



*The Royal Society
of Edinburgh*

KNOWLEDGE MADE USEFUL

Strategic plan
2023–2028

Fellowship & Council

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Executive Summary

1. The five-year strategic plan sets out the framework for delivering the RSE's purpose as Scotland's National Academy, with the mission of advancing learning and useful knowledge to support the cultural, economic, and social wellbeing of Scotland and its people.
2. Our strategic plan sets out key societal challenges which we shall be addressing through the contributions of Fellows and Young Academy of Scotland (YAS) members. The RSE's diverse expertise and membership enables us to bring multidisciplinary perspectives to the key issues of significance for Scotland, the UK, and internationally.
3. Consultations on the plan took place in 2021 and 2022, with Council, Fellows, RSE committees, staff teams, and stakeholders.
4. Following the funding agreement with Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the plan will cover activities from 2023–2026.
5. The strategic plan is structured as follows:
 - RSE's purpose, mission, attributes, and strengths; key societal challenges
 - Thematic programmes
 - Delivery
6. There are two versions of the strategic plan: this full version for Council and the wider Fellowship, and a shorter external publication for stakeholders and the wider public.

Background to the RSE's strategic plan 2023–2028



Background to the RSE's strategic plan 2023–2028

Process and product

The five-year strategic plan sets out the framework for delivering to the RSE's purpose as Scotland's National Academy, with the mission of advancing learning and useful knowledge to support the cultural, economic, and social wellbeing of Scotland and its people.

Consultations took place with Fellows about the plan in 2021 and 2022. The President and other Office-Bearers held meetings with key stakeholders. Staff teams and Fellows' committees contributed, and a special Council meeting discussed the key principles in March 2022. A strategy working group of Fellows guided the development of the plan.

“It is a framework for taking stock of where we are and for continuing dialogue about direction and priorities.”

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 of where we are and for continuing dialogue about direction and priorities. The process of making the plan is as important as the finished product. It takes the form of continuous process of deliberation and adjustment in the light of circumstances.

This plan has therefore been an opportunity for deliberation within and across the committees and staff teams over several iterations. It is intended as a living document and not the last word. 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 we 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 coming period.

Business planning and governance

The strategic plan will create a stronger link to the business plan and to financial planning. It will guide decisions about priorities and meeting our purpose and objectives.

Following the governance review, the RSE has reorganised its committee structures and introduced a Programme Committee to facilitate delivery of the plan.

Subject to reaching a multi-year funding agreement, an Outcome Agreement between the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) and RSE governs those aspects of the RSE's plan covered by SFC funding. The previous RSE Strategic Framework covered the period 2016–2021 with the SFC Outcome Agreement 2018–2021 running alongside, supported by annual business plans.

Structure of the plan

The strategic plan is structured as follows:

- RSE's purpose, mission, attributes, and strengths; key societal challenges
- Thematic programmes
- Delivery

This full strategic plan document is for use by Council and Fellows. A shorter version has been produced as an external publication for stakeholders and the wider public.



The RSE's purpose, mission, attributes and contribution

The RSE's purpose, mission, attributes and contribution

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is Scotland's National Academy, comprising Fellows from all academic disciplines, business, civil society, government service and the arts and humanities, allowing it to occupy a central place in the civic and academic life of the nation and beyond. The RSE cooperates with the London-based UK academies (notably the Royal Society and the British Academy) and the national academies of Ireland (Royal Irish Academy) and Wales (Learned Society of Wales).

Purpose

As Scotland's National Academy, the RSE's remit is the encouragement and application of learning in all its forms. 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. This involves utilising the collective knowledge and experience of its Fellowship with the aim of:

- Enhancing the wellbeing of Scotland though the application of knowledge. This includes economic prosperity, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and a vibrant and inclusive cultural life.
- The promotion of research.
- The promotion of education and learning, and raising public understanding of, and engagement with, natural and social sciences, and the arts and humanities.
- Improving the impact of knowledge through informed advice across the fields of business, government, and civil society.
- Providing a forum for discussion and debate on national and global scientific, economic, social, and cultural issues.
- Sustaining Scotland's international connections in research, education and applied knowledge, and cooperating with other academies and learned societies.

