Written evidence submitted by University College London

Summary

- The UK is **world leading in higher education and research**. Universities are one of the most successful sectors of our economy: they continue to attract a growing number of international students and UK higher education is a highly successful global export. This supports the UK’s cultural, economic and public diplomacy and will need to be protected or enhanced when we leave the EU.

- The ongoing **uncertainty** triggered by the UK’s vote to leave the EU requires urgent attention, particularly in terms of the implications for researchers and students in the UK and the prospects for EU research collaboration. There is a heightened reputational risk for UK education as a whole; therefore, there is a need for **clear political will** to ensure that the UK continues to be a global leader in research and education, an active participant in international research collaboration, and a leading recruiter of global teaching and research talent.

- The **continued free movement of students and researchers within Europe** is a pressing concern – it underpins many of the concerns expressed by UK HEIs since the announcement of the referendum result (including attracting talent, enabling collaboration and mobility, supporting knowledge transfer, etc.)  

- The **most urgent priority in terms of funding is to either retain or secure replacement funding for existing EU funds and EU funded programmes, such as Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+**. It is likely that a comparable replacement would require a significant increase in the proportion of GDP invested in higher education.

Introduction

1. UCL is pleased to make a submission to the Education Select Committee’s inquiry into the impact of exiting the European Union on higher education. We would be happy to provide more detail on any of the points raised here; please contact Sarah Chaytor, Director of Research Strategy & Policy, in the first instance – s.chaytor@ucl.ac.uk.

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2. This submission discusses our concerns at the implications of leaving the EU, but also highlights the key points that we would hope to see as part of any future education policy:

   a. Policy stability to reassure universities, researchers, business and other key stakeholders;
   b. Access to global talent and investment;
   c. Ability to retain highly skilled teachers and researchers in universities and elsewhere;
   d. Support for international research collaboration;
   e. Maintaining access to key sources of funding and resources to support mobility activity;
   f. The need for the UK to think about how its global partnerships, including EU cooperation, can strengthen and help harmonise trade and education policy.

3. We also emphasise the importance of ensuring the UK remains able to fully pursue and participate in EU research collaborations. This should be a key consideration in exit negotiations as it is critical to the continued success of the research base, and as the best mitigation of loss of UK influence in the EU research agenda. The UK Research Office will have an important role to play here. Another crucial consideration will be the UK’s continued participation in long-term EU projects (such as CERN, the European Space Agency, etc.) and the future of UK-hosted EU infrastructure (such as Jodrell Bank).

4. In preparing this submission, we surveyed our students and received responses from over 200 current students, including 86 from UK students, 75 from EU countries and 41 from our international students from outside the EU. Their insights have informed our submission.

The likely impact of the UK exiting the EU on EU students studying in England

5. The most immediately damaging impact of the UK’s vote to leave the EU remains the lack of clarity regarding our future relationship to the EU, particularly in terms of research funding and our ability to attract students from EU countries. The initial instability was most keenly felt by our EU staff and current EU students, but has also affected many others within our institution, for instance those researchers currently engaged in collaborative relationships with EU institutions.

6. We welcomed the decisive action taken by the Department for Education in announcing that EU students entering university in the 2017/18 academic year will still have access to student funding for the duration of their course. Nevertheless, these assurances are relatively short-term; universities and their stakeholders must plan on a longer-term basis. We would thus be pleased if the Committee could focus on soliciting longer-term statements on the future direction of policy and funding in this area.

7. If access to the student loan book is withdrawn, student numbers could drop substantially. We expect that the effects of such an announcement would be
immediate and our evidence suggests that the greatest impact will fall upon our students from Eastern Europe. For instance, 70.8% of our students from the Visegrad 4 countries (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) currently receive funding from the Student Loans Company. This compares to 25.5% of our students from Germany, France, Belgium and Austria.

