



# ‘One of the most positive announcements since Brexit’: UK lawyers react to new Horizon funding deal

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Sarah Speight



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The news that the UK will rejoin the €95.5 billion research fund has been met with widespread relief, but it's a bittersweet story, finds Sarah Speight. Reaction from CMS, Arnold & Porter, Bird & Bird, HGF.

Today, the British scientific community woke to the news that the UK has finally rejoined [Horizon Europe](#), the European Union's €95.5 billion (\$102 billion) research funding programme.

The collective sigh of relief is almost audible.

Following Brexit, which took effect in January 2020, the UK and the EU struggled to negotiate a deal to keep the UK signed up to Horizon. This was a huge blow to UK scientific research—especially since the UK is seen as a world leader in this field.

But after a telephone call last night (September 6) between Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen, the long-anticipated new deal was sealed.

The negotiations behind this were fraught with difficulty, not least because of political tensions after the UK's departure from the EU.

In the fresh agreement, the UK will rejoin Horizon as an 'associated country', paying €2.6 billion (\$2.8 billion) per year for access to the scheme.

While the UK formally rejoins from the beginning of 2024, British scientists can once again apply to the fund from today, September 7.

With the fund said to be the world's largest of its kind, renewed participation means that the UK can get its life sciences innovation 'oomph' back on track—and more.

As Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology [Michelle Donelan](#) said, the deal is “a crucial step forward on our mission to become a science and tech superpower by 2030”.

And president of Universities UK, [Dame Sally Mapstone](#), praised the programme: “Horizon Europe has been the basis of scientific collaboration for over 30 years.

“From early detection of ovarian cancer to developing clean energy networks involving dozens of universities and many industrial partners, Horizon lets us do things that would not be possible without that scale of collaboration.”

[Paul Stewart](#), professor and vice president, clinical, at the Academy of Medical Sciences pointed out that: “Health research is an international endeavour; it relies on supporting the best ideas, but also on creating cross-border networks which is good news for the UK, Europe and the rest of the world.”

*LSIPR* asked life sciences IP lawyers in the UK for their reaction to the news.

**[Jane Hollywood](#), partner, UK chartered patent attorney and European patent attorney at CMS: “It will take some time for the lost ground to be reversed, but this is certainly a great step in the right direction”**

“This is really positive news for the UK life sciences industry, which has been concerned about the damage caused by Brexit to funding and collaboration opportunities.

“Rejoining Horizon will undoubtedly benefit innovation in the UK, which then drives the need for IP protection. It is wonderful news for all involved in the life science sector that rejoining Horizon has finally been agreed.

“Withdrawal from Horizon was impacting on the UK's reputation as a leading hub for life science innovation. It has led to difficulties in attracting talent and funding.

“It will take some time for the lost ground to be reversed, but this is certainly a great step in the right direction—and one of the most positive announcements since Brexit.”

**[Dr Beatriz San Martin](#), partner at Arnold & Porter: “It's bittersweet...UK scientific research and innovation should never have been compromised in this way”**

“The announcement this morning that the UK has rejoined Horizon Europe is a huge relief.

“The UK’s withdrawal from the Horizon programme as a result of Brexit significantly damaged the UK as a destination for many academics from the European Union, with funding for numerous projects drying up.

“It’s a bittersweet story because UK scientific research and innovation should never have been compromised in this way and there will be an inevitable lag before we see the benefits of re-joining this programme.

“Nevertheless, the UK does have a strong history and reputation in scientific research and innovation, and I am confident that it will continue to be a significant contributor to innovation globally.”

**Sally Shorthose, partner, Bird & Bird: “The challenges to the research community in attracting talent...was coming to a perfect storm”**

“This development has been warmly welcomed by the UK’s scientific and research community (albeit with the sentiment ‘about time too, what took it so long?’).

“UK entities can once again take advantage of the international cooperation and funding established by the Horizon initiative.

“The UK has some world-leading centres of life sciences excellence, such as the Cambridge Science Park, but that pre-eminence would have been threatened if the UK had been left outside Horizon for much longer as it would be harder to attract the best scientists if the pool of attractive projects would have reduced.

“As Rishi Sunak said today, rejoining Horizon will create jobs, income and opportunities, but there are other challenges afoot and our optimism may be somewhat unfounded, as even Australia and New Zealand have secured associate membership (the type available to the UK) of Horizon.

“[For example] we are already aware of research being transferred to Australia because of its favourable R&D tax credits system.

“The immediate impact of Brexit and the UK’s withdrawal from Horizon was softened, because the very nature of Horizon projects is that they are long term and UK entities were involved with projects with some time still to run.

“Nevertheless, in two years, UK involvement and contribution to such projects had already fallen from the top to seventh place.

“Recovering our position, having now opted to re-join, will involve an equal or worse time lag as firms and universities gradually collaborate in new projects.

“The challenges to the research community in attracting talent (and of course investment) was coming to a perfect storm, with visas for overseas academics and researchers being harder to obtain or running out, and opportunities for cross fertilisation of UK scientists limited by their own visa challenges.”

## **Janine Swarbrick, patent director, HGF: “I feel excited to see what projects and collaborations spring up from UK-EU teams”**

“Personally I feel excited to see what projects and collaborations spring up from UK-EU teams, and look forward to helping inventors to understand and protect their ideas. Enthusiastic and diverse teams of inventors are brilliant to work with!

“I would expect an increase in multinational UK-EU research teams—and along with that, an increase in innovation, particularly since this is a really exciting time for life sciences innovation with the availability of powerful software tools to drive possibilities for new developments in the lab.

“I am a patent attorney, but in a past career I was a physics researcher, based at the ESRF synchrotron facility in Grenoble, France. Having worked on fantastic collaborative scientific projects with researchers from the UK, Europe, and worldwide, I am thrilled to see that the challenges faced by UK researchers caused by Brexit should start to become more manageable and eventually be overcome.

“Remaining outside of Horizon would inevitably have led to a sustained decline in innovation, with researchers continuing to be excluded from multi-nationality research teams and associated funding.

“Rejoining Horizon should lead to an increase in funding availability, more collaboration opportunities (particularly on large-team projects), freer knowledge sharing, and improve the global scientific position of the UK worldwide.

“These improvements will likely take some time, as during the political discussions and the UK’s absence from the Horizon programme, there will sadly have been funding rounds, grant application and collaboration opportunities missed by the UK science community, so there is an element of catch-up to manage.

“I suspect the scientific community will be motivated by the good news of rejoining Horizon, and aim to catch up from missing out over the last few years, by forging new links in the scientific community, developing innovative research projects and doing more great science.”

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