chair in universities all over the world. Jean Monnet encourages the participation of a broader public and also supports outreach to teacher training and civil society in particular young people. In addition, Jean Monnet enhances the dialogue between academics and policy makers at different levels .

### EU Consortium Funding

The UK’s position in the European higher education landscape is impressive: a research leader both in terms of publications and in establishing European research groups under the EU’s €80 billion Horizon 2020 programme (Jorgensen, 2018). The pooling of research and innovation is a key component of both the UK’s and the EU’s higher education policy. Structures like the European Research Area (ERA) for example draw on networks which facilitates academic collaboration on a variety of topics, creating a space for the transfer of knowledge and discoveries. This prevents duplication and avoids the costs of each country funding its own research on the same area. The ERA itself also has an added-value focus on equality and diversity,

championing methods such as Gender Mainstreaming. With the UK operating as a global leader in research in terms of its European and international collaborations, UK and the EU negotiators early on agreed that the UK remain part of the present batch of EU programmes until they end in 2020, including Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+. However, much time has elapsed since that first agreement, and no-deal scenarios pose genuine risks to current and future funding opportunities.

As identified by a number of HEIs, learned societies and funders, an unmanaged or hard Brexit could see the UK lose access to over £1 billion a year in EU research funding. UK-based researchers and SMEs will lose access to around half a billion a year in research funding, which will have an immediate impact on current and future research underway in the UK. The issues entail both replicability and sustainability: trying to construct like-for-like research structures and funding in the absence of long-established EU partners, as well as the delay and suboptimal outcomes of developing alternatives. The UK’s global reach in research needs to be borne in mind: 1 in 6 academic staff (teaching and researching) in UK HEIs come from elsewhere in the EU. Costs will likely become a deterrent to the wide range of skilled individuals upon which the UK relies. If for example the UK decided to apply immigration charges to EU nationals, based on the current system, an EU academic with a partner and two children entering the UK on a 3-year Tier 2 visa would have to pay heavy upfront costs, equivalent to 20% of their annual salary.

### Quick Statistics

Around 17,000 students in the UK would no longer be able to study or work abroad as part of Erasmus+ as planned in the 2020–21 academic year(UUK, 2019a).	The UK was the most successful country in the last round of European Research Council Advanced Grants, with 66 applicants awarded up to 2.5 million Euros each – a total of €155 million in funding (UUK, 2019b).
The UK economy would forego £390 million per year in export earnings currently brought through incoming Erasmus+ students’ living expenses alone (UUK, 2019a).	33.5% of UK research papers are co-authored with other EU and associated countries in the Horizon 2020 bloc, compared with 17.6% with the USA. The rate of UK scientific co-authorship with the Horizon 2020 bloc is also increasing faster than with the USA (The Royal Society, 2019a).

1. <https://fedtrust.co.uk/an-insiders-history-of-how-erasmus-developed/>  
2. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4e5c3e1c-1f0b-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1>  
3. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/283/28306.htm#footnote-156>  
4. [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/283/28306.htm#\\_idTextAnchor038](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/283/28306.htm#_idTextAnchor038)  
5. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/eu-home-affairs-subcommittee/brexit-eu-student-exchanges-and-funding-for-university-research/written/92644.html>

6. <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/4e5c3e1c-1f0b-11e9-8d04-01aa75ed71a1>  
7. <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/Publications/2018/royal-society-brexit-no-deal-factsheet.pdf?la=en-GB&hash=03BC02270D6BFDC28C5D268A8F12199C>  
8. Ibid.

# Sector Insights

## The Royal Society

- Responding to the proposed £30,000 salary threshold in Government’s Immigration White Paper, the Royal Society warns that this level could significantly hamper the UK’s ability to fill roles in the research and innovation workforce across the country. Many such roles are filled by highly -qualified staff from the EU and the European Economic Area, all currently able to work in the UK with neither salary nor visa restrictions. Many of the institutions supporting these roles will face immediate shortages if either EU or indeed overseas nationals can no longer fill them.
- In terms of high-ranking outputs, 33.5% of UK research papers are co-authored with EU academics, and non-EU countries associated via Horizon 2020.<sup>9</sup> As Royal Society President Sir Venki Ramakrishnan argued in reference to fast-track visas: “Half of international academic talent in UK universities comes from the European Union and the EU is our single largest research collaborator. Alongside immigration reform, therefore, maintaining close working ties with researchers in Europe and access to EU research funding, are essential.” (Royal Society, 2019b).
- Final Point: “A no-deal Brexit would be bad for UK science. It would discourage recruitment of international talent, shut us out of valuable scientific collaborations, and restrict access to new medicines and technologies that benefit everyone living in the UK.” Royal Society President Sir Venki Ramakrishnan, in an open letter to Boris Johnson (Ramakrishnan, 2019).

