



Achievements of the White Rose Brussels Office from 2015-2020

1 Introduction

The WRB Office was set up in October 2015 with initial funding for three years, with the purpose of raising the research profile of the three universities in Europe. The WR Executive Board granted an extension of an additional two years, up to October 2020.

Key achievements, impact and performances over the last five years are highlighted below against the business case of the WRB Office.

2 Key achievements, impact and performances over the last five years

2.1 Profile Raising – Engaging with Stakeholders

2.1A Strategic White Rose events

We hosted eight strategically focused events in Brussels to raise the profile of the excellent research at the WR Universities. These events addressed key EU policy issues, invited dialogue with stakeholders and increased the reputation of the WR Universities. **They have attracted senior leaders in the Commission and Parliament, and those who influence the policy decisions of those leaders.**

Key achievements and outcomes:

- Held eight strategic WR events, four in the European Parliament, with **over 700 registered attendees** in total, the majority of which were new to the WR Universities
- **Phil Hogan, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development** spoke at our Food Security event in June 2017. This was a great outcome as the profile of the 3 WR Universities was raised with **the most senior Commission official in charge of agriculture and agricultural research.**
- Our climate change event had 80 people attending, with **Gerda Verburg, Assistant Secretary-General to the UN** as a key-note speaker and Seb Dance, MEP for London as the host of the event. It was a great outcome to have Gerda and Seb supporting our event as it attracted a huge interest and raised the profile of the WR Universities to the UN and the European Parliament. This in turn led to our best attended event and Seb Dance commented that he had *“never seen the room in the European Parliament so full before”*.
- The Robotics event in Brussels has **stimulated very positive conversations across the Universities** about collaboration back in the UK. A White Rose Robotics and Autonomous Systems event was subsequently held in the UK in October 2019. This has generated ideas for specific initiatives that are being further explored. A key focus is securing additional large-scale investment into the Universities.

Case study 1:

Adapting to climate change: Are our solutions working?

Prof. Duncan Cameron was contacted by a policy advisor to John Howarth MEP after she attended the Climate Change event. She said “*I found your presentation both fascinating and very well presented, my congratulations*”, and requested a copy of Duncan’s policy paper on a sustainable model for intensive agriculture.

2.1B Engage with Brussels events

We supported academics to hold events/workshops in Brussels to engage with key stakeholders in Brussels. **We’ve held** seven Engage with Brussels events, five of which were in the European Parliament, a key achievement of engagement with EU policy makers.

Case study 2:

Regions, cities & the EU after Brexit: Towards a ‘multi-speed’ Europe?

A direct impact of supporting this activity was that SPERI (Sheffield Political Economics Research Institute) organised an additional academic symposium in Brussels in conjunction with the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS), a centre left European think tank. A further outcome of the event was that Dr Scott Lavery, Research Fellow at SPERI, returned to Brussels in May 2018 to interview a number of Brussels stakeholders on the ‘Capital Markets Union’, a key aspect of the debate on competition between financial centres after Brexit.

Case study 3:

Energy poverty and social isolation

Dr Lucie Middlemiss, Leeds said “*There were the direct benefits of sharing our research with a mixed group of stakeholders from multiple European nations. They were a very diverse group, but all interested and knowledgeable about the issue. Having MEP Teresa Griffin chair the event was also fantastic – **no matter what the future for us in Europe we can use her as a powerful ally in the future** I think. I’ve had a number of new followers on twitter, and have circulated some of my work to attendees. The indirect benefits were in the side conversations we had with people that attended. We met Lara Blake – from DG Justice before the event. She is very supportive of our agenda and I think we will include her on our next bid (advisory board).*”

2.2 Influencing and Information Gathering

Our office gathered information on EU research, innovation and education policy areas for the WR Universities and sought to influence key stakeholders in these areas. This information was fed back to the WR Universities via the Brussels Briefing email.

Insights into future European funding programmes

We organised an event with Dan Nica MEP, the EP’s rapporteur for the Horizon Europe proposal to discuss the latest developments of the EP on the Horizon Europe proposal and to influence the EP’s position to be more supportive of excellent research. Prof. Debbie Smith, PVC for Research (York) attended. We gained an important insight into the EP’s agenda and that of the Romanian presidency of the Council.

Insights into UK-European university strategic partnerships

We met with Lesley Wilson, Secretary General of the European University Association, with Prof. Hai-Sui Yu, DVC for International (Leeds) who gave an insight into the level of interest of UK universities in forming strategic partnerships with European universities.