8. Students entering higher education in the EU currently enjoy the same fee rate as domestic students; without this incentive, students going abroad to study may be just as likely to consider other markets. UK fees for international students are comparatively high\(^2\) because of the wider HE funding model in the UK, which has increasingly relied on universities’ success in recruiting international students. An increased fee for EU students could cause a sharp drop in recruitment numbers which would precipitate sudden and significant financial implications for many UK HEIs.

9. For those universities with high entry tariff requirements, it is unlikely that a significant drop in EU student numbers could be offset solely by increasing student intake from the UK population. This would increase reliance on student recruitment from non-EU countries, where we already face stiff competition from American, Canadian and Australian universities to attract talented students. As more EU universities begin to teach degree programmes exclusively in English, we can expect this marketplace to become even more crowded.

10. Should EU student fees rise to the level of international student fees, the UK would lose one of its most significant recruitment advantages over competitor institutions from the USA and Australia. Our comparatively modest undergraduate fees, in relation to those in the USA and Australia, currently help the UK to attract the most talented students from across the EU. As well as the many benefits to institutions, bringing EU students to the UK results in benefits for the country as a whole. EU students make economic contributions to their local communities in the UK, and EU alumni can assist with longer-term trust and capacity building in international relations\(^3\).

11. We foresee a decrease in the number of non-EU overseas students studying at UK universities if access to mainland Europe becomes more difficult. The UK’s status as a “gateway to Europe” has previously been an important pull-factor for those students looking for a “European experience”. Students are also likely to be deterred by a reduction in opportunities for work experience during their studies if recruiters (such as those in the financial services) move their bases elsewhere in Europe. Likewise, perceptions that the UK is ‘anti-


immigrant’ and ‘anti-foreigner’ would, if left unchallenged, make the UK a less attractive place to study for international students.

12. The year-on-year decrease of Indian students coming to the UK, down almost 20% in the wake of the closure of the Tier 1 (Post Study Work Visa) immigration route, is an example of the sensitivity of the international student market. For now, the recruitment of international students to the UK remains robust. For the UK to remain attractive to prospective students from Europe in the event that they become subject to international student fee levels, it will need a streamlined and proportionate immigration mechanism for these students and we urge the Committee to ensure that this is considered. Although immigration was a key issue in the Referendum outcome, only 22% of the British public perceive international students to be immigrants. We recommend that international students should be treated as temporary immigrants and removed from the net migration target.

What protections should be in place for existing EU students and staff

13. By teaching over 435,000 non-UK students in 2014-15 and hosting many on exchange programmes such as Erasmus+, UK universities directly display the best of the UK’s cultural, artistic, scientific and social values to a global audience. The international alumni who leave the UK are our best ambassadors and some find their way to positions of high office in their home countries; the 55 current world leaders across 51 countries who attended UK universities serve as testament to the role of universities in the UK’s soft power.

14. EU staff are an integral part of the HE sector and contribute hugely to the success of the university, including developing knowledge and talent that informs the capabilities of teaching and research within the sector. Academic staff in UK universities are a leading source of expertise on a wide range of matters critical to the success of the country, regardless of their nationality.

15. To protect this talent base, UCL believes that EU researchers and students currently residing in the UK should continue to have full rights to live and work here, with no compromise on status. Implementing a

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proportionate and financially reasonable administrative system of registration will be necessary to ensure retention. We note the concern of our many EU researchers, who have made their lives in the UK, that the status of their immediate families will also need consideration.

16. We suggest that the Committee should consider **what mechanisms the UK could introduce to give a clear message that we welcome the best students and researchers from all over the world.**

**The future of the Erasmus+ programme following the withdrawal of the UK from the EU**

17. The UK has participated in Erasmus and related programmes (including Socrates, Leonardo, Comenius and the Lifelong Learning Programme) since its inception in 1986. The most recent version of the programme launched in 2014; its budget of €14.7 billion will provide opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, gain experience and volunteer abroad. In 2015, the Erasmus+ budget for the UK was €127.9m; 63.9% of the funding for mobility of individuals (Key Action 1) was awarded to higher education applications, totalling nearly €55m. The Erasmus+ programme supports the mobility of students, teaching staff, professional services staff and researchers.

