UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 9th MARCH 2022

Present:	Marion Campbell (Convenor), Simon Bains, Marlis Barraclough, Alison Brown, Keith Bender, Mirela Delibegovic, Andrew Dilley, Dawn Foster (Clerk), Tamas Gyorfi, Susan Halfpenny, Catherine Jones, Jesper Kallestrup, Ann Lewendon, Sam Martin, Graeme Nixon, Nir Oren, Iain Percival, Louise Phillips, Dubravka Pokrajac, Liz Rattray, Tracey Slaven, Ian Stansfield, Gwen Smith
Apologies:	Elena Giannaccini, Brian Henderson, Gary Macfarlane, Jacqueline Ravet, Brice Rea, Donna Walker

Welcome: Marion Campbell welcomed all to the meeting. Sam Martin (School Director of Research, School of Biological Sciences) was welcomed to his second committee meeting. Andrew Dilley was welcomed to the committee in his new role as Dean for Academic Research Partnerships and Research Governance. Susan Halfpenny was welcomed to the meeting as an observer, in her new role as Head of Research & Learning Information Services.

1   MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings held on 11th November 2021 and 20th January 2022 were approved.

2   MATTERS ARISING

2.1   Update on Research Income Discussions with Schools/Senate Discussions

RPC noted that the majority of research income meetings had been held with Schools and these had been extremely useful. Common themes emerged, including requests for support for ECRs and mid-career researchers in the transition from applying for small grants to larger grants, and the need for reflection on unsuccessful funding bids to see if these could be further developed for submission to alternative funding bodies (or resubmitted to the original funder wherever possible, once the necessary changes had been made). SDoRs will be able to use Worktribe RAMS to identify unsuccessful grant applications from their School so they may provide support to colleagues on this issue.

2.2   Worktribe Ethics Module

RPC noted that Andrew Dilley (in his new role of Dean for Academic Partnerships and Research Governance) had met with the Chairs of the internal Ethics Boards to discuss the implementation of a new University-wide ethics approval system (Worktribe Ethics). The Project Board and User Group have held initial meetings, and issues have been noted in specific Schools regarding the future process for approving UG and PGT ethics applications, and the need for transparency on the plans to migrate to the new ethics process.

ACTION: D Foster to ensure that updates on the implementation of Worktribe Ethics becomes a standing item on the RPC agenda.

2.3   AUP/Ubiquity

RPC noted good progress has been made with the contract negotiations with Ubiquity. Some legacy material will be migrated from the previous AUP under the auspices of RISS. Invitations to join the AUP Board will be issued for staff once the Exam Board period is over. Current plans are to launch the new open access press in the autumn.

2.4   Research Culture Report

RPC were thanked for their previous feedback on the draft report, noting this had been discussed at a subsequent Research Culture Task & Finish Group meeting. A revised report is currently being finalised for submission to SMT, then Senate, and will be included in the papers for the June RPC meeting for information.

2.5   Research Pools Update

RPC noted that funding will be coming to an end for the existing research pools, and information on the new style pools (Challenge Consortia) is expected soon. Four consortia are expected to be funded at £150K p.a., with the aim that these consortia will identify challenges which are best dealt with by bringing researchers together from different institutions under the interdisciplinary banner. This initial funding will be used to leverage additional support from major funders.

ACTION: Colleagues who wish to get involved should contact E Rattray.

2.6   Collaboration with Russian Colleagues and Institutions

RPC were reminded of the recent announcement that institutional ties with Russian institutions had been suspended. Staff working with individual Russian researchers which do not involve any contractual or financial obligations would not be affected by this – and staff should continue to work on a joint paper until completion. The University will continue to participate in international networks which include Russian participants, as the networks will be responsible for managing the engagement process. The current situation will be monitored by the University with the aim of avoiding any unnecessary disruption to teaching or research. FAQs on this topic will be uploaded to the webpages in the near future.

3   POWER BI DASHBOARDS FOR SCHOOLS – APPLICATIONS, AWARDS, RESEARCH INCOME - PRESENTATION

RPC received a short demonstration of the new dashboard facility that will be made available to Schools which will provide improved reporting capability for research applications and awards. The next phase of the project will incorporate research income, and phase 3 will include HR data e.g. on protected characteristics, to support more in-depth analysis of research funding. The applications and awards dashboards will be launched over the next few weeks via the School Directors of Research, and to Heads of School, and training/demonstrations of the dashboard will be provided. RPC also noted that the link between Worktribe RAMS and Pure was almost complete and will allow the synchronisation of data between both systems.

4   SFC CONSULTATION ON THE DESIGN OF THE UK'S FUTURE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

RPC discussed the consultation process, noting that the consultation appeared to indicate a move away from the primary focus being the review of research outputs and impact in favour of more weight being assigned to the assessment of the research environment. RPC discussed some of the options for future exercises, noting that a system focusing on research quality was to be favoured, that a purely metrics-based assessment was not supported, and that an option to introduce different assessment cycles for the individual panels would be likely to work against the promotion of interdisciplinarity whilst adding undue additional complexity and flux into the system. RPC members were advised that individual responses would also be welcomed (formal submission date = noon, Friday 06 May 2022).

ACTION: RPC members to submit feedback to M Barraclough over the next couple of weeks.

13 June 2022

5 RESEARCH FUNDING

5.1 Research Income Report

5.1.1 RPC noted RPC noted that for the first half of the financial year, the University was slightly (4.3%) behind budget. Current year-end forecast is for research income to be similarly slightly behind budget.

5.2 Applications and Awards Trends

5.2.1 RPC noted that this data was not yet available and would be circulated in due course.

ACTION: D Walker to finalise and circulate this report to RPC.

