

20 May 2019

Dear Principal

Survey on University Innovation Fund (UIF) approach

Purpose

- 1 This letter invites institutions to complete a short survey on the University Innovation Fund (UIF) approach and return this to SFC by **Monday 17 June 2019**.
- 2 This information will be used by SFC's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) UIF Review Group to inform the review of the UIF approach over 2019-2020. Institutions will be invited to participate in a formal consultation exercise in 2020.

Background

- 3 As originally planned, SFC is reviewing the new UIF approach and funding model in 2019-2020.
- 4 The UIF Review Group will assist SFC with this review. It will review progress on the delivery of the UIF approach against the original vision and provide recommendations for improvement. The final outputs of the review are expected to be made in time to inform the AY2021-22 Outcome Agreement and funding cycle.
- 5 Further information on the review, including the terms of reference for the UIF Review Group, is available on the [UIF page](#)¹ of the SFC website.

Survey on UIF approach

- 6 The UIF Review Group wishes to conduct a short survey on the UIF approach to complement the evidence it currently has available to it. The purpose of this survey is, therefore, to gather initial evidence that is not consistently available elsewhere. This will provide a fuller and more nuanced picture of how the UIF approach is viewed within institutions and how the planning, management and measurement are undertaken to help deliver against the UIF outcomes.
- 7 A copy of the survey is annexed to this letter.

¹ UIF Review information: <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/innovation/innovation-funding.aspx>

- 8 Institutions will be invited to participate in a formal consultation exercise in early 2020. This will include proposals on the development of the UIF approach and potential revisions to the funding model.
- 9 Please email your return to uifreview@sfc.ac.uk by **Monday 17 June 2019**.

Further information

- 10 For further information please contact me or Fiona Bates, Policy/Analysis Officer (Direct line: 0131 313 6609; email: fbates@sfc.ac.uk).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'KM', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Keith McDonald
Assistant Director, Research & Innovation

(Direct line: 0131 313 6674; email: kmcdonald@sfc.ac.uk)

Annex

SFC survey on University Innovation Fund approach

The SFC is reviewing the new University Innovation Fund (UIF) approach and funding model over 2019-2020. A UIF Review Group has been established by SFC's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee (RKEC) to assist with this and is seeking initial information on how the new UIF approach is viewed within institutions and how the planning, management and measurement are undertaken to help deliver against the UIF outcomes. This will complement the existing evidence available to the UIF Review Group which includes SFC outcome agreement information.

Responses should be concise (up to 250 words per question), containing key points, tangibles and evidence where possible. Where challenges are identified, institutions are encouraged to suggest methods/mechanisms for overcoming these in the future. The case study should be no more than 500 words in length.

A single institutional submission is requested.

Response form

Institution: Robert Gordon University

Contact name: Donella Beaton, Director of Business and Economic Development

Contact details: Telephone: 01226262038 or 0774716113. E-mail: d.beaton1@rgu.ac.uk

Purpose
Please describe what your institution considers UIF to be for and how widely this is understood.
<p>We understand that UIF is to maximise the value that can be returned to the university and the Scottish economy from our research and knowledge base, working collaboratively with other HEIs and Scottish agencies and through the design and adoption of innovative practices.</p> <p>The UIF plan is shared with the Senior Management Group (SMG) and from this year, a year-end report will also be shared with SMG. Progress with key elements of the UIF plan implementation is also reported via quarterly updates of the Business Plan to the Executive and Board of Governors.</p> <p>When money is allocated, it is identified as UIF support with the recipient. This helps to generate true understanding of the value and helps align activity with the desired outcomes</p>

of the UIF.

Please describe how your institution ensures UIF is targeted at delivering the published UIF outcomes.

The UIF plan is drafted, with key activities identified against each of the seven UIF Outcomes, by the Director of Business and Economic Development (BAED) for the consideration and approval of the Principal and the Vice Principal for Research. The funding is then allocated, following discussion among these three individuals to ensure that it is appropriately targeted. A running report on UIF spend and outputs is managed by the University's Commercial and Research Finance Manager and monitored by the Director of Business and Economic Development, against the UIF plan.

Management and Planning

Please describe how your institution plans its UIF allocation and how well plans are understood across the institution. Are there any challenges to effective planning with the way UIF is allocated by the SFC?

The university plans its UIF allocation by considering the RGU strategy, UIF progress achieved through the previous year and the UIF plan for the coming year. The decision on what initiatives to support is taken following discussion between the Principal, Vice Principal for Research and the Director of Business and Economic Development and this decision is shared with the Senior Management Group.

There are no real challenges to effective planning other than trying to prioritise spend effectively so that maximum value can be secured from the value of the allocation received. The uplift received in 2018-19 significantly boosted the university's ability to undertake ambitious and innovative activities to address the key UIF outcomes, one of which is captured within the case study.

As the university grows its activity, generating real economic development value for the university, the region and the country, the challenge will be maintaining and growing this activity within current resource limits. This is a particular issue for a university like RGU, where the UIF resource is lower than for most universities but where the university is delivering success against each of the key UIF outcomes. We would propose that the SFC considers a different mechanism for UIF distribution, one that rewards best practice and significant outcomes.

