

BRITISH COUNCIL REPORT
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THE FUTURE OF UK-CYPRUS COLLABORATION POST-BREXIT

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ABOUT THE FORUM

The first Higher Education and Research Forum, organised by the British Council in Cyprus, brought together policy makers, university representatives and academics from the UK and Cyprus to discuss collaboration between the UK and the Cyprus higher education sectors post-Brexit. The forum focused on two questions:

- What are the implications of the UK's decision to leave the European Union on higher education and research?
- How can the current uncertainties become opportunities for closer collaboration between the two countries?

The presentations and panel discussions aimed to better understand the current situation, focusing on three areas:

- Transnational education (TNE)
- Research collaboration
- Quality assurance (QA)

THIS REPORT

This report provides the reader with summaries of each of the sessions held at the forum. It ends with recommendations that arose from the discussions.

A comprehensive list of the sessions and contributors is annexed to this report.

The report is written with the UK and Republic of Cyprus higher education sectors in mind and intended as a reference point for institutions from the two countries interested in closer collaboration.

FINDINGS

- Strong people-to-people links have ensured that UK higher education is front-of-mind among Cypriots. There is a desire for this to remain the case
- Cyprus's ambition to become a regional higher education hub provides much scope for TNE collaboration
- There are numerous non-EU research funding opportunities within Europe that can be taken advantage of
- Despite the high level of uncertainty, there are opportunities for TNE in Cyprus post-Brexit. There is heightened interest from UK higher education institutions and demand is likely to increase from both local and international students. There will be a renewed focus on partnerships that deliver better graduate outcomes



CURRENT SCENE: CYPRUS AND UK

'Higher education and research are priorities in the strategic plan of the Ministry of Education and culture. Developing Cyprus into a regional educational centre, which provides qualitative higher education and research, is one of the Cyprus governments primary educational goals' (HE Kostas Champiaouris, Minister of Education and Culture)

Cyprus has a highly developed system of primary and secondary education, both public and private. The quality of instruction can be attributed to the excellence of Cyprus's teachers and the fact that Cyprus spends nearly 7.9 per cent of GDP on education, making it one of the top three spenders on education in the EU along with Denmark and Sweden.

Most Cypriots receive higher education qualifications from Cypriot, Greek, British, other European and North American universities. Cyprus has the second highest tertiary education attainment rate in the EU: 52.5 per cent compared to the European average of 37.9 per cent in 2014. Cypriot students are highly mobile, although there has been a drop recently, and almost as many Cypriot students study abroad as in their own country.

The Cypriot market for UK education is well established. UK education and qualifications are held in high esteem and a UK degree is deemed to give better prospects for employment. Following Cyprus's accession to the EU in 2004, the number of Cypriot students applying to UK institutions increased tremendously. Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics indicate a steady increase for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies in the UK. However, there was a 16 per cent decrease in student enrolments between the academic years 2011-12 and 2014-15. This was a result of economic hardship in Cyprus and increases in university fees as well as growing transnational education provision in Cyprus.

The UK is the second most popular destination for Cypriot students abroad after Greece, where tuition is free of charge and the language of instruction is Greek¹. HESA statistics show that 9,730 Cypriots enrolled in UK universities in the 2017-18 academic year. Higher education in Cyprus is provided by public and private institutions at university and non-university level.

¹http://www.mof.gov.cy/mof/cystat/statistics.nsf/populationcondition_24main_gr/populationcondition_24main_gr?OpenForm&sub=4&sel=1 the latest available figures for Cypriot Students studying abroad are for 2010-11



The University of Cyprus was the first university established in the Republic of Cyprus. It is a public university and first accepted students in 1992. Private universities have only had permission to operate since September 2007 following a decision by the Council of Ministers. The first, and to-date only, UK institution campus in Cyprus opened its doors in 2012 offering both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Today there are three public and five private universities, of which one is a UK institution.

Higher and tertiary education are provided in several ways including full-time, part-time, distance learning and other forms of attendance.

