

Research and Innovation in the SFC review of coherent provision and sustainability

- This paper invites RKEC to note the published scope and objectives for SFC's review of coherent provision and sustainability (published following the June meeting) and to comment on the proposed approach for the research and innovation funding policy aspects of the review.

Recommendations

RKEC is invited to:

- Note the published scope and objectives for SFC's review of coherent provision and sustainability.
- Comment on the proposed approach for the research and innovation funding policy aspects of the review.
- Contribute further thinking and revisit, as appropriate, any of its previous advice from the March and June meetings now it has more clarity and context on the scope and objectives for the review.
- Recommend its view on the recommencement of the RKEC-led review of UIF.

Research and Innovation in the SFC review of coherent provision and sustainability

Purpose

1. This paper invites RKEC to note the published scope and objectives for SFC's review of coherent provision and sustainability (published following the June meeting) and to comment on the proposed approach for the research and innovation funding policy aspects of the review.

Background

2. RKEC has, over its March and June 2020 meetings, been providing advice to SFC on its funding policy for research and innovation in the context of COVID-19 and Scotland's recovery and future success. The latter meeting was framed in the context of the Minister's (for Further Education, Higher Education and Science) invitation to SFC to 'review how best it can fulfil its mission of securing coherent provision by post-16 education bodies, and the undertaking of research in these changing times.' The reference to 'changing times' includes other significant challenges such as EU exit transition.
3. Both the March¹ and June² papers on research and innovation respectively provide relevant background for this paper.
4. At time of writing the Scottish Government announced its Coronavirus (COVID-19) - Further and Higher Education Sustainability Plan³ which is relevant to this paper.
5. Since the last meeting of RKEC, the SFC has published the scope and objectives for the review of coherent provision and sustainability in a 'comprehensive briefing' on its website⁴. This sets out the review's objectives as well as the underpinning assumptions and constraints which will guide the review and its outputs and outcomes.
6. The first phase of the review (present to August 2020) is focused on three

¹ RKEC/20/04

² RKEC/20/06 and RKEC/20/07

³ www.sfc.ac.uk/news/2020/news-81362.aspx

⁴ www.sfc.ac.uk/review/review.aspx

areas⁵:

- organising the general process around the review (underway);
- short-term and immediate stabilisation, safe provision, economic recovery and accountability measures for AY2020-21;
- starting the process of considering the shape of the further and higher education system and what needs to change, and outlining phase two. Including:

“Building on previous reviews, consider the Covid-19 implications for research as well as our spend and impact on innovation and knowledge exchange, aligning that work to the imperative for fundable bodies to contribute to economic and social recovery.”

7. The review will be organised around work streams, one of which will be ‘research and innovation’. The review’s governance comprises the Review Programme Board and Review Project Team.
8. This paper focuses on the first phase of the review and the first reporting deadline of end-August when we expect to update SFC’s Board and the Scottish Government on the review’s progress and direction.

Input to the first phase

9. At a high-level we expect, at this stage, to produce evidence on the following areas for the first phase of the review⁶. This should help inform the setting of the big questions and themes for the work of the second phase of the review which the Review Programme Board will approve.
 - A post-REF 2021 sustainable university research excellence and researcher talent regime which contributes strongly to Scotland’s economic and social recovery and future success.
 - Contribution of universities to Scotland’s economic and social recovery and future success through innovation support.
 - Contribution of colleges to Scotland’s economic and social recovery and future success through innovation support.

⁵ The review process will have three deadline reporting phases (August 2020, December 2020, and May 2021) and two time-horizons (Academic Year 2020-21 and a four-year change horizon).

⁶ It should be noted that these areas will have interconnectivity with other areas but this complexity is not presented here for simplicity.

- Crosscutting themes of net-zero, equality and diversity, and wider UK developments such as the UK R&D Roadmap⁷.
10. These areas will involve in-house analysis of the key reports (Muscatelli⁸, Cumberford and Little⁹, Heathwaite¹⁰ and the Advisory Group on Economic Recovery¹¹), desk based research on current practice, potential future scenarios, international comparators and so on. This part of the process will also propose where we should commission more detailed analyses and research, objective thought pieces and other relevant exercises.
 11. RKEC has already contributed a lot of thinking on these areas and its views are summarised in the minutes from the March and June meetings. This paper gives RKEC the opportunity to contribute further thinking and to highlight, evolve, reinforce etc. any of its previous advice now it has more detail on the scope and objectives for the review.
 12. RKEC is aware that the planned consultation as part of the RKEC-led review on changes to the University Innovation Fund (UIF) model was paused in March 2020. We, therefore, need to propose how to resume this work as part of the first phase. Members may wish to familiarise themselves again with the report and approach endorsed by RKEC in December 2019 (RKEC/19/25) on the review of UIF.
 13. We envisage that by August we will have a proposition in place for how we should consult on the future of UIF towards introducing change from AY2021/22 (which was the original intended timescale). The proposed restated vision for UIF, which was originally intended to underpin the consultation, focuses the UIF on economic, social and cultural outcomes, Scotland's National Performance Framework (NPF) and net-zero ambitions and targets. RKEC is invited to recommend its view on how SFC should proceed in the wider context of the SFC review. For example:
 - Would RKEC recommend that the consultation on UIF should continue broadly along the lines of the plan endorsed in December 2019.
 - Should SFC consider reviewing UIF from a different starting point, set of assumptions etc.
 14. The specific inclusion of UIF here is not intended to suggest that other parts of

⁷ www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-research-and-development-roadmap

⁸ RKEC/19/23

⁹ RKEC/20/01

¹⁰ RKEC/19/24

¹¹ www.gov.scot/publications/towards-robust-resilient-wellbeing-economy-scotland-report-advisory-group-economic-recovery/

SFC's current research and innovation funding policy/portfolio and other agendas are not important. These other areas will be considered as part of the overall work stream.

15. The pace of change on our support for research is expected to be less rapid than in the area of innovation. This is because of the interlinkages with other systems and the Research Excellence Framework (REF). The recently published UK R&D roadmap which has a focus on Full Economic Costings (FEC) and other significant areas is also important.
16. Our support for research and innovation sits in a UK and international context and systems. The R&D Roadmap is a significant development and example of how SFC's review will need to take cognisance of wider policy developments and opportunities. As mentioned elsewhere on the agenda for this meeting, the National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) has been asked to launch a new Taskforce to advise on the future of UK R&D. The Taskforce, requested by UK Research and Innovation, will consider how partnerships between UK universities and businesses can be strengthened and maximised to drive growth and prosperity¹².

Risk assessment

17. RKEC is invited to highlight any risks associated with this paper. RKEC's discussions will be used as inputs to SFC's review. The risk assessment for this work will be owned by the Review Programme Board.

Equality and diversity assessment

18. RKEC is invited to highlight any equality and diversity issues associated with this paper. RKEC's discussions will be used as inputs to SFC's review. The equality and diversity assessment required for the review will be owned by the Review Programme Board.

Recommendations

19. RKEC is invited to:
 - Note the published scope and objectives for SFC's review of coherent provision and sustainability.
 - Comment on the proposed approach for the research and innovation funding policy aspects of the review.

¹² 7 July 2020, www.ncub.co.uk/

- Contribute further thinking and revisit, as appropriate, any of its previous advice from the March and June meetings now it has more clarity and context on the scope and objectives for the review.
- Recommend its view on the recommencement of the RKEC-led review of UIF.

Financial implications

20. There are no direct financial implications associated with this paper.

Publication

21. This paper will be published on SFC's website.

Further information

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