



European
Institute

Higher Education and Research

Report of the hearing held on 8 December, 2015



LSE Commission on the Future of Britain in Europe

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Foreword

This is a report of the hearing that took place on Tuesday 8th December 2015 from 1730 to 2000hrs. This was the second session in the series of the 'LSE Commission on the Future of Britain in Europe'.

Respected practitioners and experts in higher education and research took up our invitation to participate in the hearing to discuss the risks of a Brexit and how universities might act at this important moment in British life. Participants included those with high level and/or frontline experience of academia and research, of EU programmes in research and higher education mobility, and experience within the British and EU political spheres. Among them were former vice chancellors, a representative of the National Union of Students, directors of EU-related research programmes in science and the social sciences, prominent researchers in European studies, economics and regulation, and those whose prime responsibility is in university academic development. Also present were senior scientists who have been leading the commercialisation of EU knowledge and innovation projects, leaders of policy think-tanks across a spectrum of political opinion, and senior journalists in the sector.

The hearing had one introductory presentation to fill an information gap. A senior official from the European Commission of the higher education policy unit of the Directorate-General Education and Culture outlined what the European Commission can do under the EU Treaty to stimulate quality in higher education in conjunction with support for the Bologna Process.

We are very grateful for the expert contributions made in the session and additional papers submitted to the hearing by participants and non-participants. We have adopted the 'Chatham House' rule of not attributing comments to individuals at the hearing, unless they are on record through contributions to the LSE BrexitVote blog.

Marion Osborne and David Spence provided organisational support. Trenton Marlar, MSc student, assisted at the hearing and in the preparation of the report. My colleague, Linda Hantrais, made helpful comments on the first draft of the text. Any errors are my own.

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1. Introduction

The politics and policies of European higher education and research are generally treated as a niche area of interest, even within the sector. The leading higher education weekly *Times Higher Education* took the editorial line as the Referendum campaign opened that the process would throw up so many unknowns that the situation would produce stories that 'readers don't want to read and journalists don't want to write'.¹

This report sets out to assess the evidence available. What would be the funding and intellectual risks for higher education and research and its public should the vote be for Brexit? Might a better alternative to current policy emerge in the campaign? This first strand of the hearing focussed on the potential costs to the system should the UK be distanced from EU mobility and networking programmes and become detached from the EU concepts of the free movement of goods, capital services, and above all people. Would it matter if there were disruption to the systematic joint working across Europe that have evolved with EU support?

In this policy sector in which more is achieved by coordination and choice than by law, EU has embodied the idea that institutions, individuals, and ultimately the state, become more competitive by being more cooperative. There is much that can be done and much diversity retained within systematised rules and values.

This notion is foreign to much of the British population. Could supporters of 'remain' convince a wider public that of the EU case for education and research? Could 'leave' produce plausible evidence of an alternative to the EU model of incentive funding to stimulate quality and cooperation at the levels of governments, institutions and individuals?

The second strand of the discussion raised some 'first principle' issues as to why and how universities should play a public role in the EU referendum. How should universities respond? Should they keep silent to signal neutrality? Or should they be involved as civic institutions and guardians of pluralist traditions. How might academics and students be encouraged to play a role?

2. Summary

- There is a deeply rooted UK belief that it is an international star in research and higher education, scoring high on national league tables and OECD measures. This does not match a more complex reality where achievements are shared across national borders, with EU collaboration scoring favourably due to proximity, shared values, funded cooperation and easy mobility.
- The Brexit debate has brought to public light the existence of a European dimension to higher education and research little known outside Whitehall and Brussels.
- The EU is (i) a strategic actor in areas of research and innovation beyond the capacity of a single state to organise (ii) the promoter of collaboration which has turned Europe into the world's foremost knowledge hub (iii) a pioneer in the promotion of regional cooperation within a broadly common framework of regulatory practices.
- 'Remain' reflects the sector's concerns, 'leave' sets out to appeal to those who want the big picture, not the detail. The sector's strength lies in its tried and trusted experience of European cooperation. It has attracted top level political support (103 vice chancellors, 15 past and present ministers for universities and science, 15 past and present presidents of the National Union of Students, more than 60,000 scientists, and the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee).
- 'Leave' has not made a plausible case for leaving the EU. Its confidence that it could also negotiate a deal with the EU to buy back into EU programmes is unfounded. This strategy has cost Switzerland much in funding and lost influence. But the 'leave' side, building on its national strategy of 'restoring' sovereignty and curbing immigration, has had a rhetorical appeal which 'remain' has not effectively countered in the sector.
- University communities are active at the grassroots. But universities could also make more of their public role to reach out to their communities to facilitate open debate, and more of their educational role in developing critical citizens.
- After major political divisions, systems revert to equilibrium. Should the public vote for Brexit, experience suggests that policy advisers to the sector will do all they can to slow policy change, in the hope that much of the EU higher education and research architecture can be maintained.
- In the case of a remain victory there are lessons to learn (i) in communicating how in practice a national system balances independence and interdependence, cooperation and competition (ii) that being part of 'Europe' may not be the only way to achieve such a balance but in terms of shared geography, shared culture and understanding, shared values, it is at present the best way.

