

## Research Postgraduate Grant

- This paper invites the Committee to discuss recommendations for the Research Postgraduate Grant's principles, purpose and allocation model, drawing on the previously discussed findings of the short life Working Group and the consultation responses received (see previous paper).

## Recommendations

The Committee is invited to:

- Comment on the proposed amendments to the RPG principles and supporting text.
- Consider the proposal for the establishment of a sector-wide task-and-finish working group to co-develop the purpose and future accountability approach for the RPG for implementation by AY 2023/24, as well as to provide a forum to support the implementation of SFC's broader Review recommendations and consider a national approach in response to developments including the UK R&D People & Culture Strategy and UKRI's New Deal for PGRs.
- Discuss the executive's proposal to gather further evidence around the cost of providing a collaborative and inclusive environment for research training for both part time and full time PGR students to inform future work using the sector-wide working group proposed above as a vehicle to undertake this exploration.
- Endorse the proposal for SFC to take forward consultation recommendations for further work to explore potential interventions to attract and retain a greater diversity of students into PGR study in Scotland and to progress a sector-wide definition of widening access at PGR level.

## Financial implications

- Recommended actions will not impact overall budget, but will affect how RPG is used from AY 2023/24 onwards. RPG funding in AY 2021-22 is £36M.

## **Research Postgraduate Grant**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper invites the Committee to discuss recommendations for the Research Postgraduate Grant's principles, purpose and allocation model, drawing on the previously discussed findings of the short life Working Group and the consultation responses received (see previous paper).

### **Background**

2. In June 2021 (RKEC 21/11) RKEC agreed that a short life working group, chaired by Professor Lesley Yellowlees and consisting of RKEC members with an observer from Universities Scotland, should be established to:
  - Examine the principles of REG and RPG in light of the findings of the Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability and developments in the UK landscape since 2014 before; and
  - Examining the allocation method in light of the above and in response to changes in REF.
3. At its meeting of 28 October 2021, RKEC considered in detail the short life Working Group's recommendations on RPG. The Committee endorsed the proposed principles for the grant with minor amendments and agreed proposals for a sector wide consultation.
4. The consultation was circulated to the sector on 11 November 2021 with a deadline for responses of 12 January 2022. The accompanying paper summarises the responses received.
5. RKEC are now invited to consider the Working Group recommendations and consultation responses to advise on the way forward.

## **Research Postgraduate Grant**

### ***Principles***

6. The consultation sought sector views on proposed principles. Responses were largely supportive, with a few minor proposed amendments.
7. Our proposed principles are that the RPG exists to:
  - Invest in a collaborative environment for research training and development that values positive culture, inclusivity and exposure to high-quality research as central to the postgraduate research experience; and

- Secure a pipeline of skilled postgraduate researchers and support their career development in a way that meets the needs of academia, industry and society.
8. Proposed amendments included the following:
- Stronger emphasis on the importance of PGR wellbeing
  - Recognition of the importance of retaining and attracting talent into Scotland
  - Stressing flexible provision to support PGR students into a range of careers
  - A more specific focus on meeting the needs of the Scottish economy and Scottish society
  - Inclusion of the notion of growth and financial sustainability that goes beyond securing the pipeline of the next generation of PGR graduates
  - Recognition of the role of place in supporting the development of high value jobs across Scotland.
9. Responses varied and there was no clear consensus on which, if any, of the amendments should be adopted.

### **Recommendation**

10. The Committee are invited to comment on the proposed amendments to the RPG principles and supporting text.

### ***Purpose and accountability***

11. The consultation sought views on the purpose of RPG and its role in supporting Scottish institutions to respond – individually and collaboratively – to the changing landscape. The majority of responses to this question were receptive to working collaboratively within this space, with a range of suggestions for how this might work, but no clear consensus on preferred approaches or areas of collaboration.
12. The consultation also sought views on how increased accountability for RPG could be taken forward, and how SFC and the sector could work together to achieve this. Responses were fairly unanimous in their desire to avoid overly burdensome reporting. Some institutions saw this as an argument against further accountability, whereas others accepted the need for accountability but warned that it needed to be flexible, proportionate and manageable. Smaller institutions in particular warned about the need to be mindful of additional resources that would be required to enable reporting, and a range of institutions cited concerns about the resource-need associated with increased

reporting requirements taking funding away from PGR support.

