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GAMBICA industry position on UK access to Horizon Europe funding

Summary

GAMBICA urges the UK government to find a solution with the European Union to allow the UK research community to continue participation in the Horizon Europe programme.

If the UK is excluded from funding for important collaborative research projects, then it will be a severe disadvantage not only to the UK research capabilities, but to wider society and business that rely on the innovation to improve many aspects of our daily lives. Once lost or diminished, it will be difficult to recover the talent, expertise and resources in the UK research community.

Alternative UK replacements for the Horizon Europe funding would be by far a second-best option. Funding is only part of the issue, but a very important aspect is to be part of a multi-country collaborative research programme to get the best outcome and value.

Position

The European Research council has announced that at least 19 UK based scientists of the 115 who will lose their prestigious Horizon Europe grants are preparing to leave the UK. Access to Horizon Europe for UK scientists has been jeopardised as a consequence of the dispute over the Northern Ireland protocol.

The UK punches far above its weight in terms of research. We have long been a powerhouse of scientific discovery, with breakthroughs in the UK on climate change adaptation and mitigation, vaccine and gene therapies, materials and industrial innovation. The UK is seen around the world as exporting high quality goods at the cutting edge of innovation. But without a sound scientific base, export income, which is based on our exploitation of research developments, will crash. This is not an area where we can go it alone - the importance of collaboration in research development was massively underlined by one example, the rapidity of vaccine development in response to Covid.

Under a plan drawn up as part of EU withdrawal, the UK would pay £15bn as an associate member into the Horizon Europe scheme over seven years and UK scientists could still bid for Horizon funding. Grants were awarded on this basis, but contracts could not be signed until the UK was formally awarded associate status, which has been withheld. The [European Research Council](#) announced last month that: "The 115 ERC grants offered to UK based researchers will be

terminated now that the 29 June deadline has passed.” The UK’s political response has resulted in a dispute with the EU, with mention of replacement money being made available.

Even if the promises of replacement funding are met, this is a hugely risky approach. Once lost, our scientific expertise cannot be rebuilt. As a high wage, service-based economy, the UK relies on its exports to achieve some sort of balance of payments. Our exports are relatively expensive, so they have to be both high quality and technologically advanced. Research is critical to our economy and to our exports, whether they be in advanced manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, financial technologies or services.

Despite the warm words about a home-grown replacement for Horizon Europe, whether sufficient funds can be made available given the many competing demands of the current economic crisis is, at best, uncertain. Worse, by risking our scientists moving abroad to find grants and collaboration opportunities overseas the government risks:

- Having far fewer world leading academics remaining in the UK to teach and inspire the coming generations;
- Opportunities for collaborations with leading innovators from the rest of Europe reducing hugely;
- Fewer academic spin-offs developing commercial products from university research;
- A declining UK market for research equipment, laboratory space, education and scientists; and
- Declining exports as technological innovation elsewhere leaves our products behind.

Sir Adrian Smith, president of the Royal Society, recently commented: “While the UK government’s underwrite will support scientists to continue their research, the best outcome for both UK and European science is full association to Horizon Europe. The priority must be resolving this political impasse so that the valuable collaborations and relationships that have been built up over decades are not lost.”

Horizon Europe grant recipient Giovanni Rosotti, of the University of Leicester, is one of those planning a move to out of the UK. [While] “It’s not the only factor... losing access to ERC funds was a big reason behind my decision to move back to Europe,” he said. “I decided to move because the ERC is not simply a large amount of funding, it’s also very well-known and therefore it attracts the best talent from all over the world when hiring students and post-docs, which I’ll need to do in the coming months. There’s no guarantee that the alternative replacement scheme from the UK government will do the same. Also, without access to the ERC, the funding for science in UK will massively decrease, and so betting long-term on the UK didn’t sound a wise choice to me.”

About GAMBICA

GAMBICA is the UK Trade Association for Instrumentation, Control, Automation and Laboratory Technology.



Our insight and influence help our members to be more competitive by increasing their knowledge and impact. Together we remove barriers and maximise the market potential in our industry.

- We form a community of members and stakeholders
- We influence policy, standards and regulation
- We publish unique market reports and forecasts
- We promote our industry and the benefits of technology

GAMBICA members are active in the industrial automation, process instrumentation & control, test & measurement and the laboratory technology sectors. Find out more about us at www.gambica.org.uk