

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

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| Date / time response submitted | 12/01/2022 08:52 |
| In what capacity are you submitting your response? | Organisation |
| Your organisation (if applicable) | University of Strathclyde |
| Your full name | Professor Tim Bedford |
| Telephone | 0141 548 5982 |
| Email | tim.bedford@strath.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? | Given that current REGa allocations are based on an assessment of research performance from 2008 to 2013, delaying implementation of REF 2021 results and changes to REG until AY 2023-24 would weaken the link between proven excellence in research and core funding. To ensure accountability and maximise the academic, societal and economic benefits from Scotland's research, we recommend implementing a transitional arrangement during AY 2022-23 that is based on the REF 2021 results but limits upward or downward changes to institutional REG funding for individual institutions to a maximum of plus or minus 10% of their AY 2021-22 award. This will allow institutions to plan for REF 2022-23 with a degree of certainty and mitigate against unmanageable reductions in institutional research income in the short-term. |
| Q2. Should SFC seek to limit | As the design changes made for REF 2021, specifically the inclusion of all staff with a significant responsibility for research, make it difficult to predict the relative performance of HEIs across the UK, SFC should undertake initial modelling using preliminary data from the REF panels |

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| <p>downward changes in REG experienced by individual universities post REF2021 and, if so, what should be the scope of any adjustments made?</p> | <p>to determine if mitigation is likely to be required to avoid any short-term destabilisation.</p> <p>Rather than seeking to limit downward changes, which would penalise high-performing institutions and weaken the link between proven excellence in research and core funding, SFC should implement a short-term transitional arrangement so that any downward changes in REG are phased in. To ensure accountability and maximise the academic, societal and economic benefits from Scotland's research, we recommend that the transitional period should begin in AY 2022-23 and extend no longer than absolutely necessary to avoid destabilisation.</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>The only aspects of REF submissions where elements of equality and diversity are assessed are environment statements. However, unlike impacts and outputs, these have not been subject to the same level of scrutiny (e.g. through pilots) with regard to their robustness. In addition, environment statements account for a relatively small proportion of the results. Therefore, REF results are not a good measure of an institutions performance in relation to matters of public sector equality duty. For this reason, direct application of REG would not be an appropriate or effective tool in driving change. Similarly, REG is not an effective mechanism for the introduction of specific deliverables related to equality, diversity and inclusion, as HEIs are already expected to make these considerations through their public sector duty and through agreements such as the Researcher Development Concordat (https://www.vitae.ac.uk/policy/concordat).</p> |

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| <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>For Scottish institutions to remain competitive it is important that the level of REG and RPG funding received at least enables them to operate on a level playing field with the rest of the UK. This is true both in terms of the amount awarded relative to the Scottish sector but also the manner in which it is applied. The use of the funding must not be more restrictive than equivalent funding elsewhere in the UK. The amount of freedom given in the use of the funding was instrumental in universities being able to be responsive to the challenges that arose during the COVID pandemic. Any funding model should not undermine this resilience, agility and ability to underpin core research capabilities.</p> <p>Where there is evidence that common elements of the UK HE research sector can be effectively enhanced by a common approach to research funding, SFC should adopt such an approach. For example, having comparable dual support systems across the four nations is essential for promoting diversity in the sector, enabling collaboration between institutions, and ensuring global competitiveness throughout the UK. Consistency with the principles of the REF and its intended outcomes is also important. However, where there are Scotland-specific challenges or interests, SFC should seek to adopt a distinctive approach to the selective allocation of their grant for research to benefit Scotland's HEIs, the broader research community and Scottish society as a whole. Distinctive elements of Scotland HEIs' research competitiveness include their ability to collaborate across Technology Readiness Levels and connect across institutions and disciplines to deliver research with societal value and impact, and which supports capacity building across Scotland. SFC's approach to research funding should not undermine this and should promote an inclusive definition of high quality research. Scotland-specific challenges include how best to promote and encourage business investment in R&D, assist enhancement of industrial innovation / productivity and supporting research with potential for commercialisation.</p> <p>As an example of a distinctive approach, adopting a REG model for quality related funding with a lower ratio for allocating funding for 3* and 4* research (such as the SFC current ratio of 1:3.31, compared to the Research England model which allocates funds on a 1:4 ratio) presents an opportunity to support a diverse portfolio of research strengths and approaches. This is consistent with the Scottish Government's priority to maximise the impact of investment in research through effective knowledge exchange and innovation. It also aligns with other SFC research initiatives including on-going plans aligned with Research Pooling which will further escalate the promotion of challenge-oriented cross-institutional research collaboration.</p> |
| <p>Q5. In the changing research landscape, is the balance of funding between SFC's underpinning support for research and</p> | <p>Recognising the multiple benefits of PGR training, which not only enhances research but also contributes to Scotland's knowledge-based economy and society more broadly, we would support an increase in the proportion of funds invested through the RPG. A pipeline of research talent within Scotland is an essential part of ensuring that Scotland is able to attract BERD, inward investment and alignment with the UK Government target of investing 2.4% of GDP in R&D by 2027.</p> |

