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UK ACADEMIC SALON 2019 REPORT

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS
AND DISCUSSIONS



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All photos: Times Higher Education/Huawei

Introduction to the UK Academic Salon

The 2019 UK Academic Salon brought together leading figures from higher education, industry and policymaking to discuss the vital role that the UK higher education sector plays in the nation’s knowledge economy.

Under the rubric “openness and talent without borders”, the event posited that the modern university is truly an international institution. It explored the relationship between the UK’s universities and industry, and how commercial partnerships and global collaborations can best be utilised in order to drive innovative research projects and seed future prosperity

for the UK economy. Amid a climate of political uncertainty, there was a belief that UK universities needed to remain open to the world to secure the best academic talent and remain competitive, and that research at scale is often best pursued through international collaborations.

The salon featured high-profile speakers from a variety of backgrounds, including Andy Neely, pro vice-chancellor for enterprise and business relations at the University of Cambridge; Sarah Main, executive director of the Campaign for Science and Engineering; and Michael Hill-King, collaboration director of Huawei Technologies UK R&D Centre.

Michael Hill-King, collaboration director, UK R&D Centre, Huawei Technologies

Michael Hill-King began by saying he hoped the UK’s higher education sector would find strategies to attract and retain talent after Britain leaves the EU. This would show the world that the UK remains open for business and that its “world-renowned” higher education institutions would allow it to remain “at the centre of a global network of collaboration and innovation”. He said innovation is borne of long-term investment. Huawei currently invests up to 15 per cent of its annual revenue in research and development. “Over the past 10 years, we’ve spent \$76 billion (£60 billion) on R&D globally,” he added.

Speaking of technology’s transformative potential, he told delegates: “It is our collective responsibility to ensure this effect is positive and life-enhancing. We will only make the most of these opportunities when academia and business work together.”

Andy Neely, pro vice-chancellor for enterprise and business relations, University of Cambridge

“Today, I’d like to talk about bees,” began Andy Neely. It was World Bee Day two days prior to the salon, and the workings of the honey bee, its journey to and from its hive and the creativity of cross-pollination had him thinking of how higher education interacts with business. “The University of Cambridge has established its own hive over hundreds of years,” he said. “Over



Michael Hill-King



Andy Neely

the past three decades, our colony of technology has exploded into a prolific and profitable powerhouse that transforms research into commercial enterprise.” Investors and industry partners, he said, have found common purpose in innovation, creating a £43 billion technology cluster in the East of England. He went on to warn that curbing migrant visas risked compromising future successes.



Our colony of technology has exploded into a prolific and profitable powerhouse

Andy Neely

Talent and openness in post-Brexit Britain: what must we do to ensure that UK science and research is healthier in five years' time than it is today?

THE PANEL

John Gill, editor, *Times Higher Education* (moderator)
Sarah Main, executive director, Campaign for Science and Engineering
Joe Marshall, chief executive, National Centre for Universities and Business
Dave Robertson, head, College of Science and Engineering, University of Edinburgh
Jeremy Watson, vice-dean (mission), Faculty of Engineering Sciences, UCL



Sarah Main said the current government's industrial strategy, which plans to see an increase in R&D investment from 1.7 per cent to 2.4 per cent of GDP, could have a transformative effect, as long as international research partnerships are not stymied by Brexit. "Our partnerships, our collaborative structures, with Europe and the rest of the world, are critical," she said.

Joe Marshall echoed her sentiments and cautioned that the "fantastic rallying cry" of the government's 2.4 per cent R&D investment target was threatened by uncertainty over the UK's place in the world. He also said economic benefits must be shared across the UK, and universities and industry should enhance lifelong learning opportunities and "work in partnership to develop that future skills talent pipeline."

It would be tragic if we lost the ability in Europe to influence funding and knowledge partnerships

Jeremy Watson

Dave Robertson spoke of the changes affecting science and research, noting growing disparities in the capabilities, reputation and investment potential of universities. Large institutions now formed "clusters" around common areas of interest, such as data science. The scale involved in research areas such as precision medicine demanded that they took an international approach, with "regional populations too small to answer the research questions we are trying to answer for rare diseases".

