UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

RESEARCH POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 13th JUNE 2022

Present: Marion Campbell (Convenor), Mervyn Bain (*vice* Claire Wallace), Simon Bains, Marlis Barraclough, Ed Chadwick, Matthew Clarke, Andrew Dilley, Dawn Foster (Clerk), Emma Francis, Elena Giannaccini, Tamas Gyorfi, Claire Hawes, Hazel Hay, Catherine Jones, Jesper Kallestrup, Ann Lewendon, Iain McEwan (*vice* Ian Stansfield), Gary Macfarlane, Sam Martin, Graeme Nixon, Nir Oren, Audrey Paterson (*vice* Keith Bender), Louise Phillips, Gwen Smith, Nykohla Strong, Donna Walker

Apologies: Mirela Delibegovic, Brian Henderson, Brice Rea, Liz Rattray, Tracey Slaven

Welcome: Marion Campbell welcomed all to the meeting. New School Directors of Research were noted (Ed Chadwick, School of Engineering; Matthew Clarke, School of Education; Claire Wallace, interim for School of Social Science), and thanks were expressed to their predecessors (Dubravka Pokrajac, Jackie Ravet and Alison Brown).

Emma Francis (Library Services), Claire Hawes (Graduate School), Hazel Hay & Nykohla Strong (R&I) were welcomed to the meeting in relation to agenda items 2.2 (AUP Update) & 5 (Research Publications Policy), 4 (Concordat), and 6 (DORA) and 7 (Research Centres Review) respectively.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 19th March 2022 were approved.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Worktribe Ethics Module

RPC received an update on the implementation of Worktribe Ethics, noting that the user acceptance phase has now been completed and the project signed off. This means that the project team have received initial training and the system has been installed on test servers to explore roll out to the relevant ethics boards. Demonstration sessions have been arranged later this month with the Worktribe Ethics User Group, and the training and system roll-out phases of the project plan have been circulated for discussion/agreement by the User Group and Project Board.

2.2 Aberdeen University Press Update

RPC noted a press release about the launch of AUP as an open access publisher was imminent, to be followed by an Ezine article and further internal communications. Expressions of interest from staff to join the AUP Board would be welcomed. An AUP portal has been created at https://aup.press.ubiquity.website/ in preparation for the anticipated launch of the press during Open Access week in October of this year.

2.3 Research Culture Task & Finish Group

RPC noted that the final version of the report (included in the papers for this meeting, agenda item 12) was submitted to the Senate meeting in May. Feedback from Senate noted issues of emphasis within the report, and recommended further equality & diversity matters to be taken into account in future. G Macfarlane confirmed that he will lead a small group which will take forward the recommendations arising from this report.

3   REF DISCUSSION & POST-REF ACTION PLAN

RPC discussed the University's performance in REF 2021, noting the lessons to be learned from the recent results. The significant reduction in research-active staff, only reversed towards the end of the REF period, had a greater than expected effect on the submission. The reduction in research quality was disappointing, as were the results for research environment and impact (and the introduction of external review of these aspects will be considered for the next REF).

However, since the REF2021 submission, work has continued to develop our research environment and also the quality of our research. Support for impact will be reviewed, and the need for additional staff for the Impact Team and also impact support within the Schools, but this will take time to implement (likely next year). RPC noted that it would be important not to lose momentum on the REF, and that preparations, including the assessment of research outputs, for the next exercise should be normalised within the ongoing work of the University.

A post-REF action plan will be developed using intelligence gathered from a range of sources, including staff members who served on REF 2021 panels. Further intelligence from individual disciplines would also be welcomed, and also suggestions for potential actions.

ACTION: M Barraclough will circulate data on the predicted vs actual results for each Unit of Assessment. Any queries on the data should be submitted to M Barraclough (m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk).

RPC noted the impact of staff workload pressures, and the need to address these in order to allow sufficient time for high quality research to be undertaken.

RPC also noted that the School Directors of Research had met to discuss the REF and were keen to be involved in the preparations for the next REF.

The staff submission strategy will be reviewed, as will our assessment of output quality (as this may have been affected by the variable adoption of the revised grade descriptors provided for REF2021). RPC agreed with the consensus that the best papers had been submitted by the UoAs, hence further focus must be placed on improving the quality of our future research outputs.

4   REPORT ON THE CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT OF RESEARCHERS

RPC discussed the eight recommendations arising from the report and confirmed their approval. They noted that the report was a good example of how the recommendations from the research culture work were being translated into action.

The recommendation for mentors was discussed, noting that the impact on staff workload would need to be acknowledged in the report, as would the expectations of mentors.

ACTIONS:
- **C Hawes to include further information on expectation of workload in the report.**
- **Any further questions or comments about the report should be submitted to C Hawes (claire.hawes@abdn.ac.uk)**

5   RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS POLICY WITH RIGHTS RETENTION

RPC discussed the draft policy, noting this would help to address the recent external drivers (REF2021 results, fall in the QS rankings) and respond to the internal drivers of the objectives of the Aberdeen 2040 strategy, and alignment with the recent work on research culture. The existing University IP policy already endorses the practices proposed in the paper, however

current custom and practice means that this has not been implemented within the University. Concern was expressed that Aberdeen will lose our competitive advantage if a policy is not introduced.

