

# UNIVERSITY BOARD FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

**20/33** A meeting of the University Board for Research and Innovation was held on Friday 6 November 2020 at 10am on Microsoft Teams.

## **Present**

Dominik Zaum, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Chair)  
Parveen Yaqoob, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation)  
Adrian Williams, Research Dean (Agriculture, Food and Health)  
Phil Newton, Research Dean (Environment)  
Dianne Berry, Dean for Post-Graduate Research Studies  
Sue Walker, Department of Typography and Graphic Communication, Senate member  
Darren Browne, Commercial Director  
Richard Frazier, Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, Senate member  
Matthew Windsor, School of Law, Early Career Researcher member  
Rachel Wates, RUSU Diversity Officer, Students Union representative  
Nathan Helsby, Planning and Strategy Office [Secretary]

## **Apologies**

Roberta Gilchrist, Research Dean (Heritage & Creativity)  
Stuart Hunt, University Librarian  
Adrian Bell, Research Dean (Prosperity & Resilience)  
Mark Fellowes, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource)

## **20/34 Disclosure of Interests, Terms of Reference and 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 this meeting.

The Board received the University Risk Register, and were asked to pay particular attention to the risks relevant to the research and innovation remit, namely risks 1-4 and associated early warning indicators. Some recent high-level research performance data were provided for additional context. There were no comments at this meeting; however, members should email any further comments to the Chair and Secretary to inform the report to the Risk Management Group. It was also noted that risk ratings can be adjusted during the year, so these should continue to be monitored.

**Action: Secretary to provide Board feedback to the Risk Management Group**

## **20/35 High-level research performance data**

### **a) Research awards and applications end of FQ4 2019/20 and five-year cycle [item 2a]**

The Board received the end of year outturn for research awards and applications, which also signaled the end of the five-year 2020 Research Plan period. The University received £40m in 2019/20, which was in line with previous years. There had been a decline in application volume, but an increased success rate.

Over the five-year cycle, the University had achieved close to 200m over the five-year cycle, which represented c. 95% to target. The Chair commented that ambitious targets had been set, and the University had come close to meeting them. In addition, the University's annual research income had increased over the period, and above Russell and former 1994 Group growth. The Theme/Division level charts highlighted that there had been significant variation in performance to target at Research Division level, and some areas that would need to be addressed. Targets for 2020/21 would be based on an annual target, recognizing that this would be a transitional year.

With regard to the 2020 Research Plan, it was noted that its success would be measured in fair part through REF 2021 outcomes. There were also softer measures such as a greater emphasis on a more impact-focused research approach, and the developing open research culture at the University. The effectiveness of the 2020 Plan would be reviewed to inform the 2026 plan, which would be adopted at the end of the year.

**b) THE World University Rankings 2021 [item 2b]**

The Board received details of the University's performance in the THE World University Rankings at institutional and subject level. The University remained in the 200-250 range and in the top 30 of UK institutions in the table. At criteria level, the University was generally in the top quartile. At subject level, Reading appears in seven subjects, with notable improvement in the Business and Education tables, primarily on account of citation performance.

In discussion, it was noted that research-related metrics contributed beyond the research pillar, for example doctoral awards. Whilst there was potential for improvement in citations, there was also opportunity to be more forthright about the University performance in order to impact on reputation indicators and facilitate business and industry engagement.

**20/36 Research governance structure, Board membership and Terms of Reference [item 3]**

The Board received a schematic showing the research governance/committee structure along with the Board's membership and Terms of Reference for 2020/21. These were unchanged from 2019/20 save for the renaming of the Global Challenges Steering Group to the International Development Research Steering Group.

**20/37 Minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 June 2020 [item 4]**

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 June 2020.

**20/38 Actions from previous meetings [item 5]**

There were no outstanding actions from previous meetings that were not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

**20/39 Matters arising from the minutes: Concordat to support the career development of researchers [item 6]**

The Board received an update on the University's progress with its action plan relating to the Concordat, to which the University became a signatory in October 2019.

