

Research Incentive Grants – Impact Report

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1. Background and funding

Research Incentive Grants (RIGs) aim to support short research projects, either of a stand-alone nature or in the form of an initial study that could be expected to lead to a more extensive project. The principal criterion for the award of a Research Incentive Grant is that the planned research is of excellent quality and likely to be of benefit to one or more of the universities of Scotland.

The scheme was introduced following a comprehensive review of the Trust's research funding in 2013 and replaced the Small Research Grants scheme. The biggest differences from the previous scheme were the increase in the maximum value grant available – going from £2,500 to £7,500 – and the introduction of an extensive peer-review scheme. The move away from self-nominated referees to Trust-selected research assessors reflected the significantly more competitive nature of the scheme resulting from the award of larger grants. In addition, greater flexibility was permitted regarding the categories of costs the grants could be used to cover.

The review also recommended that the RIGs scheme should favour, where practicable, the award of grants to early career researchers.

Two years of this new scheme have now been completed: 2014/15 and 2015/16, in each of which it was allocated a budget of £400,000. Recognising the initial flurry of interest in the scheme and the higher than anticipated investment income, the actual total of grants awarded in the first year was £432k. Grants in the second year totalled £404k.

2. Profile of the Scheme

2.1 Applications and success rates

Two Research Incentive Grant rounds are run each year, with submission deadlines of the 15 March and the 15 September. On the launch of the scheme 150 applications were received but this has come down as the scheme became routinely established (see Fig.1). Consequently the success rate has increased from 26% to 32%.

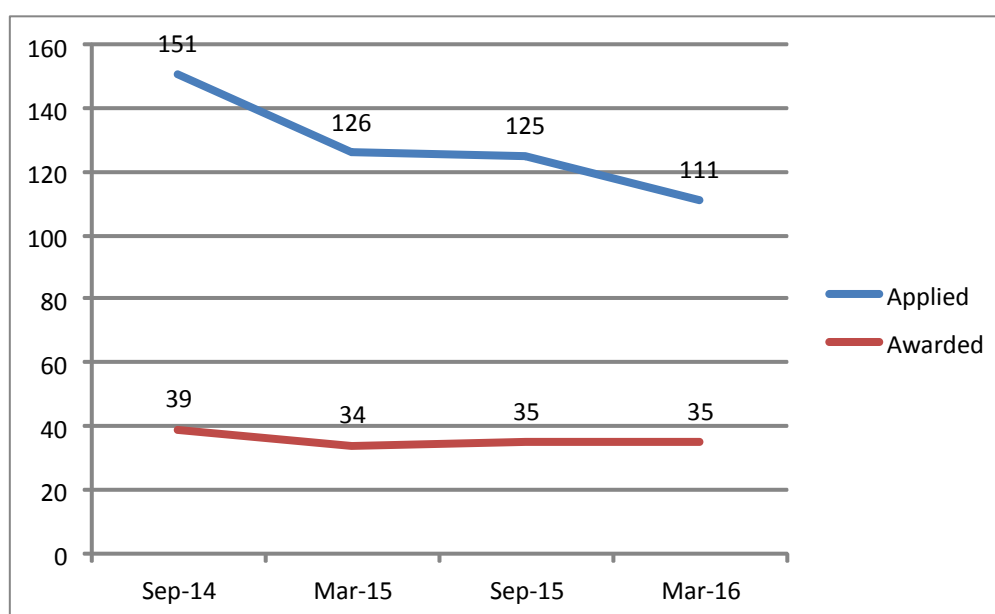


Fig.1 RIGs application and grant award numbers

2.2 Career Stage

The RIGs scheme has proven attractive to early career researchers (ECR) with, on average, 60% of applications coming from ECR academics (i.e. within 5 years of starting an independent research career). The preference, where other factors are comparable, to favour ECR applicants is apparent from the somewhat higher percentage of awards they have received – averaging 65%.

Fig. 2 shows the breakdown across all of the career-stage categories.