The EU's intention to promote 'lifelong learning' has extended the role of higher and tertiary education and led to new institutions being created, such as the Open University of Cyprus.

At the same time, the Cypriot state policy for a substantial increase in expenditure on research and its aim to establish Cyprus as a regional educational and research centre creates new prospects for tertiary education. There are great possibilities for tertiary education to contribute to economic development.

PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN CYPRUS

1. University of Cyprus
2. The Open University of Cyprus
3. Cyprus University of Technology

PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES

1. University of Nicosia
2. Frederick University
3. European University
4. Neapolis University
5. UCLan Cyprus

The quality of UK education and qualifications is recognised in Cyprus by individuals, businesses and educational institutions. Collaboration exists in many areas of education including UK degrees delivered in

Cyprus with Cypriot partners, UK professional qualifications in areas such as accounting and finance, and cutting-edge research collaborations between top institutions of both countries funded through the European Union's Horizon 2020 programme. The UK is the second most important research partner for Cypriot research institutions including the KIOS Research and Innovation Centre of Excellence (KIOS CoE) and the Research Centre on Interactive media Smart systems and Emerging technologies (RISE).

All of these are important factors in the Cyprus Ministry of Education and Culture's wish to maintain and grow educational links between Cyprus and the UK.

Transnational collaborations are a priority for all private and state Cypriot universities. Presently, collaborations are mostly joint degree programmes with Greek universities and a few with British and non-EU countries. There is growing interest in joint and double degrees with many countries. Universities are heavily involved in joint research with local, national and international scientific communities on nationally and EU funded programmes, programmes funded by international organisations and research synergies, and student exchanges.

The rapid development of university education has taken Cyprus from one university at the start of the 21st century to eight today, along with 32 private colleges and a significant rise in international students – 24,157 in 2017-18. Cypriot universities now rank among the top universities internationally. The total student population in Cyprus has gone up from 31,965 in 2012-13 to 48,172 in 2017-18.

The President of the Cyprus Rectors Conference outlined a discussion that took place at the last Rectors Conference meeting about the prospects of an organised and ambitious policy of educational diplomacy towards targeted countries. These included Russia and China, where mutual degree recognition agreements exist, as well as with Arab countries. The Ministry of Education and Culture, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have already begun to strengthen relations with Arab countries and expect a considerable number of Arab students to select Cyprus for their studies.

Collaborations for research proposals are usually based on faculty links in Cypriot universities with their primary academic experience abroad. The Erasmus+ programme is very popular. Since its commencement more than 2,000 students and 750 faculty members have visited collaborating institutions.

Cyprus offers many opportunities for successful collaborations with UK universities and institutions. Proximity to Asian markets, use of the English Language, relatively low costs and secure and pleasant environments were among those mentioned at the forum.

An overview of the existing UK-Cyprus research links can be found in the Horizon 2020 Facts and Figures (data until 13.11.2018). Highlights of this include:

- The UK is Cyprus's fifth main collaborator in Horizon 2020 (after Spain, Italy, Germany and Greece), with 526 collaborative links
- 191 Grant Agreements (Projects) exist with Cyprus and UK participants (out of a total of 360 projects with Cypriot participation)
- UK participants undertake the role of Coordinator in 32 Projects
- There are 341 UK participants and 259 Cyprus Project participants.
- The EU contributes €173,724,519 for UK participants and €86,656,649 for Cypriot participants.

(Statistics from the Cyprus Research and Promotion Foundation)

TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION (TNE) OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS

'International collaboration bilaterally and multilaterally is a key part of the future'
(Sir Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive, the British Council)

TNE enables students to access UK education in their home countries or in another country outside the UK. TNE is now considered as of high quality, far more so than it was ten or 15 years ago. Improvements have been put in place in the way in which UK universities manage the quality of TNE.

On a global level, about one third of all students who come to the UK are transferring directly from a TNE programme. A large part of UK education is delivered through TNE internationally.

