

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 September 2015

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) (Chair)
The Dean of the Faculty of the Social Sciences
The Dean of the Faculty of the Sciences
The Dean of the Faculty of the Arts and Humanities
Professor Nik Brown
Professor Jason Edwards
Dr Jonathan Finch
Professor Timo Gans
Dr Mary Leng
Professor Bill McGuire
Professor Martin Smith
Professor Jo Swaffield
The Director of Research & Enterprise
The Research Strategy and Policy Manager
The Research Grants and Contracts Manager (Deputy Director of Research & Enterprise)

In attendance: Mr David Hudson (M15-16/06 only)
Dr Alice Wakely (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Professor Clark and Professor Stoneham.

15-16/01 Membership and terms of reference

The Committee **received for information** details of its terms of reference and membership for 2015/16 (RC.15-16/01). The Chair welcomed Professor Brown, Dr Leng and Professor McGuire as new members of the Committee.

The Committee **noted** the following:

- (a) The role of PVC (Business and Community) no longer existed, so was no longer included in the Committee's membership;
- (b) A Faculty Associate Dean for Research was to be appointed for each of the three faculties. At its meeting on 7 July 2015, Senate had approved the inclusion

of these three roles on Research Committee as *ex officio* members. In the case of the Arts and Humanities, the Associate Dean would be the Director of the Humanities Research Centre – in the short term, this would be the Acting Director, Dr Giles, deputising for Professor Buchanan. In the Social Sciences, the role would sit with the Directorship of ReCCS. Time allowances for the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences roles acknowledged both the Associate Dean and the Directorship workloads. Recruitment to the Science and Social Science roles was under way, and the intention was to announce appointments as soon as possible.

15-16/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2015

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2015 (RC.15-16/02).

15-16/03 Research Committee action log

The Committee **considered** a progress report on its action log, against actions carried over from 2014/15 (RC.15-16/03). It **noted** the following:

- (a) Although actions arising from the November 2014 meeting in relation to the Research Strategy Implementation Plan had been completed, development of the Plan itself was ongoing business. Likewise, the review of internal peer review processes was an ongoing project: as noted under 'Outstanding actions', the paper received by the Committee at its June meeting would be circulated to Faculty Research Groups for discussion, in October;
- (b) Relating to M14-15/38, an institutional-wide review of University research centres would take place in Q1 of 2016;
- (c) Proposals for University level action to support the preparation of future REF impact case studies would be brought to the next meeting.

15-16/04 Report from the Chair

The Committee **received** an oral report on recent developments from the Chair. The following items were **noted**:

- (a) The Research Strategy Implementation Plan was now embedded in the University Strategy, and had been discussed at the recent SMG Away Day. A list of priorities for action with the attendant resource implications had been drafted, and would be circulated more widely within the University once finalised. The Committee **noted** the importance of full departmental representation at the meeting called by the Vice-Chancellor later in the week to set out priorities for the coming year.

- (b) Other key elements of Committee business for the coming year included:
- i. Embedding activity relating to the Research Champions and Themes within the faculties and departments;
 - ii. Post-REF reviews of six departments;
 - iii. Preliminary messaging and structures to support preparation for the next REF. The Committee further **noted** that HEFCE's consultation on the next REF had been delayed until after the Comprehensive Spending Review in late November. Amongst others, both the Committee and Faculty Research Groups would be asked to feed into the REF consultation process. It was **noted** that the REF process could change significantly; however, this would not alter the University's focus on research excellence and the ongoing development of structures to support this.
- (c) The University had submitted a response to RCUK on the latter's draft Concordat on Open Data, incorporating comments sought from Chairs of DRC and relevant administrative colleagues. The Committee **noted** that the University was supportive of openness in principle, but that a number of concerns had been raised, including:
- i. The costs (including opportunity cost) of pursuing open data, which had not been quantified by RCUK;
 - ii. A lack of precision in the aspirations set out within the draft Concordat.
- The Committee **decided** that a copy of the University's response should be circulated to members for information.
- ACTION: RSPO**
- (d) A procedure for the declaration of members' interests was under development, to ensure that the Committee's decision-making in relation to departments, and resource allocation in particular, was conducted transparently, mitigating any potential or actual conflicts of interest.

15-16/05 Report from the Director of Research & Enterprise

The Committee **received** an oral report from the Director of Research & Enterprise. The following points were **noted**:

- (a) The Directorate had taken on a significant amount of work associated with the Research Strategy Implementation, leading on nearly 20 identified projects. A certain amount of prioritisation was necessary and three projects were highlighted:
- i. Project SYGMA – covered elsewhere on the agenda
 - ii. Support for research champions. Each Research Champion had been assigned a member of the Research Development Team to work with, and an administrator had been appointed to support all seven. Regular meetings

were also being held between the Research Champions, the PVCR, the Director of Research & Enterprise and the Director of External Relations, captured within the newly-established Research Engagement Strategy Group.