6 UKRI OPEN ACCESS POLICY FROM 1 APRIL 2022

6.1 RPC received a reminder regarding the changes to the UKRI Open Access Policy as of next month. This policy will cover UKRI funded research which has led to the publication of peer-reviewed research articles, including reviews and conference papers that are accepted for final publication in either a journal or conference proceeding with an ISSN.

6.2 There will be two routes to compliance: (1) published in OA journals/platforms which give immediate access to the Version of Record, published under a Creative Commons CC BY licence, or an Open Government Licence for Crown Copyright articles, or exceptionally CC BY ND on a case-by-case basis; (2) Articles published in subscription journals but where the author accepted manuscript or version of record is deposited in an institutional or subject repository at the time of final publication under a CC BY licence. No embargo period will be permitted.

6.3 Publication in hybrid journals (where there is a subscription model but also an option to publish open access) will now only be accepted if the publisher has made the journal part of a transitional agreement with Jisc, which ensures a managed transition from subscriptions to open access ('read and publish' deals). Exemptions to the OA policy may apply, and further guidance will be provided by UKRI.

6.4 Green open access will remain the preferred option, and the move towards 'read and publish' deals (with no APCs) means there should be less pressure on the block grant. Most hybrid journals not covered by an agreement will be at risk of being non-compliant with the new UKRI policy and authors should check with openaccess@abdn.ac.uk before submission.

6.5 RPC noted that Nature and IEEE do not offer a compliant route to open access for UKRI funded authors, and Jisc and the UK university library sector are actively negotiating with both publishers.

ACTION: RPC members to circulate the associated paper (RPC21:38) within their Schools.

7 ADOPTING A RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS POLICY WITH RIGHTS RETENTION

RPC endorsed the recommendation that the University Open Access policy be revised to include a rights retention policy, as this will help to manage those publishers' who may continue to insist on an OA embargo period. RPC noted that the proposed updates will align with the University IP policy and will make explicit the University's non-exclusive rights over its published research, thereby ensuring compliance with the new UKRI open access policy and anticipated future REF requirements.

ACTION: S Bains to revise the Open Access policy accordingly and submit for RPC approval.

8   RESEARCH INTEGRITY TRAINING – STAFF COMPLETION RATES

RPC noted the low completion rates for this training amongst staff, and SDoRs were asked to help promote the training within Schools, and to consider setting a target completion date for this training (in light of the higher rate of training completion in SMMSN, who adopted this stance).

ACTION: SDoRs are to help promote the training within Schools, and to consider setting a target completion date for this training (in light of the higher rate of training completion in SMMSN, who have adopted this stance).

9   UKRI DRAFT EDI STRATEGY AND CONSULTATOIN

RPC supported the submission of an institutional response to this consultation, and that EDIC should be consulted on its preparation. It was recommended that this should be a principle-based (rather than a detailed) response.

ACTION: M Barraclough to consult EDIC on the draft submission.

10   GRADUATE SCHOOL

10.1   Guidance on Theses By or With Publications

10.1.1 RPC discussed the draft guidance, which was designed to provide clarity for PhD students wishing to pursue this option. RPC supported the draft guidance, subject to (1) further clarification to be provided on the 'thesis with publications' (from PGRs) on the sections of the thesis that are based on published material (and thus will require to be clarified at the end of the chapter); (2) the importance of clarifying contributions in multi-authored papers; and (3) confirming that references within the publication do not need to be removed before being included in the thesis.

10.1.2 RPC received confirmation that the additional background work involved in a thesis (e.g. troubleshooting) could be included in the thesis as part of a 'mix and match' approach.

10.1.3 Some concern was raised at the requirement that all publications would have to be accepted for publication at the point of submission of the thesis. It was confirmed that the submission of the thesis should not be delayed by this requirement, and that getting the PhD submitted within the supervised period remained the most important factor.

ACTION: G Nixon to revise as requested before submitting the proposal to QAC and the University Education Committee for further University approval

10.2   Submission of Annual Progression Exercises and PhD Theses via Turnitin

RPC supported the proposal that Annual Progression Exercises and PhD theses (at the point of final submission) should be submitted via Turnitin to enable plagiarism checks to be undertaken before it is forwarded on for examination; that the supervisory team would normally be the appropriate point of contact for checking the Turnitin reports; and that any suspected plagiarism should then be investigated as per the usual process.

ACTION: G Nixon to submit the proposal to QAC and the University Education Committee for further University approval.

11 PROGRESS REPORT ON THE CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS

11.1 RPC received an update on the work of the Concordat Steering Group, noting that a draft action plan will be submitted to the RPC meeting in June.

For noting:

The committee received the following reports for noting:

12 IMPACT AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE REPORT

13 SFC CONSULTATION ON KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE & INNOVATION FUNDING POLICIES

13.1 Consultation Paper

13.2 Draft Response

RPC were encouraged to provide any feedback on the draft consultation, and in particular on the opportunities to address the large-scale challenge areas for Scotland (referring back to the 'Research Pools Update' provided earlier in the meeting). The formal submission date for the institutional response is 22 March 2022.

ACTION: RPC members to provide feedback to A Lewendon as soon as possible.

For information:

The committee received the following report for information:

14 PUBLICATION OF REF2021 RESULTS

RPC were asked to note the timetable for the release of the REF2021 results:

- 09 May – institutional results released under embargo;
- 10 May – sectoral results released under embargo;
- 12 May – publication of results by the funding councils.

15 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Research Policy Committee will take place on Wednesday 15 June 2022, 10.05 – 11.55 am.

MB/DF 03/22