

## Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

The 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2019 in the Board Room, Apex 1, 99 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HD.

- Present:** Professor Lesley Yellowlees (Chair)  
Dr Caroline Cantley  
Dr Alicia Greated  
Mhairi Harrington  
Dr Jano van Hemert  
Professor Julian Jones  
Douglas Mundie  
Professor Andy Porter  
Professor Wayne Powell  
Ms Sara Rae  
Dr Helen Reddy  
Carolyn Reeve, BEIS  
Professor Jonathan Seckl
- Observers** Morven Cameron, HIE  
Helen Cross, UKRI  
Laura Dougan, SG  
Dr Pieter van de Graaf, SG  
Alison Munro, SE
- Guests:** Karen Watt, CEO, SFC
- Officers:** Morag Campbell, Dr Stuart Fancey, Jenny Jamieson,  
Robin Lee, Keith McDonald, Hazel McGraw,  
Morven Pritchard, Andrew Youngson
- Apologies:** Professor Anne Anderson  
Dr Stuart Fancey, SFC

### 19/45 Chair's business

The Chair welcomed members to the 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. The Chair welcomed Professor Julian Jones, Vice-Principal and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at Heriot-Watt

University to his first meeting as a new member. The Chair also welcomed Karen Watt, CEO to the meeting.

The Chair invited Helen Cross to provide a brief update from UKRI. There was now a clearer picture of the direction for UKRI. The UK Government had committed to a 2.4% of GDP investment in research and development. There is likely to be a new approach for 'technology and science' visas and the funding application process will be streamlined. The Clerk agreed to circulate these slides to members.

The Committee noted that despite this reassurance from UKRI, there is still uncertainty in Scotland in terms of funding and the 'Team Scotland' approach will be instrumental in articulating the priorities for Scotland's research community and activity.

**19/46 Minutes of previous meeting 29<sup>th</sup> November 2019 (RKEC/19/min4)**

The minute from the previous meeting was agreed.

**19/47 KE Framework, KE Concordat, UKRI Open Access Consultation (Oral)**

Morag Campbell and Keith McDonald provided a brief update.

Of note: the implementation of the Concordat was ongoing. There was a watching brief on the KE Framework.

**19/48 Innovation Centre Programme Strategy (Oral)**

Keith McDonald provided a brief update.

Of note: there will be a formal launch of phase-two of Stratified Medicine Scotland in 2020 as Precision Medicine Scotland.

The revised programme for the IC Programme strategy will go to the SFC board in January 2020.

**19/49 The Muscatelli Report (RKEC/19/23)**

**Background**

The Chair introduced this paper that invited RKEC to note the publication of *Driving Innovation in Scotland* and specifically the following:

### **Recommendations**

- Note the publication of The Muscatelli Report.
- Discuss the report's recommendations and comment as appropriate.
- Note that SFC's Board will consider recommendations on SFC's plan for responding to the report at its next meeting on 30 January 2020.
- Note that an unattributed summary of RKEC's discussion will be included in the SFC Board paper.

The Committee noted that the Muscatelli Report committed SFC to an increased ambition and subsequent work activity. The members noted the following:

- There was a need for coherence with stakeholders and influencers to embrace the 'challenge-led' approach and establish the right priorities
- Consideration of national and international opportunities should have parity
- We should define the intentional impact and benefit from research to establish its actual purpose
- Short term research may benefit better in terms of being able to provide impact evidence
- There is a need for SFC to be proactive, bold and adaptive.
- Opportunities for innovative thinking should be built into our approach and the option to 'try something new'
- Current economic uncertainties have impacted on business confidence and their readiness to take risks
- The Royal Society of Edinburgh will be writing a response to Muscatelli in the new year
- The Scottish National Investment Bank (SNIB) will start investing in February 2020 and may provide opportunities

The Chair acknowledged that the Committee should be mindful of the Report going forward given the implications for Scotland.

**Background**

Morag Campbell introduced this paper inviting RKEC to consider the proposed SFC response and to provide further advice on whether this accurately reflects the RKEC discussion of November and on where further development may be required.

