

Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee

The 61st meeting of the Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee of the Scottish Funding Council was held on 23rd November 2017 at SFC offices, Apex 1, 99 Haymarket Terrace, Edinburgh, EH12 5HD.

Present: Professor Lesley Yellowlees (Chair)
Professor Anne Anderson
Professor Tim Bedford
Professor David Cumming
Dr Alicia Greated
Dr Jano van Hemert
Professor Tom Inns
Dr Siobhan Jordan
Dr Jano van Hemert
Mr Douglas Mundie
Dr Keith Nicholson
Mr Ian Reid
Professor Jonathan Seckl
Professor Andrea Nolan, (incoming Interface Strategy Board Chair) for item 6 only.

Officers: Dr Stuart Fancey
Jenny Jamieson (Clerk)
Gary Bannon
Fiona Bates
David Beards
Morag Campbell
Sophie Lowry
Keith McDonald
Hazel McGraw
Morven Pritchard
John Stout
Andrew Youngson

Observers: Morven Cameron, HIE
Carolyn Fishman, Scottish Government
Dr Andrew Howie, Scottish Enterprise
Dr Carolyn Reeve, DBEIS

Apologies: Professor Susan Craw
Dr Teresa Martin
Professor Sir Tim O'Shea

17/48 Chair's business

The Chair welcomed members to the 61st meeting of the Committee. Newly appointed as Chair, Professor Yellowlees expressed how much she was looking forward to working with Committee members. Professor Yellowlees would be articulating the Committee's work back to the Board in her role as a SFC Board member.

The Chair asked each Committee member to introduce themselves and to express what had motivated them to apply to join the Committee.

17/49 Director's update

The Director welcomed Professor Yellowlees to her new role on behalf of the SFC executive. He then relayed recent announcements:

- The four UK Funding Bodies have published the Initial Decisions on REF2021.
- SFC has contacted UKRI to invite a replacement for Alex Vincent who stood down from the Committee in September.
- There are significant changes at the top of Innovate UK with both Ruth McKernan and Kevin Baughan leaving.
- Five consortia have been invited to bid for the AHRC cluster competition – SFC engaged with support as described at previous meeting.
- Recent BERD figures show Scottish BERD up by 10.1%.

The Director closed by letting the Committee know that Sophie Lowry is leaving SFC to take up a new position at the University of Edinburgh. The Committee joined him in wishing her well in her new role.

17/50 Minutes of previous meeting 14 September 2017 (RKEC/17/Min4)

The minute from the previous meeting was agreed with the exception of one minor change. In agenda item RKEC/17/24 International Strategy: Action Plan, the reference to UKRI should be edited to read UUK.

17/51 Update on UK Industrial Strategy (Oral)

The Director of Research and Innovation provided an update to the Committee on the UK Industrial Strategy. The Scottish Government is supportive of a collective approach. The Committee noted that the Strategy was due to be published on the following Monday [27th November] and once members had read the report, the Committee **agreed** to table a 'blue sky' discussion for a future Committee meeting to discuss potential opportunities.

The Committee noted that the Scotland Can Do Innovation Forum (to be renamed the Scotland Can Do Business Forum) will discuss the Strategy. The Committee also noted that the National Economic Forum would meet on 13th December 2017 and continue this discussion. The Royal Society of Edinburgh would be holding a meeting with business representatives to capture the business voice and to provide a framework in which to build a community of business and academics.

17/52 Update on Enhanced Innovation Support for the Creative Industries (RKEC/17/32)

David Beards provided an update on creative industries with an aid of a short update paper.

Professor Tom Inns and representatives from Universities Scotland and SFC would be organising a meeting on Creative Industries support in early 2018. The Committee noted that SFC was ready to offer some of the required co-funding for consortia proposals that reached Stage 2 of the AHRC's Creative Clusters call. Early engagement with SFC and Creative Scotland would help consortia to align with Scottish Government priorities for the creative industries.

17/53 Brexit: Research and Innovation (RKEC/17/33)

Morag Campbell introduced this paper which asked the Committee to note the extensive data in the paper and offer guidance to the SFC executive to inform SFC strategy for 2018 onwards. The paper informed the Committee about the current distribution of EU funding and staff across the research activity of Scotland's HEIs and invited the Committee to discuss the implication of the UK leaving the EU for Scotland's world-leading research base.

The Committee acknowledged that Brexit was of crucial importance and suggested that SFC share the paper with Scottish Government, to assist Ministers.

The Committee noted that the quality of collaboration with other countries influences the quality of research. It was reassuring that strong levels of cooperation and collaboration are already evident between UK universities and EU universities and there was a collective commitment to be part of a euro-scientific community. Research communities are not constrained by boundaries and collaborations go beyond Europe. These collaborations can be seen through programmes such as the UK Prosperity Fund. The Committee noted that an equivalent data-led analysis of the relationships within international (non-European) research communities could provide a helpful and broader picture of potential opportunities.

The Chair thanked Morag Campbell for her work on preparing the data and presenting the paper.

17/54 Interface: next phase (RKEC/17/33)

Siobhan Jordan, Director of Interface gave a presentation to the Committee on Interface, highlighting its functions, quantifiable impact, relationship management, strategic and partnership approaches. Using case studies, Dr Jordan illustrated the value brought by Interface to business and academic communities.

The Committee was invited to comment on Interface's forward strategy, consider whether Interface was positioning itself optimally with respect to other innovation ecosystem activities and consider if SFC could further help Interface and the university and college sectors to be more effective in their support of businesses. Siobhan Jordan left the room for this discussion.

The Committee noted that Interface was keen to build research and development through their collaboration with the college and university sectors and that the organisation is well respected by university Knowledge Exchange teams. Interface had a successful approach to partnership building (beyond individual projects) and capturing the impact of these longer-term partnerships would be very valuable. This could also include tracking the employment of Research PhD students by companies engaged in long term partnerships with universities.

The Committee noted that the pace at which Interface moves forward is critical to the organisation achieving its ambitions. Aligning Interface with wider targets and strategic national ambition could facilitate this pace. Interface has been a consistent point of contact for both academia and business and its service should be considered as potentially 'economically transformative'. The committee noted that, ideally, an appropriate mapping of the landscape in which Interface operates would underpin the development of a new business case but this would not be possible given the limited resources at Interface. An equivalent mapping exercise could potentially be instigated by the new Strategic Board.

17/55 Forward agenda (RKEC/17/34)

The Committee noted the updated forward agenda. The Committee agreed that discussions focussing on research strategy should feature prominently in the agenda for 2018.

In order to secure the Chair's availability, the date of the March meeting of the Committee would need to be changed. Jenny Jamieson would email members after the meeting.