



HOUSE OF LORDS

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The Select Committee on Science and Technology

Inquiry on

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EU MEMBERSHIP AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION IN THE UK

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Witnesses: Sir Emyr Jones Parry, Professor Dame Helen Wallace and Mr David Walker

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on
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Members present

Earl of Selborne (Chairman)
 Lord Cameron of Dillington
 Lord Fox
 Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield
 Lord Hunt of Chesterton
 Lord Kakkar
 Baroness Manningham-Buller
 Lord Maxton
 Baroness Neville-Jones
 Lord Peston
 Lord Vallance of Tummel

Examination of Witnesses

Sir Emyr Jones Parry GCMG, President, the Learned Society of Wales, **Professor Dame Helen Wallace** DBE, CMG, FBA, Europe Liaison Chair, British Academy, and **Mr David Walker**, Head of Policy, Academy of Social Sciences

Q41 The Chairman: Welcome to our second session. I apologise that we are a little late, but we will make sure that we do not short-change you on this. As we are being broadcast, I am going to ask if you will introduce yourselves. If you would like to make a brief opening statement at the same time, do feel free to do so. Perhaps we could start with Mr David Walker.

Mr David Walker: I am David Walker. I am head of policy for the Academy of Social Sciences. For seven years, I was a member of the Economic and Social Research Council, where I chaired the Methods and Infrastructure Committee.

Four sentences to begin with. For the principal social sciences—economics, psychology, sociology, probably geography, and certainly business studies—orientation is westwards towards the United States of America. Exchanges and conferences feature the anglophone connection in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Of course, there is much rich involvement with the social sciences in the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, but connections are bilateral. Lord Hennessy said at one of your earlier sessions that it is difficult to calibrate the EU element in talking/thinking above our weight in the world, and that is my starting point.

The Chairman: Thank you. Dame Helen.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I am Helen Wallace. Until recently, I was foreign secretary of the British Academy. I am now responsible for our European liaison work, and I am supposed to know something about the European Union.

Three quick points. As we have said in our submission, the story for British applicants across scientific domains under European funding programmes is a very good-news story. As the

British Academy, we are pleased that the social sciences and humanities do even better than the natural and life sciences.

Secondly, the British Academy has been very closely involved in discussions with the European Commission about the shaping of framework programmes, as we have as regards experience to date, and that has been very important. Obviously, part of our concern, as with David Walker, is to help ensure that social sciences and humanities have enough weight in the process.

Thirdly, given that you have just been taking evidence from the other national academies, the British Academy has been working very closely with them on the development of the new scientific advice mechanism, which we may come back to later.

The Chairman: We will indeed. Thank you. Sir Emyr Jones Parry.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: I am the president of the Learned Society of Wales. We are the new kid on the block; we have been in existence for five years. I am also chancellor and chairman of the council at Aberystwyth University. Thank you for the opportunity.

My fellows, regardless of views on membership of the European Union, would regard what the Community dimension has done for education, science, technology, research, as, on the whole, very beneficial. It has widened horizons. It has encouraged collaboration. Seen at the purely mercenary level, it has produced a degree of funding that has been very much appreciated.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, that is very helpful. I am going to ask Lord Hunt if he would like to start.

Q42 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: In yesterday's *Guardian* there was an article by a Dutch journalist discussing the British Brexit business, and he said that the question was whether we should be thinking of our relationship to Europe purely in a transactional way, the numbers and the money, or in a transformational way. What influence has the EU membership had on UK science, research and innovation? Do you see this in a positive way going forward?

Mr David Walker: It is very hard to distinguish bilateral relationships between UK social scientists, UK departments, UK universities, and their colleagues in other European countries, which for these purposes have to include Norway and Switzerland, which certainly in social science terms are very active participants, and programmes that take place under the auspices of the European Union. Regardless of the broader question of Brexit, it is not at all clear from the evidence that those bilateral connections would necessarily—taking the question of funding separately—be affected by the United Kingdom's non-membership of the European Union. There is a rich pattern of exchanges, but pinning responsibility for those to the European Union and its programmes is much more difficult.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I would move on from there to say that from where we look at it in the British Academy and working with various sister organisations, we believe that we have some influence on the shaping of European research programmes and research priorities. We have been able to have a substantive and substantial voice in the way those discussions work from the early stages through the iterations, evaluation, and so on. Nothing is perfect, and I would not say for a moment that the European research programmes are perfect, but there is a relatively good fit between what makes sense for UK-based social

science and humanities and science more generally and the way in which the framework programmes, and in particular the European Research Council, have developed.

