

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Matters for note by Senate arising from the meeting of Research Committee on 26 September 2024

1. University Research Strategy to 2030: Progress and Implementation Plan for 2024/2025, including the programme of work for URC

The Committee endorsed the summary of strategy progress, approved the overarching plan for the development of the Research Strategy KPIs, approved the URC priorities for 2024/25, endorsed the programme of work for 2024/25 and discussed and approved the wider communications plan for the research strategy.

The paper summarised activity over 2023/2024 and presented proposed actions for 2024/2025. The development of the implementation plan had allowed for greater specificity in the URC programme of work, particularly in terms of projected timings. Some of the work that had taken place over 2023/2024 to develop Council KPIs would be used to support continued work on the KPIs and success measures for the Research Strategy, with an expected delivery date of January 2025. Regarding research culture specifically, it was proposed that a sub-group of URC and the Research Culture Working Group be established to discuss potential measures, and it was noted that this particular KPI may take longer to finalise than others.

The implementation plan listed key actions for the upcoming year and included detail as to how such action might be reported upon; this then informed the URC programme of work. The Committee approved the URC programme of work, with the acknowledgement that exact timings would be flexible as necessary. Work was underway to develop a communications plan for the Research Strategy; it was suggested that a set of summary slides be disseminated, to aid in communicating activity related to the Research Strategy. The Committee noted the importance of addressing staff morale directly and clearly, particularly in the light of potential redundancies and the Changing the Work Framework.

2. Annual Research Review (ARR) Plans/Principles for 2024/2025

The Committee endorsed the proposed plan and principles for the Annual Research Review (ARR) for 2024/25. The Head of PIP reported the following:

1. It was important that the ARR be integrated with strategic planning and the Five-Year Forecast as far as possible. The Director of RI&KE would be involved in discussions around the planning process, which would aid such alignment. The aims and structure of the ARR for 2024/2025 remained similar to those in 2023/2024.
2. It was intended that Type 3 research entities be included in the ARR through the provision of documentation alongside departments. Type 1 research entities would be included in departmental returns. It was noted that some Type 2 research entities would benefit from the completion of separate returns due to their cross-Faculty activity.
3. The impact of the VS/VER scheme needed to be considered and assessed in full, and as such departments were encouraged to address this in their returns.

The Committee observed the following:

1. It was requested that further contextual information be provided to aid departments in writing their returns. It was noted that understanding the information held centrally about departmental activity was of particular importance to departments facing potential redundancies.
2. Setting out a clear plan for URC, including specifying timescales and details of interactions with Faculty, was essential.

3. Update on preparations for the REF

A number of national updates were reported; it was noted that submission was still expected in 2028, however there had been discussion of a delay. A final policy position regarding open access outputs was expected over

the next few months, with an implementation date of January 2026, and it had been clarified that long-form outputs did not need to be open access for the upcoming REF. The University was taking part in the People, Culture and Environment pilot, and a number of workshops had taken place to consider potential indicators.

The final details of the HESA return were awaited, to allow for the allocation of staff to UoAs to begin. The REF Strategy Group continued to meet and planned to undertake a 'REF Preparation Survey' to assess activity within departments.

4. Revisions to the Policy on the Payment of Individuals for Involvement with or Contribution to Research

The Committee approved revisions to the Policy on the Payment of Individuals for Involvement with or Contribution to Research. The Head of Involvement@York attended to speak to this item and reported that the policy had been redrafted to address concerns raised since its initial publication in January 2022. There had been no substantive changes, and revisions had largely focused on the clarity of language (including an extended glossary) as well as wording around the use of vouchers and an amendment to the payment threshold (from £184 p/w to £183.50). The latter change had been made to reflect guidance from the Department of Work and Pensions and the NIHR.

The Committee observed the following:

1. Differences in practices across disciplines were noted; it was emphasised that best practice is to pay individuals for their time and contribution, however if this was not possible due to financial constraint it was important that this be made clear in all documentation and information made available to individuals.
2. It was clarified that the policy covered only domestic research. Payment in the context of international research could be looked into if needed, however further work would be needed to fully assess the area.