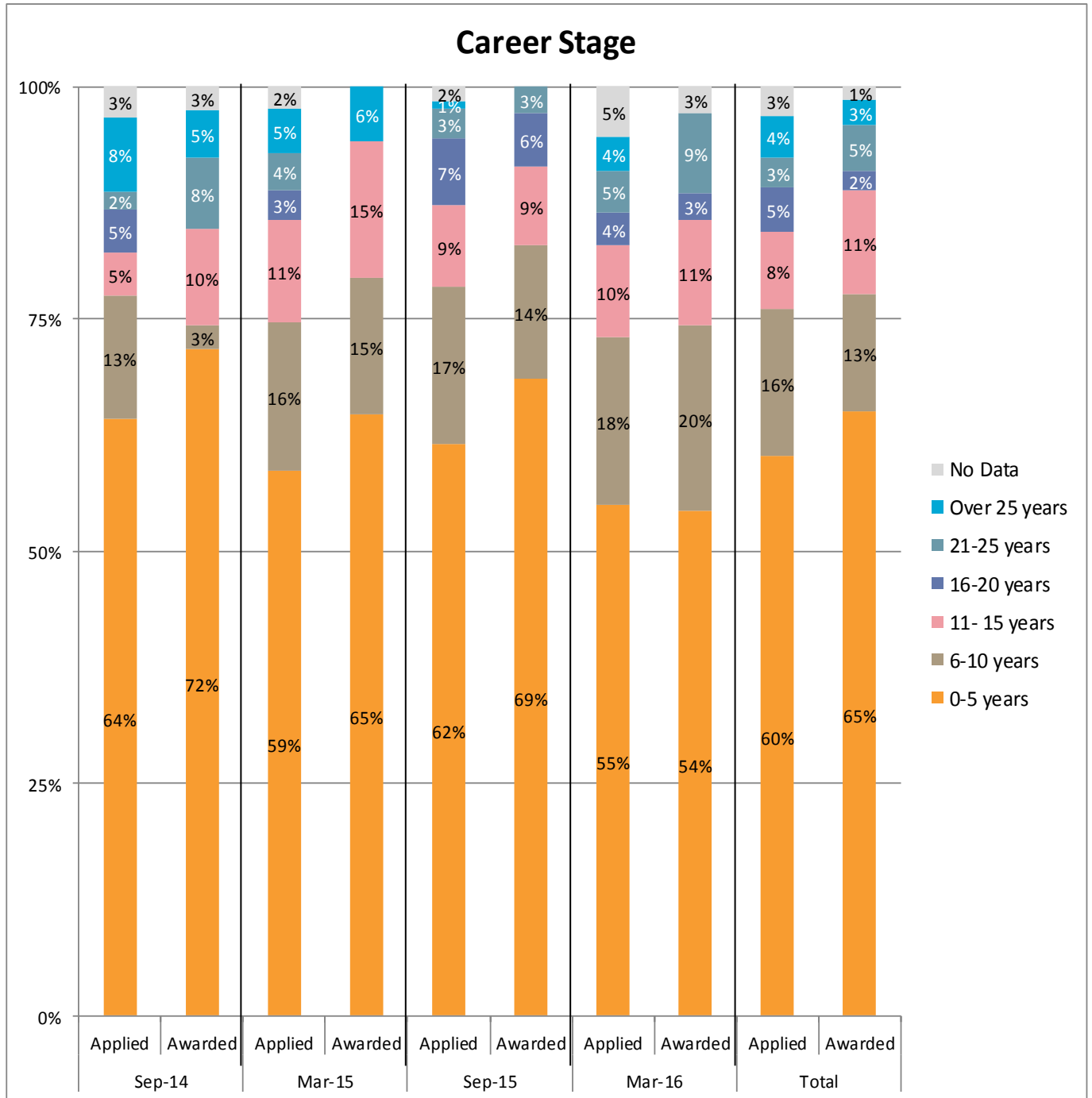


Fig.2 RIG applications and awards – career-stage breakdown

It can be seen that 75% of the grants go to academics in the first 10 years of starting their independent research career. Only 5% go to academics with careers extending beyond 25 years.

2.3 Gender split

Fig.3 shows the split between female and male applicants and awardees.

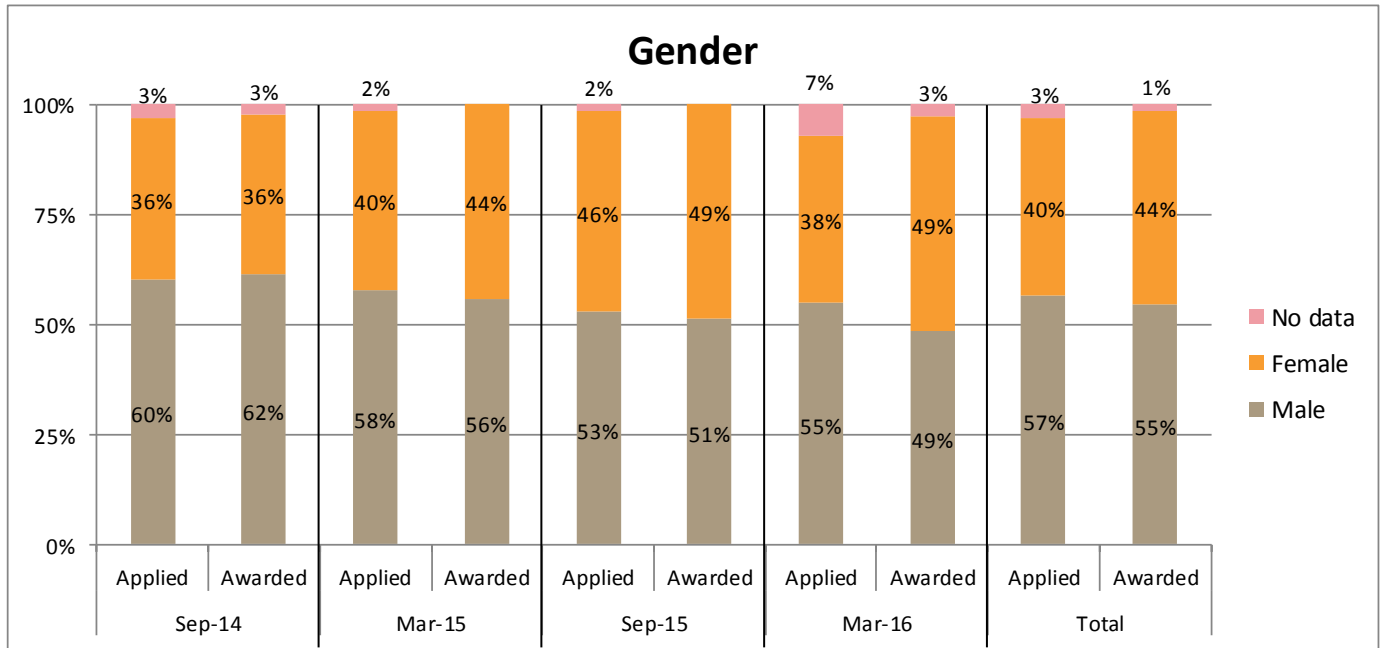


Fig.3 RIG applications and awards – gender breakdown

It can be noted that, whereas the Trust receives slightly more applications from men, the average success rate for women (31%) has been higher than for men (26%).

2.4 Academic fields

The RIG projects are split into four broad fields of study : Sciences, Engineering & Technology, Social Sciences, and Arts & Humanities. Fig.4 shows the breakdown of applications and awards.

