BRITISH COUNCIL

PSL UNIVERSITÉ PARIS

# Summary Report:
# Enhancing international competitiveness of universities – a European perspective

Collège de France, Paris, 21 June 2019

On 21 June 2019, the British Council and the Université PSL in Paris held a forum on internationalisation of higher education.

Participants came from leading universities in France and the UK, governments and global and European education institutions.

The aim was to identify common themes, interests and concerns; give sectors and policy makers a chance to feed back to each other; and provide a platform for international partners to share best practice. This report outlines the key themes discussed at the event.

Located in the heart of Paris, PSL is ranked among the world's top 50 universities. Its member institutions combine excellence and diversity to inspire dialog among and between all areas of knowledge, innovation, and creativity in the Arts, Engineering, Sciences, Humanities and Social Science

A list of speakers and sessions is available online http://bit.ly/2Y8KfwI.

## The shape of global higher education: The background

*Stéphan Vincent-Lancrin, Deputy Head of Division* and *Senior Analyst* at *OECD*, gave an overview of trends in internationalisation over the past ten years. The number of internationally mobile students has risen from two to five million over this period.

While macroeconomic factors and changes in politics have had an impact, the role of the institution has become more pronounced, something that was not expected ten years ago.

Increasingly sophisticated internationalisation strategies are now key to attracting more international students and partnerships. In recent years, national governmental strategies for internationalising countries' education systems have also developed. The British Council's latest *Shape of Higher Education* report showed that governance, quality

## France and the UK: Internationalisation now

*Béatrice Khaiat, Director* at *Campus France*, explained that France hosts the fourth highest number of international students in the world and is the first non-English speaking overseas student destination. Competition is growing, especially with Russia, Canada and China introducing national policies.

*Vivienne Stern* from *Universities UK International* explained how 430,000 overseas students currently study in the UK and 700,000 take part in UK programmes in other parts of the world, including joint and dual degrees, franchises and branch campuses, as well as distance and online learning. Over half of UK research involves an international co-author and 11 per cent of income for research comes from non-UK sources.

*Maggie Dallman, Vice-President* of *Imperial College London*, provided an example of a UK university that makes internationalisation a priority. 58 per cent of *Imperial*'s research has an international co-author. 60 per cent of students and 40 per cent of staff are from outside the UK.

UK universities are forging partnerships with whole geographies, *Vivienne Stern* also emphasised – businesses, local communities and local and national governments. The British Council's *Mutual Influence* report in 2017 outlined examples of municipalities and universities that have collaborated successfully on internationalisation strategies.



## National education internationalisation: The French strategy

*Béatrice Khaiat Director* at *Campus France* introduced the *Bienvenue en France: Choose France* strategy, launched by President Macron at the end of 2018. *Thierry Coulhon, Counsellor for Education, Higher Education, Research and Development* for the French Government, set the strategy in the context of wider French policy.

The French government aims to double the number of international students at its universities by 2027.

It will support French universities' international activities, with an emphasis on student experience that includes a pledge to contribute a third of the cost of studies for non-EU students, simplify visas and incentivise universities to arrange international student welcome programmes.

President Macron sees higher education and research as central to public policy and local capacity building.

A wider overhaul of the French system has aimed to break traditional barriers between universities and the elite Grandes Écoles so that all students have better access to employment opportunities, encourage institutional partnerships and improve the application process through a new *Parcoursup* online portal. Making campuses more international is the final pillar of this.

Internationalisation of education is also part of a French foreign policy ambition to become a European and global leader and priority-setter in education.

President Macron proposed the *European Universities Network* in 2017 – a funding system for pan-European university partnerships. The first round of successful partnership applications has since been announced, with French universities (16 so far) receiving the bulk of funding. With the G7 being in France in August, the French government also called a summit of education leaders in July to forge global partnerships.

