

Russell Group response: DIT Canada Free Trade Agreement consultation

The Russell Group represents 24 of the UK's most research-intensive, outward-facing universities. International research and innovation collaborations with trusted partners, such as those from Canada, increase the quality of UK research outputs and will be key in tackling the environmental, economic, and healthcare challenges we face today and in the future.

- 1.1 The UK-Canada Free Trade Agreement (FTA) presents an opportunity to increase research and innovation collaborations with Canada around sensitive technology areas, where trusted partners can play an important role.¹ Incentivising increased collaboration with trusted partners will help avoid the challenges associated in collaborations with potentially hostile states and can also help the UK to break technological dependence from these actors.
- 1.2 The UK-Canada FTA also presents an excellent opportunity to boost collaboration on fundamental basic research in general. Universities in both countries have an excellent reputation for world-class research and there are already numerous projects where Canadian and UK academics work side by side to address key scientific challenges and advance knowledge. No country can afford to fund all of the research that it might need to underpin future advances and economic growth, and no one country will have 'all of the ideas', so it is essential the UK funds ways to build, maintain, and ideally strengthen, research ties with friendly nations around the world.
- 1.3 The FTA, or parallel bilateral agreements, could enhance UK-Canada research and innovation collaborations in four ways:
 - (a) **Boosting opportunities for collaboration on basic research by enhancing the two-way flow of talent and supporting post-pandemic network-building.** This could be achieved through a new initiative to support PhD students and early career researchers to spend time in each other's research universities, through a funded fellowship and exchange programme. This should cover the full spectrum of research disciplines, from arts and humanities to STEM. As well as providing opportunities to learn new techniques, share knowledge and experience, this type of exchange will benefit both nations in terms of creating networks vital for future business and academic research, and for the translation of research into innovations.
 - (b) **Ensuring there continues to be mutual recognition of equivalent qualifications between our two nations and visa requirements that do not add significant burdens or costs (including indirect costs such as healthcare surcharges).**
 - (c) **Developing strategic research and innovation initiatives, including a dedicated research and innovation joint funding programme.** Increased collaboration could focus on some of the more sensitive technology areas where the UK and Canada have complementary research strengths, for example around pandemic preparedness, artificial intelligence, space, quantum and green technologies.² A key challenge will be overcoming 'double jeopardy' – i.e., if there is an agreement to fund a programme, there should be one joint grant committee to judge proposals on the basis of research

¹ For example, those defined in the National Security and Investment Act

² Some of these areas have already been identified by a series of roundtables involving Mitacs, Canada's Chief Scientific Advisor, the High Commission of Canada in the UK, and the British High Commission in Ottawa and British academics including the Special Adviser to the UK Parliament Science and Technology Select Committee

excellence, not a process that requires separate sign off of proposals in the UK and in Canada.

- (d) **Exempting Canadian entities from the new National Security and Investment (NSI) Act.** The NSI Act introduces vital measures to protect UK businesses and intellectual property from hostile actors seeking to undermine the UK's national security. However, these key measures will add to lead-in times with Canadian entities and individuals for research collaborations and investments involving sensitive technologies. For example, once the Act becomes operational, research collaborations between universities in Canada and the UK involving sensitive technologies will be reported to BEIS through the NSI's voluntary referral process. Exempting Canadian organisations³ from the new NSI Act would help to facilitate continued collaboration around sensitive technology areas and would replicate arrangements in the US's equivalent screening regime, which exempts Australian, Canadian and UK organisations and individuals from certain requirements.⁴

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³ We also welcome consideration of exempting domestic individuals and organisations from the regime, as is the case in the Australian, German, and US investment screening regimes

⁴ The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States