

Written evidence submitted by Society of Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK/CERU) (EUR0001)

Inquiry: *The UK–EU Reset*

Submitted by the Society of Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK/CERU)

The Importance of Science and Innovation in Strengthening Future UK–EU Relations

1. About SRUK/CERU and its role in strengthening EU–UK relations

1. The Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK/CERU) is a non-profit organisation founded in 2012 to represent and support the Spanish research community based in the UK. With over 400 individuals in our network, including around 280 members and 150 affiliated friends across all disciplines and career stages, SRUK/CERU works to promote scientific exchange, support career development, and strengthen research links between Spain, the UK, and beyond.
2. SRUK/CERU engages with academic institutions, civil society organisations, and governmental bodies to inform evidence-based policymaking and enhance scientific collaboration. The Society has become an active stakeholder in fostering cross-border partnerships (amongst other things) by facilitating mobility schemes, contributing to policy consultations, and coordinating international initiatives.
3. SRUK/CERU leads the EU-funded CONNECTS-UK project, which brings together EU research diaspora organisations in the UK—including those from France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Finland, and Slovenia—to promote European scientific collaboration in the UK. CONNECTS-UK is a direct response to the need of sustaining and strengthening EU–UK research links in the current geopolitical landscape.
4. *We recommend that European research diaspora organisations, including SRUK/CERU, are recognised as key and strategic partners in shaping a forward-looking UK–EU agenda for research, higher education, and innovation.*
5. One of the key pillars of SRUK/CERU’s work is the promotion of mobility schemes and academic cooperation between the UK and Spain. This includes structured collaborations with universities and research institutions, bilateral agreements with Spanish institutions, or the organisation of research internships and exchange programmes such as the SRUK/CERU Summer and Winter Internships¹. These popular initiatives help junior researchers gain very valuable international experience while fostering long-term connections between research communities. Many of these early-career researchers have subsequently pursued their academic careers in the UK, further strengthening the bilateral scientific ties.
6. During 2024 and 2025, the aforementioned SRUK/CERU mobility programme has faced additional challenges. On the one hand, some research groups in certain universities have reduced the number of visiting undergraduate students they are willing to host. On the other hand, several universities have required visiting students to enter through specific pathways that impose disproportionately high fees—up to £5,000 per term, in some cases. As a result, several students have been unable to benefit from this program due to financial constraints.

¹ See Section 6 in “The impact of Brexit on student and academic mobility” by SRUK/CERU, published by Editorial Universitaria Ramón Areces (2025). Available at: <https://sruk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/eng-report-2024.pdf>

7. In collaboration with CRUE (the leading association of Spanish universities), SRUK/CERU also coordinates a bidirectional mobility programme for predoctoral and postdoctoral researchers. This initiative strengthens research synergies, facilitates joint participation in European funding calls, and enhances the international visibility of Spanish universities and research centres based in the UK and vice-versa.
8. The international perspective and active engagement of SRUK/CERU has provided evidence to UK^{2,3} and Spanish⁴ parliaments, responded to key government consultations, and produced policy reports to inform national and international R&D policy. This includes work on the UK R&D Roadmap⁵, immigration policy⁶, and broader recommendations to improve the Spanish research and innovation system based on the UK experience.
9. SRUK/CERU is also committed to provide its members with the latest information regarding their rights as European citizens. Hence, it has organised public guidance sessions for researchers regarding administrative and legal uncertainties during and after Brexit, in collaboration with the Embassy of Spain in London, the Delegation of the EU to the UK, and the UK Home Office.

2. Evidence from SRUK/CERU's surveys (2017–2024)

10. Since 2016, SRUK/CERU has conducted annual surveys to monitor the evolving impact of the UK's departure from the EU on the Spanish research community in the UK. These surveys have informed SRUK/CERU's strategy, supported direct dialogue with the UK Government, the Delegation of the EU to the UK, and contributed to the broader policy discourse on UK–EU relations in R&D. By gathering responses from researchers at all career stages, these surveys provide a unique longitudinal insight into the implications of UK–EU relations on mobility, funding, and quality of life.
11. The 2024 edition of the survey⁷ was open between 12 and 26 April. Participants represented a broad range of sectors and positions: 72% were affiliated with universities, 12% with industry, and others with public research centres, non-governmental organisations, or governmental institutions. Among those in academia, career stages ranged from PhD students and postdocs to professors, principal investigators, and research fellows.
12. When asked about the overall impact of Brexit on their lives, 80% of respondents in 2024 reported having experienced a moderate to considerable impact. The highest perceived impacts were in relation to the UK economy, rights of EU residents, bureaucracy, the cost of living, and difficulties in hiring or hosting international students and staff.
13. One-quarter of participants (26%) indicated they were considering leaving the UK in the short term (6–12 months), with 74% of them stating that Brexit had influenced this decision.

