

General Election 2017: How universities can help the next government to deliver prosperity

The UK's world-class higher education system has huge social, economic and cultural benefits. We are asking all political parties to build on this excellence by prioritising EU workers and students in the Brexit negotiations and introducing an immigration system that supports universities to attract and retain international talent. We also ask that a future government continues plans to deliver an industrial strategy with universities at its heart, prioritises long-term investment in science and research, and ensures sufficient funding for undergraduate teaching so we can deliver a high quality student experience for all.

Our five priorities for the next government:

1. **Brexit** – secure a strong outcome for universities and research, recognising the importance of mobility and multi-lateral international collaboration
2. **International staff and students** – deliver a new visa and immigration system that supports universities to attract and retain talented staff and students from anywhere in the world
3. **Industrial strategy** – work with our world-class universities as anchors for growth locally, regionally and for the UK as a whole and support them to deliver growth across the country
4. **Science, research and innovation** – commit to at least current levels of planned investment for the science budget (resource and capital) and aim to make the UK even more globally competitive
5. **Student experience** – deliver sustainable funding for universities to provide the highest quality teaching and learning experience, in particular for high cost STEM+ subjects.

Brexit negotiations

The UK's position as a world leader in science, research and higher education depends on its ability to work with partners across Europe and beyond. In order to ensure a successful Brexit outcome, we want the next government to include the following in its key priorities for negotiations with the EU:

- Guaranteeing the rights of current EU citizens studying and working in the UK and providing timely clarity to EU nationals looking to work and study in the UK on their prospective rights.
- Ensuring UK universities can continue to attract, recruit and retain talented staff and students from across the EU without bureaucratic visa burdens.
- Ensuring the UK has full access to and influence over Horizon 2020 and future EU research and innovation programmes focused on excellence, maintains access to key infrastructures and can continue to participate in the Erasmus+ programme.

International students and staff

A strong base of overseas talent is fundamental in underpinning the UK's excellence in research, innovation and education.

- To maximise the ability of our universities to deliver cutting-edge research and innovation, boost jobs and growth and drive productivity, the next government should ensure the UK's future immigration system supports universities to attract and retain talented staff and students from anywhere in the world by:

- Prioritising highly skilled people (including researchers and academics); those with specialist knowledge and expertise (including technicians, analysts, and expert practitioners); and students.
 - Being light-touch, fair and transparent and having the capacity to adapt to the changing needs of research and academia.
 - Treating students as a separate, low-risk category of migrant and fast-tracking their access to the UK. More comprehensive post-study work opportunities for overseas students should also be introduced.
- Students should be removed from the net migration figures to send a clear message about the UK's openness to talented students from around the world. Excellent overseas students are indispensable for world-class universities, contributing to a diverse student body and a thriving society, culture and economy.

Industrial strategy

The next government must commit to an industrial strategy that supports a prosperous economy and ensures the UK remains globally competitive. UK universities and science are key drivers of economic growth, productivity and innovation at local, regional and national levels and should be at the heart of this strategy. To support UK universities to deliver growth across the whole country the strategy should:

- Sustain the dual support system and quality-related ('QR') research funding to ensure the diversity and breadth of UK research.
- Explore ways to promote university-business collaborations e.g. through enhancing HEIF (with such funding made consistently available across the UK), reforming the tax environment for research, developing a wide-ranging proof of concept fund and maintaining a flexible approach to IP.
- If the Apprenticeship Levy is continued, then allow this to be invested in the training and career development of postgraduate researchers.
- Enable our world-leading universities to take further advantage of opportunities to grow their overseas activities and maximise the benefits of international trade and investment.

Investing in science, research and innovation

To enable the UK to grow its international competitive advantage and support our world-class universities' international collaborations, a future government should:

- Continue to deliver the £4.7 billion additional R&D funding by 2021. To maximise the impact of this additional funding it will be important to allocate a meaningful proportion to QR research funding.
- Develop a long-term roadmap for increasing public and private sector R&D investment in the UK to 3% of GDP.

Student experience

Our universities are committed to facilitating social mobility, delivering excellent teaching and providing an outstanding student experience. First-rate teaching and facilities require proper investment. The fundamentals of the student finance system are working; but to ensure students' expectations of a world-class learning experience can continue to be met, and exceeded, we call on the next government to:

- Allow tuition fees caps to rise at least in line with inflation.
- Make a long-term commitment to boost and then maintain funding levels per student for high-cost subjects such as STEM and medicine to underpin growth in this high-level skills pipeline. We also seek continued commitment to grow the number of training places for medical students.
- Enable quality institutions to flourish by introducing a much lighter touch, risk-based regulatory regime for those universities who have a strong track record.