The RSE is committed to the achievement of diversity and equality in all its activities and among its Fellowship.

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.

“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.”

The RSE's purpose, mission, attributes and contribution

Societal challenges

We identify 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.

Priorities, themes and programmes



Priorities, themes and programmes

- The three challenges provide a theme linking RSE activities, whilst also providing headroom for newly emerging challenges (such as security concerns, economic crisis, or public health emergencies).
 - The strategic plan takes the form of a matrix, with societal challenges on one axis and the programmatic work on the other.
 - This provides the basis for more detailed business plans produced by each team/committee.
- The governance review currently under way will seek better to align the committee (Fellows) and teams (staff) structures to ensure better planning and delivery.
 - Outcomes, Outputs and Evaluation are built into the Business Plan framework to allow for monitoring progress, with use of quantitative and qualitative indicators as appropriate to the work being undertaken.

Societal Challenges	Programme Plans					Delivery				
	Economy and enterprise	Education	International	Research	Policy advice	Financial planning	Information technology	Communications	Public engagement	Equality, diversity and inclusion
Climate change and environmental sustainability										
Economic prosperity										
Social cohesion and inclusion										

Table 1: Illustrative framework for linking the three societal challenges with programme plans and underpinning delivery.

Priorities, themes and programmes (continued)

Programme plans

We present the main programmes under a series of headings, while recognising the interconnections among them.

Economy and enterprise

The Economy and Enterprise Committee has identified three priorities:

- Increasing **economic efficiency** via faster, more sustainable growth and overall incomes in Scotland.
- Enhancing **equity** – 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.

RSE will deliver to these priorities via a series of activities, including the following:

Addressing deficiencies in Scotland's economic performance, low growth in productivity, low business investment, inadequate availability and use of high skills, limited creation of new businesses or transition of new and growing businesses to a larger scale. Actions will include exploring a fund to boost the profile of diverse and under-represented new enterprises; risk bearing; talent attraction and retention (particularly in relation to leaders), labour shortages; the Scottish Financial Enterprise (SFE) strategy, including how to make Scotland a centre for green finance, and an evidence base for the development of indicators to measure Scotland's economic recovery.

Investment, skills, business generation and enterprise: the RSE is engaged with the development of the Scottish National Investment Bank and of the British Business Bank in Scotland. We will relaunch RSE's successful Enterprise Fellowship Scheme to take into account developments in new business generation, and the complex post-Covid and post-COP26 environment. The RSE's Economy and Enterprise Committee and Education Committee are collaborating on proposals for skills development and enhancement and the importance of vocational training and FE (including around net zero and a just transition).

“Actions will include exploring a fund to boost the profile of diverse and under-represented new enterprises.”

The RSE's **strategic regional approach** links to the economy and enterprise programme, including work with South of Scotland Enterprise and collaboration plans with Highlands and Islands Enterprise.

We plan further work on taxation and public expenditure, considering equity among income groups; work on Scottish statistics, and the distributional impacts of net zero policies. Specific items include how to incorporate environmental costs and benefits within project appraisals; building on existing work in relation to the natural economy and GDP where the RSE could become a thought leader; providing an overview of how to translate net zero commitments onto balance sheets to enable companies to highlight their environmental impact, and how to incentivise private sector companies to give due weight to environmental and equity objectives.

Priorities, themes and programmes (continued)

Education

As Scotland's National Academy, the RSE is in a unique position to consider education as a whole and relate it to the major social, economic, and environmental challenges, asking 'what does society need 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 has already created a number of workstreams, including: reform and performance of Scotland's education system (2021 OECD Curriculum for Excellence review of the senior phase of School education, Scottish Government (2022) reform agenda and The Muir Review); Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) following from the RSE's Being and Belonging conference (March 2022); Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL), actively running the IDL network and forum which allow teachers to access resources, reflect on their practice, and share advice; and Tertiary Education Futures.