5. Draft Guidance on Fair Attribution

The Committee approved the draft guidance on Fair Attribution. The Head of BRIC reported that the draft Guidance had been developed with input from a range of colleagues, including the Head of Technical Operations. The draft Guidance would be subject to review in the future to ensure continued effectiveness and applicability.

The Committee observed the following:

1. Technicians were subject to a different line management structure than academic staff and as such the process for resolving disputes would need to take this into account.
2. The boundary between direct contribution and intellectual contribution could be blurred at times. There was potential to develop training to address the transition from engaging with collaborators as sources of data to intellectual contributors.

6. Changes to Library Content Budget

The Committee discussed changes to the Library Content Budget. The Head of Library, Archives and Learning Service reported the following:

1. The Library, Archives and Learning Service (LALS) was required to save £1M over the next two years through a reduction on content expenditure (databases and journals). A first round of database cancellations had taken place, with journal cancellations to follow by the end of the year. Negotiations with publishers regarding journal reductions were ongoing. LALS had also developed a set of principles to guide the development of the library.
2. A number of mitigations were in place. The University would retain post-cancellation access to most articles published prior to cancellation, and articles with access restrictions could be accessed via interlibrary loan or open access agreements.
3. The right to publish in journals subject to cancelled publisher agreements would not be affected, however open access publication would be restricted and authors would be required to deposit

articles in the White Rose Research Online repository (in line with the institutional Research Publications and Open Access Policy).

4. The Committee was asked to endorse a recommendation to review the flat budget in 2026/2027 to allow for inflationary increases, if the financial situation permitted.

The Committee observed that any recommendation to review the flat budget would be data-driven and cognizant of the situation facing the institution at the time. There was cooperation within the sector to address the issues noted, including work with JISC to negotiate at a national-level with major publishers.

7. Other Business

1. The Committee approved the draft Terms of Reference, noting ongoing discussion regarding the role of the Committee within wider governance structures and the number of academic representatives in the membership. Further updates would be presented in due course.
2. The first meeting of the AI Working Group had taken place and had involved discussion of the scope of the group and priority areas. Concerns around sustainability had been noted, as had the need to understand benefits of AI.
3. The full impact of the VS/VER process on research operations was not yet clear. URC had a role going forward in (1) articulating the research potential of the institution and (2) working to understand the impact of changes, for example through the ARR and REF Strategy Group.
4. The recruitment process for the new Dean of YGRS was underway, with interviews due to take place shortly. Work was underway to develop a plan for the role going forward, and operational changes were in progress (for example, moving responsibility for funding and scholarships to RIKE). This included tidying up reporting lines for PGRs, who were categorised as both students and researchers.
5. Work was underway to establish a Faculty-level ethics committee with the Social Sciences, which would include all Social Sciences departments apart from Health Sciences. It was intended that a structure would be in place to allow SPSW to join in January 2025, followed by Education at a later date.
6. Concerns were noted regarding the support available for EU grants and similar complex applications, particularly within the Faculty of Arts & Humanities. It was clarified that this was an area in need of further consideration, but that work was underway to ensure cover in this area.
7. REF Preparation continued across all three Faculties, including the development of Impact Case Studies.
8. The Committee received the Annual Report from the Academic Ethics and Compliance Committee (AECC). The work of the AECC had been embedded within the ethics system at York, and the AECC continued to operate as a point of guidance and practice-sharing. The Changing the Work Framework would necessitate a pause of the reflective practice exercise coordinated by the Committee, however it was noted that this had been helpful thus far.
9. The Committee received a paper outlining recommended principles surrounding research leave. A drop-in session would be arranged for members of URC to discuss the topic with the Associate Deans for Research, following which a proposal regarding research leave would be presented to the Committee.

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20/12/2024

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