

## Update on people and culture

- This paper provides a summary of SFC's activity in support of people and culture in research and innovation, including the development of an SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers and our involvement in concordats and related groups. It also highlights the implementation of Review recommendations in this space, including linking with the growing momentum from research funders around culture and the UK R&D People and Culture Strategy.

## Recommendations

RKEC is invited to:

- Consider the summary of SFC's activity in support of people and culture and future plans to implement key Review recommendations; and
- Provide comment on our direction of travel, areas of synergy and the opportunities brought by the changing UK research landscape.

## Financial implications

- There are no immediate financial implications. Any future activity, for example in implementing SFC's Review recommendations around research culture, would be subject to availability of funding and development of a business case. We shortly expect to receive a request for funding to continue supporting Researcher Development Concordat secretariat costs. The amount requested is likely to be modest and will be shared across multiple funders.

## **Update on people and culture**

### **Purpose**

1. This paper provides a summary of SFC's activity in support of people and culture, including the development of an SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers and our involvement in concordats and related groups. It also highlights the implementation of Review recommendations in this space, including linking with the growing momentum from research funders around culture and the UK R&D People and Culture Strategy.

### **Introduction**

2. During the Committee's previous meeting in February, RKEC expressed an interest in discussing SFC's work that supports people & culture in the research and innovation landscape. Our activity spans a range of different areas, and this paper aims to bring it together to explore opportunities, synergies and our direction of travel as we implement the recommendations within SFC's Review of Tertiary Education and Research.
3. Our Review outlined a clear commitment to putting the support and promotion of equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of SFC's work. People are central to excellent research and innovation, and the freedom to work creatively and productively in a safe and open environment is essential. The increasing focus on academic culture, together with an increasing emphasis on talent and skills and support for a system that recognises varied career paths and allows movement between academia and other sectors, from research funders, institutions and the community is welcome. Our Review outlined that we want to be a part of this momentum, shaping the Scottish research and KE landscape to be more supportive of the people within it and attractive to the talent of the future.
4. The Review also made several specific recommendations including commissioning the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland; and developing better ways to support the postgraduate research student experience through a range of initiatives including development of the Research Postgraduate Grant, targeted evidence gathering, and exploring opportunities to work with UKRI to support national graduate school training.

5. This paper summarises SFC's activity in support of people and culture in three specific areas -
  - The development of work to support Scotland's PGRs, taking forward Review recommendations and the outcomes of the RPG consultation;
  - Our support for concordats and related groups; and
  - Potential future work on research culture (pending availability of resource).
6. Positive culture is inextricably linked to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) and this is an integrated component across the breadth of our R&I portfolio. The Equality Act 2010 requires us to deliver on the Public Sector Equality Duty. SFC adheres to the Equality and Human Rights Commission's (EHRC) Scotland-specific advice and guidance and has established a Memorandum of Understanding with the EHRC to strengthen our approach.
7. Beyond legal compliance, we recognise the important role that our support for research, knowledge exchange and innovation can play in advancing EDI. Consideration of equality across our portfolio - from purpose, reach and delivery mechanisms to governance - is a priority if we are to succeed in delivering our goals.
8. Our recent consultations on REG/RPG and our KE&I portfolio sought to embed EDI throughout our policies and strategies; to build on current good practice; and to identify opportunities to advance equality and build a truly diverse and inclusive system. We will continue to embed EDI across the breadth of our portfolio as well as focusing on specific areas and projects in the pursuit of discrete goals.

### **Supporting Scotland's postgraduate researchers**

9. At RKEC's meeting in February, the Committee endorsed proposals to create 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.
10. Establishing such a group recognises the changing UK research environment, with evolving 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.

11. In early May, SFC launched a [call for applications for membership of an SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers](#). 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.
12. Potential areas for evidence development include approaches to further EDI 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 that SFC activity adds value.
13. 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.
14. We intend to convene a diverse group with representatives from across the landscape. In line with best practice in EDI, we are using an applications process to recruit group members through an open call. We are seeking a variety of perspectives and viewpoints, as well as specialist understanding in relation to the RPG. 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 are therefore welcoming applications from people who are able to bring lived experience to the work of the Group.
15. The Group will be co-chaired by Professor Nick Fyfe, Vice Principal for Research at Robert Gordon University (and RKEC member) and Dr Kay Guccione, Researcher Development Manager at the University of Glasgow. Membership of the Group is expected to provide representation across a range of academic disciplines, career levels and geographical areas of Scotland and include 10-15 members.
16. A representative from the UKRI talent and skills team has accepted membership

of the group. UKRI involvement is intended to promote join up and input into UKRI's evolving portfolio of activity. Furthermore, SFC recently responded to UKRI's New Deal for PGRs consultation, highlighting our Advisory Group and areas of opportunity for increased collaboration and synergy as UKRI develops its support for PGR training.