Influencing UK Government's position on Horizon Europe

We met with Frank Moeschler, First Secretary for R&I, UK Permanent Representation to the EU on the latest developments on the Horizon Europe proposal. We took this opportunity to influence the UK Government's position (and that of the WR Universities) and to reiterate the focus on excellent research and support for the ERC.

2.3 Engaging with Alumni

We held two Leeds alumni event and two Sheffield alumni events (one with Prof. Dave Petley, VP for R&I) over the last four years. The Brussels alumni were all very interested in working with their alma maters and we generated huge interest in the WR alumni event on 19 November 2019. We had three high profile alumni speaking at the WR event, Lyn Trytsman-Gray, Senior Vice President, European Affairs at RTL Group & Board member of the Association of Commercial Television (Sheffield), Sarah Azarmgin, Senior Manager, Enterprise Risk Management at Coca-Cola European Partners (Leeds) and Stephen Quest, Director General, DG TAXUD – Taxation and Customs Union, European Commission (York).

2.4 Other

2.4A EU Teams visit to Brussels

We organised three EU funding teams visits to Brussels. Two research support staff members with responsibility for EU funding from each WR University came to Brussels to meet with European Commission officials, MEPs, and other university representative offices to gather intelligence on future European funding calls and collaborations. The staff members found the visit very useful and the added value of the visits was facilitating these meetings that would not have happened otherwise.

2.4B WRB Interns

We trained 12 recent graduates from the WR Universities on internships over the five years. After their internships, the WRB interns are working for the following organisations:

- Royal Society
- Fleishman Hillard
- Crowdhelix Network
- BEIS
- Business West
- Forrest Brown
- FCO
- Masters degree at Columbia University
- NatCen Social Research
- Masters degree at University of Leeds
- Masters degree at the University of Amsterdam
- Actively job seeking

A key achievement is the 14 reports written by the interns and shared with key staff at the WR Universities and they have been very well received.

Case study 4:

Aya-Nay Haddad wrote a policy note on "Housing Policy Challenges and Responses in the EU", working for Prof. John Flint, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, Sheffield. Prof. Flint said "*Aya's report provides an excellent resource for anyone interested in understanding how countries across Europe are responding to the growing challenge of providing affordable and appropriate housing for all*".

2.4C Insight policy notes

Insight policy notes are short EU policy reports written by White Rose College of the Arts & Humanities (WRoCAH) PhD students during their one-month Researcher Employability Placement at the WRB Office. The policy notes are in areas of EU research and education policy such as Horizon Europe and the European Universities Initiative. The Insight policy notes are shared with key staff at the WR universities.

These WRoCAH placements demonstrate another useful facet of WRBO, and form one of the ways we seek to strengthen the White Rose Consortium more generally. The WRoCAH PhD students gain a better understanding of working outside research environment and it has helped them to make their future career decisions.

Case study 5:

One WRoCAH PhD student gained a placement with WRAP (Waste Resource Action Programme) a policy-focused organisation working towards a sustainable, resource efficient economy and stated that his work with the WRB was instrumental with this.

2.4D Staff development opportunities

We supported WR universities' staff with their work in Brussels. Here are two examples:

Sabrina Zissler, Global Partnerships Manager, University of York said *"As Global Engagement Partnerships Manager at the University of York, I have had the opportunity to promote the role of the WRB office on many occasions during meetings with African, European and American partners. I have found that the mention of our presence in Brussels provides reassurance to our partners regarding our role in Europe. I have been able to explain the role of the WRB office and give examples of activities carried out by the office including lobbying, research workshops and profile raising. **The mention of WRB office has been more and more valuable in the current political context.** Not only does it show that the University of York is outward looking but that it invests in international partnerships."*

Julia Pitchford, EU Recruitment Officer, University of Sheffield, met with Brussels-based students, after which two students received offers from Sheffield. Julia commented *"Having the physical presence of the WRB Office and an extended team to help support recruitment activity, has been invaluable to me over my two years as an EU Recruitment Officer here in Sheffield. The office itself has not only been convenient for me to use as a base to work from and offer one to one counselling and conversion meetings (twice a year), but also **gives more credibility to our name/reputation** rather than just meeting in a coffee shop or hotel lobby. It is also something which our Belgian Agent mentions when talking to students. From a purely practical perspective, it means I have been able to send and leave marketing materials for future occasions, and save on the cost (and weight) of travelling with these each time".*