

Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

The 73rd meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held on 5th March 2020 in the Board Room, Apex 1, 99 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HD.

- Present:** Professor Lesley Yellowlees (Chair)
Professor Anne Anderson
Mhairi Harrington
Dr Jano van Hemert
Professor Julian Jones
Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam
Douglas Mundie
Professor Wayne Powell
Professor Andy Porter
Ms Sara Rae
Dr Helen Reddy
- Observers:** Helen Cross, Head of Strategy Co-ordination at UKRI
Alison Munro, Scottish Enterprise
Carolyn Reeve, BEIS
Dr Pieter van de Graaf, Scottish Government
- Guests:** Rebekah Widdowfield, Royal Society of Edinburgh
David Nisbet, Royal Society of Edinburgh
- Officers:** Morag Campbell
Stuart Fancey
Jenny Jamieson
Keith McDonald
Hazel McGraw
Karen Watt, CEO
Andrew Youngson
- Apologies:** Morven Cameron, HIE (Observer)
Dr Caroline Cantley
Professor Nicholas Fyfe
Dr Alicia Greated
Professor Jonathan Seckl
Caroline Stuart

20/01 Chair's business

The Chair welcomed members to the 73rd meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee. The Chair also welcomed Professor Irene McAra-McWilliam and Caroline Stuart who had both joined the Committee as Council members. The Chair also welcomed Louise Ker who was on a short secondment at SFC from the University of Edinburgh to work on the planning for the future structure of REG (post-REF). The Chair also welcomed Karen Watt, CEO at SFC to the meeting.

The Chair confirmed that Rebekah Widdowfield and David Nisbet from the RSE would be joining the Committee at Item 9 under AOCB to discuss their reviewed awards programme.

The Chair confirmed that Professor Jonathan Seckl, who had been unable to attend this meeting, would be invited to serve a second term up to December 2022.

Director's update

The Director provided members with a short update including the approval of the draft budget by Scottish Government in February and the anticipated launch of seven new SFC-funded college-led innovation projects. Mr McKee, Scotland's Minister for Trade, Investment and Innovation was expected to make this college sector announcement.

20/02 Minutes of previous meeting 17th December 2019 (RKEC/19/min5)

The minute from the previous meeting was agreed.

20/03 Building on the recommendations of the Heathwaite Review (Oral)

The Director confirmed that due to insufficient clarity on the budget, it had not been possible to make a decision on next steps for the Heathwaite Review. It was due to be discussed at the next Council meeting on 2nd April and the Chair would update the Committee on progress as it happened.

20/04 UKRI update (Presentation)

Helen Cross provided members with a short update on UKRI noting that further certainty would come within the next week in terms of budget.

UKRI intended to focus on the place agenda and within that, a further focus on positive national initiatives such as healthy aging through a level-up approach. Being able to respond to the Scottish context and ensure that the R & D strategy was meaningful to Scotland would enable investment to be better targeted across the UK.

The Committee noted the significance of Scotland's commitment to net zero by 2045 and how this could be applied within a UK framework. Members also noted that whilst Scotland was not a homogenous place, it was nevertheless a place and any positive impact as a result of the place agenda, would be felt throughout the whole of Scotland.

BEIS update

Carolynne Reeve provided members with a short update on BEIS. The UK government had made a commitment to basic research and R & D with specific reference to Catapult areas in the January announcement. There was an appetite to reduce bureaucracy on visa processing and for the funding application process. Members noted the requirement for the research system to have elements of bureaucracy despite the inevitable divergence of research. It was important for the right expert advice to be given for Scottish individuals to ensure validation, given that these decisions do not lie with SFC or the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

The Committee noted that for a future meeting, it would be useful to have sight of papers that outlined the UKRI impact and their implications given the complexity of discussions. The Chair agreed to consider where this could be placed.

20/05

The Cumberland-Little Report (RKEC/20/01)

Andrew Youngson presented this paper that invited the Committee to note the publication of the *Cumberland-Little Report: One Tertiary System: Agile, Collaborative, Inclusive* and to comment on the report as appropriate.

