

Fulfilling our potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice Green Paper

Response by the Wellcome Trust

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SUMMARY

The Wellcome Trust invests in the UK because of the strength of the research base in its world-class universities. We welcome the opportunities which flow from the HE Green Paper, providing that the following key points are addressed:

- The dual support system is fundamental to the success of UK science. Research-UK (R-UK) must have clearly defined mechanisms to ensure that QR block funding and Research Council grants are kept distinct.
- The Charity Research Support Fund (CRSF) must be protected as an essential element of QR, which encourages charity investment. The size of the CRSF has remained flat since 2010 while charity funding has increased.
- We welcome the Nurse recommendations and proposals to strengthen cross-Council collaboration. The 'Heads of Research Council' positions must remain attractive if R-UK is to succeed. We also have questions about how to integrate Innovate UK effectively, and the roles of the R-UK Board and Ministerial Committee.
- We welcome the focus on improved teaching in the Green Paper, but are concerned that the proposed Office for Students will not take a holistic view of a university. Apart from teaching and research, there are other essential elements, including knowledge exchange and public engagement, which must also be valued.
- Teaching and research are intrinsically linked. TEF and REF must be aligned to ensure that teaching and research are not forced into damaging competition.

Our response sets out questions that must be considered if implementation is to be successful. External, independent scrutiny will also be essential as plans develop to ensure that changes are introduced in the most effective way.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Q.6: Do you agree with the proposed approach to the TEF?

1. High-quality and inspiring teaching is essential and we support the intention of the TEF. However, its implementation must be carefully executed, and it is important to consider the impact that it might have on research activities. It would be damaging to force teaching and research into competition with each other as institutions chase different pots of money. Questions to address include:
 - a. *How will TEF and REF be aligned? We suggest, as a minimum, that TEF metrics should reward research-rich teaching, and REF should recognise the impact of research on education and training.*
 - b. *How can the additional and expensive bureaucratic burden of TEF be kept to a minimum?*

Q.18: Do you agree with the proposed changes to the higher education architecture?

2. There is a real danger that by splitting the regulation and assessment of teaching and research between the Office for Students and R-UK, other essential elements of a university will no longer be valued. Without institutional-level oversight, the achievements of a university as a whole could be seriously diminished.
3. The UK's world-class universities currently deliver a diverse range of functions: providing teaching and education to develop a skilled workforce; undertaking excellent research; supporting regional growth; tackling global challenges; and contributing to cultural and societal debate. It is this breadth of activities and the interplay between them that defines our universities.
4. If the bond between teaching and research is broken, quality, inspiration, and relevance will be lost from higher education. Researchers have a vital role to play in the teaching process — sparking the interest of the next generation, giving cutting-edge insight, contextualising learning, and building student critique into research. There are already moves across the sector to deliver this: for example, UCL's strategic priority is closing the divide between teaching and research, while a forthcoming Higher Education Academy-funded study¹ says that teaching-focused work is an intrinsic part of academic practice, and should be rewarded as such. Research-informed teaching and teaching-led research must be preserved and enhanced.
 - a. *If oversight of teaching and research functions is split between different organisations, how can a holistic overview of universities be maintained, without adding further complexity to the higher education landscape?*
 - b. *How will the Office for Students take account of the needs of others, such as businesses and employers?*
5. HEFCE supports a number of cross-cutting functions that are critical to the long-term success of the higher education system but do not fit neatly into a teaching or research box. These include knowledge exchange, public engagement, career development, diversity, and sustainable infrastructure, together with a number of essential funding schemes. Postgraduates and part-time students are also an integral part of the university system but are not mentioned in the Green Paper.
6. Questions to address include:
 - a. *How will organisations such as the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement be supported in any new structure?*
 - b. *Who will be responsible for ensuring that the principles set out in the Concordat for Engaging the Public with Research are embodied in practice?*
 - c. *How will the Higher Education Innovation Fund and the Research Partnership Investment Fund be managed in the future?*
 - d. *How will postgraduates and part-time students be considered as part of the reforms?*

Q.24: What are your views on the future design of the institutional research landscape?

7. We welcome Sir Paul Nurse's Review of Research Councils. A fully resourced and empowered R-UK could galvanise interdisciplinary research, provide strategic oversight of the science portfolio, harmonise policies, and reduce administrative pressures. R-UK should also assume responsibility for the strategy, management and long-term budgeting of large national and international cross-Council facilities such as the Diamond Light Source. However, R-UK's implementation must be carefully considered and executed,

¹Fung & Gordon (forthcoming/2016) Rewarding Educators and Education Leaders in Research-Intensive Universities

protecting the Haldane Principle. The current Research Councils make a major contribution to the UK's position as a scientific world-leader, and their role must not be diminished. Councils will be most effective if they retain the autonomy to invest rapidly (often with partners), at a significant scale, and with a long-term view. To deliver this, each organisation must have a substantial, locally-controlled budget.

