

UUK President's speech: To be checked against delivery

President's speech Universities UK annual conference, 7 September 2016

Dame Julia Goodfellow, President of UUK and Vice-Chancellor, University of Kent

They say a week is a long time in politics, so in that case the 52 weeks since I stood before you at last year's Universities UK annual conference feels like several lifetimes ago. So much has changed.

At this exceptionally busy time of the year – as parliament returns and MPs start the serious business of examining in detail the Higher Education and Research Bill – I am very pleased that our minister, Jo Johnson, has been able to join us today, in spite of the enormous pressures on his time this week in particular.

I spoke last year about our ability to change ourselves, as well as the transformation universities bring to the lives of our students and to society more generally. This year I want to focus not only on change, but also on some of the long-standing values to which our sector is committed.

Before I do that, I want to review our achievements as a sector.

We remain internationally competitive in research with partnerships around the world; and we continue to deliver enormous benefit to society through the wider economic, social and cultural impact of our research. We also continue to offer high-quality higher education to students in the UK – both young and mature – as well as attracting students from continental Europe and from around the world. We are one of the most successful export industries that the country has, contributing not only through students coming to the UK, but also increasingly through our campuses overseas.

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Over the last year, I am particularly proud of our student voter registration campaign that saw young voters registered in record breaking numbers. Also our ongoing inquiry into violence against women, harassment and hate crime. This has won plaudits for tackling this difficult issue.

I would like to thank all my colleagues here for their support of UUK during this most dramatic year for the sector and for the country.

As president, I have felt supported by you all, and advised, as well as challenged on occasion, by our board. Special thanks go to our vice-presidents representing the devolved administrations – Colin Riordan for Wales; Peter Downes for Scotland and Janet Beer for England and Northern Ireland. I also want to thank our outgoing Treasurer, Simon Gaskell, for his efforts over four years in this post, for his wise counsel and leadership of our work on regulatory reform and the Higher Education and Research Bill. We welcome Julia Buckingham as our new treasurer and Andrea Nolan as the incoming convener for Scotland.

It has been a year when the talents and tenacity of UUK's staff has been apparent. Nicola and colleagues have worked incredibly hard, and I am sure you join me in thanking them for all they have done, and all they continue to do. I think especially of the spending review last November, the ongoing work on the Higher Education and Research Bill, the focus on international issues by the International Unit – now UUK International; and of course the issues before and after the referendum on membership of the European Union.

But let us come back to the last few months and reflect on where we are, and where we are going.

We have a new prime minister leading a government with many new faces around the Cabinet table and new departments. And we, as a sector, find ourselves now with not one,

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but two, government departments working with us on a daily basis. We very much welcome the appointments of Justine Greening as Secretary of State for Education and Greg Clark as Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and we are very pleased that Jo Johnson continues with us as Minister for Universities and Science – albeit with the new challenge of working across the two departments.

The outcome of the EU referendum was not the result that our institutions wanted and many of us worked hard for Remain. We should be proud of our efforts, especially the way we worked with students' unions to get more young people onto the electoral register and out to vote. Having campaigned hard for a remain vote myself, and as vice-chancellor of the University of Kent, the UK's European university, I know the shock and disappointment so many people felt at the outcome.

A sleep-deprived UUK Board on the morning of the 24th of June attempted to understand what it all meant for universities whilst still feeling very raw about the result. We attempted to juxtapose the big issues for the country and for universities against the deluge of emails each of us was receiving from our colleagues and our students cataloguing their personal fears and their concerns about what the decision meant for them and their future living, working and studying in the UK. We were very grateful that Jo Johnson was able to meet with us that morning as planned and that he acted so proactively around the Student Loans Company issues and around EU research funding.

We have accepted the result and we want to work constructively with the government to support the best possible outcome for the UK during the negotiations and beyond.

However, our views will be centred on the understandable anxiety among the 125,000 EU students and the 43,000 EU staff in our universities. We understand that answers are unlikely to be quick or easy as there are complex political issues at play, but clarity is

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needed right now – for our staff as they consider whether to stay in the UK; for our current students who are anxious about what it means for their place here; for and prospective students as they consider entry in 2017.

