



Universities Scotland briefing for Scottish Government Statement: Update on the Impact of Brexit on the Scottish Further and Higher Education Sectors

Summary

- There is much that is very positive and supportive in the Scottish Government's priorities and rhetoric around Brexit and higher education, including its pressure on the UK Government to rule out a 'no deal' Brexit and support for the mobility of talent and reform of immigration policy. We are pleased to be party to a joint statement with Scottish Government and other partners on Brexit issues (annex A) and we welcome the new Brexit Action Plan published on 13 March.

However, there are actions within its powers that the Scottish Government could take now to help mitigate the huge uncertainty and instability that Brexit has caused for higher education:

- We'd welcome an urgent decision on the fees status of EU student entrants to courses starting in 2020. We would like to see a decision taken that 2020 EU student entrants will be able to study on the same fee-free basis as Scottish-domiciled students.
- Assuming the UK does leave the EU, it may give the Scottish Government the capacity to make a different choice about the fees status of EU students from 2020 onwards. That decision is currently worth around £90 million per year to universities in teaching funding. We are looking for the Scottish Government to commit now to retaining this resource in the sector. Its withdrawal from higher education would be catastrophic.
- We believe a 'no-deal' Brexit should be avoided at all costs. However, there are a range of actions – some of them very urgent – that we want to see from the UK Government depending on whether the UK leaves with a negotiated deal or no-deal. They include urgent commitments to fund Advanced Grants from the European Research Council, extending the European Temporary Leave to Remain (ETLr) to cover the duration of an undergraduate degree in Scotland and longer-term a reformed approach to immigration.

Actions for the UK Government

Universities Scotland has common cause with the Scottish Government in pressing the UK Government for a range of Brexit outcomes. These include:

Mobility of talent

Maintaining the maximum openness of Scottish universities to EU staff talent: currently 4,500 EU staff contribute their talents to Scottish higher education.

Maintaining the maximum openness of Scottish universities to EU student talent: currently we are proud to host over 16,500 EU students, at all levels of study, in Scottish higher education institutions.

Enabling Scottish students to benefit from experience in the EU through continued participation in Erasmus+.



Arguing for an immigration regime that supports our priorities, including:

- Straightforward cost-free entitlement of existing EU staff and their families to live and work in the UK with undiminished rights;
- Unrestricted ability to recruit new talent from the EU;
- Attraction of talented staff e.g. lab technicians, language tutors and creative professionals who could have difficulty meeting the Migration Advisory Committee's recommendation for a £30k minimum threshold for 'high skills' entitlement to work in the UK;
- In the event of a 'no deal' Brexit, a European Temporary Leave to Remain (ETLr) that lasts for the whole duration of a degree, not just the 3 years proposed by UK Government. Or, at the very least, that EU students could have a guaranteed transition onto a Tier 4 visa, after the three year entitlement expires, at no cost to themselves;
- The capacity for graduates to stay in Scotland and contribute to our economy in skilled employment;
- Access to public services e.g. the NHS and schools for the EU citizens we welcome to Scotland.

Continued close research partnerships with the EU

EU funding sources contribute just over £100 million to Scotland's research excellence every year¹ and, even more importantly, sustain rich partnerships and networks of discovery.

We look for continued participation in these networks through the new Horizon Europe programme's support for collaborative research and innovation. We also look for government investment in research to replace Horizon Europe single-beneficiary funding streams that, as a non-EU country, we may not be entitled to benefit from.

Advanced Grants from the European Research Council

- We also look to the UK Government to take urgent steps to prevent the UK from losing out on tens of millions of pounds worth of Advanced Grants from the European Research Council within days of a no-deal Brexit.
- Grant applicants will find out on 8 April if they have been successful for the prestigious grants which support life-changing and high-impact research projects.
- The UK was the most successful country in the last round of ERC Advanced Grants, with 66 applicants winning up to 2.5 million Euros each – a total of €155 million.
- We want the UK Government to commit, as a minimum, that all 'successful' applicants receive funding, regardless of whether the UK leaves the EU with a deal or not.

Regulation

We seek close regulatory alignment with the EU e.g. so that professional qualifications obtained at Scottish universities are recognised across the EU, so that for instance graduates can practice as doctors or architects on the basis of their Scottish qualifications.

¹ HESA Finance 2016-17 Table 7



Actions for the Scottish Government

The joint statement with Scottish Government includes the following commitment:

‘Through the full use of its devolved powers, the Scottish Government will do all it can to address the risks of Brexit, supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of Scotland’s tertiary system. This will include the attraction of students from the EU, enriching the experience of all students, and supporting our economy, public services and culture’.

We are looking to the Scottish Government to give urgent effect to this commitment in two ways.

