Visit to University of Edinburgh

31 October 2016

Meeting hosted by: Tracey Slaven (Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning) and Moira Gibson (Head of External Affairs).

Members in attendance: Ash Denham, Gordon MacDonald

Tracey agreed to provide additional information about EU Research Infrastructures, which is appended as annexe A. Information provided for the Scottish Government debate “Implications of the EU Referendum on Higher and Further Education” is also attached as annexe B.

Key priorities:

For the Scottish Government:
- clarity on the fees and immigration status of students to the point of exit: 2018/19 recruitment is about to begin – and pressure on the UK government to provide the same for postgraduate research
- understanding that collaboration is key to research, and of the reputational benefits of the research ratings

For the UK Government:
- answers to immigration questions of staff, as need to be able to recruit the best regardless of where they’re from
- sector by sector analysis
- replacements for research income

EU Staff and Students
- one of the most concentrated numbers in the UK
- 25% of academic staff (1,600-2,400)
- 17% of total staff cohort (13,000+)
- 14% students (4,500) at undergraduate level
- 1,000+ postgraduate research students (who are currently uncertain over their fee status for the rest of their studies)
- Costs and difficulties of arranging visas not a complete barrier but would add to complexity of recruitment and a general sense of being unwelcoming

Research income
- increase of 11% on 2014/15 figures expected for 2015/16
- 1/3 of research is co-authored by EU members
- Europe is the university’s “biggest collaborator”
- concerns over how levels of funding can be maintained
- 26% EU funding had been expected to grow to 40%
- limited amount of funding does go to non-member states, but those parties also have a lack of influence on the research policy: no leverage or weight if simply accessing funds from outside the EU
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- also concerns over lack of access to major pieces of infrastructure (see annexe A)

The university has worked hard to address fears of staff post-vote, holding town-hall meetings and drop-in sessions with legal advisers. Actively trying to send a message that the university wants them here. There has been no exodus of staff – “yet”. Some disquiet has been felt from research bodies.

Applications for current vacancies appear unaffected: more questions are being asked by applicants but no posts have been refused.

EU undergraduates: need treaty basis to differentiate between EU and international students. Without funding, would expect serious impact on numbers.

The University is at the start of their application cycle and saw a 9% fall in numbers of applications for the 15 October UCAS deadline.

EU Research Infrastructures

The EU invests in key research infrastructures (RIs) which would not be possible to build at a national level, for example due to the scale of funding needed, the critical mass of usage needed to justify its construction, or because the risk to one nation would be too great. This allows researchers & institutions to access and take advantage of large-scale infrastructures and also avoids duplication of efforts. RIs may be ‘single-sited’ (a single resource at a single location), ‘distributed’ (a network of distributed resources), or ‘virtual’ (the service is provided electronically).
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6 Pan-European Networks headquartered in the UK:

HiPER, the European High Power laser Energy Research facility, is dedicated to demonstrating laser driven fusion as a future energy source. HiPER is approaching completion of a Preparatory Phase to define the strategy for progression to subsequent phases in terms of the technical, financial, legal and governance issues. The Preparatory Phase has received direct funding from the European Commission for management and coordination and two national funding agencies for technical work (STFC and MSMT). In addition, the project has benefitted from significant ‘in-kind’ funding from formal partners. The current phase has partners from 26 institutions in 10 countries, including representation of 6 European nations at the governmental or national funding agency level, 2 regional governments and has involvement from industry.

ELIXIR, the European infrastructure for biological information brings together life science organisations across Europe to manage and safeguard the enormous amounts of data being generated every day by publicly-funded research. The ELIXIR hub is based in Hinxton, Cambridge.

Instruct is a pan-European research infrastructure in structural biology, making high-end technologies and methods available to users. Structural biology is one of the key frameworks on which we interpret molecular and cellular functions. The main experimental technologies are complementary, and increasingly link detailed atomic structure with cellular context. Instruct is headquartered in Oxford.