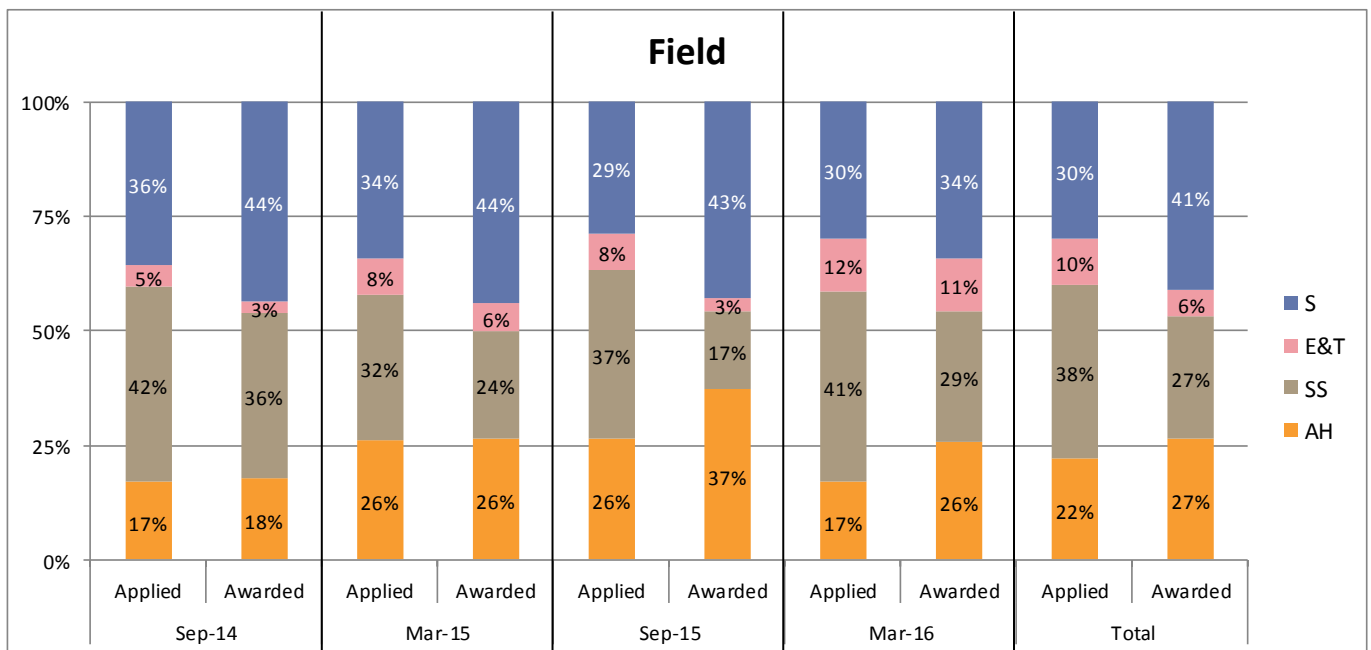


Fig.4 RIG applications and awards – academic field breakdown.

(S - Sciences, E&T - Engineering & Technology, SS - Social Sciences, AH - Arts & Humanities)

On average, 60% of the applications have come from Arts, Humanities and Social; Sciences. The best success rate is seen for the Sciences (38% on average). Arts & Humanities has been slightly lower (33%) with Social Sciences and Engineering & Technology down at 20% and 16 %, respectively.

2.5 Split across the universities

Over this two year period, each of the Scottish universities has been awarded at least one Research Incentive Grant.

Fig.5 shows the total applications and awards.

University	Applications	Awards	Success rate
Aberdeen, University of	47	14	30%
Abertay University	12	2	17%
Dundee, University of	21	3	14%
Edinburgh, University of	109	38	35%
Edinburgh Napier University	14	3	21%
Glasgow, University of	86	30	35%
Glasgow Caledonian University	10	1	10%
Heriot-Watt University	19	6	32%
Highlands & Islands, University of	7	2	29%
Queen Margaret University	15	3	20%
Robert Gordon University	26	3	12%
St Andrews, University of	47	17	36%
Stirling, University of	36	6	17%
Strathclyde, University of	43	14	33%
West of Scotland, University of the	20	1	5%
Total	512	143	28%

Fig.5 Applications and awards by university – RIGs 2014/15 plus 2015/16

It can be seen that the more research active universities generally submit greater numbers of proposals and have higher success rates. As a result they receive a larger proportion of the grants being awarded, as shown in Fig.6.

