

UNIVERSITY BOARD FOR RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

22/37 A meeting of the University Board for Research and Innovation was held on Wednesday 16 November 2022 at 9.30am on Microsoft Teams.

Present

Dominik Zaum, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Chair)
Parveen Yaqoob, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and Innovation)
Adrian Bell, Research Dean (Prosperity & Resilience)
Rowan Sutton, Research Dean (Environment)
Adrian Williams, Dean for Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development
Mona Ashok, Business Informatics System and Accounting, ECR representative
Stuart Hunt, University Librarian
Richard Frazier, Department of Food and Nutritional Sciences, Senate member
Oscar Minto, Education Officer (RUSU)
Nathan Helsby, Planning and Strategy Office [Secretary]

Apologies

Carol Wagstaff, Research Dean (Agriculture, Food and Health)
John Gibbs, Research Dean (Heritage & Creativity)
Daniella La Penna, Department of Languages and Culture, Senate member
Mark Fellowes, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Academic Planning & Resource)

22/38 Disclosure of interests [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.

22/39 Research governance [item 3]

The Board received the current research governance structure, along with the Board's membership and Terms of Reference for 2022/23. The Board approved the Terms of Reference and the membership, noting the following:

- Rowan Sutton was attending his first meeting as the new Research Dean for the Environment Theme. The Board noted that the University had now appointed the job share for the other half of the Environment Research Dean role: Tom Oliver.
- The Commercial Director role no longer existed at the University, this position on the Board being replaced by the Director of Research Services.
- The Finance Business Partner for research had been added to the membership
- There remained a vacancy for the research staff representative. It was hoped to have someone in place at the next meeting.
- There were two new RUSU officers, the Education Officer and the Postgraduate Research Part-time Officer

The Chairs welcomed the new members to the Board.

22/40 Minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2022 [item 4]

The Board approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 15 June 2022.

22/41 Actions from previous meetings [item 5]

21/38. International research partnerships. The Board noted that Paul Inman would be leaving the University at the end of November 2022. Until a replacement was appointed, Dominik Zaum would oversee international research collaboration and funding opportunities. The agenda item would be carried forward to a future meeting

22/22 Diversity and Inclusion data in research. The Board noted that the report had been shared with the Diversity and Inclusion Dean, whose comments would be incorporated into next year's report. Further consultation would be undertaken with other groups during the preparation of the report, including the CentAUR team for more comprehensive research output data.

22/33 Research Travel Grants. The Research Travel Grant Sub-Committee would develop a proposal for the use of the fund by research students studying at a distance during the course of 2022/23.

22/42 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.

22/43 REF 2021 Reflections and wider strategic changes [item 7a]

The Board received information on the University's activities in response to the University's Research Excellence Framework (REF) outcomes. This included a request that the Board approve changes to Research Division structure.

Review of REF performance at UOA level

The Board noted that the University was undertaking review of REF performance at UOA level with reference to identified comparator institutions, and in sequence. Bibliometric data had been provided to inform review of the research outputs; Research Divisions were reviewing impact case studies over the next few months; and environment statements would be reviewed in early 2023.

Future REF submission strategy and changes to Research Divisions

The Board received a paper on proposed changes to post-REF research structures, which had also been reviewed by University Executive Board. The paper outlined proposed changes to REF UOA submissions in the next exercise, along with some changes to Research Division structure to align with these proposals. Board members were reminded of the confidentiality of the paper; whilst the proposals had been outlined to some Schools/Departments, others had yet to be involved.

The Board noted the broader context of the University's institutional level REF review, including

- How to manage the 2* tail in research outputs, which was greater than forecast in REF 2021. The papers included proposals for a project around the implementation of a prepublication review process.
- In Impact, the University had not made the same level of progress relative to the sector. The papers included the University's impact strategy, which set a direction of travel.

A third reflection on institutional performance was that there was a general correlation of unit size and performance, and that compared to others, the University's submission was somewhat

fragmented, with some notably low FTE submissions. This had the following main implications for performance: a small base from which to generate impact case studies; challenges around optimising the output submission; and challenges in demonstrating sustainability and vitality.

The paper proposed that the University should no longer submit to the UOAs in Philosophy, Classics, Biological Sciences, Chemistry, and that the Art/Typography should be a combined submission. Alternative options for these areas were outlined in the paper, the Board noting that the decision on where and how the University should submit its activity rested with the REF Planning Group. The Board were asked to agree associated initial changes to Research Division structure as follows:

- Merging the Classics and History Research Divisions;
- Merging the Philosophy and Politics & International Relations Research Divisions;
- Merging the Art and Typography & Graphic Design Research Divisions.