The University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES) represents the global membership organisation for academics, students and practitioners researching, teaching and working on all aspects of Europe and the EU, including relations with the UK. The CBE asked Nicholas Startin, UACES Chair, for his insights:

*“The prospect of a ‘no-deal’ Brexit raises some real concerns for UACES colleagues based in the UK. A lack of clarity around the future of Erasmus funding, what the consequences might be with regard to future research funding and to what extent a ‘no-deal’ Brexit might have an impact on academic and student recruitment are causing great anxiety and uncertainty among many UK based scholars working in the discipline of European Studies.”* **Nicholas Startin**, UACES Chair



The Political Studies Association (PSA) regularly profile published outputs, events and activities allowing academics to be as informed as possible about the impact of Brexit.<sup>10</sup>

The CBE asked Angelia Wilson, PSA Chair to comment on the current situation: *“The network of research expertise across the EU is vital to progress, understanding and discovery in both areas of STEM and Social Sciences. Without those networks, and the shared approach to funding, the UK research community will either be isolated or, more likely, choose to relocate. In addition, without sufficient support for student exchanges, UK based higher education risks becoming more inward looking and less engaged in experiencing and learning first-hand about the wider global community.”* **Angelia Wilson**, PSA Chair



## Expert Commentary

‘We’d be naive to think that we can carry on as before, at the heart of the European research and education landscape.’ **Vivienne Stern** (UUK, 2019a).

**Professor Dame Janet Beer, President of Universities UK**, “Researchers at UK universities doing life-changing work remain in the dark over what will happen to their current ERC applications or where they will go in future for funding, if there is no-deal. Without clarity very soon vital research could be disrupted which would be hugely damaging to people’s lives. The UK also risks losing some of our brightest minds to other countries, if they don’t know how their research will be progressed.” (UUK, 2019b).

**Universities UK** has been explicit that a ‘no deal’ exit from the EU would be bad for our students, researchers and 136 member universities (UUK, 2019a).

**Cathy Gormley-Heenan** writing for **PSA** highlights the concern for universities in Northern Ireland, such as the Magee campus which employs 20% of its staff from the Republic of Ireland, meaning daily commutes are threatened. Beyond getting to work, other concerns include things such as harmonisation of tax, accessing bank accounts, being charged for using bank cards at work, roaming charges on mobile phones, just to name a few (Gormley-Heenan, 2019).

**Ian Taylor**, for the **Conservative Group for Europe**, reports that ‘this Government is being deaf’ to experts in the field of science, arguing that ‘the current Government has promised that future immigration policy won’t hinder foreign scientists from coming. Yet the atmosphere surrounding Brexit is a deterrent in itself – which is already becoming apparent’ (Taylor, 2019).

**The Francis Crick Institute’s** Chief Executive, Nobel Scientist **Paul Nurse**, warned “The concerns [in the scientific community] are less to do with money, less to do with the things people talk about, but more to do with a feeling the country has lost its way.” He underlined the detrimental effects of exclusion from the future EU science research funding mechanism which promotes collaboration and has a reputation that no domestic scheme can hope to replicate (Taylor, 2019).

9. <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/Publications/2018/royal-society-brexit-no-deal-factsheet.pdf?la=en-GB&hash=03BC02270D6BFDC28C5D268A8F12199C>

10. <https://www.psa.ac.uk/sites/default/files/PSA%20News%20Vol30%20No4.pdf>



# Impact Analysis

## Short term

- In July 2018, the UK government extended a commitment on EU funding to also underwrite the UK’s allocation for structural and investment fund projects under the EU budget period to 2020. Managing authorities will continue to sign new projects until programme closure. (UUK, 2019c).
- Governments across the UK have confirmed that EU students starting a course in 2019–20 (first batch post-Brexit) will still be eligible for home fee status and for financial support as per existing rules. However, there is currently significant uncertainty with regards to student and staff mobility within post-Brexit Europe. Equally, there is uncertainty for EU staff living in UK, and UK staff living in the EU. Rules and requirements affecting UK staff and students on mobility/work placements within the EU on day one of a ‘no deal’ scenario will differ between EU country (Courtois, 2018).
- From 2020 EU students could pay higher fees if studying in the UK.
- EUA and Universities UK have published a common document in order to assist universities prepare for a no-deal Brexit. However, depending on the progress of negotiations, there could be chaos surrounding student residence permits, student fees and student and staff mobility (EUA, 2018).

