



SSAC CONSULTATION ON THE POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS FOR SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING IN SCOTLAND IN THE INDEPENDENCE DEBATE

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ISSUES

What is important for the James Hutton Institute – and for most research bodies in Scotland - is access to a range of funding streams and the ability to recruit and retain excellent science and business support staff. This will ensure that the excellence of the research community in Scotland can continue to grow and develop.

The **current situation** is very uncertain, which in itself has a potentially negative impact on funding and staffing:

- While the Scottish National Party and Scottish Government have defined the powers of Scotland as an independent state, there is a lack of detail on what policies an independent Scotland could and would implement if it had full sovereignty.
- It is not yet clear whether Scotland will retain the pound or what the financial settlement would be for an independent Scotland, whether and how Scotland could become a member of the EU, how many of the UK-wide institutions Scotland can continue to be part of and which organisations, such as regulatory bodies or research councils, would be established separately for Scotland.

Although **a no vote** could lead to greater devolution and increasingly divergent tax systems across the UK, it would also mean that much of the UK economic and organisational infrastructure will remain broadly the same, which reduces the level of uncertainty around this outcome, certainly in the short term.

The issues raised by **a yes vote** in relation to funding and staffing are more uncertain and are set out:

1. Access to funding streams

- Being seen as an independent country with a history of science excellence could open up new funding streams but the uncertainty over status and eligibility for different types of funding could close off others.
- It is unclear in an independent Scotland whether and how Scottish research institutes could subscribe to UK research councils for funding.
- The risk of our university partners losing access to RCUK funding has led to several prominent scientists and university leaders expressing their concerns about independence publicly. However, it is not yet clear how the research councils would work post Independence and whether separate Scottish-based research funding organisations would be created.
- The prolonged uncertainty around Scottish membership of the EU could have a negative impact on Scottish research institutes, particularly as there is a risk that Scotland will not secure EU membership. This aggravates the existing uncertainty around the long-term UK intentions towards membership of the EU.
- Within the Scottish context, the level of Scottish Government funding into research in an independent Scotland is difficult to estimate, particularly with the level of work needed to establish new bodies and take on responsibilities which have traditionally been managed across the UK.
- The impact on the level of company investment in sectors related to our science in an Independent Scotland will be affected by the economic prospects for the country, the level of corporation tax and the incentives offered to firms, all of which are currently uncertain. In itself that uncertainty could damage inward investment.

What we need:

***The ability to access UK, EU and international research funding to at least the same level as now under any constitutional settlement.
Better incentives, including tax incentives, to encourage business to collaborate with research institutes.***

2. Our ability to recruit and retain excellent scientists and support staff

- There will be no change to the attraction of living and working in some of the most beautiful areas in the UK, which is a significant factor in attracting and retaining staff.
- Concerns over different taxation systems and potential immigration issues could dissuade scientists from locating to Scotland or lead to scientists leaving.
- It is unclear whether we could continue to share UK-wide BBSRC terms and conditions in an independent Scotland.

What we need:

***To be able to attract the best UK and international talent.
Sustainable funding for pension scheme.***

QUESTIONS

1. How would the Scottish Government ensure that access to UK and EU funding for science research would remain the same, if not better, in an independent Scotland?
2. What impact would independence have on the level of Scottish Government investment in science and research?
3. When will we know whether an independent Scotland can become a member of the EU?
4. How long will it take to become a member of the EU?
5. What interim measures is the Scottish Government planning to put in place to maintain access to UK and EU funding streams in the period just after the referendum?