A joint RSE-YAS initiative, **Tertiary Education Futures**, will identify future challenges and opportunities for tertiary education in Scotland by raising the topics that other organisations might avoid and investigating the lived experiences of key stakeholders such as staff and students. This work will continue through inclusive round tables, bringing in non-traditional education providers, from the Prison Service, the military, to High Tech companies, and commissioning provocative thought pieces to explore contrasting future visions of TE in 2040.

The Education Committee'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.

This work will include bringing people together to explore the importance of alternate pathways for learners outwith the 'conventional' academic route, including vocational and further education routes (in partnership with the Economy and Enterprise Committee). There is increasing evidence of the changing skills needs in all aspects of the economy as a result of the move to net zero which is as critical for technical skills as it is in the academic disciplines. The RSE will bring the breadth of Fellows and YAS to act as an expert voice and independent convening body to bring together educationalists, policymakers, industry, business—and importantly, wider society—to discuss the future of education and skills.

Priorities, themes and programmes (continued)

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. We will work with civil society groups to promote exchanges in the arts and culture.

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. We also work with the Commonwealth Science Academic Network and the All European Academies (ALLEA).

We 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. The RSE has a particular experience in interdisciplinary research, partnerships, and application of research to policy. We will work with scholars overseas in promoting research and the growth of national academies. We have experience in mentoring researchers in countries where the academic infrastructure and resources are not as fully developed as in the UK. This is now evolving into the concept of exchange and mutual learning rather than a one-way transfer of knowledge. The RSE is an active participant in Connected Scotland, which seeks to promote Scotland's higher education sector in target markets and growth of the sector's exports.

The RSE, drawing on its status as neutral space and its convening power, 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. This is not confined to government but will include wide engagement with international questions on the part of business, the educational community, and the wider civil society. Edinburgh is home to 18 consulates general, 24 consulates, and two representative offices and we are in regular contact, particularly with the full-time consulates. They continue to support our events and the RSE will host an annual series of lunches with them to build on our existing collaboration and strengths. The RSE is also working through the Scottish Government hubs located within several British embassies. With the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina we are engaged in Scotland-Germany research and innovation conversations facilitated by the UK and Scottish governments, including an initiative on hydrogen energy.

The RSE is committed to global human rights and takes a particular interest in protecting scholars whose freedom is threatened, often in collaboration with other academies and bodies such as Scholars at Risk. We are conscious that this poses dilemmas in collaborating with official institutions in certain countries and this is under continuous review.

The international strategy was reviewed in 2018 to give greater thematic and regional focus. Alongside current priorities in China, Europe, Asia, and Africa, we will add a focus on Arab countries, especially the Gulf states. The following projects will feature prominently in the next period:

Europe: during the Brexit debate, the RSE provided dispassionate analysis and a neutral space for discussion. As the future of Scotland in Europe remains uncertain, there is an urgent need for more such analysis outside the framework of partisan politics. A new Europe initiative will include Chatham House seminars with policy makers, researchers, business, and civil society to explore how links with Europe can be maintained and strengthened, and opportunities explored, in economic, social, educational, cultural, and environmental matters.

Priorities, themes and programmes (continued)

There will be events to engage the public in the debate, such as the previous event with the EU ambassador to the United Kingdom is giving the 2022 MacCormick Lecture. We will continue to present evidence to governmental and parliamentary inquiries at Holyrood and Westminster as well as to European institutions (including the EU and Council of Europe). We will work through pan-European research, educational and cultural institutions, ALLEA, and Academia Europaea. The RSE is currently administering the Scottish Government Saltire grants to foster collaborative research with European scholars and we will urge that this funding be continued.

Africa: The RSE and African Academies of Science (AAS) will finalise their MoU in 2022. The RSE Africa Working Group and AAS Fellows Working Group are prioritising:

1. Innovation partnerships to promote international collaboration and knowledge exchange via “reverse mentoring” whereby the RSE learns from African academics.
2. Collaboration on global challenges such as: the impacts of Covid-19; climate change; biodiversity loss; sustainable development; low carbon energy systems, and greater engagement to empower local communities and future generations.
3. Dialogue and collaboration with scholars in Africa on the slave trade, the extent of the RSE’s involvement, and future joint programmes of redress where considered culturally appropriate.
4. Early career researcher mobility and inclusion in RSE international awards programmes such as bilateral visits or joint projects.