UK universities are looking at different ways of delivering TNE in Cyprus, seeking:

- More collaborative types of provision
- Different pathways for students, such as the opportunity to access part of their programme in one country and the other part in the UK
- Widening access and capacity building
- Increasing access to undergraduate and postgraduate programmes taught in English.

The efforts of UK government bodies to work closely together to create and sustain opportunities were recognised at the forum.

Delegates discussed ways an institution can make the most of the opportunities TNE provides, including:

- Having a flexible approach, as there are a range of partnership models and UK partner institutions
- Understanding areas of strength of both local and UK universities and matching those
- Being open to possibilities and building solid connections based on trust
- Approaching TNE in innovative ways and seeing the relationship with the other institution as a partnership
- Being aware of the deeper structural changes that are happening in the world in terms of trade, especially digital trade.

Across Europe where TNE is delivered, including in Cyprus, most stakeholders, national governments and institutions are optimistic about the future of TNE. TNE is widely recognised for its contribution to national economies and there is widespread expectation that the number of TNE programmes will expand.

Many students choose TNE programmes because:

- They are interested in career development, skills and employability
- It offers recognised professional qualifications
- It is an easier route to UK qualifications.

Cyprus is a small country but significant in terms of TNE numbers; it ranks fourth in the

EU in terms of undergraduate and postgraduate TNE students.

Forum delegates reflected the current view that students from outside Europe wanting to take UK programmes in the EU may in future look to do so from Cyprus. Cyprus therefore has the potential to emerge as an education hub for international students taking TNE programmes. At the same time and in response to student demand, UK universities are building partnerships and opening new campuses in European Union countries.

TNE provides a window into how the world is changing for younger populations, reflecting important areas such as:

- Alternative models of education that increase employability and entrepreneurship
- Finding opportunities for providing students with entrepreneurial skills.
- Bringing TNE students from different countries together to share knowledge and ideas.

Higher education is evolving into a very different experience that offers more choice for students. As well as part-time and local TNE options, changes include:

- More emphasis on digital skills
- Helping young students have greater impact on the wider world and build their confidence to articulate their concerns and demands
- Engagement with local communities and their needs.



TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

The UK's leaving the EU will impact mainly three groups:

- People
- Programmes
- Opportunities.

There are likely to be significant changes to how EU students access UK higher education, particularly around:

- Fees
- Access to loans
- Immigration rules.

Participants expressed concern that the number of EU students coming to study in the UK might fall significantly.

All participants were most concerned about the risks associated with the UK leaving without a deal in place. They particularly discussed the fear that TNE franchise programmes would not be covered by the current legal agreement on franchise programmes across the EU.

[NB. Following the lobbying of key Cypriot contacts during and immediately after the visit by British Council and UUKi, the risks inherent in this situation were highlighted. Within weeks of the February visit, an amendment was passed in the Cypriot parliament covering franchise collaboration with UK institutions that removed the risk and paved the way for closer and broader collaboration between the UK and Cyprus higher education sectors.]



RESEARCH COLLABORATION INITIATIVES AND OPPORTUNITIES

'How do we build multilateral relationships around areas of expertise where we are bringing the research community together to work on large-scale research activities?'
(John Lathan, Vice-Chancellor, Coventry University)

Cyprus offers many research opportunities for UK universities.

The UK's exit from the EU is perceived as both a challenge and an opportunity as it encourages partners to look more deeply into the immense potential for collaboration and funding outside the EU. UK universities already have strong collaborations across Europe which are not funded by the EU, and they are exploring avenues to extend those relationships.

The UK Government, through the UK Research and Innovation organisation and the UK Research Councils, is looking to set up new funding initiatives in collaboration with EU and non-EU member states to enable programs to be delivered.

The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) supports research collaborations and academic mobility supported by its 530 member universities from 50 countries.

This provides ample opportunities for collaboration, network creation and mobility between universities in different regions of the world that share a common language and have similar educational systems. A considerable number of Cypriots have participated in the ACU's fellowships programmes.

