

## **SFC's Research Strategy**

- This paper presents a draft SFC Research Strategy (2017-18) for approval.
- It also summarises issues suggested by SFC's Research and Knowledge Exchange Committee's (RKEC's) Research Excellence Working Group (RExWG) for consideration in the development of SFC's next Strategic Plan for 2018 onwards and any associated Research Strategy.

## **Recommendations**

- Consider the draft SFC Research Strategy (2017-18).
- Agree that this should be adopted and published.
- Note the developing range of issues under debate for the Research elements of its next Strategic Plan.

## **Financial implications**

- No immediate financial implications



## SFC's Research Strategy

### Purpose

1. This paper presents a draft SFC Research Strategy (2017-18) for approval.
2. It also summarises issues suggested by SFC RKEC's Research Excellence Working Group (RExWG) for consideration in the development of SFC's next Strategic Plan for 2018 onwards and any associated Research Strategy.

### Strategic Plan implications

3. This draft Research Strategy (2017-18) provides further detail on the potential implementation of the SFC's Strategic Plan outcome on "World-leading Research".

### Background

4. In January 2016, the SFC Board agreed that renewed emphasis should be placed by SFC on research excellence and its value to Scotland, and invited RKEC to pursue this work (SFC/16/05). The development of a research strategy, particularly that for 2018 onwards, will express the ambition supported in that discussion.
5. In July 2016, Audit Scotland published an *Audit of Higher Education in Scottish Universities*<sup>1</sup>. Its recommendations include:

*"The SFC should ensure it has strategies for research and innovation that set out clearly:*

- *what the SFC's aims and objectives are for these areas*
- *how it plans to achieve its aims and objectives*
- *how performance will be measured*
- *align with the outcomes and activities in the SFC's new strategic plan and Scotland's Economic Strategy"*

*"The SFC has strategies for research and innovation, but these now need reviewed to ensure they fully align with the SFC's new strategic plan and Scotland's Economic Strategy."*

6. RKEC established a Research Excellence Working Group to provide support "in the development and delivery of SFC's strategy for research excellence". This met first in August 2016. Over four meetings, the RExWG has refined the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2016/nr\\_160707\\_higher\\_education.pdf](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/uploads/docs/report/2016/nr_160707_higher_education.pdf)

parameters of an immediate statement of SFC's Research Strategy, and the scope and style of a future statement.

7. A version of this paper was considered by the joint meeting of SFC's RKEC and Universities Scotland's RKEC on 9 May 2017 and by SFC's RKEC itself on 1 June 2017. The draft Research Strategy at Annex A incorporates comments made at those meetings.

### **Research Strategy 2017-18**

8. Any statement of SFC Research Strategy should be consistent with SFC's live Strategic Plan. SFC's current [Strategic Plan](#) runs from 2015-18. The proposed Research Strategy 2017-18 (Annex A) is therefore structured around the research elements contained within that Strategic Plan.
9. Further detail has been provided on proposed actions under:
  - i Research competitiveness
  - ii Research training
  - iii International connections
10. RKEC has commented on and recommended the draft Research Strategy 2017-18 to Council.
11. The Council is asked to consider the proposed draft (2017-18) for adoption and publication.

### **Research Strategy 2018-21**

12. Annex B briefly summarises the issues which have been covered in discussion of a future Research Strategy by the Research Excellence Working Group. These issues have also been considered by SFC's RKEC and shared at the joint meeting with Universities Scotland's RKEC.
13. To support Council's development of its next Strategic Plan (starting from September 2017) there will be further discussion by RExWG of priorities which might be included in SFC's next Strategic Plan, in the autumn. It is also anticipated that, as recommended by Audit Scotland, the 2018-21 Strategic Plan will be supplemented by a more extensive Research Strategy. These would be developed in parallel.
14. The Council is asked to note the developing range of issues under debate for the Research elements of its next Strategic Plan.

### **Risk assessment**

15. Low risk.

16. The proposed research strategy (2017-18) is structured by the current SFC Strategic Plan. Both the current Strategic Plan and the proposed research strategy (2017-18) were subject to consultation – in the case of the research strategy, through inviting comment from Universities Scotland’s RKEC.
17. Developments of research strategy beyond 2018 are at an early stage. They therefore present a low risk at this point.

### **Equality and diversity assessment**

18. A strategy which guides SFC’s actions in support of the Scottish research base has significant potential to affect participation by protected groups in Scotland’s research endeavour, and the impact of Scottish research on these groups. The executive will seek to embed the advancement of equality and diversity within the new activities arising from the AY 2017-18 Research Strategy and will undertake detailed equality and diversity impact assessments prior to implementation. An overarching equality and diversity impact assessment will be undertaken before the subsequent Research Strategy is finalised.
19. SFC Equality Outcomes<sup>2</sup> relevant to this approach are:
  - Understand the diversity of college and university staff, management and governing bodies leading to specific Equality Outcomes for improvement by AY 2017-18.
  - An improved and aligned evidence base for equality, informed by increased rates of disclosure across protected characteristics.
  - Advancement in the mainstreaming of equality and diversity within colleges and universities within the outcome agreement process.
20. Issues to be considered in undertaking the equality and diversity assessments include:
  - The SFC’s commitment to embedding equality and diversity in the design and implementation of the research strategy, in order to ensure the ready participation of all available talent in the drive to make Scotland “the best place in the world ... to research ...”.
  - The significant influence of the Research Excellence Framework and its peer review processes on our use of funds to support research excellence in Scotland’s universities and therefore the need to ensure equality and diversity considerations are built into these structures.

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<sup>2</sup> SFC Equality Outcomes for AY2017-21 have been published in the [Scottish Funding Council Mainstreaming and Equality Outcome Report](#) (pp. 44-49). The Equality Outcomes set out in this paper are those of particular relevance to the SFC’s Research Strategy.

- The contribution already made by previous equality and diversity assessments in designing current funding policies mechanisms (including Research Excellence Grant, Research Postgraduate Grant and Strategic Funding), the potential to review these and the need to ensure an appropriate contribution to future new approaches.
- The need to examine and collect evidence on equality and diversity both in initial assessment of potential impacts and in monitoring and evaluation of implementation.

### **Recommendations**

21. The Council is invited to:

- Consider the draft SFC Research Strategy (2017-18).
- Agree that this should be adopted and published.
- Note the developing range of issues under debate for the Research elements of its next Strategic Plan.

### **Financial implications**

22. While an agreed research strategy will influence SFC research policies and funding decisions flowing from these, no direct funding decisions are proposed at this stage.

### **Publication**

23. This paper will be published on the Council website and the annex will be withheld from publication under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002, Section 27, material intended for future publication.

### **Further information**

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