

## **SFC Saltire Emerging Researcher Scheme – Q and A**

### **Exchanges**

#### ***Minimum number of Scottish Universities in a consortium***

*Q: Does a proposal for a consortium including two Scottish universities meet the remit of the call?*

A: We are seeking proposals from research consortia spanning a wide range of Scottish universities (see paragraph 11 of the [Call for Proposals](#)). As a guide, we would expect consortia to span a minimum of three Scottish universities. However, all things being equal, the assessment panel is likely to prefer an application from a research consortium including a high number of Scottish universities than one which includes only a small handful of Scottish universities, as this would be likely to have greater impact in terms of the aims of the scheme.

#### ***Scheme Promotion***

*Q: Will there be a mechanism, perhaps through SFC, to promote the scheme within the EU?*

A: SFC doesn't have a specific mechanism for promoting individual schemes within the EU, but will be happy to share information about the schemes amongst our networks. However, successful research consortia who receive funding to run programmes through the SFC Saltire Emerging Researcher Scheme will be responsible for advertising their own exchange/placement programmes to relevant researchers.

#### ***Definition of ECR***

Early Career Researcher (ECR) applicants to programmes run by consortia under the SFC-Saltire Emerging Researcher Scheme must be within seven years of the award of their PhD (from the point of successful PhD viva to the point of applying) and be within seven years of their first academic appointment (paid contract of employment which lists research or teaching as the primary role). This includes post doctoral researchers (using the RSE definition of a postdoctoral researcher as "an individual holding a doctoral degree who is engaged in a temporary period of mentored research and/or scholarly training for the purpose of acquiring the professional skills needed to pursue a career path of their choosing")

Additionally:

- Maternity/paternity/parental/adoption leave after award of PhD of up to 18 months per child should be taken into consideration when assessing applicant eligibility;

- Documented periods of leave for other reasons, i.e., long-term medical absence, should be taken into consideration when considering applicant eligibility.

Consortia applying to the SFC Saltire Emerging Researcher Scheme may choose to prioritise a specific subset of ECRs (e.g. postdoctoral researchers), but need to provide justification for this prioritisation in their proposal.

#### *Further clarification on definition*

We can accept PDRAs on ongoing contracts provided they're within seven years of completing their PhD and within seven years of their first academic appointment.

#### **Quarantine costs**

Necessary quarantine costs involved in a researcher moving between countries could be covered by the Saltire exchange programme budget, provided this doesn't increase the total cost per exchange above the £10k limit.

#### **Costs that can be included as part of the exchange**

*Q: I note that you will not cover Visa costs, however, will you cover COVID 19 testing costs associated with international exchange?*

A: Yes, given current travel regulations we would consider this part of the cost of travel.

*Q: Will you cover subsistence and living costs over and above travel, accommodation and EDI considerations? (i.e stipend)*

A: Yes, provided these costs can be justified and are reasonable. For instance, it would be reasonable to pay a modest stipend to a doctoral student who takes a leave of absence to go on exchange and whose normal stipend is paused during the leave of absence (as this would ensure that the student was not out of pocket as a result of the exchange). However, it would be difficult to justify stipend payments to a doctoral student whose funder would continue to pay their normal stipend during the course of their exchange. Any stipend payments would need to fit within the £10k limit per exchange

*Q: I see you ask for contingency plans in the guidance, can we include contingency cost in the budget?*

Absolutely - we'd recommend that you include these costs in the budget.

*Q: Is the budget for each exchange pre-determined?*

A: The budget isn't pre-determined - you can request up to £10,000 per exchange (for up to 10 exchanges in total), but need to provide a breakdown of what this will cover. In addition, you can also request an amount towards the cost of administering the scheme.

In terms of the budget, we are looking for a basic breakdown of costs to show how many exchanges you propose to undertake, and an expected breakdown of costs for each exchange (for travel, accommodation and other expected costs - please note that visa costs cannot be covered by the scheme). If you are claiming additional costs for administration of the scheme, the breakdown of these administrative costs should also be included.

