

Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

The 77th meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held virtually by Zoom on 14th October at 10.00am.

Present

Chair

Professor Lesley Yellowlees

Board members

Mhairi Harrington, Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam, Douglas Mundie, Caroline Stuart

Members

Professor Anne Anderson, Dr Caroline Cantley, Professor Nicholas Fyfe, Dr Jano van Hemert, Professor Julian Jones, Professor Andy Porter, Dr Helen Reddy,

US RKEC

Professor Wayne Powell

Observers

Helen Cross (UKRI), Laura Dougan (Scottish Government), Dr Pieter van de Graaf (Scottish Government), Carolyn Reeve (BEIS)

Apologies received

Members: Dr Alicia Greated, Professor Jonathan Seckl, Ms Sara Rae

Observers: Morven Cameron, Alison Munro

SFC Executive:

Morag Campbell, Stuart Fancey, Jenny Jamieson, Keith McDonald, Hazel McGraw

20/24 Welcome from Chair

The Chair and the Director both welcomed members to the 77th meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.

20/25 Minutes of previous meetings: 14th July 2020

The minute was agreed with the exception of one minor change. Dr Caroline Cantley had not been present but was listed as being so. Executive will change.

20/26 Research Integrity (including UKRI presentation) (RKEC/20/11)

Hazel McGraw provided an introduction to this item that invited members to note the update on research integrity and note and discuss the presentation from UKRI on the development of a national Research Integrity Committee and the landscape study. Hazel McGraw introduced Dr Neil Jacobs from UKRI who provided the Committee with a further update.

The Committee noted the following in response to Dr Jacob's presentation:

- i) Researchers feel pressured to focus on research integrity;
- ii) References to bullying and harassment incidents in the landscape study were a continuing concern. It was difficult to measure their negative impact due to cultural complexities and supporting positive and effective leadership could counterbalance this.
- iii) The REF drives behaviours which in turn impact on research integrity.
- iv) Findings from the review were consistent and provided a reliable picture.
- v) In terms of gender, there were more women than men who felt uncomfortable raising questions about research integrity and this was noteworthy.
- vi) Authorship patterns in submitted articles suggest that gender inequality is quite stark.
- vii) Members noted the impact that funding strategies have on achieving research integrity. Dr Jacobs confirmed that UKRI would consider this concept further in order to inform future strategy.
- viii) The Covid-19 response has reaffirmed the importance of research integrity. How do we future proof research integrity and create the right culture for preserving it?

- ix) UKRI must ensure that devolved 'voices' are heard from across the UK by considering the best approach to ensure their involvement.
- x) Research practice is changing quite significantly and there may be a leaning towards experimental approaches. Will this require a more evaluative approach?
- xi) Members noted the benefits of joining a wider UK research community rather than duplicating SFC roles within Scotland.
- xii) Research integrity is a reflection of the current research culture. This culture must reflect the values of the aspirations and future modelling of UK research.

The Chair thanked Dr Jacobs for his presentation and reaffirmed that working closely with UKRI would benefit the whole of the UK research community.

20/27 SFC Review of coherent provision and sustainability of further and higher education: phase one report and phase two priorities and focus (RKEC/20/09)

Stuart Fancey introduced this item with the aid of a presentation that focused on the review of coherent provision, research and sustainability. The presentation also included a description of what coherent provision might look like. The Committee was invited to discuss and suggest:

- a) The positioning of the planned review of research and innovation support in the context of the wider review – including but not limited to consideration of institutional sustainability, approaches to accountability frameworks and the evolving structures of skills development.
- b) Evidence gathering methodologies and constituencies they recommend the executive uses and consults respectively.
- c) Sources of international advice and expertise – an external view of the UK and Scottish environment (also welcomed by email)
- d) Potential short-term responses to the emergency years – we expect to look at the role of UIF, Innovation Centres, Interface, the support for research – how else do we help universities and colleges make a difference to the social, public health and economic challenge.

The Committee made the following observations:

- i) The Review will likely change the way we carry out research, including the impact of REF 2021 beyond Phase 3.
- ii) SFC's will look to strengthen its role as a thought leader and a source of expertise to facilitate this change.
- iii) Supporting civic recovery and renewal is a key part of the emergency years.
- iv) Levelling up means that we are not building from scratch.
- v) Place-based approach may support initial levelling up efforts naturally.
- vi) Achieving a net zero economy will be woven into everything we do.
- vii) SFC will need to consider its own skills set when considering how to deliver the aspirations of the review.
- viii) Achieving fairer justice and a net zero society requires broad research with the capacity to embrace all communities.
- ix) Challenge led research will happen within an ecosystem that has the right infrastructure. This infrastructure could utilise the 'ladder of engagement' approach.
- x) Engaging with those stakeholders who can directly or indirectly influence spending reviews will strengthen our position.
- xi) In order to do this, we need to capture a wider view and understanding of research and innovation that goes beyond academic community.

The Chair noted that the meeting in December will revisit this item. If a member had any further thoughts, they should contact the Chair or Stuart Fancey to feed into this ongoing process. The SFC board was due to meet on 17th December 2020.

20/28

Forward agenda planning (including planning meeting schedule for 2021) (RKEC/20/13)

The Chair introduced this paper that asked the Committee to:

- a) Consider an appropriate forward agenda for 2021, taking into account the timetable for the SFC Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability, and other key dates for the sectors.
- b) Agree a timetable for Committee meetings in 2021, whilst noting the confirmed SFC board meeting dates in Annex A.

The Executive shared a table of external policy drivers that would

inform Committee business for 2021. Members agreed these drivers as significant to Committee business. The Executive agreed to bring back a redrafted forward agenda to the December meeting. The forward agenda would also incorporate the Committee dates for 2021. The Clerk will issue a doodle poll for members to return.

20/29

AOCB

There was no other competent business.