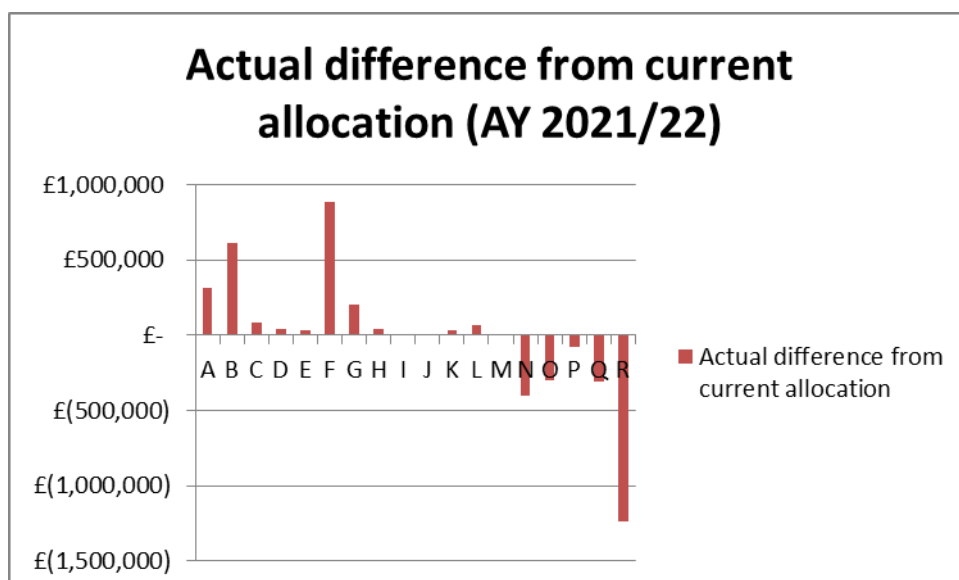
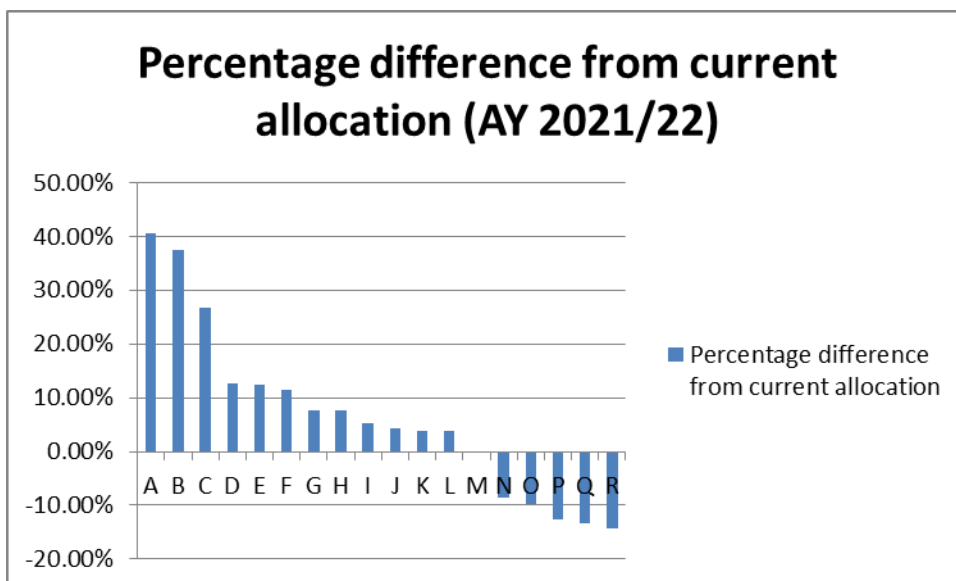
13. Given the range of responses and lack of clear consensus on both the purpose and the future accountability approach for RPG, as well as RKEC's previous indication that more development is needed in this space, the executive proposes that a sector working group is established to co-develop our approach and provide advice and feedback on the implementation of SFC's Review recommendations to better support the PGR experience more broadly. This could link into other areas of our work and also serve as a route to galvanise a Scottish response to UK developments, including the UK R&D People and Culture Strategy and UKRI's New Deal for PGRs. The executive propose that this group is established and run over a timeline to inform the RPG and approaches from AY2023/24 onwards.

