DELEGATION TO SWITZERLAND
INFORMATION NOTE
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Action:
For information

Audience:
Pro-Vice-Chancellors International; Heads of Study Abroad/Research Offices; Heads of International; International/Europe Officers; Partnership Managers
From 19-21 February 2017, a delegation of three UK university Vice-Chancellors, representatives from the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), Universities UK (UUK) and Universities UK International (UUKi) travelled to Bern and Zurich. During the visit, UK representatives met with Swiss universities, the National Rectors’ Conference (Swissuniversities), the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI), the National Agency for Mobility (Movetia), the Swiss National Science Foundation, the National Students’ Union, a Member of Parliament and the National Contact Point for research (EUResearch). In addition, the group dined with the British Ambassador to Switzerland and Liechtenstein, HMA David Moran, and other guests at the Ambassador’s residence in Bern.

The delegation’s objectives were to learn about Swiss stakeholders’ experience of having their status in Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ downgraded in 2014, how they set up national replacement schemes and their approach to negotiating with the European Commission. It was also an opportunity to discuss ways in which the Swiss and the UK sectors could work together during the UK-EU exit negotiations.

The delegation was organised by the Science and Innovation Network lead at the British Embassy in Bern, Swissuniversities and UUKi.

This report provides a summary of meetings throughout the delegation and indication of future UUKi activity.
## UK DELEGATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professor Paul Boyle</strong></td>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>University of Leicester</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Professor Gerry McCormac</strong></td>
<td>Principal &amp; Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>University of Stirling</td>
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<td><strong>Professor Colin Riordan</strong></td>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>Cardiff University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joanna Huddleston</td>
<td>Head of Horizon 2020 Policy and Strategy</td>
<td>Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela Wilkinson</td>
<td>Head, European Education Policy</td>
<td>Department for Education</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Dr Lutz-Peter Berg</strong></td>
<td>Head of Science and Innovation</td>
<td>Embassy of Switzerland in the United Kingdom</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vivienne Stern</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Universities UK International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter Mason</td>
<td>Policy Manager – European Research and Innovation</td>
<td>Universities UK International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan Hurley</td>
<td>Programme Manager</td>
<td>Universities UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stephanie Kleynhans</strong></td>
<td>Policy Officer, Europe</td>
<td>Universities UK International</td>
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CONTEXT:
HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

1. The Swiss higher education system is made up of three kinds of institutions – universities, universities of applied science and universities of teacher education. There are 12 universities as recognised by the Higher Education Funding and Coordination Act, nine universities of applied sciences (UAS) and seventeen universities of teacher education (UTE).

Universities

2. In 2013–14, over 140,000 people were studying at the 12 universities. Of these 12 universities, two are federal institutes of technology and their main courses and research activities relate to science, engineering, mathematics and architecture. The other 10 universities offer degree programmes in a wide range of disciplines and half of them also have a faculty of medicine.

UAS

3. In 2013–2014, around 70,000 students were enrolled at the nine UAS. The original seven regional public UAS were set up in the mid-1990s. In 2005 and 2008, two private UAS were approved by the Federal Council. The most common qualification held by prospective UAS students is a vocational baccalaureate. At the crossroads between practical training and academic knowledge, UAS play an important role as drivers of innovation. Research activities account for over 20% of total UAS operating costs.

UTE

4. In 2013–14, there were around 12,000 students enrolled in UTE. They were created in 2001 from former teacher training colleges. They are based on the same principle as UAS: the syllabus places emphasis on both practical training and applied research. UTE also offer continuing education and training courses and provide services to third parties.

SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

5 The traditional distribution of private and public sector roles has meant that fundamental research has mainly been the preserve of universities. Applied research and close-to-market innovation have mainly been driven by the private sector and the UAS.

Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

6 The SNSF is the most important public research funding institution in Switzerland. The SNSF does not conduct its own research but rather has a federal mandate to provide funding for non-profit research projects both in and outside the higher education sector. Within the context of its public service agreement with the Federal Administration, the SNSF mainly funds fundamental research across the disciplinary spectrum. Its grant-funding programmes are also specifically intended to foster the development of junior researchers to feed the academic pipeline.

Swiss involvement in EU research programmes

7 Switzerland participates in several large-scale multilateral international research cooperation programmes. The most significant is Horizon 2020, the current EU research and innovation programme to which it is an associate country. It also participates in programmes such as CERN, the European Space Agency (ESA), the Europe-wide network for cross-border cooperation in market-driven industrial research and development (EUREKA), and European Cooperation in Science and Technology (COST), as well as bilateral research cooperation with selected priority countries.

8 Between 2004 and 2014, Switzerland had ‘full associate country’ status in EU Framework Programmes. This status to certain non-EU countries that have reached an association agreement with the EU grants access to the entire framework programme in return for a financial contribution to the budget based on their GDP. They are also represented in scientific programming committees and working groups, although they have no role in the political development of the programme, which is restricted to EU Member States. Currently 16 countries are associated to Horizon 2020, including Switzerland. While it held full associate status in EU Framework Programmes, Switzerland was a net beneficiary of EU research and innovation funding. The EU-Switzerland bilateral agreement through which Switzerland could participate in the EU Framework Programmes was linked to other EU-Switzerland agreements through a so-called ‘guillotine clause’, meaning that if one agreement was broken, all would cease to apply.
On 9 February 2014, a referendum was held in Switzerland on a proposal to limit immigration. The motion was carried, with 50.3% of voters supporting the proposal on a turnout of 56.6%. On 15 February 2014, the Swiss Government took the first concrete step in response to the result and refused to ratify a protocol to the EU-Switzerland bilateral agreement on free movement of people to extend this to Croatian citizens (the ‘Croatian protocol’).

Subsequently, on 26 February 2014, the European Commission invoked the ‘guillotine clause’ in the original treaties by relegating Switzerland to third country status across all strands of Horizon 2020. The negotiations on Swiss association to Erasmus+ were also suspended and the Commission confirmed their suspension of programme country status under the Erasmus+ programme.

The SNSF immediately established a Temporary Backup Scheme to replace access to European Research Council (ERC) grants. This involved replicating the entire ERC process for the 2014 starter and consolidator grant calls, from application to assessment and award stage. These awards were entirely funded by the SNSF. To mitigate their Erasmus+ suspension, the Swiss worked quickly to establish an interim replacement for participation in Key Action One (incoming and outgoing mobility). The interim solution was named the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP) and it facilitates movement through numerous bilateral agreements between Swiss institutions and counterparts across Europe.

On 15 September 2014, Switzerland negotiated a temporary ‘partial association agreement’ to Horizon 2020, through which Swiss researchers could apply to certain parts of the programme (including the ERC and the ‘Excellent Science’ pillar) as full members but were still treated as third countries in collaborative research projects. This agreement was in place pending the ratification of the Croatian protocol and subject to no further restrictions to free movement of people being introduced by the Swiss Government, and was a unique and bespoke status negotiated between the Swiss Government and Commission officials.

On 16 December 2016, the Swiss Federal Council ratified the Protocol on the extension to Croatia of the Free Movement of Persons Agreement between the EU and Switzerland. They were able to ratify this despite the referendum result as they introduced a measure by which employers advertising for staff were able to advertise only within Switzerland to start with. If there were no suitably qualified Swiss candidates, employers would then advertise outside of Switzerland to the rest of the EU. This ensured those voting against mass immigration were satisfied, as were the EU as they were no longer discriminating against the free movement of Croatian citizens. Thus, as of 1 January 2017, Switzerland was once again fully associated to the whole of the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme, the Euratom Programme and activities carried out by Fusion for Energy. The Swiss will retain SEMP, their Erasmus+ replacement programme, until 2020.
MONDAY 20 FEBRUARY TO TUESDAY 21 FEBRUARY – SET OF MEETINGS THROUGHOUT BOTH DAYS

