

SECURING AN EFFECTIVE POST-BREXIT SETTLEMENT FOR UK UNIVERSITIES

Asks of the future UK-EU
relationship in higher education
and research



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Introduction

This briefing sets out how the government can secure an effective post-Brexit settlement where universities can maximise their contribution to a globally-successful UK. Putting universities at the heart of any post-Brexit settlement will help create opportunities for trade, build networks and partnerships and create opportunities to expand academic cooperation, collaboration and exchange between the UK and its EU and non-EU partners.

Opportunities and risks of the Withdrawal Agreement

Universities UK has been explicit that a 'no deal' exit from the EU would be bad for our students, researchers and 136 member universities. A briefing on our 'no deal' asks is also available [here](#).

The terms of the Withdrawal Agreement provide some certainty to universities as the implementation period until 31 December 2020 would ensure they could continue to take part in European programmes such as Erasmus+ and Horizon 2020, and recruit EU staff and students with minimal barriers.

However, in the event that the Withdrawal Agreement is passed by parliament, other crucial questions remain and it is vital any incoming government takes action to support universities' ability to help create a successful, dynamic and internationally competitive post-exit UK.

Without the government taking action, there are risks that:

- the UK higher education sector's reputation as a collaborator of choice in vital research will be weakened
- access to key funding mechanisms to support research excellence will be lost
- the UK will slip further behind competitors in sending students abroad as part of their degree
- the UK will lose out on academic talent from the EU
- universities will experience sudden, steep declines in EU student enrolments
- universities' activity to drive local growth and generate jobs will be hampered

To ensure that our universities can maximise their contribution to a successful, post-Brexit UK, the right support is needed from the government to address these concerns. In a 'deal' scenario, this means taking action through a post-Brexit transition period and beyond.

TO SECURE AN EFFECTIVE POST-BREXIT SETTLEMENT FOR UK UNIVERSITIES, AN INCOMING GOVERNMENT MUST:

Build an immigration system that supports universities' ability to attract EU and global talent with minimal barriers. This includes:

- Reaching agreement with the EU on specific mobility arrangements for EU students and staff undertaking study, teaching or research in the UK higher education and research sector.
- Introducing a UK-EU Youth Mobility scheme with more favourable terms than existing Tier 5 Youth mobility arrangements.
- Ensuring sufficient lead-in times before any substantive changes are made to immigration routes affecting university students and staff.

Enhance support for universities' international research collaboration, innovation and efforts to boost local growth. This includes:

- Securing agreement with the EU on full associated country status for the UK in Horizon Europe.
- Creating domestic replacement mechanisms to Horizon Europe ready to go live in a scenario where an agreement on UK association is not in place by January 2021. This includes replacement mechanisms for the European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions.
- Continuing to engage in key EU research and innovation policy and strategy forums, including the European Research Area and the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructures.
- Ensuring that the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the proposed replacement for the European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF), provides equivalent funding for research and innovation activity to drive local growth and mirrors the devolved structure of ESIF.

Provide greater support to facilitate outward student mobility and minimise the risk of any disruption to study abroad opportunities. This includes:

- Securing agreement with the EU on full association to the next Erasmus+ programme, starting in 2021.
- Creating a fully-funded longer-term domestic replacement scheme to Erasmus+ which is ready to go in the event that an agreement on UK involvement in Erasmus+ is delayed or not reached by January 2021. This scheme must: be open to universities across the whole UK; be ambitious and flexible with a focus on delivering student exchanges and cooperative projects with partners in Europe and beyond, and provide students with grants, a continuation of fee waivers and tuition fee top-ups for universities, aligning with the Erasmus+ scheme as far as possible.

Ensure the UK remains open and welcoming to students from across Europe. This includes:

- Agreeing to fund scholarships for EU students as is the case for non-EU students already, and opening up more studentships to EU students coming to do PhDs.
- Confirming the fee and loan status of EU students starting a course from 2021/22, ensuring sufficient lead-in times before any substantive changes are made.
- Securing agreement with the EU that the professional qualifications currently recognised under the EU Directive (Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications) would continue to be mutually recognised across the EU.

Maximise international opportunities for universities providing education overseas ('transnational education'). This includes:

- Ensuring any future agreement with the EU on services provision supports further growth of UK universities' ability to provide transnational education across Europe.