

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 2ND NOVEMBER 2020

Present: Marion Campbell (Convenor), Simon Bains, Marlis Barraclough, Alison Brown, Michael Brown, Angel Cuesta Ciscar, Mirela Delibegovic, Andrew Dilley, Dawn Foster (Clerk), Paul Fowler *vice* Ian Stansfield, Tamas Gyorfi, Catherine Jones, Ann Lewendon, Gary Macfarlane, Catia Montagna, Graeme Nixon, Iain Percival, Louise Phillips, Stuart Piertney, Dubravka Pokrajac, Liz Rattray, Jacqueline Ravet, Donna Walker

Apologies: Colette Backwell, Brian Henderson, Gwen Smith, Chris Soulsby

Welcome: Marion Campbell welcomed all to the meeting. She noted a minor change to the agenda, confirming that item 13 KE Concordat would be brought forward for discussion during the meeting.

1 MINUTES

1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2020 were approved.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 RPC received an update on the Covid uplift funding awarded to the University. £6.1M funding was received from the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), and this has been allocated in order to address all seven of the key funding criteria, including a survey of 3rd and 4th year PhD students regarding extensions to their PhD and also the provision of IT equipment for some PGRs, particularly new starts. UKRI funding has also been awarded to provide support for research projects with an end date of March 2021. The SFC grant will support PIs more generally and we will invite submissions where research has been impacted significantly shortly. The first report was submitted to the SFC last Friday detailing how the grant has been allocated, and further progress reports will be submitted as the funds continue to be disbursed.

2.2 RPC also received an update on the work of the Research Culture Task & Finish group. Members of the group will be attending a number of School and Directorate meetings to give a presentation on the work of the group and to encourage feedback on this topic. A website has been developed, a survey has been designed for circulation to research-active staff, and this will be followed up with a series of staff engagement opportunities via 'Cafe Culture' sessions, a forum which allows small groups to meet to discuss issues related to research culture.

2.3 The revised REF Code of Practice (CoP) (updated to reflect changes to the University management approval process for the final REF submission and also covid-related changes to deadlines, etc) was approved by SFC. The CoP has been uploaded to our REF webpages (in addition to having been recently circulated to all staff who will be submitted to the REF).

3 ABERDEEN 2040 – RESEARCH PERFORMANCE AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

3.1 RPC received a presentation on this topic from Marion Campbell, who confirmed this had also previously been presented to the University Management Group. This will also be followed up with a series of talks to Schools and Directorates.

- 3.2 Based on the four pillars of the strategy (Inclusive, Interdisciplinary, International and Sustainable), key performance indicators have been proposed at institutional and School level to enable research progress to be monitored. These will be used to review progress and enable us to improve our performance in national and international league tables.
- 3.3 League table performance was discussed, noting that the University is performing better in the UK citation rankings than the overall rankings would suggest. However other KPIs research income continues to fall and we also need to maintain our focus on impact post-REF.
- 3.4 RPC discussed the issues raised, noting that more staff could be supported for Fellowships at the Royal Society of Edinburgh (FRSE). Potential candidates should be identified, and additional support provided to ensure more regular submissions.
- 3.5 RPC also noted that monographs (not citations) were the gold standard in Arts & Humanities subjects, and citation metrics were not used in the REF Panel D criteria for these disciplines. It was suggested that these KPIs should be re-designed for these disciplines, as it would be difficult to engage colleagues with this process if they felt excluded. It was confirmed that this issue had been raised before, however these measures were used in international league tables so couldn't be excluded. Examples of international research collaborations could be included instead of co-authorship (for those disciplines where single authored monographs are the norm), and it was confirmed that work is underway to devise a system for highlighting international co-authorship (e.g. in edited books) in Pure.
- 3.6 RPC also discussed the salary contributions associated with fellowships, which were problematic for School budgets. It was confirmed that currently there was no central funding available as all funds had been devolved to Schools, and any plans to re-introduce a central strategic fund would likely be a longer-term issue to be resolved.

ACTION: School Directors of Research should consider how these KPIs can be implemented in their Schools.

