

## **Research Excellence Framework, Research Excellence Grant and Future Research Assessment Programme**

1. The completion of REF 2021 and the updating of REG have taken us to a new point in SFC's support of research in the Scottish university sector. While the challenges of REG and REF (and the opportunities of FRAP) are live and current, consideration of the issues which might be debated by RKEC on how Scotland moves forwards seems appropriate.
2. To inform the above consideration the Committee are provided with:
  - a summary of REF outcomes for Scotland;
  - an update on the review of REG and implications of REF results on REG allocations;
  - an update on the progress of the Future Research Assessment Programme.
3. The Committee are invited to consider the issues which these raise for Scotland and how RKEC wish to take this forward through future agendas.

### **Recommendations**

4. Members are invited to:
  - discuss REF results overall and areas for future analysis and examination in future RKEC deliberations;
  - note amendments to the REG allocation formula in line with their recommendations;
  - discuss the impacts these changes have had on allocations when taken alongside REF results
  - note progress with FRAP; and
  - consider the issues the above raise for Scotland and for future RKEC agendas.

### **Financial implications**

- There are no immediate financial implications of this paper however REF, REG and any future research assessment impact a significant level of programme funds, approximately £1.8Bn over the next REF period.

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## **Research Excellence Framework, Research Excellence Grant and Future Research Assessment Programme**

### **Purpose**

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6. To inform the above consideration the Committee are provided with:
  - a summary of REF outcomes for Scotland;
  - an update on the review of REG and implications of REF results on REG allocations
  - an update on the progress of the Future Research Assessment Programme.
7. The Committee are invited to consider the issues which these raise for future RKEC agendas.

### **Research Excellence Framework 2021**

#### ***Results***

8. The Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2021 results were published on 12 May 2022. Across the UK, 157 higher education institutions (HEIs) participated in REF 2021, with over 185,000 outputs and 6,700 case studies submitted for over 76,000 (FTE) staff. This includes 18 HEIs from across Scotland submitting over 21,000 outputs and 774 impact case studies from 8,675 (FTE) staff.
9. The overall quality of submissions across the UK was judged to be 41% World leading (4\*) and a further 43% Internationally Excellent (3\*). Scotland's performance was consistent with that of the UK as a whole, the overall quality varying only slightly with 41% World Leading and 44% Internationally Excellent confirming Scotland's position as a world-leading research nation.
10. There is evidence of world-leading (4\*) research in every Scottish HEI, and Scotland delivers world-leading research in each of the 34 disciplines (Unit of Assessment) assessed in REF2021.
11. Scottish institutions made 200 submissions, with at least two in each UoA. There were 5 joint submissions – still higher than rUK but lower than REF 2014 when there were 8.

12. The infographic at Annex 1 (previously shared with members by correspondence) highlights some key facts for Scotland.
13. Further REF 2021 publications will follow over the coming months including the EDAP and IDAP reports and publication of the impact case studies.

#### ***Staff FTE submissions***

14. Scotland's HEIs have seen an average 37% increase in staff FTE submitted to REF 2021. This increase is largely due to changes in REF between 2014 and 2021 with a requirement that all staff with significant responsibility for research must be submitted to REF.
15. The average increase across the UK was 46% which is significantly higher than the Scottish average.

#### ***Output subprofile***

16. Across Scotland 36% of outputs were judged to be World-leading (4\*) and a further 48% were judged to be Internationally Excellent (3\*) this was consistent across the UK although there are differences between the nations. (See Table 1 in Annex 3)
17. This represents a significant increase in the quality of outputs as identified in REF 2014, this can be understood largely as a result of changes to the number of outputs required per staff FTE and greater flexibility in allocation of those outputs allowing universities to return their highest-quality research.
18. Excellence in outputs was noted across all types and forms of research and examples of excellence in interdisciplinary research was seen across sub-panels.

