

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 11th NOVEMBER 2021

Present: Marion Campbell (Convenor), Simon Bains, Marlis Barraclough, Alison Brown, Keith Bender, Mirela Delibegovic, Dawn Foster (Clerk), Elena Giannaccini, Tamas Gyorfi, Catherine Jones, Ann Lewendon, Gary Macfarlane, Graeme Nixon, Nir Oren, Louise Phillips, Stuart Piertney, Dubravka Pokrajac, Liz Rattray, Jacqueline Ravet, Brice Rea, Ian Stansfield, Gwen Smith, Donna Walker

Apologies: Brian Henderson, Jesper Kallestrup, Iain Percival, Tracey Slaven

Welcome: Marion Campbell welcomed all to the meeting. Elena Giannaccini (School of Engineering) was welcomed to the committee in her role as an Early Career Researcher. She also noted that Stuart Piertney would shortly be demitting office as School Director of Research for Biological Sciences and thanked him for his contribution to the committee.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2021 were approved, subject to the correction of a typo in item 6.3.1 = BBSRC.

Clerk's Note: The minute was subsequently corrected.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Online Training

M Campbell expressed her thanks to the School Directors of Research for their assistance in circulating reminders to staff regarding the Research Integrity training. She also confirmed that the online Research Ethics & Governance training course (as agreed at the June 2021 RPC meeting), will become mandatory for all staff and PGR applicants for ethical approval, effective 01 February 2022. Email communications will be circulated on this issue to School Directors of Research and Ethics Chairs and will be followed up by an email to all staff and PGR students to advise them of this requirement.

2.2 REF Lessons Learnt Meeting

RPC noted that two meetings had recently been held with staff involved in the REF submission, and others had submitted written feedback.

ACTION: Any further feedback on the REF process within the University should be submitted to Marlis Barraclough by Friday 26 November.

2.3 Vacancy for the Dean for Academic Partnerships and Research Governance

RPC noted the recent advertisement for this post

ACTION: School Directors of Research to encourage colleagues to submit an application (deadline Friday 26 November).

2.4 Interdisciplinary Research Centre Directors

RPC noted that the recruitment process for the above posts is underway, and that one of the posts will be re-advertised.

2.5 Outcome of Senate Effectiveness Review

RPC noted the recommendation of the report that RPC (currently a joint committee of Senate and University Court) should become solely a committee of Senate. This may influence the timetabling of future meetings and RPC membership, and a further update will follow in due course.

2.6 Update on Elsevier Negotiations, UKRI OA Policy and Rights Retention policy

- 2.6.1 RPC noted the fast pace of the ongoing negotiations, which resulted in another offer from Elsevier which could involve a substantial reduction in price, amongst other commitments. Therefore there may not be a need to implement plan B. Data modelling and analysis will continue for future negotiations, as will the learning gained from the work undertaken to date on sharing digital collections.
- 2.6.2 RPC also received an update on the UKRI Open Access (OA) Policy, which comes into effect in April 2022. Feedback from Senate had highlighted some misunderstanding of the funds available, including concerns over the Article Processing Charges (APC) cap. There is also a widespread assumption that the gold route is the best option. Improved communications and information sharing is required on this subject in order to address these misconceptions.
- 2.6.3 Simon Bains also briefed RPC on a new policy on rights retention which was introduced by the University of Edinburgh. Under this policy, authors generally retain copyright of their outputs and licence the use of the outputs to their universities under a CC-BY licence. This enables institutions to share the content through their repositories without embargo, enabling compliance with Plan S and the new UKRI open access policy. RPC noted that there may be issues with publishers who do not support this. RPC noted that a zero embargo stance, and a similar policy is worth exploring. There could be legal risks in adopting this position, however given the University of Edinburgh have recently introduced this kind of policy there is a precedent for this.

ACTION: S Bains to present a paper to RPC recommending the adoption of an institutional policy on rights retention.

- 2.6.4 RPC also noted that there may also be a need to review the institutional open access policy in tandem with the UKRI policy (and of other funders), coupled with the rights retention issue.
- 2.6.5 RPC discussed the possibility of 'top up' funding, to assist in meeting the difference between the funding available from the UKRI open access block grant and the costs associated with gold route publishing of papers, particularly those that would be suitable for the REF. It was acknowledged that the institutional block grant will never be sufficient to cover all costs, and the School Directors of Research were expected to take on the role of gatekeeper for the allocation of these funds.
- 2.6.7 RPC noted that for high quality papers, there could be joint School and institutional funds made available to support these, but only in exceptional cases. To date, the policy on use of block grant funding has been to be selective in the use of these funds. RPC also noted that the introduction of a rights retention policy would also reduce the need to publish using the gold route.

