

Dear The Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP and The Rt Hon Alok Sharma MP,

We are writing to you about the urgent need for clarity on the future of the **UK Shared Prosperity Fund**.

As anchor universities and businesses of all sizes across England and Wales, we share a deep understanding and commitment to the prosperity and sustainability of our regions. One of the many ways we help to realise this commitment is through collaboration on translational research, knowledge exchange and innovation support and skills development.

EU Structural Funds have been a key enabler of this collaboration. Since the announcement in 2017 that EU Structural Funds would be replaced by a successor arrangement called the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and the commitment in the 2019 Conservative Manifesto to “at a minimum match the size of [Structural] funds in each nation”, there has been a concerning lack of communication and further details on the operation of the UKSPF. The planned consultation has not taken place and the Spending Review, alongside which further details on the UKSPF were promised at the March 2020 Budget, has been scaled back to a one-year settlement.

This issue matters greatly to us all. In addition the Welsh Government has noted this is “disproportionately important” in Wales, where R&D expenditure trails other UK nations and regions and alternative innovation funding streams have not existed until very recently, resulting in long-term impacts that will take time to reverse. As we approach the end of the EU exit transition period, and with ongoing opposition from the devolved administrations to the UK Internal Market Bill, we have two key asks.

Firstly, we are urging the government to swiftly provide greater transparency and clarity on the timescales and operation of the UKSPF. We all recognise the extraordinary times we are living through and the scale of the challenges facing the government. We want to work constructively and proactively with government to address the current economic challenges, whilst reducing inequalities between regions and levelling-up the UK for the long-term. Given the uncertainty and the regional challenges ahead, it has never been more important to deliver a commitment to long-term planning and investment, such as the UKSPF, alongside the immediate injections of temporary schemes and flexibilities that have been the focus of recent announcements.

We have leveraged EU Structural Funds and university co-investment to respond to the current crisis, offering a range of interventions and signposting to government schemes. To continue doing our part to address current and future challenges, we need greater transparency and an open dialogue with government.

Secondly, we want to emphasise the importance of ensuring the further integration of research and innovation as a central theme of the UKSPF. The combination of EU Structural Funds with research and innovation funding has played a vital role in regional economic development. As universities and businesses at the forefront of that integration, we urge the government to work with us to ensure this continues and is strengthened through the UKSPF.

The leveraging of these funds, alongside significant co-investment from universities, has played a critical role in increasing private sector investment in R&D. UKSPF will need to allow for universities to continue delivering this increased capability for scale and scope of programmes. In addition, given the pressures on spending and staff capacity as a result of the pandemic, it is even more vital that universities and other delivery partners can plan for strategic funding commitments well in advance in order to maximise limited resources.

With all current programmes required to end by 2023 and programmes typically requiring more than 12 months to gain approval, we are deeply concerned that we run the risk of a gap in regional innovation programmes. This would result in people, infrastructure and relationships disappearing at a critical time and a reduction in R&D intensity in some regions. Not only would this be a significant set-back for our regions, it would also stall the ambitions of the R&D Roadmap right out of the gate.

We look forward to hearing from you and working with you to address these issues.

Yours sincerely,

National and local organisations across the UK, and the Vice Chancellors of University Alliance.

Full list of signatures below.

University Alliance, Vanessa Wilson, CEO
Anglia Ruskin University, Professor Roderick Watkins, Vice Chancellor
Birmingham City University, Professor Philip Plowden, Vice Chancellor
University of Brighton, Professor Debra Humphris, Vice Chancellor
Coventry University, Professor John Latham CBE, Vice Chancellor
University of Greenwich, Professor Jane Harrington, Vice Chancellor
University of Hertfordshire, Professor Quintin McKellar CBE, Vice Chancellor
Kingston University, Professor Steven Spier, Vice Chancellor
Leeds Beckett University, Professor Peter Slee, Vice Chancellor
Oxford Brookes University, Professor Alistair Fitt, Vice Chancellor
Teesside University, Professor Paul Croney, Vice Chancellor
University of South Wales, Professor Julie Lydon OBE, Vice Chancellor
University of the West of England, Bristol, Professor Steve West CBE, Vice Chancellor