Asia: We will expand on our existing work in Asia:

The RSE Scotland Asia Partnerships Higher Education Research (SAPHIRE) fund is a grant scheme funded by the Scottish Government with the aim of enhancing the existing international research partnerships between Scottish universities, research institutes and partners in Australia, India, Japan, Pakistan, South Korea, Singapore and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The RSE and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences jointly facilitated an agreement between the University of Edinburgh and the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences to establish a new research institute focused initially on Hermeneutics. The RSE and the National Natural Science Foundation are jointly supporting nine successful applicants (two-year duration) during 2021 undertaking projects related to Covid-19. A further Joint Projects call with the NNSF of China will open for applications in September 2022; a new Scotland-China Joint Workshop Scheme will launch in Autumn 2023.

The Gulf: There are currently no national academies in the Gulf regions despite the UAE and other Arab countries investing heavily in higher education and international research. An initial approach has been made to Qatar’s Ministry for Foreign Affairs who have expressed an interest in how the RSE may assist in setting up a national academy in Qatar.

Priorities, themes and programmes (continued)

Research

Research has an intrinsic value of its own and RSE will encourage new thinking within and across disciplines through introducing Fellows' communities of interest. The governance review and Fellowship Committee will consider enhancing the role of Sections in creative thinking and debate.

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 Research Awards Programme and its mission-oriented research for which its cross-disciplinary Fellowship is particularly well equipped.

The RSE is committed to the encouragement of research in Scotland and attracting researchers and research funding. The RSE highlights the value of research and Scotland's shortcomings, such as the low level of industry funded research, and explains the needs of research to Governments, parliaments, and the public. Through the Celtic Academies Alliance, the RSE seeks to ensure that the devolved nations gain their share of UK research funding and opportunities. We promote Scotland's research to UK and international research foundations and help Scottish researchers to access foundation funding.

The RSE commits substantial resources to its own Research Awards Programme, providing types and amounts of funding not available from UKRI or other sources. The RSE's 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 (such as SAPHIRE, Scotland-Germany Hydrogen Research, and Scotland-Ireland Bilateral Network Grant). The RSE emphasises inclusion and the importance of early career researchers, as exemplified by the 2021 Covid-19 Research Reboot Awards Scheme and the 2022 networking and capacity-building event for the awardees.

An internal review of the Research Awards Programmes (2019/20) concluded that research is central to the RSE; needs to serve all disciplines and career stages; should benefit multiple audiences; should promote equality, diversity, and inclusivity; should maintain and enhance Scotland's and Scottish HEIs' recognised high profile in research, scholarship, and impact, and should generate better opportunities for national and international collaboration. The new programme has seen an almost tenfold increase in applications and with standards of awards (as measured by referee scores) comparable to other major research funders. This quality has been recognised by the Scottish Government and as indicated by the successful £2M SG/SFC/RSE Saltire Research Awards Programme (2021/22). The RSE is scoping whether and how it could expand its Research Awards Programme to the vocational and further education sector.

“The RSE is committed to the encouragement of research in Scotland and attracting researchers and research funding.”

Priorities, themes and programmes (continued)

Subject to availability of resources, the RSE is committed to sustaining and growing its programmes, filling a critically important niche by supporting crucial small and medium-sized grants, an interdisciplinary perspective, and emphasis on emerging scholars.

The recommendations of a review of RSE medals and prizes was accepted by Council in June 2022, including considerations of diversity (all medals and prizes were hitherto named after men), encouraging more nominations and requiring winners to contribute to the RSE's lecture, outreach, and public engagement programme.

Policy advice

The RSE has a singular ability to provide independent, evidence-driven policy expertise across a wide range of areas, drawing on the unpaid 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.