3. Background

The accepted view of the way a higher education system functions is that it is national. In promoting its achievements, the UK sector benchmarks itself by international standards of the OECD and world rankings of universities.

In legal terms higher education systems are national. The UK and its devolved authorities have jurisdiction over the 2.3mn students, 395,000 academics and 200,000 non-academics attached to the UK's 136 universities.² The universities themselves (now described in the jargon of the Higher Education Funding Council as 'higher education providers that can award degrees')³ are governed under British law. It is the British government, approved by Parliament, that decides to allocate 1.2% of its GDP to higher education in 2011-12, a lower proportion than in many countries.⁴

The achievements of the UK higher education system are seen as national too. Universities have a positive impact on local communities, jobs and the wider economy. According to a pre-election report for Universities UK, published in 2014, the UK higher education sector generated over £73bn of output, through both direct and multiplier effects. Higher education contributed 2.8% of UK GDP in 2011 (up from 2.3% in 2007-2008) and generated 757,268 full-time-equivalent (FTE) jobs throughout the economy. The sector as a whole generated an estimated £10.7 bn of export earnings for the UK.⁵ This includes the estimated £4.9 billion of off-campus expenditure by all international, non-UK (EU and non-EU) students attending UK

universities. These are handsome returns from the £ 30.7bn annual income of universities in 2013-2014, less than half of which was received from public sources.

A study by Elsevier, commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, found that, with 0.9 per cent of the global population, the UK accounts for 3.2 per cent of global R&D expenditure, 4.1 per cent of researchers and 15.9 per cent of the world's most highly cited articles.⁶ World rankings underpin this notion of British quality higher education. Ten UK universities feature in the top 50, QS rankings 2015/2016, second only to the US which has 18.⁷

Universities and colleges across the UK now gain £3.9bn from sharing their ideas, expertise and resources with their research peers and the wider community, a rising figure.

However the small print shows that research income from the UK research councils took a knock after the financial crisis of 2008 and has not fully recovered. The EU has come to the rescue. Research income from the EU at €0.8bn (£0.5bn) in 2013-14 has risen by almost 170% since 2004-2005.⁸

Appraising the European dimension

The need to understand the interface between the nation and the EU became an issue with the Conservative general election victory of May 2015, and a referendum on UK membership of the EU became a certainty

Back in 2012, the Coalition Government of 2010-2015 had taken an important step to try and engage public attention on the relationship of the UK to the EU. It initiated a benchmarking exercise, known as 'The Balance of Competences Review' on the working of the EU connection in various policy sectors. Its call for evidence chiefly concerned governance. There was only incidental concern with the contextual issues: the technological challenges of an increasingly automated society and the competitive pressures of a global economy impacting on higher education and research, how that impacts on the way knowledge is produced, and what students expect from education.

The report for research and development published in 2013, pointed to the EU doing a valuable job in research of coordinating and funding in complex areas beyond the scope of a single state. It found positive views with regard to the forums and networks the EU provides for collaboration.⁹ The parallel report on education, training and youth, published in 2014,¹⁰ saw EU work to promote international mobility and partnerships through Erasmus+ as a 'sensible' area for EU funding. It was a legitimate area of added value through the EU.

However much of the EU work largely takes place within the bureaucratic structures in Brussels and Whitehall, and is unknown to the wider public. Retired officials went on the record to say that the EU was 'neither visible on the ground nor influential in national policy-making

and, unlike the OECD, is almost entirely unnoticed by the world of education'.¹¹

The Balance of Competence exercise had few repercussions. For a sector preoccupied by the 2015 Conservative Government's reform proposals to extend the privatisation of the higher education sector, Europe was not on the radar.

Other evidence suggests that EU educational initiatives can reach the public. The EU Erasmus programme for student mobility and exchange, which now extends to all levels of education and countries across the world as Erasmus+, has made its mark in popular culture. The film 'L'Auberge Espagnol', a host of Erasmus networks, and 'cafébabel', an online blog site working in six languages and hosted in eight countries, all demonstrate a 'people to people' side of the EU.¹² More than 200,000 UK students and 20,000 staff have benefitted from the programme.¹³ But it is a fair bet that not many people will have a notion of what the EU does on research nor know about the Bologna Process which it supports.¹⁴

Although it is hardly a household name, the emerging European Higher Education Area, managed through the Bologna Process, has an indirect impact on higher education lives through its framing of codes of practice on quality assurance and recognition, as well as the spin off of its cooperative networks. Much of the UK's national regulation of higher education shadows the Bologna Process.