18. Currently, students and staff participating in Erasmus+ Key Action mobility projects in programme countries benefit from European Commission funding. In the UK, student participants in 2016/17 projects will receive a monthly grant of €280-€430 to travel to Programme countries for 3-12 months. For UCL, this funding will support nearly 400 individual mobilities, the vast majority of whom are undertaking a compulsory period of residence abroad as part of their study of one or two Modern European Languages. Indeed, this particular feature of those UK degrees that focus on language acquisition is one that is greatly at risk in the face of Brexit; it is a characteristic that differentiates our educational offering from elsewhere in the world, particularly in other parts of Europe.

19. The Erasmus+ programme provides universities with indispensable tools for facilitating international collaboration. Bilateral exchange partnerships, which underpin traditional student mobility in universities, are standardised within the framework of Erasmus+, making agreements easier to establish, manage and maintain. A unified approach to recognition and credit transfer also

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9 The term ‘mobility’ refers to a period spent away from the habitual place of work or study. In the context of Erasmus+, this will always take place overseas.


ensures that students can be confident in choosing to undertake mobility, and leads to a more harmonious relationship between partner institutions. Language learning is supported within the programme, with access to online courses available in 12 major EU languages (and more due to be introduced as the programme matures). Universities are supported in managing their projects by the UK National Agency, the British Council.

20. The UK currently enjoys “Programme Country” status in the Erasmus+ programme. Its organisations may take part in any of the Actions provided for in the programme. This status is awarded to all EU member states and has been granted to the Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Turkey. While UK HEIs would likely be able to continue with established mobility programmes should Programme Status be denied following exit from the EU, there is a significant risk that activity would be disrupted for a period of time due to the loss of such resources as are outlined above.

21. The Erasmus+ Programme Guide does not indicate the conditions for Programme Country status. However, we may infer from cases such as Switzerland that a commitment to freedom of movement is closely linked to participation in Erasmus+. This strengthens the argument that retaining freedom of movement for UK citizens in the EU is of importance and that it should be prioritised during government negotiations with the EU. In the event that EU freedom of movement were restricted, support for visa applications would need to be considerable in order to make mobility a possibility.

22. In the case that Programme Country status were to be withdrawn following Brexit, the UK could apply to become a “Partner Country” within the scheme. This limited status would allow participation in some Actions, as well as access to funds for individual participants. The status has key drawbacks; although students and staff would receive funding for mobility with partners on approved projects, there would be less control for the UK HEI over the management of the project, which could lessen the impact of any outcomes.

23. An alternative to Partner Country Status would be to create a national framework for mobility, which provides similar tools and appropriate funding to facilitate student and staff mobility. There are examples of this type of framework in the Swiss-European Mobility Programme (SEMP) and the Nordplus programme. Such a framework would need to be highly

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13 Switzerland was denied Programme Country status following a national referendum on changing immigration controls, which resulted in questions around freedom of movement in Europe. [European Commission Information Note on the Participation of Switzerland in Erasmus+](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/updates/20140128-participation-switzerland-erasmus-plus_en) [Accessed 11 Nov. 2016].


sophisticated in terms of administration, support and governance. Investment in development of a coherent programme, as well as sufficient funding for participants, would be required to ensure the quality of such mobility activity could be maintained under the new framework. The expense of such a programme to the UK government would be significant.

24. **The ideal outcome for UK Higher Education would be to maintain Programme Country status within the Erasmus+ programme.** If Programme Country status is denied after Brexit is completed, there are limited options to fulfil growing demand for student and staff mobility in Europe and beyond. The Erasmus+ Programme Guide states that “investment in knowledge, skills and competences will benefit individuals, institutions, organisations and society as a whole by contributing to growth and ensuring equity, prosperity and social inclusion in Europe and beyond.” It clearly expresses the values of the programme, as well as the benefits that mobility brings to individuals and societies. As one UCL undergraduate student puts it:

“The loss of the [Erasmus+] programme would disadvantage young people [...] The job market is becoming more and more competitive, the fact that Brexit is going to happen has already made it harder for young people to be employed as we now need to worry about visa statuses and the uncertainty of whether companies plan to move their operations away from the UK. I have seen more and more companies requiring "international experience". With the loss of the Erasmus+ Programme, it would make studying abroad more competitive and so less people would be given the opportunity to diversify their experience. Studying abroad has broadened my outlook and made me realise what path I would like to take in the future.”