We 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. We will continue to act as secretariat to the cross-party group in the Scottish Parliament on science and technology, which brings together MSPs, members of the scientific community, and interested citizens to discuss science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). We are organising a series of workshops with the Scottish Government, examining issues arising from the RSE's Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission. We have a strong relationship with the Westminster Scottish Affairs Committee (SAC), including hosting roundtables on their behalf and providing witnesses for evidence sessions.

Policy impact: With financial support from the Economic and Social Research Council, in 2022 the RSE launched an initiative on understanding the impact of academic research on public policy. The project brings together a wide network of participants, Fellows and other non-affiliated academics, Research Council representatives, policy makers, and third sector representatives. The aim is to understand how policy impact is conceptualised and achieved across UK, how knowledge is communicated across sectors and what best practices can be identified. This comprehensive analysis, grounded in both academic literature and practice, promises to lead into a wider programme, bringing in other academics and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

The RSE hosts the Learned Societies Group on Scottish STEM Education (LSG) and the Scottish Arts and Humanities Alliance (SAHA), producing policy outputs, coordinating campaigning activity, and brokering meetings with policy leaders and parliamentarians. Our work with the Celtic Academies Alliance allows the academies to achieve more together than would be possible on their own. A current example is a joint initiative on the Levelling Up agenda.

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.

Priorities, themes and programmes (continued)

As a trusted, impartial source of expertise and a neutral space for discussion, the RSE is developing a new constitutional programme, some of which will be in partnership with the Royal Irish Academy and the Learned Society of Wales, on constitutional futures for Scotland and the devolved nations. This follows the Enlightening the Constitutional Debate, conducted around the Scottish independence referendum in partnership with the British Academy produce papers analysing the key issues from a non-partisan perspective. Using its convening power, the RSE hosted a series of roundtables and meetings across Scotland, addressed both by academics and by members of civil society. The RSE developed a similar exercise around the Brexit referendum of 2016.

Judicial primers: Since 2016 the RSE has worked with the Royal Society and the senior judiciary of England and Wales and of Scotland to produce Judicial primers, short documents written in simple prose which explain the science underpinning evidence presented in the courts. Six primers have been produced to date with three more in preparation. This peer-reviewed series provides a significant and long-term public service and societal impact. RSE is now developing a series of 'science seminars' with and for the Scottish Judiciary, including a 'traveling road show', extending out into the sheriffdoms, with a conference organised in partnership with the Lord President.

Delivery



Delivery

Financial planning

The strategic plan will run together with financial planning to ensure that resources are available for the plan's delivery. Proposals for new activities will need to be accompanied by a statement outlining internal and/or external funding plans. Staff time spent on projects will now be fully costed allowing us to assess the comparative expense and assess priorities.

The RSE is committed to diversifying funding. Promising routes are through project funding, through partnerships (as with the proposals for the new Enterprise Fellowships) and working with foundations in Scotland, the UK, and internationally. Partnership proposals need to be scrutinised to ensure that they are consistent with the RSE's core purpose and themes and that they provide added value.

The RSE Treasurer is prioritising the following items in order to underpin successful delivery of the strategic plan:

- A new automated accounting system, which will substantially ease the workload of the staff and allow for the speedy production of monthly and annual accounts and other analyses.
- A new procurement policy and expenditure sign-off protocol with a clear and transparent process, whether or not the expenditure was provided in a budget.
- A revamp of the accounting processes to allow the production of profit and loss accounts, cash flows and balance sheets as at each month end with comparators to the previous year, budget, and forecasts as the year progresses.
- A system to record how the professional staff team spend their time so that we can match income directly with expenditure and cost future projects.
- A review of central overheads to see if savings can be made.
- A review of the building in George Street, its uses, maintenance costs, and opportunities for better financial returns.

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.

Partnership proposals need to be scrutinised to ensure that they are consistent with the RSE's core purpose and themes and that they provide added value"

Delivery (continued)

Communications

RSE comms is an essential function in ensuring that clear messages reach our stakeholders in Scotland.