Before I move on to the main substance of my speech, there is one urgent matter I need to highlight. We are facing an immediate challenge which we need urgent Government support to address. We need to be able to let prospective EU students know now that they will pay the same fees and have access to the same financial support arrangements for the duration of their courses. The problem is not the period when the UK is still within, the EU, when current rules will continue to apply, but what can be said now about courses which continue post exiting the EU.

Put simply, universities are currently unable to answer two crucial questions that are being frequently asked by prospective EU students considering whether to apply for to start courses in the UK in autumn 2017. What fees will you charge for any years of my course which are post the date of exit? Will I be able to access any financial support?

This issue could be addressed by Government through transitional legal arrangements for EU students starting courses in from 2016, 2017 and 2018.

This issue is urgent. UCAS applications opened yesterday for the 2017-18 intake and EU students are almost twice as likely as UK students to apply very early for those courses with October deadlines. I urge Government to take swift and positive action to address uncertainty, prevent a likely sudden decline in EU student applications and provide much needed reassurance to prospective EU students and universities across the UK.

Now let me move back to the main substance of my speech and focus on how we address the challenges and create opportunities in a post-Brexit world.

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The UK university sector in 2016 is innovative, entrepreneurial and responsive to the needs of students and society. This is in large part thanks to the autonomy of the sector, something Universities UK is fighting hard to preserve during the passage of the Higher Education and Research Bill. The strength, diversity – and crucially the autonomy – of the sector means we are well-placed to identify and create opportunities as we plan for life outside the EU.

In planning for life outside the EU we, like the government, have a vision of a strong post-Brexit Britain with a thriving economy and a fairer society. The vote to leave the EU poses significant challenges for universities that we need to address, however we believe that British universities can thrive post-exit with the right support from government.

I ask that the prime minister and her government take positive steps to create the conditions for the university sector to contribute most fully to the UK's economic success and global influence – both inside and outside the EU.

I therefore ask that the UK government supports us on four key issues:

- i. Firstly, enhancing international research collaboration, with partners both in Europe and across the globe
- ii. Secondly, developing policies to enhance the UK as an attractive destination for international students and staff – including immigration policy reforms
- iii. Thirdly, growing global opportunities for UK students and staff by enhancing mobility programmes
- iv. And finally, increasing public investment in research and innovation.

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Together, these will benefit the UK economy – and society more generally – and enable the UK to play a leading role internationally.

The UK university system is well respected around the world. We must therefore use this position to rebuild trust in the UK as a place to invest, a place to create jobs and a place to create international partnerships. Universities support the UK's soft power and global partnerships – many leading international figures are alumni of British universities and our universities are globally connected with businesses, governments, research partners and other universities worldwide.

From Cornwall in the south to the Highlands and Islands in the north, and all points in between, UUK member institutions are ideally placed to make a positive contribution to the government's new industrial strategy – creating jobs, driving innovation, supporting business growth. Universities contribute nearly 3% of UK GDP, and generate more than three-quarters-of-a-million full-time jobs. Put another way, if all universities in the UK were based in the same city, it would be the fifth largest city economy in the country.

A huge part of this is the extent and value of our collaborations with businesses and other partners, big and small. Last year the total value of knowledge exchange interaction between UK universities and their partners across the economy increased by over 6 per cent, to £4.2 billion. We lead the world in terms of return on investment from commercialisation of research and match the USA in our level of engagement with industry.

But this isn't all about growth in the abstract. It is about all universities do to help create new jobs and new businesses in communities up and down the country. Last year alone there were over 4,100 new start-ups founded by UK graduates, many of which were nurtured by our universities.

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We also have a vital role to play in the government's new export strategy – fundamental to a successful economy at any time, but now more than ever as we look towards life outside the EU. At last count, the UK higher education sector generated nearly £11 billion a year in export earnings. And every university plays a part in this. Here in the East Midlands higher education export earnings exceed £600 million a year, and the international students welcomed in this region contribute almost £300 million in off-campus spend alone, generating almost 3,000 jobs for the region.

