



What does Brexit mean for students?

Tuesday 21 February; 10:00am-11:00am;
Committee Room 18, House of Commons, Westminster, SW1A 0AA

Introduction

Since the EU referendum result in June 2016, the defining political question has been over what Brexit will actually mean for the UK. For students, in particular, the UK's exit from the EU may have dramatic implications – from their ability to travel and study to their experience of international cultures on campuses across the country. Given the 'youth vote' was overwhelmingly to remain, it is crucial to explore what Brexit will mean for students and how, or whether, Brexit will work for them.

Key statistics

- 64% of young people voted in the EU referendum (an increase of over half compared to turnouts for the 2010 and 2015 General Elections).¹
- 71% of young people that voted in the referendum voted to remain in the EU.²
- In 2014/15, there were 125,000 EU students enrolled at universities in the UK.³
 - With 2.27 million students in total in higher education, EU students amount to 5.5%.
 - EU students make up 13% of postgraduate research students.
- Each year, over 16,000 university students and 8,500 technical and vocational students from the UK participate in the Erasmus+ programme to study in Europe.
 - 46% of students who participate in Erasmus+ are modern language students, for whom travel and study abroad is often an essential course requirement.

Key terms:

Erasmus+: European exchange programme for learners and staff. The Erasmus Plus programme, introduced by the European Commission in 2014, builds on the Erasmus Programme, which was established in 1987. Expanding the original HE student exchange programme, Erasmus+ integrates exchange opportunities across education, training, youth and sport – and provides funding for partnerships between education institutions. Over 200,000 students from the UK have studied abroad through Erasmus since 1987.

Bologna Process: The Bologna Process, launched in 1999 with the Bologna Declaration, is a voluntary process implemented in the 48 states that define the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It is designed to internationalise higher education systems and institutions, and ensure comparability in the standards and quality of university qualifications. It is not an EU initiative, but all EU member states are involved in the Process.

European Higher Education Area (EHEA): Launched in 2010, the EHEA was the main objective of the Bologna process, and was designed to ensure more compatible systems of higher education in Europe. The area is currently defined by 48 countries, which implement reforms on higher education on the basis of key values such as freedom of movement of students and staff, institutional autonomy, independent student unions and academic freedom.

Current Government position

Currently, EU students are eligible to receive undergraduate tuition fee loans and Master's loans if they have lived in the European Economic Area for at least three years before study. They are not, however, eligible for maintenance loans or grants unless they have lived in the UK for over 5 years. This means the average loan made to an EU student is lower than that made to an English student. However, concerns have been elsewhere raised that it is likely to be more difficult to secure repayment of the

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/09/young-people-referendum-turnout-brexit-twice-as-high>

² <https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/06/27/how-britain-voted/>

³ <http://monitor.icef.com/2017/01/eu-applications-uk-higher-education-7-2017/>



loans from EU students, since these individuals may be more likely to leave the UK after graduation.⁴ Currently, only 1.69% of the balance for student loans in England (which includes all current and outstanding loans) have been incurred by students from the EU.⁵

Under EU law, EU students are also eligible for home fee status, which means they are charged the same tuition fees as UK students. Other non-EU, international students do not have their tuition fees capped in this way. The Government announced on 11 October 2016 that EU students applying for a place at English universities or further education institutions for courses that begin in the 2017-2018 academic year will still be eligible for student loans and grants, and will be for the duration of their course, even if the UK exits the EU during that period.⁶

However, questions about future years remain unanswered, particularly as the length of the Brexit process – and any transitional arrangement that may be agreed – remains unclear. Many students and educational institutions have been calling for further assurances for future academic years, as well as answers on what the long term effects of Brexit will be on both EU and UK students.

Implications of the ongoing Brexit debates for students

On 17 January 2017, the Prime Minister made a speech outlining her priorities for Brexit negotiations. These have since been expanded on in a White Paper on the UK's new partnership with the European Union⁷ and debated extensively during the passage of the European Union (Notification and Withdrawal) Bill. A number of implications have been raised and questions posed about the status of students, post-Brexit.

- In her speech, Theresa May highlighted rights for EU nationals living in the UK as a priority; however, she has indicated that this is contingent on the rights of UK nationals abroad. There are over 125,500 students from the EU in the UK, and the right to stay in the UK is a crucial issue for them.
- Theresa May has indicated that she intends to use Brexit as an opportunity to cut immigration figures by creating a more restrictive system; if international students continue to be counted within the net migration statistics, this is likely to affect them.
- The future of the Erasmus+ programme will be seriously compromised if the UK opts out of freedom of movement, as the Prime Minister has indicated.
- A transitional deal may give the opportunity for students to get clarifications about their futures.

Questions to consider

- What are the risks, challenges and opportunities for students in a post-Brexit world?
- What actions can and should be taken to ensure that students are genuinely and consistently included, engaged and represented in the process of leaving the EU?
- What protections should be guaranteed for EU students studying in the UK, and for UK students studying in the EU?
- What will the impact be on students of potential restrictions on freedom of movement?
- Is there a future for the Erasmus+ programme in the UK if freedom of movement is restricted, and in what other ways can the Government promote student mobility?
- How can the Government ensure that the UK remains an attractive destination for international students – from Europe and beyond – post-Brexit?

The APPG's next event will consider the decline in numbers of mature and part-time students.

For further information and to register interest in attending, please contact Alexander Lee, Secretariat to the APPG on Students (info@appg-students.org.uk).

⁴ <http://www.ifs.org.uk/comms/r94.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.slc.co.uk/official-statistics/full-catalogue-of-official-statistics/student-loans-debt-and-repayment.aspx>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/funding-support-for-eu-students>

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/588948/The_United_Kingdoms_exit_from_and_partnership_with_the_EU_Web.pdf