External Speakers

- Martina Weiss, Secretary-General, Swissuniversities
- Aude Pacton, Head of International Relations, Swissuniversities
- Christian Wasserfallen MP, National Council, Swiss Government
- Dr Peter Erni, Director, EUResearch, National Contact Point
- Ellen Krause, International Affairs, University of Bern
- Maddalena Tognola, Head of Grants Office, University of Bern
- Martina Carolus, SEMP/Erasmus Coordinator, University of Bern
- Josef Stocker, Co-President, National Students’ Union
- Bettina Ganz, Head of International Office, Zurich University of the Arts (ZHdK)
- Dr Martin Kern, Scientific Advisor, State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)
- Professor Dr Michael Hengartner, President, Swissuniversities
- Professor Philippe Moreillon, Professor of Department of Microbiology, University of Lausanne
- Gaétan Lagger, Deputy Head of International Cooperation in Education and Professional Qualifications (IBQ), SERI
- Frédéric Berthoud, Swiss Coordinator for the Recognition of Professional Qualifications, SERI
- Oliver Tschopp, Director, Movetia
- Amanda Crameri, Head of Higher Education Sector, Movetia
- Dr Angelika Kalt, Director, Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)
- Dr Jean-Luc Barras, Head of International Cooperation, SNSF
- Professor Dr Sarah Springman, Rector, ETH Zurich
- Christopher Niedermann, International Relations, Rector’s Office, ETH Zurich
- Angers Hagström, Director, ETH Global, ETH Zurich
- Sofia Karakostas, Co-Head of EU GrantsAccess, ETH Zurich
Summary

14 The two days consisted of presentations and question and answer sessions with the various Swiss representatives. They provided different perspectives on the referendum and what they had to do to mitigate the potential negative impact of the EU’s decision to suspend Swiss access to Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+.

15 There were several key learning points from Switzerland’s experience:

Negotiating with the European Commission

16 The European Commission’s negotiating position evolved over time. In September 2014, variable access to Horizon 2020 was agreed as part of the partial association deal after several months of negotiation. Prior to this, the Swiss had doubted whether such a deal would be possible given the Commission’s reluctance to divide the programme. Swiss research performs well against international competitors and the country is highly reliant on international collaboration, so it was reiterated to the delegates on several occasions that finding a deal for Horizon 2020 was of mutual benefit to both sides. The same is true for the UK, but ‘cherry picking’ the most favourable parts of the programme would not be an option for the UK.

Financial responsiveness

17 The Swiss financial deal with the European Commission, as with other associated countries, is to pay a contribution which is proportionate to its GDP. Currently with regards to EU research funding programmes, the Swiss receive more money back than they pay in so it is of great benefit to the Swiss to be involved in EU research programmes.

18 Funding for the TBS (to replace ERC grants) and fund third country participation in Horizon 2020 was committed rapidly. This was because the Swiss parliament had already granted and approved a budget for participation in EU research programmes. This money could easily then be transferred to their national scheme as it was already approved specifically for research.

Uncertainty

19 The Swiss delegates made clear to us over the two days that the most damaging problem was the uncertainty surrounding the Swiss position. Many researchers and institutions outside Switzerland were reluctant to include a Swiss partner in their research consortia until they knew for certain the interim systems would work. Moreover, researchers in Switzerland also delayed making funding application until it was clear whether the solutions worked. This is reflected in their participation rates as, despite their commitment to R&D funding and swift response to being frozen out, their participation rates in Horizon 2020 dropped dramatically:

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<tr>
<th>Relative Figures</th>
<th>FP7</th>
<th>Horizon 2020</th>
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<tr>
<td>Swiss project participations</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project funding</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss project coordinators</td>
<td>3.9%</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Swiss success rate</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
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Legal basis

20 An important technical note on the Swiss arrangement with the EU is that the legal link between free movement of people and association to EU research programmes is not set down in EU law; it exists due to the ‘guillotine clause’ that links Swiss-EU bilateral treaties. As demonstrated by Israeli association to Horizon 2020, there is no legal link between free movement of people and association to Horizon 2020.

