

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 16th SEPTEMBER 2021

- Present: Marion Campbell (Convenor), Patric Bach, Simon Bains, Marlis Barraclough, Mervyn Bain (*vice* Alison Brown), Keith Bender, Elizabeth Curtis, Mirela Delibegovic, Dawn Foster (Clerk), Helen Galley, Tamas Gyorf, Jesper Kallestrup, Maria Kashtalyan, Ann Lewendon, Gary Macfarlane, Graeme Nixon, Nir Oren, Louise Phillips, Stuart Piertney, Liz Rattray, Brice Rea, Tracey Slaven, Gwen Smith
- Apologies: Brian Henderson, Alex Johnstone, Catherine Jones, Ana Payo-Payo, Iain Percival, Michelle Pinard, Dubravka Pokrajac, Jacqueline Ravet, Ian Stansfield, Donna Walker

Welcome: Marion Campbell welcomed all to the meeting. New School Directors of research were noted and welcomed - Keith Bender for the Business School, Jesper Kallestrup for DHP and Nir Oren for NCS. The Chairs of the internal ethics committees (Patric Bach, Elizabeth Curtis, Helen Galley, Maria Kashtalyan) were also welcomed to this first RPC meeting of the session. Mervyn Bain (Head of School) was welcomed as the representative for the School of Social Sciences at this meeting.

1 MINUTES

- 1.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 16th June 2021 were approved.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Analysis of Research Income

RPC noted that this item would now be carried forward to the November meeting of the committee.

2.2 REF 2021 Equality Impact Assessment

RPC noted that the institutional equality impact assessment had been uploaded to the [REF webpages](#).

2.3 Research Integrity Training

RPC noted the gradual increase of completion rates for the online Research Integrity training course, which was launched in March 2021 and is available on MyAberdeen. Schools may wish to consider the introduction of local deadlines for completion. RPC acknowledged that the beginning of term is a particularly busy time for academic staff, and it would be helpful if a reminder could be circulated mid-term.

ACTION: D Foster to issue a reminder email to all School Directors of Research in early November to promote local completion of this training.

3 RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP & REMIT FOR 2021/22

- 3.1 RPC noted the proposed revisions to the committee's membership and remit. These revisions followed on from the recent re-organisation and re-profiling of the Vice-Principal roles, resulting in an associated review of the responsibilities of the Research Deans in order to better align with the Aberdeen 2040 strategy.

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- 3.2 RPC discussed the proposed inclusion of a PGR student on the committee, noting the benefits that would ensue from e.g. student involvement in the formation of policy. RPC also noted the suggested inclusion of an ECR, which would link to the action plan for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers.
- 3.3 RPC also recommended that the REF be re-instated within the remit, noting RPC's role in ensuring continued momentum in the preparations for the next REF.
- 3.4 It was also recommended that it would be useful to elaborate on the purpose of RPC and links to e.g. Senate and Court. The links to the proposed Ethics Committee should also be mentioned in the remit.

ACTIONS:

- **M Barraclough to revise the remit and membership and bring back to RPC for consideration at the November meeting.**

4 PROPOSAL TO CREATE AN INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS GROUP

- 4.1 RPC noted the recommendation that an institutional committee on Research Ethics should be created as a sub-group of RPC. The proposed committee would report to RPC on research ethics and governance issues, and would provide the Ethics Chairs with a formal forum to discuss ethics and governance issues and exchange ideas, and would replace the current ad-hoc arrangements for meetings of the Ethics Chairs.
- 4.2 At this stage, agreement in principle was sought from RPC that a dedicated sub-group should be established to discuss research ethics and governance policy and practice. Additional details would then be presented in a further paper on this issue.
- 4.3 The role of the Audit & Monitoring Group was discussed, noting the potential for this group to help identify patterns in research audit issues, provide further guidance to researchers and advise on best practice in research. This group should sit alongside the Ethics Board, and this would be reflected in the accompanying organogram.
- 4.4 The review clusters were also discussed, noting that consideration should be given towards the opportunity for these to cut across the disciplines. RPC also noted the existing clusters within the current Ethics Boards, and that careful thought would be required when establishing these to ensure that these would remain effective in the light of the potential implementation of an automated, institution-wide ethics review process (Worktribe).
- 4.5 RPC agreed in principle to support the ideas and proposals within the paper.