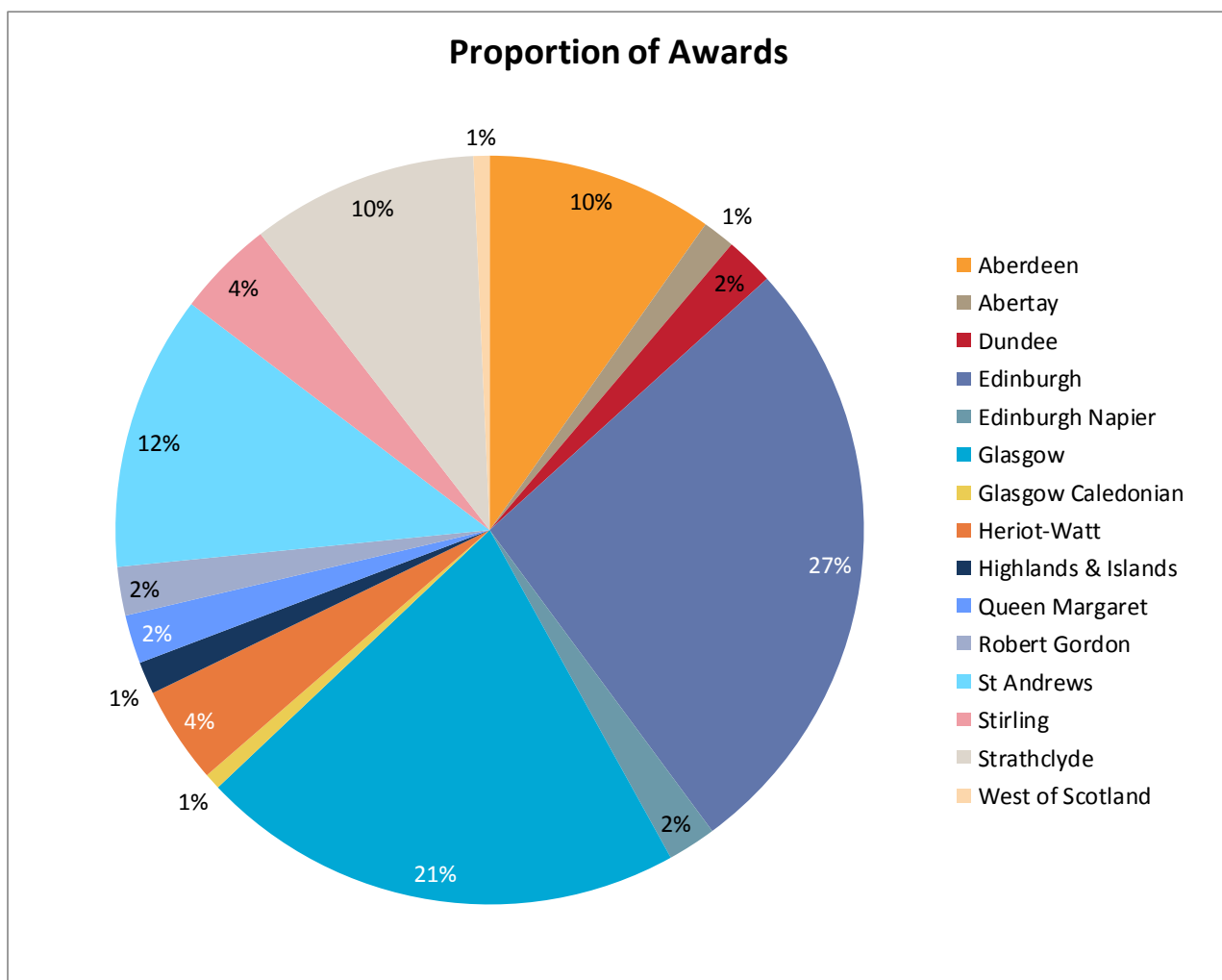


Fig.6 Distribution of RIGs awards across the universities – 2014/15 plus 2015/16

2.6 Expenditure profile

The Research Incentive Grants scheme recognises all direct research costs as eligible. Excluded are the employment costs of the academic themselves and associated overheads. The fraction of the grant that can be spent on dissemination – such as publication costs and conference attendance – is limited to 20%.

The average breakdown of expenditure for projects approved over the two years is as follows:

Salaries	23.9%
Travel	10.1%
Accommodation and Subsistence	16.7%
Equipment	13.1%
Computing	1.9%
Consultancy, specialist service fees	6.7%
Fieldwork	4.7%
Subject and volunteer expenses	1.6%
Other (e.g. consumables)	16.1%
Publication/dissemination activities	5.2%

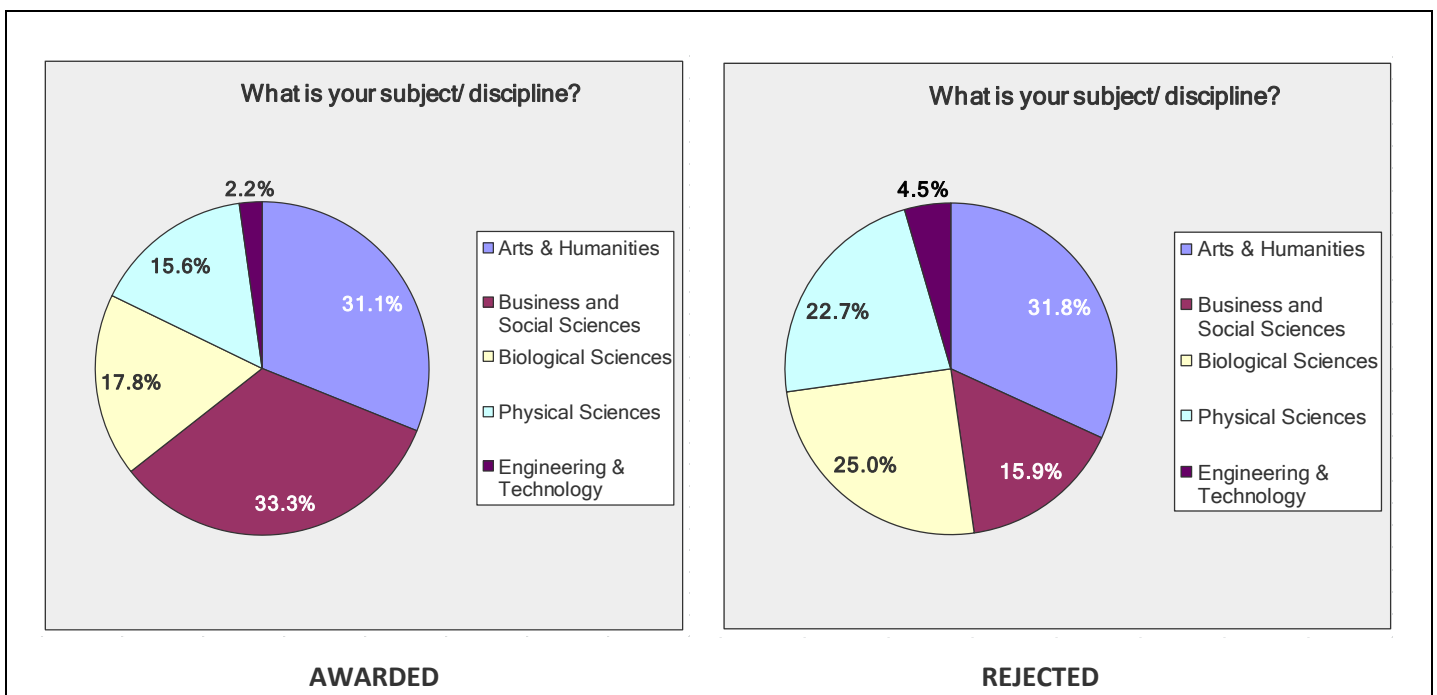
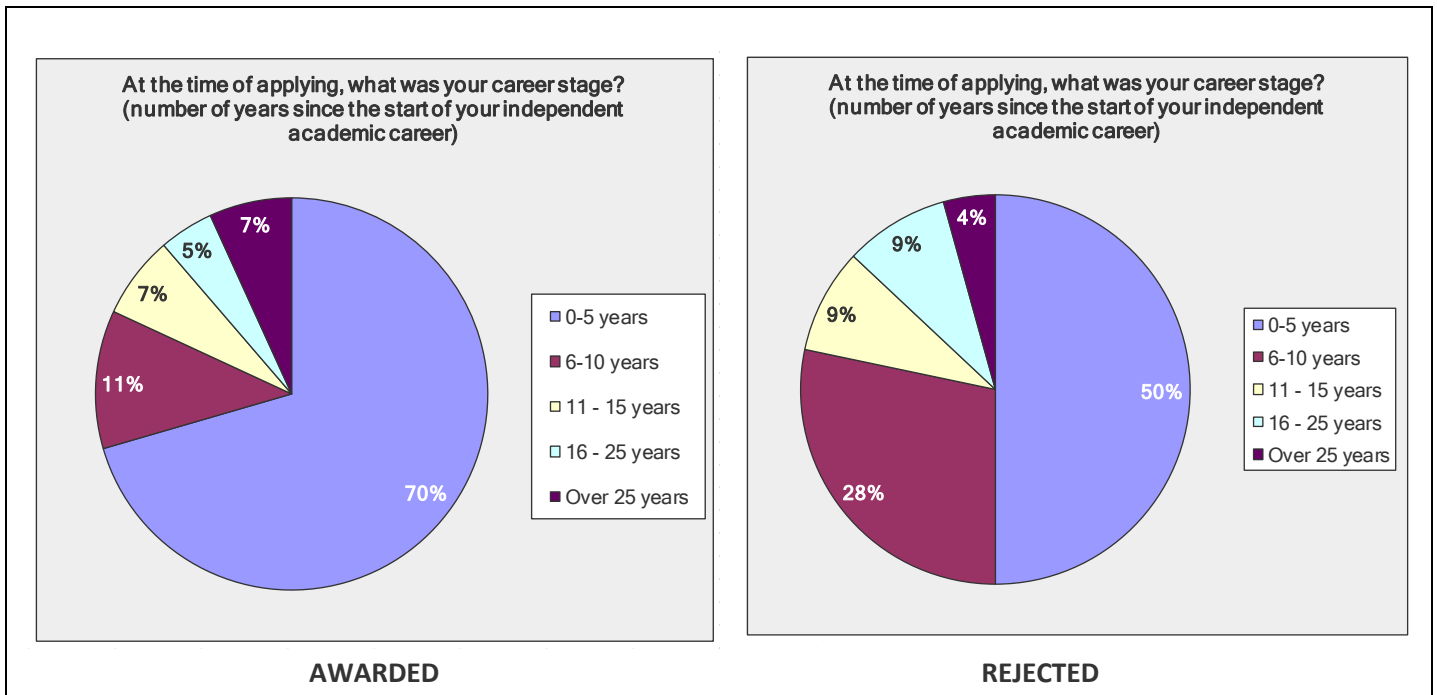
Fig.7 Overall distribution of RIGs awards across cost categories – 2014/15 plus 2015/16

