Findings from the DUCU ‘Brexit’ Survey to All Staff

Durham University and College Union (DUCU)

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(This report is for confidential use within Durham University and UCU)



# Executive Summary

## Introduction

Following the EU Referendum result in June 2016, Durham University and College Union (DUCU) set up a Brexit-Response Working Group in order to look at how DUCU can support university staff and work towards the best outcomes for its members. In order to meet this aim it was decided that we needed to carry out some research. A survey was sent to all university staff and a small number of DUCU post-graduate members. Between November 2016 and December 2016 298 members of staff completed the survey. In order to provide a quick turnaround time for this report summarising the survey responses, it focusses on issues staff are facing, what support staff would like to have and what action staff would like the university take. A separate report will be provided for DUCU at a later date with a summary of support and action for DUCU.

## Survey respondents

Of the 298 respondents, nearly two thirds identified themselves as being from the UK, nearly a third as non-UK EU and 9% as other international. 3 respondents were post-graduate students and 295 were classed as university staff. Just over half of respondents were UCU members, around a third were non-members and10% were unsure of their membership status.

## Survey Findings

### What issues have Durham University staff been facing personally post-Brexit?

There are a number of issues facing staff following the EU referendum. The issues can be divided into issues affecting non-UK EU and international staff, issues affecting all staff and issues affecting the university.

The most common theme in the issues affecting Non-UK EU and international staff was that of racism. Some staff have been on the receiving end of hate crimes, both inside and outside of the university, and others have experienced a general increase in feelings of discomfort in society. A common phrase that was repeated time and time again was that non-UK EU and international staff feel “unwelcome.” This has led to a large number of staff comments on feelings of division and isolation. Staff are also faced with a lot of insecurity. Common terms repeated again and again were “uncertainty” and “insecurity”. Staff were concerned for both their rights to work in the UK and for the rights of their family members. These issues seem to be taking their toll emotionally on some staff and have led to a number of emotional and mental health responses such as fear, stress and depression. Some staff feel they are not understood and isolated. A number of staff have applied for, or are planning to apply for, jobs outside of the UK.

There are a number of issues affecting all staff. They are concerned about the uncertainty facing staff and students and about funding uncertainty. Staff are also concerned about the economic impact of the UK leaving the EU, in particular due to the falling value of the pound. Some staff have mortgages to pay abroad and salaries are worth less now. Staff are also worried about travel costs and the value of grants abroad. Staff in general are concerned for the well-being of their non-UK colleagues and students and are concerned about staff and student retention. Some staff are also concerned about potential job losses due to a reduction in funding and reduced staff opportunities for career progression.

Finally, staff expressed a number of concerns on issues that affect the university. The biggest concern relates to the impact on research funding and collaborations. Staff are already experiencing its effects through being deterred from applying for EU grants. Staff are also concerned about student recruitment and students turning down offers due to an image of the UK as unwelcoming. Many staff are concerned about the future of schemes such as Erasmus. As mentioned before, staff are concerned about the impact on the university caused by staff leaving to work outside the UK. Staff are also concerned that the university may face difficulties recruiting the best staff in the future. Similarly staff are concerned about the diminishing reputation of the UK, and therefore the reputation of the university compared to non-UK universities, with the UK developing a reputation for being unwelcoming. A number of staff talk about their “shame” of the country.

### What action would staff like the university to take and what support would staff like the university to provide?

A large number of staff would like to see the university (preferably with other universities or the Russell Group) lobbying the government/parliament, as well as the public and the local community on a number of issues including staff residency, student recruitment, research funding and collaboration, and speaking out against racism and intolerance.

Staff would like non-UK EU staff, and other international members of staff, to be offered support. Staff would like the university to provide clearer affirmation, both internally and externally to the university, of how much it values international colleagues and their work. They would also like to see more assurances, where possible. Staff are keen to receive as much information and advice as possible, particularly in the area of residency and visa applications, which are considered an expensive and arduous process. Some staff have suggested that funds or, if not, salary sacrifice loans, would help support staff during the application process. Staff would like the difficulties and uncertainties that they are going through to be acknowledged further and some may require counselling services. Other suggestions for support include improvements to contracts (e.g. swift extensions or permanent contracts for researchers) and/or increased pay in order to create more security and improve staff retention, university-led events that bring international staff together.

As well as information on job security for non-UK EU staff, staff are keen to be regularly updated on the UK’s exit from the EU. Staff would like information and advice on funding, student fees, research collaboration and travel.

Staff would like the university to demonstrate that initiatives are being put in to place to retain current staff, students and research collaborations, and to ensure that the best staff are recruited in the future, irrespective of their nationality. A significant number of staff would also like to see funding concerns addressed through the transparent lobbying of the government/parliament for continued funding for research and schemes like Erasmus and/or by making assurances that schemes such as Erasmus will be kept going out of universities’ own funds.

A large number of staff would like to see the university take a stronger stance on intolerance and racism. Staff would like to see proactive action against racism and intolerance both in the university and outside the university in the local community. Some non-UK EU staff feel singled out and some feel being identified on staff lists as non-UK EU is inappropriate.

Staff would like to see that students are supported and provided with information and that decisions are made to keep tuition fees low in order to recruit the best possible students, irrespective of nationality.

Finally staff would like the university to summarise its action, support and decisions, in response to the EU referendum, in plans and policies put in the public domain for all staff to see.

### What action would staff like UCU to take and what support would staff like UCU to provide?

Staff would primarily like to see UCU lobbying the government on issues such as securing research funding, allowing current EU workers to stay and issues that affect EU students coming to the UK. Staff would also like to see (D)UCU lobbying the university on issues such as financial support for citizenship applications, providing affirmation for EU staff and to make a firmer stand against racism.

A large number of staff would also like to see more information and updates from (D)UCU, both information on the impact of decisions following the EU referendum and also information on the work of UCU.

Staff would like to see (D)UCU working alongside the university to support the university in any action mentioned in the previous section. In addition to working with the university, staff would like to see UCU working with other unions, other universities and student unions in order to provide a collaborative response to issues related to the EU referendum result.

Staff would like to see (D)UCU stand against racism and perhaps provide an education campaign in support of this.

Some EU nationals would like the opportunity to get together to form mutual support and the opportunity to discuss common issues. Staff have also suggested drop-in sessions and/or monthly fora for support.

A key requested action for (D)UCU was to provide support. Many staff are concerned about their EU and other international colleagues and are keen that they get the support that they need. Staff would like support with citizenship applications and legal advice, as well as advice on contracts and pensions.

Some non-EU international staff feel left out of the discussions and actions as they are affected too. “Leave” voters may also need support as some abuse has been in their direction too.