

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

Date / time response submitted	12/01/2022 11:36
In what capacity are you submitting your response?	Organisation
Your organisation (if applicable)	Glasgow Caledonian University
Your full name	Professor Andrea Nelson
Telephone	07584 642609
Email	andrea.nelson@gcu.ac.uk
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?	At present the assumption is that the imminent REF results (published May 2022) would be translated promptly into REG allocations for funding in AY 2022/23. There are challenges and risks associated with this: a practical challenge for the SFC in the preparation of budgets, a lack of clarity for HEIs as to REG budgets prior to summer 2022, and potential changes in REG allocation being notified to HEIs with minimal notice. Alongside the practical challenges, there is also a risk of late delay to the allocation of REG. The counterargument is that HEIs with a significantly improved REF profile and hence REG allocation should be able to benefit from this at the earliest practicable opportunity. Given the timeline for HEI budget planning, the multi-year commitments made against REG allocations, and the disruption to research over the 2020/2021 calendar years, we believe that a measure of stability and certainty to allow planning will be important for the sector. We, therefore, conclude that a delayed implementation date for REG funding allocations of AY 23/24 is sensible to allow planning for 22/23 to proceed on a 'known budget' basis. Any delay after 23/24 for REG implementation would not be fair in respect of the allocation of funds in line with REF performance.
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?	We note the balance between the need to ensure that REG is allocated fairly to reflect research performance and the risk that a significant change (reduction) in REG allocation would potentially destabilize an HEI's research support. Within the Scottish research eco-system, there is an appreciation of the value of a diverse and stable community and hence, on balance, it would be sensible to have a smoothed allocation if an individual HEI's allocation were to reduce by, for example, 10% or more. The intent would be to avoid extreme volatility, and hence the threshold for smoothing is worthy of discussion. This could run for 1 (at the most 2) years to allow rebalancing of REG allocations. This

	<p>would avoid unintended consequences in terms of HEIs being able to play their part in the initiatives for Research Pooling for example, where diversity is valuable to ensure that research across the sector is supported. It is appreciated that this would also mean that some HEIs with an improved REG profile would also have a smoothed upwards allocation in REG, as the overall funding envelope will be the same.</p> <p>We note that the nature of the REF process builds in the risk of such volatility, and in the absence of a wholesale change to the REF process (where a high stakes assessment leads to funding allocation for 7 years), then a sector-wide supported approach is a least-worst option for maintaining stability.</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>With respect to the public sector duty, we note the risk that people with protected characteristics are disproportionately impacted by volatility in the allocation of REG. This is because a significant proportion of REG funding will be for fixed-term staff, who are more likely to be young and female. Any significant reduction in REG that is implemented without adequate notice may lead to the non-renewal of fixed-term contracts, whereas with more notice, then alternative arrangements may be more readily assessed, identified, and implemented, thus protecting staff from redundancy and the sector from losing talented researchers. We, therefore, believe that smoothing of the REG allocation is an important aspect of fulfilling the public sector duty.</p> <p>We also welcome the opportunity to make a general point about who research is serving, namely which communities and where? The consideration of impact has been an important addition to the research agenda, and although not perfect, it allows the valuing of research and its relationships to the local economy and community.</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>The REF is a UK-wide system and we believe that it is important that Scotland should retain significant alignment such that our resultant funding approach is able to prevent significant divergence in allocation and perception by the research community. This is to avoid unintended impacts on the mobility of talent across the UK if the REF/REG treatment is perceived as significantly different in Scotland, and given our consideration of the eco-system as a whole is one that would not further concentrate research funding.</p> <p>We note that the SFC is committed to supporting the whole HEI Research ecosystem and we recognize the benefits to all HEIs of a strong and diverse sector. This may mean that the SFC seeks to smooth allocations and to provide a minimum research support level for all Scottish research institutions, as we are better able to maintain research competitiveness and address the societal together, utilizing the diverse approaches, disciplines, and networks that exist.</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>We welcome this question and note that the RPG infrastructure is a vital part of the research landscape, as well as the REG. It is noted that the overall funding levels would not likely change for the overall funding available in AY 22/23 or 23/24 (with the latest REF results), and given the need for stability in the sector, we do not believe that there is a strong case to adjust the balance between REG and RPG funding at present.</p> <p>If there were changes to the RPG grant value or conditions that increased the reporting requirements then there would potentially be a system with a small element of funding (RPG) being associated with a. proportionally larger reporting requirement than the REG overall, which may not be appropriate. We would, however, welcome consideration by the SFC as to how RPG funding should reflect the growth of the 3.5year studentship models that some funders are now supporting. There is a risk of a two-tier PGR landscape, of 3year and 3.5year funding, leading not only to issues of equity but also challenges regards the assessment of doctoral theses. We welcome the focus on employability and transferable skills but this expansion in content needs to be not at the expense of research skills acquisition and demonstration.</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 support the principles regards the REG allocation method overall and the allocation of REGa (the quality-driven element).</p>
<p>Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?</p>	<p>We welcome the "recommendation not to concentrate funding further"</p> <p>We feel that there is a conversation to be had regards the level of weighting that is afforded to 3* and 4* research, not only in Scotland, rather across the UK. Research that is given this quality mark should of course be recognized and celebrated, but the risk is that the level of weighting attributed (x1 to 3* and x3.3 to 4*) perpetuates the concentration of funding. However, this must not be a Scotland-only discussion as the need to align our approach with the rest of the UK is vital to ensure talent mobility is maintained across the UK.</p>
<p>Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?</p>	<p>The REF profile breaks down as 60% Outputs, 25% Impact, and 15% Environment. We support aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements.</p> <p>We feel that the Impact % is now right-sized, and note that the increased emphasis on impact has been a successful move. Stability would be good in this regard.</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</p>	<p>We agree that the income which is taken into account in REGb should continue to recognize funders from out with the dual support system i.e. those other than UK research councils and charities.</p>

