Universities UK update April 2017

- **Government confirms financial support for EU students starting courses at English universities in 2018/19**

  The Department for Education have announced that EU students applying for an undergraduate or master’s course at an English university that starts in the 2018-19 academic year will continue to have access to student loans and grants and home fee status, and this will apply for the duration of their course. EU nationals will also remain eligible to apply for Research Council PhD studentships at UK institutions for 2018 to 2019 to help cover costs for the duration of their study. The announcement can be read in full on the DfE website. Securing these commitments has been a lobbying priority for Universities UK over recent months and they have repeatedly stressed the urgency of clarifying this situation to policy makers and influencers in No.10, DfE, DeExEU and the Treasury. Universities UK’ positive response to the announcement can be read on their website.

- **Brexit and the General Election**

  MPs voted to hold a General Election on 8 June 2017. The current Parliament will be dissolved on 3 May 2017. The purdah period will begin on Saturday 22 April 2017, with no new official announcements from the Government until following the General Election. UUK expect Brexit issues to be at the forefront of the General Election debate, with all major political parties highlighting their exit negotiation priorities and their competing visions for a post-Brexit UK, or indeed in some cases their opposition to Brexit. Universities UK will work to engage with key manifesto writers and influencers and will publish a statement of policy priorities for a new government which will heavily draw on their recently published statement of Brexit policy priorities.

- **Erasmus+ Underwriting Guarantee from the National Agency and HM Treasury**

  In early April, the National Agency for Erasmus+ in the UK announced that the “UK Government has confirmed it will underwrite payments for Erasmus+ contracts that are signed while the UK is still a member state, even if payments continue beyond the point of the UK’s EU exit date”. This ensures that UK institutions can prepare for participation as usual in the 2018 application deadlines. Grant agreements for Erasmus+ mobility are usually signed in May/June each year and these agreements can be for up to 24 months or 26 months. If the UK’s point of exit remains as the end of March 2019, these 24-month grant agreements signed between the university and the National Agency in May/June 2018 are guaranteed to continue until May/June 2020, therefore beyond the date of exit. This announcement also provides positive news for International Credit Mobility (ICM), under which projects can run up to 26 months. Fuller information is available here. UUK realise there remains uncertainty for 2019 applications due to the unknown length of the UK-EU negotiating period and will highlight this to relevant officials.

- **Publication of two new research reports**

  UUK has commissioned two pieces of research to inform its policy development and to contribute to discussions at the Prosperity UK conference on 26 April.
The first of these, entitled ‘International research collaboration after the UK leaves the European Union’, has been produced by Digital Science. It considers how existing inter-agency agreements promote collaboration, what barriers exist and also how important it is to foster and facilitate researcher-to-researcher networks. It proposes principles for promoting international research collaboration and identifies possible countries with whom there is scope to grow the level of collaboration.

The second report, entitled ‘Can Free Trade Agreements enhance opportunities for UK higher education after Brexit?’, has been prepared by the UK Trade Policy Observatory based at the University of Sussex. It sets out issues for the UK government and higher education sector to consider as the UK prepares to negotiate a series of new free trade agreements (FTAs) with countries around the world following exit from the European Union. The paper explores the ways in which the inclusion of education and research commitments in future FTAs could strengthen the position of UK higher education internationally, and the ways in which other countries have approached this to date.

- Upcoming UUK delegation to Brussels

UUK are coordinating a delegation to Brussels on 4-5 May that includes a number of Vice-Chancellors from the UUK board. The delegation will meet with senior European Commission officials (DGs Research and Education), the European Research Council, the UK Permanent Representation, leaders of European university networks and other senior Brussels-based influencers to promote key arguments for universities aligned with our Brexit priorities briefing. The main priorities for these discussions will be the shape of the future EU research and innovation and mobility programmes and the UK’s future relationship with these programmes.