



The All-Party Parliamentary University Group

Note of speaker meeting: “International comparisons of funding in the higher education sector” 27 January 2016

Speakers:

Vivienne Stern, Director, UK HE International Unit

John O’Leary, Editor, The Times Good University Guide

Professor Sir David Greenaway, Vice-Chancellor, University of Nottingham

Vivienne Stern opened the meeting by describing the investment by the UK in research, commenting on the gross expenditure on R&D as a percentage of GDP for a range of countries. She noted that one way you can measure the success of this public and private investment by looking at the share of citations that UK research receives, this is particularly impressive as the UK has less than 1% of the world’s population but is producing more than 15% of the world’s scientific articles. Although she also asked attendees to note how rapidly China’s output has grown between 2008 and 2012. Ms Stern argued that the UK has become increasingly aware of the importance of international research. This is shown in the increased impact of research when UK researchers produce publications with international co-authors.

Her next slide showed comparisons of income and how successful UK universities have been at winning EU funding has begun to invite questions into how that income has been used, and why we haven’t seen the same progress of aspiration for research in the sector as we have on the education side.

Vivienne Stern then described how you could also attempt to measure the impact and value for money on research by looking at student satisfaction data. The percentage of students expressing overall satisfaction with their course domestically is at an all-time high according to the National Student Survey. According to the I-Grad Student Barometer the international student satisfaction has grown by 8-10% since 2005. The UK has maintained the position of 2nd in the world as the most popular destination to study for international students. Ms Stern concluded her remarks by noting that China sent the largest number of international students to the UK, but that their numbers have stagnated over the last two years and the UK sector needs to be aware of the impact this could have.

John O’Leary set out the different methodologies used by those that provide international level rankings of institutions. International league tables typically have a greater emphasis on research indicators and the UK has a good story in this area. In the Times Higher Education World University Ranking, 78 of the top 800 institutions are in the UK and three UK universities are in the top 10. On both measures the UK is second only to the US.

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However, he noted that there wasn't currently a way to assess teaching standards across the world and therefore the rankings do not cover the whole system. Mr O'Leary described how currently the best way to consider the attraction of UK universities to the undergraduates and graduates is to look at the number of international students. When presenting his slide on the number of undergraduates, he pointed out that the number of international students coming to study in the UK had declined and he expected this trend to continue.

John O'Leary closed his comments by describing the UK's performance in the various international rankings. His slides showed comparisons with the global averages and how the UK has performed in previous years.

Sir David Greenaway finished the presentation section of the meeting by describing the relationship between the UK and the EU, and touched on the importance of this knowledge with the EU Referendum likely expected to take place later this year. His slides set out the numerous ways that the UK is linked with the UK and non-EU countries. This included looking at UK academic staff by nationality and subject area and research and development funding received by UK higher education providers.

Sir David then went on to explain how EU research funding is an engine for growth, looking at how the long-term impact of FP7 is estimated at 900,000 additional jobs and a growth of GDP of nearly 1% across Europe. He also noted how the UK does disproportionately well in securing UK research funding, flagging that only the Netherlands receives a higher proportion of funding relative to GDP and population size. He then went on to describe how the UK system is affected in other ways, including in facilities and equipment and talent, networks and collaboration, noting that it has been found how research done through international collaboration has 1.4 times the impact of research done on a national level.

He closed his remarks by describing the possible impact that an EU exit would have, particularly noting the uncertainty of how schemes such as ERASMUS would continue. His final comments were on the positivity of protection of research funding in cash terms in the autumn statement along with other announcements on international research including the Global Challenges Fund, Newton Fund and the Prosperity Fund.

Q&A and Discussion

Following the presentations attendees discussed a variety of topics. First was a concern about **how funding more generally would work in a post-Green Paper environment**. The general consensus was that this was dependant on whether and/or how funding would be separated between the possible new Office for Students and the Research Councils, but that research enriches teaching and there will continue to be cross-purposes between the two.

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The conversation then moved onto the current focus of **rebalancing research and teaching** in the sector. It was commented that it is simpler to compare research than teaching in international league tables but the attention should be given to the success of the higher education system as a whole not just the top 10 institutions. It was felt that it is the culture of the higher education sector that is special and that because of the obsession over rankings this message is not communicated as successfully as it could be.

Further discussion on **international students** led to several attendees noting that those students that tend to come and study in the UK are usually the wealthier students, but there were examples where scholarships for international students had worked. There were comments on whether the sector should be more challenging of the Home Office's policy on visas and if this was currently more geared toward selective institutions. Many attendees commented on how today's workforce need to be able to work in a globalised environment, and mixing with international students or taking part in an Erasmus scheme helps development of student's social capital.

Vivienne Stern noted that the UK had another success story with the institutions that were building a capacity outside the UK, for example the work that the University of Nottingham was doing with campuses in Malaysia and China. The sector needed to work at being able to explain these successes to a wider audience.

The conversation concluded with some warnings of the **European Union Referendum**. It was noted that the sector was already working hard in this area, with Universities UK's campaign Universities for Europe sending out information and holding events with many institutions across the country. However, the information available to students on how they can register to vote needs to be clear. This is particularly important as the referendum may take place in late June when students will not necessarily be at their term time address. Attendees noted that Universities UK, the NUS, the Association of Colleges and the Electoral Commission had begun joined up working in this area.

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