#### ***Impact subprofile***

19. Across Scotland 47% of impact was judged 'outstanding' (4\*) and 40% 'very considerable' (3\*). Impact scores may be slightly higher across rUK e.g. in England 50% (4\*), 38% (3\*).
20. Through impact case studies the expert panels observed significant gains made from university investment in supporting and enabling research impact – both in the richness and depth of wider partnerships woven throughout many submitted examples of impact, as well as in the increased detail and robustness in the evidencing of impacts claimed.

#### ***Environment subprofile***

21. The expert sub-panels' assessment of environment shows over half (51%) with elements conducive to producing research of world-leading quality and

enabling outstanding impact (4\*). A further 37% with elements conducive to producing research of internationally excellent quality and enabling very considerable impact (3\*). This was relatively consistent across the UK with the exception of NI which scored significantly higher.

### ***Research income and research degrees awarded***

22. Total research income reported for the REF 2021 period (2013/14 to 2019/20) was £42Bn of which £5.5Bn was reported by Scottish institutions. This represents a 13% share of the total.
23. Also over this period, 115,138 research degrees were awarded across the UK, with 18,203 of those within Scotland. This represents a 16% share of the total.

### ***Joint US and SFC RKEC***

24. The joint meeting of US and SFC's RKECs was held on 19 May 2022. Members agreed that overall there was cause for celebration in Scotland's REF 2021 results however further analysis was required and there was some caution regarding Scotland's declining share of volume and potential loss of competitiveness compared with rUK especially regarding impact (and environment when compared with NI).
25. Members indicated a willingness to work together to maximise Scotland's performance going forwards.

### **Recommendation**

26. **Members are invited to discuss REF results overall and areas for future analysis and examination in future RKEC deliberations.**

### **REG allocations and implications of REF results**

#### ***Background***

27. In June 2021 (RKEC 21/11) RKEC agreed that a short life working group, chaired by Professor Yellowlees and consisting of RKEC members with an observer from Universities Scotland, should be established to:
  - examine the principles of REG and RPG in light of the findings of the Review of Coherent Provision and Sustainability and developments in the UK landscape since 2014 before;
  - examining the allocation method in light of the above and in response to changes in REF.

28. The Working Group met 4 times over 2021/22.
29. SFC published a consultation the Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant, on 11 November 2021 ( [SFC/CN/01/2021](#)). Responses are summarised in paper RKEC/22/02.
30. At its meeting of February 2022 RKEC considered both the Working Group recommendations and the consultation responses and provided recommendations to Finance Committee on the way forward. There was further consideration by the Finance Committee and the Working Group at meetings between February and April.
31. RKEC's final recommendations were accepted by both Finance Committee on 26 April and Board on 6 May.
32. The revised Principles can be found in Annex 2.

### ***Changes to REG allocation formula***

33. The changes recommended by RKEC to support the revised principles and endorsed by Finance Committee and Board were announced to the sector along with REG allocations for AY 2022-23 on 26 May 2022 as set out below:
  - Remove STEM premium;
  - Implement previously agreed changes to subject weights (Psychology, Psychiatry and Neuroscience to 1.6, Mathematical sciences to 1.6, Archaeology to 1.6, Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film and Screen Studies to 1.2);
  - Divide the REG(a) budget in the same proportions as the REF rating sub-profiles (60% Outputs, 25% Impact and 15% Environment) and allocate these shares of the REG(a) budget by reference to the relevant REF sub-profile quality scores;
  - Increase quality weighting to 4:1 (4\*:3\*)
  - Increase proportion of funding allocated through REGc to 13%
  - Transitional arrangements 2022-23 only
34. The Board also agreed transitional arrangements as recommended by RKEC whereby no institution would receive a reduction in REG funds between AY2021-22 and AY2022-23 greater than -10%. Funds to enable this will be drawn from the overall REG pot.

### ***AY2022-23 REG allocations***

35. Allocations as announced in MGL are set out in Annex 4 alongside change from AY 21/22. Four institutions are covered by transition arrangements.

36. As noted in previous discussions, the main driver of changes in allocations between AY21/22 and 22/23 is the REF results, rather than the adjustments to the REG formula.
37. We will summarise responses to the new REG allocations at the RKEC meeting.