² UK Parliament. Written evidence submitted by SRUK/CERU (NDB0035). Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/98871/html/>

³ UK Parliament. Written evidence submitted by the SRUK/CERU (BSI0028). Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/86531/html/>

⁴ Spanish Senate (2020). Available at (in Spanish): <https://www.senado.es/web/actividadparlamentaria/sesionescomision/detallecomisiones/ponenciasdeestudio/detallereunioncelebrada/index.html?id=G013001&id2=G020001>

⁵ Response to the UK Research and Development Roadmap, by SRUK/CERU (2020). Available at: <https://sruk.org.uk/report/response-to-the-uk-research-and-development-roadmap/>

⁶ Response to the UK's Points-Based Immigration System, by SRUK/CERU (2020). Available at: <https://sruk.org.uk/report/response-to-the-uk-points-based-immigration-system-october-2020/>

⁷ Results of the 2024 SRUK/CERU Brexit Survey (2024). Available at: <https://sruk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/report-survey-2024-q.pdf>

14. In 2019⁸, 2020⁹, 2021¹⁰, and 2024, respondents were asked whether they found the UK more or less attractive than when they first arrived, using a scale from -3 (much less attractive) to +3 (much more attractive). In all cases, the UK was rated as less attractive, though this negative perception slightly softened in 2021. However, 2024 marks the most negative perception in recent years, with an average score of -2.02—compared to -1.35 in 2019, -1.04 in 2020, and -0.74 in 2021, and this negative perception was especially marked among those who had lived in the UK the longest.
15. The most frequently cited reasons for this decline included UK immigration policies toward EU citizens, access to public services, and difficulties in securing research funding.
16. In terms of policy concerns, the most alarming measures highlighted by participants included the increase in the Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS) and the steep rise in the minimum salary required for a Skilled Worker visa in 2024. Both were rated as having considerable to high impact.
17. *We recommend that the UK Government urgently revisits recent immigration reforms¹¹ that affect international researchers and their families, to prevent a growing disincentive for talent attraction and retention. In particular, we urge the reversal of the following measures: (i) the increase in the Immigration Health Surcharge from £624 to £1,035 per year; (ii) the increase in the minimum salary threshold for sponsoring a Skilled Worker visa from £26,200 to £38,700; and (iii) the introduction of stricter rules for bringing or sponsoring dependants.*
18. Across all survey years, over 60% of respondents have consistently reported experiencing, or expecting to experience, a moderate to dramatic impact from Brexit in their personal and professional lives.
19. The percentage of respondents considering leaving the UK decreased from 41% in 2021 to 25% in 2024. However, the proportion of those identifying Brexit as the reason behind their decision rose significantly—from 57% in 2021 to 75% in 2024—suggesting a consolidating role of Brexit in researchers' long-term mobility choices.

3. Recommendations: What would a positive outcome to the 19 May UK–EU Summit look like for the UK?

20. This section addresses the question “*What would a positive outcome to the 19 May UK–EU Summit look like for the UK?*” Our recommendations are grounded in the longitudinal evidence collected through SRUK/CERU’s annual surveys, including the 2024 edition (see Section 2), our experience within the EU research diaspora in the UK, and our ongoing policy engagement work.
21. A positive outcome to the 19 May 2025 UK–EU Summit would place science, research, and innovation at the heart of future UK–EU cooperation. This is a vital strategic area for both regions, with mutual benefit in addressing shared global challenges, supporting social and economic growth and technological independence from other geopolitical actors.