Prior to the interruption of the COVID pandemic, progress had been made in terms of reviewing existing structures and processes; meetings with research staff and managers; and the development of a gap analysis and an action plan.

As a holder of the Human Resources Excellence in Research award, the University is required to report externally on progress in implementing the previous concordat and produce an action plan in relation to the new Concordat. The Board received the HREIR action plan for 2020-22, which had been submitted along with a report in October 2020. As a result of preparations for this report, some priority actions had been identified, mostly in relation to awareness raising and training, for example, online training and induction, and development of webpages, with some support from RETF. Future work will focus on the development of baseline measures and planning the implementation.

In discussion, the following were highlighted

- Consideration should be given to synergies with the research integrity concordat, for example training for PIs, being mindful of burden on relevant staff. It might be possible to explore sharing of resources/training with other universities, for example the S10 group.
- The University had adopted a Statement on Responsible Metrics, based on the Leiden Manifesto on responsible metrics; Actions ER1, ER3 and EM3 should reference the approach.
- Careful thought should be given to the baselining data, so that it is sensible, SMART and can be easily monitored using available data.
- As well as Careers, the Knowledge Transfer Centre and the University's commercial expertise should be drawn upon with regard to non-academic career development. The Commercial Director and the University lead for the Concordat would meet up to discuss further. It was noted that UKRI was introducing permeability re industry/academia, so this might serve as an additional driver.
- There were opportunities for further engagement with staff, for example to move beyond the tick-box element of training to embedding practice. It was noted that research staff were concentrated in particular Schools, so attention could be focused in these areas.
- In Research Division Operating Plans, there had been discussions with regard to the support for ECRs and research staff. These highlighted existing communities and good practice in Schools that could be shared and integrated with central activities.

The Chair thanked Lynn Moore and Dianne Berry for their work to date; an update would be provided to the Board at a later meeting.

#### **20/40 Phase 2 implementation: research related update [item 7a]**

The Board received the high-level strategy implementation paper from the PVC (Academic Planning and Resource) along with the workload allocation model proposals that had been provided to Senate in October. The former highlighted some core academic proposals, relating to space and the academic year and workload models.

Dominik Zaum, leader of the research workstream, presented the item, acknowledging that many members had already seen the proposals in some form, and some were members of the workstream group. The starting point for the workstream was the kind of institution the University wanted to be, i.e. a research intensive university undertaking pure and applied research across a broad disciplinary base, delivering quality research, high income in a vibrant research environment with an international outlook. Excellence needed to be underpinned by individuals, thus the focus on setting expectations (income, outputs, impact) and managing workload/performance accordingly, and accompanying infrastructure, whilst continuing to strengthen leadership and

develop staff. There was a need to use resources effectively, both so there was time to support different activities and in the interests of fairness in terms of work and time allocation.

It was recognised that the proposals might have uneven effects across the University and could have significant impact on individuals and ways of working.

Board members provided the following additional comments on both the high-level and workload proposals.

- Matthew Windsor had canvassed early career researchers across the University and fed back the key concerns raised
  - With regard to the space proposals (for example sharing offices), there was concern about negative ramifications for research, as well as equality and diversity implications; for many ECRs, the only quiet place for research was their office. Other points were made in regard to setting up costs for home working, which in effect amounted to outsourcing
  - The workload model was perceived as a one-size fits all approach that would disadvantage researchers in the arts, humanities and social sciences. Whilst grant application expectations were felt reasonable, imposing grant capture requirements for these disciplines was felt less so. The scope for the impact measure was potentially more limited. There was concern that some staff would leave if such expectations were introduced.

The Chair thanked Matthew Windsor for drawing together the feedback, and asked that a summary be provided to the PVCs (R&I) to inform future work. He highlighted that these were a set of principles rather than a centrally-managed systems, and that the proposals were trying to account for disciplinary differences. It was the beginning of the process and there would be further opportunities to input.

