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3 March 2022

Dear Chair,

The UK's participation in the Horizon Europe programme

I am writing to you in my capacity as the Chair of the European Affairs Committee of the UK House of Lords, which scrutinises the UK-EU relationship and is also responsible for UK-EU inter-parliamentary dialogue.

Our Committee has recently taken evidence from representatives of both the UK and the EU science and research communities on the UK's association to the Horizon Europe programme. As you are no doubt aware, this was agreed in principle alongside the Trade and Cooperation agreement but has yet to be finalised.

The Committee has written letters to both the UK Government and to the European Commission, expressing our deep concerns over the implications of the continued delay in finalising association, and our regret at the apparent politicisation of scientific cooperation which is manifestly in the interests of both parties. I have attached both letters (Annex 1 and Annex 2), and a summary of the evidence we received (Annex 3), for your information.

As Chair of the relevant Committee in the European Parliament, I hope that you and I can work in tandem to encourage both the Commission and the UK Government to unblock the current impasse, which is to the detriment of the excellent scientific and research communities in the UK and the EU alike.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Kinnoull
Chair of the House of Lords European Affairs Committee, UK Parliament

Encl. Annex 1, 2 and 3

Annex I: Letter from Lord Kinnoull to Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Research, Innovation, Culture, Education and Youth

Dear Commissioner Gabriel,

The UK's participation in the Horizon Europe programme

I am writing to you regarding the UK's participation in the EU's Horizon Europe Programme, which was agreed in principle as part of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement but is yet to be finalised.

The European Affairs Committee of the UK House of Lords, of which I am the Chair, has recently taken evidence on this subject from representatives of both the UK and the EU science and research communities. I enclose a letter which we have sent to the Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, UK Foreign Secretary and Co-Chair of the UK-EU Partnership Council, as well as a summary of the evidence we received.

Our Committee is deeply concerned by the delay to the UK's association, which is already having a detrimental impact on UK and EU researchers alike – an impact which is expected to worsen the longer the delay continues. We agree with our witnesses that securing association would be a genuine 'win-win' for both the UK and the EU, and we regard the apparent politicisation of mutually beneficial scientific cooperation as a deeply regrettable development. We strongly hope that the Commission will work with the UK Government to unblock the current impasse as soon as possible, in the interests of both sides, and regardless of ongoing disputes in separate areas of the UK-EU relationship. It would be very welcome if you could confirm that this is your view too.

I am copying this letter to João Vale de Almeida, EU Ambassador to the UK.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Kinnoull
Chair of the House of Lords European Affairs Committee, UK Parliament

Annex 2: Letter from Lord Kinnoull to Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, UK Foreign Secretary

Dear Secretary of State,

The UK's participation in the Horizon Europe programme

I am writing to you regarding the UK's participation in the EU's Horizon Europe Programme, in your capacity as UK co-chair of the Partnership Council of the UK-EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA).

Context

As you are no doubt aware, the UK and EU reached agreement in principle alongside the TCA that the UK would associate to Horizon Europe, the EU's flagship funding programme for research and innovation. However, although over a year has passed since the conclusion of the TCA, association has still not been finalised. Appearing before our Committee on 26 October 2021, Lord Frost confirmed that there "seems to be a problem" on the EU side regarding the finalisation of the UK's association to Horizon Europe. We note that the relevant TCA forum, the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes, went many months without a meeting being scheduled, and only met for the first time on 21 December 2021 (for 45 minutes).

In this context, the European Affairs Committee held an evidence session on 1 February 2022 with the following witnesses, representing both the UK and EU science and research sectors:

- Professor Robin Grimes, Foreign Secretary, the Royal Society;
- Peter Mason, Head of International Engagement, Universities UK;
- Professor Kurt Deketelaere, Secretary-General, League of European Research Universities.

The Committee also received supplementary evidence in writing from the Royal Society and Universities UK, as well as a written evidence submission from the Russell Group of UK universities. A detailed summary of the evidence we received is set out in Annex 1 of this letter.

