

NHSF statement following Brexit vote

The result of last week's vote to leave the European Union has profound implications for science in the UK and heritage science is no exception. The UK government's own Science and Innovation Plan for Growth (December 2014) places science at the heart of the country's long term economic plan, (and this commitment is fully demonstrated through the recent review of science and research in Scotland) while acknowledging that the UK has historically invested less in science than its competitors. The NHSF welcomed this plan, and now calls on the government to renew as a matter of urgency the commitments it made then, and reinforced in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills' departmental plan for 2015-2020.

A number of leading scientists, including Sir Venki Ramakrishnan, President of the Royal Society, and Sir Paul Nurse, Head of the Francis Crick Institute, have voiced serious concerns about the future funding of research initiatives currently supported through the EU – the UK currently has more EU-funded grant-holders than any other member state. The assurances made by the Leave Campaign in the run-up to the Referendum (letter of 14 June) that *"There is more than enough money to ensure that those who now get funding from the EU - including universities, scientists, family farmers, regional funds, cultural organisations and others - will continue to do so while also ensuring that we save money that can be spent on our priorities."* are yet to be re-stated.

There has as yet been no indication of firm commitments to maintain the financial support which makes the UK a leading nation in scientific terms. The announcement by Jo Johnson MP on 28th June that *"The future of UK access to European science funding will be a matter for future discussions."* is welcome but in the interim NHSF requests a firm commitment from the UK government to the continued funding of current research projects until their natural completion. An analysis of European Commission funding for cultural heritage research projects of the FP5 Energy, Environment & Sustainable development, FP6 Scientific Support to Policies and FP7 'Environment' programmes identified total EC funding of €114,308,993 (credit: Professor May Cassar, UCL Institute for Sustainable Heritage). Heritage Science is on the European road map of the European Strategy Forum for Research Infrastructure. A proposal was submitted by the UK to the Horizon 2020 call for the development and long-term sustainability of new pan-European research infrastructures on 22nd June 2016. NHSF urges the government to provide support for initiatives such as this in its negotiations with the EU which, although relatively small in financial terms, are absolutely critical to maintaining the UK's pre-eminence in the field.

Other issues which are of concern to heritage science, as to other science disciplines, are the movement of expert workers and the potential for a reduction in supported collaborative initiatives with neighbouring countries.

In the meantime, our commitment, as a Forum, is to continue to make the work of our sector on scientific and cultural heritage projects a means of transcending political and geographical boundaries. By working as part of the larger scientific and heritage communities, we seek to develop new structures that will maintain the networks, talent and infrastructure that are at the heart of heritage science research.

The heritage science community can take strength from its successes in the field of international collaboration and, as has been evident in the statements issued by many of the Forum's member organisations, reassure all colleagues of their value to this highly interdisciplinary and collaborative field.

30 June 2016

Notes:

The National Heritage Science Forum exists as a platform for sharing information and for supporting the policy, research and professional needs of its members. Its members are 20 of the leading organisations that produce and use heritage science research in the UK.

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