


<p><b>What does Brexit mean for Scottish Science and Research?</b></p> <p><b>The impact on the University of the Highlands and Islands</b></p>	 <p>University of the Highlands and Islands Oilthigh na Gàidhealtachd agus nan Eilean</p>
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**A. Is the Brexit referendum result having an effect on UHI already?**

- Over the last twenty years, EU engagement has been at the heart of the University of the Highlands and Islands and has made a significant contribution to the achievement of university title, through the investment of EU structural funds in our research capacity, estates, IT connectivity and course provision.
- We've also been involved in many EU transnational funding programmes, particularly through the INTERREG programmes for inter-regional cooperation (eg Northern Periphery & Arctic, Cross Border with Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland), Horizon 2020 (and previous Research Framework Programmes) and Erasmus+ (student and staff exchanges and joint development work).
- Many of our Academic Partner collaborations date back over many decades.
- These initiatives have had a strong influence on our development – certainly for the investment of additional funding – but also for the lessons learnt through project work and collaboration with European partners.
- Our university's research capacity has been a fundamental part of our EU engagement, providing a critical additional resource for economic development in the Highlands & Islands through the financial investment (new buildings, laboratories, equipment, researchers, students and support staff) as well as the invaluable experience of working with researchers at other EU universities. This investment has made a real difference, particularly in the key sectors of life sciences, renewable energy and the creative industries.
- SO – anything that affects this will have an impact on our strategic planning – Brexit IS a major factor.

**B. Can you give one or two examples of programmes/research projects which are already being affected – what's happening to them?**

- The implications of the UK Referendum decision in June 2016 to cease membership of the EU are immense, leading to uncertainty for all organisations involved in EU engagement and project delivery.
- Our university is doubly affected, due to the impact on the Higher Education sector *and* the impact on the Highlands and Islands as a Transition Region (lagging behind the EU average GDP).
- There are 3 key factors which impact our research, innovation and science:
  - i. **Regional Economic Development** – the loss of European Structural Funds after Brexit will cut a proposed £19m from funding for additional student places, student support and course development to meet regional skills gaps, including funding for new PhD places in key growth sectors. Further PhD places had also been planned in life sciences and renewables in collaboration with the Queens Universities and the University of Ulster in Northern Ireland and partners in the Republic of Ireland with INTERREG funding, which are now under threat. All of these additional PhD places in regional priorities would have helped to secure critical mass in research areas across the university network, from Shetland to Argyll, making a significant difference to the research and scientific base in the Highlands and Islands.
  - ii. **International students and staff** – We have always been an outward looking, international institution – and the contribution made by research students and staff from other EU member states has been an important aspect of this. Many of our students have benefitted from the ERASMUS+ programme which funds periods of study abroad. We need more re-assurance going forward on the situation for our EU students and staff.
  - iii. **Horizon 2020** - loss of opportunity for our research community to participate in the main EU research programme will curtail key development areas, including marine energy and life sciences.

Let me give you a specific example - our MERIKA project in Marine Energy Research which involves researchers at the Scottish Association for Marine Science at Dunstaffnage, the Environmental Research Institute in Thurso and at Lews Castle College on Stornoway.

It was funded by the EU 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme's Regions of Potential initiative, aimed specifically at building up research excellence in disadvantaged regions to enable involvement in future Horizon 2020 projects and runs from 2014-17.

MERIKA built on the foundation of our research capacity in marine energy over many years of Structural Funds investment in facilities, equipment, researchers and students, now developing a reference research and innovation hub for Europe on the theme of marine energy – a key sector not only for the Highlands and Islands, but for the whole of Scotland. It was one of the biggest awards to any single UK institution from the 7<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme.

Plans were well underway for a major follow-on application for Horizon 2020 funding, collaborating with some of the best universities involved in marine energy research in Europe; Brexit has now thrown these plans into disarray.

All Scottish universities are reporting that prospective EU partners for Horizon 2020 projects are showing reluctance in engaging with them, as they are concerned about what happens to the contract once the UK leaves the EU. We have at least one case where we were told that we could no longer be in the partnership, as the Lead Partner's institution had taken a policy decision not to work with UK partners until there was further clarity on future arrangements.

**C. What do you need to know, and from which government, about the future?**

- From the UK Government, we need assurances that funding for the world class research done by our universities will not be cut AND that a mechanism for collaborating with researchers in EU universities will be secured.
- From the Scottish Government, we need assurances that future support for regional economic development will recognise the specific challenges of distance, geography, remoteness and sparsity of population that we face in the Highlands and Islands – ensuring that we avoid a return to the fragile economic status that held the region back up until the 1990s..
- Along with the rest of the Higher Education sector in Scotland and the UK, we are putting the case forward to Scottish and UK Governments about the threats to research and science posed by the loss of access to EU funding and collaboration, primarily through the Horizon 2020 Programme. We welcome the involvement of the university sector in the Scottish Government Standing Council and will take any opportunity to contribute to the new Forum.
- However, for the University of the Highlands and Islands, our principal, and most immediate, concern is in the EU Structural Funds for regional economic development. We have been able to focus investments on the development of a credible research base in the Highlands and Islands due to the EU policy of Territorial Cohesion – which aims to reduce disparities in regions which are lagging behind the EU average. There have been significant improvements in the region's economic and social well-being over recent years, which can be traced directly to Structural Funds investment – and the University of the Highlands and Islands has been a major factor in these improvements. However, many of our geographic challenges remain.

#### **D. Are you reassured about what's been said so far?**

- So far, we do not have sufficient reassurance on the way forward.
- Together with the rest of Scotland's universities, we are following the latest announcements very closely and one of the most immediate priorities is to look at funding for existing projects and those in the pipeline
- Some of the recent announcements from HM Treasury have given a degree of comfort – but we need more certainty.
- For example, with our major research projects involving PhD students. We can't start any of these projects until we know that the funding is 100% guaranteed for the full duration of the project – you can't fund half a PhD student and then tell them that unfortunately the money is no longer available – that's someone's career!

#### **E. Is the timescale of Brexit affecting your decision making?**

- EU funding has levered in ~£200m for our university network over the past 20 years. Planned European funding over the next 5 years would have increased this substantially.
- **For a new university, situated in one of the EU's Transition Regions, the potential impact of Brexit is considerable.**
- **It can and will affect our decision-making – together with the other key agencies in the Highlands and Islands.**
- **Our university – and our region – we are a special case – and we need special consideration in these very uncertain times.**

Linda Stewart

Director of European and International Development, University of the Highlands and Islands

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