The Chair noted that that the report served as reminder of the role of colleges and the importance of the college agenda to the Committee.

Members noted the following:

- The Committee welcomed the publication of the report and endorsed the Chair's positive comments.
- The growth of college innovation and its fit with the Team Scotland approach had been significant.
- There were clear opportunities for Scotland's colleges to join the innovation eco-system.
- The report introduced thinking on the potential for a hybrid model across sectors with colleges adding legitimate value to opportunities and outcomes for students
- Colleges already had a business to college business model and these relationships were proactive and critical to student skills
- There were synergies between both sectors that could be developed further.

The Chair noted that the Scottish Government were still to publish their thoughts on the Cumberford-Little report as well as the Muscatelli report for HE. It was expected that the Scottish Government would consider these reports together and in the context of interrelated synergies across sectors. Once these were made public, the Committee would provide their own response through the same approach.

20/06

Review of Research Excellence Grant (REG) and Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG) (RKEC/20/02)

Background

Morag Campbell introduced this paper that contained proposals for a review of SFC's research funding models in preparation for the results of REF2021 (due December 2021). The Committee were invited to consider the underlying principles of REG and RPG and to comment on the scope of the review and on these recommendations.

Recommendations

- Consider the underlying principles of REG and RPG;
- Comment on the issues to be addressed through the review, provide advice on the information required and identify any additional issues; and

- Consider and advise on the scenarios against which the current funding model and any proposed revisions should be tested.

Members made the following observations on the five underlying principles outlined as five bullets:

- The principle of academic freedom had not been mentioned and should be included
- Further reference to research environment, research integrity and equality & diversity would strengthen the underlying principle in relation to researcher development (bullet 5)
- The reference to supporting excellence wherever it is found can refer to excellence within a geographical context or a research discipline (bullet 1)
- The reference to retaining confidence in the Scottish university research base could be expanded to include the sustainability and capacity of the sector as a factor (bullet 4)
- Further clarification is needed on the reference to business support (bullet 3) and what this support might look like across the sector

Members made the following observations on the overall paper:

- The REG delivers different data in Scotland and we should ensure data is not distorted
- Any funding decisions should be able to reflect those priorities in Scotland
- SFC Outcome Agreements also influence REF and REG decisions
- The changes that have taken place between REF 2014 and REF 2021 may affect impact outcomes and in this case, broad interpretations would not be helpful
- The role and impact of charity funding and charity support across the sector should form part of broader discussions
- A discussion was needed on the different ratings in Scotland and England
- The purpose of the RPG in training researchers for the future will become more important in a post-Brexit world and continuity of funding will support planning.

20/07 RKEC Forward Agenda/Joint meeting of SFC/US/RKEC (RKEC/20/03)

The Chair introduced this paper that invited the Committee to consider the planning for the SFC/US joint meeting being held on 17th June as well as future items for the RKEC forward agenda:

Joint meeting of SFC/US RKEC

The Committee agreed to have a workshop format for the joint meeting and to focus discussions around climate emergency and climate opportunity in the context of COP 26. Output from this meeting could inform the next Committee meeting to be held on 19th June.

RKEC Forward Agenda

The Committee agreed to the following items to be included in the forward agenda:

- Continue discussions on the Muscatelli report
- Visa/Immigration scheme
- UKRI and place-based agenda response
- Horizon Europe

20/08 AOCB

The Chair welcomed Dr Rebekah Widdowfield and David Nisbet of the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) to the meeting. Dr Widdowfield gave a short presentation to members on the revised awards programme at RSE and invited feedback from the Committee.

The Committee noted the importance of developing the established RSE brand across society and its role in bringing together different stakeholders. The RSE could have a key role in bringing together Scotland's key collaborations in a more dynamic space.

The RSE were hosting a series of roundtables to gather feedback on the new programme and members were invited. The Clerk would circulate these dates to members.

Future meetings

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

Friday 19th June 2020

Tuesday 25th August 2020

Thursday 3rd December 2020