*Q: Can you please provide an overview of eligible/ineligible costs under the scheme? Specifically I am looking to know if the following would be eligible:*

- *funding for a postdoc who could help with the implementation of the proposal?*
- *funding for a computer / IT equipment to be used for the purpose of the project (for use by the PI)?*

A consortium can request additional funding relating to the cost of administering the scheme within its proposal budget (see Section 16 of the [Call for Proposals](#)), provided the requested expenses are detailed in the proposal budget and their inclusion is justified. This would typically include expenses such as staff time and overhead costs. I suspect it would be difficult to justify the inclusion of IT equipment costs given the short timeframe of the scheme and the fact that existing members of staff employed at a university will normally already have a computer, but if there is a good reason for requesting this it can be included in the proposal for consideration by the assessment panel.

*Q: Can the funds be used only for travel, accommodation, sustenance or are other costs such as research costs (e.g. chemicals) eligible?*

A: Funds can be used for any reasonable costs associated with the exchange. We'd prefer that, where possible, research costs are covered by the host university (and these could be considered "in kind" contributions), but these costs can be included in "other" costs, provided that the total cost per exchange does not exceed £10k. Any expected research costs should be detailed in the budget provided with your proposal.

### **Match Funding**

*Q: Does 'exploring potential for match funding from partners' mean that we need 50% compulsory match funding?*

We don't expect confirmation of match funding in order to be able to consider applications (especially given the short timeframe for submitting your proposal), but

expect you to have explored the possibility of obtaining match funding. For instance, you could outline plans to approach a particular institution/set of institutions to request match funding, or provide a quick overview of any conversations you've had with international partners.

*A: Do we require any letters of support from our international partners?*

No, but if you are able to get a letter of support, this would be an excellent piece of supporting evidence to provide with your application.

*Q: For inbound exchanges, is match funding essential or desirable?*

A: We don't expect confirmation of match funding in order to be able to consider applications (especially given the short timeframe for submitting your proposal), but expect you to have explored the possibility of obtaining match funding. For instance, you could outline plans to approach a particular institution/set of institutions to request match funding.

*Q: Is match funding only a consideration if there is a two-way exchange?*

A: No - but we recognise that in-kind match funding may be more achievable for outbound only research (e.g. where a research institution covers the cost of consumables or equipment use during a researcher's stay at that institution)

*Q: Can match funding be in-kind, combined in-kind & cash or only cash?*

A: It can be any of these things.

### ***Eligibility of programme participants***

*Q: For inbound applicants, do the applications come from Scottish Universities/institutions/organisations or can EU institutions/EU-based individuals apply directly?*

A: This will be down to the way each consortium chooses to structure their proposed exchange programme. If your proposed programme allows inbound applications, you may choose to allow eligible individual inbound researchers to apply directly to your exchange programme, or (if you are working with a specific partner institution or set of institutions) you may choose to specify that applications for inbound exchanges must be come from/be submitted via a partner institution (or one of several partner institutions) to be eligible for consideration by your exchange programme. Either approach is fine.

*Q: Can PGRs and ECRs within industry apply (for either inbound or outbound exchanges) or are the exchanges only open to university-based researchers?*

A: The exchanges are open to university-based researchers. (See bullet point 1 under Section 11 of the Call for Proposals.)

### ***Number of proposals submitted per institution***

Institutions can support applications for several research consortia if they wish - we've not placed a limit on the number that each university can support. Each consortium can apply for funding of up to £100,000.

Each consortium will need to submit a separate application (with senior level support from a host university), following the format provided in the [Call for Proposals](#).

### ***Senior level sign off***

We ask for "Senior level sign off from host institution/organisation" in the call for proposals. This could take the form of a letter of support or a signature on the application indicating their support.

We don't require a specific statement for the senior level sign-off. Your suggestion for providing a dated signature at the bottom of the application sounds fine.

### ***Letters of support for new consortium***

In terms of institutional support, we will need appropriate senior level support of the application from the consortium's host university (see paragraph 19 of the Call for Proposals), but this high level sign-off is not required for each university in the consortium. Nevertheless, individual letters of support may be useful to include as evidence of the consortium's ability to deliver the programme, and something that the assessment panel can take into account when making their decision.

