

Professor John Sizer CBE  
Chief Executive  
Scottish Higher Education Funding Council  
Donaldson House  
97 Haymarket Terrace  
Edinburgh  
EH12 5HD

tel +44 020 7451 2658  
fax +44 020 7451 2692  
[www.royalsoc.ac.uk](http://www.royalsoc.ac.uk)

*From the Physical Secretary and Vice-President Professor JE Enderby CBE FRS*

6 March 2001

## **SHEFC REVIEW OF RESEARCH POLICY AND FUNDING: SECOND STAGE CONSULTATION**

Thank you for your letter of 8 January addressed to the President, with which you enclosed a copy of your Council's Review of Research Policy and Funding.

The Royal Society has already responded to the earlier exercise carried out by HEFCE, and I enclose a copy of this response (statement 13/00). As you will see, the Society believes that many of the issues discussed in the HEFCE document and in the Society's response are relevant across the UK and I highlight some of these in the remainder of this letter. References to paragraphs in statement 13/00 are given in parenthesis.

The Society notes that the bulk of HE Funding Councils' research funding is currently used to support academic staff salaries while they are undertaking research, although it is also used to provide and maintain research buildings and equipment and some support staff. It believes that it is important to provide local management with the flexibility to develop their institution's research capabilities within the context of their overall mission, with a clear understanding of how their success or failure will impact on their future funding.

### **Main Quality Research Grant (3, 10, 13 - 15, 17, 18)**

The Society reaffirms its strong support for the Dual Support system and its view that the criterion for the distribution of research funding should be research excellence. It believes that the current level of selectivity is broadly correct and it would be concerned if the resources

associated with departments rated 3b and 3a were to be reduced significantly to protect those rated 5 and 5\*. The Society recognises that SHEFC is considering making some compensating arrangements for 3 rated departments, and that this may be easier to implement with the smaller number of institutions in Scotland compared with England. Nevertheless, this is an issue that your Council should explore very carefully before removing the formula support associated with such departments. The proposed level of funding via these special arrangements is less than a quarter of the current level of funding for 3 rated departments, and the Council should consider what effect this might have on the diversity and development of research within Scotland.

At the other end of the rating scale, the Society would support the suggestion that, after RAE 2001, the Council should provide a premium to 5\* rated departments.

### **Research Infrastructure (31,32)**

The maintenance and development of research infrastructure are crucial. This includes the funding of appropriate support staff often with scarce skills, just as much as the maintenance and development of capital facilities. In determining future strategy post the Joint Infrastructure Fund, SHEFC should work towards developing a long-term solution to the maintenance of a satisfactory infrastructure base. This could well include earmarking an element within the main quality research grant for infrastructure.

### **Research Development Funding (24 – 32)**

The Society argues in its response to HEFCE that the number of special funding streams should be kept to a minimum to reduce the burden on universities. It recognises, however, that the small number of institutions in Scotland increases the net benefits that can be achieved with such funding. As indicated above, the Society is concerned about the possibility of replacing QR funding for 3 rated departments with a Research Development Foundation Grant scheme.

### **People issues (33 - 38)**

The Society agrees that measures need to be taken to ensure that UK PhD education and training remain at the forefront of developing international standards, and believes that this should be a joint responsibility of the HE Funding Councils and the Research Councils, including the Arts and Humanities Research Board. It supports the need to develop standards for the training and supervision of PhD students and for consideration of how to enable smaller departments in less research intensive institutions provide an adequate environment for such students.

The Society supports the Council's encouragement of institutions to develop satisfactory human resource management within the sector, with particular reference to career development for all staff including appropriate arrangements for contract staff and technicians. As the report indicates, the direct role of the Council is limited, but it has been influential in the past in its pilot studies and dissemination of best practice. Although not particularly mentioned in the paper, the Society would wish to commend the initiatives taken by the Council on diversity issues, which have been influential across the UK.