

Briefing from the Royal Society of Biology on Brexit, science and innovation

September 2018

The Royal Society of Biology (RSB) is a single unified voice for the life sciences, representing a large membership of individuals, learned societies and other organisations¹. In this short briefing, we summarise some key points from the bioscience community, relevant to the potential effects of Brexit, and of importance to the UK's future. There are **fundamental needs** that are of vital importance for the UK bioscience community to achieve its **realistic potential to provide excellent return on public investment, deliver substantial benefit to UK society, and contribute to the UK's international standing**. In summary, these needs are:

- **COMMUNICATION: Government should be swift, active and clear in communicating with the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) community on decisions relevant to immigration rules and regulations, and funding agreements for research, innovation and higher education, in both the short and long term.**

Clear communications, such as those provided currently by the UK Research Office (UKRO)², are helpful and welcome, but there remains a need for ongoing and active communication. For example, the national and international STEM community need reassurances, in addition to those already provided^{3,4} that Government will act to rebalance available support should sources of EU funding be unavailable in a no-deal Brexit scenario. Vulnerability of access to Horizon 2020 calls unavailable to third countries, including European Research Council (ERC) grants, some Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions (MSCA) and the SME instrument⁵ is of particular concern, both in relation to funding and collaboration benefits.

Government must safeguard and facilitate the welcoming and inclusive environment that is key for science-based businesses and innovation, and ensure that communications on an international stage provide an effective showcase for UK employment opportunities in STEM.

We will not realise the full benefit of policy to support people in gaining science experience, work and study opportunities in the UK, and reciprocal schemes abroad, without active communication with the relevant communities - including strong, transparent and consistent messaging from Government on the rules for access, the reasons behind them, and the broader context.

- **COMMUNITY SUPPORT: We must have ready access to EU and global networks, funding, expertise and infrastructure to enable the knowledge and resource sharing that are essential to support innovation and development.**

Any future agreement must facilitate collaboration and dialogue between UK and EU regulatory and funding agencies, EU Reference Networks and Reference Laboratories, in addition to support for existing projects and collaborations-in-planning, so as to support continuity of delivery. This exchange

¹ <https://www.rsb.org.uk/membership>

² https://www.ukro.ac.uk/Documents/factsheet_brexit.pdf?pubdate=20180810

³ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2018-07-24/HCWS926/>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-certainty-on-eu-funding-for-hundreds-of-british-projects>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/horizon-2020-funding-if-theres-no-brexit-deal/horizon-2020-funding-if-theres-no-brexit-deal--2>

must be two-way, and accommodate access with international communities, including low income countries. Maintaining and expanding our scientific communities offers clear and direct benefits to public and animal health and welfare, and to the economy.

Government's extended guarantee⁶ that, in the event of a no-deal Brexit, UK researchers and businesses would be able to apply as third country participants in all Horizon 2020 calls, from the date of exit to 2020, is welcome. However, Government should seek beneficial arrangements for those UK participants not covered by the guarantee, for example where consortia leadership or compliance with member state thresholds are affected. It is imperative that Government seeks the fullest possible participation for the UK in Horizon Europe.

- **MOVEMENT: The capacity to attract highly skilled people to the UK is vital and should be simple, efficient and consistent in operation. All skill, qualification and professional levels must be considered for recruitment and retention in UK STEM roles, including in study and work settings.**

Regulations need to accommodate relevant salaries, continued professional development, well-being, inclusivity, and ease of movement for dependants (family). We welcome Government's aspiration to continue to support the ERASMUS+ programme in the event of a no-deal Brexit⁷; temporary student placements, such as ERASMUS+, should be exempt from any quota.

Immigration policies must be nimble, efficient processes (for example to enable short-term visas). Revision of the arbitrary Tier 2 Visa cap to remove doctors and nurses⁸ from this category is a welcome development, and we wish to highlight the need for accommodation of a wide range of skills and expertise across the biosciences and STEM sector⁹, including on the shortage occupation list. These skills are of vital importance to the UK economy, and to society as a whole.

- **HARMONISATION: To support collaboration and trade we need legislative and regulatory harmony with the EU, through support for necessary common standards and frameworks; divergence should only be considered following detailed community consultation, ensuring full exploration of all implications.**

Trade, for example in agricultural and pharmaceutical products and medicines; the movement of living animals and organisms; medicines (including vaccines) approval and licencing, regulation and supply; and clinical trials regulation, are all areas requiring detailed consideration of the bioscience-relevant and public health implications.

We welcome the opportunity to provide comment on this important matter. Further information in relation to this summary of points can be found in previous responses to related inquiries and consultations^{10,11,12}.

For any queries, please contact the Science Policy Team at Royal Society of Biology, Charles Darwin House, 12 Roger Street, London, WC1N 2JU. Email: policy@rsb.org.uk

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/horizon-2020-funding-if-theres-no-brexiteal/horizon-2020-funding-if-theres-no-brexiteal--2>

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/erasmus-in-the-uk-if-theres-no-brexiteal>

⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/doctors-and-nurses-to-be-taken-out-of-tier-2-visa-cap>

⁹ https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/RSB_response_Life_Sciences_Industrial_Strategy_inquiry_submitted.pdf

¹⁰ https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/article/policy/RSB_response_to_HoC_STC_Brexit_science_and_innovation_Summit_inquiry_for_submission.pdf

¹¹ https://www.rsb.org.uk/images/Policy/RSB_response_to_HoC_STC_An_Immigration_system_that_works_for_science_and_innovation_inquiry_for_submission.pdf

¹² <https://www.rsb.org.uk/policy/consultations/consultation-responses>