⁸ Results of the 2019 SRUK/CERU Brexit Survey (2019). Available at: <https://sruk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/submitted-nodealreport.pdf>

⁹ Results of the 2020 SRUK/CERU Brexit Survey (2020). Available at: <https://sruk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/sruk-brexit-survey-2020-executive-%20summary.pdf>

¹⁰ Results of the 2021 SRUK/CERU Brexit Survey (2021). Available at: <https://sruk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/brexit2021.pdf>

¹¹ House of Commons Library (2024). Changes to legal migration rules for family and work visas in 2024. Available at: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9920/>

22. *We recommend that the UK Government formally includes science, research, and innovation as a central pillar in the UK–EU reset and actively works towards comprehensive mobility frameworks for students, researchers, and academic staff.*

EU-UK Youth Mobility Agreement

23. We welcome recent discussions regarding the potential establishment of a UK–EU Youth Mobility Agreement¹². This would be a significant step towards restoring opportunities for young people to study, work, and travel between the UK and the EU, fostering stronger growth.
24. At present, the UK has signed youth mobility schemes with 13 non-EU countries, but none with EU member states. This gap is striking, especially given the historic academic, cultural, and economic ties between the UK and the EU.
25. According to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), the number of new EU students enrolling in UK universities has declined by over 50% in recent years¹³. This drop is closely linked to the end of free movement, the loss of access to Erasmus+, and the sharp rise in tuition fees—issues that were also raised by respondents in SRUK/CERU’s 2024 survey (see paragraphs 12, 15, and 16).
26. *We recommend the UK and EU prioritise the negotiation of a Youth Mobility Agreement that is ambitious in scope and accompanied by complementary measures to reverse the decline in academic exchange and engagement. Such an agreement should include several key elements to ensure its success and long-term impact (see paragraphs 27, 28 and 29).*
27. *We recommend prioritising the UK’s rejoining of Erasmus+ to restore access to this well-established mobility network. Alternatively, new, well-funded and economically competitive bilateral programmes with EU countries should be developed to support undergraduate and postgraduate student exchanges.*
28. *We recommend lowering visa fees and removing the Immigration Health Surcharge for young people participating in mobility schemes. The rise in the surcharge in 2024 has further increased the financial burden on students and young professionals.*
29. *Finally, to broaden access and align with other existing agreements (such as those with Australia, Canada, and South Korea), we recommend extending the age eligibility for youth mobility schemes to 18–35 years old. This would enable more young people—including early-career researchers and students—to benefit from the opportunities such a scheme would offer.*

A UK–EU Research Mobility Agreement

30. We strongly support the negotiation of an academic and research mobility agreement between the UK and the EU. The absence of such a framework is a missed opportunity in a sector that thrives on international collaboration and talent exchange, and where mobility is often essential for career development.

¹² CONNECTS-UK statement on a potential EU-UK Youth Mobility Agreement (2025). Available at: <https://connects-uk.org/2025/03/25/statement-connects-uk-statement-on-the-discussions-within-the-uk-parliament-about-a-potential-eu-uk-youth-mobility-scheme-agreement/>

¹³ Higher Education Statistics Agency (2024). Where do HE students come from? Available at: <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/students/where-from>

31. Recent reports, including those from the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee¹⁴ and the Royal Society¹⁵, have highlighted the significant barriers posed by current immigration policies. Notably, the average up-front visa costs in the UK are up to 17 times higher than in comparable countries, making the UK considerably less attractive for international researchers.
32. *We recommend that the UK leads efforts to establish a dedicated research mobility agreement with the EU, allowing researchers with job offers from either side to benefit from flexible or hybrid visa routes. By this, we mean visa arrangements that allow researchers to change projects or institutions, spend periods overseas without needing to reapply, and engage in a range of research-related activities under a single visa. These should accommodate institutional changes and project-based moves without requiring new visa applications.* Such measures would directly address the concerns raised by our members (see paragraph 12 and 15) about high visa costs and sponsorship burdens.
33. *We recommend reducing the financial burden for international researchers by lowering visa costs and removing the Immigration Health Surcharge* (see paragraph 16). International researchers contribute to the UK economy and public services through taxation, and additional charges represent an unnecessary and discriminatory barrier.
34. *We recommend introducing a flexible visa scheme for researchers—comparable to the Graduate Visa route—that allows them to remain in the UK after their contract ends while seeking new opportunities.* This would help prevent the loss of talent due to rigid “right to work” and “right to rent” conditions, particularly in academia where short-term contracts and high mobility are extremely common.
35. *We recommend revisiting the increased salary threshold of £38,700 for visa eligibility, as this disproportionately affects early-career researchers and disciplines with lower average salaries.* Several institutions, already facing financial strain, have been forced to cut posts in the humanities, modern languages, and teaching roles as a direct result of this policy.
36. *We urge the Government to reverse the recent increase in the fees charged to institutions issuing Certificates of Sponsorship for Skilled Worker Visas which will come into force in April, 2025¹⁶.* This additional cost puts further pressure on university budgets and risks reducing the sector’s ability to attract international talent.
37. *We recommend that the costs and administrative burden of sponsorship by higher education institutions and research centres be significantly reduced.* Simplifying these processes would ease recruitment and enhance the UK’s competitiveness in attracting top global researchers.

