

Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

The 69th meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held on 11 June 2019 in Carnegie Room, Apex 1, 99 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HD.

Present: Professor Anne Anderson
Professor Tim Bedford
Dr Caroline Cantley
Professor Susan Craw
Dr Alicia Greated
Dr Jano van Hemert
Mhairi Harrington
Professor Tom Inns
Douglas Mundie
Professor Andy Porter
Professor Wayne Powell

Observers attending:
Joel Herzig, UKRI
Dr Pieter van de Graaf, SG
Carolyn Reeve, BEIS

Guests: Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Further Education,
Higher Education and Science
Karen Watt, Chief Executive, SFC
Professor Louise Heathwaite, University of Lancaster

Officers: Morag Campbell, Dr Stuart Fancey, Jenny Jamieson, Sarah
Kirkpatrick, Robin Lee, Keith McDonald, Hazel McGraw,
Maxine O'Neill, Morven Pritchard, Andrew Youngson

Apologies: Morven Cameron, HIE
Helen Cross, UKRI
Dr Siobhan Jordan
Alison Munro, SE
Professor Sir Anton Muscatelli
Professor Jonathan Seckl

19/13 Chair's business

The Chair welcomed members to the 69th meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. In addition, the Chair welcomed Joel Herzig who would be representing UKRI in Helen Cross's place for that meeting, Laura Dougan who was attending with Dr Pieter van de Graf from Scottish Government and Karen Watt, CEO at the Scottish Funding Council.

The Chair noted that Mr Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science, would be joining the meeting. The Minister would be joining the meeting at item 10 during which Mr Lochhead will hold a question and answer session with Committee members.

Director's update

The Director highlighted the Queen's Birthday Honours list in which Professor Ian Boyd from Defra and Gillian Docherty from The Data Lab had been recognised. UKRI and its constituent Councils had just published their Delivery Plans for 2019-20.

19/14 Minutes of previous meeting 6th March 2019 (RKEC/19/min1)

The minute from the previous meeting was approved.

19/15 Post-Brexit environment: update on current position (Oral)

Sarah Kirkpatrick provided an update to the Committee on Brexit and the progress the SFC team were making on assessing its impact as developments arise. The Chair encouraged the team to keep going, particularly in an environment that was unpredictable and fast-moving.

19/16 Open access: update (Oral)

The Director updated the Committee on developments on Open Access. The UKRI Steering Group's considerations extended to parity of esteem in publishing. The Chair suggested that establishing a dialogue with the office of the Chief Scientific Adviser would be of value.

19/17 University Innovation Fund (UIF) review (RKEC/19/09)

Douglas Mundie formally thanked the UIF review group for their input

and noted that responses had been challenging to gather. The Review Group were aware of their milestones and would deliver a response for the Board within the planned timescale. The Chair was grateful for the delivery plan. The Committee noted their contentment with the paper and looked forward to receiving further updates. Douglas Mundie noted he would be happy to speak with any Committee member about this piece of work at any time.

19/18

The Concordats (RKEC/19/10)
(Knowledge Exchange, Researcher Careers, Integrity, Open Access data)

Keith McDonald introduced this paper that included a copy of the draft UK concordat on research careers for consideration. The Chair noted that this Concordat has been taken seriously in the university sector. The Committee made the following observations:

- The key driver of the Concordat was to support the career of researchers.
- The guidance on environment, culture and employment may need to be expanded further and clarified within the draft.
- Creating an inclusive research environment is welcome but the environment should be capable of building on current gender activities such as such supporting women in science.
- The definition of “Research staff” may need to be provided within the Concordat.
- Achieving a balance in how the Concordat is implemented across the UK is an ongoing challenge.

The Chair emphasised the importance of this and other Concordats in supporting researchers across the sectors.

19/19

Innovation Centre Programme: forward strategy (RKEC/19/11)

Keith McDonald introduced this paper that invited the Committee to comment on the developing long term strategy for the Innovation Centre programme before the SFC Board met again on 20 June 2019.

The Committee noted that justifying the national investment would require ongoing evidence from Programme Partners on the evaluation and management of the programme and its outputs. Members wanted the programme to be successful and to be recognised as such.

19/20 SFC Strategic Framework (Oral)

Karen Watt, CEO, noted that SFC was about to publish a new Strategic Framework in which the organisation would be pursuing excellence, global positioning, reputation and connectivity. This positioning would be expected to include excellence in research. With this in mind, the Chair noted the Committee's support and welcomed the new Framework, which had benefitted from the work of the Committee and its Working Groups over the previous two years.