Perhaps I could flag the European Research Council here, because not only is it the organisation from which British-based scientists generally do disproportionately well, but it is one that is particularly favourable to high-quality applications from individual humanities and social science scholars, so it fits very well with what makes sense to us. That helps us to make a major investment in human capital as the UK on the back of funding to individuals and research groups who have the kitemark of having won their grants in a very tough international competition.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: The academics naturally go to where there is a partnership and expertise. Having said that, the EU has incentivised academics to look externally and to look to the European Union. Back in the early 1980s, I sat on the Atomic Questions Group in the council for three years, and occasionally in the Research Group. Over those years I was conscious how the United Kingdom has shaped the priorities of what is done in research in the EU. We have done that to the benefit of the sector in the UK. We have taken on a genuinely leading role because of the expertise that we have in the United Kingdom. I look back and think that the successful role that we played, and the benefit that has ensued for the sector, for the universities in the kingdom, has been to a very large extent beneficial. I do think there is a link, which you can show has been transformative to a considerable extent for universities that are perhaps not in the golden triangle that have been encouraged and incentivised, and the financial aspect has been important.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: I was involved in a project of many, many disciplines involving systems for policy. It was absolutely unheard of; no research council was doing this 10 years ago in the UK. The EU was doing this extremely effectively and it has brought extraordinary connections. I imagine that kind of thing is one of the pluses really.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: I recall that in the Department of Industry, as it was in 1982, the concept of innovation in a paper on that subject produced by the Commission was a source of ridicule within the department: what on earth was this subject? That is now part of the title of that government department.

Q43 Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: I have interests to declare as a fellow of the British Academy and of the Academy of Social Sciences, and David Walker and I wrote a book together 30 years ago. Can I move us briefly from the plumbing of the relationship to the poetry, the intellectual free trade? As David Walker was saying, it is a two-way thing. I am a “remain” person as an individual in the great debate, but it seems to me that our influence on the arts and humanities side is pretty independent of the EU relationship. For example, in many countries in Europe, the people they read about their own country are Brits: Paul Preston on Spain, Richard Evans on Germany, Ian Kershaw on Germany, Chris Clark on Germany, and Julian Jackson on France. That kind of intellectual influence is part of the internal discussion of the EU, but also the country internal discussion is both palpable and to our great credit. I do not think that would be affected by anything that we are talking about today because it pre-dated it. Denis Mack Smith was the great expert on Italy for Italians long before we were in the EEC. Do you think that we need to think of that level of the poetic life of the mind as opposed to the plumbing, the collaborations and grants, and so on?

Mr David Walker: Could I extend that to say that many of the questions which UK social scientists are interested in also interest social scientists from other countries, including the United States. This came to my attention, and I will share it with you and you can weigh it as you think fit. Lord Hennessy has a connection with the London School of Economics. The London School of Economics has a European Parliament research group. It has published some 23-odd working papers in the last few years. I have just looked at its website. Of the 23 authors involved—there is one duplication, because Simon Hix did two—12 came from the United States of America against seven from the United Kingdom and four from European Union institutions. I think that indicates something about the Americans being interested in Europe, which is a good thing, but also about how intellectual life is dense and not really national. It is very much institution-based, domain-based, but in this instance I do not think it could be said to be European Union-based.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: We have an advantage because we speak English, and that helps the resonance of people who are anglophone and who write in English. I went to German classes with Ian Kershaw in 1971, when he was moving from being a monastic historian to becoming the great biographer of Hitler, and he would not have been able to achieve what he did if he had not also spoken German and spent quite a lot of time in Germany consulting sources. The resonance of poetry, or whatever, written in English is hugely important, but in order for that to have traction it needs benefit from contact elsewhere.

Q44 Lord Fox: I think this is the non-poetic version of the question that we have just heard. I am not a poet, of course. We heard from the previous evidence-givers that the sort of biomedical research that required access to large populations and harmonised data and access to large lumps of data was particularly benefitted by membership of the European Union, whereas standalone style of research probably did not necessarily need so much of that benefit. I have probably understated that. Is there a similar dichotomy in the academia that you represent, or is it all much more of the standalone, which I think Lord Hennessy was alluding to just now?

