

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP
Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office &
Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP
Chancellor of the Exchequer
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
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18 May 2020

Dear Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster,
Dear Chancellor of the Exchequer,

The need for an immediate financial commitment on Horizon Europe association

COVID-19 represents a huge challenge for UK policymakers and the science community stands fully behind efforts to tackle the immediate threat and begin the journey to recovery. While this remains our top priority for the foreseeable future, and an area in which the Royal Society will continue to offer its support, I am writing to raise an urgent matter for UK science that was a major concern prior to the pandemic and remains so now.

With the scheduled start of the next European Union Framework Programme, Horizon Europe, a matter of months away, the science community is increasingly concerned by the lack of certainty in the UK's position on seeking an association agreement with the EU.

The possibility of the UK falling out of European research programmes at end of 2020 carries significant risks to UK science that will have knock-on effects for the British public. Europe is by some distance our biggest and fastest growing scientific collaborator. Just over a third of UK research papers are co-authored with researchers in EU and associated countries, compared with 17.6% with the USA. Collaboration through the EU Framework Programmes has led to advances in medicine and public health, cleaner energy, environment and transport innovations, the creation of jobs in UK regions, as well as growth and export opportunities for UK businesses.

In the most immediate context, UK-based scientists are highly involved in COVID-19 relevant research funded by the European Research Council (ERC), leading one in five projects related to tackling the pandemic. Now, perhaps more than ever, we are seeing the value of scientific research and the need for international scientific collaboration.

Continued uncertainty raises the prospect of a multi-million pound funding gap emerging at the end of the year and the loss of active research groups, networks and partnerships. It also increases the likelihood of an exodus of scientific talent. Among those beginning to look elsewhere are researchers with prestigious ERC grants that can only be held in EU or associated countries. Over the last five years, there have been around 840 UK-based holders of ERC grants who employ on average six researchers. This means that approximately 5,000 researchers work on projects led by a grant holder in the UK.

While the Government's intention may be to prepare for association, failure to communicate this publicly will continue to undermine confidence within the science community and increase the chances of the UK losing talent to other countries. To help prevent this, the Royal Society is urging the Government to

signal publicly its desire to associate to Horizon Europe and to offer an immediate financial commitment covering:

- Association to Horizon Europe
- UK involvement in third country Horizon Europe schemes in the event that association is delayed
- UK applicants to ERC and other mono-beneficiary Horizon Europe schemes as they prepare their applications¹

We propose that the commitment matches the estimated value to UK research and innovation of associating to Horizon Europe of approximately £2 billion a year and should be additional to R&D funds committed in the March Budget.

Taking this important step will give much needed confidence to scientists that the Government is committed to negotiating an agreement on Horizon Europe and also has a back-up plan in the event of delays or no eventual agreement. Critically, it will help avert major disruption to our science capability in 6 to 12 months when the UK will most need its researchers in COVID-19 mitigation and recovery efforts.

Yours sincerely



Venki Ramakrishnan PRS
President, The Royal Society

Copied to:
David Frost, Chief Negotiator, Cabinet Office
Charles Roxburgh, Second Permanent Secretary, HM Treasury
Jo Shanmugalingam, Director General, Industrial Strategy, Science and Innovation, BEIS

¹ This has precedent in the UK's no-deal preparations which provided an underwrite for UK participation in third country schemes and contingency for UK Research and Innovation to manage "the independent assessment of relevant UK bids to mono-beneficiary Horizon 2020 calls...if they are not assessed by the European Commission" (October 2019).