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Sir Paul Nurse
Nurse Review Secretariat
Research Councils Unit
5/ Victoria 1
Department for Business, Innovations and Skills
1 Victoria Street
London SW1H 0ET

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Dear Paul

Universities Scotland response to Nurse Review of Research Councils

As Convener of Universities Scotland, I am pleased to endorse Universities UK's response to the Nurse Review of Research Councils. I would also like to draw out some points that are of particular importance to our members.

Scotland performs well in attracting funding from Research Councils for grants, studentships and fellowships; £257m or 13.1% of the UK total of £1,954m in 2012/13, significantly more than its 8.4% share of UK population¹ and above its 11.3% share of FTE research-active staff².

However, Research Council spending in 2012/13 on Research Council Institutes, Independent Research Organisations and infrastructure in Scotland amounted to £50m, or only 5.4% of UK spending³. Similarly, only about 7% of Innovate UK funding is spent in Scotland. Universities Scotland members are concerned that this may reflect a lack of consideration amongst the Research Councils' and Innovate UK's decision making bodies of government priorities and research needs in devolved jurisdictions. This is particularly important when making "decisions to ensure research drives economic growth and promotes health, quality of life and environmental sustainability"; such effects can be highly specific to different regions or nations of the UK.

In response to the question in the Call for Evidence, "*How should the Research Councils take account of wider national interests including regional balance and the local and national economic impact of applied research?*", it is important to consider balance between Devolved Administrations as well as between regions, and to distinguish between UK-wide interests and national interests; the latter phrase can be, and often is, interpreted as pertaining to Devolved Administrations. Consideration of geographical balance in funding decisions should work hand-in-hand with recognition for research excellence, but no funding should be ring-fenced for specific geographic areas.

¹ HM Government: "Scotland analysis: Science and research", November 2013

² HESA 2014

³ Scottish Government: "Scotland's future: Higher education research in and independent Scotland". April 2014

Similarly, consideration of integrating the work of Research Councils with Departmental research and development budgets should also include such budgets in Devolved Administrations.

We would urge Research Councils' decision making bodies to seek more advice from devolved nations or the academic leaders within them. Another alternative would be for those bodies to hold more meetings in different parts of the UK, and to seek participation from representatives of interested local bodies such as HEIs; such a strategy was well received when adopted by Innovate UK and its predecessor, the Technology Strategy Board.

Scottish HEIs have been pioneers in research collaborations since the establishment of the first Research Pools in 2004. One of the key principles behind research pools was that they should support research excellence "wherever it is found"; sometimes in relatively small research groups in less research-intensive institutions. We are concerned that initiatives to encourage collaboration between institutions can sometimes exclude such pockets of excellence through, for instance, threshold criteria dependent on scale. If these criteria are based on historical performance, they can result in smaller groups or institutions being "locked out" of funding for the foreseeable future. Scotland's HEIs are, on average, smaller than their counterparts in other parts of the UK, so this issue may be particularly acute for them. This is particularly relevant when considering initiatives to set up Centres for Doctoral Training or Graduate Schools.

I would urge the Review to take into account these points alongside those raised in the UUK response.

Yours sincerely,



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