

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

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In what capacity are you submitting your response?	Organisation
Your organisation (if applicable)	Robert Gordon University
Your full name	Dr Emma Gillibrand
Telephone	01224 262074
Email	e.gillibrand1@rgu.ac.uk
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?	<p>With no increase in the overall resource available through REG, there will be 'winners' and 'losers' in the allocations made on the basis of the REF2021 results which will strongly influence views on the length of any transition period. 'Winners' will want this to be as short as possible; 'losers' will prefer the full impact of any changes to be delayed. To provide clarity and allow institutions to plan for any changes to budgets, any delay should be limited to no more than one year (i.e. by AY 2023-24). We are supportive of early modelling/indicators to allow universities to explore what the impact of REG changes might be, ahead of formal notification.</p> <p>There is suggestion that the result of REF2021 could be delayed past May 2022 and in this instance, if the delay is approximately six months, it would make sense to delay the implementation of changes to REG until AY 2023/24.</p>
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?	Limiting downward changes in REG would be an important mechanism to ensure a degree of stability for institutions and their medium to long term plans around research and innovation. It would also help to mitigate an over concentration of research resource in a small number of research-intensive institutions and align with a commitment to support excellent research wherever it is found.
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	One of the REG principles is to support ambitious and excellent research wherever it is found, but it should be possible for universities to do this and meet their public sector equality duty irrespective of their REG allocation. Addressing sector-wide weak research cultures and underlying historic problems around recruitment and promotion for research active staff will be necessary for our public sector equality duty to be achieved.

<p>review should be made here.</p>	<p>There would need to be a specific criterion of funding in relation to this aspect to demonstrate change at institution level with respect to advancing equality and achieving inclusion as a result of REG funding. While REF should recognise and support the development of an excellent research culture based on principles of equality, diversity and inclusion, there are established sector-wide tools and mechanisms (Athena SWAN, Race Equality Charter etc) that should be the primary focus of institutions in addressing their public sector duty across all their areas of activity.</p> <p>More generally, Scotland's modern universities play a vital role in relation to widening participation and access to higher education, and they work closely with local and regional communities and businesses. Sustaining a vibrant research environment in these institutions helps to ensure a level of diversity in PGR communities that might not otherwise be the case, but also provide the local evidence base that can contribute to broader agendas around levelling up and social inclusion.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>SFC's current quality rating (4*=3.31, 3*=1) in its funding model is steeper than other nations in the UK, leading to narrower support for research and thus potentially reducing Scottish universities' competitiveness. Given that Scotland operates and competes within a UK research funding system, it would be unwise to adopt an approach that would disadvantage researchers based in Scottish institutions in competing for UKRI funding. Thus, while Scotland as a small nation, should (must) define and 'shout about' its research strengths, SFC's approach to underpinning research funding should tend towards a model that reflects the other nations of the UK for parity and avoid funding models which further concentrate our research base.</p>
<p>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?</p>	<p>Institutions will have very different needs, priorities and opportunities in relation to investment in their research and PGR training so achieving an optimal balance between REG and RPG would be impossible. To better support the postgraduate community, it is important to achieve greater transparency and accountability of usage of RPG by institutions. The RPG is allocated on the basis of student numbers but with little or no recognition for 'how' this grant is used to support the postgraduate community. REG is allocated on the basis of the REF result and grant income and thus includes an element of recognition of success or excellence. We suggest that some of the 'balance' between these grants might be achieved by requiring universities to be more explicit about how they have allocated the RPG or by SFC providing a set of criteria or outcomes (for example similar to the criteria for the reports following allocation of the additional COVID funding) that would enable universities clearly to demonstrate their positive impact on this community through use of this funding. Centralised support from SFC, for example through a Scottish Graduate School, would further benefit this community through support for</p>

	smaller research active institutions.
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 welcome the principles which are clear, and the proposals are consistent with them. The key ambition has to be to secure a funding environment that is sustainable and allows for support for excellent and impactful research wherever it is found and in whatever discipline. It is important that the allocation method remains robust and transparent for confidence within the sector and wider society.
Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?	<p>As mentioned previously, the disparity in weightings between Scottish and other UK universities negatively impacts on the Scottish allocation of funding to support research and thus the definition on what is deemed 'excellent' research in Scotland compared to the other UK nations - in Scotland you have to be a little more excellent to obtain funding. It can also be argued that focusing funding on researchers already undertaking excellent research and are thus likely to be well funded, instead of 2* or 3* researchers that have the potential to be world leading is not the best focus to develop a strong research base in Scotland. If there is a long term vision to grow excellent research across Scotland, then some support for 2* and 3* work becomes important from a developmental and transformative perspective, lessening the hyper-concentration of research activity in favour of expanding its geographical and socio-economic reach.</p> <p>Whatever the decision on future quality weightings, it is imperative that they are transparent and explained in a simple and principled manner. Consistency over time, irrespective of changes in the REF exercise itself are important to ensure long term planning for support for research by individual institutions.</p>
Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?	We support the aligning of the proportions of REGa allocated with the proportions of the REF score elements.
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 consider that REGb should continue to recognise funders outwith the dual support system and would support the increased share of REG funding allocated as a result of charity income (11% to 15%).
Research Postgraduate Grant	
Q10. Are the proposed principles for RPG appropriate and consistent with the purpose of the grant and the changing PGR landscape?	The proposed principles are appropriate and consistent with the purpose of RPG, although a statement that includes an element of growth beyond securing the pipeline of the next generation of doctoral graduates would be helpful - perhaps picking up the UKRI New Deal for PGR text around financial

