

25 February 2019

Dear Colleague,

Universities UK remains deeply committed to protecting and strengthening our European links as the UK leaves the EU. Throughout this process, we have been unequivocal that we would like to see a negotiated settlement that protects citizens' rights and provides for continued UK participation in vital EU research and higher education programmes. Therefore, recent uncertainty over the ratification of the withdrawal agreement has been deeply concerning for UK academics, students and university leaders, and in particular for university research and innovation.

While we still have a great many unanswered questions, the UK Government has already taken steps to provide a degree of certainty with respect to UK involvement in the Horizon 2020 programme. I am writing to reiterate what these measures cover and why we trust that the Government will make good on its commitments to the science and research sector.

There are two specific UK Government announcements that I would like to draw to your attention. Firstly, in August 2016 the UK Government issued a statement in which they committed to underwrite all Horizon 2020 funding awarded to UK research entities as a result of a successful competitive bid submitted before the UK leaves the EU.

The second relevant government announcement came in July 2018 and extended the original guarantee to cover funding secured by UK applicants as a result of a successful competitive bid to Horizon 2020 submitted between exit day and the end of the Horizon 2020 programme in December 2020. This extension means that UK researchers can continue to access the funding required to participate in multi-beneficiary projects with European partners until the end of 2020 and for the lifetime of projects. Further information on the underwrite guarantee and extension is available in the UK Government's [technical notice on Horizon 2020 funding in case of a 'no deal' Brexit](#).

Following the publication of the joint UK-EU statement on the withdrawal agreement in December 2017, we have been optimistic that the UK Government's underwrite guarantee and extension would not be needed because the UK would remain a full participant in Horizon 2020 under the terms of the withdrawal agreement. However, in view of the elevated threat of the UK leaving the EU without a deal on 29 March 2019, we have been liaising with government to clarify how the Horizon 2020 funding guarantees would be implemented and what these would mean in practice for researchers and universities.

The most important point to note is that UK researchers will receive the full amount of funding that they would have expected to receive for all Horizon 2020 projects that they apply for before the UK leaves. This will apply for the full duration of all successful bids, even when projects last beyond the exit date or any implementation period.

The same commitment applies to bids that UK researchers submit to Horizon 2020 calls after the exit date, providing that they are eligible to apply as a third country. The vast majority of multi-beneficiary Horizon 2020 funding calls are open to third countries on a self-funded basis. It should also be noted that, according to the current Horizon 2020 rules of participation, third countries are permitted to coordinate projects.

The only qualification to this guarantee concerns multi-beneficiary Horizon 2020 projects which would fall below the minimum eligibility requirement for three different Member States or Associated Countries to be represented in consortia. Universities UK is seeking urgent clarity from the UK Government and the European Commission about how these projects would be treated should the UK leave the EU without a withdrawal agreement. We are aware that some institutions and other national funders have encouraged their researchers involved in projects which could be affected to find additional researchers from other Member States or Associated Countries to join their consortia to ensure that they would continue to meet this requirement.

The extension to the guarantee will apply to all successful competitive bids to Horizon 2020 submitted between exit day and the end of 2020, when the current Horizon 2020 programme is due to end. Both the guarantee and the extension will fund successful projects for their lifetime. The UK's involvement in the Horizon Europe programme, due to start in 2021, remains a matter for negotiation and will depend on the EU negotiation of the legislation for this programme. Universities UK would like the UK to secure full Associated Country status in this programme.

We understand that UK Government guarantees do not carry legal weight in other EU Member States and that funders in other countries may be sceptical about these commitments. Nonetheless, we have received cast-iron assurances from ministers and senior officials that the underwrite will be honoured and that the promised funding will be forthcoming. We have several reasons for trusting the government's commitment to providing stable funding for university research:

- The Prime Minister has repeatedly stated her commitment to ensuring that UK-EU scientific collaboration continues to flourish after the UK leaves the EU.
- The government has already stated that it is open to the possibility of associating to Horizon Europe.
- Since 2017, the government has set a target to increase investment in research and development to 2.4% of gross national product from the current level of 1.7%. This target is embedded in the Government's Industrial Strategy white paper.

Separate from the UK Government guarantees, the European Commission proposed a new regulation on UK participation in the 2019 EU budget in a 'no deal' scenario on 30 January 2019. It opens the door for the UK to continue to pay into the 2019 EU budget in return for continued eligibility for EU funding until the end of the year. It also provides that the European Commission would continue to make payments to UK entities already in receipt of EU funding, and that the UK would continue to contribute towards to minimum eligibility criteria.

If this proposal is accepted by the UK Government in a 'no deal' scenario, this would delay the need to implement the existing funding guarantees until the end of 2019. The UK Government has not given an explicit response to this offer, but has stated that '[it has] been clear that if the UK left the EU without a deal, the UK has obligations to the EU, and the EU obligations to the UK, that will survive the UK's withdrawal – and that these would need to be resolved'.

Universities UK places an extremely high value on our European collaboration links and will continue to work to ensure the best possible post-Brexit settlement for research and innovation. Any steps that you could take to reassure researchers in your country that they can continue to collaborate with UK counterparts in EU projects with the assurance of UK Government funding to underwrite UK involvement would be very much appreciated.

I would encourage you to contact my colleagues at Universities UK International, Anne-May Janssen, Head of European Engagement, [annemay.janssen@international.ac.uk](mailto:annemay.janssen@international.ac.uk) or Peter Mason, Policy Manager (EU research and innovation), [peter.mason@international.ac.uk](mailto:peter.mason@international.ac.uk), if you have further questions or if you would like to suggest additional steps that you think could be taken to counteract the current uncertainty.

With kind regards,

Professor Dame Janet Beer  
Vice-Chancellor, University of Liverpool and President, Universities UK