The importance of Horizon Europe

We strongly endorse the view of our witnesses that securing the UK's association to Horizon Europe is critical for the UK science and research community. The benefits of Horizon Europe go beyond the direct funding opportunities; it also represents a long-standing and prestigious evolution of programmes, which unlocks opportunities for research collaboration and wider commercial, scientific and cultural benefits. We also agree that, notwithstanding the need for continuing financial contributions, Horizon Europe represents good value for money.

UK association would also be beneficial to the EU, as is demonstrated by the overwhelming support for UK association in the EU science and research community.

Overall, we endorse the clear message we received that UK association to Horizon Europe would be a "win-win" for both parties. We note, and welcome, that this appears also to be the Government's position, as set out in the open letter from the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation of 30 November 2021.

The consequences of the delay

The delay to finalising the UK's association with Horizon Europe is already causing uncertainty and eroding confidence among researchers. Our witnesses identified a chilling effect whereby EU researchers are reluctant to collaborate with their UK counterparts, to the detriment of both sides.

Moreover, the longer association is delayed, the worse this situation will get. We are also concerned that a 'non-association' outcome would disrupt the funding stability that UK researchers rely on; diminish the UK sector's attractiveness to global talent; and render the Government's stated desire for the UK to become a 'science superpower' far more difficult to achieve.

The experience of Switzerland was highlighted as an instructive comparison. Switzerland's exclusion from Horizon 2020 between 2014 and 2017 disrupted collaboration networks and damaged that country's reputation as a destination for talent and a partner for research. We are deeply concerned that a similar fate could befall the UK if the impasse is not resolved soon. We therefore urge the Government to do all it can to secure the UK's effective association to Horizon Europe as soon as possible.

The need to de-politicise the issue

There was consensus among the witnesses that the causes of the current impasse are political, not functional, with Horizon Europe association being treated as a negotiating pawn in the context of wider difficulties in the UK-EU relationship. While one of our witnesses suggested that this delay was on the EU side, another argued that both sides have been treating Horizon Europe as a "bargaining chip". We note that, per the recently published Minutes of the first meeting of the Specialised Committee, the EU has told the UK that "the completion of EU procedures in the current political setting does not seem opportune as there are serious difficulties in the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement (WA) and the TCA".

Whatever the allocation of blame, we view the politicisation of scientific research as a highly unwelcome development, which will be to the detriment of research communities on both sides of the Channel. We note the recent launch by the European research community of the cross-border #StickToScience campaign, which calls for science collaboration to be depoliticised and appears to have widespread support on both sides of the Channel.

Given that the cause of the impasse appears to be political, we also agree with our witnesses that unblocking the question of association requires high-level political intervention, which is why we are addressing this letter to you. We urge you to work with the EU to unblock the political impasse and secure the UK's association to a programme which is of great importance to researchers in the UK and the EU alike.

Alternatives to Horizon Europe

We are aware that, as the delay has continued, the Government has been stepping up contingency plans for a non-association outcome – known as "Plan B". While our witnesses said these contingency efforts were necessary, they stressed that securing association should remain the core priority. There was some unease that the Government had been "talking up" a Plan B outcome, and it was stated that it was still too early to switch the focus wholly to Plan B.

The Committee welcomes the Government's recent guarantee of funding to the first wave of those who have already successfully applied to Horizon Europe. However, we heard support for extending this guarantee beyond the current deadline of 30 April 2022. We also heard that, crucially, the guarantee does not provide the same long-term certainty for the sector as securing association.

Although we share our witnesses' support for improving collaboration with non-EU partners, we also agree that these efforts should be seen as complementary to Horizon Europe association, rather than being any kind of adequate replacement.

We also note that association would itself unlock collaboration with non-EU partners. 9 non-EU countries, stretching from Iceland to Israel, are already associated with Horizon Europe; a further 7 have concluded negotiations on or signed association agreements that are not yet in force; and the EU is also in association negotiations with other partners, including Canada. In this context, it would be even more regrettable if the UK were to be locked outside.