3. Results from Survey

264 RIG applicants were invited to contribute to a survey of the scheme. (73 who received awards, 191 who did not.)

Responses were received from 90 academics – 44 who were successful in getting their proposals funded and 46 whose applications were rejected.

It is interesting to note that 59% of those who were unsuccessful had also applied under the old scheme, whereas only 14% of those who were awarded Research Incentive Grants had previously applied – suggesting stronger applications are being received from new applicants.

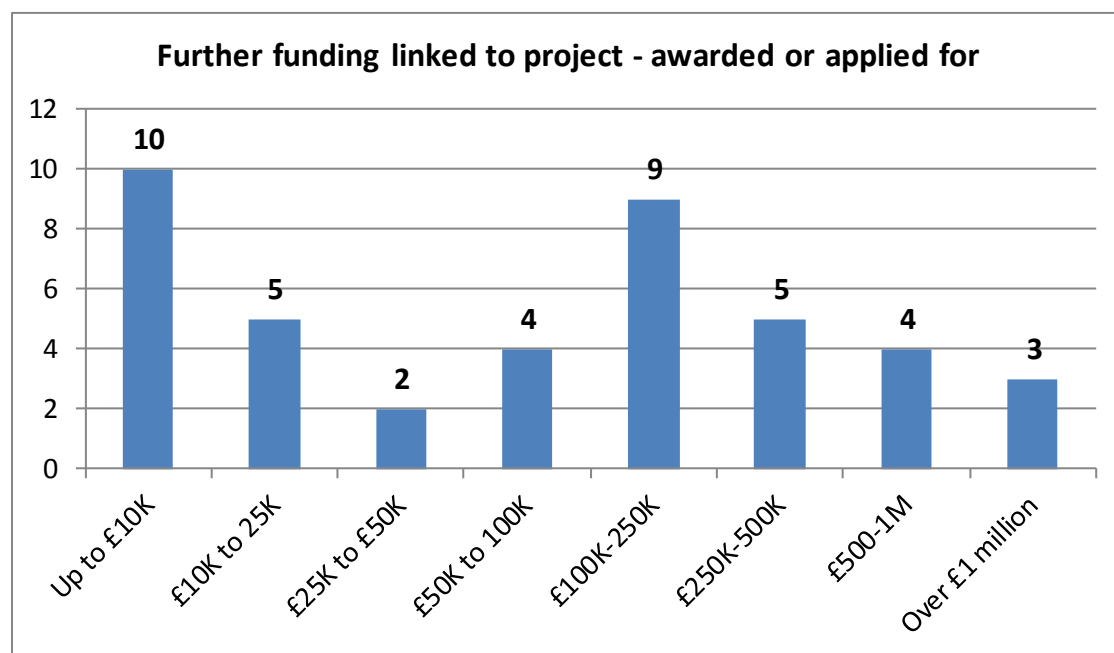


A. Responses from Grant Recipients:

About the project (awarded)	Yes
44 respondees in total	
Was this your first research grant?	12
Did the project initiate a new line of enquiry?	44
Did the project fund a pilot/case study, which will lead to a larger research project?	40
Did the funding help/has helped with career progression/promotion?	31