In the past three years, communications have increased the RSE's reach, diversifying the means of engagement, through podcasts, written and social media. In 2020, the *Tea and Talk* podcast series was launched, providing more informal engagement with Fellows around key scientific themes, including Covid-19, equality, and climate change (over 33 episodes with more than 5,000 downloads). The RSE's magazine, *ReSourceE*, was revamped to become more thematic and engaging, exploring topics including climate change and sustainability; health and wellbeing; equality and diversity, and technological innovation and disruption, profiling Fellows' and YAS members' achievements, and supported by hundreds of pieces of media coverage secured across print, radio, TV, and online. 2021 also saw the launch of the RSE's new website and monthly visitor numbers climbing to 7000–11,000 (28,000 in June 2021). Social media presence has also been enhanced, with the RSE's Facebook followers growing to over 4000 followers; Twitter followers growing 25% to over 13,500; YouTube subscribers doubling to over 2000; and Instagram and LinkedIn sitting at 795 and 4864 respectively.

The RSE is currently reviewing its communications strategy to focus on: what sort of knowledge are we communicating; and with whom are we communicating? The aim is to translate 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. We will also look at barriers to engagement and how these can be broken down.

We have a particular interest in communities that do not customarily engage in these debates but whose experiences are vital for understanding our 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 (as well as using more traditional means of communication such as TV and radio). Work will be undertaken to support increased engagement of Fellows and gather more information on Fellows' expertise and interests in order to utilise their experience, knowledge and skills. For example, in the runup to Glasgow hosting COP26 in November 2021, our well-received *Face the Facts* talking head series presented the work of climate researchers and leaders in the form of short, engaging YouTube videos that could be shared in school classrooms, on social media, and beyond, with the aim of ensuring that complex climate science could be understood by the public.

We are also pursuing a more creative approach to our policy communication through podcasts, blogs, media articles, and other outputs that are accessible to the public, created specifically for sharing and designed to generate debate and discussion.

Delivery (continued)

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. Recent years have seen a steep increase in the RSE's public engagement activity.

In 2021/22, 4679 people participated in RSE events, including:

- The RSE's flagship events programme Curious; the RSE Investigates series; Signature events; RSE Young People's Programme which includes a school talks series; Post-Covid-19 Futures Commission events, and RSE Public Engagement Medal events.
- RSE events in partnership, including with the Scottish Parliament; Festival of Politics; COP26 with Royal Meteorological Society; Midlothian Science Festival; Human Rights and Climate Change Symposium; Royal Conservatoire of Scotland; Royal Institute of Philosophy; Royal Academy of Engineering; Abbotsford Walter Scott 250 Project; Edinburgh Science Festival; Greyfriars Kirk and the Scottish Consortium for Rural Research.
- Launch of the RSE's strategic regional approach, strengthening the RSE's footprint as Scotland's National Academy through supporting Fellows' initiatives across Scotland; partnering with stakeholders to deliver locally sensitive engagement in rural regions, and developing legacy partnerships with diverse sectors and communities.

The RSE's public engagement strategy (February 2022) 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. The four guiding principles are inclusive, inter-generational and for the whole of Scotland; multi-disciplinary and cross-disciplinary; high quality and high impact, and listening to communities.

The RSE will encourage more Fellows to engage in public-facing activities. We are investing in new communications technology, allowing for online and hybrid events, drawing on lessons learned during the pandemic. We will partner with other academies and organisations where appropriate, increasing our reach and reducing duplication.

Equality, diversity and inclusion



Equality, diversity and inclusion

The RSE is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in its culture and working. We will integrate all EDI initiatives into an RSE-wide programme to enable learning and improvement that can be monitored and evaluated.

