

RKEC Update January 2021

- The paper provides RKEC with a summary of a number of recent developments of interest to the Committee.

Recommendations

RKEC is invited to:

- Note the content of this paper.
- Seek further information as required.

Financial implications

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

RKEC Update January 2021

Introduction

1. Following the Committee's approval of the trial of an update paper as a regular agenda item, this paper contains a selection of updates of potential interest to the committee since its 3 December 2020 meeting.
2. The executive will continue to send notice of events or publications, for example, between meetings where timeliness is important.

The end of the Brexit transition period

3. As the committee will be aware, agreement has been reached by the UK Government with the EU on post-Brexit trading arrangements with the EU. The agreement sets out the arrangements for the UK's participation in European Union programmes and access to programme services (subject to a financial contribution by the UK to the EU budget), which include:
 - Horizon Europe.
 - Euratom Research and Training.
 - ITER.
 - Copernicus.
 - Other EU satellite and monitoring services.
 - Peace Plus programme from January 2021.
4. UK will participate in Horizon Europe with equivalent terms as other Member States and Associated Countries. UK organisations will therefore continue to access funding via all parts of the Framework Programme, notably Pillar 1 (Excellent Science), Pillar 2 (Global Challenges and Industrial Completeness) and Pillar 3 (Innovative Europe). For the European Innovation Council (part of Innovative Europe) UK participants will not be able to access the EIC equity fund but will continue to be able to apply for grant funding.
5. UK Government has decided not to associate to the EU's Erasmus+ exchange programme. The programme will instead be replaced with the £100 million, Turing Scheme, starting in September 2021 and offering places to 35,000 students.
6. We still await the emergence of detail on arrangements to replace EU Structural Funds.

REF2021 Submission arrangements

7. SFC is a member of the four nations' Steering Group which, on behalf of our

governing bodies, oversees the REF. The Covid emergency has impacted the REF2021 process, both from the point of view of universities preparing their submissions and from the point of view of the REF team organising the process of assessment. In June 2020, the four funding bodies announced a revised REF submission date of 31 March 2021.

8. The four nations' funding bodies keep the REF under review as the pandemic continues. We have, most recently, on the [13th January](#), made the following statement:

"We continue to receive evidence and a range of views about the effects of COVID-19, and the related restrictions, on REF submission preparation, including on the effects where clinical academic staff are being called to frontline services, and for research professional staff in finalising submissions under the lockdown restrictions in place. This information has been helpful in informing our contingency planning.

With the submission deadline drawing closer, we understand that universities will want information about any further contingency measures as soon as possible. The REF team are reviewing this urgently with the four UK funding bodies, and intend to confirm any additional measures next week"

9. We will update the Committee with any further statement we have made before the RKEC meeting on the 20th January.

Scotland – Ireland

10. Ireland and Scotland have, on 14th January, [published](#) a Bilateral Review of their future relationship. At the time of writing, SFC has yet to analyse the full implications of the Review but the Committee should be aware that the recommendations include:

- "Irish and Scottish education officials will finalise a new framework for cooperation with the aim of enhancing existing collaboration and developing new initiatives in the areas of further education, higher education and research and innovation."

Professor Dame Ottoline Leyser

11. SFC organised a virtual visit by the UKRI CEO on 14/1/21 involving a wide range of stakeholders from our research pools, innovation centres and graduate schools as well as colleagues from the RSE, the Young Academy, enterprise agencies and research institutes. SFC's Chair and Board members on the Committee participated and the committee will hear a summary of the day as part of this agenda item or the remarks of the Chair.

Covid Research Laboratory Guidance

12. As part of its suite of guidance to workplaces, the Scottish Government has (on 15/1/21) issued updated [guidance](#) on the safe operation of research laboratories and related research environments.
13. Key changes from the previous iteration of the advice includes:
 - Additional advice for those going to work which came into force on the 5th of January.
 - Reinforcing the message that for those in level 4 protection areas, only essential work should be carried out in labs and research facilities, including research libraries and archives.
14. The definition of what is deemed essential research is set out in the guidance.

Risk assessment

15. The risks associated with any of the items in this update will be considered as part of any papers inviting discussion and recommendations by the Committee.

Equality and diversity assessment

16. Any equality and diversity issues associated with the reports in this paper will be considered if decisions or recommendations are subsequently sought from the Committee.

Recommendations

17. RKEC is invited to:
 - Note the content of this paper.
 - Seek further information as required.

Financial implications

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

Publication

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

Further information

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