Questions

In the light of the evidence we received, we request that you address the following questions in your reply to this letter:

1. What steps are the Government taking, together with the EU, to unblock the UK's association to Horizon Europe, given its view that association would be a 'win-win' for both parties?
2. When will the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes next meet?
3. Does the Government agree that scientific collaboration should not be politicised?
4. How does the Government respond to the argument that both parties, rather than only the EU, have been treating association to Horizon Europe as a "bargaining chip" in the context of wider political disputes, particularly negotiations over the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland?
5. Does the Government agree that the potential for collateral damage from political disputes, seen both in this area and elsewhere, underlines the importance of a UK-EU relationship based on stability and cooperation?
6. Does the Government share the concerns expressed by our witnesses that the delay to the UK's association with Horizon Europe has already caused mutual harm for the UK and EU, which will worsen the longer the delay continues?
7. Is securing the UK's association to Horizon Europe still the Government's "Plan A"? If so, when, and under what circumstances, might this position change?
8. In the absence of association, can the Government provide further details on its so-called "Plan B" option? How will the Government seek to ensure that "Plan B" matches as many of the benefits of Horizon Europe as possible, and mitigates against the costs of non-association?
9. Does the Government have plans to extend its funding guarantee to existing applicants to Horizon Europe?

We look forward to receiving your response within the usual 10 working day deadline.

I am copying this letter to the George Freeman MP, Minister for Science, Research and Innovation in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy; Rt Hon James Cleverly MP, Minister for Europe in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office; Sir William Cash MP and Dr George Wilson, respectively Chair and Clerk of the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee; and Baroness Brown of Cambridge and George Webber, respectively Chair and Clerk of the House of Lords Science and Technology Committee.

I am also writing to Mariya Gabriel, European Commissioner for Research, Innovation, Culture, Education and Youth; to João Vale de Almeida, EU Ambassador to the UK; and to

Cristian-Silviu Buşoi MEP, Chair of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy in the European Parliament.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Kinnoull
Chair of the European Affairs Committee

Annex 3: Summary of witnesses' evidence

Background: Horizon Europe and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement

1. Horizon Europe is the EU's key funding programme for research and innovation. Entities from both the EU and 'associated' third countries can participate in Horizon Europe by applying for funding.
2. Alongside the Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), the UK and EU reached agreement in principle on a Joint Declaration on Participation in Union Programmes and Access to Programme Services, including a draft Protocol. This set out the Parties' intention for the UK to associate to Horizon Europe, on the basis that the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes would formalise association arrangements thereafter.
3. The witnesses identified some differences between association and full membership. There is a different mechanism for payments into the programme, with an additional participation fee. Association is also time-limited (it lasts for the seven-year duration of the Horizon Europe Programme; renewed association for Horizon Europe's successor programme is possible, but is no longer automatic).¹ Finally, the UK's formal say in the programme is more limited as a non-member – though the witnesses stressed that the practical impact of this is likely to be limited. As Professor Kurt Deketelaere put it, “the UK will not be able to vote. But those programme committees do not have the habit of voting... the differences will not be that big.”²
4. Despite this agreement in principle, however, the UK's association to Horizon Europe is yet to be finalised one year on.

The importance of Horizon Europe association to the UK and EU

5. All the witnesses expressed strong support for the UK's association to Horizon Europe. Peter Mason, for example, described it as “absolutely critical to the interests of our sector” in terms of enabling scientific collaboration, attracting world-leading research talent to the UK, and safeguarding research income.³ Similarly, the Russell Group told us that association was “in the best interests of research and innovation in the UK”.⁴ For the EU sector, Professor Deketelaere said that “continental universities all share the same desire” that the UK will associate to Horizon Europe.⁵
6. The Russell Group provided quantitative evidence on several specific benefits of the Horizon programme. It noted that under Horizon Europe's predecessor, Horizon 2020, the UK had “over 31,000 collaborative links with countries around the world”; it also noted the benefits for businesses, with a total of €1.4bn awarded to nearly 2,000 British businesses under Horizon 2020 (60% of which was awarded to SMEs). It further highlighted the European Research Council (ERC) as “the jewel in the crown” of the programme, with funding from ERC grants accounting for 30% of the UK's total funding

