



QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

and

ULSTER UNIVERSITY

General Election 2019

Priorities for Higher Education

1. Overview

A general election has been announced to take place on 12 December 2019.

Ulster University and Queen's University Belfast are taking this opportunity to highlight to the local political parties a number of priority areas for higher education in Northern Ireland.

The key areas that we would encourage political focus on during and, importantly, after the General Election are:

- **Brexit solutions** that support and enhance universities and their contributions to the Northern Ireland economy
- **Place based funding** for higher education
- **Sustainable funding** for higher education in Northern Ireland
- **Decision making**

2. Brexit Priorities

There are four key issues that must be satisfactorily addressed in the exit negotiations to support the universities in contributing to the Northern Ireland economy post-Brexit.

i. Access to EU Research Funding and Projects

Ensuring continued full access to, and influence over, all future Framework Programmes and ensuring that there is no restriction or reduction in access to other EU Research and Innovation Programmes and infrastructures.

ii. Status of Current and Future EU Staff

Continued employment and free movement rights for current and future EU staff and their dependants in the UK following its exit from the EU with no detriment suffered thereafter.

More generally, decisions regarding immigration should reflect regional needs and more clearly recognise the benefits of EU and international academic staff.

iii. Student Recruitment and Mobility

Retain the current status regarding tuition fees, access to loans, grants and other support for EU students (both undergraduate and postgraduate) considering studying in the UK.

Ensure that future EU student mobility is not impeded by unnecessary bureaucracy, regardless of the immigration status of EU and UK nationals, and that continued participation in Erasmus is secured as well as all future mobility programmes.

Temporary Leave to Remain should be extended for students as the proposed three years is insufficient for some undergraduate courses and most PhD programmes.

We welcome the announcement of Two-Year Post Study Work Visas but strongly recommend that they be brought into effect straight away, ensuring that current students will be eligible.

iv. The Border

Post-Brexit, it is vital that staff and students can continue to travel across the land border unimpeded.

Urgent clarification is required on the method by which current “frontier workers” can obtain settled status / right to work entitlement.

Strong cooperation and partnerships that exist via the current North-South government structures should remain in place.

It is essential that the EU exit does not impact the University’s connections with Britain and is not seen as an obstacle to individuals wishing to travel to NI.

3. Placed Based Funding for Higher Education

Northern Ireland has strategic, local research and innovation strengths in key areas where we have the potential to be global innovation leaders: artificial intelligence/data science; cybersecurity; precision medicine; agri-food; advanced manufacturing and sustainability. The recently announced City Region Deals and Growth Deals provide an excellent opportunity for Northern Ireland to build a global reputation for excellence in these sectors.

In order to maximise the potential for these links, place based funding streams should be made available to support regional expansion in growth sectors, and support international collaboration and partnership building between NI universities and institutions across the globe. Crucially this would enable NI universities to leverage additional funding and attract global talent to support economic growth in the region.

4. Sustainable Funding for Higher Education in Northern Ireland

Whilst we acknowledge that higher education is a devolved issue, it is important to recognise that the sector in Northern Ireland is significantly underfunded compared to other regions of the UK, by some £54m. Under the current funding model, Northern Ireland’s universities can only meet 60% of the demand from local school leavers, in 2019, we exported 32% of our school leavers to other parts of the UK, this compares with 5% in the Republic of Ireland.

If Northern Ireland is to continue its social and economic transformation this trend must be reversed, by ensuring that as many of our young people as possible can avail of



higher education in Northern Ireland. This will require the allocation of additional resources to higher and further education.

The regional mission of the universities, in supporting not only the social and economic development of Northern Ireland but also the local communities in which we are based, must also be recognised and supported, by a sustainable funding model for Higher Education.

5. Decision making

Critical to all of this is the need for political decision making in Northern Ireland.

Without a Northern Ireland Executive, progress is either limited, slower than we would like or non-existent on these critical issues and more.

The universities encourage all political parties and General Election candidates to work together towards a resolution and restitution of the devolved institutions.