**Risks and opportunities for UK students**

25. Ultimately, this inquiry is concerned with the value that membership of the EU brings to the UK Higher Education market. However, we cannot discuss this in isolation of the overall value of international study and collaboration within universities. The major risk generated by leaving the EU is loss of this overall value through damage to integrity of programmes. A current UCL research student summed up his view of the risks as follows:

“The continued funding of Erasmus+ is a source of great anxiety to me as a research student and potential academic or cultural sector worker, whose education has always benefitted from the connections that have been in place with partner institutions in EU countries. As with many aspects of Brexit, my fear is that, amid the current climate of obfuscation and performative political discourse, research projects tied up in Horizon2020 funding will begin to suffer in unexpected ways, and that undergraduate students will fare even worse.”

26. Loss of funding from Erasmus+ could lessen the impact of international experience as a driver of social mobility, limiting the life chances of those students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Recent studies have shown that a significantly lower proportion of graduates from disadvantaged backgrounds
who were internationally mobile were unemployed (5.0%) compared with those from the same backgrounds who were not mobile (6.2%). Internationally mobile students from almost all socio-economic backgrounds reported higher average salaries than their non-mobile equivalents.\textsuperscript{16}

27. Conversely, loss of access to Erasmus+ could lead to the development of a national framework for funding both short and long term student and staff mobility, both inside and outside of Europe, which in turn could level the playing field and ensure effective support and equal participation in exchange in Europe and beyond. This would need to be adequately funded and supported by the UK government in order to be successful, as discussed in the previous sub-section.

28. UK education risks an overall loss of emphasis on language acquisition due to a reduction in opportunities to deepen linguistic and cultural knowledge. Alongside this, there is the possibility of a reduction of the diversity within seminar groups, resulting in fewer opportunities to study alongside and collaborate with students from other cultures; this has implications for the breadth of teaching we provide. Such diversity is particularly valuable in humanities and social sciences programmes, such as those that focus on European social and cultural history and politics. A reduction in the diversity of the staff body could also make it difficult to recruit suitably qualified staff to teach on those programmes.

29. A potential scaling-back of major recruiters in the financial and business sector in London could significantly reduce opportunities available to our students after graduation, as well as their access to internships and other work experience opportunities during their studies.

30. We are concerned at the likely loss of influence in EU funded programmes and EU research policy. This will be compounded by the fact that UK research students will no longer have rapid or early access to new information, as a consequence of being left out of EU programmes. This could undermine the UK’s involvement in the global research endeavour and it will be important that the Government seek to mitigate this in negotiations.

\textbf{How changes to freedom of movement rules may affect students and academics in English higher education institutions}

31. \textbf{Free movement of staff and students is critical to the success of UK universities and the UK research base}. It attracts the brightest talent from the EU and around the world and allows access to specialised skills from a wider pool. It enables UK students and researchers to benefit from the research and teaching of other EU countries. Free movement within the EU has contributed to the UK research endeavor and UCL is highly concerned at the prospect of restrictions to this.

32. Anecdotally, there is already evidence of impacts on the ability of students, postdoctoral researchers and academics to move to the UK because of the uncertainties created by the UK’s vote to leave the EU. Beyond this, academic leaders at UCL have emphasised the significant numbers of outstanding researchers that they recruit from other EU countries and their concerns at the detrimental effects on research if we cannot attract such talent in the future.

