Research, Innovation and Global Engagement Committee

Thursday 20th January 2022, 10:00am
Video-conferencing meeting on MS Teams

Minutes

Present Members:
Professor David Price (Chair); Professor Ibrahim Abubakar; Professor Lynn Ang; Dr Paul Ayris; Mr Jeremy Barraud; Dr Matthew Blain; Professor David Bogle; Professor Stephen Caddick; Ms Sarah Chaytor; Mr Andrew Cooper; Mr James Davis; Professor Carsten Gerner-Beuerle; Ms Claire Glen; Professor Stephen M. Hart; Professor Jennifer Hudson; Mr Richard Jackson; Professor Sam Janes; Professor Kate Jeffery; Dr Jane Kinghorn; Ms Sarah Lawson; Ms Viktoria Makai; Mr Benjamin Meunier; Mr Martin Moyle; Mr Ciaran Moynihan; Dr Nick McNally; Mr Derfel Owen; Professor James Phillips; Professor Deenan Pillay; Professor Geraint Rees; Dr Francesca Scotti; Professor Cheryl Thomas QC; Mr Nicholas Tyndale; Ms Kirsty Walker; Dr Kathryn Walsh; Professor Andrew Wills

Apologies:
Mr Simon Cane
Professor Janet Darbyshire CBE
Professor Jacqui Glass
Mr Alex Hall
Professor Nigel Titchener-Hooker
Ms Teresa Williams

In attendance:
Ms Megan Gerrie
Ms Amy Lightstone
Professor Graeme Reid [for Minute 8]
Ms Emma Todd [for Minute 9]

Officer:
Ms Rachel Port

Part I: Preliminary Business

6. Welcome

6.1. The Chair was pleased to welcome all members to the second meeting of the new Research, Innovation and Global Engagement Committee (RIGEC) and

especially welcomed those who had been invited to serve on RIGEC as agreed at its last meeting.

7. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2021

7.1. RIGEC approved the minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2021 [Minutes 1-5, 2021-22].

8. Matters arising from the Minutes (Paper 2-03)

8.1. Arising from Minute 3.1, some amendments have been made to RIGEC's terms of reference and constitution and membership as agreed at its inaugural meeting. Subsequent to the meeting, it has been proposed that the UCL Clinical Research Governance Committee should report upwards to RIGEC instead of to the new Health Partnerships Committee. It was considered that RIGEC's terms of reference and constitution and membership might require further minor amendment in the future once it became more established.

8.2. RIGEC:
a. Approved its further revised terms of reference and constitution and membership that would be submitted to University Management Committee (UMC) for formal approval.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

9. Update on RIGEC Governance

9.1. The Director of Governance and Delivery gave an oral update report on the governance of RIGEC. The key points made were:
a. Meetings had continued to be held with the chairs of RIGEC's sub-committees/groups individually to explain the way business was to be manged at RIGEC and to consider possible items that might require its consideration over the coming session.
b. Feedback was also sought about possible ways to streamline RIGEC's governance structure at the meetings above and proposals would be developed for the committee's consideration by the end of the current session.

10. Budget and Spending Review Implications

10.1. Professor Graeme Reid, Chair of Science & Research Policy gave an oral update report on the implications of the outcome of the government's budget and spending review for research and innovation. The key points made were:

a. From a research and innovation (R&I) perspective, the budget was considered to be a strong settlement with a proposed increase of some 30% in funding for those areas by the 2024/25 financial year. However, this would not be the level of increase in funding for those areas allocated to all Higher Education Institutions.

b. One new avenue of R&I income would now come from government departments. The fact that the government now spoke about research funding was considered to be positive. It was anticipated that there would be strong growth in the justice and local government departments but it was unclear how they would use this new income stream.

c. The sizeable cost of association with the EU's Horizon 2020 funding scheme and the political challenge of the UK Government sending £billions to Brussels to pay for Horizon association – however good the cause - was noted.

d. In terms of the three main areas that were considered to have been missed from the budget were: (i) no money earmarked explicitly for the use of R&I in levelling up regional development; (ii) no recognition of financial stability in R&I; and (iii) tactical behaviour in terms of strategy.

e. A number of reviews had been commissioned by the government including one on research bureaucracy as well as a paper on levelling up.

f. It was considered that the translation of the very high level budgets from the spending review into allocations that were distributed to individual organisations/agencies over the next six weeks would help make clearer the government's priorities in R&I.

