

UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN
UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD 28th SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Marion Campbell (Convenor), Simon Bains, Marlis Barraclough, Keith Bender, Ed Chadwick, Matthew Clarke, Philip Cooke, Andrew Dilley, Dawn Foster (Clerk), Tamas Gyorfi, Susan Halfpenny, Hazel Hay, Brian Henderson, Jesper Kallestrup, Ann Lewendon, Sam Martin, Graeme Nixon, Nir Oren, Louise Phillips, Liz Rattray, Brice Rea, Ian Stansfield, Claire Wallace

Apologies: Mirela Delibegovic, Elena Giannaccini, Gary Macfarlane, Tracey Slaven, Gwen Smith, Donna Walker

Welcome:

Marion Campbell welcomed all to the meeting, noting this was the first meeting of the University Research Committee (re-named, re-focused and re-structured as per the recommendations of the previous Senate Effectiveness Review).

Philip Cooke was welcomed to his first URC meeting as the interim School Director of Research for the School of LLMVC, and thanks were expressed to his predecessor (Catherine Jones).

Susan Halfpenny (Library Services) and Hazel Hay (R&I) were welcomed to the meeting in relation to agenda items 2.4 (Rights Retention Policy) and 8 (Draft Institutional Policy on the Responsible Use of Metrics) respectively.

1 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13th June 2022 were approved.

2 MATTERS ARISING

2.1 Worktribe Ethics Module

URC received an update on the implementation of Worktribe Ethics, noting that the roll-out of the online application process would commence this session. An email had been circulated last week to the Heads of School and School Directors of Research, and further directed communications would be issued to each of the Schools reporting to the six internal Ethics Boards as the roll-out progresses.

Due to a last-minute change in the roll-out schedule, it was noted that this would cause a minor slippage in the decommissioning schedules for the existing IT-supported applications procedures.

Draft procedures regarding procedural matters (e.g. assigning risk levels to projects, processes for managing major/minor amendments, draft ethics appeals process) were discussed at a recent Ethics Advisory Group meeting, and finalised proposals will be submitted to the URC for approval in due course.

ACTION: SDoRs were asked to remain alert to the future email communications and to assist in raising awareness of the new ethics application procedures for staff and PGRs (and UG and PGTs in the School of Psychology only) amongst their School colleagues and PGRs, and to encourage colleagues to engage with the training on Worktribe Ethics.

2.2 Research Data Scotland Membership

URC confirmed their endorsement of the proposal for the University of Aberdeen to join Research Data Scotland (RDS), a company and registered charity set up and funded by the Scottish Government to make datasets held by the public sector more accessible to other public sector organisations (and potentially to industry). URC noted that the Grampian Safe Haven (DaSH) is already a partner of RDS, and the impetus for the University to join RDS had been driven by the Aberdeen Centre for Health Data Science, as the RDS is viewed as a way of making our datasets more available (subject to data protection considerations), providing us with access to other datasets and also accessing further funding and collaboration opportunities. URC noted that this recommendation would now be progressed via the University Secretary for formal institutional sign-up.

ACTION: Ann Lewendon to progress

2.3 Open Access Week

URC received an update on the University's participation in the International Open Access week (24 – 28 October), with the programme available [here](#). Programme highlights include the formal launch of the Aberdeen University Press (AUP).

2.4 Rights Retention Policy

URC noted that the policy (with some minor revisions) had been presented to Senate, with only one concern raised which was likely a result of a misunderstanding of the terms of the policy, which will be resolved by further communication with the Senator in question. The next steps will involve submission to SMT and final approval by Senate and to commence the implementation of this policy, likely to take place during the first quarter of 2023.

ACTIONS:

- **S Bains to ensure an FAQ is created to provide further reassurance to those who have already commenced the publishing process.**
- **S Bains to send a copy of the finalised policy to M Campbell.**

Remit and Responsibility:

3 UNIVERSITY RESEARCH COMMITTEE REMIT & MEMBERSHIP, 2022/23

URC reviewed and approved the remit and membership of the University Research Committee (formerly known as the Research Policy Committee). The new title and reporting structure were approved by the former RPC in session 2021/22 and arose out of the recommendations made in the Senate Effectiveness Review.

ACTION: D Foster to amend and upload the revised remit & membership to the URC webpage.

Research Operational Plan – Linked to Aberdeen 2040:

4 LATEST VERSION OF RESEARCH OPERATIONAL PLAN

URC noted this had been circulated primarily for information and to remind URC of the higher-level activities that are currently being actioned.

ACTION: E Rattray to ensure that research-related training information, in addition to publicising within the staff ezine, will also be notified to the SDoRs and School Admin Managers (SAMs) so these opportunities can be targeted accordingly within Schools.

Risk Register:

5 R&I RISK REGISTER

URC received a copy of the current version of the R&I Risk Register and were reminded of the 'live' nature of this document and the expectation that this should be regularly reviewed and updated in line with the changing nature of risk. URC proposed some refinements to the current risk register, including acknowledgement of the impact of increased teaching loads on research activity under mitigating factors and the requirement for further details on the risks related to (i) international transfer and (ii) support for open research.

ACTION: URC members to submit any further substantive comments by Friday 23 September so that these can feed into the risk management workshop.

