

Building on the recommendations of the Heathwaite Review

- At its meeting in September 2019 the SFC Board invited RKEC to develop a detailed response to the Heathwaite report.
- This paper invites discussion around the report's recommendations and the draft principles which would guide development of any intervention model. Through a workshop session the Committee will also be invited to discuss in detail the practical aspects of how this model might develop.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- Discuss in detail SFC's response to recommendation 1 and to explore and challenge the proposed principles which would guide development of the proposed intervention.
- Discuss SFC's response to recommendations 2, 3 & 4 in light of the proposed response to recommendation 1 above.
- Advise the executive on the practical aspects of how this model may develop.

Financial implications

- No immediate financial implications, although the aspiration is towards a significant and long-term investment in Scottish research

Building on the recommendations of the Heathwaite Review

Purpose

1. At its meeting in September 2019 the SFC Board invited RKEC to develop a detailed response to the Heathwaite report (“the report”) for the SFC Board to consider at a future meeting. This paper invites discussion around the report’s recommendations and the draft principles which would guide development of any intervention model. Through a workshop session the Committee will also be invited to discuss the practical aspects of how this model might develop.

Background

2. The Scottish Funding Council announced an independent review of the Scottish research pooling initiative in November 2018. RKEC contributed to the development of the review and co-commissioned it through its Chair.
3. RKEC received the final report of Professor Heathwaite’s Independent Review of SFC’s Research Pooling Initiative at its meeting of September 2019. The Committee welcomed the report and recommended it to SFC’s Board.
4. SFC’s Board received the report and a presentation from Professor Heathwaite the following day. The Board also welcomed the report and its recommendations, agreed that it should be published on the SFC website and invited the executive, working with RKEC, to develop a detailed response to the report and its recommendations for consideration at a future meeting.
5. The Board also noted that transition funding would be sought to ensure continuation of pools until a response to the Review is put in place, so that the ‘sunk investment’ identified by Professor Heathwaite is available to contribute to any new activity.
6. The [report](#) was published on SFC’s website on 1 October 2019.

The report

7. The report concludes that:
 - i The [research pooling] 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.
8. 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.

Section 1

Recommendation 1

9. Heathwaite proposes a 'repurposing of the critical mass built through research pooling'. The review recognises that a well-coordinated disciplinary base is still needed but argues that a strategic challenge-driven investment will (1) lever mission driven research income into Scotland and (2) provide resilience. The review strongly endorses taking substantive action, an investment of 'many millions' is recommended.
10. In response the executive proposes developing a model for an intervention which will marshal Scotland's national research strengths to deal with global challenges.
11. Current support for research pools is in the region of c£1M per annum until July 2021 (some slightly later due to a staggered start to pools). The executive is working with Scottish Government to identify potential future sources of funding.
12. Although potential resources have not yet been identified it should be possible to develop the principles without knowing the scale of possible investment. In this meeting we are seeking guidance from RKEC on the principles and boundaries which will define development of this model in response to Recommendation 1.
13. The Council will be asked to agree the principles in January. Depending on availability of funding we then intend to seek views from the sector on how a

model can be developed which meets those principles.

Timeline

14. The proposed timeline for responding to the report and its recommendations is set out below, dependent on availability of resource:

30 January 2020	Possible response considered by Council and principles agreed
Spring 2020	Consultation seeks views from the sector on how a model can be developed which meets those principles
Summer 2020	Develop, with stakeholders, a 'business plan' to put to Council in September.
Autumn 2020	If Council support secured, appropriate announcement.

Recommendation 1

Principles

15. Set out below are proposed principles which will define development of a model of support.
16. As the Heathwaite report recognises, the original pooling model was developed iteratively with the sector and other stakeholders and this resulted in strong buy-in from both senior management and individual researchers. The executive propose that a similar iterative model should be employed in the development of any model which builds on the research pooling investment. The principles will provide a context and boundaries for that development.
17. The Committee is invited to explore the proposed principles and to provide a robust challenge. These are suggested to be:
- Research excellence with impact
 - Challenge-driven
 - Collaborative/ Building on existing structures & investment
 - Potential to attract external funding to Scotland
 - Bottom-up response to a top-down challenge (co-design)
 - Ambitious but realistic

Research excellence with impact

18. The primary focus of the model should be to support and encourage excellent collaborative research. There is an expectation that this excellent research will have impact within a challenge area over various timelines, short- and long-term, however the focus of support is the capacity for excellent and competitive research.