17. 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 RKEC and/or the SFC Board.

### **Concordats and related groups**

18. SFC supports sector concordats – the Researcher Development Concordat, the Research Integrity Concordat, the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research and the Knowledge Exchange Concordat. A summary of activity related to the concordats on Researcher Development, Researcher Integrity and KE is outlined below. An update on SFC involvement in the Forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment in Research and Innovation is also highlighted.

### ***Researcher Development Concordat***

19. SFC became a signatory to the revised [Researcher Development Concordat](#) in September 2019 and is a member of the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group.
20. The Concordat aims to improve the employment and support for researchers and researcher careers in higher education in the UK. It sets out three clear Principles of environment and culture, employment, and professional and career development. The principles are underpinned by obligations for the four key stakeholder groups, funders, institutions, researchers and managers of researchers, to realise the aims of the Concordat.
21. The UK funding bodies provide funding to UUK for an enhanced secretariat function for the Concordat Governance. This ensures a reporting line from the Concordat governance into the funding bodies and a route into respective governments, as recommended in the review of the previous version of the Concordat. SFC contributed £28,925 across FY 2020-21 and 2021-22 to this purpose. We shortly expect to receive a request for a further three years of funding to continue to support the secretariat function.
22. In line with our responsibilities under the Concordat, in August last year a Researcher Development Concordat Action Plan and update on activity was brought to RKEC for noting and approval. The action plan was subsequently

[published on the SFC website](#), and the SFC’s responsibilities under the Researcher Development Concordat will continue to be incorporated into ongoing SFC Review implementation work.

23. Currently, 12 Scottish HEIs are organisational Concordat signatories, out of a total of 99 across the UK. These are listed below, with links to their most recently published Concordat action plans:

<a href="#">Abertay University</a>	<a href="#">Queen Margaret University</a>	<a href="#">University of St Andrews</a>
<a href="#">Edinburgh Napier University</a>	<a href="#">University of Aberdeen</a>	<a href="#">University of Stirling</a>
<a href="#">Glasgow Caledonian University</a>	<a href="#">University of Edinburgh</a>	<a href="#">University of Strathclyde</a>
<a href="#">Heriot Watt University</a>	<a href="#">University of Glasgow</a>	<a href="#">University of the West of Scotland</a>

24. A further institution (the University of Dundee) mentions progress against the principles of the Researcher Development Concordat in their 2020-21 Outcome Agreement, which suggests that the concordat still plays an important role in shaping institution’s policy and processes around research support, even for institutions that are not formal signatories.
25. SFC’s 2021-22 Outcome Agreement guidance to HEIs states “We will seek evidence of compliance with the Researcher Development Concordat through the Outcome and Investment Agreement process”. This guidance sets out expectations that institutions will implement the Concordat.
26. Key actions carried out by the Researcher Development Concordat Signatories Group over the last year include the launch of a new website alongside other initiatives for improving engagement and transparency, publication of a highlights report and changes to the governance structure of the group, with the formation of an Executive Group to take forward work on key actions between quarterly Signatories Group meetings.
27. SFC’s involvement in the Signatories Group, the Executive group and relevant task and finish groups provides a chance to be part of sector-wide discussions on research culture, ensuring the Scottish perspective is taken into account, as well as contributing towards progressing work against key priorities identified collectively by the Group.
28. SFC’s contribution to the costs of the Researcher Development Concordat Strategy Group secretariat is modest, and the investment represents good value for money, given it provides the opportunity to ensure Scotland is represented alongside other UK funding bodies in key initiatives that will help

to shape UK research culture.

