



PRESS RELEASE

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For attention of: Education Correspondents, news desks

Cut to university research funding see Scotland's "world class" universities as victims of their own success

Allocations of the Scottish Funding Council's main research grants for higher education institutions were announced today (6 March). The announcement confirms a much-feared cut of £12.9 million to funds available for university research next year. Several individual universities will lose millions in funding despite returning their strongest performance in "world-leading" research as confirmed by the Research Excellence Framework (REF) only two months ago.

Universities only receive public funding for research judged to be "world leading" or "international excellent" (work rated 4* and 3*) according to a formula calculated by the Scottish Funding Council. As the REF judged a greater proportion of the work submitted by all eighteen of Scotland's universities¹ to be at the highest levels of excellence, a smaller total pot of funding must now be shared more thinly across a greater number of institutions with high levels of 3* and 4* research.

The Universities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, Dundee and Aberdeen are all set to lose more than a million pounds in research funding because of the funding constraints. The Glasgow School of Art will also see a significant drop in its research funding. Other universities, with particular areas of research excellence including Queen Margaret University and the University of the Highlands and Islands produced stellar results in the 2014 REF, rocketing up UK league tables for research performance. They have been rewarded for their significant progress with meagre increases of only £128,000 and £400,000 respectively.

Whilst the funding announcement comes as no surprise it is disappointing to the higher education sector particularly as it comes in the same week at the Scottish Government's refreshed Economic Strategy which put a priority on innovation and recognised the role that universities can play in Scotland's economic growth. The document said that: "*investing in Scotland's universities, supporting their world-class and high-impact research... is at the heart of the Scottish Government's ambitions for Scotland.*"²

Universities will be looking for reconsideration of the cut to research funding in the next spending review.

Responding to the funding allocations Professor Pete Downes, Convener of Universities Scotland and Principal at the University of Dundee, said:

¹ OU in Scotland treated as a UK institution for the purposes of the REF

² <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Economy/EconomicStrategy>

“It is incredibly disheartening to go from such a high in December and a feeling of great pride when our universities were confirmed as world-class and as delivering outstanding impact for Scotland through their research, to today’s funding allocations which confirm that many will lose out and there is no scope to build on that success. It’s very difficult not to feel like universities have become victims of their own success.

“We have a fantastic asset here in the quality of our research. Scotland should be investing in its strengths. The quality of our basic research links to our nation’s innovation potential, to business growth, to inward investment and ultimately plays a significant role in Scotland’s strategy for economic growth. Universities are hungry for the chance to maximise their contribution to Scotland’s economy and the REF showed we’re more than up to the task so for our funding to slip into reverse at a time when the evidence points to the opposite is a missed opportunity.

We hope the Scottish Government will be open to talking to us about this and that something can be done in the next set of spending decisions taken this summer.”

Across the sector all 18 of Scotland’s higher education institutions were found in the REF exercise to undertake world-class research with the total proportion of research at world-class and internationally excellent levels increasing from 52 per cent the last time this exercise was conducted in 2008 to 77 per cent in 2014.

Scottish universities out-performed England when it came to being judged on the impact of their research, whether that impact was economic, social or cultural. 85.8 per cent of Scottish research was judged to be at 4* and 3* - levels which means the research has had “outstanding” or “very considerable” impact compared to the UK average of 83.9 per cent.

Examples of the impact of research in Scotland’s universities includes:

- New computer algorithms for the life-saving matching of kidney donors with recipients by the University of Glasgow.
- Geochemical research at the University of St Andrews has helped to combat the global trade in illicit tobacco and its major consequences for health with a major contribution to the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control policies.
- Dundee University’s research on spacecraft technology has led to the SpaceWire standard which is being used in many spacecraft by space organisations around the world.
- University of Edinburgh’s work to develop technologies based on XML (Extensible Markup Language) to enable the online experiences like ebay and BBC online that are so much part of the fabric of our daily lives.
- The University of the Highlands and Islands has undertaken research which has helped protecting Europe’s waters from Eutrophication.
- Queen Margaret University Edinburgh’s strength in speech sciences research has led to the commercial development of technologies and instruments which can diagnose and treat speech disorders.

Today’s announcement by the Scottish Funding Council only includes information on the Research Excellence Grant (REG) and does not calculate the impact of the loss of the Global Excellence Grant, which has been cut entirely and which had been worth £14 million to universities in 2013/14 and 2014/15. The table below shows the impact of REG reallocations and the loss of the Global Excellence Grant on institutions.

Today's announcement is the first of three-years of phased changes to Research Excellence Grant allocations. Further cuts in individual institutions' REG allocations are programmed for 2016/17 and 2017/18.

ENDS

Further information:

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Notes:

- The Scottish Funding Council's indicative funding decisions for the Research Excellence Grant for AY 2015-16 to AY 2017-18 can be found here: <http://www.sfc.ac.uk/communications/Announcements/2015/SFCAN062015.aspx>
- The SFC document includes no reference to the Global Excellence Fund and so overlooks the impact that the loss of this grant will have on institutions. The table below includes this.
- Since 2013 universities have received research funding in the form of two grants allocated by formula; the Research Excellence Grant, worth around £240 million and the much smaller Global Excellence Grant, worth £14 million. Allocations for next year see the Research Excellence Grant increase by 0.5 per cent but the Global Excellence Grant cut entirely. This results in a total decrease of £12.9 million in research funding available to universities in 2015/16 relative to 2014/15.
- The table below shows the difference in funding universities will receive for blue-skies research in 2015/16 compared to 2014/15 as a result of REG reallocations and the loss of Global Excellence Grant.

Institution	Total funding for blue-skies research in 2014-15 (Research Excellence & Global Excellence)	Total funding for blue-skies research in 2015/16 (Research Excellence Grant ONLY)	Change in blue-skies funding between 2014/15 and 2015/16	Change in % terms
	£m	£m	£	%
Aberdeen University	22.4	20.8	-£1,560,000	-7.0
Abertay University	0.6	0.6	-	2.5
Dundee University	21.9	20.4	-£1,460,000	-6.7
Edinburgh Napier	1.7	1.6	-£100,000	-2.2
Edinburgh University	89.1	81.4	-£7,700,000	-8.6
Glasgow Caledonian University	2.0	2.1	£100,000	9.0
Glasgow School of Art	2.0	1.6	-£390,000	-19.3
Glasgow University	47.3	45.3	-£2,400,000	-4.3
Heriot-Watt University	10.6	10.7	100,000	0.8

University of the Highlands and Islands	1.4	1.9	£440,000	30.8
Queen Margaret University Edinburgh	0.4	0.5	£130,000	32.7
Robert Gordon University	2.0	1.7	-£330,000	-16.2
Royal Conservatoire of Scotland	0.2	0.2	£20,000	11.4
SRUC	0.0	1.2	£1,180,000	
St Andrews University	18.9	17.7	-£1,290,000	-6.8
Stirling University	5.7	5.9	£240,000	4.3
Strathclyde University	17.5	17.1	-£450,000	-2.6
University of the West of Scotland	1.0	1.1	£120,000	11.8
Total Sector	244.7	231.8	-£12,860,000	-5.3

Figures may not sum exactly due to rounding.