



Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers



Overview

- About the Scottish Funding Council
- Support for PGRs, research culture and collaboration
- Setting up the SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers





About SFC



Our ambition

To make Scotland an outstanding place to **learn, educate, research and innovate** – now and for the future.

Our purpose

To sustain a world-leading system of **education, research and innovation** that enables students to flourish, changes lives for the better, and supports social, economic and environmental wellbeing and prosperity.



What we do

We invest around £2 billion of public money each year to deliver:

- Tertiary learning and teaching
- Skills and apprenticeships
- Student support and participation
- **Core research funding**
- Innovation and knowledge exchange
- Data collection and dissemination
- National quality assurance and enhancement processes
- New and upgraded physical buildings and campus estate
- Essential digital infrastructure and collective procurement for the sector
- **Strategic change, responsive provision and research priorities**



PHOTO: PERTH COLLEGE UHI



Support for postgraduate research students

SFC allocates the **Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG)** to universities to invest in the environment for high quality research training and development (£37m in 23/24)

- Long term, stable source of funding for institutions
- Institutions use RPG funding flexibly to develop and support PGR training as best fits their individual circumstances.
- Allocation is based on PGR enrolment numbers



SFC support for research culture

A few examples:

- **Research culture statements** collected as part of annual Outcome Agreements (OA) process.
- **Signatory to the Researcher Development and Research Integrity Concordats**, setting out expectations for institutions about their alignment with both concordats via OA guidance.
- **Working with the Equality and Human Rights Commission** – in 2023 SFC published the report and associated action plan *Tackling persistent inequalities together*.



**THE CONCORDAT
TO SUPPORT
RESEARCH
INTEGRITY**

Support for collaboration in Scotland



- Scottish universities have a strong collaborative ethos.
- SFC provides support for collaborations in a range of ways.
- We know there is appetite to work collaboratively in the research culture space.
- We are currently exploring ways in which we can support this.

We recommend developing better ways to support the postgraduate research student experience by:

a) Introducing greater accountability from institutions for our Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG).

b) Restating the purpose of the RPG to include support for postgraduates to acquire the skills to develop careers in or outside of academia, and to support collaboration between universities in areas of researcher support and development.

Background to the advisory group...

SFC's 2021/22 Research Postgraduate Grant Consultation explored issues relating to:

- RPG principles and accountability
- Cross institutional collaboration and coordination around PGR training and support
- How SFC could play an increased role in improving participation of underrepresented groups
- Widening access and participation within a PGR context

Consultation answers revealed the need to undertake more work in this space.



... and why we set it up as we did



Representation across
Scottish institutions,
research pools and graduate
schools



Different voices – “not the
normal suspects”



Link to wider sector
discussions – e.g. UKRI
representative



Collaborative approach –
e.g. co-chairs

SFC Advisory Group Membership

Dr Kay Guccione (Chair)
Prof Nick Fyfe (Chair)
Frances Burstow (UKRI)
Prof Maxwell Chipulu
Prof Iain Docherty
Dr Alison Hughes (Pool)
Katrina Gardner
Dr Vicky Ingram (Pool)
Aerin Lai (PGR, UCU)
Dr Lucy Leiper
Dr Sandra Oza

Prof Lydia Plowman (SGSSS)
Mengxing Ma (PGR)
Dr Anindya Raychaudhuri
Prof Michael Rayner
Prof Eleanor Shaw
Prof Claire Squires (SGSAH)
Prof Bonnie Steves
Kirsty Woomble
Dr Charlotte Matheson (SFC)
Dr Cat Ball (SFC)

SFC Advisory Group – Agreed Terms of Reference

- To provide SFC with expert advice on the purpose and future accountability approach for SFC's Research Postgraduate Grant (RPG);
- To consider a Scottish response to UK developments in the postgraduate researcher (PGR) landscape, including, but not limited to, through the activity above and by supporting the implementation of SFC's broader Review recommendations relating to PGRs;
- To provide SFC with expert advice on how we build our evidence base to inform the directions we take to support and champion postgraduate researchers, including their training and development, in Scotland.

SFC Advisory Group – Expected Outputs of the Group

- Development of a set of sector-agreed recommended **principles regarding the purpose and future accountability approach for RPG**, to inform potential changes to the RPG formula and future reporting requirements;
- Recommendations regarding **future collaborative work within the PGR space** that is informed by UK and Scottish sector developments within this area, based on SFC Review recommendations and the changing UK landscape; and
- Advice for SFC to shape the focus of **evidence gathering and the commissioning of analysis** that explores how we can better support and champion PGRs, including their training and development, in Scotland.