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: I think generally it is both. Lord Hennessy was absolutely right in the way he described it, but I do not see why there is a problem in pursuing academic to academic, the reputation of a scholar in a particular country, and at the same time doing what we do in the European Union. Both of those things are totally consistent. I see no contradiction between them.

There are a couple of myths that I would like to expose. The first is that if we were to leave, we could carry on as we were and benefit in exactly the same way and show the same leadership we have shown, and we could continue to do that outside. The second is that alternatives exist and that we can plug into these. I do not think it is as simple as that. The truth is that we could manage perfectly well outside, but we would be diminished. The question is whether we want to be diminished. Too often, Governments speak about “the leading role” of the United Kingdom. We have a leading role in many things, but one of the few that we have “the leading role” is in science, research and what we do. Why throw that away for an argument that is slightly spurious?

Q45 Baroness Manningham-Buller: Good morning. I am not quite certain whether my question remains because of what has been asked. It is probably the plumbing of the poetry,

to overegg Lord Hennessy's image. Most of the evidence we have had has been on the value to science, not so much on social sciences and the humanities from ERC and other grants. If you are able to give a comment on that, I think the Committee would find it helpful, even though it is the Science and Technology Committee, to have a perspective on the broader benefits of EU funding, particularly in social sciences, but also in the humanities.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: There are two different kinds of answer to that. One is that there are fields of inquiry: migration, urbanisation, demography—we can make a list of the ones that are hugely important, both at the national and international level—where some mixture of social sciences and humanities scholars have really important contributions to make to our understanding of those issues. To be able to do that on a comparative basis across European countries, and indeed more broadly comparative, is important.

The second point, which links to what Lord Hunt said, is that in many fields one needs a cross-disciplinary/pluri-disciplinary team of contributions, where often issues that are about scientifically based choices also involve making judgments about the behavioural or cultural, and therefore being able to include in the team an anthropologist, a cultural studies person or a sociologist might make an important difference to understanding what makes sense in science policy and what is capable of being implemented as European legislation.

Baroness Manningham-Buller: I think the Committee would absolutely understand and accept that point. My question was about funding and benefit from the EU in this area. Can you comment on that?

Mr David Walker: In a sense you asked a leading question. Obviously there are European Union funds. From a social science perspective, the question is: what do they add to the other sources of funding that are available, national and international? If I can give you an example of data, there is a thing called the European Social Survey, which Paul Boyle mentioned when he appeared before you, an important piece of work that looks at attitudes across various European countries, including—I emphasise again—Switzerland, Norway and non-members of the European Union. It is also a European Union project, a so-called European Research Infrastructure Consortium. That is very important, although one observation might be that work from the European Social Survey does not enter into the kind of policy conversations or public conversations that take place in the United Kingdom. There are lots of other data sets social scientists draw on, such as the OECD, United Nations, and national datasets. I happen to chair the governing board of Understanding Society, a massive multiyear project looking at how households have been adapting to socioeconomic change over recent years. That is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. It does not have a huge amount of international orientation, because it is looking at the United Kingdom in real time. Trying to isolate a specific European Union contribution, provided one can get clear the question of whether monies from the EU are now and in future additional to national funding, is very difficult.

Q46 Lord Peston: I remember when Keith Joseph changed the name of the SSRC to the ESRC, and it was one of those rare occasions when I entirely agreed with him, and still do. This question is partly about the balance of the natural sciences and the social sciences. If you look at theoretical physics, plus experimental physics, and ask yourself where in the social sciences you find any work to compare with what the physicists do, you would be hard put to find anything, in my view. What passes for research in the social sciences is often completely second rate, in my view. In my own subject, once you have understood

opportunity costs and the fact that free exchange between two pressed people will benefit both of them, you have learnt almost the whole of economics. I am puzzled at this notion that somehow we are not doing enough for the social scientist. Is it not about time that the social scientists started to do some stuff for themselves rather than bellyaching? I have put that to you as cynically as I can.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I am not sure that we are bellyaching. I wonder if that is fair. I think the research communities in social sciences and humanities include more talented and less talented members, and that is probably true in physics as well. Emyr is a physicist; he can comment on that. We would argue that we want appropriate opportunities for high-quality social science and humanities work to make a contribution.

To come back to the previous question, one of the advantages of going through European Union funding is that it is seriously tough, oversubscribed international competition and on the whole is really only able to fund pretty much the best work. It is an advantage to the British communities to have that kitemark. I hope it is the case that the peer review system and the competitiveness help to safeguard European programmes from, as it were, the poor second cousins who you talk about.

