

SCOTLAND'S HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: KEY ISSUES RELATING TO THE UK'S WITHDRAWAL FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Scottish Government is justifiably proud that our world-class universities attract students, staff and researchers from around the globe, including from across Europe. We recognise that the European Union (EU) has delivered a wide range of social, economic and cultural benefits for students, staff and the wider communities they chose to make their home.

It remains the case that the Scottish Government wishes to work with its partners and stakeholders in a collaborative way to face the challenges ahead as the UK Government agrees its approach to leaving the EU. The Brexit Forum on Universities is being established as a key part of that on-going dialogue to provide an opportunity to consider collectively how we can ensure our universities¹, their staff and students continue to thrive in the context of the UK's withdrawal from the EU.

This overview paper provides a summary of issues and objectives in this context as a starting point for the Brexit Forum on Universities. It does not explore the range of possible scenarios, nor the actions required to manage risks and mitigate adverse impacts. However, these topics may all be subject to discussion by the Forum.

EU students and staff in Scotland and their migration status

We have already made clear that EU nationals, including staff and students of our universities, are welcome in Scotland and have confirmed that eligible EU students already studying in Scotland or commencing their studies in academic year 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 will still be able to benefit from free tuition fees for the duration of their course, with those who meet the residency requirement able to receive associated living cost support.

We want to now work with our key stakeholders including those represented at the Forum to continue to ensure that this message is widely understood both here and across the EU.

This includes working to provide early clarity on the funding and support arrangements for EU students starting their courses in Scotland in 2020 and beyond and working together to encourage the UK Government to provide certainty on the immigration status and rights of EU nationals coming to Scotland after the UK leaves the EU.

Opportunities for Scottish domiciled students to study in the rest of the EU

We also recognise that opportunities for Scottish students to study abroad are extremely beneficial and welcome the UK Governments confirmation that it will underwrite grant agreements for Erasmus Plus signed while the UK is still in the EU even if payments continue beyond the point of EU exit.

¹ In this context, "universities" applies to all Higher Education Institutions

Our shared preference is to continue to participate as a full member of Erasmus Plus for its broad educational, cultural and economic benefits for Scottish and European students.

In an effort to achieve this, we will collaborate with stakeholders to encourage the UK Government to make clear its intention to secure the fullest possible participation in the programme in the next Multiannual Financial Framework. We will also aim to secure improvements to the future Erasmus Plus programme to ensure it is more inclusive and fully accessible to all students, regardless of their background.

University research collaboration and funding

Scotland's university research is among the best in the world and is an active and valued partner in a large number of EU research collaborations. We welcome the UK Government's intention to continue to contribute to the annual EU budgets and to participate in the current programmes, including Horizon 2020, until December 2020.

We now want to ensure that Scotland is an active and influential participant in future framework programmes for research and innovation, including Horizon Europe.

In addition, we will work together to ensure Scotland's universities continue to access the EU research facilities and infrastructure they need to support collaboration and will seek continued close collaboration in research networks whose membership is wider than the EU, such as CERN, the European Space Agency and the European Southern Observatory.

Finally, we will continue to work together using our collective influence across the EU to ensure that it is widely understood that universities in Scotland remain committed to collaborating with our European partners in conducting world-class research.

Structural funds

Current Programmes

Scotland has participated in ETC Programmes (also known as Interreg) for more than 20 years to provide strong foundations for European collaboration and cooperation. Higher education institutions are strong and valued partners in ETC projects, and are the biggest recipients of ERDF awards (31%). To date, 14 higher education institutions have participated in 43 ETC projects.

The commitment in the draft legal text on the Withdrawal Agreement published March 2018 that the UK will continue to participate in the EU's Multi-annual Financial Framework until 2020, as set out in December's joint report, is welcome

Should, the Withdrawal Agreement be agreed in full, Scotland will continue to benefit from programmes and funding covered by the Multi-annual Financial Framework as it would if the UK continued to be a Member State.

In line with the Joint Report, both the UK and the EU stated that both parties would favourably explore participation in ETC programmes. Within our regular and direct

dialogue with the UKG, we continue to highlight the unique benefits that ETC funding brings to Scotland, and stress the negative impact that any loss of future opportunity would bring to Scottish partner organisations and their target beneficiaries. We continue to pursue UKG to provide a commitment that enables Scotland both the opportunity and the funding for future participation in ETC programmes post EU-exit.

Conclusions

We recognise the challenges ahead as the UK moves towards leaving the EU. However, we also recognise the high degree of consensus between the Scottish Government and key stakeholders on the key issues that the sector faces and a willingness to work together to ensure the best outcomes.

**Higher Education and Science Division, Scottish Government
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