	sustainability for postgraduate research.
Q11a. We are seeking views on the purpose of RPG and its future role in supporting Scottish institutions to respond – individually and collaboratively – to the changing landscape.	The RPG is vital for supporting PGR students, having the purpose of being a very specific and dedicated funding stream. We recognise that the Graduate Schools of the pooling initiatives have played a really important role in offering a shared resource to some institutions, reducing duplication of effort and allowing students based at smaller institutions to benefit from being part of larger disciplinary communities. Increasing or encouraging our use of RPG funding collaboratively across the Scottish sector would enable smaller and/or remote universities potentially to share some (often virtual) training and development opportunities that they might not otherwise be able to access or provide, making a more level playing field. RPG should also be about driving innovation and good practice so its use should be tied to these and demonstrated through good evidence to SFC.
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>This would be welcome, to recognise the value gained from the RPG in a more transparent manner. This would both provide reassurance for SFC and accountability for universities. To achieve this, it would be necessary to develop a framework for specific objectives, building, for example, on Vitae's RDF planner model. This would encourage professional training and development for PGR students for a 'range of careers' (as stated in the UKRI New Deal text) but also to support the monitoring of the career destinations of the PGR community for longer term sector recognition of trends. We would not want the sector's long term objectives in relation to PGR support and development to be negatively impacted by short term specific political imperatives.</p> <p>As a university with a relatively small level of research activity and weak REF2014 results, it has been difficult for us to access some PGR support through SGSSS and SGSAH. This disadvantages us - particularly for students whose own discipline may not have been represented in our REF2014 submission. This lack of inclusivity for all PGR students across the sector indicates that a Scottish Graduate School to support training and development centrally might be beneficial. This would potentially reduce duplication of effort in training and to build on the good work that the pandemic has encouraged in relation to online provision - increasing the recognition that online training and support activities can be very helpful, particularly to counter the isolation that PhD studies can cause.</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	Formal annual reporting requirements for RPG could include the requirement for all universities to report on how this grant has been used to improve participation of underrepresented groups and increase diversity in specific research areas. It would be important to recognise the research areas where under-representation is most extreme and recognise universities that put particular effort into

<p>areas where under-representation is most extreme.</p>	<p>addressing this and supporting these areas. The sharing of positive case studies could encourage best practice across the sector. It will be interesting to see how UKRI's New Deal for PGR tackles the participation of underrepresented groups across the UK sector.</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>Formal reporting to SFC on examples of best practice in the use of RPG to increase participation by underrepresented groups would allow SFC to demonstrate how their focus in this area is having a positive impact. Communication of these activities across academia, industry and society would further encourage people to consider postgraduate study (including different doctoral pathways such as professional doctorates or DBAs). It is also important to think more innovatively about the pipeline of potential PGR students, for example by registering KTP associates for Masters degrees, thus opening up a route into a PhD.</p> <p>It is important to bear in mind the impact of place (in relation to an institution) on underrepresented groups across Scotland and the associated potential challenge for these groups to travel for postgraduate study outside their home region. Modern universities in particular are often good examples of supporting widening access in the sector and thus are well-placed to play a leading role in diversifying the PGR community. It is important for SFC to look at the Scottish sector as a whole to look for improving representation rather than focus at institutional level.</p>
<p>Other comments</p>	
<p>Q13. Please make any other comments relevant to this consultation.</p>	<p>Our final comment relates to our being a small post-92 institution, the longevity of the impact of the REF exercise on the allocation of REG and the challenge of supporting research and building excellence.</p> <p>It is reassuring that SFC will continue to reward excellence in research wherever that research is conducted. Part of the strength of the Scottish university sector is the diversity that exists between universities with research being a vital part of their missions (compared to the College/FE sector). It is reassuring that SFC recognise that while volume may be lower in the non-research-intensive universities, they still engage in excellent and impactful research and should be supported as a consequence.</p> <p>While we agree with the model behind the allocation of the REG, there remains a high level of bureaucracy associated with submission to the REF exercise and this continues to be a challenge for smaller institutions with more limited administrative resources to support the requirements of the REF process.</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 INCLUDING the organisation name.</p>
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