Universities UK update 20 December 2016

House of Lords Science and Technology Committee report on UK science and Brexit

The House of Lords Science and Technology Committee published *A time for boldness: EU membership and UK science after the referendum* in December. The report argues that “bold steps are needed to ensure UK science has a prominent place in the global economy after Brexit”. The report includes recommendations that the Government should treat student numbers separately for immigration policy making purposes, that annual surveys assessing the UK’s reputation in the global scientific community as a welcoming place to pursue a scientific career should be carried out and published, and that the Government must ensure that it has appropriate scientific and business advice during the Brexit negotiations.

MPs debate exiting the EU and science and research

The government held a debate in the House of Commons in December on “Exiting the EU and science and research”. Universities UK briefed MPs who planned to speak at the debate, highlighting the key priorities for science, research and universities. The UUK briefing is available on the [website](#) and the transcript on the debate can be viewed [here](#).

EU students applying for a PhD starting in 2017-18

Building on previous announcements about fees and loans for 2017-18 EU undergraduate and masters’ students, it was confirmed in a [statement](#) on 1 December 2016 from Jo Johnson MP that EU nationals starting courses in the next academic year (2017-18) will continue to be eligible for Research Council PhD studentships to help fund their studies for the full duration of their course. It was also confirmed that this will be the case even if the course finishes after the UK has left the European Union.

UUK letter on international collaboration and overseas talent in the Financial Times

A [letter](#), calling for the Government to support and recognise the value of international research collaboration and access to overseas talent was published in the Financial Times in December. The letter was coordinated by Universities UK, and signed by 20 organisations and businesses, including the IoD, CBI, FSB, the Royal Society, British Chambers of Commerce, the BMA, the Creative Industries Federation and WPP. Several signatories, as well as a number of businesses that were not able to sign the letter, including Airbus, Unliever and Pfizer, have expressed a strong interest in collaborating with UUK in the future on this issue.

The number of EU students accessing loans for full-time fees (2010/11 and 2014/15)

The Student Loans Company (SLC) recently released data showing how many EU nationals (including those who were resident in the UK prior to accessing their loan) and how many EU-domiciled students (including those travelling to the UK to study full-time) accessed student finance in England. The total figure for the academic year 2014/15 was 76,170. This equates to around 7% of the total figure of 1,082,810 students who accessed loans through the SLC in 2014/15. A [document](#) provides a further breakdown of these figures, including by EU nationality and by major source of tuition fee.

BEIS ‘high level forum’ on Brexit

UUK attended the first of a series of monthly Brexit meetings organised by BEIS to discuss the impact of Brexit on universities and science. With representatives from the funding councils, the
Research Councils, mission groups and government, the intention is that the forum will advise government on the implications of Brexit for higher education and assist in formulating post-Brexit policy.

Policy Lab: Positioning of the UK within the global research landscape

On 9 December, the Policy Institute at King’s, working with UUK, hosted a ‘Policy Lab’, focused on how the UK can be best positioned to lead and participate internationally in research post Brexit. The event brought together representatives from universities, the Research Councils, the Royal Society, Digital Science, and the head of science and innovation at the Swiss embassy to identify how the UK higher education sector and the wider research community can work to maximise opportunities for global engagement. The Policy Institute will be producing a public briefing based on the day’s discussions in February 2017.

Horizon 2020 interim evaluation

The European Commission’s public consultation on the interim evaluation of Horizon 2020 is open until 15 January 2017. This evaluation will not only lead to changes in the implementation of the second half of the programme, but will also inform the Commission’s thinking on the successor programme, FP9. A strong response from the UK university sector is therefore essential, even more so in the context of the EU referendum result. UUK will be making a submission on behalf of the sector, but has strongly encouraged individual institutions to submit responses that reflect their own experiences with Horizon 2020. The public consultation is here.

EUA publishes data on UK contribution to European Research Area

The European University Association has published its second Brexit factsheet detailing the contribution that the UK makes to the European Research Area and student mobility. It shows that UK participants coordinate more Horizon 2020 projects than any other country (20%) and the UK is the most popular destination for European student mobility (28%).

UK participation in the EUA Board

The annual conference of the European University Association will take place on 6-7 April 2017 in Bergen, Norway on the theme: Autonomy and Freedom: the future sustainability of universities. Member institutions attending will have the opportunity to cast votes for three vacant positions on the EUA Board, and to secure participation of serving UK Vice-Chancellor, Professor Paul Boyle at the University of Leicester. UK influence on the Board would be extremely helpful politically, as EU policy-makers prepare the successor programmes to Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+, and of course, as negotiations take place on the future of the EU-UK relationship. The EUA could play a crucial role in mobilising support from other European higher education systems for continued access to EU programmes and will serve as a useful forum for continued dialogue regardless of the outcome of negotiations.

ERDF criteria in England – letter from DCLG Director of European Programmes and Local Growth

Please see here a letter from Julia Sweeney, Director of European Programmes and Local Growth at DCLG to the ESIF Growth Programme Board sent on 5 December 2016, setting out how future ERDF projects in England will be assessed against domestic strategic priorities and offering good value for money. Although the criteria is materially unchanged from before, it will be made more prominent in programme guidance. A value-for-money tracker will also be introduced to monitor the contribution of ERDF funding applications to local and national targets and strategic priorities.