Research Excellence and Quality:

6 POST REF ACTION PLAN – FUTURE RESEARCH ASSESSMENT

URC discussed the proposals for the post-REF action plan and acknowledged the importance of maintaining appropriate momentum on the preparations for the next REF exercise. The importance of augmenting the current research support arrangements within Schools was discussed, whilst avoiding duplication of effort. URC discussed options for how best to assess the current level of REF preparations within Schools, and how to provide support for Schools, including training in the internal review process for potential REF outputs, enhancing the research environment, oversight of staff research plans, and budget allocation for external review of potential REF outputs.

URC discussed the recent advertising of 20 fellowships, which a number of the SDoRs present had not been aware of. The proposal for the appointments had been presented to Heads of School at UMG some time ago..

URC also noted that an awayday for the Heads of School had been held last week, during which the Interdisciplinary Directors gave talks about the activities of their centres, and REF2021 panel member Tom Greggs presented on the steps taken within Divinity on their REF preparations. The event was well-received and would be repeated for the SDoRs.

Research Governance, Policy and Concordats Developments:

7 DRAFT – ANNUAL RESEARCH GOVERNANCE & INTEGRITY STATEMENT 2021/22

URC noted that the annual statement acknowledged the support that is currently provided for PGRs and recommended that further support should be provided for PDRFs.

ACTION: E Rattray & M Campbell to raise PDRF/PDRA support with M Delibegovic.

8 DRAFT INSTITUTIONAL POLICY ON THE RESPONSIBLE USE OF METRICS

URC discussed the draft institutional policy on the Responsible Use of Metrics, which is required in support of the University's commitment (as a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment) to the principles of fair research assessment and the responsible use of metrics. URC noted that the policy will influence how research is assessed for the purpose of REF submission, for recruitment purposes, and also for promotion purposes. It was noted that the draft policy would be further discussed at Senate.

9 NATIONAL SECURITY INVESTMENT ACT

URC noted the activities undertaken to date within R&I on adherence to the requirements of the National Security Investment Act. This legislation allows the government to call in an acquisition for assessment and scrutinise certain activities in shares and intellectual property (IP) if it reasonably suspects that these collaborations could give rise to a risk to national security. A checklist for researchers has been adopted as part of the Worktribe Research Award Management System process to help identify funded projects that may fall under the purview of this act. Existing funded research projects have been surveyed to assess if they could be affected by this legislation, and a similar exercise will be arranged for unfunded research activities.

A meeting has been arranged with a representative from the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) to discuss the impact of this act on our research activity. R&I are currently developing a series of guidance notes on related topics and due diligence, with further information to be presented to a future URC meeting.

10 RESEARCH FACILITIES GROUP

URC received an update on the work of the Research Facilities Group, noting a recent event held to showcase the research facilities available at the University. URC also noted that £3.3M had been spent from the capital equipment budgets (aligned with the spend of the Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) funding in line with the University 2040 Strategy and the Interdisciplinary challenges) to purchase priority equipment as per the requests submitted by the Schools. A Sharepoint site has also been developed to capture emerging request from Schools, and to support funding requests to the BEIS fund and to oversee and develop larger funding proposals for capital equipment funding calls.

ACTION: G Nixon to circulate further details of the items purchased from the capital equipment budgets.

Postgraduate Research Matters:

11 GRADUATE SCHOOL REPORT

URC noted the steady decline in PGR numbers during the previous year, noting the larger decline in home PGRs, with the PGR population moving towards international students. However the University had received 38 UKRI studentship awards in 2-21/22.

URC also noted that 719 applications for Change of Circumstances had been submitted last year, exacerbated by Covid, and this will continue to be monitored to identify any notable trends with the aim of trying to reduce the overall level of requests. It was confirmed that extensions will continue to be awarded where there are genuine reasons behind the request.

Research Income:

12 RESEARCH FUNDING

12.1 Funder's Horizon Scanning

URC were invited to note the contents of this paper.

15 December 2022

12.2 Position on Match Funding

URC noted that a £200k contingency fund has been allocated in support of significant institutional bids. This will be provided in addition to the School support for studentships. Further guidance to be provided on the contingency fund.

12.3 Grant Income Monitoring

12.3.1 Research Income Report

URC were invited to note the contents of this paper.

12.3.2 Applications and Awards Trends

URC were invited to note the contents of this paper.

Research Impact and Public Engagement:

14 RESEARCH IMPACT AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

14.1 Impact Report

URC noted the current actions, plans and strategy in support of research impact to align with the Aberdeen 2040 strategy and in preparation for the next REF submission. URC noted that approval has been granted to appoint a further Impact Officer (1 FTE) from 01 January 2023 to augment the current team and expand the discipline expertise within the team. A selection of 4* impact case studies from the REF 2021 UK-wide submissions have been uploaded to the University's [MS Teams site](#) as a useful reference tool. Schools also reported the appointment of Impact Champions to help support this at a local level.

ACTION: URC endorsed the proposal to engage external provider(s) to enhance the existing impact support, and the cost savings that could be achieved by 'bulk buying' this additional support.

14.2 Public Engagement Report

URC were invited to note the contents of this paper.

AOB:

15 Any Other Business

URC noted the impact of avian flu, and some SBS activities paused due to this.

ACTION: M Campbell to circulate a paper on this issue.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING:

Thursday 15 December 2022, 2.35 – 4.25pm

MB/DF 10/22