

Brexit: Urgent clarity needed concerning Erasmus+ and Horizon2020

Written by Lesley Wilson on 19 February 2019 in Opinion Plus
Opinion Plus

With a disorderly Brexit now a real and fast-approaching threat, detailed technical guidance from the European Commission is crucial for those participating with UK partners in EU programmes like Erasmus+ and Horizon2020, writes Lesley Wilson.



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A disorderly Brexit has become a real and fast-approaching threat, requiring serious and immediate preparation on both sides of the Channel.

It necessitates detailed technical guidance for those participating with UK partners in EU programmes like Erasmus+ and Horizon2020.

This guidance needs to come from the European Commission, and it needs to come very soon. Otherwise students, researchers, and many others, will not be able to prepare properly, leaving them in a confusing state of limbo.

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With just weeks to go before the deadline, there is no time to put too much faith in a last-minute solution. This is not only a British problem, it is a problem for everyone engaged in one of these European programmes with a UK partner, and it calls for action on the part of the European institutions.

The Commission took an important step at the end of January, when it proposed a regulation that would allow continuing support for Erasmus students beyond the Brexit date. Simultaneously, the Commission made a proposal for UK participants to be eligible for Erasmus if the UK continues to pay into the EU budget for 2019.

Without such legislation, students could be obliged to return on short notice to their home countries and institutions, and apart from potential financial and organisational challenges, there could also be a risk of non-recognition of the study stay.

However, these proposals have come at the eleventh hour and are in part dependent on the UK accepting payment to the budget and accepting EU auditors.

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Even if those conditions are met (considering the difficulty for the UK side to agree internally), the approval of the legislation would come very late, meaning Erasmus students would understand their status, at best, just a few weeks before the Brexit date.

This short deadline means that it is essential that the Council and the Parliament adopt the proposals as soon as possible.

Apart from the proposals for regulation, technical guidance is still missing for both the Erasmus+ and the much bigger Horizon2020 programmes. We need to know what will happen to UK coordinators and partners in projects.

There are rules for third countries, and they will logically apply to the UK after 29 March. However, it is not certain how the transition is going to be managed.

What will happen to consortia that will suddenly have too few partners from EU Member States? What will happen to projects coordinated by the UK?

We are in an unprecedented situation: a whole country leaving a programme while thousands of projects are ongoing.

Moreover, in a no-deal exit, the UK would leave without having agreed to procedures for mitigating the situation - meaning swift and radical change on 29 March.

"Technical guidance must give clear, unequivocal information on how third-country rules will apply to Erasmus+ and Horizon2020 projects with UK partners and what the process will be for the transition: What will the Commission do, what does it expect from beneficiaries, and what is the timeline to make the necessary changes?"

Technical guidance must give clear, unequivocal information on how third-country rules will apply to Erasmus+ and Horizon2020 projects with UK partners and what the process will be for the transition: What will the Commission do, what does it expect from beneficiaries, and what is the timeline to make the necessary changes?

New regulation is a positive step, but it cannot make up for technical guidance on how to manage a completely new situation.

The sooner the beneficiaries know what is expected and when, the better will they be able to prepare and the less disruption a no-deal Brexit will make.

About the author

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