

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 10 March 2017

Present: Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research) (Chair)
Interim Dean, Faculty of Arts & Humanities (to M16-17/97 only)
Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Sciences
Acting Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Social Sciences
Professor Nik Brown
Professor Mathew Evans
Professor Maria Goddard
Dr Mary Leng (to M16-17/100 only)
Professor William McGuire
Professor Jenny Steele
Professor Elizabeth Tyler
Professor Piran White
Director of Research & Enterprise
Research Strategy and Policy Manager

In attendance: Ms Kirsty Dillingham (M16-17/95 & 96 only)
Ms Janette Colclough (M16-17/97 only)
Dr Rachel Curwen (M16-17/100 & 101 only)
Dr Helen Jones
Dr Alice Wakely (Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from Professors Stoneham and Edwards.

16-17/89 Declaration of conflicts of interest

Members of the Committee were invited to declare potential conflicts of interest relating to the business of the meeting.

16-17/90 Minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2017

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2017 (RC.16-17/67).

16-17/91 Research Committee action log

The Committee **noted** a progress report against its action log for 2016/17 (RC.16-17/68).

16-17/92 Report from the Chair

The Committee **received** an oral report on recent developments from the Chair, as follows:

- (a) Impact case study scoping exercise: two departmental responses were still outstanding.
ACTION: DS/CB to write to these departments
A detailed report on the outcomes of this exercise would be submitted to the next URC meeting in April.
- (b) Leverhulme DTCs: 15 interesting and innovative presentations had been pitched to the internal assessment panel, and shortlisting was now in progress to identify a final three for further development.
- (c) **Paragraph redacted – CONFIDENTIAL**
- (d) The recent Budget announcement had included £300m for new PhDs and Fellowships in STEM. EPSRC had indicated that this would be aligned to the government's Industrial Strategy, and had confirmed that there was a commitment to spreading the funding across RCUK. It was anticipated that there might be additional funding available for existing DTP programmes; no further details were available at present regarding Fellowships.

16-17/93 Reports from the Associate Deans (Research)

The Committee **received** oral reports on recent developments from the Associate Deans (Research), noting the following:

Arts & Humanities

- (a) The University's White Rose partners would be core partners for DTP2, with the University of York as the lead. The position of DTP Director was being advertised, and the new post-holder would feed into the formal expression of interest, due for submission in April.
- (b) **Paragraph redacted – SENSITIVE INFORMATION**
- (c) IAA HRC funding was much valued: Professor Festenstein and Dr Jones were thanked for their support.

Sciences

- i. EPSRC mid-term review of CDTs: **sentence redacted - SENSITIVE INFORMATION**
A directive call for new CDTs was expected from EPSRC over the summer.

- ii. The EPSRC IAA had been renewed for 3 years from April 2017, worth £428k per annum. Dr Mark Mortimer and Ms Emma Brown were thanked for their support in this area.
- iii. **Paragraph redacted – SENSITIVE INFORMATION**

Paragraph redacted – SENSITIVE INFORMATION

A call for NERC DTP2 applications was likely in 18 months' time.

16-17/94 Report from the Director of Research & Enterprise - FOI EXEMPT

16-17/95 Applications and awards to end December 2016 - FOI EXEMPT

16-17/96 Application and award patterns: size bands and Principal Investigators to end December 2016 - FOI EXEMPT

16-17/97 Proposals for a central Open Access Fund

The Committee **considered** proposals for a central Open Access Fund (RC.16-17/76). Ms Colclough attended the meeting for this item. In addition to the proposals set out in the paper, the following points were clarified:

- The proposed interim review of the pilot would be presented to the Committee after one year, and a full evaluation after two years;
- The proposed fund would exclude hybrid journals since it was necessary to prioritise outputs where there was an open access cost barrier to publishing in the most appropriate journal. For hybrid journals, there was an option to publish without paying an open access fee; and if the latter were a funder requirement, the funder should support this.
- Demand on the RCUK block grant for Open Access had increased and no significant underspend was anticipated in 2016/17. The future of the block grant was not guaranteed after March 2018.

