

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN  
RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 24<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2019**

Present: Gary Macfarlane (Convenor, for Marion Campbell), Simon Bains, Alison Brown, Michael Brown, Ignacio Canales (for Catia Montagna), Angel Cuesta-Ciscar, Andrew Dilley, Paul Fowler, Tamas Gyorf, Graeme Nixon, Ann Lewendon, Richard Neilson, Louise Phillips, Stuart Piertney, Chris Soulsby, Donna Walker, and Marlis Barraclough (clerk)

Apologies: Marion Campbell, Jen Cleland, Paul Haggarty, Amanda Lee, Kathryn McPhail, Catia Montagna, Dubravka Pokrajac, Liz Rattray, Sean Treweek, Moray Watson

Professor Macfarlane welcomed all present. He noted that this would be Kathryn McPhail's last meeting as lay member of Court and thanked her for her contribution to the work of RPC over the years. He extended a particular welcome to Simon Bains, University Librarian and Tamas Gyorf, Director of Research for the School of Law who had both been appointed recently to their current roles and were attending the Research Policy Committee for the first time.

**1 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> March were approved, subject to the following amendment:

Matters arising

[..]

Professor Russell Howe (NCS, Chemistry) and Dr Xiaodong Wang (Engineering) have been awarded an International Collaboration Award by the Royal Society, value: £224k.

**2 MATTERS ARISING**

Gary Macfarlane invited those who had attended open meetings for the various workstreams preparing the draft strategic plan 2040 to report back to the Committee.

Andrew Dilley reported on the open meeting on interdisciplinarity, and Michael Brown provided an update on the inclusivity workstream

The interdisciplinarity workshop was concerned with enabling true interdisciplinarity and measures that would increase engagement. In discussion, members of RPC noted that the measures to support IDR needed to be strengthened, and that there was a need to develop the skills required to undertake interdisciplinary rather than multidisciplinary research. All interdisciplinary research needed to be based on disciplinary excellence.

The inclusivity workstream was exploring, among a range of other issues, how to enable inclusive research, particularly in terms of collaborating and co-creating research with non-academic partners. Michael Brown invited views from members of RPC on how researchers should engage and what the implications of that kind of engagement were for research integrity and ethics. The timeframe for feedback was tight as the first drafts reports of the workstreams were expected to be completed in mid-August 2019.

**3 RESEARCH INCOME/RESEARCH APPLICATIONS AND AWARDS TRENDS/GCRF**

Donna Walker reported current levels of applications and awards (RPC18:40). Applications stood at £146.8m which is comparable to the volume of applications for 2017/18. Awards in 2018/19 are valued around £70.5m. This includes the awards for the National Decommissioning Centre and TAU Rx. Without those, the underlying awards are similar to last year's award levels. Research income is £4m behind budget, largely in SMMSN due to

departing staff not spending research awards prior to moving on. The institutional orderbook presented to RPC had been adjusted to take account of departing staff and remained ahead of the orderbook at this point last year.

The Committee also received and noted the report on GCRF awards and activities (RPC18:41). The Committee noted that the Funder contribution to Jo Smith's project (7<sup>th</sup> on the list on page 4) was £614.5k.

Gary Macfarlane noted that item 14 on the agenda UKRI Delivery Plans 2019, which was for information, was relevant in this context. He invited School Directors of Research to familiarise themselves with the document and circulate it through the School Research Committees.

#### **4 KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE REPORT**

Ann Lewendon provided an update on knowledge exchange activities (RPC18:42). The Committee noted the information provided, including that UKRI's Strength in Places scheme Wave 2 will close at the beginning of October 2019. The University was currently in discussions with various partners and stakeholders around a bid on Energy Transitions.

Anyone wishing to discuss this proposal or bring forward further proposals should contact Ann Lewendon ([a.lewendon@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:a.lewendon@abdn.ac.uk) or ext. 2477) or Liz Rattray ([e.rattray@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:e.rattray@abdn.ac.uk) or ext. 4369)

Ann Lewendon told the Committee that resource was still available in this financial year to support REF impact. Researchers wishing to make a case for support should contact her directly.

The Principal's Excellence Awards had been held for the first time with a dinner in the Elphinstone Hall. The general outturn was good, and the feedback from those involved was very positive. For some of the research categories there had been few nominations and Schools and Directors of Research were encouraged to put forward candidates for the awards for the next round.

#### **5 GRADUATE SCHOOL REPORT**

Graeme Nixon spoke to the Postgraduate School report (RPC18:43). International applications and cleared numbers this year are lower than those for last year, and the actual year to date FTE are short of both the Home and International targets for 2018/19. The Postgraduate School is working with PGR Co-ordinators to identify the reasons for this reduction in numbers and to address them.

The Committee discussed mandatory supervisor training. This was recommended during the institutional ELIR and is an expectation from government and many funders. Paper RPC18:43 set out the various measures put in place by the Postgraduate School to mandate the training and generally support the quality of postgraduate supervision. New supervisors (both new to supervising and new to the University of Aberdeen) will be expected to complete appropriate training. This will be offered two or three times during the academic year. Supervisor update training for all experienced supervisors will be recommended every three years and mandatory every 5 years. Attendance and completion will be monitored by the Graduate School and will be enforced by Heads of School.