### **Recommendation**

#### **38. Members are invited to:**

- **note amendments to the REG allocation formula in line with their recommendations; and**
- **to note the impacts these changes have had on allocations when taken alongside REF results.**

### **Future Research Assessment Programme**

#### ***Background***

39. In May 2021 the four Funding Bodies launched a Future Research Assessment Programme. The Programme's ultimate aim is to develop a future process that identifies and supports excellent research across the UK and secures the confidence of the HE sector, government and the wider public.
40. The programme is overseen by a Future Research Assessment Programme Board made up of officers from each organisation.

#### ***International Advisory Group***

41. The four UK higher education funding bodies have established an International Advisory Group, chaired by Sir Peter Gluckman, to assist and advise them as they develop and evaluate options for the future approach to national research assessment within the UK. Specifically, the Group aims to:
  - advise on approaches to research assessment used internationally, including their strengths and weaknesses;
  - support the development of a range of models for research assessment adapted to the UK context to inform consultation and discussion;
  - comment on the findings from the evaluation of REF 2021; and
  - provide input to and advise on the selection of options for the future approach to research assessment

## **Workplan**

42. The programme workplan incorporates four complementary strands, summarised below:
- Learning the lessons from REF2021: An evaluation package including:
    - the Real Time REF Review [Download report](#)
    - Cost evaluation – Evaluation of the cost and benefits to HEIs for participating in the REF exercise, including additional costs due to changes made to the exercise (Due late Summer)
    - Impact Case Study analysis – Analysis of impact case studies submitted to the REF, including analysis of ‘continued’ case studies (Due late Summer)
    - Additional outputs analysis – series of data ‘experiments’ exploring how insights from REF outputs data can be maximised. Includes analysis of submission of interdisciplinary outputs (Due late summer)
    - REF 2021 reflection surveys - closed on 26 January. Received 723 responses to the individual feedback survey and 106 responses to the institutional feedback survey.
  - Understanding international practice in national research assessment. What is done elsewhere, what works well, how does the UK system look from the outside?
    - There has been extensive input in this space from the IAG who have met 6 times so far
  - Developing alternative models and enhanced approaches to research assessment. What are the alternatives, including radical change and more evolutionary options? Work includes:
    - Responsible use of technology in research assessment – a project investigating possible approaches to support research assessment, including artificial intelligence (Due late Summer)
    - Refresh of Metric Tide report – reviewing the role of metrics in research assessment (Due late Summer)
  - Listening to views, concerns and perspectives on national research evaluation from a range of stakeholders.
    - the funding bodies held three online ‘town hall’ events during



March and April 2022 which shared insights into the background, scope, and objectives of the FRAP and outlined key issues for consultation.

- Consultation on the design of the UK's future research assessment system. The consultation closed on 6 May 2022 and received around 400 responses from higher education institutions, associations, organisations and individuals with an interest in the conduct, quality, funding or use of research.

43. The Programme is intended to conclude in late 2022 and culminate in publication of a final report.

### **Recommendation**

**44. Members are invited to note progress with FRAP**

### **Next steps for Scotland?**

45. The completion of REF 2021 and the adjustment of REG have taken us to a new point in SFC support of research in the Scottish university sector. While the challenges of REG and REF (and the opportunities of FRAP) are live, consideration of the issues which might be debated by RKEC on how Scotland moves forwards seems appropriate.

46. The Committee are asked to discuss implications of REF2021 for Scotland and propose how RKEC might wish to respond through future agendas. The Committee may wish to consider whether a SWOT analysis of the Scottish research landscape might be undertaken and what the parameters of that may be.

### **Risk assessment**

47. Immediate risk is low however in the longer term failure to respond appropriately and to deliver, with the FRAP team, a workable future research assessment or within Scotland a workable research funding mechanism for a substantial element of programme funds would be a high risk to SFC and its ability to deliver its core objectives. Work proposed in this paper reduces the level of risk.

