

Speech: 'Going global' in higher education

Good afternoon. And thank you for inviting me to Berlin to speak at this year's Going Global conference.

What better way to prove the power and potential of international higher education than by looking at everyone here in this room today.

It's amazing to see people from all corners of the globe gathered together to share knowledge, expertise and ideas. And to learn from each other about how higher education can support the best outcomes and experiences for people, young and old, around the world.

I am certainly encouraged and inspired by your enthusiasm. And I look forward to hearing about the ideas and thinking that come out of your discussions over the next couple of days.

Certainly, in the UK, our world-leading universities and colleges are international at their core. And I'm here today because I want to see the international connectivity, collaboration and partnership that underpin so much of our global higher education continue to flourish.

So, as Universities Minister, I want to share with you my vision for the UK's approach to 'going global' in higher education. And I hope that, from it, you will be able to draw out synergies with your own countries' higher education systems, and identify opportunities for greater partnership with the UK and our world-leading institutions.

But most of all, I want to send the message loud and clear today that, when it comes to higher education and research, the UK is most certainly open.

As a UK Minister, I can't stand here this afternoon without mentioning the elephant in the room that is Brexit. And I'm sure many of you are already sat there thinking what Brexit means for the UK's international ambitions.

Brexit may well mean that we are set to leave the European Union, but it certainly does not mean that we are leaving Europe or, indeed, any of our global education and research partnerships behind.

The UK government is serious about exploring a deal with the European Union to guarantee continued participation in schemes like Erasmus+ and Horizon2020. And we wish to get on with negotiating the terms of our future economic partnership with our European friends.

But we cannot ignore the fact that we still face the prospect of leaving the EU without a deal.

Of course, this is not what we want.

But if it were to happen, the UK Government would ensure the country is prepared for every eventuality – including standing ready to administer the Government Guarantee to provide certainty for those already participating in the Erasmus+ or Horizon2020 programmes. As Minister for Research and Innovation, I have taken part in different meetings with my European counterparts. And I made sure the UK's voice was heard at the meeting of the EU Competitiveness Council in February.

I'll also be heading back to Brussels to take a seat at the table at the next meeting on 28th May.

Europe will always remain a close partner to the UK.

And we will continue to look outwards to the rest of the world and nurture important relationships across the globe.

That's why it's important we put forward a clear, positive vision for our ambition to remain global.

And I'm now going to share with you the four core principles that I think should underpin this vision for the future.

The first of these principles is to build and amplify the UK's role on the global stage.

This means bolstering the quality and standing of UK higher education and promoting it as a centre of international excellence.

The UK higher education system has a great global reputation for quality, of which we are rightly proud. According to the QS World University Rankings, we have 4 universities in the top 10, and 18 in the top 100 higher education institutions in the world.

In research too, we have a truly global footprint. In 2014, the UK produced 15.2% of the world's most highly cited articles.

It is this reputation that drives our ability to attract and nurture talent from around the world, and grow our valued international partnerships and collaborations.

But we want to do more.

Our International Education Strategy published in March sets out our intention to appoint an International Education Champion. This Champion will take to the global stage to grow opportunities for international partnerships, including through tackling and breaking down practical barriers to cooperation.

We want the UK to be an international partner of choice. So, the Champion will help to ensure that we are offering something that resonates with students and researchers around the world.

We have also recently launched a new EdTech Strategy which, together with the

International Education Strategy, will support UK EdTech businesses to achieve success both in the UK and around the globe.

Our EdTech Strategy has been shaped by international evidence – showing how we have looked to the rest of the world to see how technology can boost the excellence and quality of our education and teaching.

This brings me on to my second core principle, which is to enable the UK's Higher Education sector to maximise and benefit from the full range of international opportunities and interconnectedness.

There are a number of mechanisms that enable us to do this better.

Transnational education (or TNE) is one such tool, as it helps to forge international ties between institutions.

Higher education institutions in the UK already work in collaboration with partners across the globe, delivering UK degrees to students in their home countries.

From Lancaster University's Ghana campus, the first British branch campus in Ghana, to Aston University's dual degree programme with Muscat University Oman.

And European collaborations like the University of Kent Brussels School of International Studies (BSIS) branch campus in Belgium.

Research funds, such as the Newton Fund or the Global Challenges Research Fund, offer another vital pathway for international collaboration.

They bring together researchers from across the globe, to work together to tackle complex scientific and research challenges.

One such example is the global Interdisciplinary Research Hubs we launched in January 2019 – being funded by the Global Challenges Research Fund.

Through a £200 million investment, 12 global research Hubs will develop creative and sustainable solutions to help make the world safer, healthier and more prosperous.

Over the next five years, these Hubs will work across 85 countries with governments, international agencies, partners and NGOs on the ground – both in developing countries and around the globe.

