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Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy

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Lord Boswell of Aynho
Chair, European Union Committee
European Union Committee
House of Lords
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17 April 2018

Dear Tim,

5282/18: Proposal for a Council Regulation on establishing the European High Performance Computing Joint Undertaking

Thank you for your comments on the above proposal submitted on March 22nd 2018.

The UK currently operates 15 of the world's top 100 supercomputers as recorded by Top 500 - an independent ranking of global high performance computing (HPC) capacity. 5 UK systems are in the top 50, specifically at the Met Office and European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts.

However, the list of fastest or most powerful computers is not necessarily the best reflection of the UK's capability. The UK has developed a very strong skills base in both HPC and the fundamental computer science skills needed to maximise the impact of supercomputers. Software, mathematics and algorithm development are all areas of strength in the UK and facilities like the Alan Turing Institute are continuing to develop those capabilities further. Further to this the UK has had significant success in the use of international HPC facilities on a competitive basis; this is evidenced by UK researchers leading a significant proportion of calls and awards in European HPC programmes including 16.6% of all projects in the Partnership for Advanced Computing in Europe (PRACE).

We have tasked UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) to create a long-term (up to 2030) research and innovation infrastructure roadmap based on a picture of existing UK infrastructure, future requirements and resulting investment priorities. As part of this, UKRI will examine the long term e-infrastructure capabilities required by researchers in the UK across disciplines and across sectors including, if appropriate, exascale technology. It will aim to deliver a strategy maximising the UK's current position and existing international relationships to deliver the best value for money for the UK while meeting the needs of the scientific and industrial community. This will help us answer questions about what the UK can and should be delivering in terms of new HPC hardware.

To support this work, Sir Mark Walport has set up an e-infrastructure advisory board, consisting of experts from across industry, academia and the public sector. Dave Watson, formerly of IBM, will chair the new group. Future UK membership of Euro-HPC will be considered by this group and as part of this wider strategic look at research infrastructure priorities across the UK. Euro-HPC has not yet formed and the UK is actively involved in official-level discussions aimed at setting up the initiative. A decision on joining will be taken once the e-infrastructure board and UKRI has outlined its needs and priorities.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the European Scrutiny Committee, House of Lords, the Clerks of both Committees, Les Saunders (Cabinet Office) and Jenny Steinitz (BEIS).

Yours sincerely,

SAM GYIMAH MP