

UNIVERSITY BOARD FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

24/46 A meeting of the University Board for Research and Innovation was held on Wednesday 23 October 2024 at 11.00am in Whiteknights House, Committee Room 2.

Present

Parveen Yaqoob, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) [Chair]
John Gibbs, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Research (Heritage & Creativity)
Sue Gray, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Research (Environment)
Carol Wagstaff, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Research (Agriculture, Food and Health)
Adrian Williams, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor PGR and Researcher Development
Veronica Escobar Ruiz, Co-Chair of the Research Staff Committee
Anne-Marie West, Finance Business Partner
Sue Egleton, University Librarian
Karen Henderson, Director of Research and Innovation
Caroline Knowles, Head of Research Communication and Engagement
Mona Ashok, Business Informatics System and Accounting, ECR representative
Chris Jones, Department of Biomedical Sciences, Senate member
Gail Marshall, Department of Languages and Culture, Senate member
Shreyas Gandhi, Education Officer, Reading Students' Union
Nathan Helsby, Planning and Strategy Office [Secretary]

Apologies

Dominik Zaum, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning and Resource)
Adrian Bell, Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor Research (Prosperity & Resilience)
Guy Hembury, Director of Knowledge Exchange Commercialisation & Partnerships

24/47 Disclosure of interests and corporate risk register [item 2]

Board members were reminded of the requirement to disclose interests, and to inform the Chairs of any personal interest in agenda items at Board meetings.

The Board received the University corporate risk register. It noted that the University Committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI) was reviewing the wording for risk number 6 (Failure to generate impact and commercial opportunities from research) such that other successful outcomes from research could be incorporated. It was agreed that UCRI should be the owner of that risk since it met more regularly and could therefore manage more closely.

24/48 Research governance [item 3]

The Board received the current research governance structure, along with the Board's membership and Terms of Reference for 2024/25. The Board approved the Terms of Reference and the membership, welcoming new members as follows:

- Gail Marshall as Senate member
- Veronica Escobar Ruiz as new chair of the Research Staff Committee
- Sue Gray as new Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor Research (Environment).

24/49 Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2024 [item 4]

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 June 2024.

24/50 Actions from previous meetings [item 5]

24/26 Committee on Researcher Development and PGR Studies: PGR recruitment strategy. The Planning and Change Board had reviewed the PGR recruitment strategy, which had been modified to present more realistic targets.

24/27 Open Research Action Plan. The Action Plan had been published. Adrian Bell would follow up with the Open Research team to confirm budget requirements from the Research Development Fund (RDF).

24/44 Research Travel Grant Sub-Committee. The Board noted approval by Chair's action of the raising of limits for geographical location. The Board would review impact on the funding envelope in the annual report.

24/51 Matters arising from the minutes (not covered elsewhere on the agenda) [item 6]

There were no matters arising from minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

24/52 Interdisciplinary Research Centre (IDRC) review [item 7a]

The Board noted plans for the review of the six active IDRCs. The first phase will be an appraisal of each IDRC by APVCs (R) against objectives with a wider look in the new year at alternative models for delivery and opportunities. The framework for the review would be consulted with Heads of School and the IDRC directors.

24/53 Research and Innovation strategy consultation [item 7b]

The Board heard that UCRI had developed a new draft research and innovation strategy to 2030. Consultation was taking place with relevant constituencies, including Research Division Leads, Heads of School, and the wider academic and professional services research and innovation community.

24/54 AgriFood Futures [item 7c]

The Strategy had been published in the summer. The implementation plan would be taken to Council in November, to include the proposal to establish a Systems and Futures College of Experts. UEB and Council would also consider the question of the optimal structure to deliver the strategy.

24/55 Research committee framework and governance [item 7d]

UCRI was undertaking a review of the committees and governance underpinning the University's research and innovation activity, including the role and remit of the Board. Proposals would be brought to the January or April Board meeting for approval.

24/56 Research awards and applications end of FQ4 2023/24 [item 7ei]

The Board received the end of year position for research awards and applications. At £29.5m, the University award value in 2023/24 was some way lower than previous cycles (c. £35m to £40m), The University had achieved 33% towards its target against the milestone of 40%. The higher levels of applications were encouraging for the pipeline and there have been some notable successes in the recent quarter. The Board discussed approaches to converting research income in areas with less success to date, including 'momentum' sessions; review and rework of unsuccessful applications; and working together across Themes to share strategies/best practice.

In discussion, the following points were highlighted

- There remained some ongoing research culture issues, for example workload and knock-on impact of the Portfolio Review Programme
- There were opportunities for wider collaboration on environmental sustainability research, for example involving arts and humanities disciplines

24/57 QS and THE World Rankings outcomes [item 7eii]

The Board received an update on the University's position in global university rankings. The University remained ranked just outside the top 200 in THE (26th of UK institutions against a University KPI target of 25th) and within the top 200 for QS (172nd). The University was encouraging colleagues to provide names of academic contacts at other institutions to agree to be nominated for participation in the reputation survey that is a significant element of the QS rankings. In discussion, the Board noted the following

- Such rankings were becoming increasingly competitive with growth in size and quality in other countries, for example India.
- Other activity could support improvement in the specific criteria, for example publication/citation strategies; increasing external engagement with industry; and supporting patent publication.
- Whilst rankings were more heavily weighted towards research, teaching reputation and international metrics were factors that fell into the purview of other Boards.

