

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY, 3RD DECEMBER 2018

Present: Professor M Campbell (Convener), Professor A Brown, Professor J Cleland, Professor A Cuesta Ciscar, Dr A Dilley, Professor P Haggarty, Professor H Hutchison, Professor A Lee, Dr A Lewendon, Professor G Macfarlane, Mrs K McPhail, Professor R Neilson, Professor G Nixon, Professor L Phillips, Professor D Pokrajac, Dr J Scott, Professor C Soulsby, Professor I Stansfield (for Professor P Fowler), Professor M Watson, Ms D Walker

Apologies: Professor P Beaumont, Professor P Duff, Professor Fowler, Dr L Rattray

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 28th September 2019 were agreed.

2 MATTERS ARISING

Professor Campbell reported back from the meetings with Heads of School and the Principal which had taken place in September. Research was addressed specifically, particularly around low or no grant holdings and REF preparedness. Schools were tasked with putting in place measures of support for researchers who had so far not published any REF-able outputs or were not associated with research income.

In terms of REF preparedness, the meetings focused on impact. School were strongly encouraged to engage with the central team supporting impact within Research & Innovation. A further call for impact support awards will be launched shortly. Resubmissions for funding to facilitate and enhance impact are welcome, provided the feedback from previous rounds has been taken into account for the current application.

Professor Campbell talked about the recent Court Strategy Day which involved Heads of School, Directors of Professional Services, student representatives and others. One of the headline messages emerging from the discussion was increased focus on interdisciplinarity. Support for interdisciplinary research has already been subject to much discussion at RPC and other research relevant fora, and is set to continue as we prepare the next strategic plan for the University. She reminded Committee members of the IDR facility within Crombie, a bookable space for meetings and events (to book, please contact the Postgraduate Research School on ext. 4242).

3 RESEARCH APPLICATIONS AND AWARDS TRENDS

The Committee received and discussed a report on applications and awards trends (ROPC18:16). Mrs Walker introduced the paper and said that the volume of application was similar to that in previous years. Awards value was lower. A number of large awards are still subject to negotiation and have not been included in this report. These include the NERC DTP in SBS, the TAU contract which provides an annual income of £5m across a number of Schools and the RESAS award for RINH. We are awaiting the outcome of decision on a number of applications, including DTPs.

4 RESEARCH INCOME

The Committee received the monthly management report for October 2018 and orderbook (RPC18:17). Mrs Walker pointed out that operational spend was behind budget and emphasised the need for Schools to increase research spending if the University is to meet its overall income target this year. The orderbook indicates annual spend of £52m this year but does not include a number of significant awards yet. The expectation is for an overall turnout of £58m for 2018/19.

ICC varies across Schools, depending on funders, funding schemes and the nature of the research. Schools should have in place a strategy for choosing funders and funding mix, bearing in mind that UKRI pay more ICC than charities. 6 Schools are currently below target in terms of indirect cost recovery.

The Committee discussed direct cost recovery and the differences in funders' approaches to some of these costs, particularly around the use of research facilities. UKRI have very clear guidance on how these charges can be included, and what assumptions can underpin the costing of the use of research facilities. Professor Nixon said that this would be looked at in more detail by the Research Facilities Group.

Mrs McPhail asked what measures were in place to meet income targets within the Schools that are currently projecting a lower than budgeted income. Schools will be asked to report back to RPC at its next meeting in March.

5 IMPACT AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Dr Lewendon introduced the report on knowledge exchanges and commercialisation (RPC 18:19).

The University has received a University Innovation Fund Uplift from the Scottish Funding Council to support a series of initiatives to support knowledge exchange, impact and engagement with industry. A call for applications to Industry Fellowships is about to be launched, providing salary costs for postdoctoral researchers to work in industry for a short period of time. The application process is simpler than that for a KTP fellow. We are also discussing the creation of Industry Professorships, primarily within Engineering but other disciplines were invited to consider these too. A call for applications around Industry Professorships will be circulated shortly.

The National Decommissioning Centre (NDC) has been awarded £1.9m from the Scottish Government's Decommissioning Challenge Fund (DCF). Our NDC partners, the Oil and Gas Technology Centre (OGTC) have provided staff, and Professor Richard Neilson has been appointed as interim Director. Further recruitment to NDC posts will take place later this month, with the NDC expected to launch in January 2019.

Dr Scott spoke to the update on public engagement with research (RPC19:20). PERU are looking for researchers to participate in British Science Week, Cell Block Science (at HMP Grampian) and for MayFestival 2019. Any volunteers should get in touch with Dr Scott on j.scott@abdn.ac.uk

6 POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL UPDATE

Professor Nixon reported that the application for a NERC Doctoral Training Centre in Marine Freshwater Conservation had been successful. We are still awaiting the outcome of the application for a DTC in Artificial Intelligence.

He provided an update on postgraduate admissions data. PGR numbers had increased by 6.5% compared to the previous year and with admissions ongoing, were likely to increase further. International markets continue to be challenging, as suggested by the reduction of cleared international students by 35% compared to previous year. A working group exploring split site international research degrees has been convened with a view to increase international numbers.

The Committee discussed mandatory training for postgraduate research students and noted the importance of robust monitoring and consistent approach to ensure compliance across the University. Work is underway to review the content of the online ethics module as well as the mode of delivery.

7 GLOBAL CHALLENGES RESEARCH FUND UPDATE

Professor Campbell provided a short update on GCRF activities. 3 bids for large GCRF Hub Awards in which the University of Aberdeen is a partner have been invited to final bid stage. A number of applications have been successful involving partnerships with India, Bangladesh, Kenya and Indonesia, led by researchers in SBS, NCS and MMS&N. She noted that there had been fewer GCRF calls over recent months, probably due to the ongoing review of the scheme.