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| <p>underpinning support for PGR training & environment optimal?</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 with the principles proposed for REG and are content that the proposals within the consultation document are consistent with these.</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>As highlighted in the 2020 Research on Research Institute (RoRI) working paper on The changing role of funders in responsible research assessment (https://rori.figshare.com/articles/report/The_changing_role_of_funders_in_responsible_research_assessment_progress_obstacles_and_the_way_ahead/13227914), assessment exercises should ‘incentivise, reflect and reward the plural characteristics of high-quality research, in support of diverse and inclusive research cultures’. Although REF 2021 explicitly aims to do this, the heavy weighting of research outputs in the assessment model (60%) and the tendency towards the submission of journal articles over all other output types (despite the expansive list in the guidance), skews the exercise towards a sub-set of quality characteristics which are defined by academic publication norms. It is widely recognised that these norms tend to have a narrowing effect, rather than encouraging pluralism, and advantage certain types of research over others. For example, from Strathclyde's experience, highly-valued and impactful research with industrial partners is more likely to be rated 3* through the REF assessment of outputs given the nature of the research and preferred publication routes. This also applies to other areas of applied research.</p> <p>Recognising this, consideration should be given to broadening the funding by adjusting the ratio of 1:3.31 (3*:4*) to give greater weight to 3*. This would spread research funding more evenly across institutions and regions, thereby strengthening the Scottish research ecosystem as a whole. Therefore, once the REF 2021 results are known, the SFC should undertake modelling to determine a ratio which, in line with</p> |