33. One example from a UCL academic of the importance of free movement of students is of an EU student who is critical to a current Medical Research Council grant application:

“This is a highly technical and specialised area, with only a handful of people in the world trained to do this work. We have invested a lot in her training and she has a unique skill set that is vital... she is very much in demand. She has been offered several postdocs in the USA and our industry partner (UK-based SME) also wants to recruit her. So, not being able to have students would not only damage our research but would, I suspect, also have a very negative impact on SMEs in the UK.”

34. World-leading research informs both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching. Freedom of movement rules therefore need to accommodate the necessity for HEI staff to travel easily to maintain and develop the knowledge required to inform their teaching and research.

35. The Government should be mindful of the administrative burden that would arise because of any additional immigration controls that may be introduced post-Brexit and ensure that extra administration does not have a detrimental effect on HEIs’ continuing need to attract world-class talent, including from within the EU. Any additional immigration restrictions should not adversely affect the Government’s ability to process visa applications in a timely manner so as not to delay or deter applicants from working at UK universities.

36. The best outcome for Higher Education would be for no restrictions or visa requirements to be imposed on EU students, staff and researchers. Such restrictions would add unnecessary hurdles, making international mobility and collaboration more cumbersome and impeding our ability to recruit the best students and researchers.

37. UCL strongly recommends that the government argue for the continued free movement of students and researchers within Europe. If this does not appear politically feasible, then we would urge the Government to consider a harmonised, simplified scheme with few restrictions on the movement of all international (including EU) students and researchers. Such a scheme would mitigate some of the impacts of leaving the EU and reinforce the message that the UK is still committed to recruiting talented researchers from all over the world.

17 UCL submission, House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee, Inquiry into ‘Leaving the EU: implications and opportunities for science and research’
How to ensure UK universities remain competitive after the withdrawal of the UK from the EU

38. Our response to this question can be inferred from our earlier comments but, to summarise, we advise that the following principles be observed during negotiations in order to ensure the UK’s competitive advantage can be maintained following exit from the EU:

   a. Students, staff and researchers should be able to travel without difficulty;

   b. Universities, including individual staff and students, should have access to sufficient funding to support collaboration across borders;

   c. Universities should have the freedom and power to recruit competitively with the rest of the world, particularly with other nations that are considered global players, such as the United States, Canada and Australia.

39. Reflecting these principles, UCL asks that the committee consider the following policy options to manage any potential risks to UK competitiveness:

   a. Retain for EU students and staff freedom of movement arrangements as close as possible to those that exist at present; failing that, minimise any visa requirements – enabling UK universities to access the best talent.

   b. Secure UK universities’ status as full participants in EU research funding schemes – as participants in shaping the funding schemes and as applicants – enabling them to continue to shape and to benefit from this major source of funding for scientific research and attract talent from around the world. Failing that, the government should ensure equivalent levels of funding are available to UK researchers to support the kind and level of international collaboration that has been so productive for the research community.

   c. Take action to present the UK as a country that is open to and welcoming of international visitors.

   d. Ensure a transparent and competitive tuition fee structure for non-UK students; consider opportunities to attract the brightest and the best from lower-income backgrounds by providing maintenance funding.

   e. Maintain Programme Country status for the UK as part of the Erasmus+ scheme; failing that, instituting and adequately funding an equivalent scheme for UK students and staff in higher education.

40. A further consideration will be the facilitation of bilateral (and other multilateral) relationships with individual EU member states in order to facilitate high-level international collaboration. Although many individual
researchers and research students may be able to pursue individual collaborations, the UK Government should consider what structures and frameworks might be put in place to facilitate strategic relationships with those countries where the UK has the greatest number of partnerships or where there may be strategic advantage.

**What the Government's priorities should be during negotiations for the UK to exit the EU with regard to students and staff at higher education institutions**

41. The current, urgent, priority is to **keep uncertainty over the future situation for EU staff and students to a minimum** in order to **avoid unnecessary disruption** to teaching, student recruitment, researchers and research projects. Early reassurances, particularly on the status of EU staff and international recruitment, would be welcome; UCL is already seeing inquiries from students about whether they will be required to apply for visas, whether they are able to participate in Erasmus+ and for some EU students, whether they should even pursue their studies in the UK.