RPC noted the precedents for this kind of policy, e.g. Harvard University have had a policy in place since 2008, and more recently Edinburgh introduced their policy in October 2021. Assurances have been received that the proposed Aberdeen policy is legally compliant, and there is an opt-out clause to ensure this won't interfere with academic freedom. The proposed policy does not cover long-form outputs, and further support for the implementation of the policy will be provided by the Library. A simplified workflow diagram will be produced to complement the detailed FAQs. An additional FAQ for PGRs (as this policy will also apply to this group) and an FAQ on the opt-out option will be included.

RPC approved the policy, which will be revised in line with the feedback provided above. Further legal advice will be sought on the final policy, and informal consultation will take place with the unions to avoid any misunderstanding over the policy principles.

The plan will be to submit the finalised policy for Senate approval at the September meeting, with a planned implementation in October (to align with the Open Access week).

ACTION: RPC members to submit any further feedback to S Bains (simon.bains@abdn.ac.uk) by the end of this week.

6   DORA IMPLEMENTATION

RPC noted the ongoing work to implement the DORA commitments within the University's policies and practices.

RPC discussed and approved the key recommendations proposed in the report, noting that:

- A series of consultation events will be arranged with researchers and/or relevant committees in the Autumn;
- Policy and guidance on the responsible use of metrics will be produced in conjunction with the Scholarly Communications Team;
- Work will be undertaken with the Promotions Review Group, the Research Culture group, and the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers Group regarding the implementation of DORA.

A more detailed implementation plan will be submitted to RPC in the Autumn.

ACTION: RPC members to submit any further feedback to M Barraclough (m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk).

7   RESEARCH CENTRES REVIEW

RPC noted the recommendations arising from the work of the Research Centre Review, which had taken place between September – November 2021.

The 13 recommendations were around the themes of awarding of centre status; staff affiliations to Centres; the presentation of Centres to external audiences; and the update reporting process from the Centres.

RPC raised some concerns regarding the relatively short deadline for Schools to report on the recommended actions (November 2022). They also noted the lack of training for Research Centre Directors.

RPC noted the importance of the Research Centres in supporting interdisciplinary research, and to be mindful of any recommendations arising from this review that could impede

interdisciplinary working. The inclusion of the Research Centres in the REF environment statements was also noted, hence the need for the work of the Research Centres review to remain connected to ongoing REF activity.

ACTIONS:
- **The response deadline for Schools was extended to February 2023.**
- **G Macfarlane will raise training support for Research Centre Directors with HR.**
- **RPC members to submit any further feedback to G Macfarlane (g.j.macfarlane@abdn.ac.uk) by the end of this week.**

For noting:

The committee received the following reports for noting:

8   GRADUATE SCHOOL REPORT

RPC endorsed the recommendations arising from the PGR Strategy - 2040 Report, produced by the PGR Task and Finish Group, with a focus on embedding three new employability pathways as options for PhD students.

The report will be submitted to SMT for final approval, and thereafter its progress will be managed by the PGR Committee.

ACTION: RPC members to submit any further feedback to G Nixon ([g.f.nixon @abdn.ac.uk](mailto:g.f.nixon@abdn.ac.uk)) by the end of this week.

9   RESEARCH FUNDING

9.1   Research Income Report

RPC noted that this information is also available via the Power BI dashboard. Any queries should be submitted to Donna Walker.

9.2   Applications and Awards Trends

RPC noted that this information is also available via the Power BI dashboard. Any queries should be submitted to Donna Walker.

10   NEW RPC/URC REMIT AND REPORTING STRUCTURE

RPC noted that as a result of the recent Senate Effectiveness Review and previous Governance Review, RPC will become a committee of Senate. The committee remit will remain largely the same (as this was already revised earlier this session). Also, the name of the committee will change to the University Research Committee (URC). Timings of the URC meetings will be scheduled in line with Senate and will take place approximately five weeks before.   The first Senate meeting will be in September, hence the URC will submit its first report to the following Senate meeting.

11   NHS DIGITAL SOP

RPC noted the new SOP covering the control of access, secure storage and management of NHS Digital data.

28 September 2022

For information:

The committee received the following reports for information:

12   FINAL REPORT FROM THE RESEARCH CULTURE TASK & FINISH GROUP

13   CITATIONS REPORT

RPC noted that this report comprised an analysis at both institutional level and at REF2014 unit of assessment level for each School. This is a companion piece to the report on research income discussed at RPC earlier in the year.

ACTION: Any questions about the data should be submitted to Marlis Barraclough (m.barraclough@abdn.ac.uk) or Joanna Adams/Francesca Soldati in the Scholarly Communications Team (scholcomms@abdn.ac.uk).

14   NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will take place in academic session 2022/23.

MB/DF 06/22