Bilateral recognition of academic and professional qualifications

38. *We recommend that the UK and EU establish a joint framework for the bilateral recognition of academic and professional qualifications. While recognition remains a national competence for EU member states, the framework should issue clear, coordinated recommendations to both the UK and EU countries on how to automatically recognise diplomas, qualifications and academic ranks.*

Administrative agreements

¹⁴ Letter from the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee (2025). Available at: <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/46483/documents/236519/default/>

¹⁵ Summary of visa costs analysis, Royal Society (2024). Available at: <https://royalsociety.org/-/media/policy/publications/2024/summary-of-visa-costs-analysis-2024.pdf>

¹⁶ Home Office immigration and nationality fees: 9 April 2025 (2025). Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/visa-regulations-revised-table/home-office-immigration-and-nationality-fees-9-april-2025>

39. Bureaucracy was identified as one of the areas most strongly affected by Brexit (see paragraph 12). *We therefore recommend an agreement to eliminate the requirement for compulsory legalisation of documents—such as academic qualifications—issued by EU countries for use in the UK and vice-versa.*

Leadership in funding proposals and collaborative networks

40. We welcome the UK Government's commitment to Horizon Europe and its efforts to re-establish strong partnerships between UK-based researchers and European counterparts. Continued participation in this programme enables more successful joint projects, enhances the quality and impact of research, and strengthens the UK's influence in global knowledge and innovation.
41. Preliminary data from the Delegation of the European Union to the UK¹⁷ suggests that the UK's participation in Horizon Europe is, overall, on a positive trajectory. This is encouraging, but sustained support and strategic investment will be essential to fully capitalise on the UK's re-engagement with European research networks.
42. *We recommend that the UK Government ensures long-term, stable support for UK participation in EU's Framework Programmes and works closely with EU institutions to guarantee full access to all funding streams.*
43. *We recommend increased efforts to raise awareness among UK researchers and institutions about Horizon Europe opportunities, including guidance on navigating the application process and targeted promotion of UK–EU partnerships.*
44. *We further recommend encouraging the formation of consortia and international collaborative networks that align with Horizon Europe's interdisciplinary and cross-border criteria, and ensuring that UK national research programmes are strategically aligned to complement and support this engagement.*
45. As highlighted in paragraph 13, a portion of the Spanish research community in the UK is considering leaving the country, with Brexit and its consequences being a major driver. This trend, if unaddressed, risks contributing to a broader talent drain that could undermine the UK's long-term research capacity. To ensure talent retention and global competitiveness, it is essential to foster a collaborative research environment that offers stability, cutting-edge opportunities, and open mobility. Recent findings from a Nature poll¹⁸ show that over 75% of US-based scientists who responded were considering leaving the country following the disruption to the research landscape under the Trump administration, with many eyeing Europe and Canada as destinations. This serves as a timely reminder that a supportive and internationally connected research environment is essential to prevent the loss of highly skilled researchers.

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This submission has been drafted by the Science Policy Department and approved by the Executive Committee of the Society of Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK/CERU).

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¹⁷ One-year anniversary of UK association to Horizon Europe, Delegation of the European Union to the UK (2025). Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/united-kingdom/one-year-anniversary-uk-association-horizon-europe_en

¹⁸ 75% of US scientists who answered Nature poll consider leaving, Nature News (2025). Available at: https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-025-00938-y?utm_source=Live+Audience&utm_campaign=06ad1f325c-nature-briefing-daily-20250327&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b27a691814-06ad1f325c-50789016