**Action: Matthew Windsor to provide summary of ECR feedback to the PVCs (R&I)**

- There was a potential burden on managers and a need to consolidate and link-up to existing processes (PDR, Personal Research Plans, workload management) if there were a move towards performance monitoring of this kind.
- The proposals were targeted at academics; it was queried what expectations might also be developed for those services supporting research.
- The proposals should be mindful of wellbeing, particularly with regard to ECRs who were prone to overstretching themselves.
- Whilst some members did not object in principle to the space proposals, there needed to be confidence that the space was fit for purpose, i.e. that layouts could support both academic and non-academic endeavour. The interaction of academics and professional services was crucial to the delivery of research.
- Determining the sequencing of the various proposals was critical to their effective delivery.

**20/41 Knowledge Exchange Framework 2020: narrative submission [item 7b]**

The Board received for information the University's narrative submission to the pilot KEF under the following areas: Institutional context, Local growth and regeneration and Public and community engagement. The KEF had been delayed on account of COVID-19. The submission was reviewed by UEB and submitted in October 2020. The Board noted that the narratives would not be assessed

but provide context to the metrics, which would be published in a dashboard format. The metrics benchmarked the University against a peer cluster.

The University's submission highlighted the more strategic approach to knowledge exchange and recognised that the focus had broadened beyond research. It was expected now that KE would involve an external partner with a focus on entrepreneurship or NewCos. The Board noted that there had been an increase in funding levels this year; the importance of innovation and knowledge exchange had also been raised in light of its contribution to the pandemic and future economic recovery.

In discussion, members highlighted potential challenges in pulling together evidence for the submission, since it sat somewhere between the two remits. Similarly data were not captured in an automated way; there was opportunity to improve in this area and draw on expertise in professional services, and understand our performance relative to other institutions. The University would scrutinize the data and outcomes following publication and reflect on the iteration of research and knowledge exchange, recognizing their complementarity.

The Chair thanked colleagues involved in preparing the submission, notably the Commercial Director, and staff in the KTC and Research Communications. Publication of results was expected in December 2020.

#### **20/42 Research-related diversity and Inclusion data [item 7c]**

The Board received the notes from the meeting of the Working group on research-related diversity and inclusion data. The Working group had agreed an outline data set as per the following

- Staff and PGR demographics v sector
- PDRA and promotions
- Awards and applications data (including success rate and intensity)
- Publications volume
- Internal allocation of funding (RETF, prizes, Expressions of interest for large grants/fellowships)
- Support for impact

With regard to characteristics, it was agreed to focus on gender, ethnicity, disability and career stage in the first instance, with a view to considering other characteristics (for example sexual orientation, religious belief) at a later stage.

In discussion, the Board noted that COVID-19 had highlighted potential differential impact on groups at sector level, for example female researchers' publication and grant application activity. Based on recent University awards and applications data, there was no evidence of impact to date, but it was recognised that this might take longer to materialize, given publication timeframes.

A sample dataset would be drawn up, including trends over time, and brought to the next meeting.

#### **20/43 Research output prize for Early Career Researchers [item 7d]**

The Board received for information the criteria, call text, proposed assessment process and timings for the Research output prize for Early Career Researchers. There was no change to the process this year with the intention that nominees and assessment process for each Theme would be reported at the meeting of 26 January, with the winners approved by Chair's action in February in advance of Court on 15 March. Because of the ongoing impact of COVID-19, it was unclear how/when winners

would be announced/presented. Members highlighted the potential impact of COVID-19 on publication; it was agreed that in the call, Research Division Leaders should be reminded to give due regard to Diversity and Inclusion in the context of the pandemic, for example to allow submitted publications where COVID-19 had resulted in a delay in publication in the time period. Depending on the level of ongoing impact, this could be taken forward to the approach in future years.

