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## **Time for Science and Innovation to remain at the heart of the Brexit process**

From the approximately 129,000 Spanish nationals live in the UK [1], 3,500 are researchers working in universities [2]. This figure rises to 5,000 when considering Spanish scientists working in other R&I public institutions, companies and administration [3]. With over 640 members, the [Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom \(SRUK\)](#) represents a large proportion of Spanish nationals working in R&I.

SRUK has been monitoring the challenges and opportunities associated with Brexit and their impact on Spanish researchers in the UK. Moreover, we have aimed to understand this impact on students and researchers in Spain interested in moving to the UK in the near future. SRUK conducted the 1<sup>st</sup> SRUK survey on Brexit from October 2016 to December 2016 [4] and we have recently conducted two new surveys: one in UK [5] and one in Spain [6].

### **The impact of Brexit on Spanish researchers in the UK**

- The 2<sup>nd</sup> SRUK Survey on Brexit shows similar numbers to the 1<sup>st</sup> one in terms of impact of the referendum result on the future plans of the Spanish researchers. For example, 24.4% answered that they have already changed their plans due to Brexit. In addition, it seems that the percentage of members that await the outcome of the negotiation remains similar (45.2%) to the consultation in late 2016.
- The majority of SRUK members think that Brexit will have major or dramatic impact at a personal (45.2%) and professional (48.8%) level.
- In the event of moving to another country due to Brexit, only 10.3% of the respondents would move outside the EU.
- Only 14.3% of responses would consider moving to the UK under the current circumstances if they were based outside the UK now, whereas 46.1% of responses indicated that they would not have moved to the UK in the current scenario.

### **The current perception of the UK as a research destination - Views from researchers in Spain**

Another survey evaluated the impact of Brexit in the attractiveness of the UK for Spanish researchers in Spain. In this survey, most respondents (71.6%) indicated that the UK is less attractive now than before the EU referendum. Only 26.9% of respondents indicated that they find the UK equally attractive now.

### **Mitigating the risks of Brexit and seizing its opportunities**

Times Higher Education World University Rankings have recently showed that UK universities benefit from excellent levels of internationalisation [7], reflecting the high proportion of foreign staff, students and ongoing international collaborations. This long-standing tradition of international collaboration has a positive impact on the British (and European) economy, as well as on the exchange of revolutionary ideas which come with highly skilled individuals –





something that Spanish researchers have been part of. However, our surveys show that the potential loss of access to European networks and funding, and the changes in the conditions of EU researchers in UK, among other factors, are causing a stark decline in the attractiveness of UK to Spanish researchers. The bureaucracy associated with visas and any potential limitation in the amount of time that researchers could spend abroad doing fieldwork or research visits would also be detrimental to the UK's position as a global leader in research. At the same time, the respondents indicated that, should they move, only 10.3% would do so outside the EU. This illustrates how attractive the European Research Area (ERA) is to European researchers.

Promoting collaboration on R&I between Spain and the UK is one of SRUK foundational aims. For this, SRUK took part in a Brexit Science and Innovation Summit, organised by the Science and Technology Committee (S&TC) of the Commons and held in London on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February [8]. This Summit was the round up event of an inquiry launched by the S&TC with the aim to identify actions needed now to mitigate risks and make the most of the opportunities for UK science, research and innovation after Brexit. Before the Summit, the Committee had gathered over 80 written evidence from different institutes, learned societies and the general public, including SRUK. Furthermore, SRUK was invited to attend the summit and contribute to the debate, which involved 51 attendees, including the Minister for Universities, Science, Research & Innovation Sam Gyimah, other MPs and representatives of learned Societies and groups of influence. SRUK presented the evidence gathered through our surveys, which show that, while researchers in Spain are mainly concerned about the mobility of skilled workers, Spanish researchers in the UK are more concerned about access to research funding, and joined other institutions in demanding the UK Government a clearer and more straightforward communication strategy with the scientific community.

## Recommendations

The evidence gathered by SRUK shows that the attractiveness of the United Kingdom's R&I system has decreased due to the uncertainties associated with Brexit and the negotiations. We propose specific measures to address such uncertainties and maintain the already prosperous British R&I sector:

- Swiftly protecting the skills and talent provided by EU migrants that are essential to the UK Science and Technology sector.
- Continued participation of UK in multilateral research programmes, such as FP9.
- Prioritising and accelerating the UK's investment in research, science and technology to boost the competitiveness of UK's economy.
- Improving the communication strategy to express that the United Kingdom is open to research, science, and technology.
- Maintaining and strengthening the importance of evidence-based policies in the guidelines that will direct the Brexit negotiation.

## References

[1] Migration Watch UK - [The British in Europe – and Vice Versa](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).





- [2]High Education Statistics Agency (HESA) - [Staff in Higher Education 2014/2015](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).
- [3]Department of Work and Pensions, Freedom of Information request 455 - [An estimation of the number of Spanish people working in scientific-related jobs in the UK](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).
- [4][A brexit that works for all](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).
- [5][Results from the 2nd SRUK survey on Brexit](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).
- [6][Results from the survey run during CienciaUK17](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).
- [7]Times Higher Education - [The world's most international universities 2017](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).
- [8]Science and Technology Committee (Commons) - [Brexit science and innovation Summit inquiry](#) (accessed on 23.03.2018).

