

University Board for Research and Innovation

24/01 A meeting of the University Board for Research and Innovation was held on Tuesday 23 January 2024 at 9.00am in Whiteknights House, Committee Room 2.

Present

Parveen Yaqoob, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) [Chair]
Dominik Zaum, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource)
John Gibbs, Research Dean (Heritage & Creativity)
Carol Wagstaff, Research Dean (Agriculture, Food and Health)
Adrian Williams, Dean for Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development
Adrian Bell, Research Dean (Prosperity & Resilience)
Mona Ashok, Business Informatics System and Accounting, ECR representative
Karen Henderson, Director of Research and Innovation
Anne-Marie West, Finance Business Partner
Claudia Murray, Co-Chair of Research Staff Committee
Chris Jones, Department of Biomedical Sciences, Senate member
Daniella La Penna, Department of Languages and Culture, Senate member
Nathan Helsby, Planning and Strategy Office [Secretary]

Apologies

Rowan Sutton, Research Dean (Environment)
Sophie Jordan, Education Officer (RUSU)

24/02 Minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2023 [item 2]

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 7 November 2023.

24/03 Actions from previous meetings [item 3]

22/33 Research Travel Grants fund use by research students studying at a distance. The Secretary would follow up with the Sub-Committee Chair, passing forward the Board's view that the fund should also be available for research students studying at a distance.

Post meeting update. Following discussion with the Chair of the Research Travel Grants Committee, it was agreed that the fund would also be available for research students studying at a distance; applications would be addressed on a case-by-case basis with reference to start and end points of travel and relative cost.

24/04 Matters arising from the minutes (not covered elsewhere on the agenda) [item 4]

23/28 Research governance.

The Board received a schematic showing the governance structure of the research-related committees and the Board's reporting lines, along with updated membership and terms of reference (following autumn term meetings) for the committees. In particular, the Chair drew attention to the Board's main objectives: oversight of the University's core research activities, engagement with sector wide issues and policy, and support for research leadership. She

highlighted the important principle that the meeting environment should be one in which members had the opportunity to contribute and felt free to give their independent unbiased opinion.

With regard to membership, the Board agreed that the recently appointed University Librarian, Sue Egleton should be invited to attend the Board in place of Stuart Hunt, who left the University in November.

24/05 Coordinated approach to increasing research income generation [item 5a]

The Board received a paper on research income that had been provided to UEB, along with the minute of the UEB discussion in December. The paper highlighted that research income had been static over recent years and that there was a need to consider more broadly how to address associated issues of time and levels of research activity in order to grow research income.

In discussion the following points were highlighted

- Time for research was highlighted as a significant issue. While it was clear that teaching had been prioritised during COVID, there was a residual legacy of this prioritization on staff research time. In addition, the Portfolio Review Project (PRP) continued to have a significant impact on available staff time. It was agreed that workload models needed to protect research time, recognising that it could be challenging for individual staff because of the more deadline driven and time delimited requirements of teaching. Whilst business as usual research activity remained achievable, extra stretch/thinking time was challenging.
- Research needed to retain a strong voice at UEB level and through Senate and other forums to highlight concerns; Heads of School also played a very important role in determining balance of activity in their Schools through workload models and equivalent resource management.
- The PRP would yield benefits in the longer term; rationalisation of offerings and consistency in how school teaching was organised would result in general efficiency, helping to support growth in student numbers alongside the right allocation of staff resource. However, the Board recognised that there should be lessons learned from the wider impact of such initiatives, for example on staff time during the preparation and implementation.
- Further consideration could be given to differential expectations on teaching requirements with reference to contact type (e.g. TI, T&R), seniority and discipline. It was suggested that a more strategic approach could be adopted in which focus was on areas of strength where it was more likely to deliver successful outcomes.
- Members reported other barriers to efficiency, for example in time spent by researchers on IT/Contract/technician issues and general bureaucracy. The Board noted that under the new Directorates, Professional Services colleagues working in the research support areas would be reviewing their activities and processes, with a view to being more strategic and addressing some of these concerns.
- Members highlighted personal titles requirements and professorial review processes and criteria, which could be strengthened to support higher levels of research performance.
- The Board was mindful that producing high quality outputs remained important alongside grant acquisition. It was noted that some disciplines were less dependent on research grants to support research activity.

24/06 Agri-Food scoping exercise [item 5ai]

The Board received a brief update on the progress of the University's Agri-Food scoping exercise, a project focused on reviewing the University's research focus and approach in these disciplinary areas, and how to make best use of NIRD funds to support those objectives. The exercise was due to complete in April with a report and recommendations to be provided to UEB and Council.

24/07 Strategic Partnerships [item 5aii]

The Board heard that the Chair and relevant Research Deans would be presenting to Council on the following strategic partnerships: European Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF), British Museum, the Natural History Museum, and the Royal Berkshire Hospital.

24/08 Research Performance Data [item 5b]

Research awards and applications FQ1 2023/24

The Board received a summary of the most recent research income related data as of FQ1 in 2023/24, noting the following:

- At £3.3m, the value of new awards received in Q1 2023/24 was significantly lower (c. £5m) than previous years at this stage of the year.
- The University achieved 20% of its five-year target against the milestone of 25%, with significant variation between Research Divisions (0% to 60%).
- At £32m, Research application value was in line with the previous year at this stage of the year, but there was still general decline in activity over recent cycles.
- At £7.9m, research income was broadly in line with previous years.

