

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

Date / time response submitted	11/01/2022 15:34
In what capacity are you submitting your response?	Organisation
Your organisation (if applicable)	[REDACTED]
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Overarching issues	
Q1. If it were necessary, what would be the implications of delaying implementation of REF 2021 results and changes to REG until AY 2023-24?	Key priorities should be that the total level of funding available for REG is not eroded and that the principle of funding research excellence is retained. The Research Excellence Grant is essential for underpinning research. Changes in the recent Research Excellence Framework exercise, in relation to the increased volume factor, arising from 100% declaration of research staff and reductions in outputs/individuals submitted, mean that there could be volatility in the resultant funding which could have positive and negative consequences for individual universities. We support a delay in implementation of the REF 2021 results, if necessary, to stabilise REG funding.
Q2. Should SFC seek to limit downward changes in REG experienced by individual universities post REF2021 and, if so, what should be the scope of any adjustments made?	The changes in the recent Research Excellence Framework exercise in relation to the increased volume factor and reductions in outputs/individuals submitted mean that there could be volatility in the resultant funding allocations for individual universities. We would support mitigation of a greater than 10% decrease in REG funding as a transitional arrangement for any individual institution. We suggest that any transitional period should only be put in place for a maximum of two years.
Q3. You are invited to comment in your answers throughout the document on opportunities for and barriers to advancing equality and achieving inclusion. Overarching comments related to the aims of the public sector duty in the context of this review should be made here.	REG does contribute to giving institutions the essential support required to create a research environment which supports EDI. However, one of the biggest barriers to advancing equality and achieving inclusion is ensuring that the full economic costs of carrying out internationally excellent research are met and that universities are given multi-year funding assumptions and commitments by Scottish Government and SFC. Allowing universities to plan effectively with certainty over funding would in turn ensure long-term support of equality, inclusion and diversity issues. Conversely, funding given with very short spend deadlines can adversely affect, for example, individuals with caring responsibilities or other additional constraints on their time to prepare applications at short notice. We note that Research England has recently carried out an equality impact assessment in

	relation to QR funding. It is more difficult to tease out EDI issues in relation to unhypothecated block grant funding and could benefit from additional focus.
Q4. How important (or otherwise) is it that the Scottish approach to underpinning research funding is in step with the rest of the UK? What elements of consistency (or distinctiveness) in SFC's approach influence Scottish HEIs' research competitiveness?	The dual support system and REF exercises, concordats, research environment are common threads running throughout the UK. The dual funding system and reliable REG/QR funding which keeps up with inflationary and other pressures are required to position Scotland's research strongly within an increasingly competitive context. For Scotland's ambitions for prosperity and global impact, it is also very important to be cognisant of the approaches being taken by the rest of the UK to provide underlying support for research. We argue that some level of alignment must be achieved as Scotland does not operate in isolation and should not be disadvantaged by any specific approach. However, we also welcome the fact that Scotland, via SFC, currently allocates more REG/QR per FTE in the dual support of research than England does and would not want that competitive advantage reduced or removed. For Scotland to be competitive and to succeed, we need to use our strengths and distinctiveness. The decline in share of UKRI grants going to HEIs in Scotland and the proportion of innovation-focused funding to Scotland are very concerning. The [REDACTED] remains committed to the principle of funding excellent research through the Research Excellence Grant. It will be important that where REG is used as a driver for change and for supporting an excellent research landscape that the international and wider-UK context is also taken into account.
Q5. In the changing research landscape, is the balance of funding between SFC's underpinning support for research and underpinning support for PGR training & environment optimal?	The consultation acknowledges that the funding underpinning support for PGRs has not been reviewed recently. Given that there is no Quality Weighting on PGR funding, nor a clear direction of travel for changes in use of the funding, we would not support a change in the balance at this time. PGRs are a vital part of the capacity to respond to emerging research priorities. PGR funding which supports the development of this pipeline and capacity within a positive and ambitious research culture is increasingly important. We recommend keeping the RPG grant unchanged at this time but are very supportive of an increased focus on the use of RPG to ensure that there is optimal underpinning support for PGR training and the PGR environment.
Research Excellence Grant	
Q6. Views are sought on the principles proposed for REG and on whether the proposals within this paper are consistent with the principles.	We generally support the principles of REG laid out in the consultation and welcome the highlighting of ambitious and excellent research. We recommend that the second bullet, "A robust and transparent allocation method based on clearly defined criteria and avoiding unnecessary complexity", be removed for reasons provided below. In our view, this principle is difficult to support while the methodology is under review and development; it sounds more like a process statement rather than any particular statement of principle. We request that care is taken to ensure changes to

