

## **Developing SFC's Research Strategy**

- This paper presents a draft SFC Research Strategy for consideration. This draft expands on the research elements of SFC's Strategic Plan (2015-18) and is therefore focussed on 2017-18.
- The paper also highlights, for comment, issues suggested by SFC RKEC's Research Excellence Working Group (RExWG) for consideration in the development of SFC's next Strategic Plan for 2018 onwards and any associated Research Strategy.

## **Recommendations**

- Consider the proposed draft (2017-18) for recommendation to the SFC Board;
- Consider the developing range of issues under debate for the next Research Strategy (2018 on); and
- Comment on the scope and direction of the propositions.

## **Financial implications**

- No immediate financial implications

## Developing SFC's Research Strategy

### Purpose

1. This paper presents a draft SFC Research Strategy for consideration. This draft expands on the research elements of SFC's Strategic Plan (2015-18) and is therefore focussed on 2017-18. The paper also highlights for comment issues suggested by SFC RKEC's Research Excellence Working Group (RExWG) for consideration in the development of SFC's next Strategic Plan and an associated Research Strategy.

### Background

2. In July 2016, Audit Scotland published an *Audit of Higher Education in Scottish Universities*<sup>1</sup>. Its recommendations include:

*"The SFC should ensure it has strategies for research and innovation that set out clearly:*

- *what the SFC's aims and objectives are for these areas*
- *how it plans to achieve its aims and objectives*
- *how performance will be measured*
- *align with the outcomes and activities in the SFC's new strategic plan and Scotland's Economic Strategy*

*The SFC has strategies for research and innovation, but these now need reviewed to ensure they fully align with the SFC's new strategic plan and Scotland's Economic Strategy."*

3. RKEC established a Research Excellence Working Group in August 2016 to provide support "in the development and delivery of SFC's strategy for research excellence". The Terms of Reference and current membership of this Group are attached (Annexes A and B). Over four meetings, the RExWG has refined the parameters of an immediate statement of SFC's Research Strategy, and the scope and style of a future statement.
4. A version of this paper was considered by the joint meeting of this Committee and Universities Scotland's RKEC on 9 May 2017. This paper incorporates comments made at, and following, that meeting.

### Research Strategy 2017-18

5. Any statement of SFC Research Strategy should be consistent with SFC's live Strategic Plan. SFC's current [Strategic Plan](#) runs from 2015-18. The proposed

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2016/nr\\_160707\\_higher\\_education.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2016/nr_160707_higher_education.pdf)

Research Strategy 2017-18 (Annex C) is therefore structured around the research elements contained within that Strategic Plan.

6. Further detail has been provided on proposed actions under:
  - i Research competitiveness
  - ii Research training
  - iii International connections
7. RKEC is asked to consider the proposed draft (2017-18) for recommendation to the SFC Board.

### **Research Strategy (2018-21)**

8. Annex D briefly summarises the issues which have been covered in discussion of a future Research Strategy by the Research Excellence Working Group. It is anticipated that there will be further discussion of priorities for inclusion in the draft of SFC's next Strategic Plan at RExWG, in the autumn. It is also anticipated that, as is proposed for 2017-18, the 2018-21 Strategic Plan will be supplemented by a fuller Research Strategy. These will be developed in parallel.
9. RKEC is asked to consider the developing range of issues under debate for the next Research Strategy (2018-21) and to comment on the scope and direction of the propositions.

### **Next Steps**

10. Recommendations from RKEC on a statement of Research Strategy 2017-18 will be taken to SFC's Board on 23 June 2017. If agreed, we would expect the statement to be published during the summer.
11. SFC's Board intends to begin the process of developing its Strategic Plan 2018-21 in October 2017. Advice from RKEC will inform this, and this in turn will be informed by discussions at RExWG, and with US RKEC.

### **Risk assessment**

12. Low risk.
13. The proposed research strategy (2017-18) is structured by the current SFC Strategic Plan. Both the current Strategic Plan and the proposed research strategy (2017-18) were subject to consultation – in the case of the research strategy, through inviting comment from Universities Scotland's RKEC.
14. Developments of research strategy beyond 2018 are at an early stage. They therefore present a low risk at this point.

## Equality and diversity assessment

15. A strategy which guides SFC's actions in support of the Scottish research base has significant potential to affect participation by protected groups in Scotland's research endeavour, and the impact of Scottish research on these groups. An equality and diversity impact assessment will be undertaken before each Research Strategy is finalised.
16. SFC Equality Outcomes<sup>2</sup> relevant to this approach are:
  - Understand the diversity of college and university staff, management and governing bodies leading to specific Equality Outcomes for improvement by AY 2017-18.
  - An improved and aligned evidence base for equality, informed by increased rates of disclosure across protected characteristics.
  - Advancement in the mainstreaming of equality and diversity within colleges and universities within the outcome agreement process.
17. Issues to be considered in undertaking the equality and diversity assessments include:
  - The SFC's commitment to embedding equality and diversity in the design and implementation of the research strategy, in order to ensure the ready participation of all available talent in the drive to make Scotland "the best place in the world ... to research ...".
  - The significant influence of the Research Excellence Framework and its peer review processes on our use of funds to support research excellence in Scotland's universities and therefore the need to ensure equality and diversity considerations are built into these structures.
  - The contribution already made by previous equality and diversity assessments in designing current funding policies mechanisms (including Research Excellence Grant, Research Postgraduate Grant and Strategic Funding), the potential to review these and the need to ensure an appropriate contribution to future new approaches.
  - The need to examine and collect evidence on equality and diversity both in initial assessment of potential impacts and in monitoring and evaluation of implementation.

## Financial implications

18. While an agreed research strategy will influence SFC research policies and funding decisions flowing from these, no direct funding decisions are proposed

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<sup>2</sup> SFC Equality Outcomes for AY2017-21 have been published in the [Scottish Funding Council Mainstreaming and Equality Outcome Report](#) (pp. 44-49). The Equality Outcomes set out in this paper are those of particular relevance to the SFC's Research Strategy.

at this stage.

### **Recommendations**

19. RKEC is invited to:

- to consider the proposed draft (2017-18) for recommendation to the SFC Board;
- to consider the developing range of issues under debate for the next Research Strategy (2018-21); and
- to comment on the scope and direction of the propositions.

### **Publication**

20. This paper will be published on the Council website in edited format as it contains information:

- intended for future publication (annex C) and
- which – if disclosed – would be prejudicial to effective conduct of public affairs (annex D).

### **Further information**

21. Contact: Morag Campbell, Assistant Director, Research & Innovation, 0131 313 6530, [mcampbell@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:mcampbell@sfc.ac.uk).

## **Annex A: Research Excellence Working Group: Terms of Reference**

The Scottish Funding Council's (SFC) Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) wishes to bring renewed energy to the support of research excellence in Scotland. Research underpins much of the reputation of our universities and much of the value they generate for the economy, so SFC will work to play a more active role in maximising the value of Scotland's research assets.

### **Purpose**

The **Research Excellence Working Group** is being established to support RKEC in the development and delivery of SFC's strategy for research excellence. It will do this by providing an early-stage, more in-depth and wide-ranging consideration of issues of importance to the research base than is possible within RKEC's scheduled discussions on these matters. This will concentrate and inform RKEC's own deliberations and recommendations to SFC.

### **Terms of Reference**

The RExWG will:

- Monitor, identify and review developing issues and opportunities affecting the Scottish research base and its impacts, and alert RKEC to the need to act on these
- Explore, debate and advise RKEC upon issues and opportunities for the research base and research funding, as identified by RKEC, by RExWG itself, and by the Executive
- Provide reports and guidance as requested by RKEC

### **Timescale:**

- The role of this Group is expected to be long term. However, its continuation will be reviewed in autumn 2017 & periodically thereafter.

### **Outcomes**

- More fully developed advice from SFC RKEC to SFC Board
- More effective SFC research strategy

### **Membership**

- Members are invited as individuals rather than as representatives of any organisation.

## **Equalities**

- Under the duties set by the Equality Act 2010, consideration of equality issues must influence the decisions reached by SFC and should therefore be an integral element of the Group's discussions and recommendations.

## **Potential projects**

Potential projects identified by RKEC for the Research Excellence Working Group at its inception include:

- Considering the effectiveness of SFC's investment and support for (world leading) research excellence and possible alternative approaches
- Helping to develop an accurate picture of the health of Scotland's research base highlighting both the strengths and weaknesses and opportunities
- Developing a communications strategy to help celebrate and promote the successes of Scottish publicly funded research and the opportunities for Scotland
- Analysing and interpreting the threats and opportunities to Scotland's research base associated with Scotland and UK wide policy developments
- Considering opportunities and approaches to working with partner organisations to develop Scottish research
- Exploring the relationship of research training to a sustainable research base and the evolution of researcher training and development to support the expectations Scotland has of its universities in the 21st century
- Considering Scotland's international standing in research and ways of enhancing this.

August 2016

## Annex B: Research Excellence Working Group membership

Professor Albert Rodger	Scottish Funding Council	Chair, RKEC
Professor Tim Bedford	ADP Knowledge Exchange, University of Strathclyde	RKEC
Dr Alicia Greated	Director of Research and Enterprise Services Heriot-Watt University	RKEC <i>Research administration</i> (US nominee)
Professor Tom Inns	Director, Glasgow School of Art	RKEC <i>SSIs</i> (US nominee)
Professor Catherine Lyall	Science, Technology and Innovation Studies, University of Edinburgh	<i>Science policy</i>
Professor Raffaella Ocone	School of Engineering and Physical Sciences, Heriot-Watt University	(RSE nominee)
Professor Sir Tim O'Shea	Principal, University of Edinburgh	(US nominee)
Professor Judith Phillips	Deputy Principal Research, University of Stirling	<i>Research management</i> (US nominee)
Dr John Rogers	Director of Research and Enterprise, University of Stirling	RKEC (to Jan 2017) <i>Research administration</i>
Alex Vincent	Associate Director, Policy and Analysis, Research Councils UK	<i>Research funding</i>
Professor Petra Wend	Principal, Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	(US nominee)
Dr Teresa Martin	Research, Science and Society Team Leader, HE and Science Division, Scottish Government	Scottish Government observer
David Lott or Ruth Meyer	Deputy Director (Policy), Universities Scotland Senior Policy Officer	Observer