In July 2015, Universities UK launched a public campaign 'Universities for Europe'

to show why they value a European dynamic and why universities favour 'remain'. Vice-chancellors stepped out with accounts of their experience to underline four messages:

- the UK's membership makes the UK's outstanding universities even stronger
- the EU helps universities to educate and employ people in their areas and support home-grown enterprise
- the EU helps universities pursue cutting edge research, which improves people's lives and enhances the UK's global influence
- the EU makes it easier for the UK to attract talented students and staff; and it helps universities provide more life-changing opportunities for students and staff.

Its statistics showed EU membership invigorating UK institutions.¹⁵ Non-UK EU staff make up 15 % of the total academic workforce. EU students are 5% of the student body. There were over 27,000 non-UK EU students in 2012-2013 coming to study or engage in education-related work in the UK and over 14,000 UK students participated in the Erasmus programme in 2012-2013. The UK is a favoured research destination for those holding the prestigious excellence-based grants of the European Research Council. Half of the grants for the 'consolidating' stage for early career researchers and attached to UK institutions are held by non-UK EU citizens.

In funding terms the UK does well from the EU in research and innovation. Under Framework Programme (FP7) the UK received €8.8bn {£6.8bn} which the authorities concerned estimate as a gain for the UK of €3.5 bn (£2.73bn). Of the 28 EU member states, only Germany received slightly more net, and only the Netherlands received slightly more on a population/GDP ratio.

In an updated analysis, Universities UK maintained that non-UK EU students at UK universities generate £3.7bn for the UK economy and support over 34,000 jobs. This affects local economies in every corner of the country.¹⁶ Based on 2011–12 statistics of 125,000 non-UK EU students, Universities UK claimed that EU students spent £220m on campus (money paid directly to universities in fees and costs) generating £1.44bn for the UK economy. Their expenditure of £1.49bn on goods and services off-campus such as food, rent, entertainment, generated £2.27bn. Their on-campus expenditure supported 15,252 jobs and spending off-campus 18,998 jobs, totalling 34,250 in full time equivalents. These figures had not been challenged at the time this report went to press.¹⁷

In May 2015, under the name Scientists for EU, a small group of research scientists had entered the campaign with the distinction that they were overwhelmingly making the 'knowledge case' for staying in. They quickly attracted some of the most prestigious names in UK science and inspired an active grassroots movement.¹⁸

By September 2015, the higher education sector's relationship with the EU had become an issue of interest to Parliament. The House of Lords Select Committee for Science and Technology Committee issued a call for evidence on the relationship between EU Membership and the effectiveness of science, research and innovation in the UK.¹⁹

Towards the end of 2015 the press started to be interested in universities and the EU. Much of the coverage took up the 'remain' campaigners' message that it would be a serious loss, if not a disaster, for the higher education and research sector if the UK were to leave the EU. Labs would close, the UK would lose influence, and productive ways of working would be destroyed.²⁰ The young were quickly perceived to be important to the campaign, following the publication of a survey in November 2015. This showed that students were instinctively pro-EU but were not certain whether to vote.²¹

4. The hearing

Themes for 'remain': interdependence and EU dynamism

The referendum question for the participants was ultimately not one of remain or leave. It was whether 'Europe' was the best way for the sector to engage in necessary forms of cooperation and coordination. The first strand of the hearing was devoted to what the EU does to support higher education and research, and whether that is effective. There is continuous need shared by all members of the EU to adapt to a knowledge economy and a knowledge society. Continued automation and the political priority accorded to innovation is dramatically changing the demand for those with high level analytic skills and reducing the prospects for the merely average. This trend boosts the case for mobility for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and personal development.²² Regional cooperation over and above regional and national specificities is becoming a world wide solution.²³

There is a wealth of evidence suggesting that the 28 member states of the EU stand out in global comparative perspective for working within systematised rules and values. Old cultural patterns of cooperation have not been extinguished. Within the Treaty, the EU offers research and higher education an essentially supportive role backed by incentive funding. The support is strategic within the larger aim of the EU's political leadership to promote the knowledge economy in a world in which sustainability

is an issue as outlined, in the policy document *Europe 2020*.²⁴ The connections within the higher education and research communities, and through the university-enterprise projects, are designed to support innovation at all levels: government to government, institution to institution and between scholarly groups, individuals and experts. These are enriched by the Bologna Process and the emerging European Higher Education Area.