ACTION: D Foster to circulate a copy of SMMSN's APC criteria, plus a copy of the previously agreed University-wide criteria on the use of institutional open access funds to all School Directors of Research.

3 REVISED - RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP & REMIT FOR 2021/22

RPC approved the revised membership and remit.

4 RESEARCH INCOME HESA BENCHMARKING AND CONTEXTUAL DATA

- 4.1 RPC noted the paper illustrates an overall decline in research income (in tandem with a reduction in staff numbers). The University's performance has been placed in context by benchmarking against similar institutions.
- 4.2 The paper provides an assessment of the current situation and demonstrates that we are losing ground compared with similar institutions. RPC also noted the concentration of research income within the Russell Group institutions.
- 4.3 RPC noted the investment in new staff, particularly junior staff, and the new teaching initiatives that have been introduced. The significant increase in teaching income was also noted.
- 4.4 RPC also noted the expansion of PGT programmes, which has impacted on the summer period (when a lot of research activity traditionally occurs). It was noted that staff require 'thinking time' to allow them space to generate new research ideas.
- 4.5 Opportunities for diversifying the research income portfolio to include a wider range of funding opportunities was also discussed. It was acknowledged that these are often announced with a very small lead-in time. This is further complicated by the preparation time required for a high-quality funding application, and the need to quickly free up staff time for this. It was noted that the School of Law allows some capacity within the teaching portfolio to facilitate this type of rapid response.
- 4.6 Sharing early intelligence on funding calls would also be helpful so that preparations can be made in advance. The UKRI delivery plans provide an idea of what will be available.
- 4.7 RPC noted that partnership-building is also important, so we don't rely on our internal staff capacity. 'Expression of interest' calls should be circulated so that we can involve external people in our funding applications.
- 4.8 RPC also noted that the central funds for research leverage could be increased, to ensure this activity is not solely supported by School funds.

ACTIONS:

- **M Barraclough to circulate School-based data, in preparation for the forthcoming series of meetings with the Schools.**
- **School Directors of Research to submit any further suggestions for increasing research income to M Barraclough.**

5 RESEARCH FUNDING

5.1 Research Income Report

- 5.1.1 RPC noted that these figures cover the period until end of September 2021, as the Research Financial Services team are currently finalising the October figures. The September data demonstrates that the ICC recovery is ahead of budget, but research income has fallen behind. Some of the Development Trust income has been moved to January 2022, and there is still some student income to be included.
- 5.1.2 There has been limited operational spend in some of the larger grants, as equipment has been difficult to purchase and we are still operating with limits on our travel capabilities.
- 5.1.3 Plans are in place to improve the research income reporting; the intention is to move this into a data warehouse that is accessible via a dashboard system. As a result, the Order Book has not yet been updated (but this will be done in time for the annual budget-setting process).

5.2 Applications and Awards Trends

5.2.1 RPC noted that the data provided was not finalised and would be subject to further changes.

ACTIONS:

- **D Walker to ensure that (once finalised) the corrected Q1 data is issued to School Directors of Research.**
- **School Directors of Research to contact Andrew Phillips (andrew.phillips@abdn.ac.uk) for assistance on how to set up data reports on Worktribe. (A shared online demonstration session will be arranged, if numbers support this.)**

6 INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS GROUP

6.1 RPC approved the proposed membership and remit of the group, and agreed that this should be circulated to the current Ethics Chairs for their input.

6.2 RPC noted that this would not be finalised until the new Dean for Academic Research Partnerships and Research Governance had been appointed (as they will be responsible for chairing this group).

