



RSE

*The Royal Society
of Edinburgh*

KNOWLEDGE MADE USEFUL

Strategic plan
2023–2028

MISSION

The advancement of learning and useful knowledge for public good.

ATTRIBUTES AND STRENGTHS OF THE RSE



The broad Fellowship



Convening power



Research and practice



Increasing diversity

SOCIETAL CHALLENGES



Climate change and environmental sustainability



Economic prosperity



Social cohesion and inclusion

THEMATIC PROGRAMMES



Economy and enterprise



Education



International



Research



Policy advice

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), Scotland's National Academy, was established in 1783 for the advancement of learning and useful knowledge.

Its mission remains the same – the deployment of knowledge for public good. This knowledge contributes to

the social and economic wellbeing of Scotland and its people, and the nation's wider contribution to the global community.

The motto 'knowledge made useful', in the spirit of the Scottish Enlightenment, indicates the RSE's place at the interface between

research and practical experience. As Scotland's National Academy, we use the combined knowledge of our 1800-strong Fellowship and wider network to provide independent expert advice to policymakers and inspire the next generation of innovative thinkers.

Strategic plan



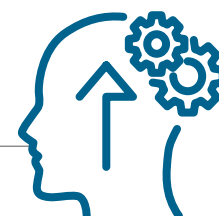
The five-year strategic plan for 2023–2028 sets out the framework for delivering the RSE’s purpose and focuses on key societal challenges to be addressed through the contributions of Fellows and Young Academy of Scotland (YAS) members. The RSE’s diverse expertise and membership enable us to bring multidisciplinary perspectives to the key issues of significance for Scotland, the UK, and internationally.

The strategic plan is not a blueprint detailing future activities, nor is it a hierarchical arrangement with high-level objectives mechanically flowing down to individual actions. It is a framework for taking stock and continuing dialogue about direction and priorities – a continuous process of deliberation and adjustment in the light of circumstances. It will guide decisions about priorities and meeting our purpose and objectives.

The plan is structured around four key areas:

- Attributes and strengths of the RSE
- Key societal challenges
- Thematic programmes
- Delivery.

Attributes and strengths



The RSE’s natural advantages include:

- The broad Fellowship: giving us an advantage in key challenges that do not fall within clear disciplinary boundaries.
- Convening power: well-connected across Scottish academia, government, and civil society, the RSE brings together key actors to address pressing issues.
- A neutral space: the RSE provides a neutral forum for the discussion of issues that might be controversial and politicised.
- Research and practice: the RSE provides a crucial link between the world of research and that of practice, whether in government, business or civil society.
- Diversity: the RSE is diversifying its Fellowship to include more women, minorities, non-academics and people from all parts of Scotland. Its Young Academy of Scotland (YAS) reaches out to a new generation.

Societal challenges



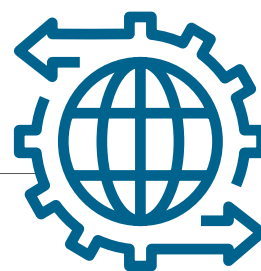
The RSE identifies three broad challenges facing Scotland and the world: climate change and environmental sustainability, economic prosperity, and social cohesion and inclusion. This does not exclude other critical issues.

The challenges are addressed through an interdisciplinary approach encompassing the natural sciences; the economic and social sciences; the humanities; the creative arts, and the world of practice.

The RSE addresses them by:

- Promoting scientific research in Scotland through its own programmes and by influencing the design of research programmes at Scottish, UK, and international levels.
- Providing advice to governments and parliaments based on the skills and knowledge of Fellows.
- Exploring future challenges and publishing reports on key issues.
- Organising meetings to disseminate key findings and provide a forum for discussion among academics and practitioners.
- Informing and engaging the public across Scotland in scientific research and the creative arts through public lectures, traditional and social media, exhibitions, and meetings.

Thematic programmes



There are five main programme areas. They are not distinct from each other, but are interconnected.