- iii. Development of a University Impact Framework. Building on the Impact Statement approved by URC earlier in the year, an Impact Framework was under development and would be presented to the Committee at its next meeting.
- (b) Figures for the previous year demonstrated that research grants were now at their highest ever level for the University, with the largest number of live awards to date. The associated workload for Research Grants and Contracts was **noted**;
- (c) Personnel changes taking place within the Directorate were **noted**: the Directorate was aiming to maintain service levels as far as possible during the recruitment period. The Committee **noted** in particular the departure of the Research Impact Officer, Ms Garcha, and extended its thanks for her significant contribution to the University's success in the last REF in relation to Impact.

15-16/06 Project SYGMA (Research Grants Management System)

The Committee **considered** an update on Project SYGMA (Research Grants Management System) (RC.15-16/04). Mr Hudson attended the meeting to give a presentation on the item.

The Committee **noted** the following:

- (a) The background to the project and the issues it was intended to resolve, including the fact that the pFACT costing tool was end-of-life, and current systems were not linked with Agresso;
- (b) Details of the project's consultation phase, and the resulting eight high level requirements which had been identified;
- (c) Bids had been received from two suppliers, and supplier demonstrations had taken place the previous week. An evaluation panel had awarded points weighted 80:20 in terms of quality:price, and identified a preferred supplier;
- (d) However, the costs associated with the preferred supplier had increased substantially in relation to the original indicative price used to inform the MTP process.
- (e) Three options had been identified:
 - i. To award the contract to the preferred supplier, despite increased costs;
 - ii. To clarify the costings and contractual terms with the preferred supplier;
 - iii. To re-open the tender.

The Project SYGMA Board had decided to approach the preferred supplier for clarification of costings and contractual terms.

- (f) Once costs and contractual terms had been clarified and budget issues resolved, Phases 2 and 3 of the Project involved implementation and training between January 2016 and December 2017.

Concern was expressed over whether clarification of costings might represent an additional procurement exercise; however, the Committee was reassured that colleagues from the Procurement Office were guiding the process according to procurement regulations.

The Committee endorsed its proposed role to encourage buy-in to the new grants management system. It thanked Mr Hudson and the Project SYGMA team for their work, and in particular their consultative approach involving departmental administrators.

15-16/07 Statement on Research Performance Expectations and Performance Triggers –

The Committee **considered** a Statement on Research Performance Expectations and Performance Triggers (RC.15-16/05). It **noted** that the document had been developed to align with the teaching performance triggers document recently approved by Senate, and consisted of the University's existing Research Performance Expectations Statement, together with a framework of performance triggers to provide guidance for Heads of Department and Chairs of DRC on the appropriate processes.

The Committee **noted** that confirmation was needed from the Registrar and Secretary regarding whether formal discussion with union representatives would be necessary. The document would also be discussed by the University Operations Group the following week.

In the course of discussion, the following points were **noted**:

- (a) The document set out a framework for action: within this, performance issues were handled within departments and there would be a legitimate degree of difference between disciplines. The Committee **noted** in particular that care was needed within the University-level document over the wording used when referring to the frequency of publication and of grant applications. The Committee **agreed** that the University document would only be effective if robust research performance expectations were in place within departments; these should be reviewed by Research Committee once the Faculties had ensured that all departments had written expectations in place.

- (b) The role of the Faculty Deans in relation to managing Research Performance Triggers had yet to be clarified. It was noted that:
- i. The University's model for the management of academic staff was at departmental level, i.e. through the Head of Department, supported by HR;
 - ii. It could be necessary for the Dean to remain independent in case adjudication was needed as part of formal HR processes.
- (c) Chairs of DRC would need to be briefed that their roles involved these aspects of research performance management, as well as research performance monitoring.

The following alterations to the document were **agreed**:

Statement on Performance Expectations

- (i) The section on 'Environment' should include reference to galleries and performance spaces.
- (ii) More specific references to fostering networks (a) outside HE and also (b) nationally and internationally within the discipline should be considered.
- (iii) Paragraph 10 could also make reference to mentoring responsibilities.
- (iv) More explicit reference should be made to the need for differentiation in paragraphs 10 and 11, including a requirement that departmental research performance expectations should be differentiated.
- (v) Paragraph 11 should clarify that written departmental research performance expectations should already be in place, and should be made easily available to staff.
- (vi) Paragraph 12 should acknowledge that the factors listed could have an impact on research performance even when leave is not taken.
- (vii) Paragraphs 16 and 17 should clarify that established departmental mechanisms should be in place to support these processes. The Committee **noted** that robust departmental processes for assessing quality were critical.