Mr David Walker: For the sake of institutional amour propre, I must not let Lord Peston's remarks go unchallenged. One can cite umpteen examples from UK economics of excellent work.

Lord Peston: Can you give me a few examples?

Mr David Walker: From UK sociology, which is held in low regard by some people, the work of John Goldthorpe on social mobility is absolutely excellent. He is a fellow of the British Academy. His work over the years is sociological quantitative work of the highest international quality. The present chief executive of the Economic and Social Research Council, Jane Elliott's work on longitudinal studies of households and families across time, again is rigorous, quantitative and extremely good work. There are exceptions that might prove a rule that social science can offer rigorous high-quality work.

Let me make a point, if I may, which is germane to your deliberations in this Committee. The success of UK social scientists in European Union-organised competitions is palpable. The data is not very great, but in quantitative terms it is better often than their STEM colleagues. I do not think there is any question of whingeing on behalf of UK social science. If I may say before you, the real question is whether we should expect UK social scientists to do as well as they do, or whether their performance does not actually reflect the excellence of UK universities and research institutions. It is the question you have addressed before of the denominator in the equation. What do you measure the return to UK social science on? Is it population, the number of institutions or, a much subtler measure, the existing research excellence of the UK? On that basis, some of the results are perhaps less impressive than the conversations we tend to have about UK participation in the EU might imply.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: Whatever the research, the important thing is to have a degree of rigour and excellence in what is being done, and that should be adequately reviewed. Going back to the early 1980s again, the work that was done by the Joint Research Centre was very expensive, but actually of no benefit at all scientifically or in any other way. That was changed over a period of time. It does follow that if you are going to do quality research in

physics, it costs more and you are going to have to invest more. That is not an argument about not having sufficient funding for other good-quality research.

The Chairman: Before I invite Lord Cameron, I must observe that, having served on this Committee for a very long time, I can recall a number of occasions where our conclusions have been that we have not involved the social sciences community often enough and early enough in the outcome and our national policies would have benefited by a greater input. I must put that on record to counterbalance.

Q47 Lord Cameron of Dillington: Good morning. I suppose I have a view of the Treasury that they always tend to take a short-term rather than a long-term view, based on this year's Budget, so you will have to excuse a degree of bias or perhaps suspicion in my question. Do you think the current funding that we put into the European Union R&D budget would remain as UK funding for R&D in the case of Brexit?

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: That is a really hard one, is it not? As you know, the UK pays an aggregate contribution to the EU budget; it does not pay a separate subscription, as it were, flagged for the research and development programmes. The British Government have repeatedly argued in favour of increasing European research funding and for decreasing agricultural funding, to take a slight caricature. After a presumed Brexit, who knows? There would be many budgetary dispositions to rethink, including what the UK national spend should in that case be on agriculture, and that would probably trump the discussion about research. The Treasury—George Osborne at least is very keen on science, as we know—might allow for some enhanced science spending, but it would not necessarily have the same criteria of mobility and international collaboration that characterise European funds. My guess is that it would be not as much, it would not be ring-fenced and it would have different characteristics.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: Perhaps I should have declared an interest as a UK farmer.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I know you are.

Lord Cameron of Dillington: But one who, I may say, believes very firmly that the agricultural spend is excessive and a waste of money.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: From the viewpoint of the scientist, the university, there is a certainty, there is a programme, there is money available, and there is an opportunity to bid for it. For a university or a scientist, especially in one of the devolved nations, there is even greater uncertainty than that set out by Dame Helen, and that is that whatever the British Government determine their priorities would be with that aggregate contribution and what they are in future going to spend it on, the way Barnett works there is then the question of how much comes to the devolved Administrations and that is not hypothecated. It is a question of what individual Governments in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales would then do with that money and how much would trickle down. There is no certainty. Given the priorities that some of those Governments put in place, I would judge that most academic researchers would say better the certainties they have than the uncertainty that they would enter into.