10.2. The following points were raised in discussion:

a. In relation to the levelling up agenda for HEIs such as UCL, there was a debate over whether R&I should be absorbed into the regional development agenda. It was noted that the North of England argued for the re-organisation of investment to help certain areas.

b. It was considered likely that research funders would not ignore research development given excellence based funding was so widely accepted.

c. Over last decade R&I formed a sizeable part of the budget and there was developing public interest in intellectual activities. HEIs would need to consider their impacts and outputs and demonstrate their contribution to the UK economy to the public. This would require improved public engagement which was also covered by RIGE.

d. It was noted that UCL Communications and Marketing were in the process of finalising the London Economics Review report into UCL's economic and social impact. It would demonstrate UCL's wide impact not just in London, but across the whole of the UK. It was expected to be published within the next two months.

e. It was considered that a technical rather than a colloquial approach to conveying UCL's impacts and outputs should continue as it provided evidence. However, HEIs tended to not to be seen as making impact on society but rather as elite and intellectual bodies. The time taken to

undertake research needed to be communicated as connectivity and where collaboration happened.

f. The development of the Covid vaccine set high public expectations and misunderstandings about R&I as it normally took about 25 years to develop a vaccine and research was at the centre of the solution.

g. While UCL celebrated its research grant funding awards, this was not done by anyone externally, nor the longevity to achieve the award.

h. The BritainThinks research into public perceptions of universities showed that the wider public were neutral about HEIs but did not really understand research and what HEIs did and their impact (see https://issuu.com/universitiesuk/docs/public-perceptions-uk-universities-).

i. The Wellcome-funded Discovery Decade project being led by CaSE was also making an important contribution to understanding public attitudes to and support for research.

j. The Wellcome Trust had recently announced that its funding would increase by 60%, although much of this was likely to be allocated to international and strategic activities.

10.3. RIGEC:

a. Agreed that Professor Reid be invited to give an update on implications arising from the government's Budget and Spending Review announcement at a meeting of RIGEC to be held in the summer term.

11. Understanding UCL's Research Culture (Paper 2-04)

11.1. Emma Todd, Head of Research Culture, introduced the report on Understanding UCL's Research Culture and the key points made were:

a. There was an increasing focus in the HE sector on research culture, including from funders, Government and across peer institutions. It was widely accepted that sustaining research excellence, and retaining the UK's global research position depended on developing healthier and more sustainable research cultures.

b. The premise of UCL's work on research culture was that developing the right kind of culture would support a productive research community and help sustain or even surpass the excellence now expected of UCL.

c. At UCL, there was significant activity and discussion, but it was somewhat disjointed and therefore did not have the impact it might.

d. The report presented the findings from a five-month scoping project, commissioned by the Research Operations Group (now the Research, Innovation and Global Engagement – Operations Committee) and sponsored by UCL Organisational Development that started in September 2021. It aimed to better understand UCL's research culture and made recommendations on how to operationalise a focused, joined-up approach to enhancing culture to support the academic mission.

e. The three main elements of the project were a consultation; training and development mapping; and a behavioural science pilot, all of which were delivered and drawn upon to make high-level, data-led recommendations on how to develop UCL's research culture.

f. It was noted that £33m of Enhancing Research Culture Funding had recently been allocated to HE providers through Research England. UCL was awarded £1m+ in January 2022 for the 21/22 financial year. Internal allocation of the funds was based on the following model: 57% for central proposals benefitting the whole institution; 33% for Faculties for more local activities; 10% for programme and project management and strategy development.

g. It was proposed that the Research Culture Operations Group chaired by the Pro-Vice-Provost (Library, Culture, Collections and Open Science) would develop a Research Culture Action Plan and that RIGEC would have strategic oversight of the Plan.

11.2. The following points were raised in discussion:

a. The Chief People Officer considered the report to be an excellent piece of work and it offered the opportunity to make a big difference to the culture at UCL. Consideration would need to be given to how to link this work on research culture into other culture work being undertaken across UCL.

b. It was suggested that in allocating the £330k for Faculty level proposals, a selection process would be needed that could be monitored, as well as monitoring of the progress of the successful proposals themselves.

c. It was noted that Faculties were keen to see the central level research culture proposals that had been agreed before preparing faculty level ones. However, there were timelines associated with the funding and all the monies allocated should be spent by 31 July 2022.