In discussion, the following was highlighted

- Communication had already been undertaken with affected Research Divisions, with a timetable for merger to be in place by Easter. In practice full integration would take 12-18 months with some RET funded project management to support.
- It was important to emphasise that this should not compromise disciplinary identity of these areas.

The Board approved the merger of these Research Divisions.

Research Outputs Development and Quality Assessment for REF

The Board received information on the proposed future approach to quality assessment of research outputs. The plan was to introduce a pre-publication process for potential REF candidates, with the current ROSS system to be repurposed as a REF output summative assessment and selection tool. With regard to the former, Research Deans would work with Research Divisions to determine appropriate processes in their areas, drawing on existing good practice, with a view to have a system in place by 2023/24.

In discussion, the following was highlighted:

- There was some lack of understanding of how papers were assessed for quality, and therefore training would be required to support this.
- The proposal had been presented at the Research Division Leads meeting, with follow up communications.
- Bibliometrics could be used to support assessment, but in a responsible fashion, and alongside the reading of papers.
- Some caution was raised about the use of CentAUR to support these processes; it was not designed for this purpose and needed updating.
- It would be important to link up to the work on the Current Research Information System. The approved Business Case for the CRIS would be brought to the next meeting

Action: Chair/Secretary to bring CRIS business case to next meeting

University of Reading Impact Strategy 2022-2028

The Board received for information the already launched Impact Strategy. Initial work would also be supported by an Impact Accelerator account in the humanities.

22/44 Research Culture [item 7b]

The Board received a verbal update on the work of UCRI on research culture. The University had received a ring-fenced QR allocation from Research England funding of £300k, part of which had been used to commission work by colleagues in the Henley Business School on the understanding of current and desired research culture at the University. This was conducted through focus groups with stakeholders; amongst other things, initial findings had identified some possible issues relating to mid-career researchers, which would be followed up. The allocation would also be supporting work on research integrity, leadership training and development, research prizes, statistics, software support, and other culture-related projects.

22/45 Research awards and applications end of FQ4 2021/22 [item 7ci]

The Board received a summary of research awards/applications/income for 2021/22. At £35m, the value of research awards was slightly down on the previous year, and 80% to its annual target; there had not yet been a bounce back to pre-pandemic levels. This was partly on account of the phasing of UKRI schemes and delay of the UKRI underwrite of EU awards. The number and value of applications dropped considerably in 2021/22 (from £156m to £108m), which was a cause for concern, although it did imply a greater success rate. UCRI would look further into this drop and, with reference to more recent data from FQ1 2022/23, consider future actions.

Action: UCRI to explore further the drop in research application activity in 2021/22 and consider future actions

22/46 THE World University Rankings 2023 [item 7cii]

The Board received a summary of the University outcomes in the THE World University Rankings 2023. The University had returned to the top 200 at 198 and had improved its UK ranking to 26th of over 100 UK institutions in the ranking. The improvement had been driven primarily by an increase in the number of academics nominating the University in the research reputation survey. Next year's table would include refinement of bibliometrics, along with additional metrics on international student mobility and technology transfer. At subject level, two subjects (Physical Sciences and Education) were in the top 100, and the University was in the top quartile for most of the subject areas where it was represented. The Board noted that the University had established a rankings group to review league table performance and identify where it could take some practical and cultural steps to optimise its performance.

22/47 University research and innovation related KPIs update [item 7ciii]

The Board received an update on progress for the University's research and innovation related KPIs, which are reported to Council on an annual basis. It noted that for KPI 4, the University was (at 26th) close to its target of being in the top 25 of UK institutions in the THE World University Ranking, and for KPI 8, was in the top quartile in the International outlook element of the THE World University Ranking. For KPI 7, which related to the University's knowledge exchange activity, a proposal had been submitted for approval by Council, which drew on the University's quintile performance in the Knowledge Exchange Framework. Once approved, this would be brought back to UBRI for information.

22/48 Strategic Foundations Programme [item 8a]

The Board received a verbal update on the progress with the research-related elements of the Strategic Foundation Programme. Recent work had focused on the Individual expectations and workload pathway, with a pilot of individual expectations data being run in two Schools. Review and feedback from this pilot would inform the future activity; initial issues highlighted some challenges around data quality and robustness and how to scale up to the whole university.