Q48 Baroness Neville-Jones: I am going to ask a question about the regional impact of EU funding when it comes to university research. In some of the submissions that we have had put to us there has been some analysis that suggests there are regions of the country that

are more dependent on EU funding to maintain their research capacity than others. Is that a feature of life that is very salient, or do you not regard that as being particularly important, the variable regional impact and whether EU funding helps the regions more significantly than perhaps money coming out of, say, the UK research councils? Perhaps Sir Emyr has views on this.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: As you will know, one of the disadvantages of the Barnett formula is that it does not take account of need; it is a formula based on population. The net result is that the way it is allocated, I think, disadvantages Wales. If you applied the British Government's criteria for allocating funds within England, Wales would do better if the same criteria were applied in Wales. Having the benefit of structural funds and a large slab of the deprived parts of Wales comes within category 1, it produces a net return that is seen as a benefit for investment for the economy, but there is a consequential spin-off for research for the university sector. Funds have been used to support universities, to support research. Put simply, if Wales and other areas in Scotland are advantaged by being part of the EU system, they would be correspondingly disadvantaged were Brexit to apply.

Baroness Neville-Jones: Do I understand you to be saying, therefore, that the structural funding element, as distinct from, say, the science funding that comes from the EU, is relatively more significant?

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: Ten streams of financing come into Wales from the European Union, and they all contribute to the economy in different ways, but the economy is so directly linked to research, to the success of universities, that there is a direct read across that comes in. The very substantive investment in Swansea University at the moment has to a considerable extent been funded from the European Union.

Mr David Walker: I think it is worth recording that we do not have a total for the amount of research money, broadly defined, that comes from the European Union, because of this division between the directorates and their research budgets and between structural cohesion funds that issue in research contracts. Horizon 2020 and the European Research Council produce an aggregate which I am not sure we have collected together as a figure. Regarding its national breakdown, I do not think the data exists.

Baroness Neville-Jones: The impression I get from what Sir Emyr said is that it is the totality of the support that comes from EU funding that in the end makes the really significant difference.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: The totality certainly makes a difference to the economy of the nation. Although the figures are imprecise, and there are errors in them, the one that I have is that from 2007 to 2013 the United Kingdom secured €7 billion from Framework Programme 7. Obviously there are other bits that have not been taken account of, but it is at least at that level. I think it is generally assumed, both in Brussels and the UK, that we do disproportionately well. How well is a matter of a question mark perhaps at the margin, but we do disproportionately well.

Baroness Neville-Jones: On the science side?

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: Yes.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: The science allocations do not have geographic criteria, unlike the structural funds. In this sense it is a random regional/interregional outcome, except that we know that under the science research funding streams it is the most highly

rated universities that are the most successful. Perversely, in a way, simply on the science budget, the golden triangle institutions—as well as Edinburgh and Manchester—would be most vulnerable to the immediate hit and void as opposed to other parts of England or the wider UK. Northern Ireland has very disappointing returns on its applications to European programmes and keeps trying to set targets to do better.

Mr David Walker: Again, could I very briefly and gently take issue with the argument that the UK share is disproportionate? Of the top 100 social science universities, according to world rankings, 31 are from the European Union, of which 12 are in the United Kingdom. That would produce a proportion of around 40%. On that arithmetic, the UK should be getting 40% of available EU social science funding, and it does not.

Baroness Neville-Jones: I would not use the word “disproportionate”, I agree.

Q49 Lord Peston: Central to the EU is freedom of movement, of course. Can you point us to any evidence or analysis of how freedom of movement affects the social sciences and humanities as compared with the natural sciences? Is it more important to social scientists, or do we not know? Dame Helen, you mentioned the Americans, who are separated from us by a common language, or whatever the joke was.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I declare an interest, Lord Peston, because my son took up a Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowship at the University of Edinburgh last week, returning from the University of Chicago, in mathematical biology, so you may disregard anything I say on mobility and programmes that fund mobility.

Lord Peston: No, quite the contrary.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I think mobility is very important in all branches for the social sciences and humanities as for the natural, life and engineering sciences. I would stress the early career fellowships, of which the Marie Skłodowska-Curie programme is a prime example, provide a talented young scholar with the opportunity to have contact with whatever the state of the art, whether it is a research group or individual expert in her field. Certainly when I ran the Schuman Centre at the European University Institute in Florence, where we had many people on Marie Skłodowska-Curie or equivalent fellowships, it was very impressive to see the outcomes for them in changing their environment, getting the extra contacts and their career progression. I do not have stats on it, but it would be a really good question to ascertain their progression from those fellowships, which are typically two or three years, to tenured posts. I think we would probably see rather robust figures showing that this sort of postdoctoral fellowship stage in particular, with the opportunity to travel and work in another country, really makes a difference.

