

Research Excellence Grant and Research Postgraduate Grant responses

Date / time response submitted	12/01/2022 12:18
In what capacity are you submitting your response?	Organisation
Your organisation (if applicable)	
Your full name	
Telephone	
Email	
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?	If there is a delay in the implementation of REF2021 results - until academic year 2023-24 - we would welcome an announcement of indicative REG allocations as soon as possible (after the issuing of REF results) in order to plan effectively for the current REF cycle, which will already be 18-months underway by summer 2022. This current REF period requires much more careful planning than previous cycles because of the impacts of the global pandemic on research productivity. A delay in announcing indicative allocations could be particularly problematic when also balancing mitigations for Covid-related impacts on research and researchers since March 2020. Should changes to REG be implemented as planned in AY 2022-23, institutions will have reduced capacity to manage potential volatility (see Question 2), due to the very limited time to plan for any resulting reductions, where applicable. There would therefore be a correspondingly greater need for mitigation actions, such as staged implementation.
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?	Where downward changes are an outcome of REF2021, these should be implemented and managed in a staged and transparent manner to enable individual HEIs to plan resource use and investment effectively. If changes are implemented from 2022-23 - given that REF results will not be known until May 22 - then the need to phase-in changes will be greater.
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.	Covid has significantly impacted equalities in relation to research opportunity, capability and capacity, with a good deal of research emerging to evidence the impacts on women researchers with caring responsibilities in particular. The full implications of these inequalities won't be felt for several years, after a generation of research has been depleted or lost. We would welcome coordinated nation-wide plans and support measures to help the worst effected recover from the impacts of the pandemic. In addition, potential downward changes in REG could have a disproportionate effect on early career

	researchers and people from other groups which are under-represented in senior research positions.
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?	It is important that Scotland maintains an approach to underpinning research funding that enables our HEIs to operate on a level playing field with counterparts in the rest of the UK, particularly given our lower potential to cross-subsidise research through fees income. As noted in the consultation paper, Scottish and other UK institutions largely apply for the same competitive research funding within the dual support system, and thus our institutions need to be able to provide equivalent (or better) infrastructure and resources for researchers in order to increase grant funded investment in Scotland, and our ability to support elements that are not 100% fully economically costed. Improving the value of grants won by Scottish HEIs will increase our collective capacity to contribute fully to Scottish policy priorities, including by working closely with academic institutions and other partners in Scotland.
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 would be open to a modest rebalancing of these two elements, to increase support for PGR training and environment in order to strengthen future research to achieve Scotland's research ambitions - particularly if any such change could be enhanced by additional, good quality post-doctoral opportunities to ensure that early career researchers are retained within the academic and other sectors in Scotland.
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 clarity of the two proposed REG principles, particularly in relation to the transparency of the allocation method, and the aim of supporting excellent research across Scotland's HEIs.
Q7. What are your views on whether the current quality weightings for 3* and 4* REF scores are fit for purpose?	We strongly agree with SFC's intention to avoid further significant concentration of REG funding, and to support research excellence wherever it is found, and believe that quality weightings should ultimately be calibrated to support that model. A case could be made for increased 4* weightings, closer to those used in England, but we would not support this if it resulted in reduced support for the diversity and range of good research across the Scottish sector, including the ability of smaller and less research-intensive institutions to meet sectoral benchmarks and contribute to high priority research agendas. Given that 3* research is regarded as internationally excellent, it may even be worth considering whether a slight increase in the 3* weighting could help Scotland to achieve its research ambitions more effectively.
Q8. What are your views on aligning the proportions of REGa allocated and the proportions of REF score elements?	While we appreciate the rationale for aligning the proportions of REGa allocated to REF score elements, on balance we are in favour of continuing to use the overall REF quality profile, since that does factor in each of the REF score elements in proportion, and will reduce complexity for planning and implementation.
Q9. We would welcome your views on the balance	There is a justifiable rationale for increasing the share of REG funding allocated by reference to

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.	competitive charity income (REGc), given that most awards in this grant category fund a lower proportion of full economic costs. We would request, however, that any degree of rebalancing is informed by analysis of the relative potential impacts on institutions, given differential levels of charitable funding awarded (and available) to researchers in different disciplines. We agree that the income taken into account in REGb should continue to recognise funders from outwith the dual support system. We support the proposed removal of the STEMM premium, since the additional costs of STEMM research should be reflected in the (current and forthcoming) subject weightings, and larger competitively awarded grants. We believe that the current balance between the REF-related and income-related elements of REG is broadly correct.
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 clear and appropriate to the current and changing landscape. We welcome their foregrounding of investment in collaboration and inclusivity as central to the grant's main purpose.
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.	As a small institution and a member of a Doctoral Training Partnership, we are in favour of the proposed emphasis on collaborative working to promote excellent PGR provision in Scotland, including through existing cross-institutional programmes and structures.
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.	We are receptive to the idea of RPG being linked to shared outcomes and objectives, and believe this could support ongoing enhancement of our provision, but with the strong caveat that the scale and range of expectations are not unduly burdensome and are proportionate to the size and capacity of each institution, including in relation to the level of RPG received. We are in favour of accountability for use of RPG, but stress that the risk for smaller institutions of overly complex reporting against standards and targets is that a disproportionate level of research funding (compared to larger institutions) must be invested in the resources and infrastructure required to meet reporting obligations, leaving less to invest in supporting research itself - so achieving an appropriate balance will be crucial.
Q12a. We are seeking views on how the RPG could	We support the ambition to improve participation of underrepresented groups within Scotland's PGR

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.	community. National Impact Framework objectives linked to RPG could go some way to establishing and promoting good practice among HEIs (for instance, in terms of recruitment practices and student support) that helps to improve representation. Any such measures should ideally be aligned, coherently, with initiatives at earlier degree stages, to increase the pipeline of potential applicants who have had the opportunity to progress to PGR level. Scarcity of appropriate funding, however, remains a major barrier to participation among some groups, and smaller institutions have limited capacity to address this directly through RPG or other internal resources. Access to studentship funding (additional to PGR), which is prioritised (fairly) for underrepresented applicants, would accelerate progress. (■■■■ has in the past allocated formula GCRF to similar ends.)
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.	We support the ambition to improve participation of underrepresented groups within Scotland's PGR community. National Impact Framework objectives linked to RPG could go some way to establishing and promoting good practice among HEIs (for instance, in terms of recruitment practices and student support) that helps to improve representation. Any such measures should ideally be aligned, coherently, with initiatives at earlier degree stages, to increase the pipeline of potential applicants who have had the opportunity to progress to PGR level. Scarcity of appropriate funding, however, remains a major barrier to participation among some groups, and smaller institutions have limited capacity to address this directly through RPG or other internal resources. Access to studentship funding (additional to PGR), which is prioritised (fairly) for underrepresented applicants, would accelerate progress. (■■■■ has in the past allocated formula GCRF to similar ends.)
Other comments	
Q13. Please make any other comments relevant to this consultation.	It is vital that any adjustments made to the allocation method for REG take into account the capacity of small institutions and those with limited alternative resources to manage potential changes in funding and any associated requirements for implementation and reporting, and that in that respect expectations are proportionate. We support SFC's position that HEIs should be entrusted to invest core research grants - for the intended purposes - as most appropriate to institutional context and objectives. Continuing clear guidance from SFC on the baseline standards and benchmarks that all HEIs are expected to achieve in terms of research culture/environment/infrastructure, however, will remain extremely valuable, and can help institutions to make optimal investment decisions internally.
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 EXCLUDING the organisation name.
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