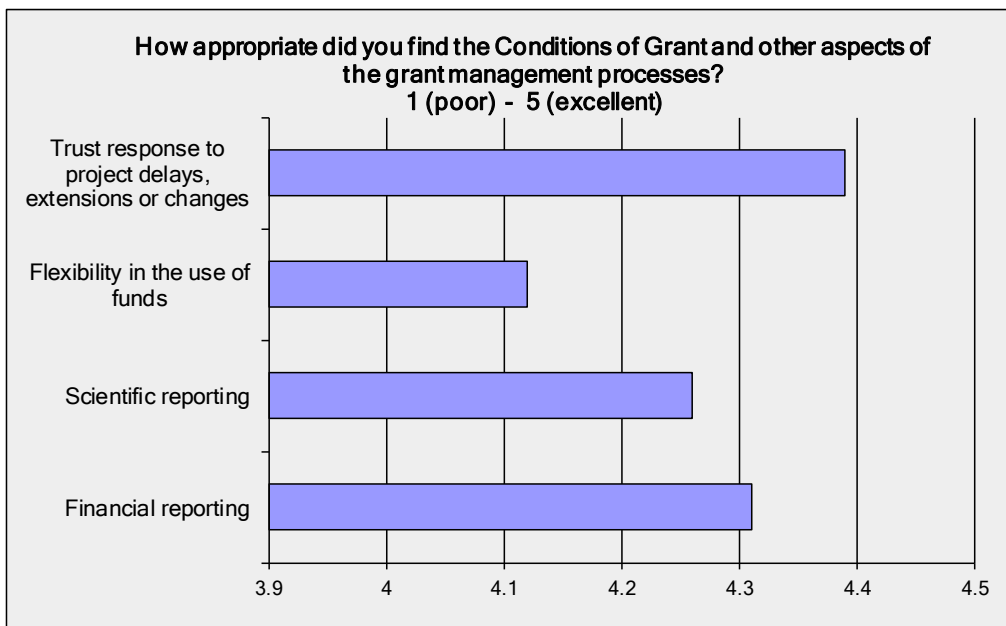
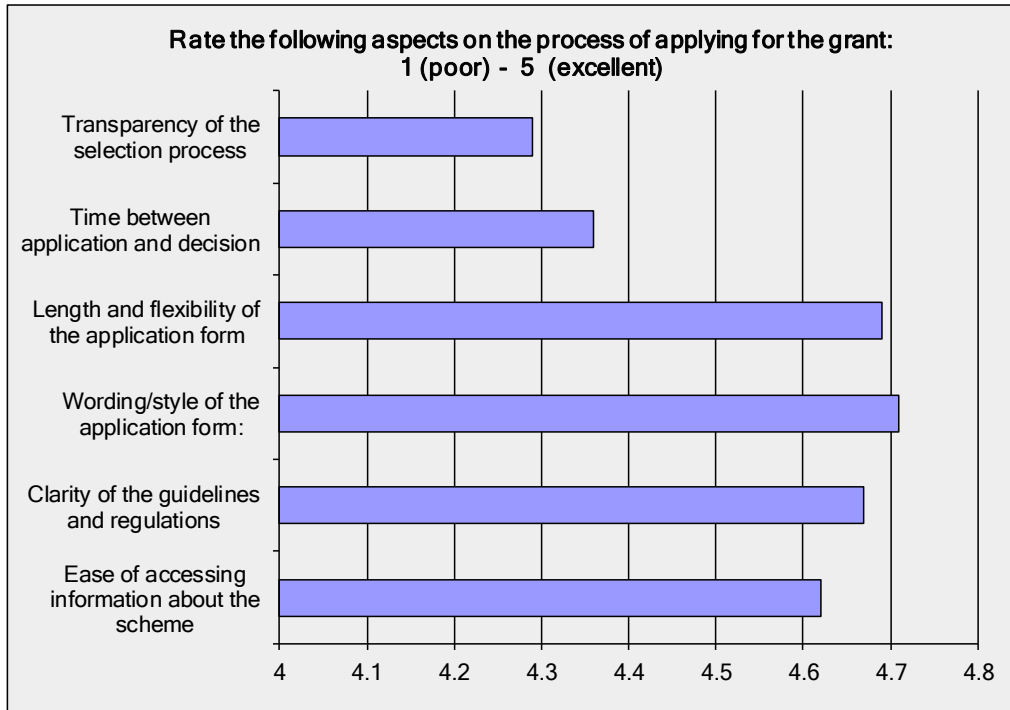
What is your subject/ discipline?	Please specify your specific research area	Total
Arts & Humanities	Contemporary Art / Contextual Studies	1
	English Literature	1
	Film Studies	1
	History of Art	1
	History of Religions--Asian Religions, Buddhism, relig	1
	Religious studies	1
	Scottish Literature	1
	Sociology	1
	Youth Justice	1
	(blank)	5
Arts & Humanities Total		14
Biological Sciences	Age-related neurodegeneration	1
	cancer biology	1
	Developmental neurobiology	1
	evolutionary biology	1
	Immunology	2
	Marine Science	1
	Neuroscience	2
	(blank)	2
Biological Sciences Total		11
Business and Social Sciences	Developmental Cognitive Psychology/Neuroscience	1
	Sociology	2
	Speech Science; Speech and Language Therapy	1
	(blank)	3
Business and Social Sciences Total		7
Engineering & Technology	Chemical Engineering	1
	(blank)	1
Engineering & Technology Total		2
Physical Sciences	Applied Mathematics	1
	Astronomy	1
	Chemistry (supramolecular and nanochemistry)	1
	EPR Spectroscopy	1
	Geoscience	1
	Invertebrate Palaeontology, Regional Geology	1
	(blank)	4
Physical Sciences Total		10
Grand Total		44

Numbers of Research Outputs	Total
Peer reviewed articles in learned journals	29
Peer reviewed letters/correspondence in learned journals	0
Peer reviewed papers in Conference Proceedings	6
Peer reviewed collection of essays	3
Peer reviewed chapter in edited volume of essays	2
Invited/Keynote presentations at international conferences	21
Invited/Keynote presentations at a UK conferences	11
Contributed (peer-reviewed) presentations at international conferences	24
Contributed (peer-reviewed) presentations at national conferences	22
Patents	0
Commercialisation activities	2
Exhibitions	8
Policy briefings	2
Stakeholder events or training	4
Knowledge exchange activities	11
Public engagement	11
Total Outputs	156



24 out of 41 responses indicated that at least one funding application had been made to another body relating to their Carnegie-RIG project.

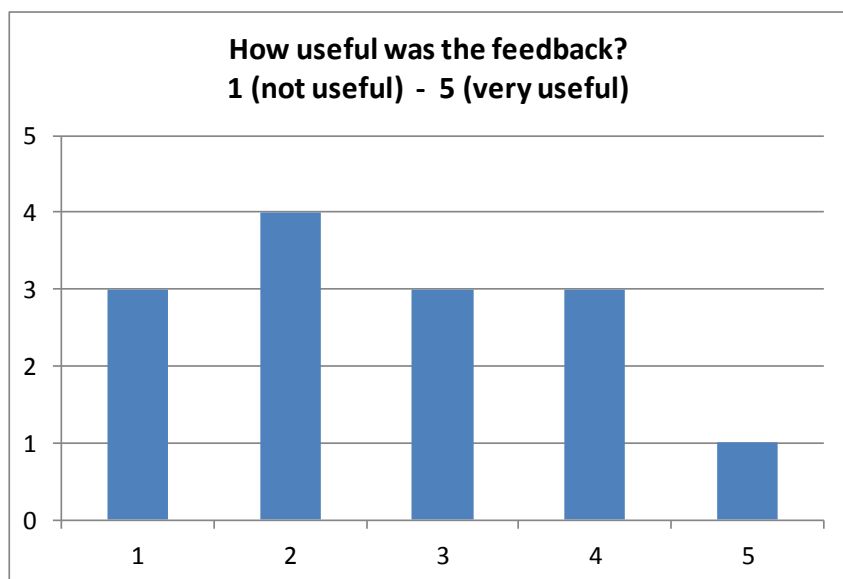
Of these, 11 reported their applications had successfully led to a further grant award.