Economy and enterprise

The Economy and Enterprise Committee has identified three priorities for the next five years:

- Increasing economic efficiency via faster, more sustainable growth and overall incomes in Scotland.
- Enhancing equity by reducing inequitable distribution of incomes and employment, by geographical area, age group, ethnicity, gender, and other relevant categories.
- A more environmentally sustainable economy – by reducing carbon emissions, more sustainable energy production and consumption and other key issues as they arise.

The RSE will deliver to these priorities through a series of activities, including relaunching RSE's successful Enterprise Fellowship scheme to consider developments in new business generation, as well as exploring a fund to boost the profile of diverse and under-represented new enterprises, and further work on taxation and public expenditure, considering equity among income groups.

Education

The RSE is in a unique position to consider education as a whole and relate it to the major social, economic, and environmental challenges, exploring what society needs from its education, skills, and assessment system. Key questions that sit beneath this overarching challenge include:

- What does society value in education and skills?
- How do we ensure we have the skills to achieve net zero?
- What knowledge do learners need?
- What is the balance between knowledge and skills?
- What is it we are seeking to assess in education?

The RSE's plans focus on the education and skills system that will be needed as we transition to a net zero economy and sustainable development and practices, while stressing inclusion and interdependence and coherence across the education system.

International

Scotland's governmental and societal priorities cannot be considered apart from developments at a global level. The RSE's work in these fields will include comparative experience and learning, and the impact of global forces on economic, social, cultural, and environmental matters.

The RSE has a strong international reach and presence across all its activities. It is well networked, including partnerships with 26 other national academies and the international connections of its Fellows.

The RSE will strengthen Scotland's international links and collaboration in research through our own research funding, international colloquia and putting our international connections at the disposal of researchers, institutions, and research funders in Scotland. The successful programme of funding for international exchanges will continue.

Drawing on our status as neutral space and its convening power, the RSE will provide a venue for discussions on Scotland's place in global affairs, covering trade and investment; science and technology; education and research; the arts and culture, and channels to project Scotland overseas whatever the outcome of current constitutional debates.

Research

The RSE commits substantial resources to its Research Awards Programme, providing types and amounts of funding not available from UKRI or other sources. These small-scale awards are critical for early career researchers, prior to attracting larger funding from UK, European and international sources. The RSE also supports and promotes related Scottish Government research programmes and emphasises inclusion and the importance of early career researchers.

Research has an intrinsic value of its own and the RSE will encourage new thinking within and across disciplines through introducing Fellows' communities of interest.

Research is critical to meeting the great economic, social, and environmental challenges. The RSE will play its part in realising the SFC (2021) Coherence and Sustainability report, via its own awards programme and its mission-oriented research, for which its cross-disciplinary Fellowship is particularly well equipped.

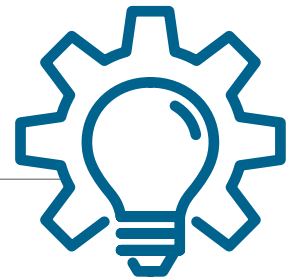
Policy advice

The RSE has a singular ability to provide independent, evidence-driven policy expertise across a wide range of areas, drawing on the work of its Fellows and YAS members. This includes responsive work, such as government and parliamentary consultations (Scottish and UK), as well as own-initiative projects.

The RSE will increase engagement with the Scottish Parliament through public and informal committee sessions, a reception with MSPs, and hosting fringe events across all party political conferences; continuing to act as secretariat to the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on science and technology. The RSE is organising a series of workshops with the Scottish Government, examining issues arising from the RSE's independent Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission. A strong relationship with the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee (SAC) remains, including hosting roundtables on their behalf and providing witnesses for evidence sessions.

Drawing on its convening power, the RSE will continue to encourage dialogue with wider society and seek a more participatory approach to policy development, which complements the expertise of our Fellowship with real-world experiences from those who are affected by public policies.

