

The Rt Hon. Damian Hinds MP  
Secretary of State for Education  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London, SW1P 3BT

Thursday 17 January 2019

Dear Damian,

I am writing in Sally Hunt's absence on behalf of 120,000 UCU members working in colleges and universities who are deeply concerned about the current Brexit crisis.

EU staff and students play a vital role in our colleges and universities. They need urgent assurances about their rights to live, work and study in the UK, whatever the shape of the country's future relationship with the EU.

The failure to provide this security has left many EU staff in limbo about their future here. We risk a brain drain of talent to competitor countries if we fail to make clear that EU and international staff and students will continue to be welcome to live and work in the UK after Brexit.

Furthermore, staff and students need urgent clarity on all aspects of research funding and access to EU programmes which contribute hugely to our international success. As the letter from university leaders on 4 January indicated, there are significant areas of European research funding which the government has yet to confirm its intentions towards.

The impact of uncertainty regarding access to EU programmes is not only financial. Without a clear plan for how the UK will engage with the EU in future, there is a major risk that research partnerships and networks which bring huge value to UK universities will be undermined.

As things stand, the UK is giving every impression to the wider world that we are pulling up the drawbridge. This perception is hugely damaging not just for our country but also for the post-16 education sector which is built upon international cooperation and delivers substantial social and economic benefits to our society.

In light of the current parliamentary deadlock it is clear that an alternative approach is needed. In a recent ballot, 89% of UCU members voted overwhelmingly in support of a second referendum on the final Brexit deal.

I would urge the government to reconsider its current position of opposing a referendum, and act now to provide urgent assurances on the issues I have raised above.

I would also welcome a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss these matters and other issues which threaten the sector in more detail.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Matt Waddup

Head of Policy