Research Performance and Research Conduct Triggers

- (viii) In order to acknowledge management of research groups as a performance issue, the section entitled 'Expectations' should be reworded as follows: 'Has not met departmental expectations in relation to research and research management activities.'
- (ix) Performance issues relating to the supervision of PhD students would be better handled in a separate document, and should therefore be removed from this document.

- (x) In relation to 'Professional Conduct' issues in particular, it was **noted** that there was no indication of the timescale for action: in fact, escalation could be rapid in such instances. It was also noted that there was potential duplication of the preliminary investigations carried out as part of formal HR processes. The Committee **decided** that it would be helpful to explore whether the guidance might be condensed to a single recommended action, as in the case of 'Misconduct'. The importance of distinguishing between poor performance and deliberate misconduct was **noted**.

A number of minor clarifications to wording were also agreed.

The Committee **decided** that a final version of the document, incorporating the above changes, should be **approved** by the Chair and **recommended for approval by Senate**.

15-16/08 Annual Departmental Research Reviews 2014/15

The Committee **considered** a report on the outcomes of the Annual Departmental Research Review (ADRR) process for 2014/15 (RC.15-16/06 - *Confidential*). The Committee **noted** the following:

- (a) This was the second year the ADRR process had run, following on from the pilot for 2013/14. The Chair thanked all who had contributed to the process.
- (b) ADRRs were not intended as part of an isolated process, but should be embedded within departmental research management structures.
- (c) A recent meeting of the Sciences Faculty Research Group had noted that the ADRR process was perceived as micromanagement in some quarters. The Committee **agreed** the importance of emphasising that the process was intended to empower departments, and that URC's role, as stated in its terms of reference, was to monitor the research performance of the institution. The Committee needed to be assured that research management procedures were in place and that research of an appropriate quality was being achieved.

In the course of discussion, the Committee **noted** the following:

- (i) Compared to the previous year, the quality and quantity of departmental reporting had improved; however, this had highlighted those who had not reported appropriately. The Committee **noted** that poor reporting should not necessarily be equated with poor quality research, and **agreed** that this should be made clear in feedback to departments.
- (ii) In particular, departments had engaged more fully with data this year, in part owing to the questions being better worded. Departments still needed to be encouraged to look at benchmarking data, however. The Committee **noted**

that the RSPO was looking at more dynamic presentation of data in Tableau towards the 2015/16 process.

- (iii) There was considerable variation in how far departments had advanced in developing their research performance expectations.
- (iv) The Committee **agreed** that the reporting procedure had improved, but there was further scope for it to be refined for the following year. In particular:
 - A more consistent understanding was needed of the balance between quality assurance and developmental conversations within the process.
 - More consistent reporting mechanisms were needed for reviewers, with a clearer sense of what to comment on and how, distinguishing between what the Committee needed to note and what needed to be fed back to departments.

In response to the generic issues raised within the paper, the Committee **agreed** the following:

1. More work was needed to clarify the University's expectations of research-only departments, in conjunction with the Planning Office and the Deputy-Vice-Chancellor.
ACTION: Chair and Faculty Deans, supported by RSPO
2. There was a need to encourage more applications from Arts and Humanities departments to the Research Priming Fund, as these had fallen recently.
ACTION: WMO to raise at A&H Faculty Research Group and circulate examples of successful applications
3. The importance and usefulness of Pure needed to be emphasised. In particular, departments should be aware that Pure was used routinely across the University at all levels to look at research outputs and performance.
4. The variety of workload models across departments presented some cause for concern. It was **noted** that the PVC (Learning, Teaching & Information) was piloting a workload model platform for rollout in 2016/17.
5. Two to three years was an appropriate timescale in which to expect improvement in departmental research performance once departmental research management procedures had been introduced; however, it was **noted** that individual departments were starting from different positions. This expectation needed to be reflected within the ADRR process e.g. by asking departments to model this trajectory.
6. There was a need to look at ADRR data and methodology in terms of how quality was calibrated; this was potentially a contentious issue, and very discipline-specific. The Committee **agreed** that more support was needed for departments in terms of how to assess outputs, and that proposals would be brought to the Committee in due course, in particular regarding use of metrics
ACTION: RSPO

Faculty Research Groups were also asked to discuss what would be appropriate in this respect.

ACTION: Faculty Deans and FRGs

7. Departments needed further guidance on how to manage research performance and REF submission without necessarily merging the two.
8. A theme-based approach to the next REF would be considered once details were known; different options for submission would be modelled and a University-wide consultation held.
9. Discussion relating to REF submission rates should be suspended until details of the next REF were known; departments should focus on the overall quality of research.