## National education internationalisation: The UK strategy

*Jack Thomlinson, Senior Policy Advisor* at the UK's *Department for Education*, explained the UK's *vision for global HE*. The UK aims to retain the closest possible relationship with European partners post-Brexit, but also look more globally.

The four key points of the UK vision are:

1. Focus on the UK's reputation for quality and learn from best practice internationally.

2. Work with the UK education sector to ensure they get the best from international partnerships. The UK government aims to increase spending on research and development to 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2027.

   The recently published *International Research and Innovation Strategy* brings together universities, businesses and regulatory frameworks to help the UK to open up internationally. This could involve collaboration with EU consortia such as *Horizon*, but also non-EU bodies.

3. Student experience: The UK government aims to increase the number of international students from 438,000 to 600,000 by 2030. Changes to visas and post-study work options will be important. However, wider reforms to student experience aim to benefit local and international students, such as improving mental health provision. The government is looking to exchange best practice examples internationally to do this.

4. Develop global citizens and international mobility: the UK will continue to encourage students to study abroad and welcome students who wish to study in the UK.

Among concerns raised by participants were those around the future of active research programmes including clinical trials, contract validity, and whether data protection laws would still cover the UK.

## European alliances: Brexit or no Brexit

*Vivienne Stern, Director* of *Universities UK International*, described how UK and EU institutions are establishing partnerships that show the strength of European collaboration – prominent examples being the *University of Oxford*'s partnership with *Berlin institutions*, or the *University of East Anglia*'s membership in the *Aurora network* of European research institutes.

She emphasised that the UK sector does not want these to be replacements for future participation in *Horizon 2020* or *Erasmus+* as they tend to be disciplinarily narrow. She and other participants urged European counterparts and UK institutions alike to push their governments for the best possible UK access to EU programmes.

Among concerns raised by participants were those around the future of active research programmes including clinical trials, contract validity, and whether data protection laws would still cover the UK.



*As far as Europe is concerned, uncertainties surround the modalities of Brexit. In contrast to all the speeches inviting us to see in Brexit an opportunity from which we must make the most of, the UK is and must remain a stakeholder in the European Research and Higher Education Area in the same way as countries outside the Union, such as Switzerland or Israel.* **Professor Alain Fuchs, President of PSL**

## The Switzerland model

*Michael Hengartner, President* of the *Swiss Rector's Conference*, gave an overview of how Swiss institutions develop research partnerships as non-members of the EU with no overarching government education internationalisation strategy and a highly devolved education system.

Switzerland's position in the centre of Europe allows it to lead interesting international university networks. *EUCOR*, a unique transnational university alliance and seen by many as precursor of the *European Universities Network*, involves the universities of Basel, Karlsruhe, Freiburg and Strasbourg. Students can cross borders for an afternoon to take a class in another country.

For Switzerland, international strategic alliances are akin to 'local' alliances – for example, the Universities of Zurich and Geneva work together in the *League of European Research Universities*. International alliances are an important way for Swiss institutions to influence European Union policy, given that Switzerland has no seat at the policy formation table.

## Government support versus government interference

All participants welcomed government support for international activities – but there was concern about the implications this might have on universities' own missions. *Michael Worton, President of PSL*'s *Strategic Orientation Committee*, urged universities to take the opportunity to shape, scrutinise and improve government objectives rather than passively accepting promises of funding. He cautioned universities to always question government objectives, priority countries and research focuses. There were concerns, for example, around certain countries' records at data protection and human rights abuses – although there was also recognition of the role that universities can play in improving practices such as these.

*Jean Chambaz, President* of *Sorbonne Université*, also mentioned the tension between increasing numbers of international students and French government regulations that require public universities to accept a certain number of home students, something that literally limits the university's capacity to internationalise its student base at undergraduate level.



## Internationalisation: Proof of success?

*Ellie Bothwell, Global Rankings Editor* from *Times Higher Education* (THE), described how their rankings system recognises university internationalisation as an indicator of a 'top university'. 7.5 per cent of a university's THE ranking is based on various factors to measure its level of internationalisation. THE has recently introduced several new ranking systems of international activity, including *Europe Teaching Rankings* that were launched on 4 July and include metrics on *Erasmus+* mobility.