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

- (a) Given that funding would be limited, it would be necessary to have a clear selection process to identify which outputs should be supported, rather than operating on a first come, first served basis. The Committee discussed whether the fund should focus on the best journals per se, where selection would already have taken place at editorial level. However, it further **noted** that journal impact factor was an indicator of *journal* performance and was not a reliable indicator of the quality of individual papers – some papers in low impact journals were highly cited and some papers in high impact journals received very few citations. The Committee **agreed** that the selection process would need to take place at departmental level, and that any procedures would need to be streamlined, agile

and robust. It would be necessary to clarify that the journal in question was the best one for the output, as opposed to the researcher's preference.

- (b) The Committee further **agreed** that it would be helpful for FRGs to scope out and share current departmental practices in this area.

ACTION: Associate Deans (Research), liaising with Library

- (c) Greater nuance was needed within the proposals in relation to including open access costs within funding grants e.g. where existing grants predated open access requirements, or where colleagues from a particular discipline within a broad interdisciplinary collaboration wished to publish a more focused output in addition to the outputs specified within the grant itself.
- (d) The cost of copyright permissions was a significant issue for the Arts & Humanities.
- (e) The Committee further **noted** that resource for the proposed Fund was not included within the Library budget, and had not been included within MTPs for the current year, which meant that a pilot could not take place until 2017/18. It also **agreed** that the proposed budget of £40 – 60k per year was unlikely to be sufficient.

The Committee acknowledged the need for support in this area, particularly given the implications for the next REF. It **agreed** that the proposals should be further developed in the light of the Committee's comments and resubmitted for consideration at the start of the next academic year, prior to securing funding via the 2017/18 MTP process.

ACTION: Library

16-17/98 University response to the REF 2021 consultation - FOI EXEMPT

16-17/99 REF Strategy Working Group

The Committee **noted** that this item had been postponed to the following meeting of URC on 26 April 2017.

16-17/100 Research Theme Appraisal: theme descriptors and potential theme performance indicators and targets.

The Committee **considered** a paper on Research Theme appraisal: Theme descriptors and potential Theme performance indicators and targets (RC.16-17/73). Dr Curwen attended the meeting for this item.

In relation to Theme descriptors, the Committee **noted** that the introduction of Themes was already enabling the University to communicate its research strengths more effectively. However, the proposed enhanced descriptors represented the Champions' perspectives only: it was suggested that it would be helpful to look at other colleagues' perceptions as well. It was **noted** that the proposed review of

Thematic performance would also generate useful information to enhance the Research Theme webpages.

In relation to Theme performance indicators and targets, the Committee **noted** that both University Council and UEB were advocating the use of KPIs against which the Research Themes model would be reviewed (in the Autumn Term 2017 in the first instance) in order to justify investment in this area. During discussion, it was **agreed** that although quantitative KPIs were needed, it was also necessary to look at qualitative experiences across the University, adopting a more reflective and contextualised approach to the review process, and focusing on quality as opposed to baseline increases in research activity and income. A consultation exercise was therefore needed with a range of colleagues in order to capture where the Themes-based approach had made a difference. The views of external stakeholders were also important. However, the Committee further **noted** that a reflective exercise would have its limitations at this stage, given that the Themes model would only have been in operation for two years.

Regarding the quantitative metrics proposed within the paper, the Committee **noted** the following:

- (a) It would be possible to take a selective approach to the range of metrics proposed. In making such decisions, it was important to consider the resource implications involved in collecting the data, to ensure that this was in proportion to the usefulness of the material gathered.
- (b) In some instances such as research grant income, it would be possible to compare University performance prior to and following the introduction of the Themes, although for other metrics, such as staff engagement with the media, the data were not available retrospectively. However, the danger of 'retro-fitting' to Themes was **noted**. The Committee further **noted** the need to distinguish between simply measuring fit to the Themes, and identifying activity which had been transformed owing to the introduction of the Themes. The latter was best assessed using qualitative measures.
- (c) Currently the proposed metrics focused predominantly on large-scale achievements and did not sufficiently address community-building activities which were vital for the future sustainability of the Themes. Further consideration was needed of how to assess developments in research culture and support for junior staff. Again, this was likely to be achieved primarily through qualitative discussion.

The Committee **noted** that the above considerations would inform planning of the review of the Research Themes model scheduled for the Autumn Term 2017.

16-17/101 Streamlining and standardising internal priming fund processes.

The Committee **considered** a paper on streamlining and standardising internal priming fund processes (RC.16-17/74). Dr Curwen attended the meeting for this item.