The ACU is keen to expand in Cyprus and Cypriot members have held important positions in ACU's council. The plan is to strengthen higher education across the Commonwealth and to fully engage with the ACU's members to represent their interests regionally and internationally and promote their work.

Participants in the Forum noted growing collaboration between UK universities and industry. The UK government is investing heavily in such collaborations and aims to expand them beyond the UK.

Given the similarities in the education systems of Cyprus and the UK and their shared language, Brexit may well present opportunities for enhanced bilateral cooperation between the two countries. This could be done either through the Commonwealth or bilateral and multilateral instruments or agreements.

RESEARCH COLLABORATION CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

'Research and innovation will now be addressed by the Cyprus government as a strategic pillar for the national strategy for sustainable economic development and social prosperity.' (Vassilis Tsakalos, Director General, Research Promotion Foundation)

Priority areas of research for Cyprus include:

Dominant priority sectors

- Tourism
- Energy.

Secondary priority sectors

- Agriculture: Food industry
- Built environment: Construction industry
- Transport: Shipping
- Health.

Important horizontal sectors

- Information and communication technologies
- Sustainable growth: Environment
- Key Enabling Technologies (KETs).

The presentations and panel discussions focused on priorities and possible models of research collaboration. They raised a significant number of questions and concerns:

- How will universities operate globally post-Brexit, both in terms of bilateral and multilateral agreements? There was focus

on the need to consider the multi-party relationships that the EU has brought about and methods of integrating these with multilateral projects post-Brexit.

- How can more networks be built at post graduate researcher level, particularly where students are working with two institutions and or awarded a PhD from both institutions?
- How can UK institutions continue to participate in EU schemes?
- How to continue the exchange of post graduate students through Erasmus+?
- How will Cypriot universities maintain existing research collaborations post-Brexit? Cyprus has good research infrastructure but due to its small size Cypriot organisations and universities need strong partners such as UK universities in order to be successful in very competitive research funding for larger projects. Individuals and faculties in Cypriot universities have developed relationships and consortia with UK academics (as with those from other countries) and they depend on these to successfully co-write grant proposals.
- Will UK partners in existing projects with Cypriot universities, institutes and organisations be able to deliver post-Brexit?

- What will happen to UK nationals who are part of Cypriot higher education institutions?
- There are prominent UK academics on the boards of Cypriot research institutions. They bring with them a culture and avenues for collaboration. Cypriot higher education institutions are keen to increase this activity. Delegates stressed that the EU is moving quickly towards joint bachelor's and master's degrees and cannot lose the excellence of the UK. They also stressed that this was not a question of replacing individuals but needed an intergovernmental agreement with accreditation agencies to sustain it.

For most speakers, the main concerns for Cyprus around Horizon 2020 were:

- What do project coordinators need to do when a UK beneficiary is a partner?
- If a UK partner is the coordinator, will they still be able to distribute the budget as third country? The UK government has committed to compensating UK project partners for lost funding from the European Commission in the case of a no-deal scenario, but this guarantee applies exclusively to project partners from the UK and not from other countries.



'The mission of the UK's Quality Assurance Agency is to safeguard standards and improve the quality of UK higher education wherever it is being delivered and to safeguard the reputation of UK HE for students... It does this by demonstrating an independent approach to quality assurance. It is designed to ensure that students studying courses overseas are receiving an education at the same academic standard and quality of those studying in the UK. The issue of equivalence is very important.'
Julian Ellis, Joint Head of Assurance, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education

Both in the UK and Cyprus a lot of work has been done by the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) and the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CYQAA).

Key findings from the 2015 quality assurance for Cyprus:

- There was generally good understanding of UK quality assurance processes and the importance of having formal agreements in place between partners
- Strong working relationships are important for enhancing the student experience
- Student representative systems are important as having a student voice can drive improvements in quality
- The curriculum should balance the needs of the local student population with maintenance of overall UK standards.

Main differences between UK and Cyprus quality assurance:

- The UK has a self-regulation policy: universities have primary responsibility for ensuring that they meet the appropriate



standards through the UK Quality Code. The code is used by universities and colleges delivering higher education and is mutually compatible with the European standards and guidelines

- Cyprus has an external regulation policy: CYQAA is the competent body that ensures quality standards are achieved and high standards maintained.

QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION



Delegates agreed there was need to continue to articulate the value of UK-Cyprus collaboration in the UK and Cyprus and across the EU.

- Safeguarding distance learning or e-learning so that it continues to provide high quality standards. The CYQAA has published criteria on this matter which are available on their website <https://www.dipae.ac.cy/index.php/en/>

- Recognition of degrees after Brexit was a concern among students, both current and potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Participants agreed on the following recommendations reflecting discussions throughout the forum:

1. A gap exists at the Commonwealth level for exchange programmes; only Erasmus+ brings together undergraduates. This is an important area to address through collaboration.
2. Social entrepreneurship is an important business model for education. UK and Cyprus institutions should consider linking employability and entrepreneurship more closely.
3. Digital skills in the educational experience need more focus. Important areas that require further discussion include young people's engagement with technology and the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of digital in all areas of life.
4. Cyprus requires a greater business and professional sector focus, including franchised arrangements to gain UK awards while working. Collaborations in this area enable Cypriots to gain good qualifications without the financial or personal cost of living abroad.
5. Processes should be put in place to allow institutions to engage with students' needs and wants and to maintain links with alumni.
6. UK universities must consider value for money as necessary to remaining competitive in a post-Brexit environment. Australia,

Canada, the United States and the European Union have programmes taught in English that are serious competitors to the UK.

7. Engagement should increase between Cypriot organisations and philanthropic funding organisations in the UK, such as the Welcome Trust
8. Expertise in highly specialised topics is becoming more important for large scale multilateral projects on a global level. Cyprus has niche dominance in several areas and should make more of this in multilateral arrangements including those beyond the EU.
9. Efforts should be made to realise the potential for cooperation and research funding in greater collaboration between the Commonwealth, the private sector and business community, and the academic community²
10. Cyprus should seek to seize opportunities that may arise after Brexit as students from the region may look to other countries than the UK for qualifications in English. A country like Cyprus is well positioned to attract those students.
11. As a member of both the European Union and the Commonwealth, Cyprus is in a unique position and should use this to enhance the scale and scope of collaboration, encompass reciprocal forms of mobility and develop new forms of collaborative provision.

² In support of this, the speaker of the House, Demetris Syllouris, was invited by UUKi to deliver a keynote address at the UUKi International Higher Education Forum (27 March). Further follow-on activities in support of collaboration include a British Council led networking lunch hosted at the Cyprus High Commission in London on 21 May as well as an inbound delegation of Cypriot university leaders hosted by UUKi in collaboration with British Council in the autumn. UUKi is having discussions over how to actively promote and support Cypriot HEI opportunities for partnerships.

12. In relation to Cyprus's ambition to become a regional higher education hub:

i) Factors that contribute to a country's success in becoming an educational hub include:

- An open environment at policy level that supports the development of partnerships
- Easy access for students
- A safe and attractive environment.

ii) Factors that enable a country to maximise the opportunities of TNE include:

- Flexibility: There are a range of models and institutions in the UK
- Understanding the strengths universities have and matching these
- Openness to possibilities
- Building solid connections based on trust.
- Awareness of the deeper structural changes that are happening in the world in terms of trade, especially digital trade.
- Accessing existing networks of knowledge spaces such as the Commonwealth
- Looking at niche areas
- Looking at how young people engage with technology.

iii) Advantageous links between the UK and Cyprus that are worth considering include:

- Common understanding on how to organise research
- Close alignment of legal and regulatory systems in the higher education sector
- A history of cooperation in higher education
- The vision for making Cyprus a regional hub.



APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

Programme of The Event

WELCOME ADDRESSES

1. **Athena Michaelidou**, Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Culture on behalf of the Minister of Education and Culture
2. **HE Stephen Lillie CMG**, British High Commissioner Cyprus
3. **Sir Ciarán Devane**, Chief Executive, British Council

SESSION I: HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR AND TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

Presentations:

1. **Transnational Education from the UK perspective** – Kevin van Cauter, Senior Adviser, Higher Education Partnerships and Transnational, British Council
2. **Overview of Cyprus Higher Education/Transnational Education sector** – George Demosthenous, President of the Cyprus Rector's Conference
3. **Cyprus MoEC's Higher Education agenda and ambition** – Panicos Giorgoudes, Senior Education Officer, Higher and Tertiary Education, Ministry of Education and Culture

Panel Discussion: The Benefits and Challenges of Transnational Education

Facilitator: Sir Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive, British Council

Panel:

- **Arif Zaman**, Deputy Director Centre for Research and Enterprise, Bloomsbury Institute
- **Nina Davies**, Director Royal Veterinary College, Access and International Engagement; Chair of the Royal Veterinary College Global Strategy Group
- **Yangos Hadjiyannis**, Deputy Director General, Cyprus Institute of Marketing
- **Kevin van Cauter**, Senior Adviser Higher Education Partnerships and Transnational British Council

SESSION II: RESEARCH COLLABORATION

Presentations:

1. **Current Picture, Ambition and Priorities** – Vassilis Tsakalos, Director General, Research Promotion Foundation
2. **The post-Brexit Funding Landscape** – John Latham, Vice-Chancellor, Coventry University
3. **Research Collaboration within the Commonwealth** – Andrew Cherry, Senior Scientific Officer, Association of Commonwealth Universities

Panel Discussion: Priorities and Models for Collaboration

Facilitator: H.E. Stephen Lillie, CMG, British High Commissioner Cyprus

Panel:

- **Andreas Anayiotos**, Rector, Cyprus University of Technology
- **Costas Papanicolas**, President, Cyprus Institute
- **John Latham**, Vice-Chancellor, Coventry University
- **Leonidas Philactou**, Chief Executive / Medical Director, Institute of Neurology and Genetics

SESSION III: QUALITY ASSURANCE OF TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION

Presentations:

1. **Quality Assurance of Transnational Education in the UK and the role of Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA)** – Julian Ellis, Joint Head of Assurance, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
2. **The Cyprus Picture: Challenges and Opportunities** – Mary Koutselini, Chairperson of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CY.Q.A.A)

Panel Discussion: What should be an appropriate strategic reaction by UK and Cypriot Higher Education Institutions to the emerging challenges and new realities in the global higher education market?

Facilitator: Mary Koutselini, Chairperson of the Cyprus Agency of Quality Assurance and Accreditation in Higher Education (CY.Q.A.A)

Panel:

- **George-Socrates Smirlis, Chairperson,** The Cyprus Council of Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (KYSATS)
- **Julian Ellis,** Joint Head of Assurance, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
- **David Cobham,** Associate PVC and Dean for Transnational Education, University of Lincoln
- **Panicos Giorgoudes,** Senior Education Officer, Higher and Tertiary Education, Ministry of Education and Culture

CLOSING REMARKS

1. **Jamie Arrowsmith,** Assistant Director for Policy, UUK International (UUKi)
2. **Panicos Giorgoudes,** Senior Education Officer, Higher and Tertiary Education, Ministry of Education and Culture

APPENDIX B

Acknowledgements and full list of participants

Warm thanks to the following individuals for participating in the event:

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APPENDIX C

Further Reading

- HE Global: The Scale and Scope of UK Higher Education Transnational Education
- www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/knowledge-centre/transnational-education/report-scale-and-scope-uk-he-transnational-education - for 2014/15
- <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/The-scale-of-UK-higher-education-transnational-education-2016-17.aspx> - for 2016/17
- British Council TNE research hub (www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/knowledge-centre/transnational-education)
- UK Quality Assurance for Higher Education Code of Practice (www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/quality-code/advice-and-guidance-enabling-student-achievement.pdf?sfvrsn=b12ac181_2)
- The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) (thecommonwealth.org/organisation/association-commonwealth-universities-acu)

