

Investing in our Future

John McGrane discusses the impact Brexit will have on the collaboration between the Irish and the UK Higher Education Sector, and how we must strengthen collaboration with our UK counterparts through bilateral partnerships to move towards a brighter future.



John McGrane is the Director General of the British Irish Chamber of Commerce.

2018 is a momentous year of anniversaries. 100 years ago, the guns fell silent on the Western Front, just 20 years ago the Good Friday Agreement was signed and 60 years ago, the roots of Ireland's economic success were laid in the First Programme for Economic Expansion. The Ireland that we live in today owes much to the vision of its authors, including the late Dr TK Whitaker.

The visionaries behind the programme realised that to invest in Ireland's future, they had to invest in education. What held true in 1958 holds true today. The problems Ireland faced in 1958 seemed insurmountable. We were a nation not long

independent, impoverished by a trade war with our neighbour and exporting our young people on the hoof alongside our animals. 60 years on, Ireland has become a vibrant nation with a resilient, talented population and a community that has paid its dues and which now features the best growth rate in the EU. The decisions of 60 years ago have been key to this.

However, as the clock ticks towards April Fool's Day 2019 when the UK formally leaves the EU, we are again faced with a seemingly insurmountable challenge. As the only organisation representing business activities with interests across these

► Continued on Page 4

Funding for Business Growth

We work with accountants to arrange fast flexible funding for SMEs

- Working Capital
- VAT and Tax Funding
- Business Expansion
- Stock Purchase
- Easy application
- Fast approval process
- Access funds within 48 hours
- Single point of contact

With 20 years' experience as independent specialists, we work with a wide range of lenders to find the best funding solution available. We manage your client's application and provide expert advice and support throughout the entire process. You can rely on our expertise to ensure your client gets the best deal with minimal hassle.



business
finance

For a confidential chat contact Lucinda Clancy on 01 438 6462 or email lucinda@clancybusiness.com

www.clancybusinessfinance.ie

► Continued from Page 3

two islands, the British Irish Chamber of Commerce has been at the centre of the Brexit dialogue since before the referendum in June 2016. The work of the Chamber touches on every dimension of the Brexit discussion, including the potential impact on Higher Education.

Brexit, of whatever hue, will be disruptive for Ireland's Higher Education Sector. The UK is and will remain a world leader in education and innovation and its leaving will have a negative impact on Higher Education in the EU as a whole. But that does not mean that Brexit will not impact on the sector in the UK. Our friends at Universities UK have identified the biggest concerns for the sector as 'increased barriers to recruiting talented European staff, damage to international research collaboration, increased barriers to recruiting European students, loss of funding for research and innovation and reduced outward mobility opportunities for staff and students.' Years of collaboration, of strengthening relationships and seamless cross-border flows of students and staff are now at risk. Losing these knowledge flows and partnerships would be disastrous for the EU and the UK alike. Higher Education and Research thrives on broadening horizons, on exploring new opportunities and challenging pre-existing concepts. Anything that narrows this and restricts the movement of knowledge and talent will be detrimental to all involved.

The impact on collaboration will be immense. According to the Royal Society UK, between 2005 and 2014 there were 16,655 co-authored papers between academics from the UK and Ireland. As outlined previously, the biggest concern for the UK academic community is whether British academics will still be able to collaborate across EU borders with their European peers. Naturally this would also be a significant concern for the Irish research community. UK and Irish research institutions already collaborate extensively, especially under EU research programmes. There are currently more than 900 collaborative links between Irish and UK researchers under Horizon 2020, the EU's €80 billion research fund. Since the commencement of Horizon 2020,

12.6% of all successfully-funded Irish research projects have included at least one UK-based partner and over the course of 2016 and 2017 that number increased to about 40%. Given the fact that Ireland shares a border with Northern Ireland, both jurisdictions have established successful collaborative partnerships. In the precursor to Horizon 2020 - Framework Programme 7 - €89.2m was raised by North-South research collaborations; a success rate of 24%, just above the EU average. These collaborative links are now in danger as a result of Brexit.

So much for the problems but we at the British Irish Chamber are in the business of solutions. That's why we have worked hard alongside key stakeholders and through our Higher Education and Research Policy Committee to identify the opportunities that Brexit presents for the Higher Education Sector in Ireland. In London earlier this year, we brought together for the first time leading Ministers, policymakers, educators, researchers and employers from across the UK and Ireland to identify specific initiatives to enhance cooperation post-Brexit.

Speaking at the event, our Patron Niall FitzGerald, spoke of how Brexit can be a catalyst for Higher Education in Ireland, not a catastrophe. The same issues that cause concern can be turned to create a true UK-Ireland Higher Education and Research Partnership. Ireland is a ready-made partner and friend for the UK post-Brexit and working together, we can mitigate against the potential risks that Brexit poses to both our economies and societies.

Ireland is currently the next best option for many international academics and students, and fears of the recruitment of staff post-Brexit can be solved through bilateral UK-Ireland agreements such as the Common Travel Area (CTA) and the creation of joint-professorships. Likewise, the CTA and commitments to "home" fees for students can ensure that two-way student flows are not unduly impacted.

Upon leaving the EU, the UK may well lose access to research funding and collaborative projects. Ireland, again,

presents the solution to this through our continued access to that same funding. Furthermore, by forming strategic partnerships, we can ensure that research collaborations between our islands continue well into the future, regardless of the Brexit outcome.

The challenge for the Irish Higher Education sector is how to make the most of this unprecedented opportunity. Brexit is not the only game in town. Chronic underfunding, lack of affordable student accommodation and a plummet in world rankings have taken their toll upon the sector in Ireland. As we at the Chamber say, 'it's hard to score an open goal when the ball is deflated'. In our recommendations to the Irish government for the up-coming budget, now more than ever it is critically important that we revitalise investment in our education system.

Cutting off ties with the UK's Higher Education Institutions is simply not an option. To avert catastrophe and make the most of the opportunities Brexit presents, we must invest more in education not less - TK Whitaker knew that and we do too.

The Irish Higher Education Sector is at a crossroads. With increased funding it can build strong, mutually beneficial partnerships with the UK. If funding is cut or allowed to stagnate, the opportunities will be missed and the Brexit risks outlined above will come back to haunt us. For the sake of the generations to come after us, we cannot allow this to happen.

Sixty years ago, Ireland overcame a seemingly impossible challenge to develop into the vibrant country we are today. In 2018, we face another seemingly insurmountable challenge yet, much like the problems faced by those before us in 1958, it is not an impossible one. For Higher Education in Ireland, strengthening collaboration with our UK counterparts through bilateral partnerships will ensure that, no matter the outcome, Ireland and the UK and indeed, the UK and the EU, can move towards a brighter, collaborative future. But to reach this future, we must first invest in our people and critically, in our education, now.