B. Responses from refused applicants:

19 out of the 45 unsuccessful applicants responding to the survey requested feedback.

Of these, 14 indicated how useful was the feedback received.



However all 19 felt that the feedback would inform further applications for funding.

82% of these respondees are planning to apply for alternative funding, from elsewhere.

Of these 40% had already been successful and 5% unsuccessful.

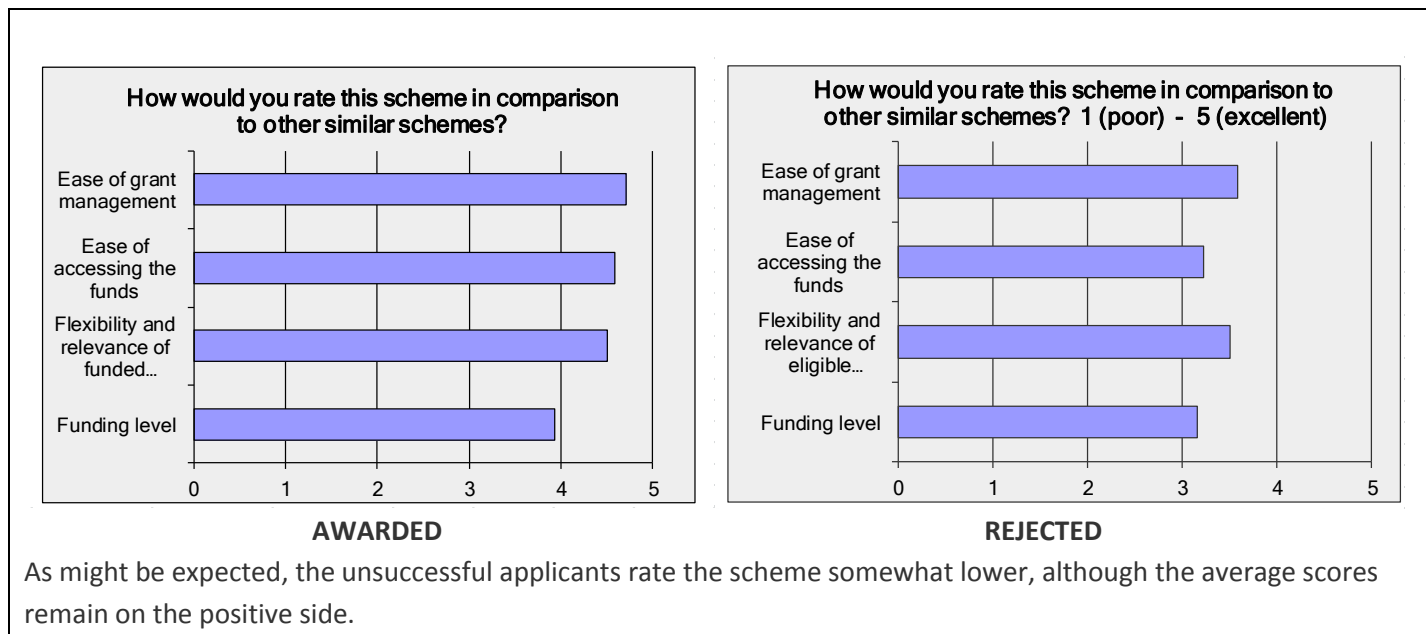
The remaining 55% were either in the process of applying or awaiting outcomes.

57% felt the RIG application process was a helpful experience.

50% were planning to apply again to the RIG scheme. 6% had already done so successfully, 2 % unsuccessfully.

82% of new applications were for a different project, the remainder were amended submissions

C. Further responses from both groups:



What do you perceive as the strengths of the scheme?

From successful applicants:

An excellent opportunity for Early Career Researchers to progress their research and funding portfolio. Small grants to support new research, application process is not too cumbersome (positive if application is unsuccessful too)

Excellent first step for newly appointed staff

Successful rate, favour early career researchers

Great funding opportunity for recently appointed staff, to enable pilot projects.

It offers early career researchers an opportunity to get their own lab up and running. It is also ideal for pilot data generation to allow larger funding applications to go forward.

Accessibility for early stage researchers. Flexibility in use of funds.

This is the kind of scheme that is badly needed because it is becoming more scarce: seed money for new ideas allowing for small exploratory workshops or conferences. Please do not change it.

The whole idea of the grant as 'pump-priming' for new projects, is definitely it's strength given that the investigator does not have to have a background in that exact area.

It is a great opportunity to pump-prime an understudied area of research

Relatively small grant is great for early-career researchers to get some funding to get started with a new project..

The possibility of funding a smaller project that might lead to something bigger, but isn't at that scale yet

The fact that the grant awarding panel were willing to see the potential of a small project and what it could lead to in terms of the bigger picture. It's difficult to get seed core funding like this

Its commitment to innovative research.

Simple and straightforward application to help jump start projects needing a modest amount of money.

Application process: - straightforward application form' - no need to provide references, relatively quick review period and decision.

Ease of application and speed of decisions

A very well run scheme with great support and communication.

The transparency and quality.

Relatively simple application process and focus on developing early-career staff. Easy to contact the very helpful Carnegie Trust staff!

Flexibility | Flexibility | The flexibility. | Flexibility, small grant amounts.

Flexibility, quick turn-around for applications, focus on Scottish universities, early career academics get priority.

Fast, flexible and not beholden to passing academic fashions.

Quick turn-around of award.

Myself being able to access it as a post-doc

Decent amount of money, allowing you to achieve something

Scottish- specific and good for generating pilot data

One of the few small grants enable to hire research assistants.