Challenge-led

19. Basing investment around challenges means investment in the Scottish research base will be strategic to allow Scotland to address critical challenges.
20. The investment would not be intended to replace unhypothecated research funding such as REG but rather to facilitate drawing on the research and research base that REG supports to address critical challenges.

Collaborative - building on existing structures & investment

21. The model should draw on all available talent to deal with the challenge(s). The model needs to be collaborative and flexible – but this should not just be collaboration for its own sake. It should be a national model drawing on expertise Scotland-wide.
22. The model should build on existing structures. It should be fluid and capable of combining with other structures but not become a fixed, all-encompassing single entity. We are not suggesting creating a new super-entity, rather seeking a means of facilitating combinations of talent and effort appropriate to current demands. The model doesn't need to be permanent but should be fluid allowing other structures to dip in and out.
23. Practically, if SFC is driving this, it has to build from the HE sector. In addition to research pools, SFC support a number of existing structures relevant to research including Innovation Centres, Graduate Schools and other investments. The Heathwaite review was clear that, to maximise their impact, these structures need to work closely together to address challenges. Therefore the proposed model needs to accommodate them.

Discussion: consider the potential for inclusion of other research structures. There is considerable investment in science and research beyond the sectors supported by SFC. Facilitating the partnership and participation of these bodies should strengthen the Scottish research response to challenges. Consideration could be given to the inclusion of Scottish research institutions not funded by SFC (such as the SEFARI institutes and Marine Science Scotland) as well as to international partnerships and to the role for Scotland's colleges.

Leverage potential

24. The further development of the culture and environment of Scottish research cannot rely solely on SFC resources. We want our investment to enable the Scottish research base to shape inter/national research agendas and position itself to generate other income, be it by competing effectively for other resources or embedding itself as the preferred provider in others' initiatives.
25. The model should therefore promote engagement with other large-scale

efforts, by UKRI or other funders.

Bottom-up response to top-down priorities

26. Among the strengths of the foundational stage of the Research Pooling Initiative was the time taken to negotiate relationships/partnerships, to identify shared agendas and to agree effective ways of working together. This strategy created enduring partnerships which have become embedded in our research environment. Building on this experience, any new investment to influence and support the Scottish research environment needs to ensure that communities of researchers “own” the activity which results. There needs to be bottom-up input because without researcher buy-in, it won’t work. Note that this takes time to develop.
27. Given the potential scale of the proposed activity, and the scale of challenges facing us, a broad level of direction will allow us to direct effort towards priority areas without constraining academic freedom.
28. The establishment of a challenge to the research community, as envisaged by Professor Heathwaite, can and should be derived from Scottish national priorities amenable to research contributions on a range of timescales and relevant to the existing research excellence in Scotland.

Ambitious but realistic

29. Heathwaite recommended “a major investment at scale”. We should develop a clear view of what we might achieve in an ideal world, and how, but will ultimately have to work within realistic boundaries. Everything will depend on resources but we should not constrain our ambition at this stage.
30. In a time of environmental, societal, technological and political change, collaboration of existing expertise across disciplines provides a means by which we can establish new ways and new teams to address challenges we face. Whether resources are plentiful or meagre, we should be seeking to efficiently enhance the competitiveness of Scottish research (and the benefits which flow from it). We need to consider both how to operationalise our thinking and how we manage if resources are limited.

Discussion

31. The Committee are invited to challenge the above proposed principles and/or to suggested additional principles. The principles will guide development of the intervention model whatever the scale of resources available.

