Universities UK update July 2017

**Brexit events with Labour and Conservative parliamentarians**

UUK hosted two events in July for Labour and Conservative parliamentarians to brief them on the sector’s priorities regarding Brexit and hear feedback on their party’s positions. Around 30 parliamentarians attended the two events. UUK also discussed how it can work with them in the coming months to gain further political traction to progress on the challenges and opportunities universities are facing.

Common themes included the urgency to ensure membership of Horizon 2020 for the duration of the programme, consideration of what membership of FP9 could look like, staff and student mobility; and the increasing importance of developing thinking on the role of universities in relation to trade policy.

UUK are continuing policy development work on each of these themes and have follow-up meetings scheduled following summer recess with a number of the parliamentarians who attended the events.

**Post-Brexit implementation period**

After much (often public) disagreement in recent months, UUK understand that Cabinet Ministers have now agreed on the necessity for a post-Brexit transition or ‘implementation’ period, with some reports suggesting that this could last for up to four years.

As part of this, UUK have developed a suggested package of ‘stability measures’ that it is asking the government to implement in order to provide greater certainty for universities as the UK prepares to leave the EU, given that we are still some way off clarity on a longer-term UK-EU settlement.

The measures, agreed at the most recent UUK Board, focus on how government can avoid any cliff-edge scenario, for example by strengthening existing Treasury underwrites to support ongoing participation in Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ past March 2019.

UUK are making it clear that current EU migration rules for university students and staff should remain in place throughout any wider implementation period.

**New clarification from the Government on the Horizon 2020 underwrite**

On 18 July, the Minister for Universities and Science provided further clarification on the Treasury underwrite of Horizon 2020 funding.

He confirmed that all applications submitted before departure are covered, even where applications have yet to be approved for funding or where there is no signed grant agreement at the point of departure. He also confirmed that applications that are subject to a multi-stage review process will be covered if successful.

Although this statement recognises that applications at different stages of the process will be affected differently, there is no new information about how the guarantee will be administered. UUK are continuing to press the government on this issue and also stressing the importance of securing full access (through exit negotiations) to Horizon 2020 for UK researchers up to the end of the programme in 2020.

**UUK FP9 survey**

In order to secure its stated objective of achieving access with influence to the next Framework Programme (FP9), UUK take the view that it is vital to continue to actively engage in the policy development process for FP9, so a comprehensive UUK vision – with input from member universities - will be submitted to the European Commission as part of the public consultation on FP9 (expected in early 2018).
Erasmus+ guarantee for staff and student mobility in Europe

UUK are aware that the Treasury’s guarantee to underwrite Erasmus+ grant agreements signed whilst the UK is still in the EU will most likely cover mobility only to the end of 2018/19. This is because the final grant agreements signed before Brexit and therefore eligible for the underwrite are likely to be those signed in June 2018. This has implications for students starting their first year this September on a course with a mandatory year abroad in 2019/20.

UUK have been working closely with the Department for Education, HM Treasury and the Department for Exiting the EU as well as with the UK National Agency to work on strengthening the current guarantee, to ensure clarity and stability for students in September.

In the meantime UUK has encouraged universities to start thinking about applying for 24-month grant agreements for 2018 as well as ensuring strong engagement and communications with current Erasmus+ partners around Europe.

EU citizens’ rights

In late June, the government published its proposed offer to EU citizens already in the UK: Safeguarding the Position of EU Citizens Living in the UK and UK Nationals Living in the EU.

UUK has analysed the proposals and has flagged a number of initial concerns with the Home Secretary, Home Office (including the Director General responsible for immigration and Brexit) and the Department for Education.

UUK’s concerns include the proposal that EU citizens in the UK who have already applied successfully for permanent residence will need to apply for settled status, which seems does unfair and inappropriate.

In July, following further negotiations between the EU and UK, the UK government published a technical note comparing the UK and EU’s respective positions on citizens’ rights. This highlights several areas where there is significant disagreement at present. UUK are analysing the main areas of divergence and will continue to brief key officials as the negotiations progress. UUK are continuing to gather wider evidence to inform these discussions, including evidence on researcher mobility.

Separately, UUK are preparing in advance of the government consulting on the post-exit immigration system (expected in September 2017).

UCAS EU applications

The release on 12 July of the latest UCAS applicant figures for the 2017 cycle showed that – at the 30 June deadline – EU applicants were down 5% compared to last year. The figures highlighted a slight improvement on the 15 January deadline applicant numbers, released in February, which showed EU numbers to be down by 7%.

UUK issued a response to the latest figures, highlighting possible factors behind the decline and repeating the need to project a welcoming message to prospective EU students. The response featured in much of the media coverage (e.g. FT, BBC News, The Times).