A diverse Fellowship

The RSE is diversifying the Fellowship to reflect more fully the talents across Scottish society. It has established nominations groups to identify people in underrepresented groups who should be considered for Fellowship. Changes have been made to the criteria for election and nomination forms to support diversity and provide opportunities for candidates to detail any individual circumstances that make the achievements particularly notable and/or impressive, or which may have affected the candidate's career profile and volume of output (for example, career breaks, caring responsibilities, and part-time working). We have increased the number of Fellows elected each year, with the additional places targeted on candidates meeting diversity criteria. Although only 20% of the overall Fellowship are women, this figure doubles (39%) among those elected in the last 5 years. In 2021, two thirds of new Fellows came from groups which are underrepresented in the Fellowship (those aged under 50; from ethnic minorities; from an underrepresented university; outside of academia, and women). In 2022, this increased to three quarters.

The RSE is committed to representing fully the diversity of Scotland's knowledge base as well as delivering outcomes that impact positively on the full range of Scotland's diverse population. The RSE also commits to making every effort to ensuring diverse panels and committees wherever possible. We make a commitment to disallow panels exclusively made up of men for all RSE activities, whether internally facing (such as committees and interview panels) or externally facing (such workshops and conferences). We understand that this requirement may place an extra representation burden on certain Fellows, and that it may not be possible to find women with the right expertise for all events and panels. However, with 39% of the most recently elected Fellows being women, the barriers to forming gender-balanced panels are increasingly straightforward to overcome.

Young Academy of Scotland (YAS)

YAS is a body of professionals demonstrating knowledge and leadership in their work, along with a wider interest in contemporary social issues. YAS is interdisciplinary with activities developed and led by members, responding to some of the most pressing challenges facing Scotland today. YAS values equality and diversity, and is proud of the equal gender split of their membership. They encourage applications, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or any other protected characteristics. Recognising that Scotland's refugee and asylum-seeking communities include many people who can make meaningful contributions to Scotland, since 2016 YAS has committed to recruiting at-risk academics and refugees (ARAR) professionals as members, with reserved slots, no membership fees and financial support to cover costs of participating in YAS activities.

“Changes have been made to the criteria for election and nomination forms to support diversity and provide opportunities.”

Ensuring diverse panels

Equality, diversity and inclusion (continued)

Research Awards Programme

The RSE's redesigned Research Awards Programme ensures that awards are open to all academics, at all stages of their career, from all disciplines and at all research institutions. Financial support for those with caring responsibilities was piloted in calls such as the Covid-19 Research Reboot Awards (2021), guidance was sought on how to support those intersectionalities of ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ and those experiencing disadvantage/caring responsibilities, since evidence showed disproportional impacts from Covid-19. Learning from this is being built into the subsequent Research Awards Programme. We remain vigilant to any proposals that might support or promote inequalities and are scoping unconscious bias training for proposal assessors (Fellows).

Public engagement

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. RSE has partnered with organisations across the public, private and third sectors to enhance awareness of the RSE's "offer". Geographic inclusion is promoted through a strategic regional approach, ensuring the RSE creates and maintains a presence across Scotland. Inclusion of individuals is also addressed through, for example, British Sign Language (BSL) interpretation at major events; easy-read versions of recent publications, and a remuneration policy to support participation of those who could not otherwise take part in events due to financial and other constraints. These initiatives are being pulled together into an EDI approach to engagement that can be monitored and evaluated on an annual basis.

Communications

The RSE's communications team work closely with the research awards and public engagement teams, ensuring that awards calls reach the greatest breadth of potential applicants (using SFC and other networks) and that the terms and conditions are expressed clearly; that the public engagement events have the maximum reach through multiple communication channels and media (including videos, blogs, vlogs etc.), and making sure RSE publications and the recently refreshed website are fully accessible.

International

As a member of the UK Human Rights Commission (UKHRC), the RSE participated in a meeting in 2021 aiming to formulate efficient responses to key humanitarian concerns, including the plight of Afghan academics and the continued targeting of Mexican scientists. The UKHRC now includes all seven of the UK academies in its membership, along with expert input from the Council of At-Risk Academics (Cara). The RSE also successfully responded to five high-profile academic-at-risk cases in 2021. Other critically important initiatives developed over 2020–2021 include creating the RSE Africa Working Group and commissioning the historical research scoping project into the RSE's historical links with slavery, as well as international policy responses. More recently, the RSE has actively engaged with other academies in response to the war in Ukraine.



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