Within the University of Aberdeen, internally awarded pump priming projects are progressing and a number are awaiting appropriate calls to which they can submit. Feedback from the funding councils on previous funding rounds had been extremely helpful and will be used in future application rounds. It is vital that Schools promote and support interdisciplinary research beyond the support and resource that is available centrally. A post for a dedicated Research Development Officer for GCRF has been advertised. Shortlisting has taken place and interviews will be conducted later this week.

Professor Haggarty said that applications to research councils under the responsive mode can be marked as GCRF relevant and will then be prioritised.

8 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK – DRAFT CODE OF PRACTICE

Professor Campbell introduced the paper (RPC18:21) which represented the 2nd draft of the Code of Practice placed before RPC for discussion and approval.

The Committee discussed the right of appeal in the draft code of practice. It currently follows that offered for REF2014, which focused on due process and information not available to the decision making body. This is in line with other academic appeals. There were mixed views around whether a researcher should be allowed to appeal a predicted grade for an output. It should be clear that researchers should feel free to ask for clarification around predicted grades, and that predicted grades that fall short of expectations should be discussed with REF leads in the first instance.

It was pointed out that the 'no detriment' statement required re-drafting, and requests were made for strengthening the wording around the statement. Professor Haggarty pointed out that the institutional expectations around the number of REF-able outputs were daunting to some researchers, particularly those at early career stages. Professor Stansfield asked whether there would be contractual consequences for researchers who did not have the required number of papers. Professor Campbell responded that, as one of the research intensive institutions, the intention was to make 100% submission. The implication of this is that we have to support colleagues in their research to make sure that we have a sufficient number of high quality papers available for submission.

Professor Lee asked about the status of SCREDS lecturers. Professor Campbell said that we are currently awaiting the final REF guidance which will set out the way in which the REF will deal with early career researchers, including researchers who have not yet completed their clinical training. It is likely that this will be addressed through individual staff circumstances which will allow us to reduce the number of outputs to be submitted by the unit of assessment.

There was discussion around the selection of outputs and impact case studies. Mrs McPhail asked what measures were in place within Schools to increase the number of 4* papers available for REF. Within the Institute of Medical Sciences, pump priming is available to increase the depth of the evidence base and corroboration which enhances the quality of a paper and can mean the difference between 3* and 4*. The School of Psychology discuss work in progress during research interviews and offer advice on maximising the quality of a paper. Researchers in Divinity, History and Philosophy are advised by the School in the delivery of monographs and book chapters. The School of Engineering have held workshops which explored in detail the difference between a 3* and a 4* paper. Researchers in RINH

submit manuscripts for review prior to submission to a publisher. All agreed that the judgement of whether a paper meets the 4* standard can be difficult and, to a degree, subjective.

Mrs Barraclough invited further comments on the draft code of practice. It will be discussed at Senate next, and will then enter a phase of consultation with the wider academic community. Engagement at School level will be vital to ensure that we achieve high levels of awareness of how we plan to prepare for REF, what that means for individual researchers and who we plan to approach staff circumstances. There will be a further iteration of the draft code of practice when the final guidance is published in January 2019 which is likely to be the version to be taken for consultation.

9 DRAFT INSTITUTIONAL SABBATICAL LEAVE/RESEARCH LEAVE POLICY

The Committee received the draft institutional policy on sabbaticals/research leave (RPC18:22). Professor Campbell said that the policy aimed to provide a consistent policy framework at institutional level, while allowing sufficient flexibility for Schools. The revised policy also expanded the scope of sabbaticals/research leave to explicitly include knowledge exchange and impact related activities.

The Committee welcomed the document, subject to a number of clarifications. Dr Dille questioned the length of notice required to be given prior to applications for research mini breaks, as 12 months seemed a long period. Professor Phillips asked whether the policy could be amended to include a requirements for applicants to explore how teaching and administrative duties will be covered during their period of leave.

There were also questions around the frequency of research leave. The policy creates an expectation for Schools to grant research leave where all the conditions have been met. These may differ between Schools. There was a need to clarify how joint appointments between Schools would be granted research leave if the Schools had different requirements.

10 OPEN ACCESS UPDATE – WELLCOME OA POLICY AND PLAN S

Professor Hutchison introduced paper RPC18:23 which set out the requirements of the new Wellcome open access policy and Plan S. She asked the committee to consider the open access requirements and associated costs against the wider background of annual subscription costs for non-open access and hybrid open access journals of £3m. Coalition S and Plan S represented an attempt to redress the balance between publishers and institutions. Wellcome had already adopted Plan S as had the ERC, and UKRI were likely to follow suit. An open access policy on books and monographs was likely for the next REF (probably in 2027).

11 RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND GOVERNANCE UPDATE

The Committee received the report from the working group (RPC18:24) and noted its content.

12 ETHICS APPROVAL PROJECT UPDATE

The Committee received the update on progress (RCP18:25) and noted its content.

13 SCHOOL ETHICS HEALTHCHECKS: ENGINEERING; DIVINITY, HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

The Committee received the completed review paper work for the Schools of Engineering and of Divinity, History and Philosophy and noted the outcome of the self assessment. (RPC18:26) It was agreed that the form for self assessment should be amended to include questions around compliance with institutional processes on remote campuses.

14 CONSULTATION ON CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS

The Committee noted that a consultation on the new Concordat to support the career development of researchers was underway (RPC18:27). Dr Claire Hawes, Researcher Development Unit, has been asked to co-ordinate the institutional response (claire.hawes@abdn.ac.uk)

15 ALTMETRICS UPDATE

The Committee noted progress in the implementation of Altmetrics (RPC18:28).

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