42. The Committee will be well aware that the UK is a global leader in science and research. For this to continue, we must be able to continue to recruit the best global talent (both staff and students.) UCL generally sees a strong showing of talented EU candidates in any research recruitment round and would be significantly concerned at any undermining of the UK’s ability to attract the brightest and best from the EU. Most of our departments have a high proportion of both EU and non-EU workers that make a vital contribution to activities and the prospect of future barriers to recruitment (including through the UK being seen as a less attractive place to work) is highly concerning. As one of our Vice-Deans (Research) put it:

"My greatest fear is that coming out of the EU will discourage movement of the best EU researchers to Britain."

43. Access to prestige funding schemes, such as Horizon 2020 and ERC is an attraction for research staff and many of our senior academics have observed that eligibility for EU funding is seen as a key advantage of working in the UK. There is much uncertainty around the possible future models for our engagement in such programmes, which we assume are likely to be broadly along the lines of either full associated country\(^{18}\), partial association\(^{19}\), or third country status\(^{20}\). At such an early stage and in advance of any indication of Government thinking or negotiations, it is difficult to make statements

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\(^{18}\) Whereby the UK will be able to continue to access future Framework Programmes, requiring mutually agreed financial contribution and an Association Agreement between UK and EU

\(^{19}\) In which case we would like to see the Government prioritise access to the 'Excellent Sciences' pillar of H2020 (including the ERC, Marie Sklodowska-Curie functions, Future and Emerging Technologies, Research Infrastructures)

\(^{20}\) Which is likely to require individual funding arrangements for specific projects; the most desirable outcome would be for the Government to secure a bilateral scientific and technological agreement with the EU
about the specific effects of models, although **the best outcome for UK Higher Education would be the full associated country model**, which would allow the free movement of students and researchers and access to EU funding. Whether this is politically feasible remains an open question, but without this free movement and access to funding, the ability of the UK HE sector to continue to offer high-quality education and retain the highest-quality researchers would be seriously jeopardised.

**What steps the Government should take to mitigate any possible risks and take advantage of any opportunities**

44. The Government should seek to ensure that recruitment of talented staff and students may continue unimpeded post-exit, via the following means;

   a. *See that current arrangements for freedom of movement for staff and students are maintained as far as possible;*

   b. *Alternatively, ensure that restrictions – and associated administration – imposed on EU staff and students are not so burdensome as to affect recruitment;*

   c. *Take swift and positive action to provide the earliest possible assurances to prospective students from the EU hoping to commence study in the UK in after 2017/18 that they will be welcomed and given access to funds to support their studies;*

   d. *Ensuring that students no longer form part of net migration statistics*

45. The Government should commit to ensuring that mobility of students and staff will continue to be a priority, ensuring that contingency is in place if Erasmus+ is no longer on offer after leaving the EU.

46. The Government should seek to maintain access to the collaborative research funding programme Horizon 2020, consistent with the Chancellor’s welcome recent statement that the Treasury will guarantee any Horizon 2020 research funding granted before the UK leaves the EU or, alternatively, set up and manage a comparable nationally funded scheme.

47. We would ask the Committee to bear in mind that academic evidence and expertise could be a useful source for the UK’s Brexit negotiators to draw on. There is already extensive engagement between academics – including UCL academics – and the Government. We recognise the scale and breadth of negotiations and stand ready to work with the Government on key policy challenges that will arise during Brexit to ensure the best outcome for the UK. It will be important that the Government considers how best to utilise available academic expertise to strengthen the UK’s negotiating position and to inform longer-term policy formation.

48. Finally, in the event of a “hard Brexit” and the failure to implement the safeguards we have outlined in this submission, the UK Government would need to need to replace existing research networks, cross-border research
funding and funding for early career researchers. By recreating similar schemes in the UK, the Government may be able to reproduce the ecosystem that has made the UK one of the world’s best research environments.

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