Lord Peston: I can see that it is important, but you still have not felt able to tell us whether it is more important for the social sciences.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I do not think there is a difference between social science and other fields.

Lord Peston: You do not think it is?

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I think mobility and the opportunity to connect to state-of-the-art research groups in other countries in your field is incredibly important if you want to make a mark in any scientific domain that is transnational.

Mr David Walker: There is a cost to this. Again, I apologise because this is anecdotal; there is no quantitative evidence. Given that one of the purposes of social science inquiry is to elucidate general problems of public policy—society, economy, the Chairman mentioned social policy—if you get largish numbers of people from non-national backgrounds, their interest in national problems, and we all live in a national environment, is necessarily more limited. One hears of departments—political science, sociology, economics—that are stocked with mobile people, which is a good thing in many ways, whose interest in contributing to better understanding of United Kingdom public policy is necessarily a lot less. We do register perhaps a possible cost.

Q50 Lord Fox: One of the scenarios in the event of a Brexit is that the UK could become an associated country. Earlier, Mr Walker, you alluded to Switzerland and Norway. Looking at those countries, in your experience how would British science be affected in the event that we did become an associated country? How likely do you think that scenario is?

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: This is one of those myths that I referred to. There is an assumption somehow that the United Kingdom could be a greater Norway or Switzerland. I negotiated the European Economic Area some years ago, and the truth is the Norwegians were screwed. They are screwed by the Spaniards and others by having to pay and grant access to fishing waters off Norway. I said earlier, and I will repeat, we have a leading role in this area. Of course, we have an excellence but, none the less, do we really think that having walked out we are going to have the same access, the same degree of influence on what is happening as we currently enjoy. I think that is an illusion. I do not think it will happen like that.

Switzerland chose not to enter the European Economic Area. When it came to having to have a series of bilateral agreements with the European Union, again Switzerland had a very hard time from Spain and had to pay heavily for access and give rights to Spanish workers in Switzerland, which it would not otherwise have done, but was forced to do. The Swiss felt a degree of second-class citizen, so they made concessions in order to respond to that. I think it is true to say that in Horizon 2020 they have been downgraded. Why do we think that people will necessarily be grateful to the United Kingdom if we walk out? I do not think it will happen like that.

If I could finish one other point, we have not said much about the degree of competition and of promoting of excellence that takes place, but I do think that message of the EU that you encourage people to look more widely, to be competitive, helps. The mobility we were talking about earlier enriches universities, both in staff and students. The British Government were most reluctant to support the Erasmus project when it first came out. There was worry about sovereignty and competence in education transferred to the Commission. Did it work like that? No, it did not. As I understand it, 125,000 students from the United Kingdom have benefited through the Erasmus scheme from exposure, horizon-widening, and, more importantly, employability at the end of it. It has been a considerable benefit.

Mr David Walker: We have examples of projects that are European in which Norway and Switzerland now participate as full members. We have mentioned already today the European Social Survey, which happens to be physically based at Bergen in Norway. The British Academy has recently been doing some very useful work, if I may say, on how far social sciences should be quantitative, and undergraduates have to do some number work

before they graduate. The examples that John MacInnes has collected for the academy again feature countries in the EU, but also Norway and Switzerland, as well of course as New Zealand, Australia and the United States. Regarding the intellectual plain of UK social sciences, I am not sure that Brexit as such would necessarily have an effect upon participation by UK academics in projects that were genuinely pan-European, leaving the money question aside for one moment.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: Of course, Chairman, we could continue to participate. That is not in dispute. The question is whether we want to play in the premier league or whether we want to be in division two, and that is where we would be.

Q51 Lord Hunt of Chesterton: One question that has not emerged in the way that Lord Peston asked is: what has been the value to the UK of the social science research? Clearly there are parts of the UK that are very deprived; the education is not very good. There are others where things are better. There are huge variations across Europe. My question is: have we learnt how to do things better in the UK from our involvement with the EU, and will that move forward? Clearly, the way education is done across the European countries is hugely different. I had a cousin who experienced the German system very unsatisfactorily as a schoolboy. There are big differences. I wonder whether the research and knowledge has emerged from the European research projects or has it just been, as it were, at the very high, intellectual poetic level.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: That is very difficult to pin down. We do not have any evaluation that will give you robust answers to that. David Walker has already made the point, which I agree with strongly, that British social science and humanities, as the British research community more generally, are the strongest in Europe as reflected by our top-ranked universities and all the rest.