"It would be tragic if we lost the ability in Europe to influence funding and knowledge collaborations which can benefit everyone," said Jeremy Watson. The UK must look to encourage international fellowships and continue to be "globally engaged" in its research strategy to compete, he added.

Assessing the value of international faculties

THE PANEL

Phil Baty, chief knowledge officer, *Times Higher Education* (moderator)
Maggie Dallman, vice-president (international) and associate provost (academic partnerships), Imperial College London
Stephen Flint, associate vice-president for internationalisation, University of Manchester



Can a university be considered world class without having a substantial percentage of international academics and students?

The data, said Phil Baty, suggests not. "There really is a sense that these top universities across the world are all very international, in particular in their collaboration with universities across borders." Citing Imperial College London as the most international university in the UK, Mr Baty quoted its president, Alice Gast, on campus internationalism: "As you build a team, you bring together diverse people to provide the most effective views. Individuals brought up in different educational systems, with exposure to different societies and markets, approach problems differently."

Maggie Dallman said she was "a firm believer that diversity of thought leads to diversity of innovation and research breakthroughs". She has witnessed this

I am a firm believer that diversity of thought leads to diversity of innovation

Maggie Dallman

in her own laboratory, where she is the only British academic. Universities, she said, should look beyond the established elite and would be "foolish" to overlook the opportunities for research collaborations with sub-Saharan Africa. The universities that will thrive, she said, will be those "bold enough to truly internationalise but also bring that learning back to operate on a national and local context."

Stephen Flint agreed that universities must be better at communicating what they do to their local communities. He described the complexity of research operations, such as the FutureDAMS consortium led by the University of Manchester's Global Development Institute, and said that such multidisciplinary initiatives were executable only with an internationalist approach.

Luke Georghiou, deputy president and deputy vice-chancellor, University of Manchester

Luke Georghiou began by referencing the government's industrial strategy. "If you look at all the things it is trying to do, they are what we are about," he said. "We are 23 per cent of the country's R&D activity. We are almost the sole source of new talent."

Professor Georghiou said that business engagement should not compromise research excellence and that universities must engage all sizes of corporations. He lauded the growing power of institutes, describing them as "siege engines that can really connect and deal with larger-scale, more complex issues." The Graphene Engineering Innovation Centre, in central Manchester, he said, was an example of the university in partnership with public and private sectors, creating a state-of-the-art research facility on an industry scale.

The future of industry-university collaboration

THE PANEL

Luke Georghiou, deputy president and deputy vice-chancellor, University of Manchester (moderator)

Wendy Hall, regius professor of computer science, University of Southampton

Michael Hill-King, collaboration director, UK R&D Centre, Huawei Technologies

Alex Marsh, deputy director, Strategy Unit, UK Research and Innovation



Asia is where my attention is focused
Wendy Hall

"The world is changing and it's not going to go back to the way it was," said Wendy Hall, but universities will stand the test of time because they are built to evolve.

"There's plenty of room for a diverse ecosystem in higher education, she said,

describing a global higher education marketplace in which much of the research potential is shifting towards Asia.

"That's really where my attention is focused these days, because I see huge investment," she explained.

Global view from left: Luke Georghiou, Wendy Hall, Alex Marsh and Michael Hill-King

UK institutions have to stay relevant to answer new global challenges – and that includes finding a model that stems the brain drain in sectors such as artificial intelligence, where universities cannot compete with technology giants on salary, she added.

Alex Marsh referenced the industry-university model mentioned earlier by Professor Georghiou.

Dr Marsh said that assembling small collaborative teams around a specific goal can stimulate collaboration between higher education and industry.

"We identify a small number of opportunities," he explained.

"We make a bet on those, and then we gather together the complementary areas of research expertise across multiple disciplines, complemented with business leadership and expertise."

Again, Brexit was unavoidable in imagining any future. Michael Hill-King noted that the UK wins 21 per cent of European Research Council funding.

"How are we going to replace that 21 per cent of the entire ERC budget just by ourselves?" he asked.

As for chronic skills shortages in tech industries, this was an issue he felt would take many years to address through education and training alone.

"The other way is to attract talent," he said. "And this goes back to one of the other themes we were talking about today, which is science without borders."



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