Please describe how your annual UIF allocation is managed within overall budgets in order to support delivery of your UIF plans.

A portion of the spend is allocated within core budget to cover the cost of the team which most directly delivers on the plan; a second portion is allocated to key positions identified within the plan; and a third is distributed to support key initiatives identified within the plan. The university itself also invests significantly within these areas.

Each RGU recipient of funding is required to report on its use and the progress achieved against the relevant UIF outcome(s).

Some spend may also be allocated to shared activity identified by the RCDG.

Collaboration

How does the new UIF collaborative framework (in addition to your Platform and Outcome Grant) help deliver your institution's KE strategy?

The framework encourages rigour in ensuring that a collaborative approach is actively considered when an idea originates at our own institution but can gain leverage and benefit from collaboration with others.

RGU also benefits from shared learning through collaborative activities originating through RCDG, its subgroups or through the UIF Collaboration Manager.

The university has worked closely with national agencies and employer organisations for many years. This year, RGU revised its strategy and included ***To stimulate economic development and support organisations to be more successful*** as one of its four strategic aims. To support this, RGU significantly increased its collaboration with KE-related agencies and local development organisations - an approach that is already bringing significant results with increased KTP, Innovation Centre and Innovation Voucher metrics. A particular example is where the university recently, with UIF support, appointed its first Knowledge Exchange Manager following a 12 month secondment from RGU to Interface.

Please identify any barriers or areas for improvement in the new collaborative approach, suggesting methods/mechanisms for overcoming these where possible.

The value of opportunity originating from within one institution, where there is potential for collaboration or continuous improvement with other HEIs; or the value of opportunity from working with non-HEI related public bodies as identified within the UIF outcomes descriptions, should not be underestimated. Although these organisations and this approach

are listed under each UIF outcome, there may not be sufficient opportunity to share best practice with other HEIs within the current structures for collaboration and information exchange. It is proposed that increased opportunities for sharing are explored.

It is more challenging for HEIs with smaller UIF allocations to maximise their involvement in shared activity such as RCDG subgroups, given their more limited staff resource. This limits the value they can receive from, but also the value that they can bring to, other HEIs.

Case study

The UIF Review Group would welcome at least one case study to help the group understand an outcome or impact which UIF has helped to support.

Outcome four (entrepreneurialism): Scottish HEIs as a sector will have made a significant and positive change in the way entrepreneurial opportunities are promoted and delivered to students, HEI staff, and businesses.

Through the support of UIF, RGU seconded staff from the Business and Economic Development Team to join the Vice Principal for Commercial and Regional Innovation to create an Entrepreneurship and Innovation Group (EIG) in August 18. From a virtual standing start, the team built a vibrant entrepreneurial community at RGU for students, staff, alumni, businesses and the wider community. Activities have included an award-winning accelerator programme, master-classes, a creative accelerator, company workshops and a new mentors network.

The first RGU Startup Accelerator program, supported by the Wood Foundation, opened for applications in September 2018. 4,500 students participated in an 'Introduction to Entrepreneurship' drive in Autumn 18, following which 160 teams applied to join the accelerator and the first cohort of 25 startup teams, made-up of RGU and North East Scotland College staff, students and alumni, started in January 19. The programme culminated in a #Start Up Sunday event in May 19 where teams pitched for additional investment, with over 200 attendees.

Eight out of the eleven RGU Schools were represented in the Accelerator, illustrating the effectiveness of the campaign to promote entrepreneurship to all. 40% of the startup teams have female founders.

In addition to the Accelerator, EIG ran a number of other initiatives to create a vibrant

entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystem within one year:

- RGU Intellectual Property policy revised in October 18 to encourage start-ups
- 26 Innovation Skills workshops delivered to 572 participants
- 10 Innovation Masterclasses by industry leaders, to 578 attendees
- Aberdeen Innovation Mentors group set up - now with 36 members
- Bespoke 4-week Entrepreneurship Advancement Programme (EAP) delivered to 55 participants
- First Creative Accelerator launched in May 19 with 12 teams, directly supported by UIF - addressing outcomes four and six

RGU was delighted to gain recognition for this work when it won the Herald Education Award for "Outstanding Business Engagement in Universities" in June 19.

Other success included 41 RGU applications (18 in 2018/19) being submitted to SIE Fresh Awards with two winning awards. One of RGU's incubator tenants was awarded a place on OGTC's international TechX Pioneers programme in March 19, one of only 10 selected from 200 applications. RGU also collaborates to increase take-up of Scottish initiatives including Converge Challenge, Scottish Edge and RSE Enterprise Fellowships.

A key focus for 2019/20 will be the rollout of entrepreneurship and innovation activity with local businesses. This is now being promoted by the RGU Vice Principal for Commercial and Regional Innovation through delivery of lectures and workshops for companies, government agencies and trade associations.

These initiatives have been delivered through collaboration with a number of partners and by drawing on expertise throughout the university and the wider region. Without the support of the UIF, along with the Wood Foundation and Opportunity North East, these initiatives could not have progressed. RGU would be happy to share its experiences with other HEIs.

Thank you for completing this survey.