

Director's Update

- The paper provides a summary of a number of recent developments of potential interest to the Committee which are not otherwise on the agenda.

Recommendations

- Note the updates contained in the paper and given orally; and
- Seek further information from the Director, the SFC executive or other members or observers as appropriate.

Financial implications

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

Director's Update

Introduction

1. This paper contains a selection of updates of potential interest to the committee since its October 2021 meeting.
2. The executive will continue to send notice of events or publications, for example, between meetings where timeliness is important.

Changes in SFC's Research & Innovation team

3. At the end of January the team said a fond farewell to Keith McDonald who left us for an exciting role with the Scottish Government. Congratulations are in order for Gary Bannon who has taken on the role of Interim Assistant Director (KE&I). An advertisement for the permanent position will be circulated shortly.
4. We are in the process of recruiting for an additional fixed term post in the research team. Applications for a Senior Policy Analysis Officer, Research Strategy closed on 14 February. The post is intended to support the implementation of the Review's recommendations for research collaboration.
5. At the end of January a PhD student intern from the Scottish Graduate School for Social Sciences, Maggie Mroczkowski, joined us for three months to explore the postgraduate research landscape in Scotland, including mapping existing PGR provision and work on tracking ECR destinations. We hope that Maggie's work will help us build our evidence base as we take forward the Review's recommendations to better support the PGR student experience.

House of Commons Science and Technology Committee evidence session

6. On 10 February SFC's Chief Executive gave [evidence](#) to the House of Commons Science and Technology Select Committee as part of their inquiry into the role of technology, research and innovation in the Covid-19 recovery.
7. The session took place at the University of Strathclyde's Technology Innovation Centre and the Committee were interested in areas including – how the Scottish research base differs to that South of the Border, and the challenges and opportunities that brings; R&D investment, including achieving the UK Government's 2.4% target; unique features in the Scottish landscape, particularly Research Pools; the impact of Covid on research; the imbalance between higher education and business R&D performance in Scotland; and how

SFC fits in to the ecosystem for business R&D support.

Forthcoming Scottish Government strategies

8. The Scottish Government's **National Strategy for Economic Transformation (NSET)** is due to be published shortly. SFC will have a key role to play in achieving the ambitions of this 10-year strategy, likely including around entrepreneurship and supporting business investment in R&D.
9. The Scottish Government continue to develop their new **Innovation Strategy** outlined in the Programme for Government. SFC is feeding in as relevant, and we intend complementarity with our KE&I consultation.

Scotland's research contribution to national and international challenges

10. Late last year, SFC commissioned analysis to explore Scotland's research contribution towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and SG's National Performance Framework (NPF). In combination with narrative and case studies from each Scottish university, we have created a compelling report on Scottish research and its contribution to national and international challenges. The analysis mirrors [work recently published](#) by the Welsh Government.
11. The publication looks set to be an extremely positive celebration of Scotland's research contribution with the key message that university research in Scotland has a positive impact on SDGs, contributes towards the Scottish Government's objectives for international relations and enhances Scottish universities' global reputation. The work also contributes to our articulation and evidence base of the value of research – particularly pertinent as the SR negotiations are ongoing.
12. A launch event and associated communications are being planned and we are in the process of exploring potential Ministerial involvement. The event would summarise the findings and showcase several university case studies that link to SG priorities. The final report, as well as an invitation to the event, will be shared with the Committee in due course.

UK Government Levelling Up White Paper

13. The long-awaited [Levelling-Up White Paper](#) was published at the beginning of

February. The strategy looks to 2030 and includes a number of commitments for R&D –

- By 2030, public investment in R&D outside the greater south-east will increase by at least 40%, and by 24/25 BEIS will invest 55% of its R&D funding outside the greater south-east.
 - With £100m of funding, three new Innovation Accelerators will be developed, one in Glasgow-City Region, to create MIT-Boston/Stanford-Silicon Valley style clusters.
14. There has been mixed reaction to the White Paper. However it is clear that the UK Government sees R&D as a significant plank of its levelling up agenda - a positive sign of continuing UKG commitment to R&D. It is widely viewed that the BEIS R&D target is unlikely to be a disaster for the Greater South East; estimates suggest that it is a proportionally small increase outside the region, so not a big change in the overall funding balance. The impact may be more significant on UKRI's funding (currently 51% outside the greater south east) but it seems likely that it is the innovation end of the funding spectrum which will do the heavy lifting.
 15. The role of UK Government R&D funding in other departments is unclear in relation to Scotland – much of this funding, for example, that from the Department of Health and Social Care, is devolved.
 16. The innovation accelerator in Glasgow is a very positive development – and it should draw on the research talents of Glasgow and Strathclyde universities. Michael Gove has apparently said that 'Glasgow will be Scotland's Silicon Valley'.

Horizon Europe

17. The UK's association to Horizon Europe remains unconfirmed and much delayed. The UK Science Minister has reaffirmed that the UK Government's position is for the UK to seek association with Horizon Europe, but he has [highlighted](#) that BEIS and UKRI are exploring a 'Plan B' Science and Discovery plan, with £6bn over three years, in case association is not possible. George Freeman has also suggested to MPs that the end of the financial year is effectively a deadline for the future UK relationship with EU science and research funding, though he would like a route to associate after this point, should it be possible.
18. The UK Government announced a [funding guarantee](#) to ensure that the UK

remains able to participate in programmes during the extended delay period. UKRI are administering the guarantee.