### **Equality and diversity assessment**

48. An assessment of the equal opportunity and diversity implications is not required at this point.

## **Financial implications**

49. There are no immediate financial implications of this paper however REF, REG and any future research assessment impact a significant level of programme funds, approximately £1.8Bn over the next REF period.

## **Recommendations**

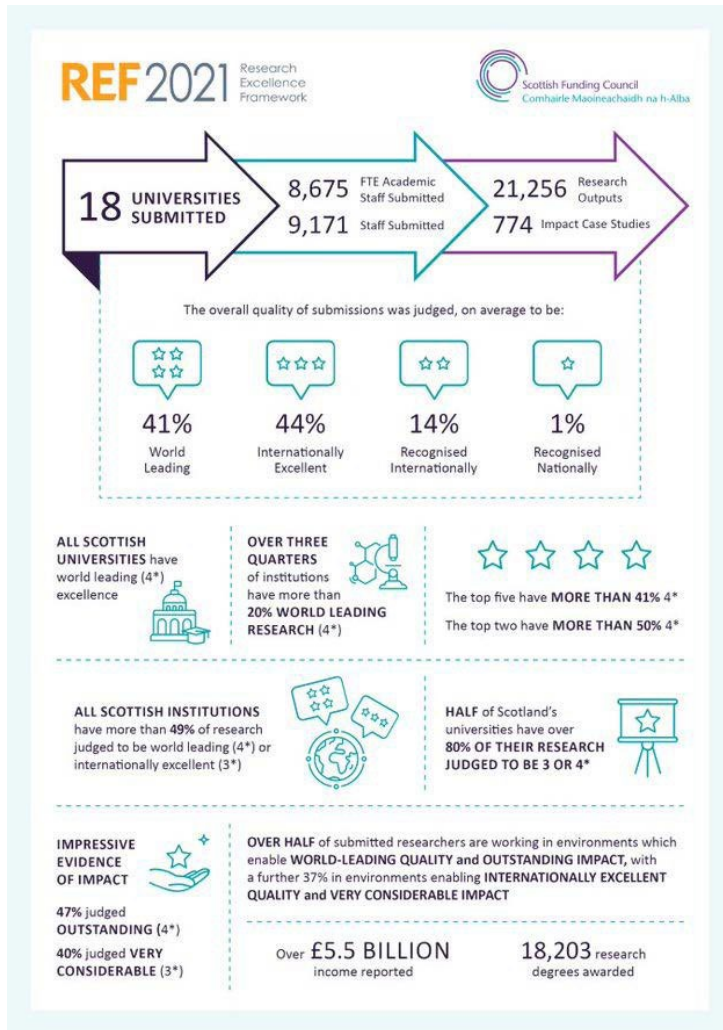
50. Members are invited to:
- discuss REF results overall and areas for future analysis and examination in future RKEC deliberations;
  - note amendments to the REG allocation formula in line with their recommendations;
  - discuss the impacts these changes have had on allocations when taken alongside REF results
  - note progress with FRAP; and
  - consider the issues the above raise for Scotland and for future RKEC agendas.

## **Publication**

51. This paper will be published on the Council website

## **Further information**

52. Contact: Morag Campbell, Assistant Director, Research and Innovation (0131 313 6530, [mcampbell@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:mcampbell@sfc.ac.uk)) or Hazel McGraw, tel: 0131 313 6657, email: [hmcgraw@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:hmcgraw@sfc.ac.uk)



## REG Principles

- **A sustainable and predictable framework to support ambitious and excellent research across the Scottish higher education institutions.**
- **Robust and transparent allocation method based on clearly defined criteria and avoiding unnecessary complexity**

Research Excellence Grant (REG) provides the majority of SFC's funding for research in Scotland. It is intended to support sustainable research excellence across Scotland's universities.

REG has a dual purpose:

- to recognise and reward research excellence wherever it is found and in whatever discipline;
- to uphold the principles of the dual support system, through making a contribution toward the full economic costs of research.

REG provides a long-term, stable source of research funding which institutions can use flexibly to develop and support excellent research as best fits their individual circumstances thereby supporting the diversity of the sector and their ability to respond to challenges.

