

Hard Brexit 'could cripple UK science', warn Nobel laureates

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'The overwhelming negativity of scientists towards a hard Brexit should be a wake-up call to the country and the government'

World-leading scientists and mathematicians from across Europe have warned against a hard [Brexit](#) if the UK is to preserve its vital research.

In a letter addressed to [Theresa May](#) and European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, 29 [Nobel Prize](#) winning scientists and six winners of the prestigious Fields Medal urged them to pursue the "closest possible cooperation".

French biologist Jules Hoffmann, Dutch chemist Paul Crutzen and German biologist Christiane Nusslein-Volhard were among those warning that leaving the EU could establish barriers to scientific partnerships that have provided a massive boost for European research.

"Many of us in the science community therefore regret the UK's decision to leave the EU because it risks such barriers," they wrote.

The call was reinforced by a survey at the UK's biggest biomedical lab, the Francis Crick Institute, which found 97 per cent of its researchers believed a hard Brexit would be bad for British science. Half also expressed a desire to leave the UK due to Brexit.

Sir Paul Nurse, the institute's director and one of the letter's signees, said a hard Brexit "could cripple UK science and the government needs to sit up and listen".

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“The overwhelming negativity of scientists towards a hard Brexit should be a wake-up call to the country and the government,” he said.

“We need a deal that replaces the [science funding](#) lost because of Brexit, that preserves freedom of movement for talented scientists, and that makes them feel welcome in this country.”

Scientists have been vocal in their criticism of the government’s approach to leaving the EU, which they say will [lose them millions in research funding](#) and throw their projects into disarray.

Royal Society president Venki Ramakrishnan, another signee, has warned that leaving without a deal [would be a disaster for the scientific community](#).

Many scientists have expressed their support for a second Brexit referendum, a cause [which saw 700,000 people gather in London on Saturday](#).

Sir Paul was among the top scientists to [back The Independent’s campaign for a Final Say](#) on the Brexit deal, alongside Nobel prize winner Sir Fraser Stoddart and astronomer royal Lord Martin Rees.

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Another [Final Say](#) supporter, Royal Society of Edinburgh president Dame Anne Glover echoed the sentiments of the letter as she called on the prime minister to secure the closest possible research relationship with the EU.

“This includes providing for the UK’s full participation in the European framework programmes for research and innovation, and ensuring that universities and research institutions can continue to recruit talented researchers and the staff that are needed to underpin the UK’s research base from a global pool,” she said.

Ms May has previously indicated she wants the UK to [remain fully associated](#) with the EU and its Horizon 2020 funding programme.

However, scientists have pointed out that under current plans Britain stands to lose around half a billion pounds of funding in the case of a no-deal outcome, and the [positions of UK researchers leading European projects look precarious](#).

Around one in six academic staff at UK universities are EU nationals, and the legal status of them and their families may not be protected after Brexit.

Researchers warn that besides the livelihoods of those working in the sector, the decline of British science should be a concern to everyone due to knock-on effects on everything from medicine to environmental protection.

“The challenges we face must be tackled in a manner that benefits everyone and those challenges are better faced together,” the Nobel laureates wrote in their letter.

“Only a deal which allows the closest possible cooperation between the UK and the EU, now and in the future, will make that possible.”