views on whether we have included the correct income sources.	The SFC is also proposing that the weighting for charity income be increased (11 to 15%) and that proportion allocated based on other competitive income should be increased. We are supportive of this.
Research Postgraduate Grant	
Q10. Are the proposed principles for RPG appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape?	The RPG exists to: invest in a collaborative environment for research training and development that values positive culture, inclusivity, and exposure to high-quality research as central to the postgraduate research experience; and to secure a pipeline of skilled postgraduate researchers and support their career development in a way that meets the needs of academia, industry and society. We agree with these principles.
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.	The RPG is an important element of support for building a vibrant research community in Scotland and hence we feel that it should continue as a complement to research Schools. It can help ensure that we do not unnecessarily concentrate research training across the sector.
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.	We note the comment about greater accountability for the RPG. Given the demography of the PGR population, the Public Sector Duty, and the clear differences in the PGR population vs the undergraduate population, there is clearly a need to enhance the accessibility of the PGR route in Scotland and to report against how the RPG is supporting that. However, we would note the need to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, and therefore for any additional reporting to be proportionate to the scale of the funding, for consideration to be given to whether data can be sourced from that already provided by institutions (such as the HESA return) rather than additional institutional returns, and for any additional monitoring and reporting to be considered in the context of wider reporting and accountability requirements.
Q12a. We are seeking views on how the RPG could play an increased role in improving participation of underrepresented groups within Scotland’s PGR community, particularly within specific research areas where under-representation is most extreme.	We welcome attention to this aspect of equality as we also believe that it will increase the quality of the research that is produced to have more diverse teams and students. Based on the historic record, the status quo does not seem capable of “improving participation of underrepresented groups within Scotland's PGR community” to the level desired by the SFC or the Scottish government, if we just simply reproduce the models, and hence greater action in this area is needed.
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.	The starting point for using the RPG to support greater diversity and inclusion is to firstly use or develop evidence to provide a clearer understanding of who the under-represented groups are and what the barriers are to their participation. It is also important to clarify what “widening

	<p>participation' means in the context of PGR study, and how this would then be measured. The tools commonly used for undergraduate WP reporting may not be fit for purpose in this population, such as SIMD.</p>
Other comments	
<p>Q13. Please make any other comments relevant to this consultation.</p>	<p>We note the increasing recognition of the importance of collaborative and cross-disciplinary working to address the societal challenges we currently face. This includes a consideration of the culture of research as a supportive, team-based, and sustainable endeavor. We welcome any discussion by the SFC as to how we can ensure that REG and RPG allocation and reporting support positive research environments and cultures.</p> <p>There has been an increase in the value placed upon research Impact assessment, not only through the REF process but other commentators and organizations. We acknowledge that real impact requires multi-disciplinary working and would welcome SFC leadership in this area to ensure that REG and RPG allocation does not inadvertently cement siloed working.</p>
Publication of responses	
<p>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 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.</p>	<p>Publish information and excerpts from this survey response INCLUDING the organisation name.</p>