	the funding model do not have unintended consequences, such as disadvantaging the excellent research in the Arts and Humanities for which Scotland has a leading international reputation.
Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?	Given that the principles of REG emphasise supporting excellent research, the 3* and 4* weightings need to translate more effectively into relative weightings and, by extension, future funding. Scotland has historically placed less weight on 4* research relative to the rest of the UK. In this area, we would encourage SFC to consider a closer alignment with the rest of the UK and would like to see a common approach across the UK funding bodies. The relative balance of 3* to 4* in terms of the outcomes from REF 2021 is unknown at this time, but if outcomes from previous exercises prevail an increase in quality across the sector is likely. An increased weighting for 4* may be necessary to give an appropriate recognition of research of the highest quality and for some discrimination between quality profiles.
Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?	The [REDACTED] supports the allocation of REGa to be aligned with the proportions of REF score elements. In REF2014, allocation was driven by the overall profile in Scotland unlike England where funding was allocated in proportion to REF score elements. This approach resulted in only 54% of the REGa pot in Scotland going to support the output element of REF even though the weighting for outputs in REF 2014 was 65%. This discrepancy was due to the environment and impact elements of REF2014 scoring more highly than outputs. Aligning the proportion of REGa to the score elements for REF2021 allocation would stabilize this important area of REG funding.
Q9. We would welcome your views on the balance between the elements of the REG formula. Within the income-driven elements, we welcome your views on whether we have included the correct income sources.	We do not support any increase in funding to REGb or REGc at the expense of REGa. Inevitably, the income-driven elements are backward looking and based on historical research income by spend. Our view is that the relative weighting of REGa should remain at least at the current level. We request that care is taken to ensure any changes in funding do not have unintended effects, such as disadvantaging excellent research in Arts and Humanities which may, for example, be less attractive to large-scale charity or industrial funding than other research areas. We believe that decreasing the relative importance of REGa could have this effect. In terms of the income sources included, we would not support removing funders from outside the dual support system (e.g. industry funding), and we believe that encouraging universities to have diverse sources of research income should continue.
Research Postgraduate Grant	
Q10. Are the proposed principles for RPG appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape?	We are supportive of the high-level statement of the principles behind the Research Postgraduate Grant. At this time, we also support not making changes to the methodology allocating this funding.
Q11a. We are seeking views on the purpose of RPG and its future role in supporting Scottish	The purpose of RPG is “to invest in the environment needed for high quality research training and development and to support postgraduate research students to contribute to the research base in

<p>institutions to respond – individually and collaboratively – to the changing landscape.</p>	<p>Scotland”, and we fully support this statement. PGRs are a vital part of the capacity to respond to emerging research priorities. PGR funding which supports the development of this pipeline and capacity within a positive and ambitious research culture is increasingly important. RPG could be considered a contribution to covering the full economic costs of PGRs, which TRAC data consistently shows is not met by fee income. The key advantage, however, is having a strategic pot of funding to support a positive environment and culture for PGRs.</p>
<p>Q11b. We are seeking views on taking forward increased accountability for RPG, for example by linking to shared objectives or outcomes, and how SFC and the sector could work in partnership to achieve this.</p>	<p>We understand the desire for increased accountability for RPG but request that the focus is on evidencing outcomes while recognising that individual institutions may achieve them differently. It will be important that any change be phased in and flexible to maximise what can be achieved across Scotland. We agree that any changes required should be developed through a partnership between the HE sector and SFC, with one goal being to minimise unnecessary bureaucracy.</p>
<p>Q12a. We are seeking views on how the RPG could play an increased role in improving participation of underrepresented groups within Scotland’s PGR community, particularly within specific research areas where under-representation is most extreme.</p>	<p>Widening participation can be increased with more support, including financial support for the relevant students. For effectiveness and better targeting, additional research is required to understand more fully the barriers to participation within Scotland's underrepresented groups. Collaboration and the sharing of best practice approaches are likely to be useful in this context.</p>
<p>Q12b. We are seeking views on how SFC’s focus on widening access and participation could be supported by RPG in the postgraduate research student context.</p>	<p>The Universities Scotland Admissions Policy Group, is a potential vehicle for progressing these objectives collaboratively.</p>
<p>Other comments</p>	
<p>Q13. Please make any other comments relevant to this consultation.</p>	<p>For Scotland to remain a strong competitor for research funding, with ultimate benefits to the wider economy in all sectors, it is vitally important that the support offered through RPG and REG, in particular, remains closely aligned to enabling the delivery of high-quality research.</p> <p>In the context of a gradually declining fraction of UKRI funding awarded to Scottish institutions, we recommend that SFC take the opportunity offered by this review to boldly support high-quality research wherever it is found and to enable institutions to maximise the leverage facilitated by SFC funding to deliver more of the excellent work which will provide both a major input into the Scottish economy and will showcase Scotland as a very attractive place for highly-talented students, researchers and support staff.</p>
<p>Publication of responses</p>	

<p>We may publish a summary of the consultation responses and, in some cases, the responses themselves. Published responses may be attributed to an organisation where this information has been provided but will not contain personal data. When providing a response in an individual capacity, published responses will be anonymised. Please confirm whether or not you agree to your response being included in any potential publication.</p>	<p>Publish information and excerpts from this survey response EXCLUDING the organisation name.</p>
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