Graeme Nixon also set out plans for phase 2 of the development of the Graduate School. The current structures had been recommended by the Professional Services Review included a partially centralised model of admissions, with some Schools handling their own admissions processes. The paper set out a proposal for the centralisation of admissions across the University of Aberdeen and was currently under consideration by Heads of School. There were a number of questions about how of the admissions activity would be centralised, and whether Schools would be required to do their own initial vetting. This remains to be decided.

## 6 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

### **REF5 – Institutional Environment and UoA Environment**

Andrew Dilley reported that he and Dawn Foster, R% had attended a workshop organised by the REF team on the institutional environment template. Paper RPC18:45 summarised the information gleaned at that workshop. He pointed out that, for REF2021, the institutional environment would not be assessed, only the unit of assessment level environment statement would form part of the formal assessment. The two statements are intended to complement each other and needed to be drafted and fine-tuned so that they supported and augmented each other. The difficulty was to draft an institutional statement that would work for all units of assessment and all panels.

### **November REF Reviews**

Marlis Barraclough introduced paper RPC18:47, a draft template which sets out a number of metrics and checks intended to assess the preparedness of each unit of assessment for REF2021. Views were sought on whether the completion of the checklist was realistic for the institutional reviews planned for November. The approach was agreed, subject to a couple of minor amendments to the template.

Mrs Barraclough emphasised that there was no expectation that all the tasks listed on the checklist would be complete by November – its purpose was a reminder that there a number of checks and tasks that needed to be undertaken prior to submission in November 2020. The expectation was to finalise, as far as possible at this stage, the list of Category A and Category B staff for each unit of assessment, along with the output profiles and predicted grades. Much of the focus at this moment is on impact and the expectation is that units of assessment will submit for review full drafts of the required number of impact case studies on the REF 2021 template. Gary Macfarlane noted that, for Main Panel A units of assessment, a number of meetings with impact cases study authors had been set up to enable authors to support each other in drafting the case studies, and provide a forum to ask questions about the guidance and good practice.

It was noted that some researchers were still likely to move between units of assessment, particularly in the light of ongoing recruitment.

Gary Macfarlane asked whether Directors of Research had received many queries following the REF communications around eligibility and the release of the predicted grades for outputs in Pure. Very few had been received and had been resolved.

### **REF Circular**

Please contact Marlis Barraclough ([m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk) or ext 3787) if an application under the terms of this communication needs to be made to the REF team.

## 7 PLAN S UPDATE

Simon Bains provided an update on Plan S, developments on open access requirements by a coalition of research funders (RPC18:49). Coalition S, a global grouping of research funders, released communications in response to the consultation exercise on their new open access requirements. The policy has been revised in response to concerns expressed by the sector on a number of aspects, particularly around the proposed timelines for implementation. The implementation timeline has been extended by a further 12 months, so research outputs resulting from funding calls from 1 January 2021 will need to comply. The Committee noted this and other revisions, and that the policy was still evolving.

We expect that funders will begin to announce their own policies that seek to implement Plan S in due course. Stricter open access requirements are likely to emerge. Mr Bains took the view that, overall, the developments are positive as they will ensure that more publications will be available to the public free of charge.

Within the University of Aberdeen, the Library, with input from Research and Innovation, is keeping abreast with developments and any questions around Plan S, its implementation and

implications for research and researchers here should be addressed to Simon Bains ([simon.bains@abdn.ac.uk](mailto:simon.bains@abdn.ac.uk) or ext. 3384).

The Library will be strengthening their Scholarly Communications team which will take forward the open access agenda for the University of Aberdeen. This was welcomed by members of RPC who noted that there was demand for a brief workshop or information session on open access and Plan S.

#### **8 HR EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH AWARD**

The Committee received paper RPC18:50 which made a number of recommendations which had been brought forward following the 8-year review of our HR Excellence in Research Award. These were approved by the Committee.

#### **9 SCHOOL RESEARCH GOVERNANCE HEALTH CHECKS - LLMVC**

The Committee noted the information provided.

#### **10 SAN FRANCISCO DECLARATION ON RESEARCH ASSESSMENT (DORA)**

The Committee received and discussed paper RPC18:52 which provided information on DORA, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment. Simon Bains introduced the paper and noted that a growing number of UK institutions had already signed the declaration. A positive statement around being a signatory to DORA and having an institutional policy on the responsible use of research metrics were seen to be strengthening the research environment, and provided clarity internally and externally the institutional approach to assessing research quality for recruitment and annual review as well as REF purposes.

There was broad agreement that the Committee should recommend to senior management that the University sign DORA. It was noted that many of the principles enshrined in the declaration were already part of the internal and external reviewer guidance used for assessing research quality for annual review and for REF. The University would also have to satisfy itself that the same principles applied within promotions and recruitment processes, and that external reviewers adhered to them.

#### **11 NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Research Policy Committee will take place on 26 September 2019, 12.30 – 2pm, Room 100, University Office, Old Aberdeen (HR Training Room)

MB 09/2019