Experts highlighted that academics and researchers more widely can be seen as less productive and less influential away from the critical mass which now exists in the EU. One example is the trend to co-production or co-authorship between individuals or groups across borders. This has a much richer impact than work authored within one country.

In the US the rate of international co-authorship has risen from from 6% in the 1980s to 33% currently. In the UK and Germany it has risen over the same period from around 10% to 50%. China bumps along at a rate in the 20% range and is not showing a consistent rise. The EU accounts for over 22% of the global total of science researchers, ahead of China (19%) and the US (just under 17%). In terms of research productivity, measured by highly cited papers, the EU has 'become the biggest knowledge hub in the world'.²⁵ In all, around 170 countries have contributed to that result. A recent UNESCO study suggests that the European Research Area now accounts for a third of the world's research output (These points are

illustrated and sourced in a hearing-related LSE Brexit Vote blog).²⁶

The funding which keeps frontier research labs open is important, but just one element of this development within the EU. Much of 'big' research requires structure. CERN, the European Organisation for Nuclear Research, founded in the 1950s is taken as an successful example of non-EU cooperation by 'leavers'. But it is within the EU that research structures to support multinational teams have burgeoned over the last decade or two. In some areas this is a functional requirement. KICs projects (the multinational knowledge and innovation projects that come under the aegis of the European Institute of Technology, an EU institution) have an infrastructure impossible to replicate on a national scale.

As one participant put it 'when you are working with 200 partners, the majority of them SMES (small and medium enterprises) from across the EU, this is on a scale not even contemplated by Innovate UK'.

Similarly where the science is aimed at developing new nano-materials or discovering ever rarer particles, very expensive machinery or very large samples of patients become a necessity. The same kind of case is made for research on new cures for the bigger killer diseases.

The social sciences are another example where EU funding for cross-border work may be small scale but is critical to certain developments. There has been a reflexive response within the EU. The recent

programmes integrate a social science strand into its big science and technology projects.

The essence of EU attraction to adherents is the close connection between competition and cooperation. The stimulus of cross-border collaboration is increasingly seen as a professional and cultural necessity across the disciplines, over and beyond historic UK-US intellectual linkages.

The biggest losers of Brexit could be the universities themselves. There is a virtuous circle within higher education of teaching and research and conferences and peer review and publication which feed back into the classroom. At present the need for international reach and its accompanying cross-fertilisation of ideas sit high on UK university agendas. This links to concerns for employability, student engagement and student experience. But the situation is fragile. The fate of European Studies gives a foretaste of what could happen. The ambient euroscepticism of the UK's political climate has led to its almost total demise as a subject discipline within the UK. The University Association for the Study of Contemporary Europe, founded by UK academics before the UK joined the then EEC, relies on a majority of non-UK EU scholars to keep up high levels of intellectual stimulus.²⁷

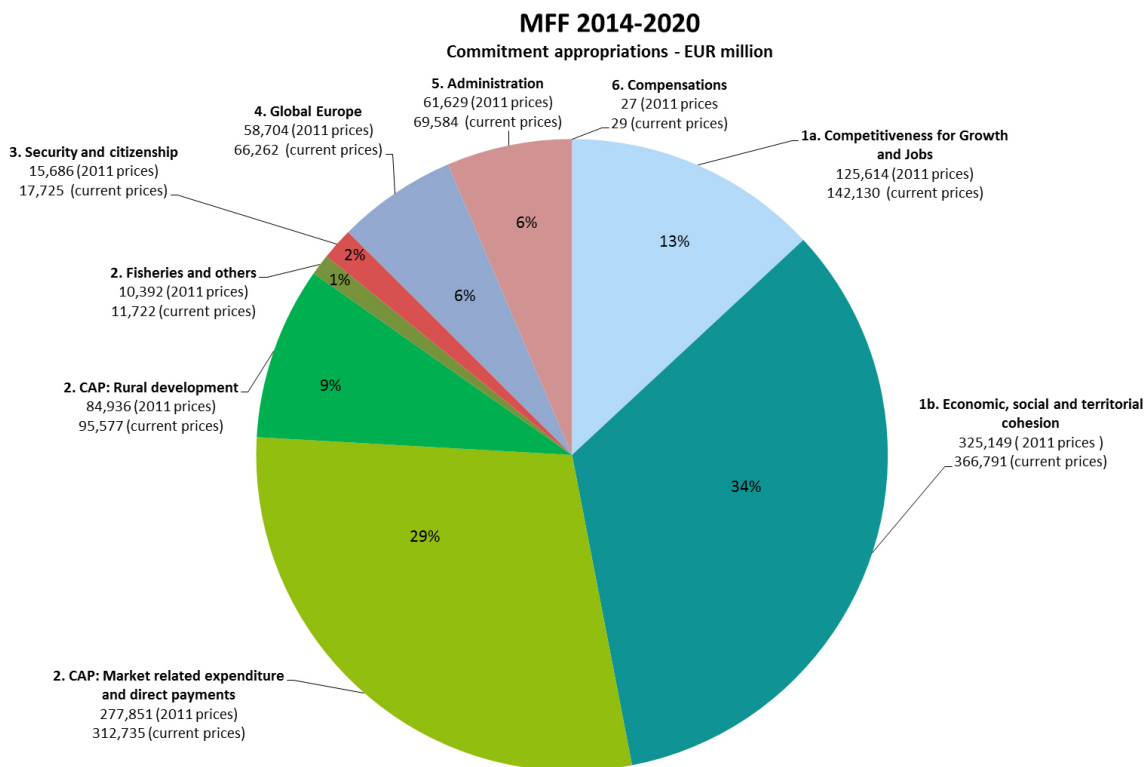
Those who campaign for 'remain' believe that EU membership is a win-win for the UK as well as the other member states, since EU research funding is both merit-based and needs-based. The proportions allocated to both have been significantly

