UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

RESEARCH COMMITTEE
Matters for note by Senate arising from the meeting of Research Committee on 1 February 2023

1. University Sponsorship of Clinical Trials

The Committee **received** an update on the University sponsorship of clinical trials. The following points were **noted**:

(a) Although there was not a great deal of demand in the University for the sole sponsorship of clinical trials at this stage, there was support for consideration of joint sponsorship with a range of different NHS Trusts. The University would remain mindful of work around digital devices and medical technology, acknowledging that research in this area would need robust ethical governance.

(b) The decision to not pursue sole sponsorship would be reviewed annually, in recognition that this remained a rapidly changing space. The CTSC had recently expanded to include members of the NHS Mental Health Trust and HYMS. It was noted that the decision regarding sole sponsorship had implications for colleagues appointed to do research in this area; the Mental Health Trust would continue to engage in these discussions. Faculties and Heads of Departments would be kept aware of developments in this space, and advice would be provided in regards to recruitment of researchers.

2. Provisional Research Strategy for the University of York

The Committee considered the Provisional Research Strategy for the University. The following points were noted:

(a) The provisional Research Strategy had been developed over recent months through a series of meetings of the Research Strategy Working Group, following a decision taken at the September meeting. The Strategy would be presented to UEB in due course, and conversation was underway with teams across the institution involved in communications to consider how the University community might best be engaged.

(b) It was suggested that priority 5.5 be moved to 'People and Culture' to better align with emphasis within the sector and the stated goal of developing the next generation of researchers.

(c) The Committee noted the importance of clear communication with the University community, specifying that language used should invite reasonable and useful comment. It was recognised that substantive changes to the provisional Research Strategy were not expected at this stage, and that it was desirable to avoid protracted discussion of detail, but that involvement should be encouraged. It was suggested that dissemination to the research community include further information on implementation plans.

(d) The Committee recognised that the process through which the community engaged with and helped to refine strategy documents was essential to their success. The Research Strategy was best envisaged as a 'living document' which could be adjusted when needed.

A copy of the provisional Research Strategy would be circulated to members for further comment and amendments as necessary.

3. Update from the Research Culture Working Group

The Committee discussed an update from the Research Culture Working Group. The following points were noted:

(a) The Research Culture Working Group (RCWG), which had been established in 2022, had a range of members representing the academic and professional services community at York, at a variety of career levels. The RCWG reported into URC and was also connected to groups across the institution working on similar issues, as well as some external groups such as the N8 Culture and Environment Group. It was noted that this area was likely to continue to rise in importance, including as part of the FRAP.

(b) The University had been awarded £500,000 from the Research England Enhancing Research Culture fund, and was in the process of allocating this funding. Ways in which this could be put to use would be considered during the development of the Research Culture Action Plan, which would be supported through a series of research culture cafes. The Action Plan would be presented to URC for approval in due course.

(c) Work continued to refine and articulate the University approach to research culture, including a review of REF Environment Statements and engagement with resources provided by other institutions. The web presence of research culture work was also under consideration. The University continued to engage externally, and three specific grant applications were noted in this regard.

(d) It was acknowledged that this was a difficult area with a number of challenging aspects to address, and it was important that these big issues were in scope of the RCWG. The Committee highlighted in particular support and feedback for research leadership, career uncertainty (which was a potential area of focus for the Wellcome Trust funding mentioned above), remote-working research culture and the collection of evidence and data to inform activity.

4. Future Research Assessment Programme (FRAP)

The Committee considered a report on the Future Research Assessment Programme. The following points were noted:

(a) The paper had been developed as FRAP outcomes were scheduled for December 2022, however this had now been delayed until June 2023. Four additional reports were also expected to be published before June 2023; these were (i) a report from the REF Director reflecting on the 2021 process, (ii) an analysis of EDI data, (iii) an analysis of impact case studies and (iv) a cost-benefit analysis of the REF process.