To demonstrate our long-term commitment to global engagement, we will soon publish an International Research and Innovation Strategy that will set out our ambition to remain the partner of choice for international research and innovation.

And, as announced by the UK Chancellor earlier this year, we will also undertake an independent review of our future frameworks for international collaboration, led by Sir Adrian Smith, which will support the early and effective implementation of the Strategy.

As I expressed in a speech in London just last week, people are key to our success in higher education, science, research and innovation.

So, it is our duty in government to deliver my third principle – namely to provide a world leading offer to international students and staff.

We have already spearheaded this principle by setting a clear ambition to increase the numbers of international higher education students studying in the UK by over 30%, to 600,000 by 2030.

But this is not just about simply boosting numbers. We also want to ensure that these students are coming to us from across a greater variety of regions across the globe.

After all, hosting students from other countries provides us with vital cultural and business links.

Opening our doors to others from elsewhere in the world gives us friends, and opportunities to engage and collaborate around the world – as evidenced so well by events like this here in Berlin today.

International students who come to the UK can become important ambassadors for our country.

As of summer last year, 57 of the world's serving monarchs, presidents and prime ministers have been educated in the UK. And I'm pleased to see we've just added the new emperor of Japan to this tally, who was a former student at the University of Oxford.

In short, we want international students to come to the UK, to enjoy their time there, and if they choose not to stay for work, we want them to go back to their home countries with happy memories and warm feelings towards us. That's why we want to ensure international students have the best possible experience of their time in UK higher education, the best possible outcomes, and enriching encounters with their institutions, other students and staff.

We are backing our ambition up with action, such as increasing the post-study leave period, making it easier for students to move into skilled work after graduation. And we are working with Universities UK International to improve the employability of our international students – both in the UK and beyond.

We recognise we have a duty of care for all students who take part in a UK higher education, be they domestic or international.

It's easy to assume that the university years are the best years of people's lives. But this is not always the case.

I was particularly shocked to learn, when I gave a speech at a Wonkhe conference on the 'secret lives of students' earlier this year, that over 15% of students said they felt lonely on a daily basis. And the figures were worse for international students.

In fact, 20% of international students said they do not consider themselves to have any true friends at university. So, they can lack support networks and be more likely to have concerns over their mental health.

That is why we are working closely with UK universities to embed the 'Step Change' programme within the sector, which calls on higher education leaders to adopt the mental health of students and staff as a strategic priority.

It is also why we are backing the development of the University Mental Health Charter, which will drive up standards in promoting the mental health and wellbeing of students and staff wherever they come from in the world.

If we are to invite young people from across the globe to study and live in the UK, we will meet our responsibility to ensure that whilst they are with us, they are happy, enriched and supported as they develop into the global leaders, thinkers and innovators of the future.

And we want to make the most of the amazing benefits international students bring to UK students as well. We know how they enrich the experience of our domestic students, helping to produce globally minded citizens and lifelong links between countries. And that is an invaluable asset in a world where international relationships are so key.

That takes me on to my fourth and final principle, which focusses on supporting UK students be prepared and confident to engage in an increasingly global world. To be truly global citizens.

It is my ambition that all UK higher education students can benefit from an international experience during their time as a student. Whether that is by studying or working abroad as part of their degree, or building relationships with international students on campus.

In a truly global UK, there is a wealth of opportunity for our young people to develop into well-rounded, internationally competent and culturally sensitive citizens. And we want to support them in that endeavour.

That is why the UK's Department for Education supports a number of outward mobility programmes, which broaden access to international opportunities, such as the Fulbright and Generation UK China schemes.

Both of these schemes have been expanded with increased funding over the last year, bringing opportunities to even more students – particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often find it harder to access experiences such as studying abroad.

We have also recently committed funding, via Universities UK, to support UK undergraduate students from disadvantaged backgrounds take part in short research internships at Canadian universities through the Mitacs Globalink scheme.

And to make outward mobility accessible to even more students, we also enable eligible students studying in the United Kingdom to study abroad for up to

50% of their course and still be eligible for student support.

We believe that, irrespective of the outcome of EU exit negotiations, the UK and European countries should continue to give young people and students the chance to benefit from each other's world leading universities post-exit.

To this end, we remain open to exploring participation in the successor scheme to the current Erasmus+ Programme.

But, as a responsible Government, we are also considering a wide range of options with regards to the future of international exchange and collaboration in education and training. This includes a potential domestic alternative to the Erasmus+ Programme.

The potential benefits of the UK establishing its own international mobility scheme would include the ability to have a truly global exchange programme. And I will be driving forward this work in the coming months.

But at the heart of all this is the message that we want our international relationships to grow, to strengthen and ultimately flourish in the months and years ahead.

We are here today because we want to partner with you, learn from you, and share our own learning in return.

The UK is not just 'going global' as the name of this conference suggests. But I can reassure you that the UK has always been global, is global, and will remain global for the future.