SFC Advisory Group – Highlights of Meeting 1, September 2022

- Group remit and housekeeping (boundary setting, Code of Conduct, definitions; collaborative approach agreed; open approach preferred; single approach rejected)
- Surfacing of the key issues currently facing postgraduate researchers in Scotland (cost of living, precarity, mental health, PGR diversity, connection and belonging, position and power)
- Key markers of success for the group (creative thinking; strong connections between SFC and PGR issues; a cultural approach avoiding deficit models; strong evaluation of development activities; reporting that adds value, not workload).



SFC Advisory Group – Highlights of Meeting 2, December 2022

Principles for SFC's Research Postgraduate Grant

What can we learn from Scottish PGR experience surveys, New Deal for PGRs, UKCGE Supervisor Survey etc to inform priorities for the funding?

Links to REF, Concordats and Agreements, Supervisory Practice – aligned agendas and whole-culture outcomes welcomed.

How is the RPG currently being utilised?

Utility of principles as an identifier of collaboration opportunities welcomed.

Parity of funding received, and reporting workload (by number of PGRs).

Links to practice sharing, dual purpose impact reporting welcomed.

What data/initiatives fall under 'EDI for PGRs?'

RPG Accountability and Reporting

Institutional targets, sector-wide themes, or a mix?

The role of funder review, and of peer review.

Restrictiveness of metrics versus labour-intensiveness of case studies.

Proportionate workload. Reporting cycle frequency. The Outcome Agreement.

How/when to involve/communicate with PGRs.

Reducing competition, promoting collaboration.

What does a value-added model for accountability look like?

SFC Advisory Group – Highlights of Meeting 3, March 2023



Key Item 1. How is the RPG currently being utilised?

Complex and varied internal funding structures. Wide variety of uses: staffing, training, projects, stipends, facilities. All institutions topped up RPG with other funding to support PGRs.

Key Item 2. What does a value-added model for accountability look like?

Enhancement-led. Outcome Agreement as a basis, shaped with Concordat and/or UKRI Statement of Expectation language. Difference in Concordats/Agreements signatory status. Untangling shared PGR/Research Staff Development data. Sensitivity to PGRs who are also staff. The role of PGRs in reporting – may not see the big picture.

Key Item 3. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Evidence gathering

Varied projects and commitments to EDI projects. Data capture, at a nascent stage across the board. Systems/tech as a barrier to data-informed practice. Do we really need more data, or do we need to take action?

SFC Advisory Group – Highlights of Meeting 4, June 2023

- **Update on UKRI work on New Deal for PGRs and widening access** – key findings from responses to the New Deal Call for Input and next steps, collective talent funding, UKRI work on socio-economic status of funded PGR students
- **Building our evidence base on PGR EDI** – what evidence do institutions currently collect and what kinds of further evidence gathering from SFC might add value?
- **RPG accountability and principles** – recommendations for SFC to take forward around accountability and a value-added approach, allowing for shared good practice and collaboration across universities

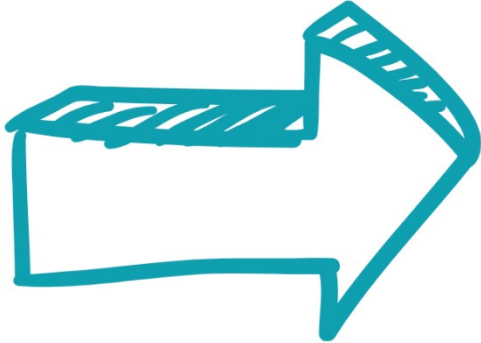


SFC Advisory Group – A key question of PGR EDI for you (10min, in groups)



- What EDI data/information do you collect related to the PGR experience?
- What specific EDI initiatives do you run for PGRs?
- What are the challenges or pitfalls of EDI work on the PGR experience?
- The aim of this activity is to amplify practice.
- But you can capture any salient points you wish to share, in your own words, on the padlet.

SFC Advisory Group on Supporting Scotland's Postgraduate Researchers – What's next?



- Meetings in October and November 2023, January 2024
- RPG accountability outcomes communicated following SFC RKEC meeting in August
- Further outcomes of the group communicated following final meeting in 2024 – timing dependent on nature of recommended actions



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