

SRUK/CERU survey on Brexit for Spanish researchers and scientists outside the UK

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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 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 two submissions to the Science and Technology Committee (Commons) in February and June 2018 on the impact of Brexit in research [1, 2].
6. SRUK has run a large-scale international survey among Spanish researchers outside the United Kingdom to understand their perceptions of Brexit. This is in addition to actions aimed 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. Previous recommendations suggested by SRUK are available in [1].

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. It was closed on the 7th July 2018.

Background of the respondents

8. This survey has been responded by 284 people. The majority of them reside in Spain (71.5%). A representative number of responses has been collected from people living in Europe, including a 10% of respondents from countries within the EU and a 9.5% from Switzerland. Overseas residents account for a lower percentage of responses, being the most representative cases Japan (4.6%) and the United States (3.2%).
9. The academic background of the respondents is mainly within Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Only a 3.2% of the responses came from individuals educated in Humanities and Arts, and a 6% corresponded to people with Social Sciences qualifications. Within the remaining 90.8% of responses, the main field of knowledge was Biological Sciences, accounting for a 41% of the respondents, followed by Health Sciences (19%). The other two main areas were Engineering and Computing (12%) and Chemical Sciences (6.7%).
10. Over half (52.5%) of the respondents' occupation is carried out in universities. 33.5% of them are employed by public research centres and 4.2% of them hold a position in mixed private/public research institutions. The respondents' profile is strongly linked to academia. 41.2% of them are either principal investigators or hold an academic position, the 23.6% have a postdoctoral post and 22.9% are PhD students.
11. 81.7% of our respondents have worked outside of Spain and, among them, 58.2% did so in the UK.

Reactions to the EU referendum

12. Almost two thirds of the respondents (65.5%) do not consider the UK as a destination within the next two years and 20.1% of them feel unsure about this matter. Among the remaining 14.4%, which accounts for the respondents that consider the UK as a destination for their professional career, 68.3% of them mention Brexit as a source of uncertainty to their decision. This percentage pointing out the importance of Brexit in the decision making lowers to 27.2% among the respondents which are not interested in moving to the UK.
13. Among the respondents, 38% of them have ongoing collaborations with UK-based research groups. Almost half of these (45.4%) think that Brexit will affect these collaborations.

Future relationship between the UK and the EU

14. When asked about whether the UK should be able to participate in funding calls of Horizon Europe programmes after Brexit, 26.8% of the respondents think that the UK should not participate, whereas 16.9% claim that partial access to the previously mentioned calls should be granted. On the other hand, 17.3% of the respondent consider that the UK should remain as a full member of the programme, while 20.1% believe that the UK should be given an 'associate country' status. These percentages remain similar regardless of whether the respondents are involved in research collaborations with UK-based groups.
15. 74.6% of the respondents believe that collaborations with UK will be worse after Brexit, as well as research visits (71.8%).

Attractiveness of the UK

16. The general opinion among our respondents is that the UK has lost attractive as a destination. Specifically, 75.7% of them think that post-Brexit UK is less attractive.
17. 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:
- UK remains in Horizon Europe (FP9) vs. UK does not have access to Horizon Europe (FP9).
 - 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.)
18. 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 (7.4% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 30.6% would find it slightly less attractive).
19. 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 (78.2% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 6.7% would find it slightly less attractive).
20. 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.
21. 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 (36.7% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 33.1% 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 (69.7% of respondents would find the UK less attractive than before Brexit, and 16.5% would find it slightly less attractive).

Expected impact of Brexit

22. When asked about what will be mostly affected by Brexit, 42.3% of the respondents consider that mobility and civil rights will suffer the greatest impact. 20,4% of the answers collected that it will be the British economy that will be troubled the most, followed by research funding (10.2%), social tension (8.8%) and excellence in research (7%).
23. Finally, a series of questions about the hypothetical impact of Brexit upon the EU were included. As a general view, 65.1% of the respondents believe that Brexit will have a negative effect on the EU R&D system. Considering specific areas within the research system, respondents think that in a EU post-Brexit will worsen the access to funding (51.4%), the attractive of the EU as a destination (48.6%) and the European excellence in research (45.8%).
24. Tables and graphs with the results are available at [3].

Conclusions

1. This survey is a good sample in terms of how the Spanish scientific community outside the UK feels about Brexit. The majority of our respondents fit an academic profile linked to STEM and are strongly linked to the state Research system. They have worked outside of Spain, being the UK the mostly selected destination.
2. Brexit has severely impacted the attractiveness of the UK as a destination for Spanish researchers. Specifically asked about this, over 75% of the respondents consider a post-Brexit UK less attractive. In addition, the 85% of our respondents do not consider or feel uncertain about choosing the UK as a destination within the next two years. Among the remaining percentage of respondents who still regard the UK as a destination, over two thirds of them admit that Brexit has brought uncertainty to their decision.
3. Brexit has brought an important uncertainty on how the mobility of researchers and their families will be affected, as well as whether the access to European funding will be maintained. A scenario where more bureaucratic procedures are required to move to the UK and access FP9 is lost is found as less attractive by nearly the 80% of our respondents.
4. Brexit is regarded as a destabilizing process for the ongoing collaborations among different research groups and UK-based ones. Approximately the half of our respondents which currently have British partners in their research consider that these associations will be affected. Remarkably, over 70% of the respondents consider that both collaborations and research visits will worsen after Brexit.
5. Reciprocally, our respondents believe that the effect from Brexit within the EU is to be considered. Two thirds of them believe that the European research system will be negatively affected, with specific concerns about the access to funding, the perception of the EU as an attractive destination and a weaker excellence in research.

References

- [1] Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK) - written evidence February 2018. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee/brexit-science-and-innovation/written/77840.html> (Accessed on 11.09.2018).
- [2] Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK) - written evidence June 2018. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee/an-immigration-system-that-works-for-science-and-innovation/written/84256.html> (Accessed on 11.09.2018).
- [3] Table summaries of the results to the survey run from the 15th May 2018 to the 7th July 2018. <https://sruk.org.uk/full-results-international-survey/> (Accessed on 11.09.2018)
- [4] Annual reports of SRUK. <https://sruk.org.uk/about-us/annual-reports/> (Accessed on 11.09.2018).

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 [4].