



SFC Call for evidence

Independent Review of SFC's Research Pooling Initiative

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Reference: SFC/CE/01/2018

Summary: Professor Louise Heathwaite CBE FRSE is chairing an Independent Review of SFC's Research Pooling Initiative. Evidence is sought on the lessons learned and impact of the initiative by **noon on Friday 18 January 2019**.

FAO: Principals / Chairs / Board Secretaries of Scotland's universities

Further information: **Contact:** Hazel McGraw
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Independent Review of SFC's Research Pooling Initiative

Purpose

1. This is a call for evidence in support of an independent review of SFC's Research Pooling Initiative.
2. The questions on which evidence is sought are set out in [Annex A](#) of this document.
3. Submissions should be made online or via researchpooling@sfc.ac.uk by noon on Friday 18 January 2019.

Background

Research Pooling Initiative

4. Since 2004, the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) has invested over £140M in research pooling. Research pools are large, multi-university, discipline-based research collaborations. They were established by long term, significant investment by SFC, with partnership commitments from each of the participating Scottish universities.
5. The research pooling initiative was developed to support institutions to establish collaborative research pools with the aim of growing a critical mass of excellent research in the relevant disciplines in Scotland, in order to compete effectively for funding, research staff and students both nationally and internationally.
6. SFC's original aims in funding the research pooling initiative were to:
 - Enhance research competitiveness.
 - Achieve sustainable critical mass in the Scottish research base.
 - Improve the quality of research.
 - Provide a more attractive research environment.
7. Bespoke models were developed for different areas of the research base with SFC's investment, matched by the institutions, supporting: academic posts; improved facilities and equipment; and graduate schools and studentships.

Review of the Research Pooling Initiative

8. Professor Louise Heathwaite of Lancaster University has accepted SFC's invitation to lead an independent review of the research pooling initiative.

Professor Heathwaite will be supported by an Advisory Panel of experts¹

9. The Review aims to:

- Establish the impact of the research pooling initiative on the Scottish research environment to date.
- Consider the types of investment which worked well and why.
- Identify lessons for SFC's future investments in research.
- Consider the changing research landscape and how the research pooling initiative sits within that environment.

10. In addition to this call for written evidence the Review will draw on existing evidence such as the pools' annual and final reports and will invite oral evidence at sessions during Spring 2019.

Call for evidence

11. This is an open call for evidence and we welcome responses from organisations and individuals with knowledge of the research pooling initiative drawn from a variety of routes. We also welcome responses from within or outwith Scotland. The Advisory Panel values diversity and seeks to ensure this where possible. We encourage members of underrepresented groups to submit written evidence

12. We appreciate that some respondents may wish to comment on an individual research pool rather than the initiative as a whole but please note that we are not looking for detailed responses on whether individual pools met their objectives.

13. Please note that it is not necessary to respond to every question and address every aspect of the call for evidence in submissions. Indeed, shorter responses with in-depth evidence and views may be of more use than longer responses which attempt to answer every question.

Further information

14. Please contact Hazel McGraw, Policy Officer for further information tel: 0131 313 6657, email: hmcgraw@sfc.ac.uk.



Dr Stuart Fancey

Director of Research and Innovation

¹ See Annex B

Independent Review of SFC's Research Pooling Initiative: Call for evidence

Format of submissions

Submissions should clearly state who the evidence is being submitted by and/or on behalf of, and include a brief introduction about the individual or organisation. It would be helpful if you could also include a brief summary of your experience of, or connection with, the research pooling initiative.

Responses must be submitted either via the online template or in a Word format to researchpooling@sfc.ac.uk by **noon on Friday 18 January 2019**. Submissions should be no longer than 3,000 words. Late responses will not be considered.

We may contact you for further information regarding your response. Please state clearly if you do not wish to be contacted.

Call for evidence

The first two sections below focus on the lessons and impact of the initial pooling investments on the Scottish research environment. The later sections focus on the continuation phase of pooling that supports the pools with more limited funding, and the future of pooling.

Opinions should be supported, where possible, by illustrative text or sources of evidence. Quantitative evidence and evidence in the form of case studies are welcome.

Section 1: Initial research pooling initiative

Q1a. What has been the impact of the initial research pooling initiative?

