

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

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| Date / time response submitted | 12/01/2022 16:17 |
| In what capacity are you submitting your response? | Organisation |
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| Overarching issues | |
| Q1. If it were necessary, what would be the implications of delaying implementation of REF 2021 results and changes to REG until AY 2023-24? | <p>We are in support of maintaining the status quo for an additional year in order to provide stability and to ensure that the revised model is implemented effectively and with due consideration to ensure its effectiveness and appropriateness for the sector.</p> <p>However, it should not be forgotten that a core argument for accepting the revised March 2021 REF submission date (as opposed to any longer submission timeframe) was to allow funding models to be implemented in the 2022-23 cycle. Given the extraordinary effort and commitment demonstrated by the sector in adhering to this revised submission date, we would encourage SFC to guarantee no further delay beyond AY 2023-24.</p> <p>Furthermore, the current model is based on REF2014 research which includes outputs produced from as far back as 2008 (some 14 years out of date). This is far from representative of the current research landscape for many Scottish Institutions and so, it is important that changes are effected by AY 2023-24.</p> <p>Based on the current REGa + REGb + REGc formula, approximately 72% of the entire REG funding is directly linked to REF results. For Edinburgh Napier University, this represents around Â£1.2m of the Â£1.7m funding (based on 2021-22 budget). Since the last REF results in 2014, Edinburgh Napier University has invested a considerable amount of resource to support its research environment. As a direct result of this investment and the subsequent improved research environment which followed, we anticipate a much more favourable REF outcome in the REF 2021 in comparison to 2014, which should result in a higher REG allocation. From our perspective, we expect that any delay in implementation of the REF 2021 results and subsequent changes to the REG allocation in 2022-23 would result in a lower allocation to Edinburgh Napier University in the interim</p> |

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| | <p>year 2022-23. Whilst we accept that some delay to the implementation may be inevitable and that it would be impractical to oppose any sort of delay whatsoever, we would urge that this is limited to one year only.</p> <p>Another suggestion might be that where there are any instances of demonstrable significant disadvantage (say monetary or percentage) as a result of the delay, that there is a mechanism put in place that would allow for a 'one off' compensatory adjustment in the following year (2023-24). This in effect could retrospectively compensate those institutions such as Edinburgh Napier University who had invested heavily in their research environment in intervening years between REF submissions with improved results.</p> |
| <p>Q2. Should SFC seek to limit downward changes in REG experienced by individual universities post REF2021 and, if so, what should be the scope of any adjustments made?</p> | <p>We support the attempt to limit downward changes in REG, recognising the need to reduce instability, particularly in the current Covid-19 environment and to allow institutions to plan strategically and effectively for the change. This should be managed carefully and transparently, so as not to undermine the integrity of the REF2021 exercise and with relative consideration for the effect on individual institutions' overall income and on research capacity to deliver against key priorities.</p> <p>Since 2014, Edinburgh Napier University has invested significantly in its research infrastructure and staff to grow and execute its long-term strategic plan. A substantial proportion of REG funding has been used to support this investment and any downward changes to funding would directly impact on this investment and future capability and capacity to deliver high quality and volume research; support for research students and early career academic staff; develop external strategic partnerships and impact our efforts to grow interdisciplinary research and strategic international research partnerships, which is all essential in enriching our research environment.</p> |
| <p>Q3. You are invited to comment in your answers throughout the document on opportunities for and barriers to advancing equality and achieving inclusion. Overarching comments related to the aims of the public sector duty in the context of this review should be made here.</p> | <p>In Scottish higher education, 56% of students from disadvantaged backgrounds and 66% of mature students study at modern universities. Modern universities represent one third of institutions, which underlines the disproportionate impact they make in relation to the statistics offered above.</p> <p>In the context of advancing equalities and achieving inclusion therefore, it is vital that smaller less research-intensive institutions are provided with sufficient REG</p> |