increased under the current budget, mainly through the research and innovation budget (competitive funding) and the cohesion budget, but are also elements in most areas of EU policy including agriculture and security (see below).

However this double and differentiated approach is not well understood in the UK sector beyond the ranks of those with first-hand experience (see below). But it is fundamental to many supporters of EU structures that the case for the EU cannot be made entirely in immediate and national cost benefit terms. There is also the issue of solidarity. There have had to be strategies that benefit the European economy as a whole since the enlargements of 2004, 2006 and 2013

brought less developed economies into membership, and the financial crisis of 2008 has left other countries vulnerable.

Such funding supports researchers and the creation of university extensions as knowledge hubs in under-competitive regions. This includes examples in the UK but its key targets are under-competitive member states. For the post Soviet countries there is a hunger to stimulate the knowledge based development of local economies. The UK has played an important role here in capacity building. Scientists for EU cites evidence that this approach has produced excellent researchers and significantly increased science/innovation capacity on a national and European scale.²⁸



The 13 per cent of the budget allocated to research and innovation includes: Horizon 2020, its €79bn (£61.6) budget divided between pure and applied projects included in Horizon 2020, ERC grants and the Marie Curie Sklodowska programme. The education programme Erasmus+ has (€14.8bn) (£11.55) and now includes EU support measures throughout the sector. The three research programmes Copernicus, COSME and Galileo total €13.5bn (£10.53) between them.²⁹

Economic, social and territorial cohesion projects (the former Structural Funds), which account for 24% of the EU budget, include an important research element. The EU budget, in line with the EU knowledge society/knowledge economy strategy, has also built in a research element to all the policy areas where the EU has responsibilities. This includes the common agricultural policy and rural development, fisheries, security and citizenship. It is a big shift from the days when the agricultural budget took over half the EU budget. Scientists for EU claim that the 2014-2020 settlement shows that nearly half the EU budget is research and innovation related.

The 'leave' argument: restore national sovereignty

Compared with the evidential arguments for 'remain', those for 'leave' are thin. The hearing participants did their best to represent what 'leavers' might say in developing counterfactual arguments to the 'remain' case. An official statement

from a 'leave' campaign on the higher education and research case for leaving the EU was not available at the time. Nor, despite our best efforts, did the hearing have an official representative of a 'Leave' campaign.³⁰ But the claim that leaving the European Union would mean the UK could spend more on research, still take part in the EU's research programmes and attract more academics from beyond Europe was on the table.³¹ This was confirmed when Vote Leave submitted its evidence to the House of Lords Science and Technology enquiry.³²

The 'leave' argument is that by removing the need to pay into the EU budget there would be funds available for the UK to decide and implement its own policy. It believes that a commitment to science research could become the national priority if the UK were free of the EU (while on record for suggesting other national priorities such as the NHS, which would be supported out of 'reclaimed' EU budget funds). 'Being free of the EU' is essentially seen as being free of the freedom of movement rules, as a weapon against uncontrolled EU immigration. These campaigners see no reason, despite evidence to the contrary, for the UK being prevented from accessing EU funding or collaborative projects. They continue to cite the participation of non-EU members Switzerland, Israel and Moldova in Framework Programme 7.

The 'leave' case has had greater traction, building on widespread euroscepticism.

The strengths and weaknesses of the 'remain' and 'leave' arguments

Has 'remain' been guilty of exaggeration?