4 UK RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT ROADMAP

- 4.1 RPC received a presentation on the UK R&D Roadmap, which had been published by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The key priorities were discussed, noting that the previous industrial strategy (devised under the previous Prime Minister) was no longer mentioned. Instead, the focus will be on investing in 'place' (sharing R&D opportunities across the UK), investing in people (staff with high potential), investing in large-scale research opportunities ('Moonshots' - 'blue skies' solutions to global challenges) and reducing bureaucracy (there will be a review of REF).
- 4.2. RPC noted that energy transition will be a key area for this University due to our location and existing expertise, and that business and overseas investment are the key priorities for the current government.
- 4.5 RPC noted the opportunities for investment in talent and investment in place e.g. in Energy, Food & Drink, Digital Industries and environmental development. The current local example of ETZ = Energy Transition Zone (a joint initiative between Opportunity North East and the Harbour regarding land development around the harbour) was also discussed.
- 4.6 RPC noted the absence of heritage and culture within the roadmap, and agreed that further discussion would be required with the devolved administration, given how important these aspects are in Scotland.
- 4.7 Some members noted that not all research can be applied immediately and that fundamental/blue skies work was not addressed in the Roadmap. In discussion it was agreed that fundamental scientific research discovery underpins the 'pipeline' of work that leads to

innovation and impact and that all researchers should remain alert to opportunities to engage with potential research users and to take steps to facilitate impact from their research.

13 KE CONCORDAT (brought forward for discussion)

- 13.1 RPC noted the proposal to create a Task and Finish group to consider whether the University should become a signatory of the concordat, the timing of the signing and whether the University should participate in the development year. The group would work for a period of six months with membership drawn from across the University.
- 13.2 It was also noted that a 'gap analysis' was currently being undertaken to identify where the University currently meets the concordat standards, and where further work would be required in order to do so. Reference to the Concordat could be made in the REF environment statements, where appropriate.
- 13.3 RPC approved the establishment of the T&F Group.

5 RESEARCH FUNDING

5.1 Research Income Report

- 5.1.2 RPC noted that for 2020/21, with only the figures for the first two months of the financial year available, that the University was currently around 9% ahead of its predicted budget. October figures are still to be confirmed, and the revised forecast and will be incorporated into the next Monthly Management Report.
- 5.1.3 Most Schools were also ahead of predictions on their research income with figures comparable to this point last year.

5.2 Applications and Awards Trends

- 5.2.1 RPC noted that these were not the final figures for this quarter as there were still several applications and awards data to be included. These figures were also ahead of the same period last year. An 18% increase in the number of applications submitted was noted, with more applications submitted and for larger sums. Also, more awards have been obtained and these were of a higher value.
- 5.2.2 Schools were acknowledged for the amount of application and awards activity during the first quarter. It was confirmed that the majority of covid-related awards had been reported in the previous quarter, so not all of this increase was covid-related. Also, some of this activity was associated with new members of staff.
- 5.2.3 RPC noted that the reporting template still refers to the previous University structure, however this will be updated once the new pre-award system has been introduced.

6 UKRI OPEN ACCESS BLOCK GRANT – PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

- 6.1 RPC noted that the next block of this funding was not due until April 2020, and unless corrective action was taken, the University would run out of these funds by the end of this month due to increased demand.
- 6.2 RPC approved the proposals that (1) requests for gold open access must be approved by the School Director of Research (SDoR) (replacing the current 'first come first served' policy), and (2) a cap of £2,500 should be introduced on individual Article Processing Charges.
- 6.3 In order to manage the demand for funds, it was agreed that researchers must be advised that resources remain limited and careful consideration must be given to publication routes.

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Gold open access requests should only be submitted once alternative publishing routes have been considered and the SDoR has confirmed these are not suitable.

6.4 In addition, it was agreed that Schools should be the first port of call for these funds. It was also agreed that a small contingency fund should be set aside within the Block Grant should be identified.

6.5 Paul Fowler raised an issue around VAT for medical publications, and Liz Rattray undertook to follow this up.

ACTION: SDoR's support for this policy should be promoted, communicated and endorsed to their colleagues.

For approval/noting:

The committee received the following reports for approval/noting:

7 REF 2021 – UPDATE ON PREPARATIONS

8 REVISIONS TO THE UNIVERSITY'S RESEARCH GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK

RPC approved the proposed revisions to the Research Governance Handbook.

9 SCHOOL RESEARCH COMMITTEES AND SCHOOL DIRECTORS OF RESEARCH

For information:

The committee received the following reports for information:

10 IMPACT AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE REPORT

11 GRADUATE SCHOOL REPORT – PGR FUNDED EXTENSIONS

12 COVID-19 INSTITUTIONAL RISK REGISTER

13 KE CONCORDAT (discussed earlier in the minute)

14 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Research Policy Committee will take place on Monday 8th March 2021.

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