19/21 Mr Richard Lochhead MSP, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science (Oral)

The Chair welcomed the Minister to the meeting and noted how pleased members were that Mr Lochhead was able to attend and have a discussion with the Committee on topics that mattered to him and the Scottish Government.

The following points were made during the discussion:

- The Minister was keen to raise the profile of science and innovation and develop and protect these national capabilities.
- The Minister would be hosting the first Science Summit on 13 June 2019.
- The university and college sector were national assets and maintaining the balance between autonomy and return of public investment was crucial. A flourishing research environment would further serve to protect these assets.
- The Committee noted the commitment to research excellence and agreed that this was the foundation for research and innovation.
- The Committee welcomed the Minister's encouragement to build an internationally engaged science base, as a global outlook attracts researchers.
- The Committee valued the joined up approach Scottish Government have taken to working with the Innovation Centres in order to maximise Scottish Government strategies.
- There were key policy areas that would require funding investment such as climate change and climate science in order to make progress and there was potential for further collaboration within city deals.
- There were a number of funding vehicles presently available to the sectors (e.g. Scottish National Investment Bank).

- The Committee noted that in many ways the Scottish strategy was 'ahead of the curve' in message. A strong university/business interface would be beneficial in meeting the Government's strategic challenges.
- The Minister was keen to see universities and colleges interacting with their local communities in order to capitalise on the diversity across the sectors. This interaction could also challenge perceptions that may exist within communities of their local college or university.

The Chair thanked the Minister for the opportunity the Committee had been given to discuss these issues with him and to debate the challenges that lay ahead.

19/22 Evaluation of Research Pooling Programme (RKEC/19/08)

Morag Campbell introduced this paper that provided the Committee with an update on the progress of Professor Heathwaite's review of SFC's research pooling initiative and to discuss its emerging findings.

Professor Heathwaite thanked her Advisory Group for their work so far and relayed some early reflections:

- The long term investment in research pooling has achieved critical mass and there is a collaborative culture supporting it. A high-level quantitative analysis of whether the investment achieved research excellence is underway.
- It will not be self-sustaining.
- If SFC chooses to prioritise investment, the critical mass could be repurposed to fit the modern research landscape, give international resilience and lever 'mission driven' research income into Scotland.

The Committee discussed the draft report and the following points were made:

- Collaboration and networks through this critical mass should be preserved.
- UKRI controls 70% of publicly funded R & D in the UK and this is growing. 30% of those funds are cross-cutting.
- SFC should be proud of the long term investment made by pooling and its longer term vision.
- Bringing alignment with SFC strategy, being bold and committing

to building Scotland's research powerhouse, should be the message for the future of the initiative.

- Leadership, vision and communication are key and can maximise drivers within the initiative.
- The pooling and IC relationship needs strategic management and oversight.
- There is a view amongst stakeholders that SFC should be more involved in setting the strategic direction on future.
- The SSAC report on Scotland's place in the landscape was excellent and highlighted the challenges of the research base in Scotland.
- The review fits well with the 'Team Scotland' concept.
- The pools are a consistent feature in the landscape and the relationship between Innovation Centres and the Pools needs unpacked.
- The upcoming Science Summit will consider alignment across the landscape.

19/23 **Balanced funding review (RKEC/19/12)**

Morag Campbell gave an introduction to this paper that invited a discussion of opportunities and threats arising from contextual developments potentially affecting the Scottish research base.

The Committee noted that the full picture from Barnett Consequentials was not yet available. Morag Campbell agreed to keep the Committee informed of developments as they arise. The Committee observed that demonstrating the benefits to the Scottish tax payer from funding research could become part of a strategy on how we communicate research outcomes to the wider public.

19/24 **Outcome Agreements: remit for AY2020/21 (RKEC/19/13)**

Karen Watt spoke to this paper that asked the Committee to consider and advise the Council on the research and innovation priorities for the next set of Outcome Agreements (OAs).

The Committee noted the intention to make the Outcome Agreements more 'punchy' and condensed. More succinct outcome agreements would support SFC in communicating with its audiences and strengthen the SFC 'voice'.

19/25 Forward agenda (RKEC/19/14)

The Chair and Committee noted the forward agenda and noted that there would be many opportunities for the Committee to feed into the Board.

19/26 Reflections from Karen Watt, SFC CEO

Karen Watt provided the Committee with the following reflections:

- Recognises that Committee is operating in a way that supports transparency and openness across members and this is welcome.
- The funding challenges across the sector are now extremely evident.
- Partnerships beyond SFC and the interconnectedness across research and teaching & learning will become even more important as a result.
- We should consider how we utilise our data to promote our international reputation and integrity.
- Who are our ambassadors and what is their message?

19/27 AOCB

There was no other business.

Future meetings

4th September 2019

19th December 2019