

German Rectors' Conference: Ensuring cooperation between German and British universities even under difficult conditions

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The President of the German Rectors' Conference (HRK), Professor Dr Peter-André Alt in Berlin described the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union as a watershed in the cooperation between German and British universities. The withdrawal was finally completed at the end of the transition phase on 31 December 2020.

The HRK President said:

"By fundamentally altering the well-established framework of traditionally close British-German university relations, Brexit threatens British-European and hence British-German university cooperation at its very core."

Alt singled out the British Government's decision to no longer participate in the European mobility programme Erasmus+ as a particularly harsh blow. He emphasised:

"Science thrives on encounters, exchange and diversity, starting at the student level. For this reason we view the British withdrawal from the Erasmus Programme as a mistake. In the negotiations on British participation in the Horizon Europe research funding programme, it will now be vital to place British-European research cooperation on a solid and forward-looking foundation. Despite the difficult circumstances, British universities will continue to number among Germany's most important science partners."

Together with British and European science organisations, the HRK has been campaigning for a seamless continuation of the strong relationships between British and European universities since the referendum on the United Kingdom's exit from the EU in June 2016. At the end of December 2020, the Conservative government in London announced that the United Kingdom will no longer participate in Erasmus+, the European programme for promoting student mobility. The withdrawal agreement between the United Kingdom and the European Union permits British participation in other EU programmes, such as the Horizon Europe research funding programme.

Along with Austria and the Netherlands, the United Kingdom is one of the three most important destinations for German students. In 2018, according to figures from the German Federal Statistical Office, 15,300 German students were studying at British universities. Around 5,800 German academics are currently working at British universities and academic institutions. After the USA, the United Kingdom was the most important country of residence of co-authors of joint publications in 2018. Almost every fifth international co-publication by academics from Germany was carried out in cooperation with colleagues at British universities and academic institutions. Currently 248 German universities maintain 1,609 partnerships with British universities and academic institutions.

Source: German Rectors' Conference

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