



Call for Applications: Membership of SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

SFC Announcement

Issue Date: 9 May 2022

Reference: SFC/AN/12/2022

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Summary: To invite applications for members to form an SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs).

FAO: University Vice Principals for Research / Research and Innovation / University Graduate School Managers and Directors / Careers / Equality, diversity and Inclusion / Knowledge Exchange / Postgraduate Researchers / Anyone with an interest in Scottish PGR support

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Call for Applications: Membership of SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers..... | 4 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Background | 4 |
| Call for applications for membership | 5 |
| Eligibility..... | 5 |
| How to apply..... | 6 |
| Assessment | 6 |
| Equality and Diversity | 7 |
| Data Protection..... | 7 |
| Island Communities Impact Assessment..... | 7 |
| Further Information..... | 7 |
| Annex A - Draft terms of reference for the SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers | 8 |
| Purpose and remit | 8 |
| Outputs | 8 |
| Confidentiality | 9 |
| Membership | 9 |
| Resource | 10 |
| Expected Commitment..... | 10 |
| Timeline and likely approach..... | 10 |

Call for Applications: Membership of SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers

Introduction

1. The Scottish Funding Council is pleased to invite applications for members to form an SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers (the Group).
2. The Group will provide advice to SFC as we take forward the outcomes of the Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG) consultation and the recommendations within [SFC's Review of Tertiary Education and Research](#), including those relating to better supporting postgraduate researchers (PGRs).
3. Draft terms of reference for the Group are provided as Annex A; these include information regarding:
 - The purpose and remit of the Group.
 - The Group's expected outputs.
 - Confidentiality.
 - Membership of the Group.
 - Resources.
 - Expected commitment from Group members.
 - An anticipated timeline of Group activity.
4. The Group will be led by a Chair or co-Chairs appointed by SFC.

Background

5. The UK research environment is in flux, with changing approaches to PGR provision and researcher training and development as pointed to in the UK R&D People and Culture Strategy, UKRI's New Deal for PGRs and a host of other documents and approaches. There are opportunities for Scotland which, in tandem with the implementation of SFC's Review recommendations, could be harnessed by a national approach.
6. In this context, SFC aims to convene a cross-sector advisory and development group involving universities, Scotland's knowledge exchange architecture and others to support us as we take forward the outcomes of our RPG consultation

and implement key recommendations within our Review of Tertiary Education and Research.

7. The Review recommended that SFC develops ways to better support the PGR experience, including through the development of RPG, as well as a commitment to foster collaboration and support positive research culture. We envisage that SFC's approach to supporting Scotland's PGRs will be a significant focus of the group, particularly initially, but that this work will also overlap with SFC's Review implementation work on research culture.
8. Scotland is already highly collaborative in many areas of (postgraduate) researcher support and development, and SFC intends to build on this collaboration with an additive, rather than duplicative, approach. Therefore, the Group will aim to draw on the many networks, groups and coalitions that already exist, including, for example, the Universities Scotland Research Development and Training Committee (RDTC).
9. Work to better support PGRs is deeply intertwined with SFC's approach to access, learning and outcomes, and our commitments to advancing equality and tackling inequalities, widening access to opportunities and the provision of higher-level skills that benefit the economy. The Group will aim to advise on bringing these threads together by, for example, considering the development of evidence and commissioning of new analyses.

Call for applications for membership

Eligibility

10. Prospective members with an interest in postgraduate researcher training, support and culture are sought from a range of expertise and backgrounds and from a range of organisations and organisation types. We are seeking a wide and diverse membership providing representation across a variety of academic disciplines, career levels and geographical areas of Scotland.
11. We envisage that the Group will include academic members, professional services staff from Scottish universities, members with specific expertise in a relevant area (e.g. careers, equality, diversity and inclusion), postgraduate researchers and members from industry or other non-academic organisations.
12. We are seeking a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, as well as specialist understanding in relation to SFC's Research Postgraduate Grant. We know that women and disabled people are less likely to undertake PGR study, and that a lower proportion of people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities

undertake PGR study in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK. We would therefore welcome applications from people who are able to bring lived experience to the work of the Group.

How to apply

13. Prospective members should complete a short application form by downloading and completing the [SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers Membership Application Form](#). They will be required to provide a **short** statement indicating their interest in being part of the Group, any background knowledge, skills or experience that make them a suitable candidate for membership and the contribution they expect to make to the Group.
14. Completed forms should be [uploaded to the SFC website](#) by the application deadline.
15. All applicants will be expected to have read and understood the draft terms of reference document (Annex A) and be committed to supporting the work of the group in around 6 – 8 virtual meetings over a period of approximately 18 months.
16. The closing date for applications is **5pm on Thursday 30 June 2022**.

Assessment

17. Following the closing date, applications will be considered by a panel of assessors comprising the Chair or co-Chairs and members of SFC staff. Successful applicants will be sent an invitation to join the group following the assessment panel's decision, which is expected to take place in mid-July. Unsuccessful applicants will also be informed of the assessment panel's decision.
18. In making their decision, the assessment panel will consider each applicant's relevant experience, skills and knowledge, their interest in being part of the Group and the contribution they expect to make to the Group. Additionally, the panel will also consider the diversity of group members as a whole, aiming to ensure as much representation as possible across areas including:
 - Size and type of institution or other organisation.
 - Geography.
 - Academic discipline (where relevant).

- Professional services staff, academics and postgraduate researchers.
- Career level.
- University and non-university roles.
- Professional and/or personal experiences of advancing equality.

Equality and Diversity

19. An Equality and Human Rights Assessment is being carried out in relation to this work and will be updated as work progresses. Issues relating to Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights are central to the success of this work, and membership of the Group is expected to add further insight to this.

