

Written Submission to the Science and Technology Committee (Commons)

An immigration system that works for science and innovation

5th June 2018

Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom

Executive Summary

1. Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK, <http://sruk.org.uk>) is an independent non-profit Society whose aim is to promote communication within Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom and facilitate collaborations between private and public British and Spanish R&D institutions.
2. A recent survey ran among Spanish researchers outside the United Kingdom has shown that over 64% of respondents consider the UK less attractive now than before the EU referendum.
3. For Spanish researchers not living in the United Kingdom, achieving an easy and straightforward migration process for European workers and their families post-Brexit is the most important concern.

Background

4. With over 650 members, the Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK) is an independent non-profit organisation officially established in 2012 that represents a large proportion of Spanish nationals working in R&D in the UK. Our members work and study in all research disciplines and are at different levels in their careers, ranging from undergraduate students to professors.
5. SRUK has been monitoring the challenges and opportunities associated with Brexit and their impact on Spanish researchers both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. For this, SRUK have recently conducted surveys which contributed to our submission to this Committee in February 2018 on the impact of Brexit in research [1].
6. SRUK is now running a large-scale international survey among Spanish researchers outside the United Kingdom to understand their perceptions of Brexit. In addition, we aim to identify the steps that could be taken to maintain the attractiveness of the United Kingdom in science and research and its capability to attract international talent.

Survey

7. The current survey was designed by the Science Policy Committee and approved by the Board of Directors. It was distributed among our contacts outside the United Kingdom, including individual researchers, research organisations, and other societies of Spanish researchers abroad. The survey was hosted by SurveyMonkey and became active on the 15th May 2018. As of 5th of June 2018, a total of 255 researchers have answered this survey.

Background of the respondents

8. Most respondents are based in Spain (69%) but responses from other 14 countries have also been received, including Switzerland (10.6%) and Japan (5.1%). Most of the respondents are based at universities (49.8%) or public research centres (35.7%).
9. A large number of respondents are Principal Investigators (41.2%), i.e., research group leaders or academics. This group is followed by post-doctoral researchers (23.1%) and PhD students (22.4%).

Perceptions outside the United Kingdom

10. When asked about how attractive the UK is now to them considering Brexit in comparison to the situation before referendum, most respondents (64.5%) indicated that the UK is less attractive now than before the referendum. A further 20.6% of respondents indicated that the UK is now slightly less attractive. Alternatively, 14% of respondents indicated that they find the UK equally attractive now. 0.9% find the UK slightly or more attractive now after the referendum.
11. The survey asked how attractive the United Kingdom would be after Brexit (compared to what their perspective was before the EU referendum) in four different scenarios. These four scenarios resulted from combining the following two alternatives:
 - a. UK remains in Horizon Europe (FP9) vs. UK does not have access to Horizon Europe (FP9).
 - b. The movement of European workers and their families is an easy and straightforward process vs. The movement of European workers and their families is hindered by bureaucratic means (need to apply for visa, lengthy process, etc.)
12. The scenario where the UK remains in Horizon Europe and the movement of European workers and their families is an easy and straightforward process resulted the most attractive, although the UK would still be less attractive than before Brexit (7.9% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 36.1% would find it slightly less attractive).
13. The scenario where the UK does not have access to Horizon Europe and the movement of European workers and their families is hindered by bureaucratic means was the least attractive (87.3% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 7.0% would find it slightly less attractive).

14. The other two scenarios clearly showed that Spanish citizens value the free movement of the EU citizens more highly than the access to European funds.
15. The Spanish researchers outside the United Kingdom would find more attractive a future UK where the movement of European workers and their families is an easy and straightforward process, even if the UK does not have access to Horizon Europe (42.3% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 37.0% would find it slightly less attractive), than a future UK with access to Horizon Europe but where the movement of European workers and their families is hindered by bureaucratic means (78.9% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 16.7% would find it slightly less attractive).
16. Spanish researchers outside the United Kingdom considered that the single area most affected by Brexit will be mobility and citizen rights in the UK (46.9%), followed by concerns about the British economy (22.4%), research funding (11%), social tension (10.5%), and research excellence (7.9%).
17. Tables and graphs with the results are available at [2].

Commentary

18. Regarding the issue, *"On what timescale is clarity needed in relation to future immigration rules in order to support science and innovation in the UK?"*, our results show that the current situation is already affecting the attractiveness of the UK severely (paragraph 10). It is particularly important that a very large proportion of responses to our survey came from Principal Investigators. Thus, clarity is needed as soon as possible.
19. Regarding the issue *"If an early deal for science and innovation could be negotiated, what specifically should it contain in relation to immigration rules and movement of people involved with science and innovation?"*, our results show that Spanish researchers outside the UK value very highly the mobility of European workers and their families, and that making this an easy and straightforward process is essential to maintain the attractiveness of the UK (paragraphs 12 to 15).
20. Regarding the issue, *"What are the specific career needs of scientists in relation to movement of people, both in terms of attracting and retaining the people the UK needs and supporting the research that they do?"*, our results show a clear decrease in the attractiveness of the UK due to Brexit and the current uncertainty [1]. Spanish researchers outside the UK are particularly concerned about their mobility and rights should they come to the UK, and about the potential impact of Brexit on the British economy (paragraph 16).

References

- [1] Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK) - written evidence. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and->

[technology-committee/brexit-science-and-innovation/written/77840.html](https://www.sruk.org.uk/technology-committee/brexit-science-and-innovation/written/77840.html) (Accessed on 05.06.2018).

[2] Results from the SRUK survey on the attractiveness of the United Kingdom to Spanish researchers outside the UK as of the 5th of June 2018. https://sruk.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/migration_survey_results_as_of_20180605.pdf (Accessed on 05.06.2018).

[3] Annual reports of SRUK. <https://sruk.org.uk/about-us/annual-reports/> (Accessed on 05.06.2018).

Declaration of interest

The Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK) is an independent non-profit Company Limited by Guarantees established in 2012. Our objectives are:

- To develop collaborations between our members and R&D-led institutions and businesses in Spain and the UK.
- To help closing the gap between researchers and the general public through scientific outreach.
- To represent Spanish researchers in the UK to British and Spanish organizations, the society and the media.
- To promote networking within the community of Spanish Researchers working in the UK.

Annual reports of our activities can be found at [3].