ACTIONS:

- **M Barraclough to invite Louise King (Research Governance Manager, Foresterhill) to join the group.**
- **M Barraclough to circulate membership and remit to the Ethics Group members (including the Chair, once appointed) for further discussion and development as appropriate.**

7 REVISIONS TO RESEARCH GOVERNANCE HANDBOOK

7.1 RPC approved the updates included in version 9 of the handbook, subject to further clarification regarding the role of the PGR Supervisor in ensuring ethical approval has been obtained for their PGR's research (where ethical approval is required). This will also be highlighted in the communications that will be issued regarding the mandatory Research Ethics & Governance training for all staff and PGR ethics applicants (item 2.1 of minute refers).

7.2 RPC also noted that revised guidance on the Nagoya Protocol has recently been prepared and will be uploaded to the Research Governance website. (The weblink is embedded within the handbook).

ACTION: D Foster to amend as required.

8 RESEARCH GOVERNANCE HEALTHCHECK – SCHOOL OF NATURAL & COMPUTING SCIENCES

RPC noted the feedback issued to the School following the submission of their completed research governance healthcheck. N Oren confirmed that this had been shared with the School in order that corrective action can be taken, where identified.

ACTION: D Foster to ensure that completed healthchecks and panel feedback are shared with the appropriate Business Development Officer.

9 RESEARCH EXCELLENCE AWARDS

9.1 RPC noted the research categories within the 2022 Excellence Awards, and the closing date of 12 noon, Monday 31 January 2022.

9.2 The definition of ECR was confirmed as follows *“An early career researcher is defined as a researcher who has less than four years’ academic research experience (or full-time equivalent) following the completion of their PhD, or is of equivalent professional standing.”*

ACTION: RPC members to consider nominations for the research categories within the 2022 Excellence Awards.

10 OPEN ACCESS UPDATE

10.1 RPC noted that engagement with open access remains strong but with the impending introduction of the UKRI policy and Plan S, our compliance is likely to reduce due as a result of the zero embargo requirements.

10.2 This is also related to the rights retention issue (item 2.6 of minutes refers), and it was noted that further support will be provided by the Library team to help raise general awareness of these issues.

ACTIONS:

- **M Barraclough to undertake further analysis to identify discipline specific issues.**
- **S Bains will prepare discipline-based guidance to help raise awareness within Schools and the researcher community.**

11 RESEARCH AND GENDER

11.1 RPC noted that this paper has arisen from a gap analysis undertaken by Anpu Varghese and Susie Hastings (EU Business Development Officers) to compare how well our current policies and procedures (including the Gender Action Plan) fit the new requirements of the UKRI and Horizon Europe in relation to promoting gender equality.

11.2 The gap analysis identified some missing elements e.g. training resources and a toolkit for researchers to help them consider gender issues in their research proposals.

11.3 The paper will be presented to the next Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Committee meeting for approval. M Campbell has been appointed to the committee to ensure that research-specific issues are discussed on a regular basis.

For noting:

The committee received the following reports for noting:

12 IMPACT AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE REPORT

12.1 RPC noted the contrasting success of recent public engagement activities. The Centenary of Insulin events in October were extremely well attended and well-received. However, the UKRI-funded Festival of Social Science (November) has been affected by low participant numbers (possibly due to online fatigue), and this will be raised with the national organisers, with a recommendation that the Festival should consider a return to in-person public engagement events. In addition, the explicit links with COP26 may have overshadowed the Festival's activities.

12.2 It was confirmed that a repository of public engagement events will be created in preparation for the next REF.

12.3 RPC also noted that Zac Hickman and Richard Neilson have been shortlisted for the PraxisAuril 2021 KE Awards ('Place-Based Initiative of the Year') for their work on the National Decommissioning Centre. The winners will be announced at a ceremony to be held on 18 November 2021.

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

RPC received an update on this work and noted that a University Senator is still to be appointed to the Steering Group.

ACTION: M Delibegovic to raise this with Rachael Bernard, Academic Registrar.

For information:

The committee received the following reports for information:

14 UPDATED INSTITUTIONAL RISK REGISTER FOR RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

RPC noted the updated register and the mitigations in place to help deal with the identified risks. They were reminded that this is a 'live' document and therefore designed for regular updates to reflect the changing nature of risk.

ACTION: RPC members to submit any further suggestions for risks or mitigations should be submitted to M Barraclough (m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk).

15 SENATE EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

16 UPDATE ON UK'S ASSOCIATION TO HORIZON EUROPE PROGRAMME

17 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Research Policy Committee will take place on Wednesday 09 March 2022, 10.05 – 11.55 am.

MB/DF 11/21