

eAlert: 24 June 2020 – ELM policy discussion document

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More Kuwaitis studying in the UK than ever before: op-ed by Michael Davenport

More Kuwaitis are studying in the UK than ever before. I am delighted that during the academic year just ending we welcomed over 6,000 Kuwaitis at British universities and colleges in a wide range of different disciplines. I would like to congratulate Kuwaiti graduates from UK universities for this academic year. The UK offers prestigious and high quality education, which is recognised all over the world and enables graduates to get ahead in their careers. There are long standing connections between Kuwait and the UK, and for many Kuwaiti families the UK is very much their second home. Kuwaitis are an integral part of local communities all over Britain, including in cities where they have studied, often to PhD level, and developed deep connections, both professional and personal.

The UK is a highly tolerant, multicultural society, with a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and faiths. International students contribute significantly to this enriching environment, which makes the UK such a stimulating place to study. UK higher education providers consistently do their utmost to ensure international students feel welcome on university campuses; they are clear that everyone with the talent and potential to succeed in higher education should have the opportunity to do so, regardless of nationality or ethnicity.

The UK is a global powerhouse of science and research. With so many universities at the cutting edge of global discoveries and emerging

technology, our students graduate with insights and experience that are in high demand around the world. Oxford University and Imperial college research into COVID-19 vaccines is a topical example of UK universities' remarkable capabilities in science and research. Most UK universities are intimately connected with business and industry in the UK and around the world and pursue research projects in a wide range of subjects.

UK degrees are of a high standard and enjoy international renown whether they are delivered in person or online. Their quality is guaranteed by UK quality assurance agencies. There are some fantastic and innovative examples of high-quality online learning being delivered by institutions across the UK, and the sector is already working hard to prepare learning materials for the summer and autumn terms.

International students studying at British universities will from Summer 2021 be able to benefit from two years' work experience in the UK upon graduation via the new graduate immigration route. This means that graduates from the summer of 2021 can stay and work, or look for work, in the UK at any skill level for a period of two years.

Admissions processes and modes of teaching might look slightly different this year, taking account of the challenges of COVID-19. However, the UK's world-class universities are continuing to recruit international students, who are encouraged to apply even if they are unable to travel to the UK to meet the usual timelines.

We are delighted to announce that the UK Visa Application Centre in Kuwait will re-open in Kuwait on Sunday 28 June. So, now is the time for students to familiarise themselves with UK visa requirements and talk to their chosen university about English language evidence they will need to supply for a visa application. The UK has a high visa acceptance rate for students: 98% of Tier 4 (General) student visa applications were granted to international students in the last year.

The UK is a safe place to study, and UK universities are prioritising students' safety and wellbeing. The national and global response to the spread of COVID-19 continues to develop quickly and our collective knowledge of the virus is growing. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) regularly publishes papers outlining the scientific advice provided to the government. Her Majesty's Government and the governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are adhering closely to this guidance, and our advice will change to match the level of the threat. In doing so, the UK's top priority remains the health and safety of all UK and overseas nationals in the UK, including international higher education students studying at our universities and colleges.

UK-wide consultation into dairy sector to tackle supply chain issues launched

The UK Government working with the devolved administrations have today [launched a consultation](#) seeking to end any unfair practices across the UK's dairy sector.

[Evidence gathered during the Groceries Code Adjudicator Call for Evidence in 2016](#) highlighted how unfair practices have persisted in the dairy industry. This consultation will explore whether regulations could be introduced to ensure farmers are treated fairly.

This evidence suggests unfairness in the supply chain has sometimes been caused by milk buyers having the power to set and modify the milk price in a contract, often with little notification. This leads to uncertainty and pricing that can be unfair to dairy farming businesses.

To supplement wider efforts to support dairy farmers during the coronavirus pandemic and into the future, the UK Government with the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have worked together to today launch a consultation seeking views from dairy farmers and processors across the whole country on whether future regulation could be used to strengthen fairness and transparency.

Proposals include an option to introduce a mandatory pricing mechanism within all contracts between dairy farmers and processors.

This would ensure the price paid for milk produced by the farmer is formally agreed within the contract, and that contract negotiations take place in a clear and transparent way.

Farming Minister Victoria Prentis said:

It is absolutely vital that our dairy farmers are paid fairly for their high quality produce and I am committed to cracking down on any unfair practices within the UK dairy industry.

I welcome all views to this consultation to determine how best we can guarantee fairness across the supply chain. This will help the industry continue its vital role in feeding the nation and ensure our dairy farmers can continue to be competitive in the future.

Scottish Rural Economy Secretary, Fergus Ewing, said,

I encourage all dairy farmers, processors and their representatives to take part in this consultation and ensure that their voices are heard on this matter.

Milk prices can vary and are often changed at short notice for a variety of reasons which can cause major issues for farmers in Scotland and across the UK.

It is vital that we look at any opportunity to address any potential imbalance that exists between buyers and producers and bring our supply chains closer together.

Welsh Government Rural Affairs Minister, Lesley Griffiths, said:

The proposals we are consulting on today aim to ensure our dairy farmers get the fair price for their high quality produce they deserve and have fairer conditions for their milk contracts. I urge the sector, farmers and anyone with an interest to get involved and have their say.