Fees status of EU student entrants to courses starting in 2020

- Universities have already published prospectuses for entry to courses starting in autumn 2020, but are unable to give EU students clarity about their fees status. The Scottish Government has the devolved responsibility for deciding whether 2020 EU student entrants should be able to study on the current fees basis, which is the same as Scottish-domiciled students, including fee-free full-time undergraduate education.
- 2020 entrants were intended to come within the post-Brexit transition period in which case they would have the same rights as Scottish-domiciled students, but Scottish Government deferred a decision on their fees status because of the prospect of a ‘no deal’ Brexit.
- As a consequence of the UK Parliament ruling out a ‘no deal’ Brexit (assuming that is how the vote goes in Westminster on 13 March) we believe the Scottish Government should make a decision now that 2020 EU student entrants will be able to study on the same fee (or fee-free) basis as Scottish-domiciled students.
- This would be consistent with the Scottish Government’s Scotland's Place in Europe emphasis on openness to talent from the EU. It will also give higher education institutions some ability to plan provision: a range of courses particularly in STEM subjects are highly dependent on EU student recruitment and the sudden collapse of EU student recruitment caused by a move to international fees status for 2020 entrants would endanger provision.

Retention within higher education of the resources currently supporting EU students

- Beyond 2020, we recognise that Brexit (if it happens) may take a form which gives the Scottish Government the capacity to make a different choice about the fees status of EU students – unless a future treaty arrangement for a close relationship with the EU includes reciprocal rights for students.
- Currently, around £90 million per year of teaching funding supports EU students.
- This supports educational provision, a high quality student experience, and employment across the higher education sector. Its withdrawal from higher education would be catastrophic.
- We are looking for the Scottish Government to **commit now to retaining this resource** in the sector even if Brexit takes a form in which Scottish and EU students no longer have their current reciprocal rights to equal treatment.



- We note that the Commissioner for Fair Access has already identified the need to retain these resources in the sector to enable continued progress on widening access².
- Retaining these resources also gives the Scottish Government some capacity to address the sharp decline in university funding since 2014/15 and way this is compromising higher education's contribution to Scotland's success: **SPICE estimate that SFC revenue funding for universities is now £127.6m less per year in real terms than it was in 2014/15³.**
- We are looking for discussion with Scottish Government about how the resources currently supporting EU students could best be re-purposed – if that is enabled in our future relationship with the EU – in ways that support the sector's contribution to Scotland's success, enable wide access to higher education, and enable a continued attraction of EU student talent through higher education and into high-skills employment.

ENDS

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Note: November 2019 LEAVING THE EUROPEAN UNION: JOINT STATEMENT by SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT, COLLEGES SCOTLAND, UNIVERSITIES SCOTLAND, NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS SCOTLAND, UNISON, EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND, UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE UNION and ROYAL SOCIETY OF EDINBURGH

- Scotland's story, and especially that of our universities, has been shaped by our close relationship with Europe. The UK's expected departure from the European Union (EU) raises major issues and risks for our colleges and universities as well as for their staff and students. We will work together to do everything we can to safeguard and continue to strengthen Scotland's relationship with the rest of Europe.
- We are proud that, to date, Scotland has been a destination of choice for staff and students from around the globe. EU nationals – whether students, researchers, lecturers or other staff – continue to be welcome at our universities and colleges. EU nationals add to the diversity of our communities, enrich the learning experience, promote international collaboration and networks, boost the quality of our research, support knowledge exchange, and contribute to local businesses and jobs.
- We welcome opportunities for Scottish-based students to study abroad and for international students to study in Scotland, particularly through Erasmus+ which is particularly important to students and others who would not otherwise be able to access such opportunities. We recognise that student mobility improves academic attainment, enhances the learning experience and increases employability, as well as promotes Scotland as a learning nation globally. We seek clarity from the UK Government on their detailed plans for implementing the guarantee in respect of Erasmus+ in the event of No Deal, and on their commitment on future participation.

² <https://www.gov.scot/publications/laying-foundations-fair-access-annual-report-2017-commissioner-fair-access/>
³ https://www.parliament.scot/S5_Education/Meeting%20Papers/20190116ES_Meeting_papers.pdf, table 2b



- We want EU nationals living, working and studying in Scotland to feel settled and secure. We will therefore continue to encourage the UK Government to provide an early guarantee of the rights of EU nationals already working and studying in Scotland or entering the UK in future to do so. We also call on the UK Government to introduce a post study work route in Scotland to enable our universities and colleges to continue to attract and retain talent from across the world.
- Scotland's research is widely recognised as amongst the best in the world and is underpinned by collaborations which have helped secure significant funding from European research programmes. We will work together to support Scottish universities in building on their existing relationships to continue to collaborate with a wide range of European partners. We call on the UK Government to make clear how the guarantee in the event of No Deal will be implemented for Horizon 2020 in practice and seek clarity on how the UK Government will enable the UK to fully participate in Horizon Europe.
- Through the full use of its devolved powers, the Scottish Government will do all it can to address the risks of Brexit, supporting the sustainability and competitiveness of Scotland's tertiary system. This will include the attraction of students from the EU, enriching the experience of all students, and supporting our economy, public services and culture.
- We will work together using our collective influence in Europe and beyond to ensure it is widely understood that Scotland's universities and colleges remain open and welcoming to EU staff and students, and will do our utmost to continue to collaborate with our European partners.