## Medium term

- Probable ongoing uncertainty about fee / loan status – there may be short term solutions but by 4-5 years the entire loan structure may be pitted against EU students.
- Potential changes brought about by proposed Home Office policy to allow postgraduate students far longer leave to remain after graduation. This may be a bonus for international students (e.g. if EU students are classified as international), or produce problems by forcing students to take jobs for which they aren’t qualified.
- There is some concern over the effect of funding losses on subjects deemed ‘not profitable’, such as the humanities. This could result in potential job losses and lack of funding for research, for the less profitable subjects. Furthermore, the impact across institutions of different status will most likely be very unequal, which could have a knock-on effect on less privileged students.

- Beyond 2020, the UK economy could forego £390 million per year in export earnings currently brought through incoming Erasmus+ students’ living expenses alone. (UUK, 2019a).
- The continued mutual recognition of professional qualifications covered by the current EU Directive would be uncertain.
- UK researchers would become ineligible to compete for the globally-prestigious research funding from the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (UUK, 2019c).
- The UK government has not explained how it will ensure that applications from researchers at UK universities for European Research Council (ERC) awards will be funded if they are in the middle of the evaluation process, or what future system will be put in place to replace funding for world-leading research, in the event of no-deal. This means life-changing discoveries and leading researchers tackling some of society’s major health and environmental challenges could be left in limbo (UUK, 2019b).

## Long term

- The UK is the most popular place for students in the EU to study. This could be considerably reduced if EU students face both logistical and economic problems securing access to UK universities.
- Impact of Erasmus reduction: student numbers, mobility, staff exchanges, diminishment of pedagogic and research quality overall plus the broader opportunities afforded by exchange
- Impact of Jean Monnet reduction: less opportunity to set up modules, Chairs, Centres and networks in which UK students benefit from high-level teaching, learning and research on all aspects of European integration, and for European and international students to learn about the UK’s own emerging relationship with Europe
- Impact of reduction of consortium funding : again see Royal Society
- General inability for the UK to play the ‘Global Britain’ card if with numbers of students dropping off (EU coming here) and UK students going to Europe: a good point made by UUK that this would “severely limit study and work opportunities for students to enhance their language skills, employability and intercultural awareness – all vital in a global Britain”.<sup>11</sup>

11. <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2019/no-deal-briefing.pdf>

# Policy Suggestions

Short-term	<p>The European Commission and the UK government should promptly arrange discussions about the implications of a ‘no deal’ Brexit for researchers involved in EU-funded projects.</p> <p>The Government should take up recommendations given to the Lords to maximise certainty and stability on Erasmus, Jean Monnet and Horizon2020 projects by providing further information on the practical operation of underwrite guarantees, reciprocity, oversightand collaboration.</p> <p>The government should work with universities to fully communicate EU students’ eligibility for home fees/loans for those starting courses in 2020–21, and ensure that any future changes are announced at least 18 months ahead of implementation. (UUK, 2019c)</p>
Mid-term	<p>The government should reconsider the three-year limit to the European Temporary Leave to Remain scheme and guarantee EU students entering under this scheme that they will be able to stay for the duration of their course and graduate. (UUK, 2019c).</p> <p>Details of a full-funded replacement scheme to Erasmus+ should be published and publicised; students due to go abroad in year 2 or 3 of their degree have already started their course and face huge uncertainty. (UUK, 2019a)</p> <p>Fully-funded UK replacements for Horizon 2020, European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions to be in place to ensure like-for-like current funding options, and sustaining the UK’s current global standing.</p>
Long-term	<p>In addition to fully-costed UK replacements for existing UK-EU research structures, the government needs to commit to actively seeking and funding third-country participation by UK researchers: EU and non-EU within these structures.</p> <p>The government will need to begin work now on future arrangements regarding mutual recognition of professional qualifications.</p>

12. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/lducom/283/28306.htm#footnote-156>

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