#### **20/44 Research and Knowledge Exchange Funding 2020/21 [item 8a]**

The Board received for information the University's funding allocation from Research England for 2020/21. It noted that the total recurrent funding of £17.75m was in line with the previous year, the only significant drop being £200k (c. -7%) in relation to the PGR supervision fund. As per 2019/20, the University had received additional funding of c. 1m from the NPIF. Strategic Priorities and GCRF awaiting. There had been a sector-wide increase in the Knowledge Exchange allocation, the University seeing an (above sector) increase of c. 15% based on the metrics from the Higher Education Business and Community Interaction Survey (HEBCIS). The University was awaiting details of its Strategic Priorities and Global Challenges Fund allocation.

The Board also heard that additional monies had also been made available from the World Class Laboratories Fund to upgrade and maintain current research infrastructure and ensure research infrastructure was COVID safe. The University would receive a formula allocation of £1m to be used in line with the outlined specifications by the end of March 2021. UCRI would discuss potential priority areas with Estates/Facilities and the Committee for Research Infrastructure. It was noted that Research England was requesting an increase in the future to the QR funding.

#### **20/45 Research Endowment Trust Fund (RETF) allocation [item 8b]**

The Board was asked to agree the use of RETF over the next three years. Taking into account existing commitments, between £600k and #900k per annum was available. It was proposed to prioritise areas in line with the Research and Innovation strategy, namely to develop the pipeline of strong grant proposals; develop research talent and leadership; and support public engagement and impact.

The Board noted the following in particular:

- There were some significant existing allocations, notably for BOISP (Impact programme) and its planned successor beyond REF 2021. The Committee for Impact and Public Engagement would be receiving an end of project review by SUMS Consultants in Spring 2021, which would inform the approach to support in the future. Earmarked allocation for Impact was lower than current ones; posts previously funded by RETF had been moved into RES as part of planning processes.
- The allocations did not include the potential investment in a Current Research Information System. This would be a significant investment, which would need to be funded from elsewhere, but for which part contribution might be drawn from RETF.
- Additional items for support included the Concordat and support for people development and research leadership, which might be co-funded by Schools/Depts.
- The Research Deans fund was retained to support Theme pump-priming and projects. It was double counted in the paper.

The Board approved the planned approach. The Fund would continue to be overseen by UCRI.

## **20/46 Reporting committees [item 9]**

The Board received and noted the following reports from Committees/Groups

- REF Planning Group: an update on progress with the University's submission
- University Committee for Research and Innovation (UCRI): summary highlights from recent meetings
- Committee on Open Research and Researcher Integrity: minutes from the autumn term meeting

## **20/47 Open Research Action Plan [item 9d]**

The Board received for information from CORRI the Open Research Action Plan. The Research Dean for Environment outlined some key points.

- The motivation was to increase research quality, integrity, accessibility for the benefit of individual researchers and to facilitate wider collaboration. The overall approach was summarized as "Be as open as you can as soon as you can".
- Apart from REF and funding body open access requirements, none was mandatory, so the purpose was to raise awareness of benefits for their own research and communities.
- The Plan not only applied to Open Access research, but also reproducibility and software licencing. It also supported the development of innovative practices in research plans and methods, for example the peer reviewing of approach in advance of the research.
- The University's open research website included a position statement and would showcase our work, including case studies, handbooks and supporting information.
- The aspiration was to increase practice/awareness, increase use, but also learn from good practice elsewhere, e.g. the UK reproducibility network, for which Etienne Roesch was network lead. Grant proposals were in train to support funding for sharing practice and training.
- The Plan would be mindful of the UKRI road map.
- The Plan would be delivered by existing and evolving resources, e.g. through adjusted roles. The University would seek School champions, but this would not be mandatory. The Plan recognised the risk of resource not being available, so would adjust as necessary.
- CORRI had approved the plan in principle with UCRI due to agree earmarked funding in RETF, which could be reduced should funding applications be successful.

The Research Dean thanked other CORRI members for their input into the plan.

In discussion, it was noted, in regard to reproducibility, that statistical support for academics was lacking, for example for statistical design. Whilst some things were in place, where there were mandatory requirements, for example for research ethics and NHS applications, and was covered in broad good research practice, there was concern that there were areas where it was needed.

## **20/48 Date of next meeting**

26 January 2021, 9am