

Independent review of SFC's research pooling initiative

- This paper provides the Committee with the final report of Professor Heathwaite's independent review of SFC's research pooling initiative. This report should be treated as 'strictly confidential' until it is published.
- Professor Heathwaite will present her final report and recommendations to the Committee at the meeting.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- Receive Professor Heathwaite's report and presentation and offer any observations and early responses in discussion
- Note plans to publish the report before the end of September subject to approval from the Board
- Note that the executive will take a proposed detailed response to the report and its recommendations to the December Board meeting for decision.
- Note the proposal to the Board to respond where possible to recommendations 3 & 4 before December 2019
- Note the request to the Board to delegate authority to the Chief Executive to consider providing sufficient funding for a minimum of 12 further months activity at the current level for all pools.

Financial implications

- Future development of the research pooling initiative will have financial implications for SFC.
- Continued support for existing pools at current levels to end September 2020 would require an additional c.£130,000

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Purpose

1. This paper sets out the background, process and publication timeline for the independent review of the research pooling initiative and invites the Board to engage with Professor Heathwaite at the meeting and respond to her findings ahead of publication by the end of September.

Background

2. The Committee discussed the independent review of SFC's research pooling initiative in June 2017 ([RKEC/17/19](#)) and September 2017 ([RKEC/17/28](#)). These papers set out the background to the pooling initiative. The Terms of Reference of the review are available [here](#).

Summary of key issues and options

3. SFC issued an open call for evidence inviting written submissions by 18 January 2019. Evidence was sought on the impact of SFC's research pooling initiative and the lessons learnt. Professor Heathwaite invited individuals and groups to attend oral evidence sessions in March 2019. Following the oral sessions Professor Heathwaite invited further written responses to targeted questions from some key stakeholders.
4. In total 94 written submissions and 44 witness statements were received. The Review also benefitted from a limited quantitative analysis by Dr Kirsty Collinge, University of Edinburgh.
5. The Committee received a presentation from Professor Heathwaite at its June 2019 ([RKEC/19/08](#)) meeting where she set out her emerging findings and a meeting was hosted in the Royal Society of Edinburgh on 5 August 2019, chaired by Rebekah Widdowfield, to act as 'critical sounding board' ahead of final reporting to SFC Board on 5 September 2019.

Final report

6. Professor Heathwaite's final report is appended to this paper. She will present her report and recommendations at the meeting and invite members to provide any comments. Subject to Board approval the final report will be published on SFC's website by the end of September.
7. We will recommend to the Board that SFC should publically welcome the report and that we should share it with key stakeholders through established networks and social media. The Committee is invited to recommend any key messages from SFC. The research pools will receive a copy of the report under embargo in

advance of publication.

Report conclusions

8. The report concludes that:
 - i The initiative has built critical mass and research excellence in a number of disciplines important to Scotland's research base and continued global science leadership
 - ii It is important to sustain, in some form, the research capacity built on this pooling of excellence

Report recommendations

9. The report makes four recommendations which are set out below:
 - i. A major investment at scale that builds on the collective critical mass of the research pools but re-orientated to address the strategic cross-disciplinary research challenges important to Scotland by coupling to other disciplines and research and innovation structures. This is the basis of Scotland's research powerhouse of the future.
 - ii. Direct financial underpinning of the existing research pools by SFC stops. The most effective research pool coordination activities are supported to cover the transition period between now and the implementation of Recommendation 1 (the transition pools).
 - iii. The international presence of the transition pools is enhanced to ensure Scotland remains an attractive place for research and international graduates.
 - iv. Scotland's complex research-innovation landscape is reformed to ensure that the function and purpose of the transition pools and innovation centres are aligned, going forward as a seamless and integrated 'cradle to grave' model that can play effectively into Recommendation 1.

Next steps

10. The SFC Board will receive the report and a presentation from Professor Heathwaite at its meeting on 5 September 2019.
11. The executive will propose to the Board that a detailed plan for the development of the research pooling initiative in response to the review's recommendations is drafted and brought to SFC's Board at its December 2019 meeting.
12. It is further proposed that between now and December the executive can take

some steps to respond to recommendations 3 & 4 including incorporation into forward planning for the Innovation Centres.

13. In order to ensure that research pools are able to continue to function as viable entities, and do not lose key staff while a response to the recommendations is implemented, the executive will request that the Board delegate authority to the Chief Executive to consider providing sufficient funding for a minimum of 12 further months activity at the current level for all pools.

Risk assessment

14. No risk assessment has been carried out. The executive will develop a response to this review for the SFC Board in December 2019 and will carry out a risk assessment against specific recommendations at this time if appropriate.

Equality and diversity assessment

15. An equality and diversity impact assessment has not been carried out. This will be undertaken as part of the executive's detailed response to the review.

Financial implications

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Recommendations

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Publication

17. This paper will be published on the SFC website.

Further information

18. Contact: Hazel McGraw, tel: 0131 313 6657, email: hmcgraw@sfc.ac.uk.