



Universities Scotland briefing for Scottish Government Debate: Safeguarding Scotland's International Research Collaborations and Reputation for Scientific Excellence from the Threat of Brexit

Key facts

- Staff from the EU made up 12.4% of all staff at Scotland's HEIs in 2016/17 (5,495 FPE). 17% of academic staff in Scotland are EU (non-UK) nationals, increasing to 25% of research-only staff.
- EU students count for 16% of our postgraduate research population.
- Scottish HEIs received £94m in research funding in 2014/15 from the EU, which represents 9% of our total research funding. As of May 2016, Scottish HEIs received 13% of all Horizon 2020 funding to UK HEIs. Through Horizon 2020, we have seen 480 projects with 2191 collaborating organizations and 89 collaborating countries.

Safeguarding research collaborations and excellent research

We believe the following are amongst the most important factors to safeguarding research collaborations: staff mobility into and out of Scotland/the UK and frameworks such as Horizon Europe, which have been set up to support collaboration:

Staff mobility

- We [strongly support](#) efforts to facilitate researcher mobility. International collaboration is associated with high quality research and is often grown out of informal discussion and information sharing. Our [evidence to the Migration Advisory Committee](#) shows that Scotland's non-UK EEA workforce is disproportionately young and concentrated in academic roles, particularly in science, engineering and technology disciplines. Those staff will often be early-career researchers and they support a lot of the research effort in Scottish HEIs. Many of those individuals will be attracted to Scotland due to the world-leading universities but may not pursue academic careers – the value of highly skilled individuals in the work-force cannot be over-estimated, including increasing absorptive capacity for innovation in businesses for research and development. This has been a Brexit priority for Universities Scotland since the referendum result.
- The forthcoming Immigration Bill, expected in Westminster, presents an opportunity to create an immigration system that works for the higher education sector. We need to see measures in the Bill that will ensure the following: support recruitment of PhD staff, protect the pipeline of study to work, the ability to recruit technicians. We also want to ensure that we're able to recruit the best into any role including non-academic roles.
- Work must take place to address the negative perceptions, caused by the UK's immigration policy and compounded by Brexit. There is a need to send the message that Scotland and the UK remains an attractive destination for researchers at all stages of their careers.



Development of Horizon Europe

- If Scotland is to retain its outstanding reputation for delivering world-class research, with worldwide impact, then membership of Horizon Europe (the successor programme to Horizon 2020) is essential. We want the benefits of being in Horizon Europe. Not just for the funding of research but the added benefits: facilitating cooperation, nurturing international networked and experience researchers, consistency of approach to funding across national boundaries, pooling of expertise and data, the importance of winning competitive research at a EU-level to underscore the quality of the work, having a long term funding settlement. We think these are massively important and really must a) inform the development of Horizon Europe, b) be recognized as valuable and why we need to 'stay in' the future Programme.
- We've [set out our eight recommendations](#) on the future of Horizon Europe, with a focus on an increased budget, focus on excellence and investment in successful programmes. These priorities would safeguard and enhance research and science in Scotland. We think it's very important that both the Scottish Government and the UK Government promote the importance of Horizon Europe developing in a way that a) allows the UK to be involved, and b) critically, continues a strong focus on excellence.

Safeguarding our reputation for Scientific Excellence

- Following Brexit, it's critical that the sector works with both governments to promote Scotland as a long term science and research partner.
- A focus is required on countering a perception of being unwelcoming and promoting the assurances that the UK Government have put in place.

Structural Funds

Many of our members interact with Structural Funds (often in areas such as innovation and skills development). In particular, the University of the Highlands and Islands have found Structural Funds highly valued and impactful in delivering science and innovation in their region. We have made the case to the UK Government that universities should have a big role in the replacement scheme, as they act as 'anchors' in many instances in locations around the country.

Impact of a No Deal

In the case of a 'no deal' [we've set out our priorities](#) to the Parliament's Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee. For research and innovation issues we want UK Government to set out contingency plans for replacing access to EU grants, particularly grants such as European Research Council and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions; a commitment to the same net level of funding based on past performance in Horizon 2020 and adopt the same administrative procedures to minimise disruption and burden to researchers.

ENDS

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