The pursuit of knowledge would not stop with a Brexit.³³ For those with an inside experience of government the 'remain' camp's chief weaknesses are to oversell the disaster scenarios of Brexit. 'Leavers' could keep to their pledge and put the £0.7bn that came from EU sources into British research.³⁴ It is a view that has been held by some distinguished figures in academia.³⁵ The experts also talked down the assumption by some on the 'remain' side that 'leave' campaigners would be trying to get the UK to turn its back on its European neighbours. 'The UK will not float off into a dark zone of the Atlantic. If it leaves the EU, our phones, emails and airports will still work'.³⁶ There would be no overnight fall to zero in the academic staff from non-UK EU states from the present total of 15% over the sector and more in certain universities.

The Erasmus scheme would not stop overnight. The international characteristic of UK university campuses and the opportunities for cultural mixing would remain even if the composition were to be different, with more international students. Any drop in the number of other non-UK EU students could have financial

advantages for universities. The UK would stop having to finance student loans for non-UK EU students. Recent figures show 42% would be unlikely to be repaid.³⁷

Leave weaknesses – the UK research hub and what the Swiss case signals

The 'leave' view of a generous 'quid pro quo' which would be offered to the UK after Brexit is unlikely.

Switzerland is the example. Despite its top-performing research institutions, its links with the EU are now fragile. Following the Swiss popular vote in the 2014 referendum to oppose the EU's fundamental principle of free movement. The EU retaliated by making Swiss membership of the EU programmes provisional and costly. The Swiss lost their privilege of leading research projects and their position as a full member of the Erasmus+ programme. With Switzerland's status changed to 'partner country' it has been forced to fund a national scheme for mobility whereby the Swiss pay all the costs of sending and receiving students.³⁸

The 'leave' side has failed to put up credible alternatives for the sector. The existing links with the English speaking nations may be strong: the US and Australia are among the five countries with which the UK conducts most research collaboration and there is no reason why that should not continue. There are claims that European research hardly registers intellectually in some disciplines. But the impact of a UK, US, Australia

triangle, evokes for experts an institutional 'anglosphere' with echoes of the 19th century. At the time of the Hearing, Leave appeared to be trying to hone existing arrangements with the EU and with existing bilateral relationships in line with its preoccupation with immigration.

Remain's underlying strength lies in its tried and tested experience. Since the hearing its stand has attracted major political and governmental support (103 vice chancellors, 15 past and present ministers for universities and science, 15 past and present presidents of the National Union of Students, more than 60,000 scientists, and the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee. See below). Leave's strength, in contrast, lay in its potential to connect through its rhetoric with a public uninterested in sectoral detail or the quality of evidence. It worried the experts at the hearing that they did not have more material from 'leave' to critique.

Why universities matter

The second strand of the hearing was a 'first principle' question: 'why do universities matter? What is the appropriate behaviour for academics at a moment of national significance? This has been spurred in part by widespread criticism that much of the 'remain' case is focussed on the economic benefits of staying in the EU.

The Universities UK line that Europe makes the UK's already excellent universities stronger, our economy more productive and our society more open has been

largely related to what the UK gains from EU funding.³⁹ Vice chancellors have the evidence of what universities do to drive local economies, such as the jobs they support and the knowledge hubs they represent. Would universities have been wiser not to have committed to 'remain' from the start? Participants grappled with the distinction to be made between Universities UK as the lobby group for the sector, the institutional values of the university as a civic or democratic organisation embedded in the nation, and the values of academic freedom and dissent as they play out for individual academics. The distinctions are well developed in the literature.⁴⁰ Universities as institutions stand for the democratic tradition of scholarship, of acquiring and marshalling facts in good faith, and challenging that knowledge and its interpretations in the search for an albeit provisional truth. Academics have the time-honoured freedom to dissent.

University efforts to facilitate discussion in the name of pluralism have been appreciated. Academics are ready to play their part in assisting students in developing insights at what for many is a transformative moment in their lives.

The 'remain' side needs to highlight how European culture and geography form part of the rich identity of UK universities and research.

The concept of academic freedom presupposes that within a university there will be reasoned dissent and a plurality of values. But the academic authority of the educator counts too. As one of the participants put it: 'This is not a partisan point. It is what we have given our professional lives to: the rebutting of factual errors with evidence, and helping in the process of sharing ideas and increasing understanding'.