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: A lot of our education is very inferior to what is happening in certain schools.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: At the university level?

Lord Hunt of Chesterton: At the school level, but university people study what happens in the schools and say what should happen in the schools.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: I think British university experience has been very valuable in helping to develop the wider European research communities. One of the by-products of that is that universities in other European countries are setting about trying to become more competitive with British universities. In this sense, although the British record is a very powerful one, there are no grounds for complacency on our side that British universities can continue to have such a leading edge when universities in other European countries are beginning to do better.

To return to the association question, it is none the less the case that the rest of the European Union would suffer a loss if it no longer had such active British participation because of the current quality of British research. The question then is what kind of deal could be negotiated. We do not know whether an EEA/EFTA status could be negotiated for Britain, as with Norway. That is part of a much wider question that is not about research. We might end up with something that is more ad hoc and bilateral. What the British would lose in that scenario is the opportunity to be full participants in shaping the direction of

travel of programmes, because we would be takers, not makers, of the policy process and guidelines.

Mr David Walker: To address your specific question about schools education policy, again one of the prime purposes of the social science inquiry is to try and undergird policymaking with evidence. I make the observation in a non-partisan spirit that schools policy in England recently has not been much driven by evidence of how things work, but the ideas that have powered policy have largely come from the United States of America, where Secretaries of State have found inspiration. They have not come from comparative studies across the European Union. The policy for schools in respective EU countries does not seem to have been relevant in any palpable sense regarding the formation of English schooling policy, and I think that would continue regardless of the relationship of the UK and the EU.

The Chairman: I think we can all accept that shaping the agenda is going to be at risk, and possibly funding too, were Brexit to happen. I do not follow playing in the second division, as Sir Emyr said, because we have already agreed that America can play over here and we can play in Europe. Why should the quality of our research suffer as a result of Brexit?

Mr David Walker: If I may endorse your question by giving you an example, there is a very useful longitudinal survey called the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. In an ageing society it produces very useful data and analysis about how we are coping with demographic change. That survey is partly funded by the American National Institute on Aging. It is not funded by a European entity. It is first-class social science and would inevitably continue.

Another counter example is there is a big European Union-funded project called the Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe, an important piece of work based in the Netherlands led by one of the scientists who is on the new scientific advice mechanism in Europe. There is no UK participation in that. It doubtless does very useful, interesting work, but it does not feature, partly because we have extant national programmes to analyse ageing here. There is maybe evidence that the future could be quite bright for UK social science in a non-EU context.

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: Can I add a point? It is clear, and we are all agreed, that currently the UK has high-quality science communities. Those science communities are full of many talented people who are not British. A very significant proportion of faculty researchers in British universities are not British. A very significant proportion of postgraduate, doctoral and postdoctoral fellows in British universities, as indeed with undergraduates, are not British. That is because the British have had a very open and welcoming system, we happen to speak English, which helps enormously, and we are a magnet for talent from elsewhere in Europe and other parts of the world. If we were less welcoming of, and less attractive to, talented people from elsewhere, my guess would be that UK universities would not do so well in those rankings. There is obviously a set of issues here about how far Brexit would put that at risk. It would take away some of the schemes that bring talented people from other European countries. That does not necessarily affect the rest of the world. Let me say, in parentheses, our migration rules do not help in this context for third countries.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: If I could answer the question you addressed to me, Chairman, I was referring to premier league and second division regarding our involvement in the European Union research community. Of course we will continue. Outside the EU the United Kingdom will prosper. Research will prosper because of our excellence. The point is that we would be

impoverished, diminished, by taking that course of action. That is not an argument against universities being international; of course they are international much beyond the European Union, but the EU dimension in what it has brought—the competitiveness, the incentive, the resources—has actually benefited very considerably the sector. That is not to argue, a point that Lord Hennessy raised at the very beginning, against the different strands. They should continue, but one strand would be materially the weaker.