ACTION: M Barraclough to develop a detailed remit for the Board, suggested membership, and to revise the organogram to reflect how the Audit/Monitoring Group and Review Clusters will link with the work of the Board in enhancing research ethics and governance at the University.

5 ABERDEEN 2040 IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- 5.1 RPC noted the Aberdeen 2040 plan and the implementation plan for the associated research related commitments and priority actions. The role of RPC members in promoting the implementation plan and securing School support for these activities was discussed.
- 5.2 Communication channels between the Schools and theme leaders was also discussed. RPC noted that the confirmed Interdisciplinary Challenge Directors will be in post in January 2022 and this would be an opportune time to establish an appropriate synergy between these roles and the School Directors of Research.

6 RESEARCH FUNDING

6.1 Research Income Report

- 6.1.1 RPC noted that during the financial year 2020/21, despite the impact of Covid-19, the level of research income had been maintained at £46M (ahead of the budget by £5.5M), with an Indirect Cost Contribution (ICC) of £10.4M (ahead of budget by £3.1M).
- 6.1.2 RPC also noted the large research awards that had been confirmed since the previous RPC meeting. Once reporting is available from Worktribe, further information will be provided on e.g. IDRs.
- 6.1.3 The institutional order book was also noted, which provides details of the values of live research grants and contracts between 2021/22 and 2024/25. In September 2021, the order book showed similar committed spend to those recorded for September 2020, suggesting a broadly similar outturn for 2021/22 as that for 2020/21.
- 6.1.4 In order to improve monitoring on grant expenditure, RPC noted that the Worktribe reporting tool should provide clearer reports and include information on unspent research budgets. These reports will be shared with Heads of School and SDoRs so they can monitor (and investigate) any underspending on grants.
- 6.1.5 RPC noted that a number of larger grants are currently having difficulty in spending the funding given the current external circumstances and the impact of covid. It was also noted that it can be useful to retain a small contingency fund for unexpected costs.

6.2 Applications and Awards Trends

- 6.2.1 RPC noted the significant volume of applications managed in 2020/21, taking into account the work involved in the implementation of Worktribe in February.
- 6.2.2 Despite external circumstances, £52.5M of new awards were received in 2020/21 (in 2019/20, £37.7M of awards were received). Although this contrasts with £76.7M of awards received in 2018/19, this figure included significant one-off awards e.g. the National Decommissioning Centre and the TAU grant.
- 6.2.3 Current signs are encouraging for new awards, albeit RPC noted that award values for UK Industry have declined. The committee noted that conversations were currently taking place but partners were unwilling to commit to new spending.

ACTION: D Walker to issue reports to each School containing a breakdown of applications and awards by value range.

6.3 Impact and Knowledge Exchange Report

- 6.3.1 RPC noted that three applications were currently in preparation for Impact Accelerator Awards (AHRC, BBSRC and MRC). School Directors of Research who would like to find out more about any of these bids or would like to contribute should contact Ann Lewendon for further information.
- 6.3.2 RPC noted the variety of metrics used as a proxy measure for industry engagement. Recording the number of confidential agreements with industry works well as a measure for Science and Technology disciplines but not for Arts, Social Sciences disciplines, where alternative measures would be helpful.

ACTION: RPC members to submit suggestions for good proxy measures for industrial engagement with Arts, Social Sciences and Business disciplines.

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6.4 Covid Mitigation and Pump Priming Funds

- 6.4.1 RPC received a summary of the Covid-19 mitigation actions that were taken in relation to the external grant funding portfolio, postgraduate research student support, and the new pump priming fund. There was still an opportunity to submit bids for the Covid-19 funding until the end of December 2021.
- 6.4.2 RPC also received a summary of the pump priming projects that had been funded, reflecting a spread of research activity. 48 awards (including those supporting interdisciplinary projects) have been made to date, and applications are still being received and reviewed.

