Thank you for your letter of 20 January, enclosing the report your Committee considered on Scotland’s participation in the Horizon 2020 Programme.

I would like to assure you that the Government is committed to making the UK a global science superpower that attracts brilliant people and businesses from across the world. We value the strong collaborative partnerships that we have across Europe and the world in these areas – and recognise their importance to all parts of the UK, including Scotland. That is why we want to continue to support these opportunities in all scenarios.

As your letter states, the terms of the Withdrawal Agreement mean that the UK can continue to participate in EU Programmes financed by the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) until their closure. Horizon 2020 is a Programme funded under the current MFF. UK scientists, researchers and businesses can continue to participate in these Programmes and receive EU grant funding until the end of 2020 and for the lifetime of individual projects.

I am delighted that the whole of the UK, including Scotland continues to have a high success rate when applying for Horizon 2020 funding. Scottish researchers have secured close to €700m in research funding from Horizon 2020, clearly demonstrating Scotland’s continued success in Horizon 2020. Your Committee may wish to be aware that the Government is continuing to encourage organisations from all parts of the UK to carry on bidding into calls for new Horizon 2020 grant funding. We welcome your continued support in promoting this message.
You also raise the issue of Scottish participation beyond Horizon 2020 in the successor Horizon Europe Programme, and I can assure you that as set out in the manifesto, the Government will support the UK’s continued collaboration with the EU on scientific research.

We have been clear that where it is in the UK’s interest and good value for money, we will seek to participate in some specific EU Programmes. With regards to Horizon Europe, we have worked with EU Member States to negotiate a future Programme that will be in line with UK priorities, and have made clear that regardless of EU exit, we look forward to continuing our relationship in research and innovation with our European partners. However, the terms of any participation would be a matter for future negotiations.

To date, officials have been engaging regularly with their counterparts in the Devolved Administrations, including via the Horizon Europe Alternatives Board and the monthly Technical Group. We value the spirit of cooperation and important insights your officials contribute, without which we could not prepare for all EU Exit scenarios appropriately. Let me reassure you that it is absolutely my intent to ensure that the Devolved Administrations remain fully and appropriately involved in the ongoing policy work to provide credible alternatives to Horizon Europe.

I recognise the importance to the entire UK’s research and innovation community of these policies, and I hope my response is helpful in your Committee’s ongoing work. You may be aware that I have been invited to appear before the Scottish Education and Skills Committee in April by its Convener, Clare Adamson MSP, which will provide a further opportunity for me to update the Scottish Parliament on the Government’s position.

RT HON CHRIS SKIDMORE MP