

# Brexit and Irish Higher Education and Research: Initial Risk Assessment of Challenges and Opportunities

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# General Observations

- Higher Education is a highly internationalised sector
- Ireland and UK operate in a “shared” higher education and research environment with a common academic and research culture:
  - Commonalities with respect to university/college organization, and curriculum structure and pedagogy;
  - Go-to partners for research;
  - Common QA and peer-review culture;
  - Shared academic career system and environment;
  - Expertise and policy sharing and learning;
- Until negotiations finalised, UK remains part of EU, and will/can be a partner in forthcoming H2020, Erasmus and other proposals.

# Themes

1. Key issues emerging
  - Student mobility and residency rules
  - Internationalization
  - Educational programmes
  - Academic/professional mobility and recruitment
  - Research collaboration and funding
2. Initial UK response(s)
3. Possible alternative models
4. Challenges
5. Opportunities

# Student Mobility & Residency Rules (1)

- ~12,000 RoI ft. students in UK (down from 13,000 in 2012-2013), and ~2,000 in NI; ~ 2,000 UK ft. students studying in RoI
  - 4 main categories of Irish students in UK: Oxbridge/Russell Group, specialist programmes (e.g. health sciences/medicine), alternative entry, postgraduate studies/research;
- Students studying in either jurisdiction may be classed as Non-EU students
  - If Irish students who previously chose to study in UK stay in Ireland, could impact on CAO offers/places & facilities;
  - If Irish students who previously sought UK places refrain from transitioning to FE/HE, could be wider social/economic implications.
  - Change in residency requirements, and tuition fees/student loans, likely factors influencing student choice.

# Student Mobility & Residency Rules (2)

- Erasmus is major EU undergraduate mobility programme;
  - Ireland currently has ~400 UK students, cf w/ ~15,000 EU students going to UK;
  - As difficult to see UK remaining part of Erasmus, could open-up Ireland as alternative English-speaking experience, while also reducing options for Irish students.
- Implications for specific programmes: Student Assistance Fund and Student Disability Fund

# Internationalisation

- International student recruitment is a vital source of income + internationalisation of educational programmes (“global citizens”) and creation of “new diaspora”
  - Currently, 15,600 ft. non-EU students studying in Ireland, and 2,880 ft. EU students
  - Equivalent to 1.6% of 179,354 total ft. enrolments.
- Being only Native-English speaking country in EU (NB. Malta) could play to Ireland’s advantage.
  - Concern amongst potential international students regarding pursuing studies in the UK;
  - Discontent amongst researchers/academics in the UK, and other international scholars, seeking alternative employment/career base.

# Educational Programmes

- Implications for joint programming/degrees, staff mobility, and other teaching and learning initiatives, especially those funded via EU programmes could be adversely affected.
  - Erasmus/Erasmus+ programmes –which support educational initiatives and some research
  - For example: EUA-led EFFECT (European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration in Teaching) project, funded through Erasmus+.
    - EUA has issued a statement to express its continued support for British universities, but their status within schemes such as Erasmus+ would need to be determined.

# Academic/Professional Recruitment

- Strong commonality, interconnectivity and mobility between UK and Irish academic labour market.
  - Important location for post-graduate qualifications and post-qualification experience:
    - First-port-of-call for career academics and researchers, as well as for graduates of all disciplines seeking employment opportunities;
  - Arguably, UK has been accessible safety valve; reduction of such opportunities could have implications for graduates and professionals training and early career opportunities, and accordingly for employment/unemployment in Ireland.
- Future recruitment of UK citizens may require a work permit unless agreement similar to Norway and the other EEA countries.

# Research Collaboration and Funding 1

- UK currently contributes €5.4bn to EU research, development and innovation, and receives back €8.8bn.
  - ~10% UK public funding for science from EU, 2007-2014;
  - Of UK's international collaborations, 80% include an EU partner.
  - UK universities benefit from ~£2bn (~€2.38bn)/year or 15.5% funding from *Horizon 2020*; second of all participants
  - 14% universities' research funding comes from EU programmes.
- UK-based academics are Ireland's biggest international collaborators
  - Largest for H2020, with 13.4% of projects won, followed very closely by Germany (13.3%) and Spain (10.9%).
  - Largest for academic and 2<sup>nd</sup> largest non-academic collaborator for SFI-funded researchers, followed by US and Germany.
- Uncertainty causing backlash against UK academics/researchers.



# Research Collaboration and Funding 2

Some implications:

- Given close academic and research networks, could be fewer opportunities for collaboration;
- Loss of UK contribution could have disproportionate impact on R&I if the overall EU budget has to be re-adjusted;
- UK has frequently been strong ally for Ireland in terms of policy discussions; departure could affect future EU policy development.

On the other hand:

- Absence of UK could open up new opportunities for Irish researchers as EU and other international researchers seek an English-language partners.



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# Initial UK Response(s)

- Until negotiations finalised, UK remains part of EU, and can be partner in H2020/other proposals (e.g. ERDF, Interreg, Erasmus+).
- UK government issued statement confirming it will honour existing H2020 research partnerships and matching funding;
- UK may use European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to continue to retain/build upon relations with European partners.
  - Possibility of EU-based campus, w/ Ireland as possible location
  - Oxbridge/Russell Group likely to be unaffected.
- EU students in UK will be able to access student loan funding for entirety of course if enter 2016-17 admissions year;
  - Currently ~125,000 EU students in HE in UK, = 6% total UK students, and 5% undergraduates - paying same tuition as UK students.

# 3 Possible Alternative Models

- Switzerland has a separate agreement with the EU on participation in Horizon 2020 and Erasmus+, negotiated in response to voting to restrict free movement for labour. It must ratify a new treaty before the end of 2016 or lose access to H2020 plus risk its bilateral trade agreements.
- Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland have negotiated the EEA (European Economic Area) agreement. This allows them to participate in H2020 and Erasmus+. They contribute to the EU for participation in the programmes but limited involvement in shaping programmes and calls.
- Israel pays membership fees to participate in H2020. In contrast, it participates in Erasmus+ as a partner country. However, not all elements of the programme are open to Israeli institutions and accordingly, Israel has a different status than European countries.

# Challenges (1)

- Ireland won't have all opportunities to itself;
- Visibility in countries w/ which traditionally have strong linkages, but:
  - Profile poorer elsewhere – and perception in many countries is that Ireland is part of UK and will be leaving the EU.
  - Rankings play a role here – because they essentially measure wealth/investment
  - International Quality Mark (IEM) from QQI could help.
- Many European countries building up English-language provision;
  - 27% European HEIs (2014) offer at least one English-language programme;
  - Netherlands, Denmark and Sweden are leaders: 60% Dutch courses at undergraduate taught in English; 70% master's programmes

# Challenges (2)

- Other European countries seeking to attract mobile talent, and European commission under pressure to move flagship projects to rival cities.
- Ease of cross-border travel will need to be factored into discussions if a “hard” border reappears.
  - Implications for Irish HEIs, especially along the border, which are seeking to extend recruitment to NI students, including FE graduates;
  - Implications for continued study/postgraduate, post-doctoral and early career opportunities, etc.

# Opportunities

- Higher education and research should be core to whole-of-government strategy;
- Potential for Ireland to act as a talent magnet, attracting the best students, academics and researchers and those holding EU grants (especially ERC grants);
- Ability to take advantage will depend upon positioning ourselves as a high quality education and research location, which has implications for the level of investment, and quality of education and research.
  - Debate on the future funding of higher education, along with the future of PRTLII, will be critical.