

Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

The 78th meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held virtually by Zoom on 3rd December 2020 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, Ms Sara Rae, Dr Helen Reddy, Professor Jonathan Seckl.

Observers

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

Apologies received

Members: Dr Alicia Greated, Professor Andy Porter

Other member: Professor Wayne Powell

Observers: Alison Munro (SE)

SFC Executive:

Cat Ball, Morag Campbell, Stuart Fancey, Jenny Jamieson, Robin Lee, Keith McDonald, Lynne Raeside, Andrew Youngson

20/30 Welcome from Chair

The Chair and the Director both welcomed members to the 78th meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.

The Chair welcomed Cat Ball to the meeting, who had joined the Research & Innovation Directorate as an Assistant Director and Lynne Raeside, Head of External Relations at SFC.

Update from Director (RKEC/20/14)

Stuart Fancey introduced an update paper to support the oral update he currently gave to members as Director. This would be a new addition to the information provided to members. The paper would provide a summary of recent developments of interest to members at each meeting.

Recommendations

RKEC was invited to note the content of this paper, indicate if it supported SFC being an active participant in the REF review now being initiated and advise the executive as to the usefulness or otherwise of such an update paper for future meetings.

The Committee welcomed the update paper and agreed with all recommendations, including that of the REF review.

20/31 Minutes of previous meetings: 3rd December 2020 (RKEC/20/min6)

The minute was agreed.

**20/32 SFC Review of coherent provision and FE/HE (RKEC/20/15)
Sustainability: research and innovation**

- emergency (recovery) years AY2020/22; and
- longer term planning for phases two and three

This item invited members to continue providing input and advice to SFC's review of coherent provision and sustainability (the review) as a standing item on its agenda. The paper was introduced by Stuart Fancey, Keith McDonald and Morag Campbell of the SFC executive. Stuart Fancey would also deliver a presentation to support the second part of discussions on longer term planning.

The item was aimed at continuing the conversation with RKEC and was thus divided into two sub sections:

- i) Annex A – focussed on how to ensure our current research and innovation investments and frameworks are the best they can be to have a positive impact in the recovery or emergency years as defined by the phase-one report.
- ii) Presentation – focussed on how we would consider the longer-term strategic direction of SFC’s support and role in Scotland’s research and innovation system or landscape.

Recommendations

RKEC was invited to provide feedback on our actions and priorities for research and innovation in the ‘emergency years’ and to suggest stakeholders, groups, individuals, organisations etc. for SFC to consider including in its stakeholder engagement plan.

The Committee noted the following in response to Annex A:

- iii) In order for Scotland to become more resilient as a result of the pandemic, our response must be proactive and build renewed confidence and stability.
- iv) Institutions are facing unique challenges in how they engage with PhD students due to social distancing measures. This demands a proactive and assertive response.
- v) Levels of financial health and sustainability will vary across research departments and institutions.
- vi) The strong brands of institutions and their ability to promote their distinctive offering may be diluted by remote and digitised learning.
- vii) Research leads to innovation and a positive impact on different parts of society. This requires a robust funding pipeline.
- viii) Understandably the balance of research and teaching has been impacted by the response to the pandemic with responsibilities for teaching in many departments reducing. It remains vital that we invest in the researchers of the future.
- ix) Pump priming does not always provide the same assurances for sustainability as longer term investment.
- x) How we will deliver the Research & Innovation agenda has changed since Covid-19 with significant geographical changes to how the landscape is organised and those who work across it due to home working and an acceleration of the place agenda.

The status quo has changed and our assumptions have changed with it.

The Committee made the following observations in response to the presentation:

- xi) The economic impact of Covid-19 will be long lasting and will require institutions to engage strategically over the longer term.
- xii) SFC as an organisation and its respective board and committees will have to manage a large complex list of opportunities and risks.
- xiii) A focussed engagement with the Committee will enable members to bring their knowledge and expertise into the Review, and go beyond 'reinventing the wheel'.
- xiv) Impartial and distinctive contributions from stakeholder groups will add to the quality of the Review. This will include published evidence such as the Logan Review.
- xv) There will be an established network such as those organised around net zero that we could utilise.
- xvi) Grass root engagement could add further value to the feedback provided by an institution.

The SFC executive thanked the committee for their feedback and suggestions.

20/33

Researcher Development Concordat (RKEC/20/16)

Andrew Youngson introduced this paper that updated the committee on the development of SFC's Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan and sought views on the document prior to its finalisation.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to consider the listed actions in the draft Concordat Action Plan, offer insights on whether these actions are appropriate, suggest other actions for inclusion in the Plan; and advise the executive on issues and opportunities in broader researcher development that are pertinent, especially with regards to the current Covid-19 situation and the issues it has raised.

The Committee noted the following:

- xvii) The mental health and wellbeing agenda would become an integral part of this action plan given recent findings.

- xviii) Many pathways of engagement for PhD researchers have been disrupted or have fundamentally changed as a result of Covid-19.
- xix) Established career routes for researchers have potentially changed.
- xx) Accountability was a key part of the action plan but was currently absent. The executive agreed to further develop this within the plan.
- xxi) The Concordat ethos took research activity beyond institutions and acknowledged that it was people who influenced these systems.

20/34 Forward agenda for discussion (RKEC/20/17)

At the meeting of 14 October 2020, RKEC agreed to revise the forward agenda to take account of the emergency years 2020-22 and consequential policy adjustments due to the impact of the pandemic. This paper notifies the Committee of proposed agenda items for the future business of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. These items take account of views expressed by Committee members.

To enable alignment with the SFC Council, the forward agenda plan follows the same format as that used for the SFC Council, for easy mapping.

Recommendations

The Committee is invited to note the proposed agenda items and suggest any further additional or amendments to the list.

The Committee made the following suggestion:

- xxii) To add discussion on EU/International funding/Discovery fund and Brexit impact.

The executive agreed to incorporate these suggestions into the forward agenda.

20/35 AOCB

The proposed schedule of meetings for 2021 was agreed.