¹ [Q2](#) (Peter Mason)

² [Q2](#) (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

³ [Q1](#) (Peter Mason)

⁴ Written evidence from the Russell Group ([HOR0001](#))

⁵ [Q1](#) (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

from Horizon 2020 and more ERC grants to Russell Group universities alone than to the whole of France.⁶

7. Witnesses were also keen to stress that the benefits of Horizon Europe went beyond the direct opportunities for research funding, with Peter Mason highlighting “wider commercial, scientific and cultural benefits.”⁷ Professor Robin Grimes echoed this: “it is more than just about the money”.⁸ In supplementary written evidence, the Royal Society identified some of these additional intangible benefits: “EU funding raising standards, accelerating research progress and increasing diversity of UK funding sources; providing access to advanced facilities and access to large data sets unavailable in the UK alone; helping to attract talented researchers to the UK; and opportunities to influence the future shape of EU research and innovation and influence technical standards that shape future regulation.”⁹
8. Horizon Europe’s long-standing track record, and the experience and prestige that this brings, was highlighted by Professor Robin Grimes as a particular benefit of association.¹⁰
9. If the UK associates to Horizon Europe, it will need to pay into the programme; the precise overall contribution is determined by a correction mechanism, but the Government estimates that UK payments will be “in the region of £15bn” over the seven-year duration of the programme.¹¹ The witnesses were very clear that this contribution represented good value for money to the UK, highlighting in particular how difficult it would be to replicate the benefits of Horizon Europe through an alternative programme at domestic level.¹²
10. Overall, the Committee received a clear message that the UK’s association to Horizon Europe represented a “win-win” for both the UK and the EU. Professor Kurt Deketelaere said that this was demonstrated by the strong support for association on both sides of the Channel, and highlighted the “major contribution of the UK to [EU] policy development regarding research, innovation and education” when the UK was a Member State. He added that while some EU organisations might win more funding for projects if the UK did not associate, this would come at the cost of “a very significant downside... to collaboration, exchange of staff, joint projects”.¹³

The causes of the delay

11. The prolonged delay to formalising the UK’s association to Horizon Europe has been attributed to wider political disputes between the parties. On 14 October 2021, the EU Commissioner for Innovation, Research, Culture, Education and Youth, Mariya Gabriel,

⁶ Written evidence from the Russell Group ([HOR0001](#))

⁷ [Q1](#) (Peter Mason)

⁸ [Q1](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

⁹ Written evidence from the Royal Society ([HOR0002](#))

¹⁰ [Q1](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

¹¹ Letter from Amanda Solloway MP, then Minister for Science, Research and Innovation in the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, to Sir William Cash MP, Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee in the House of Commons, 25 May 2021:

[https://europeanmemoranda.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/files/2021/05/Letter_to_Sir_Bill_Cash_MP_\(Chair_of_ESC\)_-_Horizon_Europe_Association_\(002\).pdf](https://europeanmemoranda.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/files/2021/05/Letter_to_Sir_Bill_Cash_MP_(Chair_of_ESC)_-_Horizon_Europe_Association_(002).pdf)

¹² [Q2](#) (Peter Mason, Professor Robin Grimes).