CBI: Confederation of British Industry, Matthew Pecival, Director People and Skills
Institute of Economic Development, Nigel Wilcock, Executive Director.
Birmingham City Council, Councillor Bridget Jones, Deputy Leader
Medway Council, Richard Hicks, Director of Place and Deputy Chief Executive and Neil Davies, Chief Executive
Coast To Capital Jonathan Sharrock, Chief Executive
Wakefield Council, Clare Elliott, Service Director, Economic Growth and Skills

Harrogate Borough Council, Councillor Graham Swift, Cabinet Member Resources, Enterprise and Economic Development
West & North Yorkshire Chamber of Commerce, Sandy Needham, CEO
South East London Chamber of Commerce, Helen McIntosh, President
Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce, Jo James OBE, Chief Executive
Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce, Paul Faulkner, CEO
North East England Chamber of Commerce, Rachel Anderson, Assistant Director
North East Process Industry Cluster, Philip Aldridge, CEO
Thames Estuary Growth Board, Kate Willard, Thames Estuary Envoy and Chair
South East Local Enterprise Partnership, Christian Brodie, Chair
Adur and Worthing Business Partnership, Andrew Wayne, Chair
Visit Greenwich, Barrie Kelly, CEO
Midlands Arts Centre, Sally Pennington, Head of Development
Birmingham Reperatory Theatre, Rachael Thomas, Executive Director
Nicander Limited, Derek Lister, Director
Trade Interchange Ltd, Mike Edmunds, Co-founder and Manager
Kraken IM, Ian Cornwell, Director
Bosch Thermotechnology Ltd, Carl Arntzen, Managing Director
HydraForce Hydraulics Ltd, Christine Tolley, Head of Human Resources
Salts Healthcare, Lee Cattermole FLPI, FIToL, Learning & Development Manager
Continental Engineering Services Ltd (Trading as Zytec Automotive Limited), Neil Heslington, Managing Director
Alucast, Tony Sartorius, Chairman

Desiblitz, Indi Deol, Director
Bruntwood, Jessica Bowles, Director of Strategy
Neurolixis Ltd, Adrian Newman-Tancredi, CEO
Terraprima Group Ltd, Jozef Wallis, CEO
One Big Circle Ltd, Emily Kent, Director
Spark SW (Trading as TechSpark), Ben Shorrock, Managing Director
Studio Giggle, Jonathan Brigden, Managing Director
Wriggle Local Limited, Rob Hall, CEO
GarField Microelectronics Ltd, Rod Oldfield, CEO
Mobius Works Ltd, Lee Bignell, Managing Director
299 Lighting Ltd, James Pomphrey, Managing Director
Hydrolize Ltd, Andrew Cox, Director
The Real Wrap Co, Phillippe Gill, Co-Founder & Operations Director
The Waiting Game Ltd, Tom Pickles, Director
Rentalist Ltd, Roland Tao, Managing Director
Bristol & Bath Regional Capital CIC, Colin Barnes, Housing Specialist
Muscle Rage Ltd, Ken Robson, Managing Director
Foot Anstey LLP, Nathan Peacey, Partner
Plus X Brighton Ltd, Mat Hunter and Paul Rostas, Co-CEO
Akro Valve Ltd, Matthew Knight, Managing Director
Now Charity Group Ltd, Michael Ryan, CEO
Easy Ceiling Technologies Ltd, Elena Likhodaeva, Director
Curenetics Ltd, Sola Adeleke, Director
Linguisticator Ltd, Aaron Ralby, CEO

Acoustic Associates Sussex Ltd, Peter Attwood, Managing Director
Gatwick Diamond Business, Jeff Alexander, Chief Executive
Ricardo PLC, Mike Bell, Group Strategy and Transformation Director
U9 Group, Carole Barron, Chair
Sock Monkey Studios, Bob Makin, CEO
Ten Feet Tall Ltd, Graham Ramsay, Managing Director