The Committee further **agreed** that individual departmental feedback should be provided to Chairs of DRC and HoDs in the form of a discussion, led by Faculty Deans on behalf of the Committee as a whole. To ensure feedback was transparent, it should be agreed between the relevant Dean and the Committee member who had considered the report in detail, prior to meeting with the department; these Committee members would also attend these meetings where appropriate. In order to structure discussions, the Committee **agreed** that feedback should be circulated to departments in advance of their meetings, organised as follows:

- Acknowledgement of good practice;
- Points for further clarification;
- Action points to be addressed over the coming year.

Feedback should be kept on record for the department by the RSPO.

The Committee further **noted** that in subsequent years, the Associate Deans for Research would lead on feeding back to departments on behalf of URC.

The Committee **decided** that the full report on the ADRR process for 2014/15 should remain confidential to URC. However, in addition to feedback to departments, a top level report would be provided for Senate in the form of a summary of the relevant URC minute. In relation to Faculty Research Groups, it further **decided** that nuanced versions of the feedback to individual departments should be shared, but should be confidential to Chairs of DRC. The Committee also **noted** that it would be helpful to have comments back from the Faculty Research Groups on the ADRR process, to inform refinements for the following year. It **agreed** that proposed process improvements, including those outlined in the paper, should be considered in detail once the current year's process had been concluded.

Paragraph redacted - CONFIDENTIAL

15-16/09 Research Priming Fund 2015/16

The Committee **considered** a report on the operation of the Research Priming Fund in 2015/16, including the minutes of the meeting held on 30 July 2015, information on applications and awards, and a paper relating to the reporting of project outcomes (RC.15-16/07 – *Confidential & FOI Exempt*). The following points were **noted**:

- (a) The summary of awards included an indication of how funded projects mapped on to the University's Research Themes, for information. It was confirmed that applicants had been asked to align to the University Research Strategy and their departmental research strategy, and that mapping to a specific Theme was not a prerequisite for funding;
- (b) The need to improve the quality of reporting on project outcomes through Pure had been acknowledged, and further work was currently being carried out in this area by the Research Strategy and Policy Office. This would need to take into account the timelag between initial investment and demonstrable outcomes (often 2-3 years), and include reporting on activities such as networks and publications as well as grant applications. The Committee **noted** the importance of a robust evidence base in order to demonstrate to the University the positive impact of investment in research priming funding, and make the case for continued resourcing;
- (c) A second call for applications was proposed for early November, with a deadline in early January in order to avoid disruptions to the IT network before the Christmas break;
- (d) Three vacancies on the Research Priming Fund Committee were noted: one in the Social Sciences and two in the Sciences. It was further **noted** that an additional representative in the Sciences was needed in order to ensure robust and independent scrutiny of applications, and was a reflection of the current volume of applications in this area rather than a move in support of an imbalance between the Faculties. Members interested in serving in this way were invited to contact the Chair;
- (e) It was clarified that the Research Champions would be involved in encouraging and helping to generate Research Priming Fund applications, but that the decision-making process was owned by Research Committee, operating through Research Priming Fund Committee. Expertise could be brought in on an ad hoc basis to help review applications, as long as processes were robust and transparent.

15-16/10 Research Integrity Tutorial

The Committee **received** a report on the approval of an online Research Integrity Tutorial for research students, and **noted** that Professor Clark and Professor Martin Smith had contributed to this process on the Committee's behalf. The Committee further **noted** that at its meeting on 7 July 2015, Senate approved the Tutorial as a progression requirement for all students enrolling for a research degree from the start of academic year 2015/16 (RC.15-16/08).

The Committee requested clarification of the mechanisms by which the University would ensure that all research students had completed the tutorial, and the sanctions in place for any who failed to do so. The Dean of the York Graduate Research School was asked to report on this briefly at the Committee's next meeting.

ACTION: TS

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

15-16/11 Ethical conduct audit for ESRC-funded projects 2014/15

The Committee **received for information** a summary of the annual ethical conduct audit for ESRC-funded projects undertaken for 2014-15 (RC.15-16/09).

15-16/12 Minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Humanities Faculty Research Group held on 28 May 2015

The Committee **received** the minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Humanities Faculty Research Group held on 28 May 2015 (RC.15-16/10).

15-16/13 Minutes of the meeting of the Social Science Faculty Research Group held on 3 July 2015

The Committee **received** the minutes of the meeting of the Social Science Faculty Research Group held on 3 July 2015 (RC.15-16/11).

15-16/14 Minutes of the meetings of the Science Faculty Research Group held on 27 May and 23 July 2015

The Committee **received** the minutes of the meetings of the Science Faculty Research Group held on 27 May and 23 July 2015 (RC.15-16/12).

15-16/15 Next meeting

Details of the next meeting were **noted**: Wednesday 4 November 2015 at 2.15pm in HG17, Heslington Hall.

aw/aw October 2015