

## 1. NUS Wales

- 1.1. National Union of Students in Wales is the largest democratic organisation in Wales, representing learners in a wide variety of settings including higher education and further education, adult community learning and apprenticeships.

## 2. General Comments

- 2.1. We welcome the opportunity to respond to the External Affairs and Additional Legislation Committee's consultation on the implications for Wales of Britain exiting the European Union.
- 2.2. NUS UK, with the support of NUS Wales, recently responded to Parliament's Education Committee's inquiry on the impact of exiting the European Union on higher education. This response has been included as an annex at the end of this submission, for reference.
- 2.3. We believe that this inquiry is a vital one, and we would be happy to give evidence to the Committee if required.

## 3. Question 1: *What should be the top priority for Wales in advance of the UK Government triggering of Article 50 (which starts the formal process of exiting the EU)?*

- 3.1. We believe that the National Assembly for Wales, and the Welsh Government, should do everything they possibly can to protect EU students in Wales, while also addressing the rising in hate crime in a post-Brexit UK. There are a number of ways in which this can be addressed, and so we will not limit our response to one priority but rather to a necessary set of actions.
- 3.2. *Racism.* Perhaps the single most important concern that must be addressed, by both the National Assembly and the UK Parliament, is the rise in racism and hate-crime since the vote on 23<sup>rd</sup> June. By the middle of July, there had been a recorded rise of 42% in the reporting of hate-crime in England and Wales. This has been dismissed by some commentators as an increase in awareness of how to report crimes, rather than a direct rise in racism itself.
- 3.3. This argument is an entirely invalid one. A rise in reporting may not directly correlate to a rise in crime, but it is almost certainly likely to be heavily linked. Irrespective of the particular causes behind the rise in these figures, it is clearly true that there is racism in post-Brexit UK and it must be tackled. EU and international students will likely see the UK as no longer welcoming, and this will have a substantial knock-on impact for universities and society as a whole.

- 3.4. *Fees.* A major area of consideration for the Welsh sector will inevitably be the future of tuition fees for EU and international students. The current funding regime allows for EU students (and students from the European Economic Area countries) to be eligible for home student funding. This means that EU students will have access to £9,000 loans and the associated maintenance support. Welsh-domiciled students are eligible for a £5,100 tuition fee subsidy, with English students paying the full £9,000. International student fees are much higher.
- 3.5. International students do not have access to these loan frameworks, meaning that their courses are entirely self-funded. In the immediate weeks following the result of the referendum, it became clear that EU students were worried about the pincer-effect of higher fees and the inability to access schemes to finance them. For students currently in the system, and for those who will likely be in the system by the time Article 50 reaches its conclusion, governments across the UK have indicated that they will be able to finish their course on the terms they started.
- 3.6. We therefore believe that EU students, at the very least, will be able to expect to finish their course on the terms on which they initially started. We also believe that it would be a regressive move for institutions to be able to charge future EU and EEA students international fee rates. This could lead to a system where international students are dissuaded from applying to study in Wales altogether, which would ultimately lead to greater debt for home students to make up this funding deficit.
- 3.7. We also believe that it is necessary to address the UK Government's position on the NHS surcharge for international students. Prospective international students applying for a study visa must pay a minimum £150 for access to the NHS for a year. There are currently 19,660 international students in Wales, with a minimum NHS contribution of £8.8m (£2.9m per year). NUS Wales believes that this policy is unfair, and could in fact be met via top-ups from Welsh Government (we do recognise that visas are not a devolved area).
- 3.8. The most recent figures indicate that there are 5,645 EU and EEA students in Wales. If EU students were classified as international students, then they would also be forced to pay this surcharge. Over the lifetime of an average course, a total of £2.5m would be charged. When this surcharge is combined with the staggering level of international fees, it becomes quickly unaffordable.
- 3.9. It is also worth considering that, by the time Article 50 takes effect, the recommendations of the Diamond Review will have been put in place. This will not have an impact on international students, but will potentially change the support available for EU students who start pre-March 2019. This has to be fully considered by the sector. We therefore believe that the Committee should consider ways in which EU student fees can be protected, alongside broader visa implications.
- 3.10. EU students [generate](#) an estimated £132.9m for the Welsh economy and create 1,264 jobs. It is imperative that they are not dissuaded from studying in Wales.
- 3.11. *ERASMUS+.* The Erasmus+ scheme is one of vital importance to both EU and home students. The scheme pays for the costs (and stipends) for students to study in other areas of the EU for a variety of periods. The aim of the scheme is

to promote the social good, and to create students with a genuinely international outlook.

- 3.12. While there are elements of the scheme that can be improved, including on widening access, it is a scheme that NUS Wales and students believe need to remain in place. Membership of the scheme is not linked to being a member of the European Union, but it is linked to freedom of movement. This is why certain EEA countries are able to take part in the scheme, but also why Switzerland is no longer eligible. This creates a difficult situation, where we would advocate that Wales must argue for continued access to the single market and freedom of movement.
- 3.13. The above goes hand in hand with maintaining membership of the Horizon2020 programme. The scheme, for [Wales](#), currently attracts almost 2.5% of the UK share of funding, worth a total of €35m. The projects funded are varied, but broadly contribute both to the social good and to important research schemes.