*Q: Would a Scottish PI need to ask their EU partners to seek official approval from their universities ahead for the application or could the PI just submit a letter signed by the Chair and co-Chair of an existing scheme offering official support for the implementation of the SFC proposal?*

A: No, official approval in advance isn't required in order to submit the proposal, but any evidence that can be provided to show willingness from European partners to be involved will be useful to include with the proposal. A letter of support from the Chair and/or co-Chair of an existing scheme offering support for the proposal would be a very strong piece of supporting evidence.

### ***Placement in industry***

*Q: Can university-based researchers apply for an exchange (either outbound or inbound) for placement within industry?*

A: Yes - provided these placements will demonstrably help to maintain and strengthen Scottish universities' research ties with European collaborators. For outbound exchanges from Scottish universities, placement within industry in Europe would be a way of achieving this. For inbound researchers from European universities, it might be much more difficult to establish how a placement in industry in Scotland achieves this aim unless there are clear links with university consortium research activities.

*Follow up Q: Has this one been fully thought through? On the surface it would seem to say that the programme is encouraging Scottish universities to help European industries create new products, but European universities will not be able to help Scottish industry likewise. There is always the element of knowledge and experience gained on both sides by the exchange, but it still looks very one sided – the company will expect to own any IP.*

A: There is no requirement that proposals allow for industry placements for either incoming or outgoing researchers, and we expect that most exchanges will be based in universities. However, the assessment panel will consider proposals for exchange programmes that include industry placements or visits, provided that these exchanges meet the requirements and aims set out in the call for proposals. For instance, some exchanges may involve researchers being based at a Scottish or European university with links to a particular industrial partner, where they have opportunities to spend time undertaking a placement or visit with that industrial partner during their exchange.

*Q: As part of the exchange from University to University, is it possible for the researcher to include visits to associated businesses or companies? This may increase the chance of some match funding from the companies.*

A: Yes, as part of the exchange it would be fine for the researcher to include visits to associated businesses or companies. This could be a good way of improving the value of the exchange to the researcher, and extending Scottish-European research links.

### **Visa guidance**

*Q: If exchange students require visas, we understand that costs of visas cannot be included but will SFC be able to provide guidance? For example, in the case of doctoral students, inbound exchanges would be classed as students, but for outbound exchanges, in the EU doctoral students are considered “staff”.*

A: SFC don't have OISC trained staff, so can't provide qualified guidance on this. We would recommend speaking with the international office or staff immigration advisor at your institution for advice about the appropriate visas that will be required for the exchanges.

## **Cohort building event**

### ***Date of event***

*Q: If we made our rationale explicit, for an event slightly later in the year would this idea be entertained or is the timescale fixed?*

A: Funding has been provided by the Scottish Government for use during 2021-22 and we're expecting the proposed cohort-building/networking/learning and development event(s) to take place within this timeframe. Consortia may put forward an argument to extend this timeframe in their application to host the event(s), but this would need to be supported by the assessment panel and approved by Scottish Government. For now, we would suggest putting forward a proposal for an event that can be completed within the original timeframe, but explain what you'd do if it were possible to extend the timeframe past the end of August.

### ***Administrative costs associated with event***

Q: Is there any scope to include a request for additional financial support - to assist with reasonable administrative costs?

A: You may apply for reasonable administrative costs relating to the cohort-building/networking/L&D event(s) in your proposal, but we cannot guarantee that these costs would be awarded if your bid is successful: this decision will be up the assessment panel. I'd recommend that you provide a clear breakdown of these costs with your proposal so it is clear what you are proposing that SFC funds and what would be funded through other sources.

*Q: If some element of administrative costs were to be included in a proposal, is this in addition to the £100,000, or should it be within the £100,000?*

A: You can apply for additional administrative costs on top of the £100,000 total, provided these costs are justified and a breakdown of these costs is included in your proposal.

### ***Eligibility to run event***

Q: Can a consortium run the cohort event if they don't get funding for the exchange programme?

A: Yes