### ***Research Integrity Concordat***

29. SFC, in common with other significant UK funders of research and Universities UK (UUK), is a signatory of the [Concordat to Support Research Integrity](#), a revised and strengthened version of which was published in October 2019.
30. The Concordat was developed by UUK in collaboration with the UK Funding Bodies and Research Councils, the Wellcome Trust and various government departments. It sets out five commitments intended to provide assurances to government, the wider public and the international community that research in the UK continues to be underpinned by the highest standards of rigour and integrity. In doing so, it sets out obligations for researchers, employers of researchers and funders of research.
31. By acting in agreement with the Concordat commitments, members of the research community demonstrate that they:
  - uphold the highest standards of rigour and integrity in all aspects of research;
  - ensure that research is conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards;
  - support a research environment that is underpinned by a culture of integrity and based on good governance, best practice, and support for the development of researchers;
  - use transparent, timely, robust and fair processes to handle allegations of research misconduct when they arise; and
  - work together to strengthen the integrity of research.
32. SFC's Outcome Agreement guidance states that we will seek evidence that Scottish HEIs are in compliance with the Research Integrity Concordat through engagement with Universities UK. The guidance sets out expectations that institutions will implement the Concordat. However, unlike the Researcher Development Concordat, individual HEIs are unable to become signatories to the Research Integrity Concordat.
33. Members of the SFC Research Team regularly attend Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group meetings which meetings provide a chance to be part of sector-wide discussions on research culture, ensuring the Scottish perspective is taken into account, as well as contributing towards progressing work against key priorities identified collectively by the Group.
34. SFC does not contribute towards Research Integrity Concordat secretariat costs,

which have to date been covered by Universities UK. However, we anticipate there may in the future be some modest requests to fund activities carried out by the signatories group, where additional resource is required. For instance, recently the group commissioned work from UKRIO to develop a template and updated guidance for the annual institutional statements required by commitment five of the concordat. Funding for this work was provided by other signatories.

35. Key actions carried out by the Research Integrity Concordat Signatories Group include publication of an annual statement from signatories and developing links to the recently formed UK Committee on Research Integrity (UK CORI).

### ***Knowledge Exchange Concordat***

36. As a collaborative, creative endeavour that translates knowledge and research into impact in society and the economy, people are critical to excellent KE and a positive, inclusive culture is essential.
37. The [KE Concordat](#) aims to recognise, develop and improve the diverse ways in which universities engage in KE. The Concordat provides a [framework of eight principles](#) for supporting KE against which participating institutions assess themselves and identify priority actions to drive future growth and success. They include principles focused on developing the capacity of staff and students for KE, recognising the achievements of those who perform high-quality KE activities and meeting the needs of a wide range of beneficiaries; all underpinned by a commitment to sharing best practice and continuous improvement.
38. The implementation of the KE Concordat is managed by UUK and GuildHE, supported with investment from Research England. SFC is a member of the Strategic Group that is responsible for considering long-term approaches, alignments and the embedding of the KE Concordat across the UK.
39. In 2021, a development year exercise of the KE Concordat was undertaken. Although all UK institutions were able to sign up to the KE Concordat principles and participate, each UK nation was able to develop its own process for implementation. SFC encouraged universities to commit to the principles of the KE Concordat, with view to using the development year to decide what formal arrangements it may wish to put in place for subsequent years. SFC understands this to have been a very valuable exercise that had a positive impact on participating institutions. A report on the review of the KE Concordat development year process will be published by summer 2022.
40. As outlined in the accompanying paper on the KE&I consultation, SFC will work with universities over AY 2022/23 on the detail recognising the opportunity the KEC presents to help people engage and contribute to KE effectively. Proposals



to support the development of an entrepreneurial mindset and a culture of entrepreneurialism through the Entrepreneurial Campus Strategy are also set out in the accompanying paper.

### ***Forum for Tackling Bullying and Harassment in Research and Innovation***

41. SFC is a member of the Forum which brings together funding, policy and regulatory organisations in the UK and internationally to explore, understand and share knowledge around practices for tackling bullying and harassment within the research and innovation landscape.
42. The aims of the Forum are to:
  - raise awareness at sector level to bring about culture change, focusing on prevention and creating a healthy research culture;
  - share learning and practice across organisations; and
  - promote collaboration to maximise the impact of policies and resources and reduce bureaucracy wherever possible.

The forum is chaired by UKRI, and a summary of key discussions from previous meetings is [published online](#). Much recent focus within the forum has been on thinking about the future of the Forum. Other recent areas of discussion have included consideration of how organisations' bullying and harassment (or similar) policies have impacted on organisations, and the opportunity to support implementation of the R&D People and Culture Strategy, regarding an ask of the Forum from the UK Government's [R&D People and Culture Ministerial Coordination Group \(MCG\)](#) regarding "starting the conversation on what collaborative, cross-sector action" could be taken on "making bullying and harassment no longer an issue."

### **Research culture**

43. There are significant challenges in cultivating a truly diverse and inclusive research environment in institutions in the UK. An increasing body of evidence and data demonstrates that many researchers find the environment and level of competition associated with their work creates a difficult and pressured atmosphere, with many expressing concerns about their mental health and wellbeing, their ability to be creative, and concern at the importance associated with metrics of success other than research quality.
44. Although we can point to good levels of participation in current UK activity associated with improvements in research culture (such the initiatives outlined

above), and to institutional work in this area (such as the University of Glasgow's [Lab for Academic Culture](#)), we can and must do more to improve Scotland's research culture. SFC's Review made clear that the environment in which research is conducted is an essential part of research excellence.