By interconnecting national systems biology centres and making their collective expertise, resources and services easily accessible for all European researchers, Infrastructure for Structural Biology - Europe (ISBE) will bring systems biology within easy reach of scientists. Researchers will be able to gain easy access to the best systems biology expertise, resources and services including state-of-the-art facilities, data, models, tools and training. ISBE is currently in the preparatory phase and headquartered in London.

Square Kilometre Array (SKA) project is an international effort to build the world’s largest radio telescope, with eventually over a square kilometre (one million square metres) of collecting area. The telescope arrays will be located in South Africa and Australia but the headquarters of the international project is in Manchester.

The European Social Survey (ESS), headquartered in London, is an academically driven cross-national survey that has been conducted across Europe since 2001. The survey measures the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations in more than thirty nations. The ESS data is available free of charge for non-commercial use and can be downloaded from this website after a short registration.

National Research Infrastructures: Research infrastructures funded by the European Commission to provide transnational access to researchers. These infrastructures are part of networks supported through Integrating Activity projects with a view to maximise their use for the benefit of the scientific community.
Examples in Scotland include:
- University of Strathclyde Kelvin Hydrodynamics laboratory
- EPCC at the University of Edinburgh
- Edinburgh Curved Wave Tank
- Moredun research facilities at Penicuik – part of the network of animal disease laboratories.
- Royal Botanical Gardens – access to Collections.

Other Examples:

The European Mouse Mutant Archive (EMMA), is a typical example of a distributed infrastructure. It consists of a large scale repository of mouse lines, with nodes in six different countries yet appearing as one unique centre to the users, via a single web interface and that distributes the lines to the broad biology scientific community.

The GÉANT high-speed network is just one of many examples of e-Infrastructure initiatives launched to facilitate cooperation among researchers. E-infrastructures enable scientists to share knowledge and resources and bring real benefits for ordinary people.

http://ec.europa.eu/research/infrastructures/index_en.cfm?pg=landscape

Tracey Slaven
University of Edinburgh
8 November 2016
University of Edinburgh

“As a community we are determined that the University of Edinburgh will continue to wear its heart on its sleeve as a European and international university and I know that we will be even more global and outward-looking in the future, not less. The post-Brexit landscape will offer us many opportunities to thrive and we will be ready to take them”.

Principal, Professor Sir Timothy O’Shea

Staff

- 17% of all our staff (2,389 people) are non-UK EU nationals;
- 25% of our academic staff are EU nationals (15% UK universities; 21% within Russell Group)
- So far, we haven’t lost any staff but they are very uncertain about the future
- We are doing extensive internal communications to reassure them as far as possible and keep them informed of recent developments.
- We would wish to continue accepting staff from EU countries and it will depend on Brexit negotiations as to how attractive and easy this will be
- Our academic staff are experts in many Brexit-related areas and are committed to informing the wider public debate on the issues, for example the Centre on Constitutional Change hosted a recent conference in conjunction with the Scottish Parliament’s Committee for Europe and External Relations, and academics hosted a public engagement event on Brexit in Leith.

Students

- 14% of all our students (4,742 in 2015/16) are from the non-UK EU (5% UK universities; 7% within Russell Group)
- 250 Erasmus exchanges (students in and students out)
- Our applications and enrolments by EU nationals are holding steady
- We haven’t lost any existing EU students
- We are doing extensive internal communication to reassure them as far as possible and inform them of the latest developments
- The Scottish Government has agreed to honour ‘no fees’ status and access to loans (if they meet the residence requirements) for the 2016 EU intake. The 2017 cycle of admissions has now begun but we cannot yet inform these students what their fee status will be.
- We would wish to continue accepting students from EU countries and it will depend on Brexit negotiations as to how attractive and easy this will be.

