

# EDUCATION

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## Serving the nation to promote and protect our best interests



The Learned Society of Wales is working with the Welsh Government

as it seeks to influence the British government's positions in the negotiations with the EU. Sir Emyr Jones Parry, president of the LSW, says expert opinion on Brexit is vital...

Leaving the European Union is involving complex negotiations, both on the terms of the divorce settlement, but crucially also covering Britain's future relations with our former partners.

We all have a stake in successful outcomes, and every group, be they farmers, care workers, students or whatever, has distinct interests which they will want the British Government to protect.

Every citizen of the United Kingdom will be affected by the constitutional and political arrangements which will unfold as we exit. Outside the EU, the UK and devolved governments will no longer be as constrained by EU law and policies. On environmental issues, for example, the Welsh Government will no longer have to implement decisions taken in Brussels.

But removing EU competence in environment does not affect who is responsible in Wales for putting in place policies on the environment. That will remain a power of the National Assembly as previously legislated by Westminster.

However, without co-ordination the four legislatures in the United Kingdom could pass their own different laws on issues such as environment.

That will be their constitutional right under the terms of our system of devolution. However, diverging policies in the four nations could be undesirable. If, for example, each had its own animal health rules, movement of cattle from Scotland to England would be impeded.

Today the EU Single Market guarantees free movement among 28 countries, and simultaneously among our four nations. Outside the EU, there will need to be close co-



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Matt Cardy

ordination between the four governments to avoid such impediments and deliver free movement, while respecting each nation's constitutional rights.

The academic community in Wales collaborates internationally, and particularly with EU partners. This has encouraged and enhanced Wales' growing research excellence. Competition has thrived.

The best staff have been recruited and students have come in large numbers to study here. That mix of international excellence has been a characteristic positive environment for our universities. The capacity to recruit staff and students from other member states should be preserved. The great success in securing EU funding across the disciplines has been vital to the research investment in the UK. Funding at least to the same value will need to be provided after exit if Wales is have a chance of being competitive.

Better would be continued participation in EU research programmes which mark international competitive excellence and promote collaboration. EU Structural Funds have

been a valuable complementary source of funding for our universities' infrastructure. They too will need to be replaced after exit.

The Learned Society of Wales not only recognises excellence through its distinguished fellowship, it also seeks to inspire Wales' talent by showing what merit and hard work can achieve. It did this recently at the AGM dinner medal awards in May, where I had the privilege of awarding the society medals all named in honour of significant figures from Wales' distinguished history.

The society also serves the nation. We are therefore working with the Welsh Government as it seeks to influence the British government's positions in the negotiations with the EU. In the recent Queen's Speech, the government promised widespread consultation as the negotiations proceed. This is vital when so many diverse interests are involved and when the constitutional implications are complex and challenging.

A more effective system of inter-governmental relations now needs to be agreed to make a reality of this

need for consultation and co-operation. The complexity and challenge of the Repeal Bill illustrate why close working co-operation is essential if Westminster is to legislate into law EU provisions which in large part are the responsibility of the devolved administrations. If they were EU directives, transcription into law would depend on who had the power for that area. The bill and its subsequent passage should be shaped with the involvement of the devolved legislatures.

The Sewel Convention is an important constitutional principle which requires the prior consent of devolved bodies if Westminster intends to legislate in areas which have been devolved.

Northern Ireland is particularly exposed to challenges arising from the UK leaving the EU because of the nature of relationships - social, political and economic - with the rest of the island of Ireland. In the higher education sector, as in others, there is an intertwining of Irish and Northern Irish staff and students. Some funding has come to Northern Irish institutions under rubrics designed

to promote cross-border co-operation. Hence the need for creative solutions to avoid the creation of a formal border between north and south. No deal would under any circumstance be the worse deal for the island.

The Learned Society is working closely with six sister academies to identify the particular challenges which Brexit poses for us. These include the Royal Society, the British Academy, the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Royal Society of Medicine, the Royal Society of Edinburgh, and the Royal Irish Academy.

I have recently drafted a common statement which is now under discussion. The aim is to present a united view offering practical and procedural solutions to the different governments.

It is our responsibility in serving Wales to put the considerable expertise of our Fellowship at the disposal of government.

It's governments' responsibility to listen and take account of the different interests and opinions. If they do not, the outcome of negotiations will be much worse.