RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Matters for note by Senate arising from the meeting of Research Committee on 23 November 2023

1. **Research Strategy and Oversight: (a) RIRG Terms of Reference and Membership, (b) Task and Finish Group to Develop Principles of Corporate Social Responsibility in Research**

   With regards to the RIRG Terms of Reference and Membership:

   a. The Head of PIP **reported** that the RIRG had decided to adopt the SCOPE model to assist in developing success measures and would return in the new year with further proposals and recommendations.
   b. The RIRG Terms of Reference should be clear that the relationship between the group and URC was two-way, with both committees able to request input from the other.

   With regards to the Task and Finish Group to Develop Principles of Corporate Social Responsibility in Research:

   a. The Head of PIP reported that the Task and Finish Group proposal had developed out of a recognition that further structure was needed to effectively enable researchers to address challenges and feel confident in understanding how University values translated into practice. It was hoped that the proposed Task and Finish Group would support the research space once a wider Corporate Social Responsibility framework was in place.
   b. Communications would take place once the Group has convened, to ensure that advice was taken on board from members as to how to articulate the mission of the Group most effectively.
   c. The Committee observed that the use of 'Corporate' in the Task and Finish Group to Develop Principles of Corporate Social Responsibility in Research ought to be considered, noting that the University was not a corporation. It was clarified that there would be time allocated for the Committee to discuss an initial draft of the Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference prior to submission to UEB next year.

2. **OPPA and Research Activity**

The paper outlined the interaction of philanthropy with other sources of research funding, and success in this area had demonstrated the value of seeking philanthropic funding. Current plans projected to 2030, and there had been a drive to recruit frontline fundraising staff in support of this. The aim of the work was to (1) effectively diversify who benefits from philanthropy and (2) normalise philanthropic funding across the institution and ensure it is considered as a potential source of support.

The Committee observed the following:

   a. Assessment of current funding gaps would be helpful in assessing where OPPA could be best utilised, particularly in terms of priorities for the institution.
   b. The issue of studentship funding within the Arts & Humanities was raised, and it was suggested that funding from OPPA could be used to support the PhD community.
   c. It was important that the possibilities associated with OPPA funding were appropriately communicated; this could include maintaining a database of contacts and opportunities. It was noted that an awareness of OPPA ought to be embedded in research support teams following the E2E process. Communications should be joined up effectively, for example with the AD(R)s and RIKE, to avoid overloading colleagues with information.

3. **Annual Report from the Open Research Strategy Group**

The Head of Content and Open Research reported that this was the third annual report presented to the Committee, and was intended to set out previous activity and planned priorities for 2023/24. The Open Research Strategy Group met regularly and was guided by the Library.

The Committee observed the following:

    a. Regarding R2, which referred to a clearer sense of purpose for the Open Research Advocates Network, it was suggested that network be encouraged to find ways to expand in order to encompass all members of the University community. It was important that all researchers and staff understood the Open Research landscape and how the principles applied to their work.

    b. There was concern that the drive for industrial collaboration might clash with the principles of Open Research due to need for confidentiality and tools such as NDAs. It was confirmed that this was something funders were aware of, and a checklist of considerations was under development to help colleagues navigate the area.

    c. Regarding R2, which listed a number of agreements in the sector and specified UKRN as a group the University wished to join, it was clarified that the commitments of such agreements needed to be considered prior to signing. This was why only UKRN had been noted as a goal at this stage, however work on concordats and agreements had been picked up the Research Culture Working Group and this would cover agreements relating to Open Research.

