

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 29 April 2020

Present: Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Research), Professor D Smith (Chair)
Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Sciences, Professor S Thompson
Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Social Sciences,
Professor Y Birks
Associate Dean (Research), Faculty of Arts & Humanities,
Professor R Ogden
Dean, York Graduate Research School, Professor T Stoneham
Professor D Barnett
Professor M Evans
Professor M Goddard
Professor S Smith
Professor J Steele
Professor J Thijssen
Professor E Tyler
Professor P White
Director of Research & Enterprise, Dr D McBeth
Associate Director of Research & Enterprise, Ms J Gilmartin
Research Strategy and Policy Manager, Ms A Grey

In attendance: Ms Z Clarke (Secretary)
Emma Montgomery (M19-20/109 only)
Dr R Curwen (M19-20/111 only)
Mr E Kirby (M19-20/106 and 107 only)

Apologies for absence were received from Professors S Carroll, A Field and B Fulton.

19-20/98 Declaration of conflicts of interest

Members of the Committee were reminded of the procedure for declaring potential conflicts of interest relating to the business of the meeting.

19-20/99 Minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2020

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2020 (RC.19-20/77).

19-20/100 Research Committee action log

The Committee **received** a progress report against its action log for 2019/20 (RC.19-20/78). Further to the information provided, the Committee **noted** the following:

(a) 19-20/16: Work on Open Research was ongoing, and the Library was leading internally on developing a response to the UKRI Open Access Policy Consultation. Comment had been sought from Chairs of DRC and the University community. It was agreed that it would be useful for members of URC to have sight of the draft response and have the opportunity to comment.

ACTION: ZC to circulate the draft response to members of URC

(b) 19-20/59: The pilot for the Departmental Tableau workbook has been delayed due to COVID-19, however the team is planning to begin the pilot in the summer (workload permitting). Work to optimise the accuracy of research income reporting had been undertaken, including a daily refresh of the Worktribe database that allows accuracy of Applications and Awards data to within 24 hours. Members of URC would be notified when this update was live.

19-20/101 Report from the Chair

The Committee **received** an oral report from the Chair. The following points were **noted**:

- The Chair had been in conversation with the sector more widely, including UKRI, N8 and Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Research from other Russell Group universities, and such conversations had been valuable in enabling the sharing of approaches to managing issues arising from the pandemic. It was **noted** that key decisions were pending on both PGR students (including funding) and research associates. In the case of PGR students, a supportive statement from UKRI had just been received (see 19-20/102). The sector was waiting for the government response to the UUK letter regarding financial stability in the light of COVID-19 (included later on the agenda, RC.19-20/85); it was expected that the Treasury would ask for a stronger case to be made.
- It was important for the University to maintain its research operations. A Research Contingency Group had been established to ensure the oversight and high-level coordination of research support. Externally funded grants would go ahead with already-agreed matched funding in place. URC was pleased that the University was able to make a strong statement of support. It was important to emphasise that research and teaching are separate activities, and that resuming research activity is not dependent on a return to normal teaching activity.
- Professor Smith would step down as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research on 1 May 2020, and her replacement, Professor Matthias Ruth, would chair the committee from that date. The handover process, though disrupted by COVID-19, was in train.

19-20/102 Oral Report from the Dean of the York Graduate Research School

The Committee **received** an oral report on recent developments from the Dean of the York Graduate Research School, in which the following points were **noted**:

- The Academic Contingency Group continued activity. The light-touch and risk-based approach to supervisor and progression meetings had been successful, and had reduced the number of necessary meetings from approximately 700 to just 20. Online vivas were proceeding successfully and it was **clarified** that students were able to ask for a three month extension. It was key to maximise the experience for PGR students starting at York in 2020 and to enable this, work was ongoing to develop guidance for supervisors and students. Students would be able to start in 'work from home' mode if necessary.
- The situation with funding extensions from UKRI had been resolved, and an open letter to all students and grant holders would be circulated shortly.
- It was **reported** that UEB had agreed to a 6-month funding extension for all PhD students in line with UKRI terms, including those funded by the University. The cost would be recouped via external funding opportunities. UKRI had specified that, where difficulty was expected in matched funding, current students should be prioritised as opposed to future arrangements. Currently, Imperial College London was the only other institution offering this arrangement. Matched funding remained a live issue, and further clarity from UKRI was desired. UEB had also taken the decision to unfreeze PhD recruitment, with the caveat that offers for overseas research scholarships would not be made as these were not business critical. It was the responsibility of departments to assess what is categorised as business critical.
- Communication and openness on PGR issues were key for YGRS and the University. A series of newsletters had been circulated to graduate students to enable this, and a Question Time webinar was planned for 7 May. An open letter, signed by students and staff and detailing five requests for the Graduate School, had been delivered to the Vice-Chancellor and the Dean of YGRS, and the Dean was able to report that action had been taken as far as reasonable with all requests.