From unsuccessful applicants:

Easy to apply | Relatively easy application process
 Easy application process. | Relatively easy application process.
 Simple process; speedy response; accessible especially for early-career researchers
 Broad range. pump priming | Access to a wider group than many funds
 Good to have a funder who is willing to consider applications for incentives in research
 That it provides research incentive funds to a wide range of disciplines.
 Ease of requirements for submitting a small pilot grant. Small pots of money are essential to starting bigger projects, but becoming more and more difficult to come by.
 Can provide source of funds for Scottish History projects in a way which is difficult to obtain through UK funders. exclusive to Scotland. concise application form.
 Dedicated to Scottish researchers
 Flexibility; good for small projects | Its flexibility
 That it is aimed at young researchers | Quick response | Reputation; Notoriety
 It used to be a fantastic scheme for early careers, as it provided the means for attracting their first grant. Now it has become ridiculously competitive for such a small amount of money, and with no access to significant feedback it has become unattractive to me.

What do you perceive as areas for improvement?

From successful applicants:

None. None. None. None, really
 I am pleased with everything so far.
 The RIG scheme is unique, and the application process is not burdensome. Please do not change it.
 Size of grants would give more scope (but then there would be less to award).
 A higher budget? Use for personnel?
 More money will always be an improvement. Do not restrict too much to benefiting more than one Scottish university.
 The value of the award Funding amounts The limit on the funding amount.
 More money in the overall pot ... though keep it 'small' in terms of individual awards
 Potentially different levels (amounts) of funding could be an area to look into, with some grants being funding at this amount, while others may be doubled over the same time course, or over 2 years.
 Being less prescriptive about how the funding is used. Maximum funding level could be extended to £10,000.
 Perhaps the period could be slightly longer, e.g up to 18 months.
 Speed with which results announced.
 Perhaps explain the 'of benefit to Scottish universities' a bit more thoroughly
 Collaborations/impact beyond Scotland are just as important.
 University Finance Offices operated their own rules and procedures to the detriment of the research plan between Carnegie and the researcher
 The trust could develop a drop box like system for researchers to deposit important updates or outputs. Equally, it would be good to have a mechanism to support follow on funding to other councils- perhaps having a Trust facilitated forum to send proposals to experienced reviewers prior to submission. This would help funded applications obtain more grant monies subsequently.

From unsuccessful applicants:

None
 Feedback. | Not sure I received any feedback. | Verbal and written feedback would be helpful
 Better feedback and transparency about the basis on which selection is made and funds awarded. There seems to be a bias towards more 'scientific' work.
 Complete lack of feedback; No real preference for ECR; Low funding
 Feedback availability. Why the proposal was not funded? | Lack of feedback; Ratio of success unclear
 Feedback - I was unaware it was available | More feedback is needed for how individual proposals are evaluated.
 Feedback provided to applicants after the decision could be more comprehensive.
 Unclear on why my application was unsuccessful and was told no feedback could be given on why I had not been awarded the grant/on the application. Don't require requests before providing feedback
 Applicant feedback, time for decisions, more value for high risk seed projects
 It was all very disorganised, feedback was poor.
 £7500 is quite limiting. | Level of funds - really restricts what can be done
 Too long an application for a small amount of money
 The maximum amount for application should be increased

The grants are very small, for the amount the application is too long.
 The ease of access for new colleague is a strength, but older more established colleagues should also have access - funding is not widely available - especially to ALL Scottish institutions
 Lack of transparency over what types of projects you award the grants to; what you're looking for in successful grants.
 Clearer selection criteria.
 Less onerous application procedure.
 I think it is important to have a funding stream for academic who are mid-career. There is a gap here within the British grant making community - and this is a gap that Carnegie can reasonably fulfil.
 If the scheme is to remain competitive it needs improved transparency. The scheme used to be the first experience early careers had on putting together a proposal and it was always successful, which provided researchers with motivation to continue. In its current form, it should at least provide detail feedback, so that early careers could continue learning from the scheme how to improve their proposals.

Do you have any other general points about the Research Incentive Grant scheme that you would like to bring to the attention of the Trust?

From successful applicants:

No. | No. | No. | None, really.
 Not at this moment. So far I am just grateful that I obtained the grant and extension. Thank you.
 I've been very impressed with all the interactions I've had with the trust and its enabling ethos compared to other schemes.
 This is one of the most useful schemes both for helping to start projects which don't always have predictable outcomes. The flexibility of the scheme in terms of what is funded is also valuable.
 This RIG scheme is perfect for getting research off the ground.
 I believe it to be an excellent scheme that supports development of research within Scottish Universities.
 It's a very good grant scheme.
 This is an excellent scheme and I cannot recommend it highly enough.

From unsuccessful applicants:

No. | No. | Keep up the hard work! | Please continue to offer them.
 Ensuring that early career researchers are supported is important - even if this means putting more restrictions on senior academics applying (but don't restrict this totally - even senior people sometimes need new ideas funding at a low or moderate level initially).
 I'm not entirely sure due to my biased view of my own experience. But as someone who has been working in education for a long time who is now being required to work full time and do a PhD part time by their institution I feel disadvantaged as I'm not classed as either an early career researcher nor as a full time student by both these types of funding applications and by my institution. Perhaps the Trust could consider different criteria or create such applications for such people caught between a rock and a hard place metaphorically speaking.
 With the exception of the BA mid-career fellowship, all other grant schemes target ECR or senior (professorial) colleagues. The idea that most academic climb a career ladder and need grant support throughout their professional lifetime seems to have evaded the notice of grant-making bodies. So as the funding landscape exists, the only way for mid-career applicants to be successful is to (nominally) piggy back on senior colleagues - who often further their career as PI with Col that probably do the hard work!
 Why only exclusively proof of concept work/work that is pilot/in development - the sum of money can also produce projects in entirety.
 The selection criteria need to be much clearer. It's easy to spend a lot of time on an application whilst still "in the dark" about what is and is not being prioritised by reviewers.
 My hope is that Arts and Humanities projects, History in particular, don't lose out to Social Science projects in new funding climate.
 There are other universities in Scotland, not just Edinburgh and Glasgow...
 I preferred the old scheme, where more applications with smaller budgets were funded. The new scheme goes in the direction of funds concentrated in fewer hands. This type of policy (which RCUK, EU, etc. are now following) will destroy Science in the long term. At least The Carnegie Trust could go in a different direction and really promote new ideas and early career researchers. Lots of small grants is the way to go, in my opinion.