

SFC monitoring and evaluation of strategic projects: annual update

- This paper reports current progress on reporting by SFC Strategic Investments, evaluation activity in 2017, and proposed evaluation activity in 2018.

Recommendations

- Note the current progress on reporting, and evaluation activity, of SFC's Strategic Investments.
- Note the indications emerging of the effects on SFC's Strategic Investments.

Financial implications

- No direct financial implications.

SFC monitoring and evaluation of strategic projects: annual update

Purpose

1. This paper reports current progress on monitoring of SFC strategic investments, evaluation activity in 2017, and proposed evaluation activity in 2018.

Strategic Plan implications

2. The investments covered by this report address our Strategic Plan commitments to:
 - Invest in, and support, the development of high-performing colleges and universities ... (High-performing colleges and universities).
 - Invest our resources strategically.
 - Work ... to achieve the greatest impact.
 - Work with colleges and universities to make the best use of public resources. (Strategic Investment)

Background

3. Council last considered a paper on monitoring and evaluation of strategic investments in January 2017 (SFC/17/10). The Audit and Compliance Committee considered a version of this paper in December 2017 (ACC/17/34).
4. Following a pilot, a new approach to Reporting on Strategic Investments (ROSI) was [launched](#) in June 2016. Key features were a standard return template and a standard return date (30 September)¹. Once returns are made, they are logged centrally and distributed to the responsible SFC staff for review and further action. SFC's internal Strategic Funding Group receives progress reports on this implementation and progress.

Monitoring of strategic investments

5. The end of September 2017 saw the first ROSI return deadline. At 20 January 2018, we have returns from awards with the following status:

| Requested through ROSI | Logged | Reviewed | Of which: On-track/ Completed | Not on-track/ blank |
|------------------------|--------|----------|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| 119 | 108 | 42 | 37 | 1/4 |

¹ As part of the gradual introduction of this process, awards due to make a return between July and December 2016 were asked to do so by their original planned date.

6. The majority of current awards have fulfilled their conditions of grant by reporting as required. Staff are processing these returns to record progress against objectives, to ensure appropriate use of resources and to capture lessons learned. The challenge revealed by this first cycle is in ensuring staff time is available and committed to completing these reviews.
7. Of the 11 ROSI outstanding returns: 3 are already assessed as on-track by their liaison officers as a result of on-going interactions; 4 had been granted extensions and were due to deliver by the end of 2017. The Strategic Funding Group will give consideration to suspension or clawback of payments on these awards.
8. The majority of current awards are showing good progress towards achieving their outcomes, as indicated by officers' assessments that they are on track. The one return which has been reviewed as not on-track has been experiencing difficulties with staff vacancies and with its governance structure. SFC is working with the host institution and with Scottish Government to resolve these issues.
9. Internal audit considered our records of awards and assessment of progress towards outcomes during review of grant funding distribution (see ACC/17/32). No issues of concern were highlighted.
10. Work is underway to extract:
 - Summaries of progress as identified by (i) the award-holders' annual reports and (ii) by SFC liaison staff assessing those reports for alignment with strategic priorities.
 - Quantitative and other data contained within the annual returns.

Other information extracted

11. Quantitative extracts from 121 self-assessment annual and 38 end of award returns is given in Annex A². The numerical data from this first full set of self-assessments has not been further validated, but its collation gives us a glimpse of the overall impact our strategic investments are having on the sectors and society more generally. We hope that through engagement with award holders, the quality of the information gathered through these self-assessments can provide more robust information in future years.

² These include returns made on strategic awards which are not part of the ROSI process, but which parallel this method. Taken as a whole, including ROSI and other arrangements, 198 returns were due of which 159 have been logged as received. Of the 39 returns which were due but which are not yet logged, indications from colleagues are that 27 have been received.

12. With the proviso that the quality of returns is variable and not necessarily complete, we note that:
- The awards' assessment of their progress against each of their original award outcomes was overwhelmingly positive.
 - By far the most commonly cited achievements for these investments were improved networks and collaborative engagements.
 - Our funding is helping to lever further funding (around £132M).
 - Our awards are supporting around 340 FTE posts and studentships within the sector.

Evaluation

Forward evaluations

13. Each award is reviewed at the end of its funding. Under SFC's evaluation framework, it is intended that significant investments by SFC should be subject to impact evaluation several years after the end of support, either individually or as part of a programme evaluation. The number of impact evaluation undertaken in any year is affected by the available resources.
14. Individual strategic awards are assigned evaluation scores at outset and completion, allowing identification of priorities for evaluation. SFC's internal Strategic Funding Group has considered recently completed projects and their scores, and agreed that the priorities for evaluation should be a group of awards relating to:
- Enterprise education and entrepreneurial training.
 - Business start-up support concentrated around colleges and universities.
15. These two areas are of interest to the Scottish Government and SFC will involve them in the evaluation process. Interest has also been expressed in evaluation of the long term impact of our Knowledge Exchange investments.
16. The Council Board approved a proposed evaluation of the Research Pooling programme at its meeting in September 2017 (SFC/17/79). Terms of reference for this evaluation are being finalised and work will be undertaken in 2018.

Evaluations in 2017

17. Progress with reviews of strategic student places was reported to the Finance Committee in November 2017 (FC/17/56). Institutions have been informed of the outcome of the reviews of the Widening Access and Articulation places. Work on Skills places is nearing conclusion.

18. Access evaluation work fed into the [Triennial Review](#) which was published in August 2017. This is a significant piece of work and is informing future policy and funding decisions.
19. Work has started on an examination of approaches to monitoring and evaluation of SFC's Capital/Estates funding.

Risk assessment

20. Failure to maintain a proper system of monitoring and evaluation of strategic investments would mean a risk of failure to demonstrate:
 - That strategic plan commitments are being met.
 - That the resources and effort committed by the Council are adding value.

Equality and diversity assessment

21. Contributions of SFC investments to the equality and diversity agenda are reviewed in the annual ROSI collection.
22. Equality impact assessments will form part of the preparations for the proposed evaluations for 2018.

Recommendations

23. The Council is invited to:
 - Note the current progress on reporting, and evaluation activity, of SFC's Strategic Investments.
 - Note the indications emerging of the effects on SFC's Strategic Investments.

Financial implications

24. No direct financial implications.

Publication

25. This paper will be published on the Council website.

Further information

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

Annex A Quantitative extracts 2017 returns