

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2013

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) (Chair)
Professor M Beaney
Professor K Claxton (MM01-10 only)
Dr I D'Amico
Dr J Finch
Professor B Fulton
Professor T Gans
Professor F Hardman
Professor M Ormrod
Professor J Potts
Professor M Smith (MM01-11 only)
Professor J Swaffield
Professor A Webster

In attendance: Professor D Smith (PVC(R) elect)
Ms L Waller (MM01-07 only)
Research Strategy and Policy Manager
Research Grants and Contracts Manager
Research Strategy and Policy Officer
REF Impact Officer
Research Integrity Project Officer (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from the Director of the Research and Enterprise Office and Dr Rees-Jones.

13-14/01 Terms of reference, membership and frequency of meetings

The Committee **considered** the proposed revisions to its terms of reference and membership (URC.13-14/01). It **noted** that the proposals were intended to strengthen the Committee's position in leading and driving the University's research endeavour, and influencing the decision-making of SMG and Senate.

During discussion, the following points were **noted**:

- The proposal was for a reduced membership, with members drawn from across the Academic Clusters, with an emphasis on research

management experience at departmental level. While membership was smaller than for the comparator committee, University Teaching Committee, it was recognised that additional staff could be co-opted to support departmental reviews or working groups. Support Services would be invited to attend as necessary in relation to specific projects. It was clarified that the six members from the Academic Clusters were in addition to the Academic Co-Ordinators.

- While Research Committee members were currently appointed by Senate via nominations put forward by Senate members, it was proposed that the Chair of Research Committee should put forward nominations as part of this process in order to meet the overall membership criteria.
- The accompanying Notes were for the Committee's information and would not form part of the formal terms of reference

The Committee **agreed** that the following should be considered for inclusion within the terms of reference:

- a. Term of reference 2 to include a responsibility 'to champion and promote research excellence'
- b. Term of reference 4 to articulate the Committee's role in flagging up to SMG and Planning Committee where other initiatives within the University presented an opportunity cost to the research endeavour. It was noted that the Committee reported formally to Senate and Planning Committee, and was represented at SMG and on the Better Management group by the PVC for Research
- c. Term of reference 7 regarding annual updates from departments to make more explicit reference to departmental research strategies
- d. Articulation of the Committee's role in overseeing research centres. It was acknowledged that more work is needed in relation to this issue
- e. Articulation of the Committee's role in relation to impact, and clarification of the boundaries of responsibility in relation to business and community-related activities. It was noted that the PVC Business and Community was included in the proposed membership as an ex officio member
- f. A greater emphasis on promoting interdisciplinarity, in line with the current terms of reference.

The Committee also **noted** the need to revisit its terms of reference in relation to its remit regarding research postgraduates, once responsibilities in this area had been clarified, although the proposed Committee membership did include an ex officio member with oversight of PGR students.

Members were invited to submit any further comments to the Chair after the meeting.

ACTION: ALL

It was **agreed** that a revised version of the document would be presented to the Committee for consideration at the November meeting, prior to recommendation to Senate.

ACTION: JL & AMG

The Committee **noted** the importance of increasing awareness across the University of the Committee's authority and remit and the visibility of its members, once the finalised terms of reference and membership had been approved.

It was also **noted** that in addition to the terms of reference, it would be helpful for the Committee to have a clear overview of the range of support provided for research by different support departments.

13-14/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 14 June 2013 (FOIA exempt)

13-14/03 Research Awards and Applications to Month 8 (March 2013)

Arising from M12-13/53, the Committee **noted** that the Director of Research and Enterprise would report on income from industry at the November meeting.

13-14/04 Pricing Principles for Research Projects

Arising from M12-13/55, the Chair **reported** that work on pricing principles for research projects was still being undertaken by the Commercial Finance Manager, and proposals would be presented to SMG in due course.

13-14/05 Progress report on Research Data Management

It was **agreed** to postpone this item until the November meeting.

13-14/06 Progress with the REF submission (FOIA exempt and Strictly Confidential)

13-14/07 Embedding Impact in Research

The Committee **considered** a report from the working group on Embedding Impact in Research (URC.13-14/04).

The Committee **noted** that:

- The report emphasised the need to embed impact as part of business as usual for researchers through cultural facilitation, as opposed to top-down implementation.
- Researchers should be encouraged to generate impact rather than merely identify where it had occurred. It was important for researchers to articulate why their research was significant to external parties and to build up a long-term understanding of their audience. There was also a need to keep a strategic eye on the changing external environment.
- It was important for centres and departments to mobilise and share existing intelligence, and for the University to develop impact champions within departments or centres.
- The report identified different types of impact in relation to different types of research. The N8 social science partnership was developing the notion of 'co-production' of research with external users, leading to a more interactive understanding of impact.
- Impact activity should not be driven by REF, but the latter had provided important and useful knowledge and incentives in the area. Impact case studies should be used internally to build up an understanding of the factors behind their success and the timescales involved. The Committee **noted** that it had been difficult in some cases to construct an impact narrative supported by evidence. As such, methods to capture impact needed to be developed and embedded into researchers' practice from the start of a project.