Data Protection

20. Personal data including name and email address will be gathered as part of the application process. For more information about how SFC uses personal data please see our [Privacy Notice](#).

Island Communities Impact Assessment

21. An Island Communities Impact Assessment is being completed in relation to this work.

Further Information

22. SFC welcomes discussions with interested parties. For further information and informal enquiries please contact Dr Cat Ball, email cball@sfc.ac.uk, tel: 0131 313 6660 or Dr Charlotte Matheson, email cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk, tel: 0131 313 6650.

Annex A - Draft terms of reference for the SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers

Purpose and remit

23. The SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers ("the Group") will have the following remit:
 - To provide SFC with expert advice on the purpose and future accountability approach for SFC's Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG).
 - To consider a Scottish response to UK developments in the postgraduate researcher (PGR) landscape, including, but not limited to, through the activity above and by supporting the implementation of SFC's broader Review recommendations relating to PGRs.
 - To provide SFC with expert advice on how we build our evidence base to inform the directions we take to support and champion postgraduate researchers, including their training and development, in Scotland.
24. Although the focus of the Group's work will be on supporting Scotland's PGRs, where relevant the Group may choose to explore how the issues under consideration feed into issues relating to the support, training and development of research staff, particularly research-only staff on fixed-term contracts. These discussions will inform future SFC work within this area.
25. It will be outside of the Group's remit to recommend specific changes to the RPG funding formula. However, the general principles and approach developed by the Group will be used to inform SFC's future thinking in this area, including potential changes for implementation by AY 2023-24.
26. The Group will provide advice on the issues within its remit to SFC. In turn, as appropriate, SFC will use this advice to develop recommendations to take to SFC's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) and/or the SFC Board. The Group will not provide recommendations directly to RKEC or the SFC Board.

Outputs

27. Expected outputs of the Group are:
 - Development of a set of sector-agreed recommended principles regarding the purpose and future accountability approach for RPG, to inform potential changes to the RPG formula and future reporting requirements.

- Recommendations regarding future collaborative work within the PGR space that is informed by UK and Scottish sector developments within this area, based on SFC Review recommendations and the changing UK landscape.
 - Advice for SFC to shape the focus of evidence gathering and the commissioning of analysis that explores how we can better support and champion PGRs, including their training and development, in Scotland.
28. Potential areas for evidence development include approaches to further equality, diversity and inclusion within the Scottish PGR population and the value of PGRs to our economy and society. The Group's advice will ensure join-up with ongoing sector initiatives and minimise duplication to ensure SFC activity adds value.

Confidentiality

29. The Group's ethos will be focused on openness and transparency. However, some aspects of the Group's work will inform policy development and the exploration of new ideas, which may or may not lead to a change in policy. In such cases, meeting papers and discussion will be withheld from publication under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Section 30 - *Prejudicial to effective conduct of public affairs*.

Membership

30. The Group will be chaired by a sector representative appointed by SFC on the basis of their knowledge and experience of issues within the Group's remit (the Chair). Where more than one suitable and willing candidate is identified, SFC may choose to appoint two co-Chairs.
31. Membership of the Group is expected to provide representation across a range of academic disciplines, career levels and geographical areas of Scotland. Prospective members with an interest in postgraduate research culture will be sought from a range of expertise, skills and backgrounds and from a range of organisations and organisation types. We recognise the value of diverse perspectives and the value of lived experience and the membership of the group will reflect this.
32. The Group is expected to include 10-15 members, and a representative from UKRI will be invited to join as a member of the group. At the Chair's discretion, guests may occasionally be invited to attend meetings to provide additional

expertise, where this is likely to enhance the quality of discussion and decision making.

33. SFC secretariat will be provided by Dr Cat Ball and Dr Charlotte Matheson.

Resource

34. Members will be able to claim reasonable expenses incurred in carrying out their roles as members of the Group. In order to make this opportunity widely accessible, particularly to PGR students, SFC is able to offer a modest daily honorarium to those without another salary.

Expected Commitment

35. Members will be expected to attend 6-8 meetings of around 2-3 hours duration each over a period of approximately 18 months. Work is expected to conclude by the end of January 2024.
36. Meetings are likely to predominantly take place virtually, with meetings in person taking place if/when necessary.
37. Meeting materials will be circulated a week in advance of each meeting, and members will be expected to have read and prepared for each meeting in advance. Some work may also be required between meetings, however this is expected to be minimal.

Timeline and likely approach

| Date | Action |
|--------------------------|---|
| May 2022 | Membership recruitment begins |
| 30 June 2022 | Membership recruitment closes |
| July 2022 | Applicants notified, final group membership confirmed |
| August or September 2022 | First of around 6-8 Taskforce meetings. |
| October or November 2022 | Proposed date for meeting 2 |
| January 2023 | Proposed date for meeting 3 |
| April 2023 | Proposed date for meeting 4 |
| July 2023 | Proposed date for meeting 5 |

| | |
|--------------|---|
| October 2023 | Proposed date for meeting 6 |
| January 2024 | Proposed date for final working group meeting |

38. A key focus of the first two to three meetings is likely to be on:

- Proposed accountability and reporting principles for RPG. These principles will be used by SFC to make recommendations to our Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee and our Board regarding potential changes to the RPG formula for implementation by AY 2023-24.

39. Later meetings are likely to focus on:

- Recommendations around shared aspirations around Scottish PGR support, how institutions can work individually and collectively to achieve this and how much this should be guided and shaped by SFC.
- Advice around SFC commissioning of evidence on PGR support and EDI (including intersectionality) to better support future policies.
- Equality, diversity and inclusion, including widening access approaches at PGR level.

40. Considering the scope for a national response to UK developments in the PGR landscape will be woven throughout the Group's discussions.