Excellent research demonstrates originality and rigour in its approach and significance in its advancement of understanding and in the reach of its impact.

By supporting universities in Scotland to explore and improve the world by doing excellent research, they develop the knowledge and techniques which: deal with current challenges; address future challenges; and create future opportunities.

REG supports institutions to:

- sustain an excellent research environment and a thriving and inclusive research culture
- consolidate and/or expand existing excellence to attract global investment and talent to Scotland
- respond flexibly to changing priorities and invest in new and emerging areas of research ensuring that the research base is in a position to respond to the challenges of the future
- support researchers in their early career stages
- helps meet the full economic costs of research work contributing a public good, supported by, for example, Research Councils and charities.

	% of submission meeting the standard for 4*					% of submission meeting the standard for combined 4* and 3*				
	UK	Scotland	England	Wales	NI	UK	Scotland	England	Wales	NI
Output	35.9	35.6	36.3	31.4	30.7	82.7	83.4	82.7	80.7	83.8
Impact	49.7	47	50.4	44.6	45.2	87.2	86.7	87.1	89.1	89.1
Environment	49.6	50.6	49.5	45.5	54.6	86.5	87.8	86.2	84.6	97.5
<b>Overall</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>40.8</b>	<b>41.8</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>37.8</b>	<b>84.4</b>	<b>84.9</b>	<b>84.3</b>	<b>83.5</b>	<b>87.2</b>

Annex 4

Institution	Research Excellence Grant for AY 2021-22	Initial Research Excellence Grant for AY 2022-23	Percentage change from AY 2021-22	Adjustment to limit any percentage reduction to -10%	Research Excellence Grant for AY 2022-23
	£	£		£	£
Aberdeen, University of	19,736,000	<b>15,078,000</b>	-23.6%	2,685,000	<b>17,763,000</b>
Abertay University	704,000	<b>1,236,000</b>	75.6%	-135,000	<b>1,101,000</b>
Dundee, University of	18,689,000	<b>17,186,000</b>	-8.0%	-	<b>17,186,000</b>
Edinburgh Napier University	1,680,000	<b>3,373,000</b>	100.8%	-430,000	<b>2,943,000</b>
Edinburgh, University of	81,612,000	<b>89,131,000</b>	9.2%	-1,910,000	<b>87,221,000</b>
Glasgow Caledonian University	2,786,000	<b>3,273,000</b>	17.5%	-124,000	<b>3,149,000</b>
Glasgow School of Art	1,225,000	<b>1,066,000</b>	-13.0%	37,000	<b>1,103,000</b>
Glasgow, University of	49,881,000	<b>51,431,000</b>	3.1%	-394,000	<b>51,037,000</b>
Heriot-Watt University	12,757,000	<b>11,074,000</b>	-13.2%	408,000	<b>11,482,000</b>
Highlands and Islands, University of the	2,376,000	<b>2,918,000</b>	22.8%	-138,000	<b>2,780,000</b>
Open University in Scotland	-	-		-	-
Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh	718,000	<b>850,000</b>	18.4%	-34,000	<b>816,000</b>
Robert Gordon University	1,248,000	<b>835,000</b>	-33.1%	289,000	<b>1,124,000</b>
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	266,000	<b>309,000</b>	16.2%	-11,000	<b>298,000</b>
SRUC	3,268,000	<b>3,253,000</b>	-0.5%	-	<b>3,253,000</b>
St Andrews, University of	17,599,000	<b>16,580,000</b>	-5.8%	-	<b>16,580,000</b>
Stirling, University of	7,453,000	<b>7,332,000</b>	-1.6%	-	<b>7,332,000</b>
Strathclyde, University of	19,426,000	<b>19,650,000</b>	1.2%	-57,000	<b>19,593,000</b>
West of Scotland, University of the	1,517,000	<b>2,253,000</b>	48.5%	-187,000	<b>2,066,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>242,941,000</b>	<b>246,828,000</b>	<b>1.6%</b>	<b>-1,000</b>	<b>246,827,000</b>

