

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Matters for note by Senate arising from the meeting of Research Committee on 3 May 2023

1. Provisional Research Strategy for the University

The Committee considered the Provisional Research Strategy for the University. The paper had been refined further to clarify the engagement plan. The Provisional Research Strategy had been well-received at meetings and workshops thus far. Following the remaining workshops and panel meetings, the Strategy would be revised to incorporate the comments raised. Following the development of a full implementation plan, the Research Strategy would then form the basis of the arc of business for URC going forwards.

Integration with other areas of work across the institution was important, in order to ensure alignment. There was a role for philanthropy in delivering funding and support for the goals of the Strategy. The removal of research-intensive courses had the potential to undermine the implementation of the research strategy; this had been particularly noted in the Faculty of Sciences and would be discussed further at Faculty-level and brought back to URC as needed.

2. Impact of Generative AI Technology on Research

The Committee considered a paper on the impact of generative AI technology on research. There were a number of specific concerns relating to generative AI in research which were highlighted: (a) the threat to research integrity (b) the responsible use of the technology (for example in terms of secondary data analysis) and (c) the ethics surrounding the development of the technology. The difficulty in identifying instances of research misconduct using generative AI and enforcing any policy on this subject was acknowledged. The conversation surrounding generative AI was ongoing in different areas of the University, however a dedicated and co-ordinated group was needed to ensure alignment.

Previous work to develop guidelines in this area had been challenging. It was recognised that the area was moving incredibly quickly and that whatever was developed needed to be flexible and able to act as a 'hold' until the situation was clearer across the sector. The Committee recognised that practice and risk would differ across disciplines, and it was recommended that guidance was sought from funders, learned societies, journals and other institutions. It was important to consider both the benefits and opportunities provided by generative AI technology.

The establishment of a group to explore the issues surrounding the use of generative AI in research was agreed. It was requested that this group involve colleagues from IT Services, as well as researchers with expertise in AI technology.

3. Verbal Update on the Implementation and Review of the Policy on the Payment of Individuals for Involvement with or Contribution to Research

The Committee considered a verbal update on the implementation and review of the Policy on the Payment of Individuals for Involvement with or Contribution to Research. Following the launch of the policy in early-2022, a light-touch review had taken place to identify any outstanding issues.

The Committee did not approve suggested amendments to the title of the policy, noting that “participation” was a specific term and so would not be appropriate for the title of the policy. Further discussion would take place outside the meeting.

A proposal to include wording within the policy explaining an exceptions route for payment methods was approved.

4. Proposals for the Annual Departmental Research Review for 2023

The Committee considered proposals for the Annual Departmental Research Review (ADRR) for 2023. The value of the ADRR process for URC was noted, as was the general appreciation for the process amongst the research community.

It was proposed that a small-scale process be undertaken in 2023, followed by a more developed process in 2023. The small-scale process would use fewer datasets in the interest of efficiency. The full process proposed for 2023 would depend on the outcomes of the FRAP as well as the ‘Review of Reviews’. In the course of discussion it was agreed that, rather than the proposed two-phase approach, a full process be planned later in the year (potentially to align with the 2024 planning process). Instead of running a small-scale ADRR over the summer, this time could instead be used to have conversations with FRGs and other relevant groups.

It was important to clearly articulate the value of the ADRR for the research community, emphasising the benefits of the reflective process and the intersection with both the REF and the financial planning process. The Committee emphasised the principle that the quality of feedback provided to respondents be commensurate with the effort put in. It was suggested that a section be added to the question sheet for discussion of areas of concern or things to flag for URC.

The Committee approved a suggestion that the word ‘Departmental’ be removed from the title of the process to reflect the range of organisational groups involved in the process.

5. Other Business

- a) The Committee confirmed the unreserved minute summarising the approval of the establishment of the Centre for Blood Research at York. The role of the Centre in elevating the good work taking place in this area was recognised, as was the alignment with the overall strategic vision of the University.
- b) UKRI had recently published a response to the consultation on the New Deal for PGRs. A number of areas were highlighted in particular:
 - o A number of responses had commented on the issue of PGR stipends and their alignment with changes in the cost of living (as well as associated support for those with caring responsibilities), and in response UKRI had announced increased support for PGR stipends. The University would match this increase; [REDACTED].
 - o The issue of PGR categorisation remained under discussion. Trade Unions were involved in the discussion, but their position was not yet confirmed.
 - o Support for PGR supervisors was a priority, and the University was well-placed on this count. A review of University provision would be undertaken to ensure it remained fit for purpose.
- c) The challenges associated with recruitment of PGR students were reported at the most recent meeting of the York Graduate Research School Board (YGRSB); although numbers were healthier than expected, there was still a decline from the previous year. There was not yet strong enough intelligence to fully assess the breakdown of enrolment along key lines (for

example, home and international students or self-funded and funded). A decline in international funded studentships, as well as the turbulent economic situation and the rising cost of living, were all noted as potential factors. Applications from Europe had declined notably.

- d) The Postgraduate Researcher Experience Survey had recently closed, and analysis of results would take place over the summer. The results would then be presented for discussion by URC in September.
- e) YGRS was working with the Industrial Action Contingency Group to assess the impact of the Marking and Assessment Boycott on PGR students.
- f) Discussion at the most recent Faculty Research Group for the Sciences had included the development of a Faculty Research Strategy. There was also enthusiasm around the Sparks programme, with a large number of applications having been received. The financial challenges faced by the University were of great concern to the Faculty, particularly the potential impact on the End-to-End Research Support process and implications for the setting of research aspirations. Departments had pushed back the recruitment of staff on ART contracts, and the impact of this on the future REF was recognised.
- g) Professor Nina Caspersen would take over from Professor Yvonne Birks as the Associate Dean (Research) for the Faculty of Social Sciences from September. New posts to support impact and partnerships were also in development.
- h) The Faculty Strategy for the Arts & Humanities had been well-received at the Faculty Research Group and would shortly be presented to the Faculty Executive Board. This would be supported by the incoming Associate Dean for Partnerships, Engagement and Innovation, with this role able to prompt new activity.
- i) The financial situation faced by the University presented a range of challenges. It was important that the Committee continued to advocate for the value of research and highlight areas of risk, and that members of the research community flag instances of tangible risk so that these could be addressed as early as possible. Further to this, it was requested that areas where further streamlining and standardisation was possible be highlighted.
- j) The Operational Plan for the Directorate of Research, Innovation & Knowledge Exchange was under development, having initially been launched in 2022. The revised plan would come to URC in due course.

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