45. Linking with the growing momentum from research funders in this space and the UK R&D People and Culture Strategy, our Review recommended that SFC commission the sector to develop a blueprint for establishing a positive research culture in Scotland, instigating a broader debate that explores and defines good practice as well as opportunities for cross-institutional collaboration.
46. At this juncture of our Review implementation, we are exploring how we take forward these recommendations. As well as the reasoning outlined above, research funder interests and the potential direction of the Future Research Assessment Programme (as outlined in an accompanying paper), point to an opportunity for Scotland to get ahead by focussing on research culture. Any SFC culture intervention therefore needs to be rigorous and aligned with improving Scotland's competitiveness – with a focus on boosting quality with the belief that better teamwork, better supported researchers, and more effectively trained students and staff can achieve that.
47. Options range from commissioning a small set of collaborative pilot projects that lay the groundwork for cross-institutional activity, to exploring how our future approach to outcome agreements and the National Impact Framework could play a role (these options are not mutually exclusive).
48. Potential areas where Scottish strengths could be built on and national opportunities seized include -
  - **Open research** – Improving the quality of the research we do and how we do it is at the heart of open research and this, in turn, is essential for Scotland in maintaining a world-leading reputation in research. As a result of national Open Access policies, the UK features heavily in [world rankings for open research](#) and Scottish institutions are performing exceptionally well. Scotland's reputation and visibility in this space could tie into our national narrative and ethos. There is scope to strengthen both practice and training activity that supports transparency, rigour, and reproducibility by facilitating early sharing of outputs and materials to wider audiences and valuing different research output types.
  - **Research careers** – There are opportunities to foster institutional collaboration including, for example, linking with the Researcher Development

Concordat (as described above). This could boost Scotland's attractiveness by enabling the sector to make a distinctive offer to researchers. For example, a potential focus could be on exploring creative ways to solve the issue of postdoc mobility at a national level with an initiative such as 'Scottish postdoc contract passports' so individuals can move around intellectually but stay in the same space. Experimenting with sector-wide destinations tracking could also be a focus; Scotland's size and scale means that trials of new approaches could be feasible.

- **Reward and recognition** - The consequences of the pandemic, and the difficulties that it has caused for many in the research community, call for accelerating the development of new ways to recognize and reward academic researchers. There are moves to appraise researchers on their efforts and progress in light of their personal circumstances, and funders, [including UKRI](#), are moving towards evaluating narrative CVs, instead of using assessments focused only on more traditional considerations. Again, there is an opportunity for Scotland to get ahead of shifts in the research landscape.
- **Research reproducibility** – Greater understanding of the factors that contribute to poor research reproducibility and replicability is needed to develop approaches to counter these and improve the trustworthiness and quality of research. Scottish institutions are involved in the [UK Reproducibility Network \(UKRN\)](#), a national peer-led consortium that aims to investigate the factors that contribute to robust research, promote training activities, and disseminate best practice. Again, this is an opportunity for Scotland; working collaboratively across the sector is the only way to drive lasting change and coordination is essential to achieve changes that no one organisation can create alone.

49. We recognise the need to align with the variety of initiatives and focuses underway in this space as well as the danger of any SFC intervention being too diffuse. The design and development of future research culture activity will be subject to resource availability.

### **Risk assessment**

50. Risk associated with this work is low to medium. While none of the activities outlined are identified as involving a high level of risk, there is potential for reputational damage should SFC not sufficiently support and further EDI and

good practices in support of people and culture. There are also legal implications from a breach of SFC's statutory duties.

### **Equality and diversity assessment**

51. Focus and consideration of issues of equality, diversity and inclusion run at the heart of the work outlined in this paper. Full equalities assessments are underway or will be carried out as part of the development of our activity in this area.

### **Recommendations**

52. RKEC is invited to:
  - Consider the summary of SFC's activity in support of people and culture and future plans to implement key Review recommendations; and
  - Provide comment on our direction of travel, areas of synergy and the opportunities brought by the changing UK research landscape.

### **Financial implications**

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### **Publication**

54. This paper will be published on the SFC website.

### **Further information**

55. Contact: Dr Cat Ball, Assistant Director (Research), tel: 0131 313 6660, email: [cball@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:cball@sfc.ac.uk) and Dr Charlotte Matheson, Policy/Analysis Officer, tel: 0131 313 6650, email: [cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk](mailto:cmatheson@sfc.ac.uk)

