To DRC Chairs and YRAF

Cc Heads of Departments, ADRs, PVC-R, PVC-P/E, SAVC (Research), Director of R&E

Dear All,

Pump-priming projects to stimulate both research and translational activities have been hit by COVID-19-related restrictions to lab access, travel and other activities. Sources of priming funding vary and can be University-derived, match-funded with external funds or wholly external in origin. Work has been completed to determine the extent of disruption for each of these sources and how this could be mitigated, and also to consider what funding is available in the current University financial year, and future years.

A paper has been discussed and approved by both URC and UEB, with the following conclusions with immediate consequences:

- ‘Live’ projects, approved after competitive and rigorous processes during 2019-20, can continue to spend in this academic financial year (i.e. to end July 2020), regardless of their source of funding (and including Capital purchases), on activities that fit within the current Government restrictions on workplace activity and travel.

  Individual PIs are being notified of this decision. Changes to projects that might be necessary to accommodate current working conditions are being discussed and approved as required by the relevant Fund Manager and Academic Lead.

- No new funding should be allocated from University-derived or part-derived sources this financial year in open competition: small sums may be used on strategically-important projects subject to PVC-R approval.

- A small COVID-19 emergency ‘rapid response’ fund will be made available shortly with funding drawn from externally-derived sources, to support projects deemed to utilise University expertise and that have high potential for a timely impact on the current situation.

Funds derived from external sources (i.e the IAAs) with a grant end date beyond July 31 2020 are less immediately affected as they have the ability to extend end dates or allocate additional funds to mitigate against disruption of current projects. Fund Managers are contacting PIs where required to discuss their individual projects and to give guidance on their next steps.

For the next University financial year, the following has been approved:

- University-derived priming funding is likely to be significantly reduced in 2020-21 and the ‘cash’ match for the Wellcome Trust Institutional Strategic Support Fund will be converted to ‘in kind’ if possible; both of these actions mean there will be much less funding available for research priming.
It should also be noted that the funding notification letters for both the GCRF QR and HEIF funds are yet to be received (though are currently anticipated to arrive in July as per usual), and 'roll over' of spend to the next financial year is not allowed by Research England.

Unfortunately, these factors together mean that PIs with projects funded from University-derived sources (e.g. University Priming Funds), CFH, GCRF or HEIF cannot extend their project end dates or receive additional funding next financial year to mitigate against COVID-19 disruption. Projects will therefore end at the end of the current financial year, regardless of whether their objectives have been completed.

PIs are being notified of this reality: it is recognised that this is not good news for many colleagues who have shown a lot of patience in waiting for this communication. Fund Managers are available to discuss individual projects with the PIs to consider what mitigation might be possible.

To ensure best use of available funds from financial year 2020-21 onwards, available priming funds (mostly derived from external sources) will be allocated via a more streamlined mechanism, focusing on University priority areas. This process is being taken forward by the PVC-R, Associate Deans for Research and Research and Enterprise, assisted by me.

If you have any questions about any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me, or to contact the relevant Fund Manager for information on a specific project or funding stream.

Kind regards,

Rachel

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Dr Rachel Curwen
Associate Director (Research and Innovation Development), Research and Enterprise