Section 2

32. The Committee are also invited to consider, in light of the above discussion on the principles for developing a future model, the additional recommendations:

Recommendation 2

‘Direct financial underpinning of the existing research pools by SFC stops’

33. Existence of pools to lead and feed into this model is assumed. However Heathwaite recommends that core funding is stopped following introduction of the new model.
34. The review also recognises that a well-coordinated disciplinary base is still needed, and that supporting and sustaining the existing pooling networks going forward is a critical challenge. The review suggests there may be a place for Scotland’s Learned Societies here.
35. The Committee are invited to consider the effect of this recommendation across the pools, and on collaborative pool activities such as graduate schools, as well as on international research presence (see also below). The report highlighted the success of these collaborative activities and the potential for research pools to increase their representative role both nationally and internationally.

Discussion:

How might the core activities of pools be maintained going forwards. Is there a greater role for institutions, Learned Societies or other agencies in this space? The Heathwaite report surmised that pools would not continue without SFC support and endorsement almost as a ‘license to operate’. Will a challenge-led model provide sufficient SFC endorsement to allow continuation through institutional funding alone? What about pools which do not easily align with the identified challenges?

Recommendation 3

‘The international presence of the transition pools is enhanced to ensure Scotland remains an attractive place for research and international graduates’

36. The importance in the modern research environment of international linkages and partnerships, as well as of leverage of funding, is well recognised. Heathwaite recommendation 3 is around the international role of pools and the value of pools in presenting a united Scottish front. In particular recommendation 3 encourages growing the international presence of the pools either through investment in high calibre international graduates, creating an integrated presence in Europe or building on Scotland’s GCRF success

Discussion

Internationalisation can easily be included within a challenge-led model. Should this be confined to the limits of the challenge in question or should this be a wider ask of pools and, if so, how should it be supported?

Recommendation 4

‘the transition pools and innovation centres are aligned, going forward as a seamless and integrated ‘cradle to grave’ model’

37. The challenge-led support model will clearly encourage aligned working between pools and ICs within the challenge areas. However is there more that SFC can do to align these different structures, whether as one of the goals of a challenge-led funding model or as an independent intervention ?

Section 3

Workshop session

38. Having discussed the recommendations in detail and agreed the principles for a challenge-led model of support, the executive invite Members to give consideration to practical aspects of how this model may develop.
39. Dr Stuart Fancey will present to the Committee and invite workshop style discussion in two or three groups. The Groups will be asked to consider, in light of the discussions regarding principles:
 - How might challenges be identified? Are they broad, with underlying themes or narrowly defined?
 - Whether/ how baseline activities of pools might be supported (earlier questions)?
 - What might a model look like in practical terms? What form could the structure take? A single body, a collaboration of existing bodies? An overarching leadership/ project Board. Is the working assumption that this need not be a single entity right? What elements might the model need to include: studentships; funding for research; collaborative activity; co-ordinators/ project leads?
 - How should the executive best engage with the university sector and other stakeholders in co-development of the model?

Next steps

40. Informed by the Committee’s discussion the executive will draft a proposed response to Professor Heathwaite’s review to paper to be considered by SFC’s Board in January 2020. The Committee will have the opportunity to comment

on the developing paper at the 19 December 2019 RKEC meeting.

Equality and diversity assessment

41. Equality and diversity issues will be explored when the scope and direction of the policy is more defined.

Risk

42. The Heathwaite report identifies a risk of declining competitiveness for the Scottish research sector if the sunk investment in research pooling is not capitalised upon effectively.
43. There is a risk that developing a response to the Heathwaite review raises expectation in the sector and more widely which SFC is unable to deliver on, due to lack of resource.

Financial implications

44. No immediate financial implications, although the aspiration is towards a significant and long-term investment in Scottish research

Recommendations

45. The Committee is invited to:
 - Discuss in detail SFC's response to recommendation 1 and to explore and challenge the proposed principles which would guide development of the proposed intervention.
 - Discuss SFC's response to recommendations 2, 3 & 4 in light of the proposed response to recommendation 1 above.
 - Advise the executive on the practical aspects of how this model may develop.

Publication

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

Further information

47. Contact: Stuart Fancey, tel: 0131 313 6559 email: sfancey@sfc.ac.uk.