

NO-DEAL BRIEFING

Universities UK has been explicit that a 'no deal' exit from the EU would be bad for our students, researchers and 136 member universities. This briefing sets out the consequences of exiting the EU without a deal and the stabilising policies required for the higher education sector.



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IMMEDIATE CONSEQUENCES OF A NO-DEAL EXIT FOR UNIVERSITIES

EU students entering the UK would be subject to the European Temporary Leave to Remain system only allowing them to stay in the UK for up to three years.

Those wishing to study for courses longer than three years, such as medics, linguists, PhD students and most undergraduates in Scotland, would have to apply for a Tier 4 visa and face additional costs and uncertainty about their immigration status part way through their studies. Potential students may therefore be put off from choosing UK universities.

UK researchers would become ineligible to compete for the globally-prestigious research funding from the European Research Council (ERC) and Marie Skłodowska Curie Actions (MSCA).

UK-based researchers secured €540m through the latest round of ERC Advanced Grants alone. This, combined with increased barriers to mobility, risks the UK becoming less competitive in attracting global research talent.

There would be considerable uncertainty amongst prospective EU students about their future fee/loan status which could lead to reduced interest in studying in the UK.

EU students account for one third of all international students in UK universities and bring in £2.4 billion a year to the UK economy through fees and living expenditure (minus the cost of loan support).

Around 17,000 students in the UK would no longer be able to study or work abroad as part of Erasmus+ as planned in the 2020–21 academic year.

This would severely limit study and work opportunities for students to enhance their language skills, employability and intercultural awareness – all vital in a global Britain.

The UK economy would forego £390 million per year in export earnings currently brought through incoming Erasmus+ students' living expenses alone.

This is because EU students would lose the right to come to UK universities under the scheme.

There is a real risk that a no-deal exit could jeopardise the UK's ability to associate with the next Horizon and Erasmus+ programmes which run from 2021–27.

Lead-in times for developing research partnerships across borders can be lengthy, but UK researchers remain in the dark about whether they will be eligible to lead or participate in key projects. We have already seen a sharp drop in UK universities leading projects through Horizon 2020 because of uncertainty.

There would be great uncertainty around mutual recognition of professional qualifications (MRPQ).

This could potentially disincentivise individuals from around the world studying subjects covered by the current MRPQ Directive (eg architecture, veterinary science) from coming to the UK.

UK universities that provide degrees in EU countries ('transnational education' or TNE) face uncertainty about their future operations once the EU Services Directive no longer applies to UK education providers.

There are already 79,700 higher education students in EU countries who are studying for a UK degree in their home country, and TNE is a key source of education exports for the UK.

THE STABILISING POLICIES

UNIVERSITIES WOULD NEED IN PLACE BY THE TIME OF A NO-DEAL EXIT

The government should reconsider the three-year limit to the European Temporary Leave to Remain scheme and guarantee EU students entering under this scheme that they will be able to stay for the duration of their course and graduate.

This could be done by allowing seamless movement onto a student visa without facing additional costs. The government must commit to, and communicate this publicly so potential students looking to study in the UK are fully aware.

Fully-funded replacement structures for the ERC and MSCA must be up and running.

Given the success and global prestige of Horizon 2020, a UK-based replacement mechanism should mirror mechanisms used by the ERC and MSCA. Details of these contingency plans should be made available immediately.

The government must extend the underwrite in place for Horizon 2020 funding into the next Horizon Europe programme to guarantee the health of the UK research base.

This will ensure the UK can continue to participate in collaborative research projects on a third country basis following our departure from the EU.

The government should work with universities to fully communicate EU students' eligibility for home fees/loans for those starting courses in 2020–21, and ensure that any future changes are announced at least 18 months ahead of implementation.

This should be supplemented by a government-backed communications campaign, supported by additional scholarships for EU students and the roll-out of the Study UK: Discover You campaign in Europe.

Details of a full-funded replacement scheme to Erasmus+ should be published and publicised; students due to go abroad in year 2 or 3 of their degree have already started their course and face huge uncertainty.

A new scheme must closely mirror Erasmus+, provide incentives for other countries to collaborate, and be backed by at least the same level of funding to improve on recent progress made to increase the number of people studying abroad, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Full details of how the underwrites for Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ would work in practice must be published and publicised by the government.

The government must provide clarity on what the future arrangements will be on mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

This is important particularly for UK universities attracting EU students to their courses usually covered by the EU Directive.

Clear guidance must be provided on the rights and protections for UK universities that are providing transnational education services in EU host countries.

This includes guidance on the protections granted to the establishment in the EU, and the provision of education services in the EU.