

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

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In what capacity are you submitting your response?	Organisation
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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?	<p>We believe that the impacts of changes in REG arising from REF2021 results should be actioned by SFC as soon as practicable, subject to whatever "smoothing" is deemed to be appropriate (see Q2).</p> <p>However, given the current stage in the budgetary cycle, delaying implementation and continuing with the current funding model for another year would make planning easier for the Funding Council and individual institutions.</p> <p>In accepting the principle of a delay, we would request that the methodology/allocations for 2023/24 are announced earlier than usual to allow extra time to plan for any significant adjustments/changes.</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?	<p>Whilst it will be important to enable HEIs to adjust to downward changes over a limited period, this should not deter from the purpose of REG to reward high quality research wherever it is found. SFC should not limit downward changes where quality has been diluted by increased FTE multipliers. We suggest that significant downward changes might be mitigated for HEIs in UoAs where their overall GPA is in the top 25% (upper quartile) of the UoA.</p>
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.	<p>REG funding underpins the development of research careers and enables Early Career Researchers ("ECRs") to develop their research profile and reduce the pressures that they are under. Across disciplines, there is variation in the way REG supports researchers due to variations in the levels of competitively awarded funding available to different disciplines. Generally speaking, the Natural Sciences are more dependent on REG for supporting the unfunded portion of competitively won research projects, whereas Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH) research depends more on the REG grant to support the general research environment. The different levels of funding by disciplines may drive inequalities in the research environment in Scotland and the SFC may wish to commission some</p>

	research into understanding whether this results in unequal outcomes for researchers.
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?	We consider that the Scottish approach should be more in step with England, as we believe this would maximise the ability of Scottish universities to compete on quality. Increasing the REF quality multiplier in Scotland to align with England is important in ensuring that scarce resource is not spread too thinly and clearly signals a commitment to quality, which is key to competitiveness. Reduction of the quality multiplier from 4:1 (4*:3*) in England to 3.31:1 in Scotland suppresses competitiveness of the most excellent Scottish HEIs. We therefore recommend increasing the quality multiplier to, or towards, that used in England.
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?	We feel that the balance between REG and PGR is about right, however, we feel that there would be an opportunity to increase the % of REGc funding relative to other elements of REG to enable HEIs to recover more of the cost of charity-funded research.
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.	<p>The principles of recognising and rewarding research excellence wherever it is found and of making a contribution toward the full economic costs of research in line with the dual support system, are the right ones to underpin REG allocation.</p> <p>The greatest funding gap in the dual funding model is for charity-funded research, and an increase of REGc funding would address this. Given the pandemic, and the relative reliance on charity-funded research for the UK HE Sector's leading position in global healthcare research, we think this is strategically important at national level.</p>
Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?	As noted in Q4 above, we recommend an increased quality weighting to align more closely with Research England i.e. a ratio closer to 4:1 for research assessed as 4* and 3* - this would support SFC policy to protect excellent discovery research wherever it is found.
Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?	We believe that it is right to have the REGa allocation based on the overall REF profile; the combined REF profile provides a holistic metric and it is not clear that there is any value in picking it apart.
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 agree that SFC should implement appropriate subject weightings that align with practice across the UK. We value the STEMM premium weighting very highly and it plays a very important role in maintaining the quality of our research base and infrastructure - so we feel strongly that the SFC should maintain the STEMM premium weighting. We strongly support an increase in the REGc proportion from 11% to 15%: with the increased financial pressures that Universities are under, charity-funded research becomes harder to justify and increasing the REGc proportion would help offset this. Charity-funded

	<p>research is often focussed on areas where significant inequalities exist, and this is all the more reason to help universities to support it.</p> <p>We consider that the income which is taken into account in REGb should continue explicitly to recognise funders from outwith the dual support system i.e. those other than UKRI Research Councils and charities.</p>
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 fully endorse the principle that ‘we should secure a pipeline of skilled PGR and support their development in a way that meets the needs of academia and industry.’ Given the amount of evidence for the need for greater support for wellbeing, it would be good to see this highlighted in the statement but we accept that this could be covered by ‘positive culture’.
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.	<p>The RPG Grant already enables Scottish institutions to respond individually to the changing research landscapes. UKRI Research Council Centres for Doctoral Training/Scottish Graduate Schools and Collaborative Training Partnerships provide platforms for institutions to collaborate in areas of disciplinary and interdisciplinary strengths. We do not see the need to supplement this effort at the Scottish level, and we would caution against the establishment of further partnerships being led by institutions in the Central Belt which risk exclusion of institutions in other parts of Scotland.</p> <p>The Scottish Graduate Schools are a model for good partnerships, but they are labour-intensive. Individual universities should have leeway to spend SFC income in strategic ways. It is important that increased accountability does not lead to more cumbersome reporting for a relatively small amount of funding. Light touch accountability is already achieved through a funding model driven by student FTE, where lower numbers of RPG students results in lower funding.</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.	Rather than being an exercise in metrics it would be more valuable to have an informal mechanism to showcase best practice. A holistic approach to illustrate how RPGs fit into the wider environment/culture can only help institutions as they work to improve RPG perceptions on Research Culture when surveyed - for example in PRES. The narrative part of the Outcome Agreement process could provide an opportunity to address this in a non-formulaic way.
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	Dundee is already recognised as an institution with a good track record in widening access to PGR study. We consider that increased reporting burdens within an existing relatively modest grant would not necessarily achieve the goal sought. It would be good to see studentships emerging in this space from the RPG, as already available to English universities through the Research England and Office for Students funding competition for BAME Participation in PGR (http://www.ukcge.ac.uk/article/research-

extreme.	england-office-for-students-launch-bame-funding-comp-468.aspx).
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.	
Other comments	
Q13. Please make any other comments relevant to this consultation.	We consider that Scotland has an opportunity to become more competitive than other parts of the UK in relation to attraction of RPG student talent, and would encourage the SFC and Scottish Government to reflect on this in their future policy considerations. To be clear, not at the expense of the grants that are the subject of this consultation.
Publication of responses	
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.	Publish information and excerpts from this survey response INCLUDING the organisation name.