Advice for the UK

21 If the UK were not able to gain association to FP9 in the future and decided to create a UK-led separate research collaboration system, some Swiss representatives warned that there would be several EU countries who would not be able to join due to political sensitivities.
Additionally, as a non-EU country, Switzerland do not have voting rights on any committees or groups where decisions are made on the future of the Framework Programmes. However, many decisions are debated and made before the issue and, on reflection, some representatives stated that they felt as though they were adequately consulted in other ways, despite not having actual voting rights. As a strong and well respected research nation, they were hopeful that the Commission would regularly consult them because of this.

**SEMP**

The Swiss Erasmus+ replacement scheme, SEMP, is doing relatively well and the numbers of Swiss staff and students studying abroad is steadily rising under the scheme. Similar to Horizon 2020, the Swiss government had already approved a budget for Erasmus+ prior to the referendum, which allowed SEMP mobilities to be fully funded. When the Swiss were suspended from the programme, the money already put aside was then transferred to SEMP. The money allocated for Erasmus+ association included other Key Actions besides mobility, but most of the money is now only being used for mobility. This is because the cost of mobility has dramatically risen now that the Swiss have committed to paying for both incoming and outgoing mobility. By comparison, under Erasmus+ they would only be paying for outgoing students.

Switzerland continues to have very limited access to Erasmus+ actions; under Key Action Two, the Swiss are able to take part in projects but cannot receive EU funding and there must be a specific ‘added value’ of having a Swiss participant in the project. They are unable to coordinate projects and do not count towards the minimum number of country participants needed to submit a proposal. In addition to this, the Swiss do not have access to Online Linguistic Support (OLS) and their students are excluded from certain Erasmus+ specific language courses. The main disadvantage from a governmental perspective is that the Swiss are no longer invited to expert groups that influence the way Erasmus+ is structured or improved, nor on the development of the successor programme. Switzerland has also lost visibility to students from other programme countries since it is no longer an Erasmus+ programme country, which has impacted on smaller, specialised institutions more so than the larger, internationally-renowned and recognised institutions. The branding and 30-year history the Erasmus name holds is impossible to recreate on a national level and the Swiss were specifically told they were not permitted to use Erasmus branding with SEMP.

In terms of the functioning and implementation of SEMP, an advantage for the Swiss in this situation was that for 15 years, the Swiss only held indirect participation to Erasmus where they did not receive any money from Brussels and funding for student and staff mobility came from the Swiss government. Therefore, when they were frozen out of Erasmus+ in 2014, institutions could resurrect older systems and the government were not starting from scratch with SEMP. Additionally, the paperwork and processes for SEMP have remained similar to Erasmus+ as the ultimate goal for the Swiss is to associate to Erasmus+ or its successor programme which, again, eliminated a lot of the work in creating a brand new scheme. Swiss institutions are unable to partner with institutions in Europe that do not hold an Erasmus Charter by way of ensuring quality assurance of partner institutions. Swiss institutions have to implement something incredibly similar to the Erasmus Charter so partner institutions are secure in the quality assurance. A students’ learning agreement is largely similar to the Erasmus version and the partnership agreements are as well.

The main advantage that the Swiss representatives made clear to the UK delegation was that their national scheme is considerably less administratively heavy than the Erasmus+ scheme. Whilst initially it was stressful for institutions to renegotiate and renew each individual partnership they had around Europe under Erasmus+ within a matter of weeks, the process has now been significantly streamlined and the Swiss are working on further improving this. This advantage came from both institutions and the government as they have also managed to significantly reduce the cost of running their National Agency.