#### **Recommendation**

14. The Committee are invited to consider the proposal to establish a sector-wide task-and-finish working group to co-develop the purpose and future accountability approach for the RPG for implementation by AY 2023/24, as well as to provide a forum to support the implementation of SFC's broader Review recommendations to better support the PGR experience. The group could also provide a forum for a national approach in response to developments including the UK R&D People & Culture Strategy and UKRI's New Deal for PGRs. RPG allocation model

#### *Headcount vs FTE*

15. One institution's response suggested that the RPG formula be adjusted to provide more support for part-time students, noting that part time students take up significantly more than 50% of resources and administrative burden. One way of achieving this would be to use PGR headcount, rather than FTE, to calculate the RPG allocation.
16. The graphs below show the impact this change would have if applied to the AY 2021/22 RPG allocation, both as a percentage change and an actual change. The impact would be significant with three institutions receiving an increase of funding of over 20%. Further investigation is needed to understand the relative costs of supporting part-time postgraduate researchers, compared with full-time postgraduate researchers.



*Minimum allocation*

17. Two institutions noted the need for further clarity around the minimum level of funding provided to HEIs *via* the RPG, currently set at £76k for AY 2021/22.
  
18. RPG baseline funding has increased by £1k per year over the past 3+ years, to nominally to reflect inflation. Modelling of an increase of the baseline to £100k results in a minimal change to institutions receiving higher than baseline funding (no more than 0.65%). However, changing baseline funding to this amount without a clear rationale for the level of funding would be arbitrary.
  
19. There is a need for further data on the relative costs of supporting part time and full-time research students to undertake research within a collaborative and inclusive environment. This information could be used to inform potential

changes to the funding formula, and to determine an evidence-based appropriate minimum level of RPG funding for Scottish HEIs.

20. The executive proposes that SFC undertakes further data-gathering around the costs of providing a collaborative and inclusive environment for research training for both part time and full time PGR students to support further work within this area.

## **Recommendations**

21. The Committee is invited to discuss:

- the executive's proposal to gather further evidence around the cost of providing a collaborative and inclusive environment for research training for both part time and full time PGR students to inform future work;
- using the sector-wide working group proposed above as a vehicle to undertake this exploration.

## ***Underrepresented groups***

21. The consultation sought views on how the RPG could play an increased role in improving participation of underrepresented groups within Scotland's PGR community, and how SFC's focus on widening access and participation could be supported by RPG in the postgraduate research student context.
22. Overall, the responses received varied in terms of recommendations for action. However, many responses pointed to the need for additional data to support informed, evidence-based decision making within this area.
23. The executive proposes that SFC either undertakes or commissions work to explore potential interventions to attract and retain a greater diversity of students into PGR study within Scotland, including those in traditionally underrepresented groups.
24. This work could potentially also aim to progress a sector-wide definition of widening access at PGR level, and would be consistent with the SFC Review recommendation to increase our evidence base as part of articulating the value that PGRs bring to our society and economy. The sector-wide working group would be involved with this work, providing advice, ensuring join up with ongoing sector initiatives and minimising duplication to ensure that SFC activity adds value.

## **Recommendation**

25. The Committee are invited to endorse the executive's proposal that SFC takes forward consultation recommendations for further work to explore potential interventions to attract and retain a greater diversity of students into PGR study

in Scotland and to progress a sector-wide definition of widening access at PGR level.

### **Risk assessment**

26. A future assessment of risk will be carried out.

### **Equality and diversity assessment**

27. An equality and diversity assessment of the impact of proposed changes is underway.

### **Financial implications**

28. Recommended actions will not impact overall budget, but will affect how RPG is used from AY 2023/24 onwards. RPG funding in RPG in AY 2021/22 is £36M.

### **Recommendations**

29. The Committee is invited to:

- Comment on the proposed amendments to the RPG principles and supporting text.
- Consider the proposal for the establishment of a sector-wide task-and-finish working group to co-develop the purpose and future accountability approach for the RPG, as well as to provide a forum to support the implementation of SFC's broader Review recommendations and consider a national approach in response to developments including the UK R&D People & Culture Strategy and UKRI's New Deal for PGRs.
- Discuss the executive's proposal to gather further evidence around the cost of providing a collaborative and inclusive environment for research training for both part time and full time PGR students to inform future work using the sector-wide working group proposed above as a vehicle to undertake this exploration .
- Endorse the proposal for SFC to take forward consultation recommendations for further work to explore potential interventions to attract and retain a greater diversity of students into PGR study in Scotland and to progress a sector-wide definition of widening access at PGR level.

### **Publication**

30. This paper will be published on the SFC website.

### **Further information**

31. Contact: Dr Charlotte Matheson, tel:  
0131 313 6650, email:  
[cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk)