

Scottish Research Networks

- This paper provides an update on implementation of the SFC Review's recommendations for research collaboration ('Next Gen Pools') and seeks the Committee's feedback on plans for new Scottish Research Networks (*working title*).

Recommendations

RKEC is invited to:

- Consider plans to implement the Review's recommendations for research collaboration ('Next Gen Pools') through the creation of Scottish Research Networks;
- Provide comment and feedback on the proposed approach in terms of both design and deliverability; and
- Suggest potential names for this new initiative.

Financial implications

- The funding contribution suggested here is a maximum of £2.4M over Financial Years 2023/24 to 2026/27.

Scottish Research Networks

Purpose

1. This paper provides an update on plans to implement the 'Next Gen Pool' recommendations for research collaboration within SFC's Review. It seeks the Committee's comments and feedback on proposals for new Scottish Research Networks, subject to budgetary confirmation and a two-stage commissioning process.

Background

2. SFC's [Review](#) of Coherent Provision and Sustainability recommended that future support for research collaboration focuses on next-generation networks that build on our sustained investment in the [Research Pooling Initiative](#), with a focus on interdisciplinary challenge-oriented research collaboration, leveraging additional funding and fostering early career researcher communities and training. It also stated that, given the excellence of our research base and the collective challenges we face, we need to mobilise funding and action, across disciplines, to coalesce around particularly knotty societal problems. Annex A presents a summary of the relevant Review recommendations.
3. In [response](#) to our Review, the Scottish Government indicated their support and stated that -

*it is clear that a missions-based approach could benefit the evolution of existing SFC investments in the research and knowledge exchange infrastructure – Government will champion this, and will expect agencies to align around key societal challenges, such as the urgency needed to tackle the climate emergency and to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities. We expect the SFC to take forward its investments in the University Innovation Fund, Innovation Centres and **Research Pools** with this alignment in mind*
4. The 'Next Gen Pools' recommendations for research collaboration were identified as an early implementation priority in order to align with the end of the Research Pool funding cycle and build on 15 years of sustained SFC investment.
5. We have worked closely with senior university leaders to develop the purpose and plan for Scottish Research Networks. Since August, discussions have been ongoing with Vice-Principals for Research to co-develop proposals - through both the Universities Scotland Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

and through individual discussions. Extensive discussions have also taken place with Research Pool Directors.

6. Based on the recommendations above, and the advice provided by the Committee and others, we have developed a proposal for Scottish Research Networks.

Our vision for Scottish Research Networks

7. Scottish Research Networks will connect Scotland's research excellence to Scotland's national challenges. They will build on our unique collaborative ethos and our world-class universities - plus structures such as Research Pools and Innovation Centres – to prime the Scottish landscape to respond to challenge-focused research funding opportunities.
8. Scottish Research Networks are intended to:
 - forge multi-institutional and multidisciplinary connections around key societal challenges that have a clear line of sight to Scottish Government priorities;
 - increase external research funding investment in the Scottish research system by targeting winnable external research funding opportunities; and
 - raise the profile of the contributions of research to societal challenges.
9. As self-organised networks or coalitions, Networks will facilitate multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional connections and collaborations across the Scottish research landscape and support the development of bids for research funding. They will direct their efforts to defined societal challenges where research can play a pivotal role.
10. We intend to, initially, create four Networks focused on four challenge areas. Challenges will be chosen to be non-overlapping and embrace the contribution of a range of areas and disciplines, including the arts, humanities and social sciences.
11. Encouraged by the significant ongoing sector support for the continuing activities of the Research Pools, now to be funded by universities as originally intended, we (SFC) will be vocal about the value of such continuing pools to Scotland *where universities continue to recognise their value*. Our plan for Networks aims to strike a balance between drawing on the assets present in continuing Research Pools and developing new approaches and collaborations.

12. As a result, the name ‘Next Gen Pools’, or variations thereof, is not appropriate. The value of a strong name is clear from our experience with Pools. Our working title is ‘Scottish Research Networks’. Other suggestions include – Research Challenge Networks, Challenge Coalitions, Research Challenge Connectors, Research Challenge Alliances. The Committee’s ideas and suggestions for suitable, memorable and ‘catchy’ names would be valued.

Our rationale for Scottish Research Networks

13. Scottish Research Networks are a strategic use of our funding to align winnable external research funding opportunities with Scottish Government priorities, including those set out in the forthcoming National Strategy for Economic Transformation, the National Performance Framework, the Climate Change Plan and other key documents.
14. The critical opportunities and challenges facing us as a society demand focus from the research community. From social and economic Covid-19 recovery, to the climate emergency, and the necessary just and fair societal transformation that will be required to ensure everyone can prosper, research has a critical role to play. It is more important than ever before that research plays its full role in contributing to our society and economy, and Networks are intended as a tool to support this.
15. Networks are also part of our response to the changing UK R&D policy landscape. They reflect the shift towards challenge-led research and mission-oriented approaches¹ and, in doing so, intend to address the gradual downward trend in Scotland’s UKRI research funding leverage. HESA income statistics show that UKRI income across the UK grew by 5.4% between 2015/16 and 2019/20. In this time period, income across English institutions grew by 8%, while Scotland’s UKRI income reduced by 7.1%. Early intervention to address this will benefit Scotland’s universities and, when our funding is limited, catalytic activity that boosts funding leverage is an important strategic approach.
16. Scottish Research Networks also take forward the central recommendation within the [Independent Review of Research Pooling](#). In her report, Professor Heathwaite recognised the gap in Scotland’s university research landscape that could be addressed through focused support from SFC for challenge-oriented research collaboration. Her central recommendation was for -

¹ This shift is observed within Scottish Government funding, UKRI funding programmes, the UK Innovation Strategy, the soon-to-be-launched Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA), Horizon Europe’s Missions, the Wellcome Trust and others. These moves present an opportunity to Scottish university research.

A major investment at scale that builds on the collective critical mass of the Research Pooling Initiative but reorientated to address the strategic cross-disciplinary research challenges important to Scotland by coupling to other disciplines and research and innovation structures.

17. SFC's Board received Professor Heathwaite's report in September 2019 and welcomed the report and its recommendations and invited the executive, working with RKEC, to develop a detailed response to the recommendations.

Relationship with Research Pools

18. Research Pools are an established and valued part of universities' research success in Scotland, recognised and funded by external funders including the Scottish Government, UKRI, industry, the EU and the Enterprise Agencies. SFC established the Pools with universities over 15 years ago and has been gradually transferring them into university control.
19. SFC's core funding contributions to Pools have been extended until the end of January 2023 to give adequate transition time and to ensure that valuable activity can continue to contribute to SFC's future support for research collaboration. From February 2023, Research Pools will no longer be core funded by SFC. SFC is proud of the achievements of Pools and has confidence in the growing contribution they will make to Scotland's future success, after the transition point when Pools will become fully university 'owned'.
20. We anticipate that Pools will continue current activities and evolve new functions where valued and funded by universities and other stakeholders. Pools and Networks will therefore be separate entities; however, we anticipate that Networks are a commission that some Pools may be well-placed to deliver and/or lead as relevant.

Commissioning process

21. In order to ensure that Scottish Research Networks can build on the foundation of SFC's 15-year continuous investment in Research Pools, we aim to dovetail with the end of our contribution to core Pool funding in January 2023 as much as possible. This means that we have a narrow window of opportunity to begin the commissioning process and there is limited flex in timelines. Anticipated timelines are presented in Annex B. *To meet these timelines we need to issue a call for expressions of interest imminently.*
22. We will commission Research Networks *via* a two-stage process, separating the identification of challenges from the development of the

networks/coalitions. Further details are presented in the draft call for expressions of interest in Annex C.

23. Challenge areas will be chosen during stage one. In stage two we will issue a call for proposals that seeks the development of a single Research Network in each challenge area. We will issue key criteria for Networks and stage two of the commissioning process will be non-competitive – we will encourage the sector to work together so that a single bidder emerges for each challenge. SFC will work with the bidder in each area to ensure that our criteria are being met, thereby making sure that the optimum group of institutions (and other bodies) are selected to deliver the Network.
24. We will require that Networks are led/hosted by a university or universities on behalf of a grouping of universities and others. As Networks will be a research-led commission, we will preclude leadership and/or hosting by an Innovation Centre, a Fraunhofer or other similar entity. However, we will welcome, and encourage, involvement of such entities.
25. Some of the activities that we would expect Networks to deliver include:
 - convening workshops and events;
 - horizon scanning;
 - development of leadership groups;
 - early career researcher support (linking and building on Research Pool activity where relevant); and, centrally
 - creation of credible large-scale multi-disciplinary research funding bids.
26. We will require Networks to show that they will have sufficient resource available to support their proposed activities. An ambitious target of funding leverage into Scotland will be one part of our assessment criteria.

Funding

27. The total investment proposed for Scottish Research Networks is £2.4M over four years (FYs 2023/24 - 2026/27). This equates to £600K per Network, at £150K per annum. These funding decisions will be made individually by SFC as each Network proposal is finalised.
28. Given the highly challenging current financial circumstances and the timing ahead of the Scottish Government's multi-year resource Spending Review process, detailed discussions on resourcing have taken place with SFC's finance team.

Risk assessment

29. We are confident that Scottish Research Networks, once proposals are created, are low risk (building on our extensive experience in Pools and on extensive consultation). The process of creating proposals carries risks (of failure pre-financial commitment) as a result of: current financial pressures; the reliance on stakeholder engagement; the resources needed to carry out the two-stage commissioning activity; and the limited window of opportunity to align with the end of SFC's core funding for Research Pools.

Equality and diversity assessment

30. An equality and diversity assessment for the principal activities of Scottish Research Networks will be required from successful coalitions as a condition of funding.

Recommendations

31. RKEC is invited to:
- Consider plans to implement the Review's recommendations for research collaboration ('Next Gen Pools') through the creation of Scottish Research Networks;
 - Provide comment and feedback on the proposed approach in terms of both design and deliverability; and
 - Suggest potential names for this new initiative.

Financial implications

32. The funding contribution suggested here would be a maximum of £2.4M over Financial Years 2023/24 to 2026/27.

Publication

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

Further information

34. Contact: Dr Cat Ball, Assistant Director (Research), tel: 0131 313 6660, email: cball@sfc.ac.uk

Annex A – Relevant SFC Review recommendations and the Minister’s response

Our Review recommended that we:

- recommission Research Pools, creating next-generation networks that build on our sustained investment in the Research Pooling Initiative with a focus on interdisciplinary challenge-oriented research collaboration, leveraging additional funding and fostering early career researcher communities and training;
- engage with the sector, including through Universities Scotland’s Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) and other routes, to build buy-in and develop the vision for Next Generation Pooling in the present-day research landscape; and
- provide explicit support for Pools 2.0 for three years (AY 2022-23 – 2024- 25).

It also stated that:

- Given the excellence of our research base and the collective challenges we face, we outline the need to mobilise funding and action, across disciplines, to coalesce around particularly knotty societal problems.
- We recommend developing mission-oriented research and knowledge exchange themes and funding at a national level to catalyse cross-sector working and collaboration that maximises resources and expertise to tackle long-term challenges (particularly the climate emergency and net-zero carbon).

The Minister indicated support for SFC in taking forward these recommendations and stated that:

- it is clear that a missions-based approach could benefit the evolution of existing SFC investments in the research and knowledge exchange infrastructure – Government will champion this, and will expect agencies to align around key societal challenges, such as the urgency needed to tackle the climate emergency and to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities. We expect the SFC to take forward its investments in the University Innovation Fund, Innovation Centres **and research pools** with this alignment in mind

Annex B – Anticipated timelines for the development of Scottish Research Networks

Proposed timing	Activity
2022	
Early March	Issue call for expressions of interest for Network challenge areas
March – June	Call for expressions of interest for Network challenge areas open (competitive process) - <i>3 months</i>
Late June/early July	Challenge selection by panel
August	Announcement of challenges and call for proposals for Research Networks opened
August - January	Development of Research Networks (non-competitive process) - <i>6 months</i>
2023	
January	Panel assessment of Research Network proposals
<i>End of January</i>	<i>End of SFC core funding for Research Pools</i>
February/March	Announcement of Research Networks

Annex C – DRAFT SFC Scottish Research Networks - Call for Expressions of Interest

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Introduction

The Scottish Funding Council is pleased to invite expressions of interest for Scottish Research Networks.

Scottish Research Networks will connect Scotland's research excellence to Scotland's national challenges. They will build on our unique collaborative ethos and our world-class universities - plus structures such as Research Pools and Innovation Centres – to prime the Scottish landscape to respond to challenge-focused research funding opportunities.

Scottish Research Networks are intended to:

- forge multi-institutional and multidisciplinary connections around key societal challenges that have a clear line of sight to Scottish Government priorities;
- increase external research funding investment in the Scottish research system by targeting winnable external research funding opportunities; and
- raise the profile of the contributions of research to societal challenges.

Four Scottish Research Networks will be funded by SFC for four years (spanning five academic years AY 22/23 - AY 26/27).

We are inviting expressions of interest that outline potential challenge areas where Scottish Research Networks could be commissioned, and coalitions who could deliver them, in response to this call by XXX 2022.

Up to four successful coalitions will then be invited to submit full proposals for Networks funding.

In this document we set out the aims, objectives and assessment process for this call for expressions of interest, as well as a draft of the call for full proposals.

Background

SFC's Review

SFC's [Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability](#) made recommendations for how SFC should support research collaboration in the future. It outlined an intention to create next-generation networks that build on our sustained investment in the Research Pooling Initiative, with a focus on interdisciplinary challenge-oriented research collaboration, leveraging additional funding and fostering early career researcher communities and training. It also stated that, given the excellence of our

research base and the collective challenges we face, we need to mobilise funding and action, across disciplines, to coalesce around particularly knotty societal problems.

In [response to our Review](#), the Scottish Government indicated their support and stated that -

it is clear that a missions-based approach could benefit the evolution of existing SFC investments in the research and knowledge exchange infrastructure – Government will champion this, and will expect agencies to align around key societal challenges, such as the urgency needed to tackle the climate emergency and to reduce health and wellbeing inequalities. We expect the SFC to take forward its investments in the University Innovation Fund, Innovation Centres and research pools with this alignment in mind

We have worked closely with senior university leaders to develop the vision for SFC's future support for research collaboration, based on these recommendations.

Scottish Research Networks

The critical opportunities and challenges facing us as a society demand focus from the research community. From social and economic Covid-19 recovery, to the climate emergency, and the necessary just and fair societal transformation that will be required to ensure everyone can prosper, research has a critical role to play. It is more important than ever before that research plays its full role in contributing to our society and economy.

SFC's investment in Networks also reflects the changing research landscape in both UK and international contexts. In particular, the shift towards challenge-led research and mission-oriented approaches, including within Scottish Government funding, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) funding programmes, the UK Innovation Strategy, the soon-to-be-launched Advanced Research and Invention Agency (ARIA) and Horizon Europe's Missions. These moves present an opportunity to Scottish university research.

To harness these opportunities, Networks will forge novel connections between diverse nodes of excellence within the research community. They will be centred on defined societal challenges where research can play a pivotal role, with a direct line of sight to Scottish Government priorities, and, as self-organised networks or coalitions, they will build multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional connections and collaborations across the Scottish research landscape and support the development of bids for research funding.

SFC will commission Research Networks via a two-stage process, separating the identification of challenges from the full development of the delivery coalitions. In this call, we are inviting expressions of interest that outline challenge areas where Scottish Research Networks could be commissioned and potential coalitions who could deliver them. Following this, up to four successful coalitions will be invited to each develop a full proposal.

Relationship with Research Pools

Research Pools are an established and valued part of universities' research success in Scotland, recognised and funded by external funders including the Scottish Government, UKRI, industry, the EU and the Enterprise Agencies. SFC established the Pools with universities over 15 years ago and has been gradually transferring them into university control.

SFC is proud of the achievements of Pools and has confidence in the growing contribution they will make to Scotland's future success, after the transition point in January 2023 when Pools will become fully university 'owned'. We consider Pools and Networks as separate entities, with the potential to be linked.

Where valued and funded by universities and others, Pools will continue as an important component of Scotland's research landscape, maintaining current activities and developing new functions as appropriate. As part of the landscape's response to Networks, we anticipate that some Pools are likely be involved in their delivery and leadership, as relevant.

Call for expressions of interest

SFC is inviting prospective coalitions of Scottish universities to propose challenge areas for Scottish Research Networks.

The list of major Scottish Government policy imperatives below is intended as a high-level guide. We are seeking ideas of how these high-level priorities can best be expressed as individual tractable research challenge areas -

- **Achieving net zero** – including green technologies, the energy transition and industries of the future;
- **Enabling a fair and just transition to net zero** - including widening opportunities, improving outcomes, addressing societal inequalities;
-

- **Driving economic and social recovery** – including developing the technologies of tomorrow, supporting Scotland in reaching new markets and maximising its productivity;
- **Health, ageing and wellbeing** – including healthtech, data & AI, post-Covid health challenges; and
- **Developing the blue and/or natural economy** – including conservation and sustainable use of marine and/or land resources.

We anticipate that suggestions for challenge areas will fall beneath at least one of these areas, linking to, for example, priorities in the forthcoming National Strategy for Economic Transformation, the National Impact Framework, the Climate Change Plan and other key documents.

As an illustrative example, an interpretation of bullet two could be a ‘reducing child poverty’ challenge, or an interpretation of bullet three could be a ‘quantum technologies for Scotland’s future’ challenge or an interpretation of bullet four could be an ‘addressing the mental health impact of the Covid-19 pandemic’ challenge.

We will consider challenges that fall outside the list above, provided they meet the criteria outlined below.

Prospective coalitions should be led by a university or universities. Delegation of leadership to a Research Pool or other multi-university structure might be appropriate and would be welcomed. As Networks will be a research-led commission, we will preclude leadership by an Innovation Centre, a Fraunhofer or other similar entities and partners. However, we will welcome, and encourage, involvement of these entities in prospective coalitions. We anticipate that a variety of collaborations could come together to deliver Networks.

The deadline for responses is noon on XXX 2022. Proposals will be considered by an assessment panel in XXX 2022. The selected challenge areas and the panel’s advice on prospective coalitions will be announced at the end of XXX 2022. Successful consortia will be invited to submit full proposals (see Annex B for the draft call for proposals for Scottish Research Networks).

Challenge criteria

Expressions of interest should outline how the challenge area proposed meets the criteria below.

Challenges must -

- Align with Scottish Government priority(ies);
- Involve areas of evidenced Scottish sector research strength;
- Require multidisciplinary responses;
- Link to defined funding opportunity(ies), for example from UKRI, UK, EU, Scottish Government or other research funders; and
- Be of appropriate scale – balancing breadth and specificity.

In addition to the above, we expect expressions of interest to briefly indicate the capacity for coalition/partnership formation to deliver a Network in the challenge area proposed. For example, the relationships that the Pools have made with each other and/or other consortia such as the Scottish Graduate Schools (SGSSS and SGSAH) could feature as well as the involvement of entities such as non-Scottish universities, colleges, Research Institutes (e.g., the six Scottish Environment, Food and Agriculture Research Institutes, [SEFARI](#)), Innovation Centres or others, with the proviso that SFC's funding does not support activity where the benefits are realised outside of Scotland. We advise that formal coalition/network building does not begin until the announcement of the results.

We will ask that responses focus on a single challenge area and are brief (no more than four pages in length). Expressions of interest must follow the proposal structure outlined in Annex A.

Funding

No funding will be awarded as a result of this expressions of interest stage. However, successful applicants will be invited to submit full proposals for Scottish Research Networks and funding of up to £600K over four years.

We will require that the full proposals for Networks show that they will have sufficient resource available to support their proposed activities (not at this expressions of interest stage). An ambitious target of funding leverage into Scotland will be one part of our assessment criteria. We will expect that full proposals (not at this expressions of interest stage) will outline how additional funding will be raised and spent on the Network activity or its underpinning architecture. We will not put constraints on how the non-SFC resource is raised or spent

Equality and Diversity

SFC considers equality and diversity in all its priorities. SFC asks institutions to be mindful of the Equality Act (2010), including the statutory requirement for Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIs) of new and revised strategies and policies. EHRIA are not required in response to this call for expressions of interest but will be sought in response to the full call for proposals.

Submission

The deadline for proposals is noon on XXX 2022. Proposals should be submitted to XX, XX, XXXX@sfc.ac.uk.

Assessment

Expressions of interest will be considered by an assessment panel comprising SFC and its partner organisations. The assessment panel is likely to include representatives from SFC, Scottish Government and external stakeholders representing both UK and international perspectives. Equality, diversity and inclusion will be considered in the development of the panel.

The assessment panel will support SFC to determine four challenge areas and, as appropriate, judge, negotiate and develop prospective coalitions of Scottish universities where Scottish Research Networks will be developed. We will ask the panel to consider where submissions could be merged, additional collaborations formed, or improved in other ways, as necessary/appropriate.

At the end of the assessment process, we envisage that a single potential grouping – a single ‘bidder’ - will emerge in each challenge area. This grouping will then be invited to submit a full proposal (see Annex B for further details).

Assessment criteria will focus on:

- the involvement of a full and appropriate range of disciplines, institutions/organisations and areas of Scottish research strength;
- the urgency, relevance and alignment of challenges with Scottish Government priority policy areas;
- the potential to attract external research funding; and
- added benefit brought as a result of SFC’s investment.

The final set of challenges will be chosen to be non-overlapping and embrace the contribution of a range of areas and disciplines, including the arts, humanities and social sciences.

Indicative Timetable

Action	Date
Call for expressions of interest launched	XXX 2022
Deadline for expressions of interest	XXX 2022
Assessment panel	XXX 2022
Applicant notification*	XXX 2022
Successful applicants invited to submit full proposals	XXX 2022
Deadline for full proposals	XXX 2022
Announcement of successful Scottish Research Networks	XXX 2022/3
Funding award letters issued	XXX 2023

*We will provide feedback to unsuccessful applicants at a later date. The level of feedback will be dependent on the number of proposals received.

Data Protection

Any materials produced, reporting required, promotional information, etc. must be compliant with data protection and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) requirements. Institutions must ensure any participants are aware of how their information will be processed in accordance with GDPR. For more information about how SFC uses personal data please see our Privacy Notice.

SFC reserves the right to share content, reports and other information with the Scottish Government and other relevant stakeholders to promote and evidence the way in which funding has been used.

Further information

SFC welcomes early discussions with interested parties. For further information and informal enquiries please contact: Dr Cat Ball, email: cball@sfc.ac.uk, tel: 0131 313 6660.

Annex A – Outline structure for expressions of interest

Responses must include the following sections in the order listed. Expressions of interest should use this structure to meet all proposal criteria. Proposals which do not provide this information will be ineligible.

We will require a cover sheet which includes:

- relevant contact details;
- interested partner universities/organisations; and
- disciplines that would be included.

Submissions should be maximum 4 pages (excluding cover sheet) and cover:

- A brief description of the proposed challenge area, including:
 - How it aligns with Scottish Government priorities (through reference to key strategy and/or policy documents or otherwise);
 - The nature of the multidisciplinary response required and how areas of evidenced Scottish sector research strength are involved; and
 - Justification of the balance the challenge strikes between breadth and specificity.
- Suggested future or current defined funding opportunity(ies) which a Network focused on this challenge would be well-placed to target.
 - For example, funding from UKRI, UK Government, Horizon Europe, Scottish Government or other research funders.
- A brief description of the prospective coalition of universities, and any others involved, which could deliver a Network in this area. This should indicate who would lead.
- The added benefit that would be brought by SFC funding.

Annex B – SFC Scottish Research Networks – Draft invitation to submit full proposals

This process will be non-competitive and only successful applicants from the expressions of interest stage will be invited to submit full proposals. This text is included as an indicator of the likely requirements, process and approach in order to inform the expressions of interest process.

Invitation to submit full proposals

Collaborative university-led research consortia will be invited to submit proposals for funding of up to £600,000 each over four years to run one of four SFC Scottish Research Networks. Each Network will focus on a different challenge area connected to Scottish Government priorities, as determined by the outcome of the expressions of interest stage. SFC will work with applicants and their partners to ensure that our criteria are being met.