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| | <p>and RPG funding to support a vibrant research environment, which informs teaching and exposes students to a learning environment that has research activity embedded into the wider structures of the institution.</p> <p>Larger research-intensive institutions tend to attract the lion's share of competitively funded research income, which contributes towards a vibrant research culture. Appropriate levels of REG and RPG funding within the institutions that do the heavy lifting on access and participation at undergraduate level will serve to prevent research being siloed across different groups of students.</p> |
| <p>Q4. How important (or otherwise) is it that the Scottish approach to underpinning research funding is in step with the rest of the UK? What elements of consistency (or distinctiveness) in SFC's approach influence Scottish HEIs' research competitiveness?</p> | <p>We would be in favour of maintaining elements of consistency with the rest of the UK, recognising the importance of a UK identity in research and research collaboration. We are strongly committed to the idea of UK system of higher education and the UK wide principles underpinning REF. In this regard, it is important that the allocation of recurrent funding is informed by the REF and that some of the fundamentals of how excellence is recognised are maintained across the whole of the UK with respect to recurrent funding.</p> <p>Aspects of consistency might aim to include some core principles across the nations, particularly with regard to quality elements of any formula, particularly around thresholds and relative weighting/value.</p> <p>However we also believe there is some flexibility and room for distinctiveness in order to reflect the Scottish education context and research priorities, and that this can be managed accordingly within the formula.</p> |
| <p>Q5. In the changing research landscape, is the balance of funding between SFC's underpinning support for research and underpinning support for PGR training & environment optimal?</p> | <p>Whilst recognising the overall budgetary constraints of SFC, our view is that the funding allocated for environment is currently at a minimum of what is really needed to invest building a thriving research environment.</p> |
| <p>Research Excellence Grant</p> | |
| <p>Q6. Views are sought on the principles proposed for REG and on whether the proposals within this paper are consistent with the principles.</p> | <p>We agree that proposals put forward are consistent with the principles for REG and particularly emphasise the need for a robust and transparent allocation method based on clearly defined criteria which avoids unnecessary complexity, which rewards excellent research 'wherever it is found' and avoids further concentration of funding.</p> |

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| <p>Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?</p> | <p>The level of weighting attributed to 3* and 4* research in the REG funding formula disproportionately benefits those larger institutions who already have large concentrations of competitively won research funding, effectively inhibiting growth and innovation in the smaller less research-intensive institutions. In Scotland, there are two institutions who attract 54% of the total REG funding (and 60% of Scottish competitively won research income as per their 2019-20 accounts) and nine smaller institutions which attract less than 6% of all REG funding.</p> <p>Edinburgh Napier University would strongly advocate a change to the funding model which also recognises the developmental nature of research and considers increasing funding to support growth of research capacity and excellence in smaller Scottish institutions. SFC should consider a funding model that recognises 2* research, which would support developmental research and support the narrative on nurturing academic talent. Whilst the recognition of 3* & 4* research should be maintained, Edinburgh Napier would support a change to the current funding model where a proportion of the REG funding could be utilised to recognise developmental research.</p> <p>If, however it is decided that only 3 and 4* research is to be rewarded, we would strongly discourage any further increase in disparity between 3 and 4* weighting beyond that which is currently used ($4^* = 3.31$, $3^* = 1$), so as to avoid any further concentration of REG funding towards larger institutions.</p> |
| <p>Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?</p> | <p>Edinburgh Napier University is generally content with the balance of the different elements that make up REG as outlined in the document.</p> <p>It should continue to be based on the overall quality profile rather than the sub-profile proportions, because the overall profile is a reflection of the combined research portfolio for the unit and reflects the cumulative, rounded scoring calculation already applied by REF.</p> |
| <p>Q9. We would welcome your views on the balance between the elements of the REG formula. Within the income-driven elements, we welcome your views on whether we have</p> | <p>We recommend maintaining the current proportion of REG a (72%) and REG b /c (28%). Particularly because an element of the income generation has already been accounted for in the REGa quality formula, whereby the REF environment score considers the income in the period (REF4b/c) when informing the final environment</p> |

