The European Research Council (ERC) funds a large number of basic research and psychological science proposals though its starting grant, advanced grant, and consolidator grant schemes. Pre-Brexit, the United Kingdom was a member and participant of ERC funding schemes through Horizon Europe. The issue of U.K. participation in a post-Brexit setting has been complicated by the lack of a formal agreement between the United Kingdom and European Union for participation in Horizon Europe.

In February, the European Union (EU) and United Kingdom signed the Windsor Framework, a post-Brexit deal that settles disputes over trade across the Northern Ireland border. Although not related to science or science funding, the Windsor Framework nonetheless offers hope that an agreement can be reached for U.K. participation in the EU’s high-profile Horizon Europe funding program, which includes the European Research Council (ERC). (Learn more about the ERC, including its funding of psychological science research.)

Although Science reported that a deal was struck in December 2020 for the United Kingdom to become “associated” with Horizon Europe, similar to other non-EU countries such as Turkey and Norway, the dispute around Northern Ireland delayed implementation. At the heart of the ongoing negotiations is the
question of the size of the United Kingdom’s contribution to Horizon Europe. The EU may offer the United Kingdom a pass on payment for the first two years after rejoining (to account for the missed years from 2020–2022). The United Kingdom wants a larger discount.

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BBC reported that at the signing of the Windsor Framework, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyer expressed openness to negotiate U.K. involvement in the Horizon Europe program, but U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak did not comment. If the United Kingdom and EU fail to find common ground, the United Kingdom has proposed its own £14 billion scientific funding program called Pioneer. Horizon Europe, by comparison, is a €95 billion program. Scientists in the United Kingdom have expressed concern that the Prime Minister is considering a Plan B to Horizon Europe as it suggests the government may not rejoin the EU program.

Negotiations are ongoing and may affect psychological scientists from the United Kingdom and EU interested in ERC funding. APS will keep members informed of developments.

Related Reading

APS coverage of opportunities and news related to the ERC.

Science: U.K. scientists hope to regain access to EU grants after Northern Ireland deal

BBC: Scientists warn Sunak on EU research programme

Guardian: British science will not flourish outside EU’s Horizon scheme, academics warn

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