
The impact of the vote to leave the EU

Position Statement from
The Institute of Cancer Research, London

Summary

The Institute of Cancer Research (ICR) believes that world-class science is an international effort. It is essential for UK science that we can continue to welcome researchers from across the UK and worldwide to work in this country. We also believe that many of the biggest challenges in science require researchers working together in collaboration, and are very keen that political developments do not erect barriers to collaborative working. We are keen that whatever deal emerges between the UK and the EU preserves the best possible opportunity for collaboration with scientists in Europe and around the world – to generate excellent scientific discoveries and patient impact. We would also want to see the best possible commercial and regulatory environment to accelerate innovation and adoption of medicines and technologies.

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Background information

On 24 June 2016, citizens of the United Kingdom voted for Britain to leave the EU – 52 percent to 48 percent. Although the UK has voted to leave, it remains part of the EU and will continue to apply EU law until the formal exit process has concluded. These developments present significant challenge to the science, health and research sectors due to the integration of funding, regulation and collaboration between the EU and Britain.

Key ICR positions on the impact of the vote to leave the EU

We have developed key positions on a number of areas likely to impact the ICR and the wider research sector.

Collaboration

- Many of the biggest challenges in cancer research will only be met by scientists and clinicians working together in collaboration – within the UK, across the EU and worldwide. It is critical that ICR scientists can still collaborate freely with scientists, institutions and companies inside and outside the EU.
- UK scientists need to continue to have access to EU funding and EU information resources that allow scientists to find potential collaborators. Otherwise, it will become much more difficult for UK researchers to participate in collaborations that receive funding through the EU.
- We need to ensure that the UK is aligned to regulatory frameworks across the EU, so that we do not create additional complexities and regulatory barriers in establishing collaborations. For example, multicentre trials facilitated through collaborations across the EU are vital in order to involve the necessary number of patients, particularly for rarer cancers where they may be few cases in the UK. Any regulatory barriers to working in this way would limit our opportunities to take part in and lead these trials, which would have an impact on both research and patients.
- It is also critical that the ICR can still access large data sources that exist within the EU such as the Collaborative Oncological Gene-environment Study.

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Researcher mobility

- It is critical we do not lose our ability to recruit the best staff and students from inside and outside the EU. For the ICR to retain its competitiveness we need to be seen as an attractive place to work and study for the best scientists throughout the world. We find it difficult already to attract staff with skills in certain areas with skills shortages such as big data and computational biology.
- We need to ensure that the UK Government secures a deal with the EU which allows research staff from EU countries to work here in the UK. It would be damaging to place barriers in place, such as visa requirements, for scientists wanting to work or study in the UK. Any loss of EU staff who make up the clinical workforce would also have an impact on our ability to carry out multi-centre clinical trials around the UK.
- We need confirmation as soon as possible of the status of EU citizens who are currently working in the UK. It is essential for the stability of organisations such as the ICR, with a high proportion of staff from EU countries, that we can reassure these people that they can continue to work in the UK.
- We also need the UK Government to secure a deal with the EU that preserves the rights of EU citizens to study within the UK, and for UK citizens to study within the EU. It would be extremely damaging to science and academic study more generally to erect barriers in the flow of students.

Funding

- European funding plays an important role in supporting large-scale scientific initiatives. We are concerned at the prospect of UK scientists losing access to these sources of funding.
- We need the UK Government to strike a deal with the EU that as much as possible preserves access to EU sources of funding and facilities for UK scientists. The Government must act to prevent any funding shortfall to science once the UK formally leaves the EU.
- The current uncertainty over whether UK scientists will have access to European funding mechanisms is already making it difficult for UK researchers to take leadership positions on EU-funded collaborations. We need clarity on the access to EU funding by UK scientists as soon as possible. We welcomed the announcement that the Treasury will underwrite funding for approved Horizon 2020 projects applied for before the UK leaves the European Union, but there is still uncertainty over arrangements for the next Framework Programme. We need to know which sources of EU

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funding UK scientists will be able to access, and for how long.

- Access to large-scale shared European scientific research infrastructure is vital for UK research. If the UK withdraws its funding from these shared facilities as a result of the vote to leave the European Union then it would severely damage the UK research base.

Policy and regulation

- The UK operates under EU frameworks in many areas of science, innovation and drug access. While some of these regulations can be bureaucratic, overall operating under European-wide frameworks has many advantages for UK science. It reduces the regulatory barriers to working across European borders, and provides an attractive single market for drug licensing.
- We need to ensure that as much as possible the UK can continue to align with EU regulatory frameworks for research, so that we do not create additional complexities and regulatory barriers in establishing collaborations.
- We also need the UK Government to negotiate a deal with the EU that avoids erecting any additional barriers to gaining access to new drugs in the UK. If drug companies needed to gain separate licences in the UK before they could market drugs here, there is a risk that UK patients could suffer significant delays in accessing the latest cancer treatments.
- We need the Government to provide clarity as soon as possible on the extent to which UK science will continue to be aligned with EU regulatory frameworks. The ICR has until now been able to exert influence on EU policy, legislation and research priorities through formal participation in EU activities, campaigning and UK and international networks. Our ability to influence policy in the future is uncertain. It is important that UK organisations such as the ICR continue to be able to exert an influence on all areas of policy and regulation to which the UK continues to be subject.