- a. *What legal status will R-UK have and how will it be established (e.g. by Royal Charter or another mechanism)? Will the Research Councils retain their separate Royal Charters?*
- b. *Will primary legislation be required to dismantle the component parts of HEFCE? What are the timelines for this process?*
8. While we agree that R-UK should have a distinguished and effective leader at the helm, it is important that this should not make the role of 'Head of Research Council' less attractive. Getting this right is essential. It is critically important that Research Councils are led by high calibre, well-remunerated individuals who have an in-depth knowledge of their discipline, are respected by their community, and can champion their field. They must have budget autonomy, responsibility for peer review, the ability to hire staff, and the flexibility to act strategically. The Heads of Research Councils will require a different skillset to the R-UK Chief Executive but these positions should be viewed as a 'cohort of peers' with similar pay scales. It would be wrong to implement a tiered, overly hierarchical structure.
9. Other questions to address include:
 - a. *How will cross-Council support for interdisciplinary research be administered, how will funding be allocated, and at what level?*
 - b. *How will the Global Challenges Fund be managed and, if it is allocated only to Research Council support, will there be any implication for the QR budget?*
10. As part of the 2015 Spending Review, the Government signalled its intention to integrate Innovate UK with R-UK. We believe that this could help improve alignment between academia and industry — cross-sector collaboration is essential to ensure effective translation, and movement between the university and business sectors should be supported wherever possible. However, Innovate UK has a very different function and stakeholder base from other R-UK activities, and all of its funding is commercially focused. It will be important to consider carefully how best to integrate it so that it can still support each stage and type of commercial R&D. We invest in almost 50 spin-out companies across the UK and so would be pleased to discuss these issues further.
 - a. *How will Innovate UK's commercial focus be retained?*
 - b. *How will the conversion of some R&D grants to loans be implemented?*
11. The R-UK Board will likely play an important role in providing advice and guidance on the potential myriad of R-UK functions. It must be carefully constructed. Representatives should have a breath of expertise and be drawn from academia, industry and the charity sector, and include international expertise.
12. The Ministerial Committee, or a reconfigured Council for Science and Technology, must serve a different purpose to the R-UK Board. The Ministerial Committee could address a fundamental gap by drawing together all of the Government departments that support the research base, and facilitating joined-up, strategic thinking. It could also ensure that research is championed, understood and used at the highest levels of Government, support Ministers to set broad priorities for research investment, and identify strategic areas of importance. However, it is critical that funding decisions remain at arms-length from Government, and are informed by scientific peer review.
 - a. *How will the Ministerial Committee and R-UK Board be constructed and remain distinct? Will the Ministerial Committee have an advisory or decision-making role?*

- b. *How will the Haldane Principle be upheld, particularly in relation to any recommendations made by the Ministerial Committee?*

Q.25: What safeguards would you want to see in place in the event that dual funding was operated within a single organisation?

13. We strongly welcome the Government's commitment to the dual support system in its 2014 Science and Innovation Strategy, its 2015 Productivity Plan and again in this Green Paper. Dual support provides the foundation for this country's world-leading research base. It enables universities to act strategically, underpins vibrancy, diversity and breadth, and leverages investment from a wealth of companies and charities. If block and grant funding are to be administered by the same organisation, mechanisms must be put in place to protect their distinct principles and functions.
14. It is crucial that the dual support system is not eroded over time as a result of structural changes. There are a number of approaches the Government could take to ensure its long-term future, including: a statement of its importance in the preamble or explanatory notes tied to any new legislation relating to R-UK; a mention in a Ministerial Statement in a House of Commons debate on this issue; or a statement in the governing document of the new R-UK. In addition, any changes to the Higher Education Act or the Science and Technology Act will need external scrutiny and consultation.
- a. *What is the process for independent scrutiny and how will stakeholders, including National Academies and research charities, be consulted?*
 - b. *What is the timetable for introducing these changes and how will disruption during any period of uncertainty be minimised?*
15. Importantly, QR funding is independently allocated based on excellence and institutions have discretion over how it is invested. This must continue. It gives universities the flexibility to take strategic and long-term decisions, build capacity, support the salaries of world-leading researchers, pump-prime, and develop new opportunities to a point where they are able to bid for competitive funding.
16. We would strongly caution against any future moves to allocate QR in proportion to Research Council funding. Such a change would alter the profile of public support for science in England and skew researcher behaviour. It would be likely to increase the quantity of applications to Research Councils and drive success rates down as other funding streams become less attractive and incentives greatly favour one form of investment over all others.
17. The Charity Research Support Fund (CRSF) is an essential element of QR. It leverages charity funding and encourages donations by giving the public confidence that their money will be spent directly on research. We would like assurances that this, or an equivalent, will be protected under any new structure. The CRSF pot has flat-lined at £198 million since 2010 in England, and the equivalent support for charity research in Scotland (REGc) is particularly vulnerable. In the future, we would like to see a framework to increase these pots in-line with charity investment, along with a clear Government commitment to funding the indirect costs of charity research.
18. In our view, the current split of funding between QR and the Research Councils is broadly appropriate, and should be retained and protected in any new structure. If both are administered via R-UK, there should be clear divisions and non-transferrable budgets.

Q.27: How would you suggest the burden of REF exercises is reduced?

19. We welcome the Green Paper's commitment to REF and hope that Lord Stern's review of university research funding will help ensure that this process is working as effectively as possible. While we agree that REF should be less burdensome, it works as an independent process to recognise and reward excellence, wherever it is found. We were particularly pleased to see efforts to reward impact and diversity in REF 2014, with highly-rated outputs from early career researchers, part-time staff and those who had

taken time out for maternity leave. In the future, we would also like to see more incentive for cross-disciplinary work and collaboration between universities.

20. We are concerned that the Green Paper suggests increasing the role of metrics in future REFs. As the recent report *The Metric Tide*² concludes, metrics should support, not supplant, peer review. Individual metrics are not yet sophisticated enough to replicate the current REF process.

The Wellcome Trust is a global charitable foundation dedicated to improving health. We support bright minds in science, the humanities and the social sciences, as well as education, public engagement and the application of research to medicine. Our investment portfolio gives us the independence to support such transformative work as the sequencing and understanding of the human genome, research that established front-line drugs for malaria, and Wellcome Collection, our free venue for the incurably curious that explores medicine, life and art.

²James Wilsdon et al (2015) *The Metric Tide*
http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE/2014/Content/Pubs/Independentresearch/2015/The.Metric.Tide/2015_metric_tide.pdf