

Government “Future Partnership” paper – collaboration on science and innovation

Scientists and the academic world predominantly supported remaining in the EU during last year’s campaign. Some of them are still most reluctant to come to terms with Brexit, fearing that our educational and scientific institutions will be out on a limb, unable to collaborate with their European colleagues while being denied access to the sources of funding which they enjoyed prior to Brexit.

This latest Government paper, entitled a “Future Partnership” paper as opposed to the “position papers” which came out two weeks ago, attempts to provide some reassurance.

Whether it will succeed is another matter. The paper begins by cataloguing our collaborative ventures and lists some of the non-EU bodies through which collaboration will still be possible on Brexit. Then follows the usual wish list, summarised by Paragraph 13:-

“It is the UK’s ambition to build on its uniquely close relationship with the EU, so that collaboration on science and innovation is not only maintained, but strengthened. Therefore, as part of the new, deep and special partnership, the UK will seek an ambitious science and innovation agreement with the EU that will support and promote science and innovation across Europe both now and in the future.”

Great stuff, but the desire to continue co-operation is nuclear research and the EU’s space programme is just that – a desire. It points to non-EU participation in the EU’s Horizon 2020 research programme. “We want to continue to work

closely with these EU bodies” is a repeated message but will the EU want to work closely with us? At the moment, discussions on areas such as this seem a long way off. Recent statements by Michel Barnier, the EU’s Chief negotiator, suggest that until there is some significant movement on resolving the issue of avoiding a “hard” Irish border, the scope of talks is not going to be broadened.