22/49 Concordat to support the career development of researchers [item 8b]

The Board received a verbal update from the Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development on activity relating to the Concordat. It noted that the University had attended an interview with Vitae on the renewal of its HR Excellence in Research award. The Dean was also pleased to report the reconvening of the research staff committee, which would now be able to contribute to Concordat related activity and actions.

22/50 Research output prize for Early Career Researchers [item 8c]

The Board approved the call text and proposed assessment process and timings for the prize. It noted that the prizes would be presented at the research celebration event in the summer.

22/51 Research England funding for providers 2022/23 [item 9]

The Board received for information a summary of the University's funding allocation from Research England for 2022/23. The University had received c. £19m in research funds, £4m in knowledge exchange funds, and c. 2m in capital funds. The changes in this year's allocations primarily relate to the use of REF 2021 results to inform Quality-related research funding; the University's allocation remained broadly in line with the previous year against an uplift in the sector; the growth in the University's submitted FTE had not kept pace with other institutions. There were significant fluctuations at UOA level, depending on volume and quality outcomes relative to the sector. The Board noted that there was likely to be additional QR and capital allocations in year, subject to the outcomes of the spending review.

22/52 Research Endowment Trust [item 10]

The Board received the end of year outturn 2021/22 for the Research Endowment Trust, noting the following

- There was significant underspend against allocated budgets. This mainly related to the delay to the start for some projects and calls, for example open calls, and NIRD expenditure now falling into the 2022/23 academic year.
- There were lots of small project funds, e.g. Research Division pots, which were burdensome to administrate and often underspent. UCRI would consider alternative approaches for the Research Division standard allocations, such as having a larger pot available on a bid basis.

In discussion with the Chairs, the Finance representative would draw up a more detailed report, including mapping of activity to research strategy priorities, in order to get a more nuanced understanding of the current allocation and spend in the Trust.

Action: In discussion with the Chairs, the Finance Business Partner to draw up a more detailed report for subsequent meeting

22/53 Reporting committees [item 11a-c]

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

- Committee on Researcher Development and PGR Studies
- Committee on Open Research and Researcher Integrity
- University Committee for Research and Innovation

22/54 Any other business [item 12]

There were no other items of any other business raised by members.

22/55 Date of next meeting

In view of the short time between this meeting and the next scheduled meeting of the Board on 24 January, the Chairs and Secretary would review matters of business for that meeting and potential for postponing or rescheduling to a later date.

Annex to the UBRI minutes of 16 November 2022: open actions

Actions from 27 October 2021

21/38 THE World University Rankings

Chair/Secretary to invite Paul Inman (PVC International) to a future meeting to discuss international collaboration.

Status (November 2022): Paul Inman was unable to attend the June 2022 meeting because of diary commitments. He will be leaving the University at the end of November 2022. Until a replacement is appointed, Dominik Zaum will oversee international research collaboration and funding opportunities.

Actions from 15 June 2022

22/22 Diversity and Inclusion data in research

Secretary to refine the report and share findings with relevant individuals/groups, for example Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, Personal Titles group, Race Equality action team, and relevant D&I Staff networks Planning and Strategy Office to discuss with Library the extraction of the full CentAUR dataset for future iterations.

Status (November 2022): Ongoing, to be reviewed in advance of the data collection for the 2023 report A refined report has been shared with the Dean for Diversity and Inclusion, who made the following comments:

- Improving the staff declaration rate for disability is part of Target 1 for the 2026 D&I targets: Our commitment to diversity (reading.ac.uk)
- For Research Students, race equality issues are being explored by the Graduate School following Recommendation 9 of the Race Equality Review. Joanna John is a key contact for this work.
- Increasing number of female Professors is covered in Target 10 of the 2026 D&I targets.
- For research committee membership, are we using a consistent EoI approach across all committees?
- For awards, are applications blind assessed or named? Or does this vary by awarding body? Do we have a consistent approach for internal research awards?

22/33 Research Travel Grants

Research Travel Grant Sub-Committee to develop a proposal for the use of the fund by research students studying at a distance.

Status (November 2022): The Sub-Committee noted UBRI's response at its last meeting in the summer term, and will be revisiting the action during the course of 2022-23.

Actions from 16 November 2022

22/43 REF 2021 Reflections and wider strategic changes [item 7a]: Research Outputs Development and Quality Assessment for REF

Chair/Secretary to bring CRIS business case to next meeting.

22/45 Research awards and applications end of FQ4 2021/22 [item 7ci]

UCRI to explore further the drop in research application activity in 2021/22 and consider future actions.

22/52 Research Endowment Trust [item 10]

In discussion with the Chairs, the Finance Business Partner to draw up a more detailed report for subsequent meeting.