Today's consultation is just the latest action we are taking to support the sector during the challenging times of this pandemic. We will continue to work with the sector during these unprecedented times, so together we can ensure a resilient future for our Welsh dairy industry.

Northern Ireland Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Minister, Edwin Poots MLA, said:

I am committed to raising the issue of fairness for dairy farmers in the marketplace in the strongest possible terms. I am pleased that Northern Ireland stakeholders will have the opportunity to take part in this UK-wide consultation and I strongly encourage all Northern Ireland stakeholders to respond accordingly.

Today's announcement is the latest action from UK governments to support dairy farmers, following the [Dairy Response Fund in England](#), which [opened for applications](#) on Thursday 18 June and [a similar support scheme in Wales](#) last month, which enables eligible English and Welsh dairy farmers to access up to £10,000 each to help them overcome the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

This builds on recent action to [temporarily relax some elements of UK competition law](#) to allow suppliers, retailers and logistics providers in the dairy industry to work more closely together on some of the challenges they are facing.

RWM partners with the British Geological Survey

The British Geological Survey (BGS), a leading global geological survey and the UK's national geoscience agency, and RWM work together to provide expertise, research and information to support the UK's geological disposal programme.

The two UK government organisations today jointly published a five-year agreement setting out the framework for collaborative work at strategic, technical and operational levels. This will fulfil a key role in helping us understand and assess the rocks below the surface and their suitability for a UK Geological Disposal Facility (GDF) as we move through the process of finding a suitable site and a willing host community.

A GDF is a highly-engineered network of vaults and tunnels built into the rock many hundreds of metres underground designed to safely and permanently dispose of higher activity radioactive waste.

The MoU sets out ways of working between RWM and BGS, and describes key principles and areas for collaboration, including strategic planning, site characterisation, stakeholder engagement, research, training, communications, and information exchange.

PDF, 197KB, 7 pages

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This partnership between these two independent organisations will enable world-leading UK applied research in environmental geosciences to contribute towards delivering a GDF.

Karen Wheeler, Chief Executive of RWM said,

Delivering a Geological Disposal Facility to permanently deal with UK's higher-activity radioactive waste is the right thing to do. BGS will play a key role in ensuring we receive expert impartial advice as we work on this vital national programme. Their expertise in UK geoscience is unparalleled and crucially they will help us fully understand the rocks below the surface and their suitability for a GDF.

Dr. Karen Hanghøj, Director of BGS said,

The agreement with RWM will help to maintain BGS's impartiality whilst enabling us to provide the high-quality and objective geoscientific knowledge and expertise required for the delivery of a UK Geological Disposal Facility. BGS research will help to progress the UK's understanding about the rocks below its surface, and their suitability for hosting a GDF, as the importance of finding environmentally sound solutions for the issue of radioactive waste disposal grows. It's also important that communities and their representatives understand how geoscience plays a role in the process of evaluating sites for suitability, and this will form part of our work.

Farmers invited to shape new Environmental Land Management scheme

Farmers and interested parties throughout England will have the chance to shape the future of Environmental Land Management (ELM) by taking part in one of six upcoming online webinars.

Following industry feedback on the disruption caused to the farming community by the coronavirus outbreak in the UK, the government paused the national conversation launched by Environment Secretary George Eustice earlier this year at the NFU conference.

Six webinars have now been set up to ensure that farmers and others in isolation continue to have the opportunity to share their views on the proposed design of three "tiers" of entry, which will enable all farmers and land managers to participate in the new scheme at the right level, and help shape the new scheme.

While farmers are encouraged to sign up to and attend a webinar if they can, [a policy discussion document on Citizen Space](#) provides those who can't attend with the opportunity to respond to the new policy ideas. Their views, experiences and advice will help to ensure the new scheme is co-designed with farmers across the country and does not repeat the mistakes of the past.

Farming Minister, Victoria Prentis, said,

I very much look forward to working with farmers and land managers across the country to develop the future scheme and discuss how it will work on the ground.

Many farmers and land managers are already contributing directly to the co-design of ELM by participating in the ongoing tests and trials and they're doing great work to explore how the building blocks of the future scheme are put together.

This conversation is a chance for farmers and land managers to have their say and help shape our future approach to farming alongside caring for the environment. I would encourage all those interested to sign up to an event and have their voice heard.

Those interested in attending any event can [sign up via Eventbrite](#), with a full list of the available dates below:

- Wednesday, 1 July – 12:00-1:30 pm
- Tuesday, 7 July – 6:00-7:30 pm
- Thursday, 16 July – 8:30-10:00 am
- Thursday, 23 July – 12:00-1:30 pm
- Tuesday, 28 July – 8:30-10:00 am
- Thursday, 30 July – 6:00-7:30 pm

Farmers looking to get involved in the webinars should also [follow Defra on Facebook](#), as all followers will be notified of the links to sign up to webinars within the events on our page.

The policy document has remained available for review online since it was launched in February. Individuals and organisations that have already submitted a response will also be given the opportunity to review or reconsider this and resubmit their response to the document within the new timeframe for the conversation.

The deadline to share views on the document setting out policy ideas for the new scheme is 31 July 2020.