

## **Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee**

The 75th extra meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held virtually by Zoom on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020 at 10.00am.

### **Present**

#### **Chair**

Professor Lesley Yellowlees

#### **Board members**

Mhairi Harrington, Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam, Douglas Mundie, Caroline Stuart

#### **Members**

Professor Anne Anderson, Dr Caroline Cantley, Professor Nicholas Fyfe, Dr Alicia Greated, Dr Jano van Hemert, Professor Julian Jones, Professor Andy Porter, Ms Sara Rae, Dr Helen Reddy, Professor Jonathan Seckl

#### **US RKEC**

Professor Wayne Powell

#### **Observers**

Morven Cameron (HIE), Helen Cross (UKRI) Dr Pieter van de Graaf (Scottish Government), Alison Munro (SE)

#### **Apologies received**

Laura Dougan (Scottish Government), Carolyn Reeve (BEIS)

#### **SFC Executive:**

Gary Bannon, Morag Campbell, Stuart Fancey, Robin Lee, Jenny Jamieson, Keith McDonald, Morven Pritchard, Andrew Youngson

**20/12 Welcome from Chair**

The Chair welcomed members to the 75<sup>th</sup> (extra) meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee.

**Update from Director**

The Director noted that the report from the Scottish Government's Advisory Group on Economic Recovery (as a result of Covid-19) had been published on 23 June 2020.

**20/13 Minutes of previous meetings: 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2020**

Both minutes were agreed.

**20/14 SFC review of coherent provision and FE/HE sustainability (RKEC/20/05)**

The Committee noted the paper that updated members on the request from Scottish Ministers that SFC review the provision and sustainability of further and higher education in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Executive would provide the Committee with a further paper on this review at the July meeting.

**20/15 Research: summary of issues and developments (RKEC/20/06)**

The Committee noted the paper that summarised the current position on issues relating to Scottish research policy and development in the context of Covid-19.

The Director confirmed that Martin Boyle, Director of Policy, Insight and Analytics and Donna MacKinnon Director of Access, Learning and Outcomes would be invited to a future committee meeting to aid further discussion.

**20/16 SFC Innovation Strategy (COVID-19) (RKEC/20/07)**

The Committee discussed the paper that asked the Committee to provide advice and guidance on SFC's strategy for innovation in the context of the review of further and higher education support and wider. The following points and observations were made:

- Collaborative activity will be more important than ever, in targeting recovery with a need to move beyond current models of competition. There are good ambitions to date on collaboration which has been effective to some extent but could be embedded further. This includes effective collaboration across SFC investments. SFC can lead by example.
- Building models of co-creation with wider groups will ensure that changes are not built in isolation to the wider ecosystem. This will include working closely with businesses, third sector, public bodies in Scotland and UKRI. Colleges also have stronger activity with micro and SME businesses. This should not be forgotten.
- Consideration should be given to how we frame our approach around key policy positions, or how to use these policy positions as a platform for delivery. Examples such as the creation of a wellbeing economy and a low carbon transition could be the obvious basis on which to drive change.
- The dual support system creates additional complexity and it is important to be clear on interdependencies within this system. For example the relationship between learning & teaching and research & innovation and the associated mixed contracts of staff as well as cost recovery for research through income from students.
- Ensuring continued close (or closer) working with UKRI can influence the direction of spend and ensure successful funding bids. To some extent we must be pragmatic about the funding that can be deployed by Scotland and SFC for mission-led activity compared to UKRI levels of funding.
- We should take the opportunity to be ambitious and to be bold in our approach. This will make way for considerations about what should stop. Do we focus on fewer areas of excellence or take a broader approach?
- We must take into account place based and regional activity and the role of universities and colleges within their regional economies as drivers of recovery as well as the anchor role they can provide to support businesses and communities in those regions.
- Colleges still face significant challenges and although some support has been provided for college innovation in the last few AYs, this

has focussed on different priorities and types of activity. To embed innovation effectively, we should consider how to provide a more sustainable investment.

- The Covid-19 crisis has shone a light on social capital as a function of an effective society including areas such as public trust and science policy. As we move into recovery, we should seek to build on this and incorporate whole system thinking into our KE/innovation activity.
- We already have some good starting points. There are examples of HEBCI data that shows some Scottish institutions at the higher end of UK figures for SME interaction.
- Looking to other countries for best practice could be useful but should align with our own ambitions. We could look to Germany for examples of regional approach and closer work with government and USA as an example of mission based activity.
- If we are to be agile we must be aligning shorter-term adjustments with our longer-term ambitions.
- We should be defining a Scottish approach with teaching at its heart.
- Working practices globally will have changed as a result of Covid-19 and we must assume this change will be permanent – therefore how will we work in the future? And how will this impact on how we collaborate?
- How do we incorporate inclusivity and equality into our building back better and greener strategy? And what does this mean for skills?
- Our strength is our Scottish research excellence.
- How can research and KE be flexible and agile enough to cope with future changes including Brexit?
- Innovation Centres already have knowledge and proven expertise on agile development and co-production. How can we use this for our own benefit?

- Building back better after such a crisis will require a different style of competitiveness to be successful and collaborative. There needs to be a shift in mind-set.
- Supply chain resilience will be a key concern.

**20/17**

**AOCB**

Helen Cross from UKRI provided a brief update to members on continued activity taking place at UKRI in response to the Covid-19 crisis.

The Chair proposed that the Committee would discuss the forward and longer term agenda planning at their August meeting.

The Committee would meet again in July.

**Future meetings**

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> August 2020

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2020