

CCBS – LEGISLATIVE AFFAIRS

07/10/2016 - 14/10/2016



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Monday 10 October 2016

Summary: “Growing Northern Ireland’s Exports”. Mr Lyons moved the motion that this Assembly welcomes the recent Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs export data for Northern Ireland, which record a growth rate of 9.5%; notes the Executive’s commitment to increase the competitiveness of the economy; recognises the opportunities that the decision by the United Kingdom to leave the European Union presents to improve external sales; and calls on the Minister for the Economy to ensure that growing exports is a key part of the Northern Ireland economic strategy.

Mr Allister: Would the Member agree that, in setting out the export figures, we need to be mindful that, in fact, our greatest external market outside Northern Ireland is GB? We export 60% to GB, and, of the balance, a fraction goes to the EU.

Mr Lyons: The Member must be good at reading my mind: that was the exact point I was going to make. There is, obviously, a difference between exports and external sales, and, of course, in terms of external sales, the UK is by far our largest market. Whilst our biggest trading partners are the rest of the UK, the Republic of Ireland and the US, which saw a massive increase of 75% last year, we need to look at the next tier of countries, where there has been significant economic growth and room for us to expand. That is why we included in our motion a recognition that there are opportunities that can come from leaving the EU. We all know the position of each party in the Chamber, and the arguments have been made numerous times. However, I hope that everyone in the Chamber, regardless of their position on Brexit, would want Brexit to be a success. I hope that people will want us to be able to exploit the opportunities that could come from leaving the European Union. Whilst Sinn Féin has made it clear that it would rather stay in the EU, it has, in its amendment, recognised the result, which is to be welcomed, and that we need to focus on getting the best deal and outcome for Northern Ireland, especially in issues relating to cross-border trade and maintaining the common travel area. For those reasons, we are content to support the amendment if it creates greater consensus in the Chamber than might otherwise be the case. We tabled the motion to impress on the Minister once again the importance of exports to the local economy and the need to support key sectors and to target key markets. Additionally, we call on the Minister to make sure that, as a devolved Administration, we are to the fore in getting out there and showing the world what we have to offer and, in so doing, bringing greater opportunities, wealth and prosperity to everyone in Northern Ireland.



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Written Questions

Carol Nolan asked the Minister for Education and Skills two questions:

1. The situation with respect to student fees for cross-Border students in view of Brexit; if he will guarantee currently enrolled students from the North or Britain that they will not be considered as international students for fee purposes in view of Brexit; if he discussed this matter with his counterparts in Britain or the North; and if he will make a statement on the matter.
2. The plans his Department has made to address the potential impact of Brexit on the education system, particularly in the areas of research and development; and if he will make a statement on the matter.█

Richard Bruton: The Government has a contingency framework in place which maps the key issues that will be most important to Ireland in the coming weeks and months. The Government has published the key actions that will be taken to address the contingencies arising from the UK's decision to leave the EU.

My Department participated fully in and contributed to the preparation of this framework for the education sector and have identified student flows as a priority area. Negotiations on the future EU UK relationship will now be required and officials from my Department will engage fully in these discussions with the EU and the UK to protect our special relationship with Northern Ireland and the UK.

My Department is conscious of the resulting pressures that may fall on the Irish higher education system following the UK's decision to leave the EU. My Department will be liaising with all relevant parties, including the relevant education departments in the UK in relation to these pressures. These include issues with regard to the movement of students between this State and the UK, fees and student grant arrangements and engagement in research cooperation, including under EU funding programmes.

The Irish Universities Association has issued a statement reassuring all UK students currently enrolled in an Irish university that they will continue to enjoy the same conditions as other EU

students regarding fees and contributions, for the duration of their degree. The Irish universities also confirmed that UK applicants planning to enter an Irish university in 2016 will likewise enjoy these same conditions as other EU students for the duration of their degree.

In addition, Universities UK and the UK Student Loans Company (SLC) have made statements regarding EU nationals studying in the UK. Universities UK have stated that their first priority will be to convince the UK Government to take steps to ensure that students from EU countries can continue to study at British universities in the long term. The UK SLC has stated that EU nationals or their family members, currently in higher education, and who are assessed as eligible to receive loans and/or grants from the SLC, will continue to receive these loans and grants until they finish their course.

Source: <https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2016-10-11a.465&s=cross-border#g466.q>