19-20/103 Reports from the Associate Deans (Research)

The Committee **received** oral reports from the Associate Deans for Research, as follows:

Sciences

- (a) The Faculty was grateful for the establishment of the Research Contingency Group, which would be beneficial for coordination and communication across the University.
- (b) Departments within the Faculty had been heavily affected by lab closures, however the impact varied across departments and it was **noted** that this impact would increase with time. Departments had done well to maintain research activity, and were engaged and looking to the future.

Arts & Humanities

- (a) The establishment of the Research Contingency Group was appreciated. It was **noted** that departments within the Faculty had been affected by the closure, particularly those making use of studios and labs.
- (b) The Humanities Research Centre continued the #HumanitiesAtHome campaign on Twitter; the Department of Music would soon release archival concert footage as part of

this work. The annual poster competition for postgraduate students would take place online, and the link would be circulated shortly for members of the committee to view.

ACTION: RO to circulate link

- (c) The next Deputy Director of the HRC would soon be appointed, and URC would be notified in due course.

Social Sciences

- (a) The Faculty was working to maintain research activity, however a lack of clarity from funders remained an issue. Work was ongoing to gather information from those holding grants with charity or industry. Overall, it was reported as a positive picture, albeit still with some nervousness.
- (b) Communication from the ESRC indicated that requirements regarding university commitment to matched funding were to be relaxed in the early stages of grant calls.

19-20/104 Report from the Director of Research & Enterprise (FOI Exempt)

The Committee **received** a report on recent activity in the Research & Enterprise Directorate (RC.19-20/79) (FOI Exempt), **noting** the following in particular:

- (a) [Section redacted due to FOI exemption]
- (b) Enterprise services had been working with Professor Kiran Trehan, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Partnerships and Knowledge Exchange, to assist in civic engagement and support for small businesses in partnership with York Council.
- (c) The Research Contingency Group was appreciated. It was **noted** that a lack of definitive information had been problematic thus far, and that the group would be beneficial in allowing central communication with departments. Central advice on research is good, with informative and up-to-date webpages.
- (d) It was clarified that postponement of the Apprenticeship programme was a temporary measure.

19-20/105 Impact of COVID-19 on research activity and possible routes for mitigation (FOI Exempt)

The Committee **considered** a report on activity within Research and Enterprise regarding the COVID-19 disruption (RC.19-20/80) (FOI Exempt). The paper demonstrated the progress being made across Research and Enterprise although the outcome might not be immediately visible. Work was ongoing to gather information on grant expectations from funders, and staff in the directorate were working to gather relevant data to enable a prompt response when information was made available. Involvement with the Russell Group network had been beneficial throughout the pandemic, particularly in regards to the REF.

It was important for members of URC to communicate the information in the paper to colleagues across the University, to ensure that information was available and well-circulated.

19-20/106 Minutes of the meetings of the REF Strategy Group held on 3 March 2020 and 2 April 2020 (Confidential)

The Committee received for information the minutes of the meetings of the REF Strategy Group held on 3 March 2020 and 2 April 2020 (RC.19-20/81).

19-20/107 Update on the postponement of the REF and potential next steps (*Confidential & FOI Exempt*)

[Item redacted for reasons of confidentiality.]

19-20/108 Oral update on support for research

The Committee **received** an oral report on support for research with relation to the COVID-19 disruption. The following points were noted:

- (a) Four key areas of focus had been identified; (i) pump priming (see M19-20/111), (ii) PGR funding, (iii) fellowships, and (iv) match funding. Of these four areas, (i) and (ii) had been resolved, and both (iii) and (iv) were in progress, with information currently being brought together for a paper for UEB.
- (b) The issue of match-funding in particular would need to be strategically and operationally coordinated.

It was agreed that a paper on the topic of support for research would be presented at the June URC.

ACTION: ZC to add to agenda

19-20/109 Research grant applications and awards: Year to Date March 2019 and Previous 4 Year Comparisons (*FOI Exempt*)

[Item redacted due to FOI exemption]

19-20/110 Costings associated with the COVID-19 disruption

The Committee **considered** a letter, presented to the government by Universities UK, on costings associated with the COVID-19 disruption (RC.19-20/85). The current expectation was that a response would be available by the end of April.

19-20/111 Report on the University approach to internal priming funds

[Item redacted due to FOI exemption]

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

19-20/112 Minutes of the Research Communications Strategy Group meeting held on 21 February 2020.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the Research Communications Strategy Group held on 21 February 2020 (RC.19-20/87).

19-20/113 Minutes of the GCRF Steering Group meeting held on 26 February 2020.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the GCRF Steering Group held on 26 February 2020 (RC.19-20/88).

19-20/114 Minutes of the Faculty Research Group for the Arts and Humanities meeting held on 17 March 2020.

The Committee **received** for information the minutes of the meeting of the Faculty Research Group for the Arts and Humanities held on 17 March 2020 (RC.19-20/89).

19-20/115 Updated Human Tissue Act Standard Operating Procedures for the University.

The Committee **received** for information the updated Human Tissue Act Standard Operating Procedures for the University (RC.19-20/90).

19-20/116 Next meeting

The Committee noted details of the next meeting: Wednesday 17 June at 2.00pm. The meeting would be held online.

zc/zc

May 2020