

German universities likely to benefit from Brexit, report suggests

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A new [report](#) suggests that while UK universities are likely to suffer because of Brexit, German universities may reap the benefits.

This is one of the findings from a study of the potential impact of Brexit on UK and European universities. The report is based on a series of interviews with academic staff, university leaders and policymakers in higher education across 10 European [countries](#) between April and November 2017.

The report shows that since the referendum result, European academics were less likely to seek UK partners as leaders on collaborative research bids. There was also a reluctance from some European academics to involve UK partners in research bids at all.

Germany emerged as a significant potential 'winner' from Brexit, with countries in both northern and eastern Europe planning to reinforce their existing partnerships with German universities.

The findings indicate that while the UK is an extremely important player in European research and higher education, it is not as central as Germany. Germany is currently the top research collaborator for 19 European countries and the second top collaborator for seven countries. By contrast, the UK is the top collaborator for only one country (Germany) and the second top for nine countries.

The UK's strong position in European higher education and the market

orientation of UK universities also create imbalances and tensions in its relationships with other partners, according to the report. Nonetheless, participants in all the countries studied valued UK academics' role in leading research consortia and saw the participation of their UK partners as essential to many of their research projects.

The report reveals a mixture of anxiety and hope. The loss of the UK as an academic exchange partner was a concern for countries sending significant numbers of students to the UK. On the other hand, for countries where universities offer tuition in English, the departure of the UK from the EU was seen as an opportunity for increasing incoming numbers.

Participants in some of the countries studied suggested Brexit might provide an opportunity to 'poach' high-profile UK-based academics and funds. Yet many participants were more concerned with finding ways of maintaining cooperation and expressing solidarity with their UK colleagues.

UK-based academics feared waves of restructurings and redundancies and loss of funding in the wake of Brexit. The report suggests that Brexit will have a very unequal impact across the different nations of the UK, on different types of university and across disciplines. This concern was echoed in other countries as well.

There was also a widespread fear of a net loss of early-career academic positions, not only in the UK but also across the EU, as many of these positions are funded by research grants held with UK partners.

All the countries studied in the report expressed fear not only that the quality and reputation of European research would suffer with the UK's departure from Europe, but that Brexit posed a threat to the European project at large.

Dr Aline Courtois from the Centre for Global Higher Education at the UCL Institute of Education, the editor of the study, said:

'The report highlights that Brexit is not an issue for UK higher education only. It creates uncertainty for other countries as well, with fears that research cooperation and academic mobility will be severely affected across the EU and that the region as a whole will lose its competitive edge. The exact impact of Brexit on the [higher education](#) sector, in the UK and beyond, is still largely unknown; some countries may benefit in the short term in certain ways, but overall it is perceived as a significant risk.'

Susan Wright, director of Centre for Higher Education Futures at Aarhus University, says about the Danish case study, which she led:

"The repercussions and uncertainties of Brexit are being felt across Europe and were expressed by the Danish academics and policy makers. Interviewees valued the UK's research excellence and its leadership in HE-industry research consortia. Although the market pressures on UK [research](#) and [education](#) sometimes make collaboration difficult, still half of Denmark's H2020 projects have British partners and most international co-authors of Danish articles come from the UK. For policy makers, the UK is a valuable ally in negotiations over whether EU funding policy should be based on quality or regional development. For university administration, continuing cooperation post Brexit heralds a 'bureaucratic nightmare' of contract renegotiation, but academics were more imperturbable, as one put it, 'Let's see the results of the negotiations, then we'll find a way to carry on cooperating anyway'."

Provided by Aarhus University

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