The Committee **noted** the report's recommendations, and in particular the need for:

1. a full time central post to co-ordinate and facilitate impact. [REDACTED]
2. development of an impact 'route map' resource to provide information and support for colleagues
3. requiring departments to commit to impact through:
 - allocating MTP resources to support a departmental impact 'champion'. It **noted** that impact officers already existed in certain quarters, although there was a need to co-ordinate their efforts
 - building impact explicitly into performance review, and as one of the criteria when supporting cases for promotion (although not as a compulsory element). It **noted** that the Academic Co-

ordinators were currently involving reviewing promotions criteria with HR

- promoting PURE as a tool for facilitating and capturing collaboration.

The following points were **noted** further to the report:

- a. The External Engagement Awards scheme had proven effective in focusing strategic thought at departmental level, and a second call for submissions was currently out
- b. Departments could make more use of existing bodies such as external advisory boards to help develop impact
- c. It would be helpful to explore whether impact activity could be formally built into workload models
- d. Departments should be encouraged to promote and support staff placements which develop impact
- e. The performance of departments against their impact strategies should be monitored, and they should demonstrate that they were exploiting competitive advantage
- f. Colleagues should be mindful of the increasing emphasis of research councils on impact
- g. Impact statements within research grant proposals should also be reviewed to identify scope for development
- h. The Committee itself had a role to play in prompting the University to lobby in order to influence the shape of the next REF with respect to impact.

The Committee **agreed** that the report, along with the minute of its discussions, should go to DRC Chairs for additional comment, prior to approval of finalised recommendations at the next meeting.

ACTION: AW

Professor Webster and the Chair thanked all those involved for a valuable report.

13-14/08 Research Performance Expectations

The Committee **considered** a report from the working group on Research Performance Expectations (URC.13-14/05). The Committee **noted** that:

- The working group had been established to look at the extent of awareness of the University's Statement on Research Performance

Expectations (RPE) and how it might be used to support research excellence

- The group acknowledged that the Statement was seen in some quarters as potentially punitive and restrictive; however, the group viewed the Statement as a positive tool for research management and endorsed the need for fuller engagement with it. The University and its departments need to make strategic choices informed by calibration of research quality and monitoring of departmental success.
- The report emphasised the importance of equality of opportunity
- Although the REF descriptors provided a useful shorthand for describing the quality of research output, an holistic approach should be taken, acknowledging a range of factors where appropriate.

During discussion, the following points were **noted**:

- a. There was a need to confront the widespread perception that the University did not tackle underperformance of individuals effectively. Setting out expectations clearly was a necessary step in order to challenge underperformance; it was also important to deal with issues in a balanced way, taking account of departmental as well as individual interests. A group convened by HR, with academic input, was currently reviewing the University's performance management structures in the round, and it would be useful for that group to have sight of this report.
- b. The Committee stressed the importance of devolving definitions of research quality to specific subject areas as far as possible.
- c. The Department of Archaeology had asked staff to draft performance expectations for researchers at different stages of their careers. The Committee **noted** that the Department's findings would be of interest to the group on performance management
ACTION: JF to send details to BF
The Department had also recently introduced a 'five year performance plan form' for staff in order to plan outputs on a larger scale.
- d. Departments should be encouraged to look at the statistics relating to staff research output to work out what might be considered an 'average performance' within the sector in relation to a particular peer group and identify deviation from the mean.
- e. There was a need to explore how bibliometrics might be used in relation to research performance. The Committee acknowledged that this was not appropriate to all subjects and that it would be up to departments to determine a sensible approach.
- f. The Committee endorsed Recommendation 6 regarding sharing of information held in PURE as a way of promoting accountability.

- g. The Committee endorsed the importance of Recommendation 9: to review induction and training for new academic staff (including PGCAP) to ensure that colleagues are aware of the research culture within their departments and the University.
- h. The paper's recommendations aimed at DRCs could be streamlined, focusing on:
 - Setting benchmarks and assessing quality
 - Reporting to Research Committee
 - Managing the balance between research and teaching.
- i. The paper could acknowledge more explicitly that the balance between research, teaching and administration shifted at different stages of an academic's career.
- j. The paper could also acknowledge more fully that research is often collaborative and conducted in teams, as well as focusing on researchers as individuals.

