RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Matters for note by Senate arising from the meeting of Research Committee on 21 January 2025

1. **Research Strategy KPIs and Supporting Indicators**
   The Committee approved proposals for presenting the KPIs and supporting indicators for the University Research Strategy to URC. The Head of PIP reported that:

   1. Previous work in this area had been superseded by that undertaken by University Council, however the focus for this item was now on URC KPIs and indicators specifically for the Research Strategy.
   2. The proposed timeline was laid out in the paper, and it was noted that most of the suggested KPIs and indicators do not yet have targets and some are not yet defined. This work would be taken forward over the next year, with a number of measures dependent on developments concerning the REF (including outcomes of the REF PCE Pilot).
   3. Further proposals were under discussion as part of the Research Information Reporting Group and would be presented in due course.

   The Committee observed the following:

   1. Measures should be benchmarked across the sector, however it was noted that this was difficult in some cases.
   2. Regarding the KPI 1 (percentage of publications in the top 10% FWCI), it was suggested that a distinction between potential 3* and 4* REF outputs be included, with emphasis placed on these. It was noted that the top 10% figure roughly matched the number of 4* outputs in the previous REF, whilst it was acknowledged that the two did not correspond exactly; the target was largely about maintaining the proportion of high-quality outputs. Qualitative metrics were also necessary for future planning.
   3. It was clarified that indicators relating to research students were included under the Research Culture KPI. The upcoming ARR would involve discussion with departments about their aspirations and targets for PGR numbers.

2. **REF Preparedness Survey**

   The Committee discussed a report on the recent REF Preparedness Survey. The Research Excellence Manager reported the following:

   1. The survey had highlighted a number of areas of work which would be taken forward, however there were specific risks noted in the paper for the Committee to note. In particular the Committee noted the withdrawal of one UoA from the REF PCE Pilot due to lack of research support capacity. It was recognised that the survey had been conducted prior to changes to the Library content budget, and as such did not reflect more recent conversation on that topic.

   The Committee observed the following:

   1. Consideration as to the best strategy for the REF would take place once guidance on eligibility and outputs was available from Research England.
   2. REF planning needed to be cognisant of the financial situation faced by the University, as well as the impact of the situation on staff morale.
   3. Guidance on REF Panel membership was requested, and it was recommended that clear and consistent messaging be delivered in the near future to enable appropriate planning within departments. The value of REF Panel membership was emphasised.

3. **Proposals for the Annual Research Review 2024/2025**
   The Committee approved proposals for the Annual Research Review 2024/2025. It was noted that the intent for future iterations of the ARR to be synced with the Planning Process, however this was not possible for 2024/2025. The value of the ARR in collecting information to support strategic discussion was noted.

The Committee observed the following:

1. The question set should be accompanied by information on the indicative length and content of answers.
2. Resource was limited currently in regard to data support, but the Committee requested the opportunity to review the data held centrally and confirm its accuracy. Departments would be given access to the URC Tableau workbook to enable this.
3. The current timeline was rather tight, particularly in the space allotted for developing Faculty-level reports. It was recommended that the URC Away Day be moved to allow more time for this work to take place.

4. Draft Guidance on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Research

The Committee considered the draft Guidance on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Research. The Chair of the AI Task & Finish Group reported that the draft Guidance had drawn from best practice material across the sector. Consideration was especially appreciated in regard to the potential for AI 'Champions' across the institution, literacy and training, and the role of ethics committees.

The Committee observed the following:

1. It was essential that the Guidance was clear on the definition of AI and the scope of the document. It was suggested that the Terms of Reference of the AI Working Group include a reference to drawing on the expertise of the University, to incorporate research on AI.
2. The draft Guidance could be circulated to researchers using AI in their work to gather feedback. Differences across career stage and discipline were noted. EDI considerations needed to be further drawn out.
3. Further clarity was needed as to sanctions for non-compliance with the Guidance, and its relationship with the Codes of Practice on research integrity and ethics.
4. It was requested that the recommendation regarding disclosure of AI in the generation of hypotheses and research questions had implications for PGRs, and as such this discussion needed to incorporate the supervisory relationship.
5. Further consideration was needed as to the potential appointment of 'champions' for research using AI within departments.

5. Update on budget changes for the Library

The Committee considered an oral report on budget changes for the Library. The Director of Library, Archives and Learning Services reported the following:

1. Negotiations with publishers had been mostly concluded, with the exception of a proposed 'read and publish' deal with Taylor & Francis which was expected to be finalised in February. A similar deal was in place with Cambridge University Press, with a variety of deals in place with other publishers.
2. Discussion was ongoing to assess the full impact of changes. Journal content had been reduced by 50%; although there had been a method applied to the prioritisation of content, the shift was significant. Work was underway to analyse the REF 2021 submission and identify which outputs would not have been possible under current access restrictions.
3. Questions remained around the rights retention policy and the Open Research team were available for guidance on this point. Green open access work was ongoing.

The Committee observed the following:

1. There had been a smaller reduction in the number of databases due to feedback from the University community. There were no mitigations in place for database access aside from the weekly bus to the British Library (run by the University). The Committee noted concern around contractual obligations where PGR projects depended upon access to specific databases; members were asked to highlight any such cases where they arose.
2. The Library continued to work as part of the national negotiation process. Although content could be purchased on an ad hoc basis it was not possible to re-enter into a large deal without damaging the forthcoming national negotiations. Discussions at Senate, UEB and the University Senior Leaders

Forum would be pragmatic and open regarding the impact of the changes. It was requested that a summary of the situation be shared with departments.

3. In some cases it was possible for researchers to opt out of the institutional Open Access Publications policy and follow the Green Open Access route, but this was not allowed in the case of UKRI or Wellcome funded work.

6. Principles for Research Leave

The Committee endorsed proposals regarding the University approach to research leave policies. The Associate Dean for Research (Sciences) reported that the paper reflected the range of research leave policies across the institution and laid out the next step of developing a University-level policy. The paper advocated for a policy which offered research leave to all R&T staff, with some flexibility allowed across Faculties and Departments, with the Policy itself including best practice as to how the opportunity is advertised, applied for and awarded. It was intended that the University policy remain principles-based and generic enough to be applied flexibly.

The Committee observed that leave for the purpose of interdisciplinary research would need to be coordinated across departments. The resultant policy should be clear that research leave is not to be used as the only way to develop Impact Case Studies, and that such case studies needed to be properly supported within departments' normal workload allocations.

7. Other Business

(a) The PIP Team had met with the EDI Office and considered the completion of an Equality Impact Assessment for the Research Misconduct Policy & Procedure. It was determined that the completion of an EIA would not be appropriate given the lack of data available to make meaningful assessments. This decision will be recorded and may be revisited if the number of cases rises significantly.

(b) Professor Ruth would step down as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research on 30 April 2025, with Professor Thompson taking on the role in the interim. The handover was in progress.

(c) Conversation had taken place at both Research Forum and Senior Leaders Group concerning the strategic research priorities of the University. The discussion had been well-received this far. Work continued on communications for the Research Strategy, with slides developed to enable this.

(d) A meeting had taken place concerning the effectiveness of URC, involving colleagues from the Committee, PIP and the Governance & Assurance Office. Emphasis had been particularly placed on the relationship between the Committee and Faculties.

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