The UK immigration policy for both students and staff remains challenging for the UK higher education sector. The University of Edinburgh’s visa approval rate exceeds 99% each year.
Annexe B: Briefing for Scottish Government Debate: Implications of the EU Referendum on Higher and Further Education

Research funding

- 10% of our total research income, which was £226m in 2015, comes from EU sources, with the largest proportion currently going to research in our College of Science and Engineering.
- We have applied for 91 Horizon 2020 projects (awaiting results) to the value of €77.6m.
- In last 10 years, 30% of our research outputs were co-authored by EEA partners (cf 18% with USA partners).
- The UK Treasury has confirmed that all EU structural and investment fund projects signed before the Autumn Statement in November will be fully funded, even when these projects continue beyond the UK’s departure from the EU.

Other funding

The University has loans of £250m from the European Investment Bank (EIB). The UK has a 16% shareholding in the EIB and is one of its four main shareholders. We understand that agreements currently in place will be honoured.

Research Collaborations

Researchers from the University have been and are partners with EU researchers in collaborations on areas including:
- the development of the next generation of clean low-carbon energy;
- the European Space Agency EUCLID mission to search for dark energy;
- the interdisciplinary training of PhD students from across Europe at the European University Institute;
- FISHBOOST, a project involving 14 European research partners aiming to improve efficiency and profitability of European aquaculture by advancing selective breeding of six main fish species.

European support for the University of Edinburgh

We have received many letters of support from EU Commissioners and Directors-General, from the Rectors and Vice-Chancellors of universities across Europe, and from fellow-members of the European centres of excellence in higher education such as the League of European Research Universities, the Coimbra Group, Universitas 21, the Eurotech Alliance and others bodies.

The University of Edinburgh seeks the following:

1. maintain UK university access to EU research programmes – seeking income, partnerships and influence – preferably through remaining part of the European

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1University of Edinburgh written submission of evidence on the risks and opportunities for science and research of leaving the EU
Research Area which produces one-third of the world’s research outputs\(^2\), and/or negotiating Associate Country status;

- continue UK contribution and access to EU research infrastructure (ops like CERN unaffected);
- preserve ‘research excellence’ as a key criterion for funding under an association agreement;
- seek continued freedom of movement for UK and EU researchers, especially early-career researchers;
- early clarity over the rules which will apply to tuition fees and fee loans for EU students;
- continue access to Erasmus schemes and the European Investment Bank funding.

**Edinburgh Global**

Whilst firmly rooted in Scotland, and proud of its heritage, the University has always been an outward-facing institution. From our earliest days we looked to Paris, Leiden and other European universities for models of education and knowledge exchange. In the mid-1800s, Edinburgh was acknowledged to be the western world’s foremost centre of excellence for Medicine. We were also early European educators of students from China, India and Africa. Over 11,000 (29%) of our students are ex-EU international students (33% of our students are Scottish-domiciled). More recently, we have opened offices in Beijing, in Mumbai, in Santiago (Chile) and in New York. We have hundreds of research and study collaborations across the world. More than 2 million students worldwide have registered for our MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses).

The University of Edinburgh is ranked Number 19 in the world (QS rankings 2016). Our students come from 137 countries, speak more than 70 different languages, and return to their country as ambassadors for Edinburgh and Scotland. In turn, the University of Edinburgh hosts 10 world-leading area and cultural studies centres, creating dialogue, knowledge exchange and advancing cultural connections between Scotland and other countries. These include: Confucius Institute; South Asian Studies Centre for Advanced Study of the Arab World; Centre of African Studies; Princess Dashkova Russian Centre; Europa Institute; Nordic Studies Centre.

Our Global Academies – in Justice, Health, Development, and Environment & Society – aim to equip future leaders with the skills and knowledge required for the global challenges ahead. We have a network of more than 170,000 graduates across the world. Research has shown a clear correlation between increased levels of trust in a country and an increase in a person’s inclination to do business with, study in or visit that country. Since its foundation, the University of Edinburgh has always had an international outlook and, despite the uncertainty which Brexit inevitably brings, we are well-positioned to operate on a global basis and to face the challenges ahead.

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\(^2\)Comparative Benchmarking of European and US Research Collaboration and Researcher Mobility 2013