However, many participants questioned whether 'internationalisation' could be measured or defined in a uniform way. *Giorgio Marinoni* from the *International Association of Universities* outlined a recent survey that his organisation undertook to obtain data on internationalisation activities and interest among institutions worldwide. The questionnaire was delivered to nearly 7,894 institutions worldwide and received replies from 907 institutes in 126 countries.

Universities that saw internationalisation as a priority three years ago now saw it as even more important – but those that hadn't been convinced about the benefits three years ago were still unconvinced. Also, the definition of 'internationalisation' had changed over just three years to focus much more on partnerships than student recruitment – but this still differed based on countries, size of institution and other factors.

Doubts were also voiced about whether there was proof that internationalisation really opened education opportunities – only 2.2 per cent of students in the world are internationally mobile, and even digital courses are usually accessed by more socially privileged students.

Scholarships were regarded as essential in ensuring international opportunities were further reaching, although penetration of promotion of scholarships was recognised as a challenge. There was general recognition of the dangers of brain drain from countries sending more international students.

## The direction of internationalisation: Outbound versus inbound

There was also a call for the same efforts to be placed on outbound student mobility as well as inbound. The ambition in the UK's International Education Strategy to encourage UK citizens to study abroad was welcomed.

But it was noted that the UK has a very low number of outbound international students, and low foreign language ability. Participants called for the UK government to do more to address foreign language ability at an early age.

*Béatrice Khaiat Director* at *Campus France* described how the UK is the third biggest host country of French students after Belgium and Canada. France is the top destination for UK students going abroad – but there is a disparity in 'real numbers', with just 4,000 UK students going to France in 2016 compared with 12,000 French students to the UK. This was seen as an example of the UK's 'language crisis' (discussed later), and *Campus France* is actively seeking to address this in a bilateral way – they recently opened an office in London and are taking part in Universities UK's *Go International* campaign. Other UK universities described their local initiatives to support foreign language study among their students and urged the government to help embed these.

*Jean Chambaz, President* of *Sorbonne Université*, also called for more emphasis from the French government to help home students get an international experience. Participants called for less emphasis in general on English language courses as essential to attracting international students. France's international students are primarily from Francophone countries, including Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia. In Switzerland, at undergraduate level, universities tend to recruit from their respective linguistic regions, whether German or French.

## Network-building: Practical advice

The directors of *PSL*, *Sorbonne*, *Université Paris-Saclay* and *Imperial* offered insights into their tried-and-tested methods for supporting international partnerships. Several participants urged universities to focus on their priorities before trying to build hundreds of international networks, particularly because of the financial cost involved. *Jean Chambaz, President* of *Sorbonne Université*, emphasised that the long-term sustainability potential of international collaborations was key.

University leaders such as Pro-Vice Chancellors were encouraged to 'get the ball rolling' by offering or applying for funding opportunities which often form the basis of networks, or by encouraging their staff to attend networking events as relationships are essential to starting new networks. Participants also encouraged universities to consider having specific members of staff assigned to international opportunities.

However, they also emphasised that university leaders should be guided by the knowledge of their staff and researchers. *Jean Chambaz* said he had learned that his faculty knew best with whom to form strategic partnerships.

*Marc Mézard, Director Ecole Normale Supérieure PSL*, suggested that his role in senior leadership was to review these smaller initiatives, extend the scale of those that were working best to more departments – and at the same time to question those that weren't well-planned enough to succeed as there was so much appetite for new partnership building among his research staff.

### Useful links
Article: The race for international education.
Article: L'attractivité internationale des universités, une perspective européenne.
List of speakers and sessions

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**Want to find out more about future events?** Keep up to date on the British Council's Higher Education Opportunities site.