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| | <p>the Coherent Review recommendations, will 'nurture excellent discovery research and create knowledge that translates into immense social, economic and cultural value and impact' by ensuring greater support for internationally excellent 3* research across Scotland. Following the line of argument made in the RoRI paper and in a recent London School of Economics (LSE) blog post (https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2021/04/29/the-refs-singular-focus-on-excellence-limits-academic-diversity/), increasing the relative reward for 3* research is also likely to promote more diverse and inclusive research cultures.</p> <p>There is also nothing to suggest that moving the SFC model further away from that used by Research England, which currently weights the reward more heavily towards 4* research with a ratio of 1:4 (3*:4*), will decrease Scottish HEIs' research competitiveness. A broad definition of research competitiveness should be taken to ensure that Scottish HEIs' distinctive strengths are considered.</p> |
| <p>Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?</p> | <p>Allocating REGa funds in proportion to the elements which make up the REF profile (60% Outputs, 25% Impact, and 15% Environment) would introduce unnecessary complexity to the funding formula. Furthermore, this change would amplify the known skew in the peer review of outputs (the majority of which are journal articles) towards certain characteristics of high-quality research. This is likely to have a narrowing effect by further incentivising HEIs to prioritise research which has the best chance of being highly-rated in the REF assessment of outputs. As well as limiting the scope and impact of Scotland's research, this would almost certainly exacerbate existing inequalities within the research community and hamper efforts to improve research culture.</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 included the correct</p> | <p>We are strongly of the view that industrial research income should continue to be counted within REGb. Industrial research, like charity research, is not funded from the public purse, but should be considered as a core part of the dual support funding system. This is especially important given the need to increase overall levels of research spend in the Scottish and UK economies, and UK government policy to raise overall investment in R&D to 2.4% of GDP.</p> <p>With regard to the balance between the elements of the REG formula, we do not agree that the share of REG funding allocated by reference to competitive charity income (REGc) should be increased from 11% to 15%. If any adjustment is to be made to the proportions of the total budget driven by quality and by income won, this should be in favour of non-charity research income (REGb) to encourage and support industrial R&D investment; this would also be resonant with elements of Scottish Government's economic strategy.</p> <p>While charity income is expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels as the overall economy recovers, there is less certainty around funding from industry sources. The National Centre for Universities and Business State of the Relationship 2021 report (https://www.ncub.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/State-of-the-Relationship-2021-Final.pdf) highlights growing evidence that business R&D and innovation activities declined during the pandemic, as did the number of interactions between universities and businesses. As businesses focus on post-Covid recovery, they are likely to prioritise recuperation of profits over R&D and innovation. In order to meet the UK Government's ambition to increase private investment in R&D and innovation, industry funding should be encouraged. We believe that increasing the proportion allocated by reference to other research income (REGb), particularly income from industry, will motivate HEIs to interact and collaborate more with businesses, thereby stimulating greater R&D and innovation investment.</p> |

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| income sources. | |
| 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 proposed principals for RPG are appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape. |
| 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. | Any changes should support universities in responding to the R&D People & Culture Strategy (https://strath-my.sharepoint.com/personal/helen_l_young_strath_ac_uk/Documents/Research Policy/Post-submission REF/SFC REG RPG consultation/CURRENT DRAFT/People & Culture Strategy), especially in relation to the New Deal for postgraduate research students to attract and retain talented people within the sector and support the flow of people and ideas across the R&D system. In addition, the SFC RPG should complement PGR block funding from other sources, especially UKRI. For example, where such funding is discipline-specific the RPG might be used to extend opportunities and research studentships in other research areas. Given this, it is important that RPG funds can continue to be used flexibly. While seeking greater accountability from institutions, SFC should seek to minimise the burden of any additional reporting requirements (e.g. by avoiding repetition of reporting to other UK bodies). Given this, it is important that RPG funds can continue to be used flexibly. |
| Q11b. We are seeking views | While seeking greater accountability from institutions, SFC should seek to minimise the burden of any additional reporting requirements (e.g. by avoiding repetition of reporting to other UK bodies). |

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| <p>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>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-</p> | <p>To increase the role of RPG in improving participation of underrepresented groups, examples of good practice should be shared and promoted across the sector. For instance, Strathclyde has an expanding portfolio of professional doctorates (https://www.strath.ac.uk/studywithus/postgraduateresearch/professionaldocorates/) which provide research training for those at a more advanced career stage. Working closely with the University of Strathclyde Students' Association, Scottish Refugee Council and The Carnegie Trust, we have also recently introduced an Asylum Seeker Scholarship (https://www.strath.ac.uk/studywithus/scholarships/asylumseekerscholarship/) which is intended to help Asylum Seekers and those staying in the UK on humanitarian grounds to overcome barriers in progressing to higher education.</p> |

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| 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. | Recognising the important role that postgraduate research students can play in widening participation (e.g. by acting as role models or undertaking public engagement activities targeted at underrepresented groups), they should be encouraged and supported to do so through RPG. Furthermore, RPG could be used to support activities, such as summer placement awards, in which Scottish UG students from a widening access background could be encouraged to consider a research career. |
| 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, | Publish information and excerpts from this survey response INCLUDING the organisation name. |

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.