This part of the discussion was given a helping hand by the student representative from the National Union of Students. Her intervention confirmed the HEPI poll findings that students were likely to favour the 'remain' case but could not be guaranteed to vote.⁴¹ She reasoned that most of the students she met would not have a clue about the Bologna Process or details of how EU institutions work. Many of them did however care about some of the basic reasons which brought a united Europe into being: democracy, human rights, peace and the benefits that citizenship brought, notably freedom of movement. Peace has a renewed value as the more politically aware students find themselves face to face with students from countries where democratic values are fragile or under threat. Ukraine was a particular shock to many politically aware students. 'Students should be active citizens in society, and shape the debate that influences this referendum', she said.⁴² Weeks later, the National Union of Students took up the cause with the slogan 'We Want In'.⁴³

The referendum has been the opportunity for those hostile to the sector to fight a proxy battle, spurred by the strongly pro -EU stand of UK university leadership - a distinct rise in the political temperature.

5 After the Hearing

The hearing was held more than six months before Referendum Day, June 23, 2016. It had ended with a sense in the corridors that the 'leave' side had still to unleash its arrows and that when the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee, examining UK EU relationships was published in spring 2016, there would be a respected benchmark. A question hung over whether universities would respond to suggestions in the Hearing that as authoritative institutions they had a role to play in encouraging evidence-based debate. This postscript to the Hearing takes up how these points played into the relative strengths of the 'remain' and 'leave' campaigns.

'Leave' case supporters have not been impressive on the sectoral case. They have continued to make their regularly contested claim that Brexit would not prevent the UK easing back advantageously into EU programmes of its choice, and that only a Brexit would deliver the pro-higher education regime UK universities need. The anti-immigration line of 'leave' has become more specific echoing the national campaigns. Its advocates claim that Brexit would deliver 'the immigration control desired by voters and offer the best students and academics preferential treatment such as automatic work visas after graduation and an expedited academic talent visa'. Free to charge EU students full fees, UK universities could use the resulting income on scholarships for the world's best, regardless of nationality'.⁴⁴ Other 'leavers' stress the benefits of revoking

EU membership and the obligations of EU citizenship in terms of the extra opportunities for British students.

The case for the UK setting up a British DARPA, modelled on the US Defense Advanced Projects Research Agency, and periodically subject to ethical conflicts, is an idea floated by Vote Leave in evidence to the House of Lords and in an *Economist* article by Vote Leave's director.⁴⁵ However the argument has never been substantiated, either by the national campaign or by Scientists for Britain.⁴⁶

The 'leave' theme of national sovereignty argued by Alan Sked, a well-known eurosceptic, may prove to have more traction. His snide reference to vice chancellors reducing the EU referendum question 'to the grubby level of vested interest' is of a piece with insults being thrown out as the referendum day approached from those favouring Brexit. But Sked did develop the larger point that it is not sufficient to argue the higher education and research case for 'remain' in purely sectoral terms. 'The EU referendum choice concerns issues of national sovereignty, democratic government, economic advantage, geopolitics, immigration and national identity.'⁴⁷ The remain side in aiming for the undecided voters has not got into the arguments.

The House of Lords' judicious report: EU membership positive for UK science and technology

The House of Lords' Science and Technology Committee report handed out some

The 'leave' case has failed to convince political leaders or the education sector that it has a viable plan for post-Brexit British higher education and research.

prizes to both sides in its report, *EU Membership and UK Science*.⁴⁸ It reflected some of the 'leave' criticism that the EU programmes had not been effective in the UK in stimulating innovation, noting that UK businesses were lagging behind competitor nations seeking EU funding⁴⁹. The committee also agreed that there were some restrictive EU regulations that could prohibit innovation.

But its concluding judgement was clear. It echoed the view of 103 vice chancellors expressed in July 2015,⁵⁰ that of the Minister for Universities and Science, Jo Johnston, in February,⁵¹ the letter of a further 13 ministers for science who had held office in the previous 25 years⁵², support from National Union of Students presidents going back to the 1950s, office holder Fred Jarvis, who had participated in the Normandy landings, and lifelong advocate of European unity as a guarantee of peace.⁵³

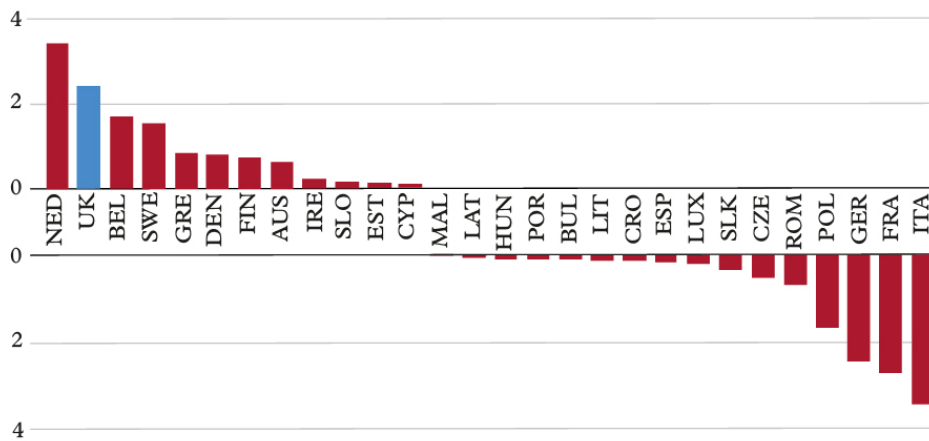
The Lords took to heart the evidence on why the scientific community 'greatly values membership' of the EU. It noted that the harmonisation of scientific regulation across the EU was 'seen to be

