

NUS Scotland manifesto - European Parliament elections

Following months of political wrangling and ongoing uncertainty over how, when and even if we will leave Europe, the European elections present an opportunity to refocus the debate and to work together to ensure that students in Scotland are protected and continue to have access to the best support, opportunities, teaching and facilities.

As Brexit approaches, we want to ensure that students voices are heard. As part of the EU Elections, NUS Scotland believes European Parliament candidates must commit to:

1. Guarantee EU funding which supports access to further education will be replaced in the event of Brexit
2. Guarantee EU funding which supported research in higher education will be replaced in the event of Brexit
3. Guarantee protections for EU national apprentices post-Brexit
4. Protect inward and outward student mobility post-Brexit, including participation in Erasmus+ or any successor schemes and cross-border study on the island of Ireland
5. Create a fair immigration system for all migrants including international students, with post-study work visas lasting at least two years
6. Ensure no hard border on the island of Ireland and protect the Good Friday Agreement
7. Give students and young people a final vote on exiting the EU

EU funding

It is well accepted that Scotland currently punches above its weight (compared to the UK as a whole, and even globally, on a population share) when it comes to securing competitive research grants, and this is no different with EU research funding. Scotland's universities receive almost £90 million of research funding a year from EU sources, accounting for 13 per cent of the total research funding Scottish universities receive¹.

Scotland's colleges also receive significant funding from the EU through the European Social Fund (ESF). ESF programmes "provide additional student places for up-skilling and supporting young people not in employment, education and training." Between 2015 and 2018, this has funded around 11,000 college places². In addition to this, colleges also benefit from the ESF through funding administered by Skills Development Scotland for apprenticeship programmes, as well as in other areas.

Apprentices also benefit from the ESF through funding administered by Skills Development Scotland for apprenticeship programmes within colleges.

The future of this funding will depend on the method and terms agreed for Brexit. If a withdrawal agreement is reached and approved by Westminster, then funding will be available until the end of the

¹ <http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Scotlands-relationship-with-EU-US-response-FINAL-0916.pdf>

² http://www.sfc.ac.uk/web/FILES/corporatepublications_sfccp012018/SFCCP012018_EU_Exit_and_Scottish_colleges_and_universities.pdf

transition period with the UK continuing to be treated as an EU member. In the event of a no-deal Brexit, funding would cease on the day of leaving the European Union.

Regardless, continued access to funding streams or a replacement will be needed to ensure that our students and institutions do not lose out.

Student mobility

NUS Scotland recognises the many benefits of student mobility, especially through programmes such as Erasmus+, and the importance of the opportunities it offers to students.

Higher education students who participate in exchanges are more likely to receive a 1st or 2.1 degree and are less likely to be unemployed than their peers who do not. Likewise, they are more likely to be in a graduate job 6 months after completing their studies, and earning a higher wage by this point too³. The positive benefits are also long term. A 2014 report by the EU Commission which found that Erasmus+ alumni are only half as likely to be long-term unemployed and are significantly more likely to hold managerial positions 10 years after graduation and are more likely to go on to start their own company⁴.

Students from low socio-economic backgrounds and low participation wards, black and disabled students and care leavers are much less likely to participate in exchange programmes. Those that do attend however experience much greater impacts than their more advantaged peers⁵. Losing access to such a scheme would disproportionately affect these students who may be unable to afford, or unable to access, study abroad opportunities without the financial support aspect of Erasmus+.

NUS Scotland is unequivocally clear: there should be no detrimental impact to students' ability to learn, thrive and succeed in education, nor to their access to opportunities, as a result of Brexit.

Internationally diverse campuses

Students from outside the UK – be that within the EU, or beyond it - bring immense cultural, economic, and educational benefits to our universities and colleges, as well as wider Scottish society⁶. Any decrease in the number of EU students in Scotland would impact on all students studying in Scotland as well as the diversity of our campuses.

If the future fee level of EU nationals is increased this may result in higher fees for Scottish students who want to study in Europe outside of Erasmus+, any successor programme or institutional exchanges, as a number of countries charge reciprocal fees.

A decrease in European students may have further consequences, particularly for the feasibility of courses with a high proportion of EU national students. Particular care must be taken to ensure that any changes in student demographics do not result in course cuts or any resulting staff cuts.

³ <https://russellgroup.ac.uk/news/the-importance-of-student-exchange/>

⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/assets/eac/education/library/study/2014/erasmus-impact_en.pdf

⁵ <https://www.erasmusplus.org.uk/file/213/download>

⁶ <https://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Richer-For-It-US-270813SMALL.pdf>

While we have welcomed the Scottish Government's guarantee for further and higher education students, especially as the only part of the UK to provide a guarantee for students starting in 2020/21, allowing them to complete their studies on the same terms as when they started, no such guarantee has been given for the EU nationals who are doing apprenticeships in Scotland.

EU nationals currently have the same access to apprenticeships as Scottish citizens and we would like to see this continue. If this access cannot be maintained, all EU national apprentices must be able to complete their programme under their original terms and conditions, similar to the guarantee for other students in Scotland, and that this guarantee will also apply to any transitional arrangements.

Regrettably, the UK Government has failed to adequately consider the impact of a no-deal Brexit on Scottish higher education with respect to post-Brexit immigration proposals. Under current plans, the proposed European Temporary Leave to Remain scheme would only allow European students to study for three years, disadvantaging Scotland's four-year courses as well as longer courses such as medicine and students who have to extend their studies for any reason, who will have to apply for a student visa under Tier 4 of the Points Based System which have additional restrictions.

If we want to continue to have world-leading institutions post-Brexit, we must have an immigration system that continues to attract and retain the most talented students and apprentices.

A fairer immigration system

Regardless of the future fee status of European students, we believe that this can, and should, be an opportunity to address the wider issues experienced by international students.

We continue to call on all parties to support the reintroduction of the post-study work visa and have welcomed the Scottish Government's ongoing commitment, and wider consensus within Scotland, on this issue. Post-study work visas would not only make Scotland more of an appealing place of study for international students but would also allow Scotland to benefit from the expertise of recent graduates.

We further believe that the current fee system is unfair to international students, allowing universities to charge increasingly large amounts to students outside of the EU, treating them as mainly a source of income and failing to recognise the many benefits they bring to our world-class institutions. NUS Scotland would like to see universities and students work together to ensure a fairer system for all students, regardless of their nationality.

NUS Scotland would urge a collaborative, sector wide approach, calling for a fairer, more equal immigration system; one that recognises the incredible talent, skill and culture benefits of international students who choose to call Scotland their home.

A Final Say

Students will be one of the groups who will be worst affected by the consequences of Brexit. The majority of those currently in tertiary education, and those planning to enter in the coming years, were

not allowed to participate in the EU Referendum due to their age, with many of them being 16 and 17 year olds at the time they were denied the right to vote.

We believe that these students must be allowed a final say on this issue as it will greatly affect their futures.

NUS Scotland is calling on all candidates to support a final vote on exiting the EU to give students a voice in this process and to enfranchise young people who were previously excluded. Students, and young people, cannot continue to be denied a say in one of the most defining political decisions of their lifetimes.

Northern Ireland border

We must ensure that there is no hard border on the island of Ireland, protect peace and the Good Friday agreement.

All protections and rights within the 1998 Belfast Agreement must be retained. **Freedom of movement, access to services and student mobility must be retained through preventing a hard border and preventing tuition fees increasing for cross-border students post-Brexit.**

For more information on this, please contact:

Risga Carson

Policy and Public Affairs Officer

risga.carson@nus-scotland.org.uk