

Out in the cold at Christmas?

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As we head ever closer to Christmas, we here in the UK are facing a general election which could have serious implications for all of us, especially those working in the higher education sector. Here I am proud to draw on recent (very erudite and well-balanced) blog posts put out by the Vice Chancellor at my own institution, which have laid out the university's position and encouraged students to engage with the democratic process.

The last few weeks of campaigning has turned what should have been a 'season of goodwill to all men' into a season of (often vicious) political debate, tinged with a fair amount of mendacity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is still a great sense of uncertainty and mistrust. The country is deeply divided, with huge political, social, economic and cultural divides, and, demographically, recent surveys have shown that the political allegiances of the over 60s are at polar opposite to the under 25s. For many, these uncertainties lead to a longing for the certainties of the past. However, as the historian Jon Lawrence argues in his recent book, *Me, Me, Me?*, these idylls are often viewed through rose-tinted spectacles. Brexit hasn't created these divisions, but it has clearly exposed them to more public debate.

A vote for the incumbent political party could mean a promised swift Brexit by 31st January and a dramatic reshaping of our relationship with our European colleagues. A vote for the major opposition party would bring further debate and a potential new referendum followed by a possible renegotiation of the departure agreement. What this will all mean for our international staff and students, we don't yet know! What this will mean for international research funding, we don't yet know! What this will mean for our relationships with suppliers of goods and services within the EU, we don't yet know!

The UK has been one of the leading advocates for a transition to open access, in large part driven by the recommendations made in the Finch Report back in 2012, but it has worked with, and benefited greatly, from partnerships with European colleagues. How this will be affected by a potential departure from the EU remains to be seen, but there will, inevitably, be a change in the power balance in the relationship. This will, inevitably lead to further uncertainties around funding and collaborative research projects.



This election will be a turning point for the UK, indeed the very future of the unitedness of the kingdom may hang in the balance! Whatever the outcome of the vote, what remains clear is that higher education in the UK will strive to maintain its international outlook and retain its role within Europe. We continue to strive to even out the inter-generational inequalities, to drive future prosperity and change, and to retain and build on the international relationships we have built up over many years. My own institution has clearly laid out its commitment, we will ‘lead locally and engage globally’, and I am sure this position is being echoed across most institutions as we speak.

By the time you read this editorial, we will know the outcome of the 2019 general election and will be coming to terms with whatever situation it brings. However, one thing is for certain, UK higher education will strive to deliver international impact, through continued international partnerships. Scholarship should have no boundaries, and through collaborating with each other and with the international publishing industry we will continue to play a significant role in global scholarly communications. And finally, before signing off for 2019, and anticipating what 2020 will bring, may I take the opportunity to wish you all a restful Christmas break and a happy New Year.

These views are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the views of UKSG.



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