

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?	<p>We are content with a delay of the implementation of REF2021 results and changes to REG until 2023-24. This will enable us to set budgets for the coming financial year without having to speculate what the REF2021 results will be and without anticipating significant changes to REG that may have to be reflected in our institutional budgets at very short notice.</p> <p>If there is a strong preference to implement the changes and results for 2022-23, it would be helpful if the SFC could provide early notice of the resource available across the sector for REG and what the criteria and methodology for any transitional funding arrangements are for institutions that experience significant changes to their REG.</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>Yes, we would welcome the introduction of transitional funding arrangements. For institutions subject to REG reductions from 2022/23 onwards, transitional funding will be vital to ensure that longer term investment in research capacity and infrastructure is protected as far as possible. REF2021 differs from REF2014 more than any exercises differed before that, and the outcome is more difficult to predict than that for REF2014 or other previous exercises. In the past, SFC have defined tolerances which, if exceeded, would trigger transitional funding. Having experienced significant volatility in our funding due to the impact of Covid restrictions and Brexit on our research and teaching income, and the cuts to international development budgets, transitional funding arrangements will be vital to many HEIs.</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	<p>The primary purpose of REG is to provide a supportive and enabling environment for researchers, and to foster a research culture that allows them to undertake excellent research. The attributes required for an environment that supports equality and diversity are the same. Like its predecessors, REF2021 provides a rich dataset against which we can judge how</p>

<p>aims of the public sector duty in the context of this review should be made here.</p>	<p>supportive our environment is for researchers of various career stages and for those with protected characteristics. The REF Equality Impact Assessment informs discussions around our research culture and environment beyond those that take place during REF preparations. Continuity and consistency of support by the SFC to institutions through the REG is vital for us to further progress our work on the research environment, and to ensure that we address lack of representation, progression and retention of certain groups, to be reported through the annual outcome agreement.</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>In view of the fact that we compete for external research funding, PGR students, and research staff nationally and internationally the resources available to support research need to enable institutions to do so successfully. The very close alignment between UKRI and Research England gives rise to concerns that English institutions are better placed to compete for UKRI funds than Scottish institutions - HESA income statistics show that UKRI income across the sector grew by 5.4% between 2015/16 and 2019/20 (the most recent year for which sector data is available), with income across English institutions growing by 8%, while Scotland's UKRI income reduced by 7.1%. Any significant departure in terms of funding policy or focus may have detrimental impact on our ability to compete. In terms of overall funding, Scottish institutions returned Â£4.50 of external research income for every Â£1 of REG invested in 2019/20, compared to Â£3.80 returned by English institutions for every Â£1 of QR invested. If there are specific Scottish initiatives or foci which are policy priorities for SFC great care must be taken to ensure that they do not detract from our ability to compete nationally and internationally.</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 are not supportive of changing the balance between REG and RPG in favour of RPG. Any investments of REG in research facilities, environment and research culture will also benefit the postgraduate student population and their supervisors; shifting resource from REG to RPG will bring benefit to a much smaller community, unless it is additional resource (see also comments under Q11 and Q12)</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>The proposed principles for REG are consistent with the current funding formulae for REG (a) and REG (b,c), and we are supportive of this to remain in place. The more difficult question is whether the balance between those elements is correct and consistent with those principles, whether institutions are rewarded appropriately for research excellence, whether REG (b) and (c) are sufficient to address the funding gap created by external funders that do not award indirect costs and whether RPG is sufficient to create and maintain a vibrant PGR community. We believe that, given the very high cost of REF to the sector, it is appropriate that the majority of the funding should be determined by measures of research excellence and not historic grant income. We would not support a significant shift of</p>

	resource from REG (a) to REG (b) and (c).
Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?	The bulk of research funding across the entire UK sector is concentrated on around 40 or so research intensive institutions; the Russell Group alone attracted 83.7% of all external grant funding across the UK sector in 2019/20. The funds provided by REG enable us to implement measures to compete among research intensive institutions, most of which have significantly larger research capacity and higher shares of 4* research. For REF2014, researchers from the 24 Russell group institutions represented 54% of all those submitted, and achieved 68% of all research judged 4*. Any shift in weighting for 3* and 4* research would have to be modelled and considered carefully to prevent further concentration of REG and research contracts income among a few institutions.
Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?	We support the proposed alignment of the REG (a) formula with the weightings used for the various elements of assessment to make up the quality profiles for REF2021. The REF weightings were agreed following extensive consultation across the sector and should be reflected in the part of the funding formula that rewards research excellence achieved in REF2021.
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 included the correct income sources.	<p>We believe the current balance between REG(a) and REG(b) and (c) is appropriate and do not support shifting resource from (a) to (b) and (c). Given the very high overall cost of REF to the sector it is appropriate that a significantly larger part of REG is driven by the REF outcomes.</p> <p>The current split for the calculation of REG (b) and (c) works well and includes all funding sources. Focusing exclusively on UKRI and charitable funding would be detrimental to institutions with more diverse funding portfolios.</p>
Research Postgraduate Grant	
Q10. Are the proposed principles for RPG appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape?	We agree that the principles for RPG set out in the consultation document are consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape. We also agree that the current funding formula for RPG should be retained, provided subject weightings are monitored carefully.
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.	We agree that RPG is vital to ensure that the sector is able to adapt to a changing landscape for PGR provision and skills development for academia, industry. However, it is important that the purpose, accountability and reporting requirements leave sufficient flexibility to maintain diversity in provision and do not stifle innovative and creative approaches to PGR provisions that are in keeping with individual institutional strategies.

<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>Increased accountability and reporting on how RPG is used to achieve the agreed policy objectives should be considered carefully to ensure that it does not divert resource away from PGR provision in favour of data collection and reporting. We already report on PGR activities through the outcome agreement, and we would ask that the SFC consult with institutions on any detailed requirements to ensure that they are not unduly onerous</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 community, particularly within specific research areas where under-representation is most extreme.</p>	<p>We are committed to working towards greater inclusivity across all our activities, including our PGR provision, and there are multiple datasets that could be collected and reported to SFC around protected characteristics, recruitment and progression, and, to a lesser extent, destinations of our PGRs. However, in order to ensure that accountability and reporting requirements around improving participation achieve our strategic objectives and the government's policy aims, we would need to define widening access at postgraduate level clearly and consider what data collection is practicable and can reasonably inform strategy and policy considerations. We also refer to our response to Question 11 - any additional reporting requirements need to be proportionate and workable for institutions and must not be onerous.</p>
<p>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>	<p>Access to funding for postgraduate degrees remains the biggest obstacle for improving participation, particularly for those who are likely to be in debt from their undergraduate degree. A step change is likely require significant additional funding and innovative and collaborative solutions.</p>
<p>Other comments</p>	
<p>Q13. Please make any other comments relevant to this consultation.</p>	<p>Our responses assume that the resource available to SFC for research funding would remain static, and we have considered the implications of changes to the formula within that context. The Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability recommended, and Government agreed, that the current concentration of research across the sector should be maintained and that excellence should be funded wherever it is found. In order to narrow or even close the funding gap between English and Scottish institutions, and to protect our competitiveness while avoiding further concentration of research funding across the Scottish sector, more overall resource for research funding will be required.</p> <p>We welcome the opportunity to comment on the principles that underpin the discussions around the new funding formulae but would also like to have early sight and the opportunity to input into detailed</p>
<p>Publication of responses</p>	
<p>We may publish a summary of the consultation</p>	<p>Publish information and excerpts from this survey response INCLUDING the organisation name.</p>

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.

