

Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

The 74th extra meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held virtually by Zoom on 29th April 2020 at 3.15pm.

Present

Chair

Professor Lesley Yellowlees

Board members

Mhairi Harrington, 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 Irene McAra-McWilliam, Professor Andy Porter, Ms Sara Rae, Dr Helen Reddy,

US RKEC

Professor Wayne Powell

Observers

Morven Cameron (HIE), Helen Cross (UKRI) Laura Dougan (Scottish Government), Alison Munro (SE)

Apologies received

Carolyn Reeve, Professor Jonathan Seckl

SFC Executive:

Morag Campbell, Stuart Fancey, Robin Lee, Jenny Jamieson, Keith McDonald, Morven Pritchard

20/09 **Welcome from Chair**

The Chair welcomed members to the 74th extra meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and thanked everyone for arranging to attend at short notice.

Update from Director

The Director noted that this meeting had been convened in response to the COVID-19 crisis and confirmed that:

- All staff at SFC are now successfully working from home and SFC is functioning as a virtual office;
- None of the topics covered in the paper should be a surprise to members.
- SFC was in the process of gathering an understanding through broad engagement across all sectors.
- There is an existential threat to the quality of research and the reputation of our institutions and education sectors due to COVID-19. Members are being asked to consider a response to this unprecedented risk.

20/10 **COVID-19 and Research in Scotland** **RKEC/20/04**

The Chair introduced the paper that asked members to provide input on other impacts of which members were aware and to gather views from the Committee that would inform the short, medium and longer term considerations of SFC's executive and Board. In particular, the Committee was asked to:

- Note the emerging impacts of COVID-19 on Scotland's research base;
- Advise the Council executive and Board on other risks not covered;
- Consider the post-pandemic future of the research base in Scotland, both its opportunities and challenges; and
- Suggest topics for discussion at both June meetings of the Committee.

The Committee made the following observations and comments:

- a) Protecting the strong research reputation of Scottish universities is a top priority and strategies for doing this should be bold and visionary
- b) The financial impact on the sector from a public health crisis that has no known end date demands an urgent response
- c) The financial impact on each university will be different.
- d) The investment made by universities in the REF and its anticipated outcomes could impact on future ambition across the sector.
- e) The wellbeing and success of PhD students and the suspension of PhD research programmes is a real concern.
- f) Across the academic piece, individuals will be affected and research disrupted.
- g) Undoubtedly, the equalities agenda and its impact on women in research could be impacted despite mitigating efforts.
- h) The sectors ability to recruit students and staff internationally will be affected by social distancing measures and their willingness to travel.
- i) Medicine, Life Sciences and Health are leading the response to the pandemic. However in the medium to longer term, there will be opportunities for subjects such as social sciences and engineering to make a contribution as part of a wider and more diverse research effort.
- j) The sector has a key role to play in shaping the economic recovery and this role is vital in leveraging the sector's reputation.
- k) New ways of working and the expansion of virtual learning will change how research and innovation is delivered.
- l) The value of research and the innovation that develops as a result is being showcased during the pandemic with the sector demonstrating a collective purpose.
- m) Members would welcome more clarity on furloughing and funding extensions across the sector
- n) Changes within business sectors and civic society are likely to have a fundamental societal impact with social and economic implications around poverty and inequality increasing the challenge further
- o) Industry links across university sector are likely to be impacted with business sectors restructuring and changing in critical mass. What might the shape of collaboration be in a more virtualised future? And how might this affect the commercialisation of research?
- p) The student learning experience will change as a result of the pandemic. It will be vital to preserve a positive student experience in different learning environments with increased pedagogical research to ensure quality of teaching.

- q) The aspirations of students post COVID-19 should influence how the sectors transform into a sustainable future, including the potential demography of future students.
- r) It is crucial that the sectors emerge resilient in adaptability and relevance and are part of the future economy and its landscape.
- s) There will be new business models for sustainability across business, government and the wider public sector to ensure a robust response to future crises.
- t) Research Excellence remains a key driver.
- u) The Committee noted the 'explosion' of research across the UK in response to COVID-19 and the reservoir of research excellence that is being utilised during the pandemic.
- v) Science has found a new voice on a national media platform as an integral part of humanity's journey.

20/11

AOCB

The Executive proposed that the Committee focuses on innovation at its next meeting on 19th June 2020.

For the joint meeting with Universities Scotland's RKEC on 17th June, early thinking was to focus discussions around decarbonisation. Additional topics for this meeting might include research integrity and international perspectives.

The Director invited contributions and ideas from members for these two meetings and suggestions should be sent to the Clerk.

Future meetings

Wednesday 17th June 2020 (Joint RKEC SFC/US)

Friday 19th June 2020

Tuesday 25th August 2020

Thursday 3rd December 2020