

Press release – 25 October 2017

Europe's University Leaders Call for Urgent Brexit Clarification

Leaders of European higher education bodies have signed a statement calling on governments across Europe to speed up Brexit negotiations so talks can begin over the future of European research, collaboration, and student mobility.

The statement from 22 representative organisations of universities and national rectors' conferences from across Europe asks for clarification on arrangements for the European Research and Innovation programme – Horizon 2020 - and the Erasmus+ exchange programme after March 2019 when the UK is due to leave the European Union.

Research and higher education will be discussed in the second phase of Brexit negotiations, which are expected to start following the conclusion of the first phase of discussions. The European Council Summit concluded on 20 October 2017 that not enough progress had been made to start the second phase. The delay in the negotiations extends the uncertainties that the higher education sector is facing.

Professor Janet Beer, President of Universities UK and Vice-Chancellor of Liverpool University, says the lack of clarity is causing problems for universities now:

“We are now entering the period in which universities need to be finalising their research, collaboration and student exchange programmes for 2019. There is an urgent need for clarity on the UK's participation in Horizon 2020 beyond Brexit. This scheme enhances the impact of our research by providing access to vital networks, talent and funding. Without clarity, the risk is that important European research programmes could stall.

“The arrival on campuses across Europe of students hoping to study abroad in 2019 increases the need to know whether the UK will or will not be able to continue to take part in Erasmus+. Participation in outward mobility schemes, such as Erasmus+, has major benefits for students, universities and employers.”

Full statement:

Higher education, research and innovation are critical to the future of Europe. Conditions favourable to close cooperation and exchange are crucial to knowledge development in the interests of our societies. Universities call on the leaders of our respective governments and on the European Commission to accelerate the process of reaching agreement on the UK's continued participation in, and contribution to, Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+ to the end of these programmes. Clarification is now urgent: European consortia are already being formed and bids designed ready to be submitted after March 2019. Similarly, students arriving on campus this autumn and planning a period abroad as part of their studies need clarity on whether they can participate in Erasmus+ mobility involving UK partners from 2019 onwards.

The time has come for clarity and agreement in this important area. Universities must know which, if any, measures they need to undertake in the future to enable their students to thrive and their researchers to continue their innovative research. We urge you to address these pressing issues.

Signatories: The Presidents of European Rectors' Conferences

Professor Rolf Tarrach	President	European Universities Association
Professor Janet Beer	President	Universities UK
Professor Jan Szmidt	President	Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland (KRASP)
Professor Helen Dannetun	Chair of the Board	Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF)
Pieter Duisenberg	President	Association of Universities in the Netherlands (VSNU)
Professor Herman Van Goethem	President	Flemish Interuniversity Council (VLIR)
Dr. József Bódis	President	Hungarian Rectors' Conference
Professor Tiit Land	President	Universities Estonia
Arvids Barsevskis	Chairman	Council of Rectors of Latvia
Professor Michael O. Hengartner	President	swissuniversities
Professor Rudolf Kropil	President	Slovak Rectors' Conference
Professor António M. Cunha	President	Portuguese National Conference of Rectors (CRUP)
Professor Dragan Marušič	President	Slovenian Rectors' Conference
Dr Jon Atli Benediktsson	President	National Rectors Conference in Iceland
Professor Jouko Niinimäki	President	Universities Finland (UNIFI)
Professor Tomas Zima	President	Czech Rectors' Conference
Professor Mari Sundli Tveit	President	Norwegian Association of Higher Education Institutions
Rector Anders Bjarklev	Chairman	Universities Denmark
Prof. Dr. Oliver Vitouch	President	Universities Austria (UNIKO)
Roberto Fernández	President	Conference of the Rectors of Spanish Universities (CRUE)

Professor Alfred J. Vella	Rector	University of Malta
Professor Vladimir Bumbasirevic	President	Conference of the Universities of Serbia

Notes to editors:

National Rectors' Conferences (NRCs) are member organisations that represent the universities and higher education institutions in their respective countries or regions. The NRCs represent their members to government, parliament and civic organisations. The signatories are all members of the European University Association (EAU), which is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries.

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