19. Funding for a number of Horizon Europe programmes, including the prestigious European Research Council fellowships, has already been announced. This leaves UK recipients in a situation of much uncertainty. Scottish institutions continue to be concerned about the delay and warn of the potential impact.
20. A coalition of European, UK and Swiss researchers have launched the [Stick 2 Science campaign](#), calling for UK and Swiss association to Horizon Europe. The initiative is a helpful push from the research community and BEIS has asked that it is disseminated throughout our networks.

Trusted research

21. On 4 January, the National Security and Investment (NSI) Act came into force. With it come new requirements for international university research collaboration, intended to address concerns in 3 spaces: dual use (i.e. new knowledge being used for something other than intended purpose e.g. military); threats to IP & commercially sensitive research; and espionage (in all forms, includes concerns relating to international students and teaching/research).
22. It is important that universities understand the risks and can act to mitigate them. Universities Scotland is active in this space and Peter Mathieson, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh and SFC Board member, is a UUK champion/UK Government link. The Foreign Interests Register (FIRS) is one of the most relevant associated developments and details are yet to be worked out.
23. BEIS has established a Research Collaboration Advice Team (RCAT) to support universities on trusted research issues. RCAT is intended to be the first point of contact for HEIs seeking advice on international research collaborations. Regional hubs are being established, including one based in Edinburgh which SFC is engaging with.

Future Research Assessment Programme consultation

24. The four UK higher education funding bodies will publish a consultation on the design of the UK's next research assessment system, as part of the Future Research Assessment Programme (FRAP) (*not yet published at time of writing – due on 22nd Feb*). Responses are being sought from higher education institutions and other individuals, groups and organisations with an interest in

the conduct, quality, funding or use of research. This includes businesses, government and public sector bodies, charities and other third sector organisations.

25. The Programme is a significant piece of work aimed at exploring possible approaches to the assessment of UK higher education research performance. It seeks to identify those approaches that can encourage and strengthen the emphasis on delivering excellent research and impact, and support a positive research culture, while simplifying and reducing the administrative burden on the HE sector.
26. Responses to this consultation will be considered alongside a range of internal and commissioned evaluations, feedback on the current REF exercise, and advice from the Programme's International Advisory Group. Decisions on the design of the next exercise will be taken by the four funding bodies.

ARIA

27. ARIA's inaugural Chief Executive was [announced](#) at the beginning of February. Dr Peter Highnam, previously the Deputy Director of the Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA), will take up the post in May 2022. This perhaps indicates that the UK Government are serious about their intention to create a UK-version of DARPA.
28. BEIS have resumed their search for a Chair and have asked for that the Scottish Government promote the campaign with Scottish stakeholders, and send on any recommendations. The legislation to create ARIA has passed the final stage of scrutiny before receiving Royal Assent. Aside from government amendments tidying up the way ARIA will work with devolved administrations, the text of the Bill is identical to that which was introduced in March last year.
29. According to the BEIS R&D budget allocations, ARIA has £50m to spend by the end of March so we should hope that funding can be rolled over.

Trio of UK Reviews - Landscape Review, UKRI Review and Bureaucracy Review

30. There are currently a number of ongoing Reviews which will influence the UK research and innovation system –
31. **The Landscape Review** is being led by Professor Sir Paul Nurse with a focus on organisations that deliver research in the UK. It is commonly thought that Sir Paul is focusing on UK Government Public Sector Research Establishments (PSREs). The BEIS secretariat have undertaken a number of Scottish sector

engagements and SFC has highlighted that it is important that the different research funding systems and structures in the devolved nations are taken into account during the Review's exploration.

32. **The Review of UKRI** is being led by Professor David Grant with a focus on the efficacy, efficiency, accountability, and governance of UKRI, including whether it is delivering on its original aims. SFC has fed in comments through Scottish Government. We highlighted that the way that UKRI is set up, with a mix of reserved and devolved responsibilities, brings some inherent challenge to the SFC-UKRI relationship. However, we have noticed a renewed enthusiasm for collaboration and closer working recently which is welcome.
33. **The Bureaucracy Review** is being led by Professor Adam Tickell with a focus on identifying reforms to research bureaucracy in order to preserve and enhance the UK's scientific and research strengths, while giving researchers more time to focus on their research. An [interim report](#) was published in January 2022. SFC continues as a member of the funders group.
34. A meeting took place between UK Science Minister George Freeman and the corresponding Ministers from the Governments of the Devolved Administrations with Professor Adam Tickell and Professor Sir Paul Nurse at the end of January 2022.

Risk assessment

35. No policy advice is sought in this update paper so no assessment has been performed. Items of committee business arising from developments reported here will have appropriate assessments included.

Equality and diversity assessment

36. No policy advice is sought in this update paper so no assessment has been performed. Items of committee business arising from developments reported

Recommendations

37. The Committee is invited to:
 - Note the updates contained in the paper and given orally; and
 - Seek further information from the Director, the SFC executive or other members or observers as appropriate.

Financial implications

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

Publication

39. This paper will be published on the Council website.

Further information

40. Contact: Stuart Fancey, sfancey@sfc.ac.uk