¹³ [Q1](#) (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

said that “transversal issues” needed to be tackled before the EU would move forward with association, a comment that was interpreted as a reference to the dispute over the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.¹⁴

12. The relevant TCA forum, the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes, went many months without a meeting being scheduled, and only met for the first time on 21 December 2021 – the last of the 18 Specialised Committees under the TCA to meet (in contrast, the Specialised Committee on Fisheries had already met twice by October 2021). The meeting lasted for 45 minutes. According to the minutes of the meeting, the UK “stressed that participation would bring benefits for scientific research across both the UK and the EU and outlined how it had done everything possible to progress with adoption of the Protocols”. In response, the EU said that it was “important to recall the political situation” and “stressed that the completion of EU procedures in the current political setting does not seem opportune as there are serious difficulties in the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement (WA) and the TCA.”¹⁵
13. Our witnesses were in agreement that the UK’s association to Horizon Europe was being treated as “negotiating capital” in the context of the broader relationship.¹⁶ Professor Deketelaere was particularly forceful on this point: “I do not think it is a bargaining chip: I am sure it is a bargaining chip.”¹⁷
14. There were differences in emphasis over who was responsible for this state of affairs. The UK-based witnesses suggested that the delay was mainly the responsibility of the EU; Peter Mason said that “from where we are sitting... the hold-up seems to be on the Commission’s side”¹⁸, and also identified “a broader trend for the Commission to treat participation in science programmes as part of the range of negotiating tools it has at its disposal”. Professor Deketelaere, on the other hand, said that association was being treated as “a bargaining chip on both sides” in negotiations over the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland.¹⁹
15. The witnesses agreed, however, that unblocking the delay would require high-level political intervention. Professor Deketelaere said his organisation’s engagement tended to “focus on the top of the Commission, the Parliament and the Council”.²⁰ Peter Mason added that the relevant Specialised Committee was not the key obstacle, as it is “a technical body”; the priority, he said, “is to secure the political will of the EU institutions.”²¹
16. The witnesses were highly critical of what they saw as this “politicisation” of scientific research.²² Professor Deketelaere said, “We need to end the political game. We need to

¹⁴ Science Business, ‘Gabriel confirms UK can’t join Horizon Europe until row over Northern Ireland Protocol is settled’, 14 October 2021: <https://sciencebusiness.net/news/gabriel-confirms-uk-cant-join-horizon-europe-until-row-over-northern-ireland-protocol-settled>

¹⁵ HM Government, Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes Minutes: 21 December 2021, published 25 February 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/specialised-committee-on-participation-in-union-programmes-minutes-21-december-2021>

¹⁶ Q5 (Peter Mason, Professor Robin Grimes)

¹⁷ Q5 (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

¹⁸ Q8 (Peter Mason)

¹⁹ Q5 (Peter Mason)

²⁰ Q8 (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

²¹ Q8 (Peter Mason)

²² Q5 (Peter Mason, Professor Robin Grimes, Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

end the politicisation of something that threatens the fantastic scientific community in the UK and in the EU. We are both going to lose.” He added that “the whole EU27 is united behind this [view] in the academic and scientific world.”²³

The consequences of the delay

17. Witnesses warned that the delay was already having negative consequences for the UK and EU science and research sectors. Professor Grimes told the Committee, “Because the environment for research collaboration remains very uncertain, there has been an erosion of confidence”, adding that research networks “need to be nurtured” if they are to be sustained.²⁴ Peter Mason echoed these concerns about uncertainty: “we are increasingly hearing from our members of examples of counterparts across the continent having doubts about including the UK”.²⁵
18. Some of this uncertainty may pre-date the current delay and the current iteration of the Horizon programme. In supplementary written evidence, the Royal Society highlighted that in the period between 2015 and 2018, the UK’s annual share of EU research funding had fallen by almost a third and that there had been a 40% drop in UK applications to Horizon 2020.²⁶
19. The UK Government has guaranteed funding to the first wave of those who have already successfully applied to Horizon Europe, covering those calls for which the last legal date for signing their grant agreement is expected to pass before 30 April 2022. This was welcomed by our witnesses, but they stressed that resolving the issue of association would be “the ultimate guarantee” for “long-term certainty”.²⁷ In addition, Peter Mason also said that it was “problematic” that the guarantee was limited to the first set of successful applications, and said his organisation would welcome an expansion of the guarantee.²⁸
20. In terms of the impact of the delay within the EU, Professor Deketelaere said that there was a growing tendency among EU researchers to ignore potential collaboration with British counterparts: “more and more universities, certainly if it takes longer and longer, ask themselves whether it is still worth doing”. He also warned that the delay could lead to “an exodus... of a lot of top academics from the UK”, adding “a kind of football transfer system is starting up in continental Europe looking at the best people... who are based in the UK and can perhaps be seduced by all kinds of interesting offers from EU27 universities”.²⁹

