

Written Submission to the Science and Technology Committee (Commons)

What will 'No Deal' mean for science and innovation?

23th January 2019

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 survey run among Spanish researchers in the United Kingdom from the 11th to the 22nd of January 2019 showed that a 'no deal' Brexit is the least attractive option and that 27.3% of them would plan to leave the United Kingdom in such scenario, with a further 52.1% not being sure about whether they would leave or not.

Background

3. 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.
4. 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 has conducted several surveys which contributed to two submissions to this Committee in 2018: on the impact of Brexit in research [1] and on an immigration system that works for science and innovation [2].
5. SRUK is now running a survey among Spanish researchers in the United Kingdom to understand their perceptions towards a no-deal Brexit. We aim to understand how a no-deal Brexit may affect the decisions taken by Spanish researchers in the United Kingdom, and how it may decrease the attractiveness of the United Kingdom.

Survey

6. The current survey was designed by the Science Policy Committee and approved by the Board of Directors. It was distributed among our regular members living in 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 11th January 2019 and it was closed on the 22nd of January 2019. A total of 122 researchers answered this survey.

Background of the respondents

7. All respondents are members of SRUK and are based in the United Kingdom. 20.7% of them were PhD students, 43.0% postdoctoral researchers, 14.1% principal investigators in academia or research centre, 4.1% technicians or research assistants, 13.2% employees in a company, organization, charity, etc., and 5.0 specified other occupations.
8. Concerning the date of arrival at the UK, 69.4% settled in the UK before the Brexit referendum (23rd June 2016), 13.2% came between the Brexit referendum and the invocation of Article 50 (23rd June 2016 - 29th March 2017), and 17.4% came after the invocation of Article 50 (29th March 2017).

Comments about the survey

9. The respondents were asked in most questions to compare the attractiveness of two different scenarios. The options to compare the scenarios were: -2 (least attractive), -1, 0 (equally attractive), +1, +2 (most attractive).

Perceptions of our members concerning Brexit

10. Our respondents claim that, at the time of moving to the UK, the attractiveness of the UK was higher than the current attractiveness of the country (average response +1.30).
11. When asked to compare how attractive would the UK be in 2019 if the country leaves the EU without a deal, compared to the situation of the UK before the referendum (or the situation in which the UK remains in the EU), the respondents gave the average assessment of -1.56 (i.e., the UK would be less attractive in the event of a no-deal with a score of -1.56 over -2.0). The reasons indicated for this were: new immigration status / difficulty of movement of skilled workers (71.9%), access to research funds (both from British and European funding bodies) (70.3%), social instability (59.5%), economic instability (71.9%), and others (6.6%).
12. When asked to compare how attractive would the UK be in 2019 if the country leaves the EU without a deal, compared to the situation of the UK exiting the EU with the current agreed deal between the EU and the British Government, the respondents gave the average number of -1.08. The reasons indicated for this were: new immigration status/difficulty of movement of skilled workers (62.8%), access to research funds (both from British and European funding bodies) (58.7%), social instability (56.2%), economic instability (72.7%), and others (5.8%).

13. When asked if they would plan to leave the UK if a no-deal Brexit is produced, 27.3% indicated that they would leave the UK, 20.7% indicated that they would not leave the UK, and 52.1% indicated that they do not know.
14. Tables and graphs with the results are available at [4].

Commentary

15. Most of our respondents have an academic background and moved to the UK before the Brexit referendum in 2016. Our respondents claim that moving to the pre-referendum UK was a much more attractive choice compared to staying in Spain. However, the answers show that the UK has lost attractiveness after the referendum.
16. The possibility of a no-deal Brexit affects dramatically the attractiveness of the UK among our respondents, placing it in the least favourable position of all scenarios, past and present, considered in the survey. The main concerns involving a no-deal scenario are uncertainties about the immigration status, economic instability and access to research funds, followed by social instability. On the other hand, the Withdrawal Agreement ameliorated the concerns in our respondents related to immigration status and access to research funds.
17. There is a 27% of respondents willing to leave the UK if a no-deal Brexit takes place, and over half of our respondents are unsure if they would leave the UK if a no-deal Brexit takes place.

References

- [1] Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK) - written evidence on the impact of Brexit in research. <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/science-and-technology-committee/brexit-science-and-innovation/written/77840.html> (Accessed on 23.01.2019).
- [2] Spanish Researchers in the UK (SRUK) - written evidence on an immigration system that works for science and innovation. <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 23.01.2019).
- [3] Full report from the SRUK survey on an immigration system that works for science and innovation. <https://sruk.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/report-international-survey.pdf> (Accessed on 23.01.2019).
- [4] Results from the SRUK survey on "What will 'No Deal' mean for science and innovation?", accessed as of 23rd of January of 2018. <https://sruk.org.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/full-results-nodeal.pdf> (Accessed on 23.01.2019).
- [5] Annual reports of SRUK. <https://sruk.org.uk/about-us/annual-reports/> (Accessed on 23.01.2019).

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 to close 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 [5].

The Society of Spanish Researchers in the United Kingdom (SRUK) does not declare any conflict of interest.