of overall benefit to the UK'. In particular, freedom of movement was a key benefit. 'The ease with which talented researchers and scientists can move between the UK and across the rest of the EU is an enormous advantage to our country's science community. Every effort should be made to preserve it'.

In the same vein, the Lords took the issues of the strategic influence of the UK on EU science policy as being a serious loss should the UK vote leave. The 'leave' claim that money saved from EU contributions would be redirected to compensate science for any losses was dismissed. As the chairman put it 'there would be other claims on the public purse' and it would be 'extremely trusting of the future Chancellor of the Exchequer to think that that sort of funding would continue in the event of Brexit'.⁵⁴

More generally the House of Lords rendered a service to those looking for evidence. One timely example appears in Appendix 7: 'Additional presentation of data on FP7 and structural funding for research and innovation as presented by the Royal Society'. The information is expressed in terms of the percentage proportion of EU GDP for each of the 28 member states. The first table relating to research and innovation, under Framework Programme 7 shows the UK second only to the Netherlands in the merit based funding it wins. The second table relating to the distribution of Structural Funds for economic, social and territorial cohesion, shows the UK along with Germany and France at the bottom of the table.

Difference between the percentage proportion of Framework Programme 7 funding received and the percentage proportion of EU GDP for each EU Member State. 2007–13



Difference between the percentage proportion of EU funding on for research, development and innovation (Framework Programme 7 and structural funds) received and the percentage proportion of EU GDP for each EU Member State. 2007–13



These tables can be seen as a litmus test by the ‘remain’ and ‘leave’ camps. For those who support membership of the EU (as in the hearing evidence presented by Scientists for EU), the shape of these tables is a foregone conclusion. The countries in the greatest receipt of Structural Funds are the ones most needing

to build up their capacity for ‘smart’ growth. For those for whom European citizenship is of no consequence, or something not to be desired, there is some traction to be gained by saying that here is another source of funds to be diverted to British students and deserving others.

6. Conclusions

It is surprising that the EU record on research and higher education has not been more widely evoked in national debate by 'remain' as an example of what can be achieved when there is national support for cooperation and EU strategic leadership in specific areas.

There is solid scholarship on how EU and Bologna institutions work in terms of pooled sovereignty and voluntary coordination in the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area. The way knowledge is produced, the pressure of technology, the labour market with high problem-solving skills, the growth in the number of mobile students and academics, the growth of institutional autonomy, have long since destroyed national autarchy. The evidence is to hand that the EU is flexible enough to accommodate diversity and has no wish to force member states to adopt policies contrary to vital national interests.⁵⁵

Whatever result the referendum delivers, a new equilibrium will emerge once the divisive campaign is over. Faced with a possible victory for 'leave', policymakers will be preparing their Plan B: just how much of existing EU higher education and research policy can they weld into a post-Brexit framework, taking advantage of the uncertainties which would follow.

There are also lessons should 'remain' win the day. There is a need for public education on how deeply a European dimension is embedded in national systems. The campaign has underlined that the British know less about the EU than the

populations of almost all other EU member states, and as Simon Hix has put it, what they see they don't necessarily like.⁵⁶

Why have there not been more attempts to capture public imagination by resorting to concrete examples? Critical as funding might be for research survival, taking it as a key factor has been a gift for the 'leavers' to present as self interest.

As this report was going to press the vice chancellor of the University of Sheffield cited its peer cities 'as not simply Leeds and Manchester, but Essen, Eindhoven and Toulouse, Bratislava, Wroclaw and Krakow'.⁵⁷ To anyone involved, European shared interests and shared geography and shared culture are real.

Proximity, cooperation and coordination are powerful factors in the development of modern systems of higher education and research, fertile for the development of knowledge and of ideas. But a sector which has so much first hand experience of 'Europe' has itself counted for little in a public debate. While Europe may not be the only way to cooperate, on present evidence from this sector, it is the best.

Endnotes

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- 30 The campaign proposed a former vice chancellor who said he was in fact going to vote 'Stay'
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