

EU IN BRUM

Public network for positive people who believe in remaining – and want to do something about it



Remain IN Brum rally, Sat 3rd Sept – Speeches

Graham Stroud, former research Director at the EU Commission

There was a lot talked during the referendum campaign about what the EU costs, most of it barefaced lies, as we now know.

In monetary terms, EU membership costs each and every one of us the equivalent of one cup of coffee per week, but I would argue that that it actually costs nothing at all when you add up the massive benefits that we get for that paltry cost.

What does it buy us?

Firstly, tariff-free access to the largest and richest market for goods and services in the world. It doesn't matter what measures you use to gauge its size, the EU is the world's biggest market and being part of it is of colossal benefit to both manufacturers and consumers. And access to the single market also gives you consumer rights that apply right across Europe.

Next, we get access to the EU's regional and social funds. Between 2007 and 2013, the West Midlands received £640m from the regional development funds and the European Social Funds. This money went to support small businesses in their development, it got 61,000 people into work, 48,000 14-19 year olds went into education, employment and training as a result. The list goes on. So much social funding that people think comes from central government actually comes from the EU and we abandon that at our peril.

Our one cup of coffee per week also gives us access to the largest and most efficient publicly-funded research and development programme on earth. And it's a programme where just in cash terms, the UK gets back far more than it pays in.

In the last EU research programme, West Midlands companies, universities and research centres participated in around 1000 projects and received more than €350m of EU funding. However (and this is what makes it so important), that participation gave them access to the results of research costing nearly €3 billion. Around 200 of the West Midlands beneficiaries were small companies and the main areas funded were, as you would expect, transport, materials, production and nanosciences. In total, the UK received back €7 billion from the EU's last R&D programme.

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And that trend continues with the current programme, where, just over two years in, the West Midlands has received nearly €150m, giving access to €1 billion worth of research results and the UK as a whole has already received €2.3 billion.

I've heard people ask what R&D has to do with ordinary people. Well, EU-funded research has led to:

1. The technology in your mobile phones
2. The development of high-definition television
3. The decoding of the human genome, opening up the possibility of gene therapy
4. Novel treatments for cancer, including proton-beam therapy
5. Keeping GPS satellites synchronized, so you don't end up miles from your destination when you use a satnav

These are just some of the success stories; I could have mentioned thousands more.

Right now, researchers at Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital are preparing research projects on fighting one of the next big killers – sepsis. And they are desperately worried that not having access to the EU's R&D programme will ruin their chances of successfully carrying out research with the European partners they need to collaborate with.

But surely the government can now take over paying for this research, I've heard people suggest.

Unfortunately, they can't – the EU's programme is absolutely unique in the way it operates and has been built up over 45 years to its current pre-eminent position in the world. Every £1 spent on EU research generates £7 worth of economic activity. No single country could possibly replicate it. To paraphrase a researcher I know at Birmingham University, "without access to the EU's R&D programme, the UK can kiss goodbye to its dreams of having a knowledge-based economy".

The university sector has made it quite clear that leaving the EU's research programmes would be catastrophic and that we should pay to stay in – a number of non-EU countries pay to be part of the programme, after all. Unfortunately, our much-vaunted savings would not go very far, as the budget rebate that we currently get would disappear, of course, so that leaves even less to be spent on the NHS...


I haven't time to detail them all, but one other important benefit needs to be mentioned. Every year, the EU's education programme Erasmus+ enables more than 400,000 young people to study or pursue personal development programmes in other European countries. It has become a significant part of university courses and a significant source of income for universities.

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I think by now that it will be clear what I think will be the effects of leaving the EU.

Would we really jeopardize all or even some of those gains for the sake of the cost of a cup of coffee per week?

And don't imagine that we will take back control of our destiny. We are already part of a global economy where decisions are made elsewhere and leaving the EU is not going to change that – it's just going to weaken our clout on the international stage and give us no say in what the EU does.

Many are campaigning to remind politicians that 48% of those who voted on June 23rd voted to remain. I like to put it another way – 62% of the electorate did not vote to leave the EU and I will never stop extolling the virtues of remaining a member.



EU IN BRUM and Graham Stroud 2016

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