You may wish to consider the following in your response:

- Has the pooling initiative met its objectives: to enable Scotland to compete effectively for funding, research staff and doctoral students both nationally and internationally; and provide a more attractive research environment? How can that be evidenced?
- Examples of the ways that pooling has impacted on the relations between pooling partners and on how individual partners work with other external bodies.
- Evidence that the partnerships associated with pooling have had broader impacts on Scottish HEIs.
- Examples of other outcomes of research pooling, and how they have impacted on the Scottish research landscape.

- Have pools made an impact on Scotland's reputation? What are the national (Scotland/UK) and international perceptions of pools?
- What aspects of pooling have attracted most interest from outwith Scotland/academia and have they impacted on developments elsewhere? Can you give examples of this?
- What has happened that would not have happened without research pooling? Please give examples.
- What has been the impact of pooling outside of the academic sector, on policy and industry? Can you provide examples of this?
- Have there been missed opportunities, where pooling could have had an impact but didn't?

Q1b. What lessons can be learnt from the research pooling initiative?

We are interested to hear what lessons can be learnt from the initiative both to identify and share good practice, to understand better collaborative relationships and to inform development and management of future SFC investments. You may wish to comment on:

- What lessons can be learnt about making collaborations work effectively?
- Have particular pooling models been shown to work well/badly, in all cases/in specific contexts?
- Were particular elements of pooling more effective than others? From your perspective what evidence can you give regarding what worked well, or didn't? Why? You may wish to consider: academic posts; improved facilities and equipment; graduate schools and studentships.
- Are there lessons to learn from the range of pools supported? Were the disciplines covered by pools the right ones? Some pools were focused on discrete discipline areas while others were broader / interdisciplinary – are there lessons to be learned from the different models? Were there missed opportunities in other areas? What happened in those areas?
- Are you aware of examples of location impacting on or limiting institutions' involvement in research pooling and/or of examples that overcame any limitation?
- What lessons can SFC learn from the initiative on how we design/ implement/ manage projects?

Section 2: Pooling now and in the future

As the initial pooling investments came to an end, SFC provided limited continuation funding (matched by institutions), to allow successful pools to maintain a central resource, for 5 years.

The research landscape has changed since the inception of pooling and continues to change substantially. This includes changes to funding and funding structures, a greater interdisciplinary and challenge-led research focus, increased prominence of innovation, industry engagement and the economic impact of research, BREXIT and international competition.

Q2a. In the current research landscape, what is the perception of, and role for, the pools?

- Has the changing landscape and funding environment affected evolution of the research pools? Do institutions remain committed to individual pools and the concept of pooling more widely?
- How does pooling fit with the current focus on interdisciplinarity and challenge led research? What is the current role of pools and how has that changed since the initial phase? Is the current model right? How do pools interact with other SFC investments such as Innovation Centres?

Q2b. Should research pools have a continuing role in the Scottish research base?

- Will the concept of research pooling remain relevant in the developing research landscape? How can/should the model evolve to fit that landscape?
- What happens when the five years continuation funding comes to an end?

Section 3: Anything else

- Any further perspectives on the introduction, implementation and impact of research pooling are welcome.

Disclosure of the information - Confidentiality and data protection

SFC will publish aggregate responses to the call for evidence which will not be personally identifiable. However, information provided in response to this call for information may be subject to disclosure in accordance with the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA). In some circumstances this may include personal information, usually when it involves information relating to senior representatives of key stakeholders.

If you believe any of the information you provide in your response is confidential, please advise us why you believe this to be the case. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, however we may still have to release the information if required by FOISA. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on this.

Data Protection

All personal data collected in the responses will be handled in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and EU General Data Protection Regulation 2016/679. The information provided to SFC in the call for evidence will be used for the purposes as outlined in the review purposes (paragraph 9) and for no other purposes. Personally identifiable information will not be shared with any third parties for these purposes. For further information on how SFC uses personal information please see our [Privacy Notice](#).

Advisory Panel Membership

Dr Cat Ball, Policy Manager, Association of Medical Research Charities.

Dr Alicia Greated, Director of Research & Enterprise at Heriot-Watt University, member of SFC's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC).

Douglas Mundie, Deputy Chair of SFC's Board and of SFC's RKEC.

Professor Philip Nelson, Professor of Acoustics, University of Southampton, formerly Executive Chair, Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC).

Dr John Rees, Director of Science for Earth Hazards, Observatories, British Geological Society and Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF) Challenge Leader, UK Research & Innovation (UKRI).

David Sweeney, Executive Chair, Research England, UK Research and Innovation.

Professor James Wilsdon, Professor of Research Policy and Director of Research and Innovation, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Sheffield.