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| <p>included the correct income sources.</p> | <p>score.</p> <p>Paragraph 36 of the consultation document makes reference to a potential increase in the share of REG funding allocated by reference to competitive charity income (REGc) from 11% to 15%. The impact on REG funding allocations on smaller less research-intensive institutions from this proposed change would need to be considered carefully. Analysis of each of the Scottish Institutions research income in 2019-20 shows that charity research income as a proportion of total research income is relatively low across the sector. However, charity income accounts for 27% of all research income in both Glasgow University and Dundee University and 21% at Edinburgh University. These three institutions combined REG allocation already accounts for 62% of total REG funding available across the sector, so an increase to REG formula to reflect a greater percentage of charity related income could potentially increase this proportion to these institutions further. Careful consideration is required to avoid any further concentration of REG funding towards larger institutions at the expense of smaller institutions.</p> |
| <p>Research Postgraduate Grant</p> | |
| <p>Q10. Are the proposed principles for RPG appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape?</p> | <p>We agree that the proposed principles for RPG, while fairly high-level, are appropriate for the purpose of the grant and recognise the need to support Postgraduate Research students with the variety of career routes that can include research skills both in academic and beyond.</p> |
| <p>Q11a. We are seeking views on the purpose of RPG and its future role in supporting Scottish institutions to respond – individually and collaboratively – to the changing landscape.</p> | <p>We welcome the principles of the RPG to support Postgraduate research students to become world-class researchers. The research environment is increasingly complex and having a stable, long-term funding stream allows organisations to develop initiatives to prepare our students for this complex, and regularly changing, landscape. With this complexity, there is a need for improved support for the range of careers that PGR students now enter to ensure they are equipped for the flexible, dynamic career paths that now exist and RPG could be used to support this across the sector.</p> <p>We regularly collaborate with other universities, and through the Research pools and National Graduate Schools using our RPG funding to contribute to shared initiatives where needed. The current RPG allows us to</p> |

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| | <p>maintain these collaborations, while retaining the ability to develop support for our individual PGR cohort based on their needs.</p> <p>There is individual distinctiveness within the Scottish university sector, and having RPG funding allows us as an organisation to develop the support for the diverse cohort of PGR students that study at Edinburgh Napier. There remains a need for the RPG to support individual organisations to create their own research culture and environment which attracts a diverse range of students.</p> |
| <p>Q11b. We are seeking views on taking forward increased accountability for RPG, for example by linking to shared objectives or outcomes, and how SFC and the sector could work in partnership to achieve this.</p> | <p>Researcher Development activities (which often include PGR students in smaller institutions) are already held accountable through reporting on several sector wide Concordats (such as the Researcher Development Concordat and associated HR Excellence in Research Award, Research Integrity Concordat and the Knowledge Exchange Concordat) as well as through the REF environment component. We recognise the need for accountability of RPG funding, however there is a risk that we create an additional burden of complex reporting that could divert effort from initiatives that will make the difference to our PGR students.</p> <p>The development of the National Impact Framework could be used to facilitate shared objectives across different organisations; with the recognition that agreeing shared approaches can require longer term planning than an annual cycle.</p> <p>While many universities are tackling similar concerns around the PGR experience, we need to retain funding that allows some flexibility for individual organisations to tailor initiatives to the needs of their individual PGR cohorts (which may differ significantly between research intensive and smaller research institutions; for example, in the diversity of their cohorts in age, part-time status, and students with caring responsibilities).</p> |
| <p>Q12a. We are seeking views on how the RPG could play an increased role in improving participation of underrepresented groups within Scotland's PGR</p> | |

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| community, particularly within specific research areas where under-representation is most extreme. | |
| Q12b. We are seeking views on how SFC's focus on widening access and participation could be supported by RPG in the postgraduate research student context. | <p>Modern universities, such as Edinburgh Napier have a long track record of widening access to education, and our expertise could be applied to widening participation at PGR level. Recognising that we have strong links to our local communities, which include often underrepresented groups, strategic use of the RPG could ensure that all universities have a visible PGR cohort representing the diversity of our communities.</p> <p>Creating a visible pipeline for underrepresented groups to progress into university, all the way through to PGR level, by embedding research at all stages and through visible representation from diverse students could help achieve SFC's aims to widen participation at postgraduate level. Supporting a vibrant research environment in all universities, not just in research-intensive organisations by recognising that developmental research (i.e. 1* and 2* research outputs as defined in REF) and integrating research activities into all stages of education could help underrepresented groups see the benefits of PGR study for themselves and to society.</p> <p>Institutions such as Edinburgh Napier, in their location and connection to place, have the opportunity to connect with underrepresented communities, and RPG funding could be used to support this more strategically to widen participation.</p> |
| Other comments | |
| Q13. Please make any other comments relevant to this consultation. | |
| Publication of responses | |
| We may publish a summary of the consultation responses and, in some cases, the responses themselves. Published responses may be attributed to an organisation where this information has been provided but will not contain personal data. When providing a | Publish information and excerpts from this survey response INCLUDING the organisation name. |

response in an individual capacity, published responses will be anonymised. Please confirm whether or not you agree to your response being included in any potential publication.