Further delay and non-association

21. Further delay to the UK’s association is expected to exacerbate the current uncertainty. Professor Deketelaere told the Committee that “as the weeks and months pass by, it

²³ [Q5](#) (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

²⁴ [Q3](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

²⁵ [Q3](#) (Peter Mason)

²⁶ Written evidence from the Royal Society ([HOR0002](#))

²⁷ [Q3](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

²⁸ [Q3](#) (Peter Mason)

²⁹ [Q4](#) (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

becomes more and more problematic... the longer it takes, the more difficult it becomes to convince people to continue business as usual.”³⁰

22. It was also suggested that the longer the delay lasts, the less valuable association becomes, even if it is eventually finalised. Professor Deketelaere said this consequence was “obvious, because researchers, labs, faculties, departments and universities cannot drag this on for years”.³¹ Professor Grimes added, “if you miss out at the beginnings of the programme, it is just a bit more challenging to get into the networks as they form and as they develop.”³² The UK Government also appears to share this view; according to the minutes of the first meeting of the Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes, it has told the EU that the benefits of association were being “eroded” by the delay and warned that, “while the UK still wanted to associate, participation cannot be at any price and it could not wait forever.”³³
23. There was a consensus that, if association was not finalised at all, this would be a bad outcome for UK research. Peter Mason said that Universities UK members had stressed “the importance of the stable and reliable and, over time, increasing pot of funding that Horizon represents”, and that non-association would mean a loss of practical reassurance that there will be long-term funding available for sustainable investments in collaborations.” He added that “the attractiveness of the sector to global talent... really would take a hit without access to EU funding.”³⁴
24. Comparisons were made to the experience of Switzerland, which was excluded from the Horizon 2020 programme between 2014 and 2017. Professor Deketelaere said that while Switzerland had been able to fund its research, “it was not, at the end of the day, a question of money; it was a question of collaboration... At the end of the day, Switzerland came back, lobbied enormously to be back on board”.³⁵ Similarly, the Russell Group told us that “Switzerland’s experience of exclusion from Horizon 2020 caused considerable damage to their coordination and participation rates. However, the perception of Switzerland as a destination for talent and as a stable partner for research in a competitive environment was also damaged.”³⁶
25. We also heard that a non-association outcome would undermine the Government’s stated objective for the UK to become a “science superpower”. Professor Grimes said, “I do not think that is achievable without a very strong commitment to international scientific collaboration, and Horizon Europe is the world’s largest multinational research funding programme.”³⁷ Supplementary written evidence from the Royal Society noted that the “superpower” objective “is in the context of competitors also making large increases to their domestic research budgets”.³⁸

³⁰ Q3 (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

³¹ Q6 (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

³² Q6 (Professor Robin Grimes)

³³ HM Government, Specialised Committee on Participation in Union Programmes Minutes: 21 December 2021, published 25 February 2022: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/specialised-committee-on-participation-in-union-programmes-minutes-21-december-2021>

³⁴ Q6 (Peter Mason)

³⁵ Q6 (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

³⁶ Written evidence from the Russell Group ([HOR0001](#))

³⁷ Q6 (Professor Robin Grimes)

³⁸ Written evidence from The Royal Society ([HOR0002](#))

26. Professor Kurt Deketelaere added that it would also be difficult for the EU to achieve its research goals if UK association to Horizon Europe was not finalised.³⁹