UKRI Competitive Funding Decisions 2017/18 - 2022/23

The Board received a summary of the recently published sector data (2022/23) on UKRI competitive funding decisions alongside the five previous years. It noted the following:

- The value received (£13.6m) and market share (0.76%) was the highest over the previous six years.
- At individual council level
 - NERC was the most successful, ranked 3rd of HEIs for award value, and representing over 50% of the University's total award value.
 - AHRC success rates remained consistently high, albeit from a small number of applications.
 - There had been no successful awards in 2022/23 from MRC, ESRC or STFC.
- Levels of award value where the University was co-investigator remained at c.£15m (value of award), in line with previous years.

In a general discussion about award success, the Board highlighted the following:

- The data for 2022/23 were lagged so didn't reflect current position.
- There was some pipeline activity and platforms in place to support grant acquisition, including grant writing workshops, support for interdisciplinary bids, and collaborative working to leverage opportunities.

- Agri-Food calls and Horizon Europe opportunities would be the focus in the coming months.
- There were very low sector-wide success rates for some Councils, for example ESRC. Notwithstanding, there was a question about whether the University was sufficiently targeted in its approach.
- It remained challenging in some areas to find PIs for calls, and therefore co-investigator applications with other institutions as PIs was the only option.

24/09 Perceptions of research culture at the University of Reading [item 6a]

The Board received the University report on research culture, which drew on focus groups and a staff survey of academics and research adjunct professional services colleagues. The report included a response from the PVC (Research and Innovation) along with some solutions being considered by UCRI for areas of concern, for example lower levels of satisfaction among mid-career researchers, issues of time pressure for research, and IT/Technical support challenges.

The Board also noted that a programme of work had been initiated around research culture, led by Adrian Williams and Karen Henderson, and to be supported by the appointment of a research culture manager. The programme, drawing on the allocation from Research England to support research culture, would build on work already in train relating to research culture, for example research integrity, open research and research leadership, as well as supporting the environment elements of the next REF, which would have a greater emphasis on research culture. Further work would also be undertaken in the Research and Innovation Directorate to dig a little deeper into professional services colleagues' perceptions. At local levels, some Research Divisions were undertaking a self-assessment, for example looking at seminar structures and grant support schemes in place.

In discussion, members highlighted the following:

- The PhD student community was an important part of research culture. There was a question about the optimum number of students per School/Department or supervisor, and the balance between home and overseas students from a financial and capacity perspective, recognising that the right balance would vary between disciplines.
- As also highlighted in the report, there were concerns about technical/IT/contracts support, and the level of burden on PIs to manage and coordinate some of these aspects. The Board noted the new appointments (including a Digital Research Manager) and focus groups to shape the IT research strategy that would be taking place, and that there were other ongoing changes in train that would further support academics. It was agreed that it would be helpful to communicate these changes more widely.
- Whilst there were still some University-wide public research talks seminars, it was noted that the level of activity had dropped in recent years, partly the result of a change in the University approach to building its community engagement. At local level, inaugural lectures for Professors were recognised as a way to bring the community together and celebrate success but were not taking place in most areas, at least not formally. With regard to celebrating success, the Board noted the University Research Excellence Awards event in June.

24/10 Current Research Information System update [item 6b]

The Board received an update on progress with the implementation of Current Research Information System at the University. The project was at the stage of tendering to the open market, so setting out requirements (must/should/could) for potential providers. There would be further

opportunities for academics to input into the process with additional demos planned as part of the procurement process.

24/11 Research Excellence awards [item 6c]

The Board received an update on plans for this year's Research Excellence awards. The awards would be launched this week, the four categories being public engagement with research; external collaboration and innovation; research impact; and interdisciplinary research. The award event was on 18 June.

24/12 Research Excellence Framework [item 7a]

The Board received an update on the Research Excellence Framework. It noted that:

- The Funding bodies had extended the exercise by one year. The results of REF 2029 would be published in December 2029.
- The Funding bodies would undertake further work through 2024 on the people, culture and environment element.
- The University process for appointing Unit of Assessment Leads had begun. A well-attended Q&A session had been held for those interested in the role. Deadline for applications was the end of January with UOA leads intended to be in place in March.
- The University workstreams supporting preparations would begin their work from March. On Impact, UCRI would be reviewing the long list for Impact case studies in order to take stock and agree next steps.

The Board received the University REF risk register along with the Units of Assessment to which the University intended to submit and associated Research Divisions. The Board highlighted corrections to the table listing associated Research Divisions as follows: Modern Languages should be Modern Languages and Linguistics, and English Literature and Language should be English Literature.

24/13 Updated Research Data Management Policy [item 7b]

The Board was asked to approve the adoption of an updated Research Data Management Policy.

The Board approved the policy, noting that:

- The policy was first introduced in 2015; this was the first significant update since then, the main changes being updates to references to other University policies and links to the wider research data landscape, and more detail on the requirements/expectations of individual researchers.
- The policy had been reviewed and endorsed by the Committee on Open Research and Research Integrity.
- Funder and publisher requirements had strengthened, so this should also prompt increased engagement and compliance.

The policy would now be submitted to the Committee for University Policies and Procedure. The Board also recommended that it be provided to the Committee for Research Infrastructure for its information.

24/14 Research Endowment Trust [item 8a]

The Board noted changes to how Finance would capture and report activity on RETF projects going forward. This would include changes to how projects are flagged, and improvement in information

on year-on-year breakdown of expenditure in order to highlight potential underspend. The approach would also be backdated for current projects. The Board would receive a report in the new format at its next meeting.

24/15 Reporting committees [items 9a-c]

The Board received minutes and/or summaries from the recent meetings of the following Committees.

- University Committee for Research and Innovation

The Committee on Researcher Development and PGR Studies and the Committee on Open Research and Researcher Integrity had not met since the previous meeting of the Board.

24/16 Date of next meeting

9 April 2024, 9am.