

**Conference of the Italian Academics and Researchers in the UK**  
**AISUK (Association of Italian Scientists in the UK) Official Statement**

The community of Italian academics and researchers in the United Kingdom amounts to approximately 5,000 people, engaged in research across all disciplines in the physical, engineering, biomedical, social, and human sciences. We are the largest community of non-British researchers after the Germans. We work in many universities, including all the best departments and research centres in the country. In addition, many (almost 7000) Italian students undertake master and PhD programmes in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

AISUK (Association of Italian Scientists in the UK) was established in 2015 and has now more than 350 members. Our members are academics and researchers at various stages of their careers, across the whole country. The board of directors, research area coordinators, geographic coordinators and other collaborators can be found on our web site: [www.aisuk.org](http://www.aisuk.org).

Our presence in the UK is no coincidence. Contrary to a very popular expression, we do not feel part of a “brain-drain”. In a global labour market we look for the best job opportunities. The quality of the research environment, of colleagues and collaborators, the availability of laboratories and other research facilities, the availability of funds for our research, and the salary are the main elements we take into account in our professional decisions. The United Kingdom has so far been a success story in scientific research. It has attracted researchers from all over the world. Although the research investment as a proportion of GDP is relatively low compared to other countries, the UK is second only to the United States for scientific output.<sup>2</sup> The regular evaluation of research projects and academic departments, a competitive funding system and the regular and continued availability of resources for the most innovative projects are among the key features of the British system. These features have led an international scientific environment, promoting collaborations beyond geographical boundaries. In the conference, we will discuss this topic, with a session on “The Organization of Academic Systems: Research Evaluation (in Italy and UK).” We hope that the rigorous, evidence-based analysis will shed light on a topic where different opinions are sometimes driven by ideology.

As we have already pointed out in the past, the choice of “Brexit” by the United Kingdom, regrettably, goes against the international openness of the scientific system and can have a negative impact on it. Policies aimed to reduce immigration and the anti-immigrant rhetoric will affect the ability to attract and retain many researchers (and students), depriving the British scientific community of ideas and talents. Exiting the European Union also risks causing a slowdown of the British economy: less economic growth means fewer resources for everyone, including our centres, laboratories and hospitals. Moreover, the EU has represented an extraordinary source of funding for our studies, such as for example the European Research Councils grants. It is now uncertain whether the UK government has the resources and the intent to guarantee such economic support in the years to come. We regret these developments in the country where we live and that we love, and we hope that politics will seriously take into account the consequences of Brexit. We offer our

contribution, with a session of our conference on “The Impact of Brexit on the Academia in the UK and Abroad.”

Unfortunately, Italy is not very attractive to researchers. It seems to us that, rather than focusing on how to make the Italian scientists go back to Italy, the main issue should be how to reform the system so that it becomes globally attractive, regardless of the nationality of the researchers. We wonder how the Italian government wants to address this issue. As we have observed in the past, a negative "shock" for the UK research system can be a great opportunity for the Italian system. How does the Italian government intend to attract the many researchers, Italian and not, who might consider the United Kingdom a less attractive scientific work environment?

We believe that the Italian scientific community in the United Kingdom is a great asset, both for the United Kingdom and for Italy. Like all other researchers in the UK, we are concerned about the potential negative impact of Brexit. As European citizens, we are concerned about the residence and work permit for all European Union researchers (as well as for British researchers in other European countries), and we call on both the British authorities and the European Union to reach an agreement on this point soon. Finally, we hope that Italy will want to reform and strengthen its academic and research system, to make it more open and international. We are ready to offer our disinterested opinion about this, based on direct knowledge of the British and international research systems.