4. Annual Report from the AECC

The Committee had been in operation for three years and continued to focus on developing a community of practice, both within the AECC and the wider institution (including Local Research Ethics Committees and with researchers). The following was noted:

    a. The annual reflection process undertaken by the Committee, in which LRECs were asked to reflect upon a previous application, provided oversight at the local level and from the AECC. The Professional Services REC had also been established and had considered a number of applications.

    b. A number of priorities for 2023/24 were noted, including further work on Artificial Intelligence, the development of training resources, refining the escalation process for high-risk research, the alignment of ethics and due diligence, and guidance for Involvement@York. It was important to ensure an effective process was in place for the escalation of concerns regarding high-risk research. Currently high-risk research or research incurring institutional-level risk was flagged by the LREC to the AECC.

    c. The ongoing situation in Palestine had prompted conversation regarding teaching and research in rapidly-evolving circumstances, and it was noted that there was scope for greater awareness amongst PGRs of the resources available on this topic.

    d. Regarding Involvement@York, it was acknowledged that ethical review processes be proportionate and in alignment with sector guidance. Conversation was underway with LREC Chairs with specific experience in the area, and the AECC was keen to draw upon existing knowledge at the institution.

5. Update on Research Culture

The Research Culture Working Group and the Concordat Implementation Group had been combined into one larger group, in the interest of ease and reducing the duplication of work. The BRIC team continued to embrace research culture in all aspects of their work, and it was emphasised that research culture was not considered to be a separate project.

The Committee observed that research culture needed to be considered when making decisions regarding the use of buildings and hybrid working, noting the benefit of in-person spaces for building community and networks.

The grant award letter for the Wellcome Trust 'Valuing Voices' project had arrived and a press release would be issued shortly. The involvement of a range of colleagues on the 'Valuing Voices' project would be appreciated. The project was currently in the planning stages, with a focus on mapping out current processes, however avenues for involvement would be made clear as relevant.

6. Other Business

a. The Committee approved a proposal concerning the representation of Early Career Researchers (ECRs) and Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs) on University Research Committee. Further information regarding the role of such representatives would be brought to the next meeting of the Committee.

b. The Research Support End2End project was progressing at pace, and the associated recruitment process had provided promotion opportunities for the research support community, which had been well appreciated by colleagues. A number of Building Industry Engagement academic posts had been advertised, with a total of four

professorships and a range of appointments at Grades 7 and 8. It was clarified that an important strategic goal of these posts and related investment was to diversify and strengthen the income stream of the institution.

c. The UKRI AI CDT in lifelong Safety Assurance of AI-enabled Autonomous Systems (SAINTS) had been awarded funding to support 60 PhD students over five years. The students would be located in ISA and registered across several departments, mainly Computer Science.

d. After a pause in the programme, the Wolfson Foundation has renewed its Postgraduate Scholarships in the Humanities, and re-selected York as a partner university. The number of universities had been cut from 9 to 6, so the success of York was notable. Funding will be available for three doctoral students over three years for students starting their research in autumn 2024. This change to doctoral support was a result of the AHRC rebalancing their spending; the new funding model aligned more closely with the spend profile of other research councils. The Committee emphasised the detrimental impact of this change with respect to doctoral support, and requested that URC took a view on the strategic use of doctoral funding. Although lobbying at a national level was possible, involvement in the discussion at York was important.

e. As part of UKRI's transition to a collective talent funding model, a new doctoral investment framework will be launched from January 2024. This will involve two models of awards across all research councils: (1) Doctoral Landscape Awards and (2) Doctoral Focal Awards.

f. Departmental strategic planning meetings were underway across the faculties, with a number of follow-up meetings scheduled in advance of the Annual Research Review deadline. The process had been valuable, however time had constrained some of the opportunities for in-depth discussion.

g. There was growing interest in plans for the future REF, particularly in terms of Impact, and the Head of PIP clarified that recruitment for a Research Excellence Manager was underway and that this would provide more direction in this area. The REF Strategy Group was due to meet for the first time in January.

h. The impact of the financial situation at the University upon research needed to be better understood, as did the impact of the shift to semesters. It was noted that semesterisation had already had an impact on research leave and opportunities for research activity across the year.

i. The Committee approved a report outlining payments made to research participants and contributors. The PIP team continued to work alongside Finance and Involvement@York to refine the policy and resolve issues identified, and amendments would be presented to the Committee in due course.

j. The Concordat to Support Research Integrity was due for review in 2024, alongside wider work within the sector on Concordats in general. There was also research taking place into the scale of and approaches to managing research misconduct, with an expected delivery date of February or March 2024. UKRIO had provided a template for the Annual Statement on Research Integrity, which would be used from 2024.

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