(b) It was clarified that the likely options were (i) continuing with the same process as 2021, with some minor changes, (ii) retaining the framework but making more substantial changes (for example, eligibility requirements, the removal of portability and the decoupling of outputs), or (iii) a radical overhaul (for example requiring all outputs to be submitted and randomly sampled to grade, implementing a fully metricised assessment, or a move to institutional-level assessment). A radical overhaul was not expected, however aspects of (ii) were more likely, with potential implementation over two REF cycles. The consequences of these changes were under assessment by Research England.

(c) It was noted that research culture would likely be a larger component of the next REF; York's activity in this area would be beneficial in this regard.

5. Review of Research Governance Policies

The Committee approved proposals for the review of research governance policies. The following was noted:

(d) The prioritised list of policies for review had been developed to support PIP in planning workload, and presented to URC to enable the effective planning of future business. The priority order had been influenced by a number of factors, including the date of last review and developments within the sector. The Research Misconduct Policy and Procedure was currently top priority, followed by the Policy on Staff Groups Seeking to Engage with Research Activities.

(e) The Committee requested that the language used in policies be considered to ensure a supportive tone that invites engagement. The role of policies in shaping research culture was recognised.

(a) Some policies, such as the Policy on Staff Groups Seeking to Engage with Research Activities, were the subject of ad hoc workarounds – it was important to ensure this was accounted for and considered in a review.

6. Terms of Reference for the University Internally-Distributed Funding Steering Group

The Committee considered the Terms of Reference for the University Internally-Distributed Funding Steering Group, and discussed the relationship between the Steering Group and URC. Further to the information noted in the paper, the following was noted:

(a) The process for distributing internal funding had recently been streamlined, with academics applying to a central process and the IDF team allocating applications to specific funding streams. The steering group provided oversight of the process, whilst panels were responsible for awarding funding.

(b) The Committee supported the proposal that further updates from the IDF Steering Group included data on the outcomes of funding rounds and their relation to funding priorities; requirements for standardised reporting from UKRI meant that metrics were regularly submitted covering this area. It was noted however that a few rounds of funding would be needed before trends could be identified.

(c) Although there were three representatives of URC on the IDF Steering Group, the role of URC in prioritising funding was recognised.

It was **agreed** that periodic updates would be provided to URC going forwards.

7. Other Business

(a) The Committee approved a change to the membership; the new Deputy Director of Research, Innovation & Knowledge Exchange (RIKE) would join the Committee in the place of the Associate Director of RIKE, who was due to retire later in the year. This would be reflected in the Terms of Reference.

(b) The application for the recommissioning of ESRC WRDDP had been prepared. An EPSRC-funded DTP had been awarded, as had a DTP concerning AI. A number of strong bids continued to be developed, demonstrating the innovative thinking within the institution on topics such as PGR training, Responsible Research and Innovation and EDI. The Faculty of Sciences had performed well in the recent White Rose DTP awards, and the ESRC IAA had been renewed.

(c) Discussion at the most recent meeting of the YGRS Board noted the decline in PGR recruitment numbers; work was ongoing with the Faculty Deans to consider how this might be tackled to avoid a further dip in numbers in the future. Although not as exposed as other institutions, the reduction in EU students had affected departments across the University, and work was needed to mitigate the impact of this.

(d) Community-building activity continued within the Faculty of Arts & Humanities. Discussion was underway with the Long Room Hub of Trinity College, Dublin with the aim of organising joint events, such as an online poster competition between the two PGR communities and an online roundtable discussion on decolonising research. Wellbeing activities continued. Funding from the Research Culture Fund would be used to encourage multi-lingual activity across the Faculty. Collaborative activity with York Museums Trust and the National Rail Museum continued. A project on creative collaboration, for example with artists, was in development.

(e) The PSD Case for Change had been received positively at the Change Steering Board on 23 January, including suggested structural changes. The proposal had included the recommendation for investment in new posts to ensure appropriate resourcing for projected growth. The importance of avoiding duplication of effort and enabling a consistency in quality was noted.

(f) Research income, applications and awards continued to increase in value in line with targets. ██ ████ The Committee endorsed further work on the creation of user profiles and user stories. Context and benchmarking data, for example income per FTE or grant activity by career stage, would be helpful when analysing the data presented. Broader work was ongoing to develop reusable datasets which could be used to support a range of analytics.

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25/04/2023