

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Matters for note by Senate arising from the meeting of Research Committee on 12 March 2025

1. Report on the refresh of Council KPIs

The Committee considered a report on the refresh of Council KPIs. It was noted that a full review of the KPIs underlying the Research Strategy would still take place later in the year when the updated HESA data is available as planned. At this stage the Committee was asked to consider the commentary included for the report to Council, noting that there would be opportunity for a fuller discussion of the data itself at a subsequent meeting.

The Committee noted the following:

1. Currently only ART staff were included in the definition of 'academic'; although this definition did not have a large impact at the institutional level, its limitations in regard to research-only departments were noted.
2. It was suggested that the references to philanthropic funding be amended to clarify where this was included under research funding.
3. The distinction between research expectations for PGRs and academic staff needed to be made clear. It was clarified that this was on the agenda for YGRS.

2. Draft Responsible AI Use in Research: Policy and Best Practice Document for Researchers

The Committee considered the draft Responsible AI Use in Research: Policy and Best Practice Document for Researchers. The following was reported:

1. AI continued to develop at a rapid pace and as such the Guidance should be considered as a 'living document', which would be amended and reviewed as necessary to align with developments in the field. The document had been split into policy and best practice, with the policy drawing largely from existing requirements concerning research integrity and data management. Sustainability issues remained prominent and would continue to be monitored, alongside efforts to strengthen literacy and training options.
2. It was important to ensure that work on AI in research aligned with work taking place in the teaching space.
3. The document had been circulated to colleagues in the School of ACT and the departments of Computer Science and Sociology, and comments arising from this process had been incorporated.
4. Members of the Task & Finish Group had indicated willingness to continue involvement as part of a long-term Working Group on the topic, with Dr Jenn Chubb continuing to chair the group.

The Committee **noted** the following:

1. There was a need to provide training opportunities and resources, to enable AI technology to be engaged with productively and effectively. The potential use for other mechanisms for the delivery and discussion of this information was noted, for example through drop-in sessions.
2. It was acknowledged that, although the development of an institution-wide approach was appreciated, faculties and departments would need to consider tailored approaches for their respective disciplines.

3. Review of the Statement on Research Performance Expectations

The Committee considered an update on work to review the Statement on Research Performance Expectations. The following was noted:

1. It was important to be mindful of the timing and potential optics of the review, and it was emphasised that the review was not part of the wider discussion of university finances. The value of recognising varied backgrounds and career patterns was recognised, and the membership of the

group had been designed with this in mind. It was suggested that the core Working Group would be supported by a wider circle of colleagues who could provide feedback and comment as needed.

2. The review of the Statement should take into consideration the work ongoing regarding the PDR process.

The Committee noted the following:

1. The function of the Statement needed to be made clear, particularly in terms of performance management and the responsibilities of the institution. It was important to lay out how flexible departments could be with adapting the statement, noting where certain aspects needed to be included. The role of mentoring as part of performance management needed to be considered.
2. The format and presentation of the Statement would be considered as part of the review, including the position and content of the table which laid out steps to take where performance expectations were not met.
3. The membership of the Working Group ought to include a representative from HR.

4. Other Business

- (a) Work was ongoing as to the best way to support staff and enable research following changes to the Library budget, and clarity in terms of the process, expectations and communications was essential. It was noted that the landscape would continue to change as publishers responded to steps taken by universities and that the University would review the Library Content budget once the outcome of the national negotiations lead by JISC are complete. It was confirmed that the university would pay Article Processing Charges (APCs) where the green access route was not possible due to funder restrictions. Further clarity was requested as to the ratio of databases to publications; this would be addressed by the Head of Content and Open Research. It was noted that data concerning staff time spent on editing and peer review was not currently captured, and that doing so would require consideration to ensure such data collection was not resource-intensive.
- (b) The University of York had recently joined the Health Research Authority (HRA) Shared Commitment to public involvement in research, making it the first higher education institution to join the partnership. The partnership aimed to foster better collaboration between researchers and members of the public, with the goal of improving the extent and quality of public involvement across the sector.
- (c) The processes and practices around recruitment and retention of PGRs needed to be improved; the Dean of YGRS is reviewing PGR portfolios and strategies across departments with the aim of presenting the outcomes to URC in due course. The Committee expressed concerns regarding the impact of cuts to funding which had been used to support PGRs.
- (d) Concerns remained regarding the impact of the Commercial Costing and Pricing Policy, particularly regarding partnerships within the Faculty of Arts & Humanities. It was noted that the requirements of the policy had the potential to impact the REF return, and that the reliance on the exceptions process was not a sustainable route forward. There was a need to understand the cost of investment and the scale of activity in affected areas. A meeting would take place to discuss a route forward.

PROFESSOR SARAH THOMPSON
14/04/2025

MS ZOE DEACY-CLARKE