7 DRAFT – ANNUAL RESEARCH GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

- 7.1 RPC noted the draft statement which will be submitted for Court approval. The increasing number of research misconduct issues that have been raised in recent years, particularly involving publication ethics, plagiarism and authorship, were noted. These cases involved the full spectrum of researchers.
- 7.2 RPC suggested that additional guidance on authorship would be welcomed. This is currently covered in the online Research Integrity training course and will be supplemented by further information from the Scholarly Comms Unit, who are currently preparing an action plan to help address these types of issues.

8 REPORTS FROM THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIAN

8.1 UKRI Open Access Policy

- 8.1.1 RPC received an update on the UKRI Open Access Policy. The revised policy includes three key changes, in that long-form research outputs will now be within scope, embargo periods will no longer be permitted, and hybrid journals will only be accepted if the publisher has made the journal part of a transitional agreement with Jisc. RPC noted that most Elsevier journals are not compliant with this policy.
- 8.2.2 RPC also noted that the revised policy supports the Aberdeen 2040 commitment to open research. However, the policy comes with some associated implications and uncertainties, some of which may be addressed in the current ScienceDirect negotiations with Elsevier, and also via the expected increase in the UKRI block grant.
- 8.2.3 RPC noted that this paper had been endorsed by the Senior Management Team at a meeting earlier on this week.

8.2 ScienceDirect Negotiations

- 8.2.1 RPC received an update on the national negotiations with Elsevier. A strong bargaining stance has been taken by the UK HEI sector with the aim of achieving an acceptable pricing model for continued access to ScienceDirect (the current licence due to expire at the end of 2021). In the event that a resolution cannot be reached and access is withdrawn, a number of institutions (including several from the Russell Group) have already agreed to participate in a consortium to support a “collective collection” of key journals to be shared with other consortium members. This would likely cover around 95% of the ScienceDirect publications and allow for rapid access to the publications within the consortium.
- 8.2.2 RPC noted that this paper was presented to the Senior Management Team, who remain very supportive of the action being taken across the sector on these issues.
- 8.2.3 RPC endorsed the action being taken by S Bains and commended him on the leadership he has shown on this issue through his work on the UUK strategy committee.

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- 8.2.4 RPC noted that Elsevier may adopt a direct communications approach with our academic community, aiming to garner their support. It would therefore be important to encourage widespread staff awareness and support for the current negotiating position being taken by the HEI consortium. Further information is available on negotiations on the Library [webpages](#).

ACTION: S Bains to prepare a short summary of the national negotiations for the School Directors of Research to distribute within their respective Schools.

For noting:

The committee received the following reports for noting:

9 REPORTS FROM INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS BOARDS

RPC also formally acknowledged the essential work undertaken by all Ethics Board members, reviewers and the Professional Services staff involved in supporting the ethics review process.

9.1 Physical Sciences & Engineering Ethics Board

9.2 Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business

9.3 School of Psychology Ethics Committee

9.4 School of Biological Sciences Ethics Committee

9.5 School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition Research Governance Report

9.6 School of Medicine, Medical Sciences & Nutrition Ethics Review Board

10 GRADUATE SCHOOL REPORT

RPC noted the Graduate School's action plan for the coming session, working in partnership with the Schools and Professional Services, and the alignment of their 2021/22 strategy with the Aberdeen 2040 commitments.

11 RESEARCH FACILITIES GROUP

- 11.1 RPC noted that this paper was approved by the Senior Management Team at its meeting earlier this week. The paper proposes a strategic review of all research equipment and potential future equipment requirements. Contact will be made with the Schools to ascertain their equipment needs in line with strategic investment plans, with the aim of creating a priority purchase list.

ACTION: School Directors of Research were encouraged to circulate to their Schools some further information and registration details for a 'Research Facilities Showcase' on Monday 20 September, accessible via MS Teams (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/coursebooking/11146>)

12 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS

For information:

The committee received the following report for information:

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13 CREDIT – CONTRIBUTION OF ROLES TAXONOMY

RPC noted that this taxonomy provides a more explicit method of classifying the variety of contributions made to an academic output. It was noted that this was not only a way of (potentially) avoiding authorship disputes, but its adoption would also support recent work on developing our research culture by providing a further opportunity for formal recognition of staff contributions to research activity.

14 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Research Policy Committee will take place on Thursday 11 November 2021, 2.05 – 3.55 pm.

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