

**Nuclear energy**

## EU rebuffs UK attempt to continue collaborating on nuclear fusion experiment

Bloc tells London it will be locked out of Iter project in France within months unless it rejoins civil atomic programme



A module being assembled at the Iter nuclear fusion project in Saint-Paul-les-Durance, southern France © Nicolas Tucat/AFP via Getty Images

**Andy Bounds** in Brussels, and **Michael Peel** and **Tom Wilson** in London 9 HOURS AGO

The UK's attempt to continue collaborating in the world's largest nuclear fusion experiment has been rebuffed by the EU, which wants Britain to rejoin its civil atomic programme as part of the deal.

Brussels has told London it will be locked out of the Iter project, based in France, within months unless it affiliates to Euratom, which it quit when it left the bloc, according to people familiar with the matter.

The UK has asked to continue with Iter as an outside partner, an arrangement granted to Australia. But the EU has said it must also join a Euratom research scheme, the people said. Australia has a co-operation agreement with Euratom.

London left Euratom because it did not believe the programme provided value for money, and stayed out when it rejoined other EU research schemes last year.

Iter is an international project to build the world's biggest tokamak — the reaction vessel for nuclear fusion. After four decades of experiments the technology is still years away from proving it can generate commercially viable power, but supporters hope it will prove a viable source of plentiful low-carbon energy.

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apart from the EU, other members are China, India, Japan, South Korea, Russia and the US.

A crunch point between the EU and UK has come because contracts with Iter for dozens of UK scientists that continued after Brexit come to an end in August. These cannot be extended beyond that point, according to two people familiar with the situation.

“The UK participated in Iter as part of Euratom and it should do so on that basis if it wants to remain involved,” said an EU official. A second official said there should be no “cherry picking” of EU programmes.

EU countries must participate in Euratom’s research and training programmes if they want to be part of the Fusion for Energy joint undertaking that manages the bloc’s contribution to Iter.

Fusion for Energy has a €1.4bn (£1.2bn) budget covering the period between January 2021 and December 2025. The UK’s share, were it to rejoin, would be more than €150mn without discounts.

London and Brussels drew up a draft Brexit protocol in December 2020 that stated the UK would affiliate with both the Euratom training programme and Fusion for Energy.

A joint statement by the European Commission, the bloc’s executive arm, and the Council of the EU, which represents member states, last year noted “with regret that the United Kingdom has [decided not to participate](#) in these two measures”.

The UK has its own fusion ambitions, which are managed by its Atomic Energy Authority. For 40 years, it hosted the EU-backed Joint European Torus project, which conducted its last experiment in December.

Now Britain plans to build the world’s first commercially viable fusion power plant in Nottinghamshire, using pioneering reactor technology,

UK atomic energy officials hope to strike a bespoke laboratory co-operation deal with the EU and other Iter members.

The UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, which has oversight of energy policy, said: “International collaboration remains a key pillar of our strategy and we hope continued UKAEA collaboration with Iter partners can be agreed.”

The European Commission declined to comment.

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