

## International Student Forum, December 2020 – Brexit

### Attendance

18 students joined the online forum and were initially put into 3 breakout rooms for discussions with facilitators. Attendance dropped after the breakout rooms started, resulting in 2 rooms being merged part way through.

### Topics discussed

Students were asked to share their thoughts and concerns regarding Brexit by answering some pre-prepared questions. Below are the students' responses.

#### **What is your understanding of Brexit?**

Students highlighted the end of free movement between the UK and EU, as well as the uncertainty surrounding changes that will come into effect:

- There's a lot of uncertainty because it's the first time a country has left the EU and we don't know what to expect. It's scary in a way.
- We need to wait for the UK Prime Minister to announce what will happen - deal or no deal.
- It's a lot less simple - if you're from Europe you're used to crossing borders all the time, but now there's a lot you need to be prepared for when crossing so you don't get stuck anywhere.
- Free movement will be restricted and we will not have similar rights to UK citizens. We will also be subject to the same treatment that other international (overseas) students experience. I'm really worried about it.
- If you arrive before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021 you can apply for the settlement scheme, but if you arrive after then you must apply for the student visa.
- A year ago we were told that if we start studying in the UK in the academic year 2020/21 we would be fine and pay UK fees. But I have also read otherwise.
- Travelling will become more complicated.

#### **What are your thoughts or concerns about Brexit? How does it impact you?**

There was much confusion regarding pre-settled status, needing a visa, change in tuition fees and not being in the UK before 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Additionally, there were several questions about security checks at airports and if there will be any restrictions on travelling between the UK and EU:

- Does pre-settled status allow me to study in the UK without a visa?
- Are EU students awarded with pre-settled status subject to the new visa and health insurance rule? The government website makes it clear for those with settled status, but not for those with pre-settled status (like many students have).
- After being given pre-settled status, what documents do I need at the airport for travelling back and forth to my home country?
- Will it be a problem to travel to Europe (or abroad in general) just after the 31<sup>st</sup> December? Do I need to have pre-settled status? Will I need a visa to come back?
- I'm not sure about my own status so I don't know where I stand. Should I be applying for pre-settled status in the meantime?
- I'm an EU student and planning to come to Bath for semester 2 - can I come to the UK and then apply for the visa?
- Do we have the right to stay in the UK for 6 months without a visa from 2021?

- I'm living in the EU and studying an online Masters degree programme. How will this influence my tuition fees for the upcoming modules? I am currently paying UK fees, but will this stay the same as I started my programme before Brexit?
- I haven't been able to move to Bath yet because of COVID, but do I need a UK address now for residency in order to study in the UK later this year? Do I need to sign a housing contract soon?
- Will my degree still have the same recognition abroad after Brexit?
- What will happen at the border - will security and checks be stricter and take longer? Will moving at airports and international train stations be more difficult?
- Will there be a limit to how often we can travel home and how long we can stay there?
- Will I need proof showing that I'm in the UK on 1<sup>st</sup> January?
- When do we need to apply for the graduate visa? What proof/documents are needed for this?

### **How well do you understand the changes that will start in January 2021?**

Students generally agreed that although the changes following Brexit are very confusing, communications from the University have been very helpful and reassuring for understanding the implications on their studies:

- It's very confusing but I hope everything I've done is fine for staying in the UK.
- Until there is a deal or no deal, there is a lot of confusion. There will be changes whatever the outcome.
- I've signed up to the daily updates from the UK government, but it's still confusing.
- The government information is not clear, but I realise there will be many different individual cases.
- I've applied for pre-settled status but that's all I know.
- I hope having pre-settled status is enough to stay here and study without any issues.
- Communication from the University has been very good, I'm confident I can continue studying my course unaffected. If I can be sure that's not going to change, then it's reassuring.
- If I didn't receive the emails from the University, I'd feel even more lost so it's good to have the support of the University.
- The University is doing as well as they can to update us considering the situation.
- Emails from the University are helpful and are responsive to students' needs.
- I received emails from the University with details on requirements for staying in the UK.

### **What would you like the University to do in supporting you?**

Students highlighted the need to have clear answers to their questions, along with the option to talk to someone who can check they've done everything required in order to stay in the UK. They also felt more information on any changes for EU students upon return after the winter break (e.g. possible attendance monitoring) would be very useful:

- I would like to talk to someone before 1<sup>st</sup> January who can check that I've done everything needed to stay in the UK.
- We all have very different questions so it would be good to have lots of appointments available where you can ask your questions and receive good answers. I had an appointment, but I was directed to do my own research which wasn't helpful.
- More information about returning to Bath after going home in the winter break and what will happen for EU students.
- More information on whether EU students will have online attendance monitoring, like Tier 4 students do currently.

- Many EU students will have pre-settled status, so it would be good to have more information on what we must do in order to stay in the UK, or what could affect our status.
- Most communications received from the University are designed for students living in Bath (e.g. testing before returning home). There is little relevant for students on online programmes.

### **What impact does Brexit have on your plans after graduation?**

Generally, students felt that documents required for the visa and new travel restrictions were a barrier to staying in the UK after graduation; it is much easier to stay in the EU despite the opportunities available in the UK. However, those who will have settled status after 5 years in the UK noted they felt lucky, but also obliged to stay so as not to risk losing their status.

- It makes me feel reluctant to stay in the UK for a Masters degree or future work. I like being abroad, but I would rather go to an EU country where I don't have to get a visa or have any fuss with travelling.
- It's a huge deciding factor and there's lots of bureaucracy.
- I have pre-settled status and assume that I do not need to apply for the graduate visa, but I must stay in the UK for 5 years. If I leave the UK for more than 2 years then I will lose my pre-settled status, so I feel obliged to stay in the UK to protect my rights.
- I'm lucky that my course is 5 years and I applied as soon as pre-settled status became available, so I will have settled status when I finish and will be able to work in the UK.
- If anything changes to my settlement status and I need to sort out extra documents to stay here on a graduate visa, then there's no reason for me to stay as everything's a lot easier back in the EU. Even though there's lots of opportunities here, it's not worth the effort.
- At this point as a finalist, I don't know if I want to be in the UK in 6 months' time.

### Response from the University

This report will be shared with the Student Immigration Service for comment, as well as answering students' queries surrounding Brexit.