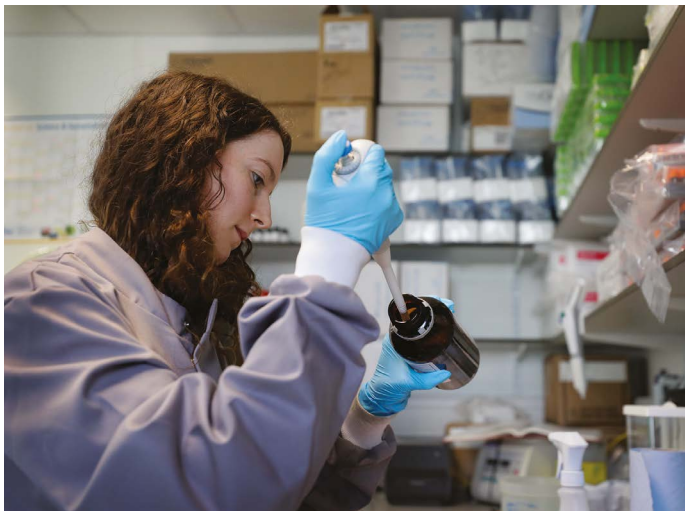
Correspondence

COVID shows UK–EU collaborations are irreplaceable

As economies around the world spiral into recession, the prospect of filling multimillion-pound holes in UK research and development budgets is politically and financially daunting. With the end of the Brexit transition period less than three months away, it is impossible to develop separate UK equivalents to European Union and European Commission science and knowledge-exchange programmes.

The COVID-19 crisis has brought into sharp focus the importance of UK involvement in these programmes and the need for international collaborators to have access to UK facilities. Of the first 40 EU-funded COVID-19 projects (totalling €50 million; US$59 million), UK scientists have been partners in projects worth a total of €18 million, in collaborations spanning more than a dozen countries (see go.nature.com/3ijbttk). During the two most recently completed iterations of the EU research-funding programme, between 2002 and 2013, the EU was the third-largest funder of UK-led research into infectious diseases (M. G. Head *et al. EBioMedicine* **3**, 180–190; 2016). The European Commission has also committed a €14-billion boost to funding for pandemic recovery in the Horizon Europe and EU4Health budgets.

Generations of UK and EU students and academics have worked together through schemes such as the €80-billion Horizon 2020 framework, the Erasmus+ mobility programme, the Euratom nuclear treaty and the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions research fellowships. These have helped to create a knowledge base for the urgent research into virology and immunology that is now taking place across the continent and beyond.



Many institutions in UK COVID-19 vaccine research receive EU funds.

KIRSTY WIGGLESWORTH/AP/SHUTTERSTOCK

We and others have been warning since 2016 that anything less than continued UK association with these programmes will be catastrophic for both UK and European research. As we weather the worst public-health crisis in living memory, now is the time for the United Kingdom to be leading and enhancing scientific collaborations with our European partners, not leaving them.

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B. F. declares competing interests; see go.nature.com/2fkwk8g

Mandate and reward open research records

Transparent and responsible record-keeping is a pillar of high-quality research. Yet many scientists report that spending extra time on this practice sets them back in a game in which funders and institutions continue to reward pace and volume of publications — not quality.

Funders have the power to change incentives to support rigorous research. Together with Chris Chambers, co-founder of the UK Reproducibility Network (https://ukrn.org), I have drafted a Universal Funders' Policy (go.nature.com/3gfwde4) that mandates and rewards the open deposition of all records associated with a publication.

Our proposal does not apply to all materials generated in the course of a project. To many, at least in the biomedical sciences, such a requirement would not be beneficial or pragmatic. It could result in a 'data dump' of limited value. Yet the bulk of a standard biomedical publication is based on smaller data sets that are often available only from the corresponding author 'upon reasonable request', a practice that hampers transparency.

For such a policy to be accepted and work long-term, its implementation route might find inspiration in Plan S developments: an initial phase of consultation with diverse stakeholders, followed by a transition period during which researchers and institutions prepare for the 'new normal'. Finally, funders will need to enforce the mandate.

To change a game, its rules must change. Funders can make open science the norm and improve research culture in the process.

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Japan's government must seek out expert scientists

I agree with your argument that the successor to Japan's prime minister Shinzō Abe must embrace diversity, diplomacy and better regulation in science (*Nature* **585**, 159; 2020). However, such policy advances depend on advice from expert scientists, which is not solicited under Japan's present political system.

Japan's political parties are faction-ridden. In a quest for consensus, the prime minister appoints the ministers recommended by each faction. These ministers can be bizarrely ignorant of the pressing scientific and technical issues of the day: Japan's cybersecurity minister, for example, claims that he has never used a computer (see go.nature.com/32kd98a).

If an appointee's background means that they are unsuited to the task they are charged with, they will call on advice from other government officials.

Instead, ministers should follow the practice of other democratic nations and call in experts to advise on policy. Only then can the government genuinely improve how science is run.

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