

Press release: Government commits to continue funding its share of Europe's flagship UK-based nuclear fusion research facility

- government pledges to meet its fair share of funding for the JET project until the end of 2020
- payment assured if the EU extends the UK's contract to host the Oxfordshire-based facility beyond 2018
- announcement underlines government commitment to maintain high quality research in the UK and continued collaboration with EU partners

The government has signalled its willingness to maintain research collaboration with European partners after the UK leaves the EU by committing to underwrite UK funding for the Joint European Torus (JET) project, the Business and Energy Secretary Greg Clark has announced today (27 June 2017).

Subject to the EU extending the UK's contract to host the world-class nuclear fusion facility beyond 2018, the UK has agreed to underwrite its fair share of JET's running costs, which is based at the Culham Centre for Fusion Energy in Oxfordshire.

The move supports the UK's ambition to be the go-to place for scientists and innovators across the world, and secure the right outcome for the UK's research base as we exit the EU.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

JET is a prized facility at the centre of the UK's global leadership in nuclear fusion research, which is why the government is taking every possible step to secure its future and to maintain highly-skilled jobs in the UK.

Combined with our Industrial Strategy and investment of £4.7 billion for research and development, today's funding commitment highlights the importance we place on this partnership and our desire for this valuable work to continue uninterrupted.

The JET project is home to the world's largest and most advanced nuclear fusion reactor and has led global efforts to develop a clean, safe energy source. It supports 1,300 jobs in the UK, 600 of which are highly skilled scientists and engineers.

Science Minister Jo Johnson said:

For nearly half a century, the UK has hosted national and international researchers who have brought us closer to realising one of science's greatest prizes – a clean, safe and virtually inexhaustible energy source.

Our exit from the EU has not altered our desire and willingness for the UK to continue playing a leading role in furthering our scientific understanding, and today's announcement aims to provide the necessary reassurance for us to continue this partnership.

The UK's contract to maintain and run the JET project is managed by the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) and is due to end in December 2018. As part of this contract, the EU currently provides around £60 million of funding per year, which represents 88% of JET's running costs. The UK's commitment to continue funding the facility will apply should the EU approve extending the UK's contract to host the facility until 2020. A discussion will then take place on the appropriate funding split.

Professor Ian Chapman, CEO of UKAEA said:

International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor (ITER) is the largest scientific endeavour mankind has ever undertaken and JET is undoubtedly the best place in the world to prepare for ITER's successful operation. UKAEA are pleased that the UK Government is committed to exploiting JET as we prepare to break fusion records in the next few years.

Today's announcement follows previous UK commitments to continue European research collaboration. In 2016, the government announced UK businesses and universities should continue to bid for competitive EU funds, such as the EU's Horizon 2020 research programme, while the UK remains a member of the EU, and the government will work with the Commission to ensure payment when funds are awarded – even when specific projects continue beyond the UK's departure from the EU.