

Brexit to cost jobs if Britain loses medicines watchdog

Tom Whipple Science Editor

Sweden is planning to poach a key medicines watchdog from Britain in a move that threatens hundreds of skilled jobs.

The revelation came as the Japanese government said yesterday that its pharmaceutical investments in Britain would probably have to move if, as expected, the European Medicines Agency relocates its headquarters out of London.

Anders Lönnberg, the Swedish government's co-ordinator for life sciences, said that he was already helping to prepare a bid for the agency, amid a widespread belief that it could not remain in the UK after the Brexit vote.

The EMA is the EU watchdog responsible for approving all drugs across the 27 nations. It employs 900 people from its headquarters in Canary Wharf.

However, officials have said that after Brexit its UK operations are now untenable. Sir Kent Woods, who was chairman of its board until last year, said immediately after the vote that "the leading assumption must be that the EMA will move elsewhere".

Mr Lönnberg said there was already a working group in Sweden convened on the basis of that assumption, and

preparing a case for Stockholm. "You cannot have an agency for the EU if you are not a member. That is quite obvious," he said. Given that is the case, he said it was a tantalising prize. "We get 900 jobs, and a network of highly skilled researchers. It will help a lot with national healthcare."

There is also the possibility that Sweden would attract other private companies into the sector. The Japanese government has released a document warning of the consequences of Brexit to their investments. It specifically singles out the EMA as crucial to the presence of their companies.

"Many Japanese pharmaceutical companies are operating in London, due to the EMA's location in London," the document said. "If the EMA were to transfer to other EU member states, the appeal of London as an environment

for the development of pharmaceuticals would be lost, which could possibly lead to a shift in the flow of R&D funds and personnel to continental Europe. This could force Japanese companies to reconsider their business activities."

Mr Lönnberg said that at least half a dozen EU countries were also plotting to entice the agency, but that Sweden was the most serious contender.



Copyright NLA Media Access. For internal use only. Not for reproduction.