Q52 Lord Hennessy of Nympsfield: Can I pursue a little further the evidence-based policymaking theme that we touched on a moment ago? Can we have your thoughts on the organisation of professional advice to the UK Government compared to the EU? It seems to me that arts, humanities and social scientists are not as well placed as scientists, because we do not have chief sociologists or chief historians attached to departments. We have chief economists and statisticians, but the humanities and social sciences have always been rather thinly represented regarding organised advice. Having said that, we have been very concerned about the scientific advice mechanism that is being developed in the European Union. Are you happy, for example, that the arts, humanities and social sciences will have a strong enough voice as part of the wider science input into the SAM? Do you think the British tradition of speaking truth unto power, which we prize greatly as the key to public service here in the Crown service sense, is not exactly replicated inside the European Commission, if I can put it tactfully?

Professor Dame Helen Wallace: It is a very complex landscape. The European Commission has always drawn on science advice and has some 1,200 expert advisory groups. We are not starting from nowhere. Much of that policy advice has come in policy silos, for which we pay prices, as with the Volkswagen diesel fume issue, because climate change trumped public health and they got off lightly on the public health side.

The EU experiment with a single chief scientific adviser, which is the British system, turned out not to work very well at first sight, and with the new scientific advice mechanism—and it is a pure experiment—it is much too soon to say what its chances of flying are. The High-Level Group has been designated. It has yet to elect its own chair and deputy chair, which will come shortly. How that will operate and how far they will get on with the truth unto power challenge is a really interesting question. It was part of the remit that one of the members of that High-Level Group should be a social scientist. There are only seven of them, so that is not unreasonable. A Dutch empirical sociologist has just been nominated. We have to see how this works out. Flanking that High-Level Group, we hope, will be a consortium of European academy federations. I can only assure you that those of us who speak for social sciences and humanities have been, and are being, extremely active in trying to develop the proposals for that in such a way that the social sciences, and so forth, will have a firm position, not least because it is the behavioural, the societal and the cultural issues that will often be very, very important in determining whether or not new scientific breakthroughs turn out to be publicly acceptable in Europe. Genetic editing is an example—one of the new sciences. We all have to try to make the new science advice mechanism work.

Mr David Walker: Two months ago you had before you that eminent scientist Sir Mark Walport, Government Chief Scientific Adviser, and I have to say you were eating out of his hand. Sir Mark is a very charming, courteous and distinguished scientist.

The Chairman: You are saying we were a pushover?

Mr David Walker: It is not at all clear, and Lord Hennessy hinted at this, that the organisation of science advice in the United Kingdom is perfect. Lord Hennessy mentioned economics I would say the fact there are separate organisations within Whitehall for economists, social researchers, operational researchers and statisticians means that there is a large area of policy-relevant activity that does not get fed into the official channels of 'science' advice. Mark runs the Government Office for Science. There are few social scientists, as such, who are present in the running of the Government Office for Science. I am not sure that in Whitehall/Westminster we necessarily have a model that we should say without qualification should apply elsewhere. That said, and Helen has hinted at this, the arrangements in Brussels look rather temporary. It is true that there is one social scientist on the inner group of the new scientific advice mechanism, and she may well be a distinguished Dutch sociologist, but, from our point of view, it does not look like the critical mass that would speak truth to power, that would say, "Here is evidence that is contrary to the thrust of policymaking", that has been built into these arrangements.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry: It is not only in the European Union, but perhaps in some of our nations that the need for a more evidence-based approach to policy exists. I have a colleague who was vice-president of the Academia Europaea as well as the Learned Society of Wales, and, talking to him, his view is that at least under this new system—and the jury is still out, as Dame Helen said—science advice and evidence-based policy in the EU will be given much more emphasis under this new arrangement than it was in the past. The seven individuals are quite impressive in their own right, but for the first time there will be an officially recognised route for academic professionals to provide scientific evidence for policymaking to the Commission through the pan-European academic networks. If those work well, reflect their membership and co-operate together, there is a prospect of a transparent system that may well work, but the jury is still out.

The Chairman: Thank you. Looking around the Committee, there are no further members trying to catch my eye. I will say to Mr Walker that I entirely agree that the present arrangements are not necessarily the best of all possible arrangements for organising science policy advice and regulation. I repeat again that we have said many times that the social sciences could make a greater contribution were Government to effectively interact with that community. I think that is precisely the advice that Mr Walker has just given us, so we agree about that.

The purpose of this report, and thank you for all the input you have made to it today, is to discuss the relationship between EU membership and the effectiveness of science, research and innovation in the United Kingdom. When we come to write the report we will be looking very carefully at the evidence you have given us today, both written and oral, on the role that social sciences can play, and indeed should play. Thank you very much indeed for a most illuminating morning.