

Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom 2020 Brexit Survey

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK, www.sruk.org.uk) is an independent non-profit Society whose aim is to promote communication within Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom and to facilitate collaborations between private and public British and Spanish R&D institutions.
2. A recent survey among Spanish researchers in the UK has shown that that over 40% of respondents are thinking about leaving the country, mostly because of Brexit, and that 83% of them think that the UK is now less attractive than it was before the Referendum.
3. Most respondents highlighted the access to European research funds (96.8%) and the rights of European citizens (81.5%) as being particularly negatively impacted by Brexit.

BACKGROUND

4. With over 750 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 mainly in academia and industry, and are at different levels in their careers, ranging from undergraduate to professors.
5. SRUK has been monitoring the challenges and the unintended consequences associated with Brexit, as well as their impact on Spanish researchers both in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. For this, SRUK has conducted regular surveys since the results of the Referendum which have contributed to several submissions to the Science and Technology Committee ([February 2018](#), [June 2018](#), [January 2019](#)) and has informed our policies in this area.
6. SRUK launched its latest survey in the Spring of 2020 to update our data on the views and concerns of our membership once the UK left the European Union on January 31, 2020.

SURVEY

7. The survey was designed by the Department of Science Policy and approved by the Board of Directors. It was distributed to all of SRUK's regular members (i.e. Spanish nationals that live and work in the UK).
8. The survey was hosted on Google Forms and was active between 2nd of March 2020 and 15th of April 2020. As of that date, a total of 67 researchers answered this survey, which represents 21% of the target membership.



BACKGROUND OF RESPONDENTS

9. Most respondents (86.2%) were affiliated with a UK-based University. 35% of respondents were postdoctoral researchers, followed by PhD students (27%) and academics (21%).
10. The vast majority of respondents (73%) have been living in the UK for more than 3 years, 45% of have been living in the UK for more than 5 years, and 8% for more than 10 years.

IMPACT OF BREXIT IN THE R&D LANDSCAPE

11. Respondents were asked to assess the impact of Brexit up until now and its potential future impact on several aspects of the R&D landscape and related policy areas.
 - i. Movement of relatives of workers: While 73% think that Brexit has had little impact in movement up until now, 44.3% of respondents think that Brexit will have a high impact in the movement of relatives of workers after the transition period ends.
 - ii. Access to European research funding and opportunities to lead European projects: 77.4% and 70.5% of respondents respectively think that they will be highly affected after the transition period ends.
 - iii. UK professional opportunities: over half of respondents (57.7%) think that access to UK funding opportunities will be affected by Brexit once the transition period ends. A further 52.4% think that opportunities to progress in their careers would also be negatively impacted.
 - iv. Bureaucracy and costs to live and work in the UK: 68.3% of respondents think that Brexit has had little impact up until now, whereas after the transition periods ends, this perception changes to 84.1% of respondents thinking Brexit will have a considerable or high impact.

IMPACT OF BREXIT IN PERSONAL LIFE AND IMMIGRATION

12. When asked about how attractive they see the UK now in comparison to the situation before the Brexit referendum, a majority of respondents (83.1%) think that the UK is now less attractive than before the referendum.
13. Of those that see the UK as being less attractive, 78.5% think that it is due to the new immigration system. This is followed by the political and economic situation in the UK (72.3%) and access to research funds (both domestic and international/European) (61.5%).
14. A majority (63.1%) of respondents consider that Brexit has/is impacting their lives significantly ('It affects me considerably' or 'It affects me').
15. 43% of respondents are considering leaving the UK in the near future. Of those, 63% say that Brexit has had an impact in their decision-making process. This is up from 20% in our survey in early 2018.
16. 40% of respondents wouldn't apply for a 'Talent Visa' to come to the UK if they had to pay for the associated fees themselves. Contrarily, 22% of respondents would still apply.
17. Most respondents (82.5%) think that the rights of European citizens living in the UK will be negatively impacted by Brexit once the transition periods end.



COMMENTARY

18. This survey shows that Brexit still remains an increasing cause of concern for Spanish researchers in the United Kingdom and that the impact of Brexit in the attractiveness of the UK as a host country to carry out their research is still very high.
19. The percentage of our membership that is thinking about leaving the UK because of Brexit doubled in two years. This shows that confidence continues to decrease among our members as the process of withdrawing from the European Union advances.
20. Most respondents identified access and opportunities to lead in European funding programmes as areas that will be highly impacted by Brexit. This shows that clarity around access to Horizon Europe is essential to retain confidence in the sector.

DECLARATION OF INTEREST

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

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

Annual report of our activities can be found [here](#).

Results from this survey can be found [here](#).

