



## **No Deal Brexit very bad news – not least for Science**

**By Ian Taylor**

Advocates of Leave in the 2016 Referendum never implied such an outcome would seriously disrupt lives, cost jobs or diminish living standards. But that is what is now facing the citizens of this country, especially if we leave with No Deal. This would have disastrous consequences for businesses, create chaos at the borders, drive up food prices and lead to a shortage of essential goods. It would also mean turbulent prolonged uncertainty of how to secure a future trade relationship with by far our largest market without transitional arrangements in place.

This Government is being deaf to experts when it advocates No Deal (even when the advice comes from Civil Servants). For the hugely important science and research sector, this is both depressing and scary. No amount of upbeat messages from Downing Street touting the benefits of science should disguise the reality that Brexit is harmful to scientific strength in the UK.

The Francis Crick Institute's Chief Executive, Nobel Scientist Paul Nurse, warned "The concerns [in the scientific community] are less to do with money, less to do with the things people talk about, but more to do with a feeling the country has lost its way." He stressed that it would be harmful not to be part of the future EU science research funding mechanism which promotes meaningful collaboration and has a reputation that no domestic scheme can hope to replicate.

Attracting European research talent goes hand in glove with enticing and retaining inward R&D investment. Failure on one harms the other. Without the people, we cannot offer an attractive inward investment climate, and other countries will find it easier to tempt research spending away from our shores.

The current Government has promised that future immigration policy won't hinder foreign scientists from coming. Yet the atmosphere surrounding Brexit is a deterrent in itself – which is already becoming apparent. It not sufficient just to be a possible destination, we must continue to be a popular one amongst the increasingly competitive global options.

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The UK is one of the largest recipients of European Union research funding. Despite Ministerial assurances of underwriting the funds of any “in-flight” Horizon 2020 applications in the event that we leave the EU without a deal, the mid-term loss of ability to participate in future European Research Council grants and prestigious collaboration is depressing.

Sir Venki Ramakrishnan, President of the Royal Society, has noted that “half of international academic talent in UK universities comes from the European Union and the EU is our single largest research collaborator”.

UK science thrives because it operates without frontiers. Creating the right climate for both investors and researchers means providing access to talented people and facilities whilst encouraging the flow of ideas across borders. Incidentally it is absurd to suggest that post Brexit we will develop stronger links with the rest of the world. We are doing this anyway – partly because leading scientists globally have seen the UK as integral to EU research collaboration.

Leaving without transitional arrangements will create hazards. For example, it might rupture negotiations for a continued UK relationship with Euratom leaving unresolved the negotiation of associate membership for the UK in respect of research collaboration on nuclear fusion beyond 2022. Working outside of Euratom would reduce the reliability by which the UK can secure a consistent supply of radioisotopes which have a range of applications in medicine, leave the UK increasingly exposed to supply chain risks, restrict the ability of the EU and UK to share expertise; and weaken collaborative links between the UK and EU on nuclear-medicine research.

Despite assurances of more support, scientific investment in the UK is already lagging behind some key other nations. In a No Deal environment, all government funding will be under increased pressure.

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Any Brexit is likely to be a bad outcome for UK Science. A No Deal Brexit would be really painful. This outcome will be highly detrimental to science and innovation in both the UK and EU as it will hinder long-term funding, immigration, trade and many other factors.

We must stop it.

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