The Committee **noted** that different funding streams were subject to different rules and pressures, and that the flexibility to exercise discretion was important. It further **noted** that it was important to encourage departments to support research through their own internal funds if possible rather than relying solely on priming funds at institutional level.

The Committee **considered** the discussion points set out in the paper, as follows:

- (a) Regarding the questions concerning the definition of staff eligible to act as main internal applicant and the provision of funds to cover staff buyout or existing staff salaries, the Committee **noted** that the two issues were linked. Within the Sciences in particular, encouraging post docs to lead on additional projects when they were employed to carry out specific pieces of work could prove problematic, and was not necessarily the best use of limited funds. However, it was important to retain the potential for staff buyout in circumstances where this was justified, as was currently the case, for example, in relation to CHE. The Committee **noted** that it would be helpful have an official list of research-only departments and units which were in a similar position.

The Committee further **noted** the following:

- (i) Priming funds were potentially a helpful means of enabling more junior members of staff to develop as independent researchers, and the involvement of an independent researcher as Co-I would ensure continuity. However, it was **noted** that the key focus of these funds was usually to prime University research i.e. the long term benefit of the investment to the institution was paramount.
- (ii) It was suggested that in order to mitigate tension, decisions regarding whether more junior members of staff should be able to act as main internal applicant should be taken by the DRC in consultation with the member of staff's line manager.
- (iii) The University's approach should take into account any implications in terms of eligibility for inclusion in a REF return.
- (iv) It was harder to justify buyout for research as opposed to knowledge exchange.

In the light of the above discussions, the Committee **agreed** the following:

- Eligibility guidelines should indicate that the main internal applicant should 'usually' be on a Teaching and Research contract within the ART category, or on a specific Research contract and considered to be an independent researcher.

- The provision of funds to cover staff buyout or existing staff salaries should not be allowed, except in exceptional circumstances.
- (b) The Committee **agreed** that the contribution of administrative staff towards bids should usually be recognised in some way other than inclusion as a Co-I, since administrative staff would not be carrying out the research. However, there were some exceptional cases, such as the involvement of technical staff in bids for Strategic Capital. In such cases, inclusion as Co-I should be agreed with the DRC Chair.
- (c) The Committee **agreed** that DRC Chairs should have a mandate to comment on the quality and suitability of applications. As set out in the URC *Guidance on designing processes for the allocation of internal funding for research and impact*, to avoid conflicts of interest, value judgements should not be made by the DRC Chair alone, but in consultation with at least one other DRC colleague.
- (d) The Committee supported the introduction of an ‘office rejection’ mechanism, to apply in significant cases of non-compliance which had implications for the smooth running of the review process, as opposed to minor presentational details.
- (e) The Committee **agreed** that an annual timetable of panel meetings should be trialed to enable the movement of applications between funds and increase the efficiency of the reviewing process. It was **noted** that applications would need to be explicit about their fit to the various funding criteria, and to provide clear and full information about what was proposed in order to avoid the need to seek clarification outside meetings prior to final decision-making. The Committee further **noted** the need to diversify the range of colleagues involved in decision-making.
- (f) The Committee **agreed** that an outcome summary should be provided for departments as proposed.
- (g) The Committee **agreed** that, in line with other universities, externally-awarded priming income should where possible be classified as ‘research income’. A straightforward mechanism was needed to facilitate these decisions.
- (h) The Committee **agreed** that URC should receive a summary of post-award reports on an annual basis. It **noted** that BIU did not currently have the capacity to assist with the preparation of a database for priming funds for the next round, but that it was already possible to pull out data from Pure into Tableau. It further **noted** that the Committee had already established sanctions for dealing with failure to report, and that this would now apply across all funding streams.

- (i) In relation to the proposal to develop a light touch process for the distribution of smaller sums, the Committee **noted** the following:
- It was helpful for DRC Chairs to sign off on applications;
 - Although previously the application forms for some funds had been quite lengthy, the new standardised form (from which the relevant fields could be selected) would enable panels to focus on the information needed in order to make a robust assessment;
 - It was proposed that under the standardised processes, each application would be reviewed by two panel members, rather than the full panel.
- (j) The Committee **agreed** that it was important to be clear and consistent about the level of feedback provided to unsuccessful candidates: a standard approach of three or four bullet points was reasonable.