11.3. RIGEC:

a. Approved the proposals as set out in the report including that RIGEC act as the Steering Group for the development of a Research Culture Action Plan.

12. Research Ethics Strategy Board

12.1. Professor Cheryl Thomas QC, Chair of the Research Ethics Strategy Board (RESB) gave an oral update report on the Board's work. The key points made were:

a. The RESB was established in 2021 by the former Research Governance Committee and started its work in earnest in the Autumn Term.

b. It had strategic oversight of research ethics at UCL, including developing and reviewing research ethics policies and practices across UCL as well as monitoring and auditing all bodies at UCL that looked after research ethics.

c. Membership included senior academics from each faculty, post graduate representatives and professional services staff involved in ethical review.

d. In light of its broad remit, the Board had split into three working groups

e. The first group was focusing on the governance of local research ethics committees (LRECs), and RESB was expected to delegate authority to approximately 20 local RECs to approve low risk ethical applications from February 2022. Approval of applications for research with high risk ethical implications would remain with the central UCL Research Ethics Committee (REC).

f. The second group was focusing on research ethics communications and training and advising on the development of an online reporting system for research ethics.

g. The third group was covering governance and risk, considering how the Board could ensure proper oversight of the work of the range of RECs across UCL.

h. The Board had been established on an interim basis and its terms of reference required an annual report to RIGEC which would be submitted to the June meeting of RIGEC.

i. This report was likely to highlight several issues of concern involving both policy and process. The volume, scope and type of UCL research activity had grown substantially in recent years, but the systems and processes for ethical approval of research had not kept pace. This had impacted substantially on the capacity and efficiency of the UCL REC. Devolving the approval process for low risk research to local RECs would not in itself solve these issues.

12.2. The following points were raised in discussion:

a. The Chair noted that proposals for the 22/23 budget were needed by the end of the current term. If resources were likely to be required for research ethics, it was suggested that a pre-finalised report on the Board's work would be useful for UMC to view.

b. Professor Lynn Ang, Co-Chair of the UCL REC, noted that the central REC covered a vital function of approving applications for research with high risk ethical implications, which were becoming more complex and often highly contentious, and considered its role to be more than just an operational one. The Chair recognised the importance of the UCL REC's work and the challenges it faced and considered that the Board was in place for more strategic discussion around research ethics.

c. In response to a query about animal research, the Chair of the Board said that work was still being done to determine the best reporting route for the Animal Welfare Ethical Review Bodies.

d. Professor Hart expressed his thanks to the Board for helping the Arts and Humanities and Social and Historical Sciences faculties devolve their ethical approval process. This was unique for both faculties as they had never had a local REC before. However, there was concern that unless

training was made available soon, applications from both faculties would have to continue to be submitted to the UCL REC for approval.

e. It was noted that ethics involving innovation and enterprise was not included in the Board's terms of reference and the RESB Chair and the Executive Director of Innovation and Enterprise would discuss offline whether a structure covering these areas was needed.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

13.   Annual Research Integrity Statement 2020-21 (Paper 2-05)

13.1.   RIGEC approved the Annual Research Integrity Statement 2020-21. It would be submitted to Council for final approval and be subsequently published on the UCL Research Integrity website.

14.   UCL Research Misconduct Procedure - Annual Report 2020-21 (Paper 2-06)

14.1.   RIGEC received the UCL Research Misconduct Procedure Annual Report 2020-21. The Annual Report would also be submitted to Audit Committee for noting.

15.   Research, Innovation and Global Engagement Operations Committee (RIGE-OC) - Update Report (Paper 2-07)

15.1.   RIGEC received the RIGE-OC Update Report.

16.   Date of the next meeting

16.1.   The next meeting of RIGEC would take place on Thursday 24th February 2022[1] at 10:00am on MS Teams.

Ms Rachel Port, Governance Manager: Research Integrity, Secretariat
February 2022

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[1] This meeting was subsequently postponed and it was rescheduled to take place on Wednesday 9th March 2022 at 2:00pm.