Delivery



The strategic plan will run together with financial planning to ensure that resources are available for the plan's delivery. The RSE is committed to diversifying funding. Promising routes are through project funding, through partnerships and working with foundations in Scotland, the UK, and internationally.

Information technology

The RSE will increase investment in IT, enabling it to embrace online collaborative spaces further, building on the learning and experience gained during the Covid-19 pandemic to increase our reach and inclusion. IT investment will encourage and support Fellow-to-Fellow engagement, particularly for Fellows who are more remote, and expand RSE's reach as Scotland's National Academy to the regions and the global stage.

SFC/RSE Funding Agreement

The Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and RSE have entered into a funding agreement to cover those elements of its plans and programmes funded with SFC resources, including those where SFC moneys will be combined with external funding. Thematic areas comprise research and innovation; economy and enterprise; education; international, and public engagement.

Communications

RSE Communications is an essential function in ensuring that clear messages reach our stakeholders in Scotland. The RSE's communication strategy will include a focus on translating what can be specialised knowledge, with its own vocabulary, into language that policymakers, stakeholders, and citizens can understand and with which they can engage. This requires different pitches for different audiences, while relating scientific knowledge to the lived experience of citizens. The strategy will also

look at barriers to engagement and how these can be broken down.

The RSE has a particular interest in communities that do not customarily engage in these debates but whose experiences are vital for understanding key challenges in the economy, social cohesion, and sustainability. This involves experimentation in modes of communication and engagement, building on what we have learned in recent years. Work will be undertaken to support increased engagement of Fellows and gather more information on Fellows' expertise and interests to utilise their experience, knowledge, and skills.

Public engagement

Public engagement is an intrinsic part of all the RSE's thematic programmes. As an independent organisation with a reputation for intellectual rigour and a Fellowship of diverse experience and expertise, the RSE is well placed to engage the public and provide an impartial platform for debate.

The RSE's public engagement strategy builds on the experience and learning from prior years and aims to engage the people of Scotland on key contemporary issues and stimulate and provide an impartial forum for public debate and informed discussion. There are four guiding principles:

- Inclusive, inter-generational and for the whole of Scotland
- Multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary
- High quality and high impact
- Listening to communities.

The RSE is investing in new communications technology, allowing for online and hybrid events, drawing on lessons learned during the pandemic. It will partner with other academies and organisations where appropriate, increasing our reach and reducing duplication.

Equality, diversity and inclusion

The RSE is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and will integrate all EDI initiatives into an RSE-wide programme to enable learning and improvement that can be monitored and evaluated. The key areas of focus are:

- Diversifying the Fellowship to reflect more fully the talents across Scottish society – identifying people in under-represented groups who should be considered for Fellowship. Changes have been made to the criteria for election and nomination forms to support diversity.
- Ensuring more diverse panels and committees wherever possible.
- Continuing the work of the recently established nominations groups to identify people in under-represented groups who should be considered for Fellowship.
- The re-designed Research Awards Programme ensures that awards are open to all academics, at all stages of their career, from all disciplines and research institutions, and that the calls reach the greatest breadth of potential applicants.
- Engagement with public, policy and wider stakeholders has seen a shift to a more inclusive approach, in order both to reach, and secure input from, the breadth of Scottish society.

Reviewing the strategic plan



The strategic plan is not designed to be a finished product but a continuous process of deliberation and adjustment in the light of circumstances. Some proposals are fully developed while others are more tentative, depending on where the various activities are. The plan is open to ideas for activities – whether about the advancement of science or new societal challenges, from committees, Fellows, and external stakeholders – while accepting that the RSE cannot do everything and that choices must be made.

The future of the RSE and the fulfilment of our broad vision will depend on the work and initiative of Fellows, with the support of staff. The objectives and proposals in this plan stem from intense discussions with them but are not intended to exclude new ideas and new ways of thinking over the next five years.



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