

The 2024 Elections: Labour's New Approach to EU-UK Relations and the Imperative for Scientific and Research Priorities

London, United Kingdom, July , 2025

Following Labour's success in the recent UK elections, there is an expectation that its plans to build closer ties with the European Union will translate into a more constructive and productive relationship in the post-Brexit era. This was reinforced by Keir Starmer in the recent European Political Community summit held at Blenheim Palace, where the new UK Prime Minister addressed the authorities, "We want to work with all of you to reset relationships, rediscover our common interest and renew the bonds of trust and friendship that brighten the fabric of European life."¹

In this sense, and even though Labour has firmly stated that the UK will not be rejoining the EU nor its single market, the new government has expressed its willingness to improve trade and investment relations with the EU and to sign new agreements on issues such as security and defence. This comes at a time when the newly elected EU Parliament is also reassessing its priorities and approaches to international collaborations.

However, policy areas such as higher education, science, and research were scarcely mentioned in Labour's manifesto. Whilst the UK's rejoining of Horizon Europe earlier this year was a positive step towards rebuilding EU-UK scientific relations, critical topics such as the ongoing crisis in UK universities and R&D funding, the lack of support for early career researchers, and the absence of specific academic mobility programmes between the EU and the UK remain unaddressed and will need to be prioritised.

This oversight is compounded by Labour's approach to immigration. The new government has promised to reduce net migration and address skills shortages more efficiently but has so far failed to recognise its potential impact on researchers and international students. These highly mobile groups have been significantly affected by changes in immigration policy since Brexit, creating barriers that hinder the UK's ability to attract top global talent to its universities and research institutions.

The recent UK elections, alongside the outcome of the EU elections, present both challenges and opportunities for future EU-UK relations. The new UK government should prioritise addressing these gaps to build a more forward-looking framework for EU-UK cooperation in education and scientific research. This will not only strengthen the UK's position as a global leader in innovation, but also reinforce its critical bonds with the EU, ensuring a thriving ecosystem for scientific and academic excellence on both sides of the Channel.

¹ Booth, William, Emily Rauhala, and Karla Adam. "New U.K. Prime Minister Seeks Reset with Europe after Years of Squabbling." *The Washington Post*, July 18, 2024. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/07/18/keir-starmer-reset-europe-uk/>.



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