As university leaders we must continue to be loud and consistent voices in championing internationalism and promoting the UK as *the* most welcoming destination for talented people from across the world. We urge political leaders to stand alongside us in this endeavour.

We must redouble our efforts to promote the values – of diversity, tolerance and freedom of speech – that make British universities the envy of the world. We are best when we are outward looking, globally networked and welcoming to the world. We want to play a role in working with international counterparts to address the great global challenges of our age, to seek out and work with the best minds wherever they are.

As such, we make no apologies for continuing to make the strong case for a government-backed campaign to promote the UK's world-class higher education sector across the globe, accompanied by a visa regime that makes clear that international students and staff are welcome and make a highly valued contribution to the British economy and society. If Britain is to meet the government's own target of increasing total education exports to £30 billion by 2020, it needs a new approach to immigration that is proportionate and welcoming to genuine international students.

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International (non-EU) students already make a £7 billion contribution to the economy, generating almost 137,000 jobs in every region of the country. International students enrich campuses both academically and culturally. Many return home having forged strong professional and personal links that provide long-term, soft-power benefits for Britain.

Polling consistently shows that the British public regards international students as valuable, temporary visitors. They come, study for a period, and then the overwhelming majority go home.

Reform of the immigration system is long overdue, to recognise the value of international students as temporary visitors and to remove unnecessary barriers for highly-skilled international staff wanting to work at UK universities.

I now want to return to two important domestic policy issues – social mobility and the Higher Education and Research Bill.

Our new prime minister and our new secretary of state for education lost no time in making social mobility and improved life chances for all a key ambition for the remainder of this parliament. An ambition that I wholeheartedly support. In 2015, young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in England were 65% more likely to enter higher education than they were 10 years ago. As a sector we should celebrate this progress – while recognising that there is still more to do.

I am proud that the work of Universities UK will be contributing to this hugely important issue by analysing current policies and practices, and developing a set of recommendations that seek to ensure that the chance to benefit from a university education – whether as a full-time student, an adult learner or a degree apprentice – is not limited by where you come from, or what your background is.

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The Social Mobility Advisory Group – led by Nicola Dandridge and drawing on expertise from universities, business and schools – will report this autumn on how universities can improve access and long-term success for underrepresented groups. It will offer a fresh perspective on how we can make smarter and better use of data and evidence; how businesses large and small can recruit the best talent irrespective of a graduate's background; and how we can learn from best practice from across the sector.

And so, finally, to the Higher Education and Research Bill, which is being scrutinised by MPs as I speak.

In the sea of change, the fact that the bill continues on its course – captained by the same, able minister in Jo Johnson – is reassuring and demonstrates that government is getting back to business as normal.

Universities UK did not join the call to delay the bill in spite of the array of changes for the sector, but we will be doing our utmost to protect the unique features of our universities: their outstanding teaching and their world-leading research. And where we will be calling for things to be slower, more measured, and evidence-based, is with the introduction of future iterations of the Teaching Excellence Framework to ensure this adds real value for students and the sector.

Over the coming months UUK will be continuing to support the broad aims of the bill in terms of the necessary reforms to higher education regulation. But at the same time, we will continue to raise concerns about those provisions in the bill which could negatively impact students and the value of their degree; which undermine confidence in universities across the UK as a whole; and which diminish the flexibility and autonomy on which the world-class reputation of the sector is built.

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As we look towards the future, we will meet both the challenges and the opportunities that lie ahead from a position of strength and resilience, with determination and creativity. Many of our universities have withstood changes far greater and periods of uncertainty far longer than that which we are currently experiencing. And they have emerged on the other side stronger, reinvigorated and with a clear sense of purpose.

So colleagues may I reiterate my thanks to you, and I look forward to discussing the challenges and opportunities we face with you during conference and over the coming year.

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