The Committee **agreed** that the report should be refined in the light of its discussion, and another iteration considered at its next meeting, prior to circulating the report to departments for comment. The Committee also **agreed** that the paper and the minute of its discussion should be submitted to the working group on performance management for consideration.

ACTION: WMO

Professor Ormrod and the Chair thanked all those involved for a valuable report.

13-14/09 Departmental research strategies

The Committee **received** for information an update on departmental research strategies (URC.13-14/06). It was **noted** that the paper had been prepared for SMG, in response to the latter's concern that departments should develop these strategies to inform decision-making, recruitment and resource allocation. The Committee **noted** the two recommendations that strategies should be discussed fully within departments and at cluster level.

The Committee **noted** that the deadline for departments to have revised strategies was likely to be brought forward to the beginning of 2014. The proposed academic cluster-based meetings would then take place from spring onwards, led by the Academic Co-ordinators.

The Committee **agreed** that the following should also be considered for inclusion in the departmental research strategy template:

- a. Consideration of sustainability issues
- b. A response to the internationalisation agenda
- c. Identification of key external partners and relationships
- d. Articulation of the role of impact within the research strategy.

A refreshed template and a proposed timescale for implementation would be presented for consideration at the November meeting.

ACTION: PVC(R) elect & Academic Co-ordinators, working with RSPO

13-14/10 Academic Study Time

The Committee **received** the draft University policy on Academic Study Time (URC.13-14/07). The following points and queries were **noted**:

- a. Whereas the covering note stated that the policy applied to sabbatical leave, research leave and leave of absence, leave of absence appeared to sit outside the rest of the policy framework. As such, clear definitions for the terms should be given to indicate the type of activity included.
- b. The terminology in relation to staff varied throughout the document and needed to be clarified.
- c. The Committee queried the use of the descriptors 'staff who are employed on University funds' and 'staff on external funding' in paragraph 2.2.
- d. The policy needed to define more clearly where the award of AST sat in relation to a department's existing ability to vary a member of staff's relative load of research, teaching and administration from year to year according to the department's needs
- e. The policy needed to be more robust in terms of:
 - i. legitimate reasons for awarding AST
 - ii. legitimate grounds for refusal – not least in terms of the cost and potential training implications associated with covering the substantive role.
- f. The Committee queried the reasoning behind the policy not permitting accrual in 5.1.
- g. The Committee queried the reasoning behind the time limits prescribed in 5.1, and why this was not left to a department's discretion.

The Committee **agreed** to refer these points back to HR in order to inform consideration of the paper at the next meeting of Senate.

ACTION: RSPO

Members were invited to submit any further comments to the Research Strategy and Policy Manager by the end of the week.

ACTION: ALL

13-14/11 Annual operating plan

The Committee **considered** progress against its annual operating plan for 2012/13 (URC.13-14/08). It **noted** that good progress had been made, although some actions had been superseded by the appointment of a new VC. In relation to action 6, it was noted that there were a few departmental research strategies which had yet to be signed off.

The Committee **noted** that although the plan for the coming academic year would usually be considered at the October meeting, the plan for 2013/14 would be presented in January following the REF submission and in light of the arrival of a new VC and PVC(R) at this time.

13-14/12 Research Grant Income (FOIA exempt)

13-14/13 Reports from Committee members

It was **noted** that individual members' responsibilities for particular departments would need to be revisited following the REF submission and in the light of any changes to the Committee's membership and terms of reference.

It was **reported** that there was an increasing interest in 'big data' across all three academic clusters which would have implications for central IT Services. The Committee **agreed** to request a report in the spring term on current and potential activity at York in this area, including plans for taking advantage of the funding opportunities currently available.

ACTION: RSPO

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

13-14/14 Allocation of additional investment in Open Access

The Committee **received** for information a copy of the University's report to RCUK on allocation of additional investment in Open Access (URC.13-14/10). It

noted that a significant amount of funding had been spent on institutional subscriptions rather than article processing charges, and that to date five articles had been funded from the subscriptions. It **agreed** to request further information, including:

- The reason(s) for favouring subscriptions over article processing charges
- The length of the subscriptions purchased
- The journals involved and the reasons for selecting them, including whether PURE data had been consulted

Where the reports from other institutions were available, it would be helpful to compare their approaches.

ACTION: RSPO

The Committee **noted** that the current consultation on REF and open access and that it was likely to be implemented. The University would need to ensure and support the necessary implementation of open access compliance. The Chair was due to attend a meeting of the Russell Group PVCs for Research and would raise the issue for further discussion. The Committee **noted** that a more detailed report would be presented at the next meeting.

13-14/15 Date of next meeting

Details of the next meeting were **noted**: Wednesday 20 November 2013 at 2.15pm in HG17.

October 2013

Alice Wakely

Research Strategy and Policy Officer