Alternatives to Horizon Europe association

27. The UK Government has been stepping up contingency plans for a non-association outcome, including an alternative UK mechanism for research funding and collaboration. Writing for Research Professional News on 13 December 2021, the Minister for Science, Research and Innovation, George Freeman, said that “Horizon Europe membership remains the priority—but alternatives are on standby”, adding, “We are very disappointed by the persistent delays from the EU in formalising associate membership.... Our strong preference is for [UK science collaboration] to be built around Horizon membership, but, if the EU stands in our way, we are ready with a seamless transition to something just as good, or better.”⁴⁰

28. While our witnesses said the Government was right to consider “Plan B” options, they stressed that “association needs to remain the core priority”.⁴¹ Peter Mason said that the Government should “put off making that decision [to focus on plan B] any earlier than is absolutely necessary”.⁴² Similarly, Professor Robin Grimes said there had been “an awful lot of talking up of plan B [from the Government], and we need to balance it and understand it against what we have with association”.⁴³

29. It was also stressed that it would take a long time before a UK alternative to Horizon Europe could develop the same benefits. The Russell Group warned that “ground-breaking research and innovation requires decades of support”. They highlighted that European Research Council (ERC) would be particularly difficult to replace: “We estimate that a UK-based alternative to the ERC would take at least a decade to reach the same level of impact and prestige”.⁴⁴

Opportunities for the sector

30. The witnesses were also asked if there were opportunities for UK science and research that they could identify from Brexit. There was support for the Government’s ‘Global Britain’ agenda, which Peter Mason said UK universities were “keen to be a part of” both through research collaboration with international partners and through their role in extending the UK’s soft power.⁴⁵

31. There was also support for expanding UK research collaboration with non-EU partners, such as the USA. However, Professor Robin Grimes stressed that it was “not a question of either/or”, and that these opportunities did not negate the central importance of securing association to Horizon Europe.⁴⁶

³⁹ [Q6](#) (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)

⁴⁰ George Freeman MP, ‘If the EU stands in our way, we are ready,’ Research Professional News, 13 December 2021: <https://www.researchprofessionalnews.com/rr-news-uk-views-of-the-uk-2021-12-if-the-eu-stands-in-our-way-we-are-ready/>

⁴¹ [Q7](#) (Peter Mason, Professor Robin Grimes).

⁴² [Q7](#) (Peter Mason)

⁴³ [Q8](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

⁴⁴ Written evidence from the Russell Group ([HOR0001](#))

⁴⁵ [Q10](#) (Peter Mason)

⁴⁶ [Q10](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

32. Indeed, it was stressed that associating with Horizon Europe would itself unlock collaboration with non-EU partners. The Russell Group said that it would “act as a springboard to other countries such as the USA, South Korea and Canada”.⁴⁷
33. Witnesses further argued that the EU is “disproportionately” important as a science and research partner for the UK, reflecting not just geographical proximity but “long-standing historic and cultural ties” and the international prestige of the Horizon Europe programme.⁴⁸ In the words of Peter Mason, “collaboration with Europe as a region is far more important for the UK than any other individual continent.”⁴⁹

Other concerns

34. While association to Horizon Europe was described as “the most pressing matter” arising from the TCA for science and research, several other issues of importance was highlighted. Peter Mason said that “mutual recognition of professional qualifications would be second on the list”.⁵⁰ Data adequacy and mobility of persons were also identified; according to Professor Grimes, “To do research, you need two things: the people and the data, and you need to be able to exchange those”.⁵¹ Professor Deketelaere also said that even if association is secured, “we have to avoid divergent legislation in the UK and in the EU on all kinds of topics.”⁵²

⁴⁷ Written evidence from the Russell Group ([HOR0001](#))

⁴⁸ [Q1-2](#) (Peter Mason), [Q10](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

⁴⁹ [Q2](#) (Peter Mason)

⁵⁰ [Q9](#) (Peter Mason)

⁵¹ [Q9](#) (Professor Robin Grimes)

⁵² [Q9](#) (Professor Kurt Deketelaere)