**Recommendations**

- Discuss and endorse the amended principles for recommendation to SFC's Board;
- Comment on the themes for consultation and the development of a 'strawperson'.

The Committee made the following observations regarding the proposed investment in response to recommendation 1:

- Pooling has created alignment and critical mass across disciplines. This recommendation requires alignment with challenges to preserve our research competitiveness and retain a common purpose across the sector.
- It is important to identify challenges where Scotland has relevant strengths and can make a unique contribution
- An international focus is vital
- The foundation built from the research pools can be the building blocks for further investment that should support both blue sky and challenge-led research
- The investment should create an incentivised research landscape which must be interconnected and sit within an infrastructure that can generate activity and attract a broad range of funding opportunities
- We should consider how to preserve the positive aspects of the Pools to protect the brand so progress can be bold and ambitious.

The Committee agreed to recommend that SFC support for research pooling as it stands should cease after the transition to a new approach, but there should be a clear message that pools have been successful and there are many positive outcomes, including universities continued commitment to their own investment in pools. While SFC may no longer provide core funding, pools and institutions should be

encouraged to explore alternative models of support. The Chair was keen to keep the Committee involved in discussions and would relay this to the SFC board.

#### **19/51 University Innovation Fund (RKEC/19/25)**

Keith McDonald introduced this paper that invited RKEC to note the recommendations of the University Innovation Fund Review Group (UIFRG) and to advise SFC on next steps for the review of the UIF.

##### **Recommendations**

- Note the UIFRG's report and recommendations:
- Advise the SFC executive on next steps for the review of UIF including issues for consultation.

Douglas Mundie thanked the UIF Review Group for their high degree of attendance and commitment and summarised the Group's five recommendations. The Committee was provided with access to additional background reports. Douglas Mundie advised members that the Cumberland/Little report was now being published in February (originally scheduled for January).

The Committee noted the following:

- The platform grant and formulaic/variable grant should complement each other
- Match funding can produce different outcomes
- Volume measure must not discount small but potentially revolutionary research
- The UIF would benefit from an increase in funding in the longer term
- The structure of the consultations and its approach would be impacted by the outcomes of the SFC board discussion. Further thought would be needed on the timing of the consultation and the impact of other published reports in developing a coherent consultation across stakeholders.

#### **19/52 Researcher Development (RKEC/19/26)**

Andrew Youngson introduced this paper that invited RKEC to discuss SFC's current strategy and funding policy for researcher development and to make recommendations on its development in the context of

SFC's new Strategic Framework and the new Researcher Development Concordat.

### **Recommendations**

- To note SFC's current strategy and funding policy for researcher development;
- To advise SFC on the development of its strategy and funding policy for researcher development in the context of its new strategic framework and the new Researcher Development Concordat.

The Committee noted the following:

- Significant resources and staff investment are required to deliver the REF at any institution
- The current skills required for researchers have changed dramatically and this should be factored into considerations
- Not all postgraduate students will go into research
- All aspects of research culture should be considered in the development of any strategy to support this community

**19/53**

### **Brexit: The Smith Report (RKEC/19/27)**

Sarah Kirkpatrick introduced this paper that provided RKEC with an update on the publication of the Smith Report and seeks the views of RKEC on the report.

The Committee noted the following:

- That the report considers potential alternatives to association to Horizon, following the transition period
- As significant parts of science and innovation policy are devolved to Scotland, there is flexibility in how we choose to manage and mitigate the risk to the Scottish research base
- We cannot predict at this early stage the real impact of these changes
- Further consultation with external parties may benefit our thinking.

**19/54**

### **Forward agenda (RKEC/19/28)**

The Chair introduced the forward agenda that invited RKEC to provide suggestions for items that can help deliver the objectives of the SFC

Strategic Framework.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is invited to:

- Consider whether these items are appropriate for future discussion, particularly bearing in mind SFC's priorities as outlined in SFC's Strategic Framework;

The Committee agreed to consider the forward agenda more fully at the March committee meeting. The Clerk will add this as an item to the March agenda.

### **Future meetings**

Thursday 5<sup>th</sup> March 2020

Friday 19<sup>th</sup> June 2020

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

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