Networks will be facilitators. They will focus on building connections and collaborations across the Scottish research landscape to support the development of bids for research funding. Though SFC will not be prescriptive of their activities, we would expect that some of the things that Networks do would include:

- convening workshops and events;
- horizon scanning;
- development of leadership groups;
- early career researcher support (linking and building on Research Pool activity where relevant); and, centrally
- creation of credible large-scale multi-disciplinary research funding bids.

For example, Network funding could be used largely for salaries and to buy out staff time to deliver the activities above. It could also be used to support the costs of workshops or sandpits, or potentially the costs of a consultant to support on a large-scale funding bid.

SFC will not explicitly require that institutions match our funding for Networks. We will require Networks to show that they will have sufficient resource available to support their proposed activities. An ambitious target of funding leverage into Scotland will be one part of our assessment criteria.

Networks will be required to contribute to positive research culture. This includes an explicit aim to support early career researchers (ECRs) and a proactive ambition to further diversity, equity and inclusion. We see this as a helpful corollary to the work that Research Pools are doing with ECRs on a (in some cases) more mono-disciplinary basis. Network activity in this space will be explicitly linked to SFC's research culture ambition as outlined in our Review.

Outcomes, impacts and progress indicators will be co-developed with SFC to create a suitable evaluation framework and approach for each Network. We are cognisant of the challenge of quantifying impact for this type of activity and expect this to be a key area of focus in the development of the Network.

The deadline for proposals is noon on XXX 2022. Proposals will be considered by an assessment panel in XXX 2022 and the announcement of successful consortia will be made in XXX 2023.

Proposal criteria

Proposals will be invited from successful applicants to the expressions of interest stage. Proposals:

- Will be based on the specified challenge area identified as a result of the expressions of interest stage.

- Should consolidate and provide further information as relevant on what was provided at the expressions of interest stage including:
 - Fit with Scottish Government priorities;
 - Alignment with defined area(s) of current or future investment from UKRI, Horizon Europe or other sources of research funding; and
 - The nature of the multidisciplinary response required and how areas of evidenced Scottish sector research strength are involved;

- Should give a credible account of their ambition to accelerate Scottish research in the challenge area, also giving a credible account of the research, impact and leverage they can predict.

- Should be led by the university or universities identified following the expressions of interest stage, on behalf of a partnership of universities and others.
- Should draw on other parts of the system as appropriate and relevant, including Scottish Innovation Centres, colleges, research institutes, non- Scottish HEIs and other infrastructure and bodies as relevant (noting this will vary depending on the challenge). Note that Partnerships should not be hosted or led by these entities.
- Should suggest the activities that will be central to the Network, expected to include some of the areas indicated above as relevant.
- Should show that they will have larger resource available to support the challenge they seek to address.
- Should include an account of the effort the proposed Network will put into involving the ECR community and supporting equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Should outline suitable outcomes, impacts and progress indicators which will be co-developed with SFC to create a suitable evaluation framework and approach for each Network.

Proposals should be submitted by each consortium's nominated host university and must be signed off by participating universities. Host universities will be required to administer SFC funding on behalf of the Network and report back on the use of this funding.

Funding

Each successful Scottish Research Network will be offered SFC funding up to a maximum of £600K over four years, at £150K per annum.

SFC will fund up to four Networks, making our total investment £2.4m over 4 years (spanning five AYs 22/23 - 26/27). Depending on progress, performance against

developed success measures and SFC's future funding settlements, we will consider funding additional Networks in the future.

SFC funding will be allocated to and managed by the consortium's nominated host university. Other institutions involved in the project must also be listed in the proposal.

Equality and diversity

SFC considers equality and diversity in all its priorities. SFC asks institutions to be mindful of the Equality Act (2010), including the statutory requirement for Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments (EHRIs) of new and revised strategies and policies. **Proposals must include an EHRIA.** Institutions can complete their own EHRIA form or use SFC's form which is available upon request. Further information and guidance are available from SFC's website.

Submission

Proposals must be able to demonstrate senior level support from the nominated host university. Applications will only be eligible if signed by the Principal or delegated signatory.

The deadline for proposals is noon on XXX 2022.

Assessment

Eligible proposals will be taken forward for consideration by the same assessment panel who considered the expressions of interest.

SFC will develop assessment criteria for full proposals in due course.