16-17/102 Report on the University's Impact Conference held on 6 December 2016

The Committee **considered** a report on the University's 2016 Impact Conference (RC.16-17/75), noting that the item had been postponed from its February meeting. It **noted** that the Conference had been a well-organised event with good speakers; however, non-attendance rates had been disappointing, even given that 30-50% non-attendance was not unusual for events of this kind.

The Committee **agreed** that an internal Impact Conference should be held annually. Given non-attendance rates, it was suggested that it would be helpful to reflect on the timing of the event, and also whether a more central venue such as Spring Lane might encourage better attendance. The Committee further **agreed** that the 2017/18 event should focus to some extent on REF2021, but that in order to avoid equating Impact solely with the REF, there should be broader parallel sessions e.g. focusing on ECRs and the development of Impact activity. Members were invited to put forward suggestions for speakers in due course.

The Committee thanked Dr Jones for organising the 2016 Impact Conference.

16-17/103 Proposals for the ADRR process 2017

The Committee **considered** proposals for the ADRR process for 2017 (RC.16-17/72). It **noted** the following:

- (a) The timescale for the process had been brought forward for 2017, as approved by the Committee at its November meeting. The data and question set would be circulated to departments in May.
- (b) The question set for 2017 employed a lighter touch in relation to Impact, given that departments had already undergone the Impact case study scoping exercise. The questions relating to PGRs had been reviewed by the Associate

Deans (Research) and the YGRS Dean, and an additional data set, on PGR recruitment against targets and on-time submission, would be included.

- (c) A REF preparedness exercise would be conducted alongside ADRR 2017: details of this were still to be scoped out.

The Committee further **noted** University Council's interest in KPIs for research: currently the University collected data on research income and REF performance. It was the view of the Vice-Chancellor that quality of research outputs should be monitored on a more regular basis. This did not currently form part of the ADRR process proposed for 2017, which asked about departmental mechanisms for assessing quality and for an overview of departments' findings, but did not seek detailed information.

The Committee **decided** that in 2017 this need should be addressed through the REF preparedness exercise, which would form an Appendix to the ADRR. It **noted** that RSPO and BIU did not currently have the capacity to generate a detailed data set for departments on the quality of research outputs; it was therefore suggested that departments should be asked for a quantitative data snapshot at a manageable level of detail, e.g. the top rated output for each member of staff. The Committee further **noted** that departments would need plenty of notice regarding this requirement in addition to the ADRR 2017 process.

ACTION: AG & RSPO

Details of the REF preparedness exercise would be developed via the REF Strategy Group. It was proposed that these should be submitted to the Committee for approval at its next meeting in April, prior to circulation to departments at the beginning of May alongside the ADRR data and question set.

ACTION: AG

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

16-17/104 Minutes of the meeting of the Faculty Research Group for the Sciences held on 25 January 2017.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the Faculty Research Group for the Sciences held on 25 January 2017 (RC.16-17/79).

16-17/105 Minutes of the meeting of the Faculty Research Group for the Social Sciences held on 26 January 2017.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the Faculty Research Group for the Social Sciences held on 26 January 2017 (RC.16-17/80).

16-17/106 Minutes of the meetings of the Faculty Research Group for the Arts and Humanities held on 23 November 2016 and 23 February 2017.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meetings of the Faculty Research Group for the Arts and Humanities held on 23 November 2016 and 23 February 2017 (RC.16-17/81).

16-17/107 Minutes of the meeting of the York Graduate Research School Board held on 23 February 2017.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the York Graduate Research School Board held on 23 February 2017 (RC.16-17/82).

16-17/108 Minutes of the meeting of the Global Challenges Research Fund Steering Group held on 6 February 2017.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the Global Challenges Research Fund Steering Group held on 6 February 2017 (RC.16-17/83).

16-17/109 Minutes of the meeting of the Research Excellence Training Steering Group held on 10 February 2017.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the Research Excellence Training Steering Group held on 10 February 2017 (RC.16-17/84).

16-17/110 Summary of the University's British Council SPHEIR bid. (FOI Exempt)

The Committee **received** for information a summary of the University's British Council SPHEIR bid (RC.16-17/85).

16-17/111 Next meeting

The Committee **noted** details of the next meeting: Wednesday 26 April 2017 at 2.15pm in H/G 17, Heslington Hall. It was further **noted** that the meeting scheduled for Wednesday 21 June 2017 had been moved to Wednesday 28 June 2017 at 2pm in H/G17, Heslington Hall.

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March 2017