

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

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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?	Delaying implementation would facilitate forward planning giving institutions time to accommodate any changes in their allocation. This would be a good thing to reduce volatility across the sector.
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>SFC should limit any downward change, particularly for institutions with excellent UoAs. Supporting pockets of excellence wherever they are found is the right way to enhance and underpin Scottish research. Buffering lower quality UoAs/institutions is not appropriate in the longer term though some delay in making any big allocation adjustments is reasonable to enable forward planning.</p> <p>The inclusion in REF 2021 of all research active staff will lead to changes in the REF results for some universities who omitted lower-performing staff in REF2014, while the change may be less for institutions who already submitted all research active staff in 2014. SFC should not limit downward trends where quality has been diluted by increased FTE multipliers but rather support excellence wherever it is found.</p> <p>It is well known that research runs at a net cost for universities and that REG fails to fill the shortfall between full economic costs and grant awards. This is a big issue particularly in expensive biological and medical research areas where institutions with the highest research income per FTE in these UoAs can struggle to support the deficit inherent in the research grants they are awarded, particularly those from charities. It would be welcome if the total REG sum were increased to reduce this gap. Where there is excellence in winning research income UoAs/institutions need to be protected from downward trends in REG, otherwise Scotland will lose some of its most excellent research.</p>
Q3. You are invited to comment in your answers throughout the document on opportunities for and	Better funding for research would reduce the extreme pressures academic researchers and students are under and would allow the development of initiatives to enhance fairness and inclusion. The dual

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.	support model is not working and institutions are not really recovering the full FEC of their research.
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?	The Scottish approach should be in step with the rest of the UK to ensure Scottish University competitiveness. The quality multiplier in Scotland should align at 4:1 with RUK to signal an equivalent commitment to excellence and Scottish research competitiveness.
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?	In general we think the balance is right - we do not want REG to be reduced by increasing PGR. We would prefer to see the emphasis shift from PGR to REG A or C. Unless UoAs/institutions have a thriving community as evidenced by active research grants, PGRs do not enter an appropriate culture or receive adequate training.
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Q6. Views are sought on the principles proposed for REG and on whether the proposals within this paper are consistent with the principles.	It is right for REG allocation to be underpinned by the principles of rewarding research excellence and of making a contribution toward the full economic costs of research according to the dual support system. However, research still runs at a significant net cost for universities since REG fails to fill the shortfall between full economic costs and grant awards. Any reduction in the total REG sum (for example by transfer to RPG) will exacerbate this problem and it would be far preferable to increase REG to make excellent Scottish research more sustainable. The principle of having a robust and transparent allocation method that avoids unnecessary complexity is a useful one, but only if the allocation is still appropriately based primarily on excellence.
Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?	We recommend an increased quality weighting to align with Research England i.e. 4* and 3* have ratio 4:1 - this would support SFC policy to protect excellent discovery research wherever it is found. A strong quality multiplier is critical to ensure that scarce resource is allocated according to excellence from whatever quarter and avoids it being spread too thinly and avoids the concentration that can occur if FTE volume becomes overly-dominant.
Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?	The REGa profile should be based on the overall REF profile which provides a reasonable holistic metric.
Q9. We would welcome your views on the balance between the elements of the REG formula. Within	SFC should implement appropriate subject weightings that align with practice across the UK including the STEMM premium weighting. The data provided suggests that there are still barriers to participation

the income-driven elements, we welcome your views on whether we have included the correct income sources.

for females and potentially other groups. While the premium may mean that universities have received more funding per male PGR student under the RPG formula they have also received more funding per female PGR, and these average numbers do not provide any insight into how the premium may be used to encourage EDI in participation. We recommend retention of the STEMM premium weighting. We need to improve equality of entry into STEMM, not penalise STEMM itself, upon which the nation depends, and the premium weighting should assist this. Indeed, there is an argument for particular support for medical and life science disciplines in a post-pandemic world.

UKRI funding has increased at a greater pace than REG and this is even more true in Scotland that RUK, so increased funding is needed to plug the FEC gap. To accommodate this, a greater proportion of funds should go into REGb and REGc which are based on grants won. We support an increase in the REGc proportion from 11% to 15% and this will help alleviate the risk that Scottish universities might move away from applying for charity funding due to increased financial pressures. Charitable research funding represents a very significant proportion of the entire Life Sciences research budget of the UK; not supporting that investment would be unthinkable. Moreover, charity-funded research is often focused on areas where significant inequalities exist - by helping universities to accept charity funding without exacerbating their research deficit, REGc supports these valuable areas of public-good research. Charity-funded biomedical research is proving crucial in the fight against Covid and will continue to be pivotal in fighting many diseases globally. The proposed increase in REGc provides a sensible provision for compensating for the lack of formal overhead in charitable funding and this will send a very positive sign to organisations like the Wellcome Trust and CRUK, who have been major funders of Scottish science.

We would also support an increase in the REGb proportion of funds allocated by reference to competitive research income including that from funder's outwith the dual support system, including industry.

REGb and REGc deserve emphasis: Peer-reviewed grant funding is entirely dependent on an applicant's prior impact and publication (output) track record. Thus, within a discipline, quality + impact are conveniently folded into grant-funding metrics. Grant funding is dependent on current and future (not previous) research ideas and direction. Thus, REGb and REGc can be more reliable indicators than REGa of where the REG monies are actually needed - i.e. where the current and future activity and innovation is. Making REGa too dominant could reward previous excellence as it is based on past outputs with a legacy (i.e. outputs already 6 years old at census date can influence funding for a further 6+ years into the future - a 12 year+ influence in total) rather than active and emerging excellence.

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Q10. Are the proposed principles for RPG appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape?	More consideration should be made in the proposed principals of the quality of the research training and research environment that PGRs are placed in. Without underlying grants and REG to support grants and provide post-docs to laboratories, RPGs in STEMM cannot be adequately supported. SFC need to ensure that STEMM RPGs are placed in well-found laboratories and departments by supporting such Labs/departments through REG.
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.	Changes to how the RPG is allocated could perhaps assist Scottish institutions to respond better to changing research landscapes. Instead of being solely volume-based, the RPG might usefully include a quality element as it does in England. In STEMM areas in particular, RPGs will get the best training and support in well-found laboratories with active research grants and in institutions with excellent cultural environments - these elements could be more overtly recognised by the RPG allocation and would be in line with how funder's expectations are changing.
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.	Having more explicated stated outcome measures across the sector would be a positive step forward and might help with accountability for EDI and address some of the under representations observed at RPG level. This would need commitment across the sector to drive real change. There has been a lot of focus at the UG level on widening access and targets, but no equivalents at the PGR level.
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.	Explicit outcome measures and more overt focus of the RPG on widening access and targets, as there has been at undergraduate level, could improve representation within Scotland's PGR community.
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.	Having more explicated stated outcome measures across the sector would be a positive step forward and might help with accountability for EDI and address some of the under representations observed at RPG level.
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 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.	Publish information and excerpts from this survey response EXCLUDING the organisation name.