24/58 Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF) 4 [item 7eiii]

The Board received the outcomes of the recently published KEF4. At metric and perspective level, the outcomes were broadly in line with previous years except for a drop in quintile (5 to 4) in the Working with the public and third sector perspective on account of a reduction in the University's consultancy and contract research income with public and third sector. The Board noted a general drop-off in income-related metrics in line with University research income more broadly, and reflected in other rankings measures.

24/59 Research culture update [item 8a]

The Board received an update on the University's research culture programme. It noted that the areas of activity were drafting the research culture statement for consultation with stakeholders; setting up the research culture programme board and other governance arrangements; and mapping the Vitae framework to the University's activities and priorities.

24/60 Research Excellence Framework 2029 [item 8b]

The Board noted recent Funding body policy work, including the confirmation in the REF 2029 Open Access policy that open access was not required for long form publications, and ongoing development of the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) element. The Board was mindful that the University approach to the REF needed to consider the balance of staff volume and quality for funding and reputational outcomes, taking into account the eligibility and algorithms as they are finalised by the Funding bodies and the University's Code of Practice. Unit of Assessment Leads were currently developing SWOT analyses for review by REF Planning Group.

24/61 Current Research Information System update [item 8c]

The Board received an update on the University's procurement and implementation of a CRIS. There have been some delays in the procurement schedule, such that go-live date has been put back to Q1 of 2026.

24/62 Research output prize for Early Career Researchers [item 8d]

The Board approved the criteria and process for this year's Research output prize for Early Career Researchers, noting the small change to clarify that eligibility encompassed all forms of research outputs in line with the REF definition.

24/63 University export control policy [item 9a]

The Board approved the University export control policy ahead of approval by UEB. The policy addressed the requirement for institutions to have clear policies and procedures to deal with national security matters in relation to international collaborations. The Board suggested that acronyms could be spelled out for clarity.

24/64 Research England funding 2024/25 [item 9b]

The Board received information on the University's annual allocation of research and knowledge exchange funding from Research England for 2024/25. Whilst the research element had remained broadly the same (c. £18.3m), there had been a 10% drop in the University's HEIF income (£2.75m) on account of a drop in the underlying innovation metrics. The Board noted that the University Committee for Research Impact and Public Engagement (UCRIPE) had discussed strategies to address some of these areas, including removing barriers to external engagement, staff incentives for external engagement, and marketing the University offering to business/industry.

24/65 Research Development Fund [item 10a]

The Board reviewed the 2023/24 outturn and budget/allocation for 2024/25 for the fund. In regard to underspend, it noted that there was contingency incorporated into the budget to allow for spend in year, for example matched funding requirements, targeted strategic activity, or unforeseen requirements. There was also potential impact of HEIF reduction on demand on the fund. The Board agreed that it would be helpful in future for budget holders and UCRI to review more regularly (UCRI quarterly) to identify and address underspend on particular projects or streams of activity at an earlier stage. Finance would explore further some specifics, for example spend against Digital Humanities.

24/66 Reporting committees: University Committee for Research and Innovation [item 11a]

The Board received summaries from the Committee's recent meetings.

24/67 Reporting committees: Committee on Researcher Development and PGR Studies [item 11b]

The Board received minutes from the April meeting. It noted in particular the success of the Fairbrother Lecture, which was held in the Biscuit Factory in the town centre and therefore attracted a more diverse audience.

24/68 Reporting committees: Committee on Open Research and Researcher Integrity [item 11c]

The Board received minutes from the October meeting. It noted the following

- The Committee decided to continue to pause the UK Research Integrity Office subscription (UKRIO).

- There was ongoing consultation on the Library research engagement strategy.
- There was ongoing University work on use of AI, including development of guidance and policy on grant writing, plain English summaries and abstracts. UKRI was developing policy on use in peer review.

24/69 Reporting committees: Research Travel Group [item 11d]

The Board had received a request from the Group about the inclusion in the application process of a question about applicants plans for sustainable travel. Following consultation with the University's sustainability team, the following feedback was provided to the Group. Instead of the proposed question, they recommended that the form include a statement to the effect that grants are awarded with the expectation that all travel would be arranged in accordance with the Travel Policy, including its sustainability considerations.

24/70 Any other business [item 12]

The APVC PGR and Researcher Development queried the value of the University's continued participation in the HR Excellence in Research in proportion to the amount of work involved and in light of the level of duplication with other signatories and concordats. As with other similar subscriptions and charter marks, the University would need to take into account a number of factors, such as financial savings, reputational benefits and expectations of external funders.

24/71 Date of next meeting

22 January 2025, 2pm.