

ROBERT GORDON UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Minute of the meeting held on 27 May 2020 (2.00pm – 4.00pm).

Present: Professor P Hagan (Convener), Dr J Blackwood, Dr S Christie, Professor K Cooper, Professor S Duthie, Professor R Flin, Dr E Gillibrand, Professor C Kennedy, Professor R Laing, Dr A Lamb, Professor L Lawton, Professor J McCall, Mr C MacLean, Mr C Moule, Professor J Njuguna, Professor S Pedersen and Professor S Vertigans.

Apologies: Professor D Gray and Professor N Wiratunga.

In Attendance: Ms K Fraser, Mrs F McLean Whyte (Secretary) and Ms P Sledzinska.

1. **MINUTE**

The Committee **approved** the *Minute of the meeting held on 26 February 2020 (RC/20/2)* and considered matters arising from the minute.

1.1 **Carnegie Scholarships [RC/20/1/1.4]**

[REDACTED]
Fewer scholarships had been available due to the impact of the stock market on the available Carnegie Scholarships Fund.

Members were encouraged to identify potential candidates as early in the session as possible in order that they might be supported and nurtured through the application process. The Convener **agreed** to support the setting up of an early meeting of potential Carnegie Scholarship candidates.

Prof P Hagan,
Dr A Lamb &
Dr E Gillibrand

2. **RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

The Convener provided an update on the activities undertaken in response to the University's lockdown for the COVID-19 pandemic, and planning for the return to campus. He commended staff for the rapid and effective move off-campus, and for maintaining the momentum since. The University's approach had been to preserve academic integrity and the quality of its provision, but the demands placed on staff during this period were widely acknowledged and appreciated.

The [Scottish Government COVID-19 Routemap](#), published on 21 May 2020, indicated four phases, although *Phase 1* saw no on-campus activity for universities and colleges:

- *Phase 2:* On campus university lab research restarted subject to physical distancing;
- *Phase 3:* Universities and colleges phased return with blended model of remote learning and limited on campus learning where priority. Public health measures (including physical distancing) in place;
- *Phase 4:* College and university campuses open – including key student services with any necessary precautions.

There was a general feeling in the sector, however, that a phased return might happen earlier given the right conditions. Current expectations were that after initial business-critical preparations had been made, researchers with externally-funded projects and/or on funded contracts would be the first to return, with research students following in the next phase. This was, however, still under discussion in the University and would be discussed further at the University Management Group meeting scheduled for 3 June 2020. More detailed internal guidance would be issued within the next two weeks.

In addition to research, two other strands of scenario planning were underway – involving campus-enabling and facilities, and teaching and learning. The safety and wellbeing of staff and students would be paramount in all planning.

Financial sustainability would be very challenging for some higher education institutions, particularly those dependent on fee income from international and European students, and those with large student accommodation estates. Although the University was facing a deficit, this was considered manageable and measures were being taken towards securing financial stability in 2021-22. Details of the Executive’s plans would be presented to the Board of Governors on 23 June 2020. Budgets would be reviewed in September 2020 once student numbers were confirmed.

The Scottish Government had announced on 6 May 2020 a one-off £75 million increase in funding for Scotland’s universities to support research against the financial impact of COVID-19 and contribute to the challenges Scotland was facing, particularly in respect of supporting businesses and postgraduate research students. It was not yet clear, however, how this funding would be distributed across the sector.

3. **RESEARCH EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK 2021**

The Committee noted a paper confirming the expected *units of assessment* the University intended to submit to, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A final decision had yet to be made on the Units of Assessment and individuals whose outputs would be submitted would be notified formally.

The UK REF team, working with the Funding Councils, was working on revisions to the REF timetable. It had been agreed that the 27 November 2020 submission deadline no longer applied, but the census date for staff of 31 July 2020 would remain unchanged. They had also committed providing eight months’ notice of a new deadline.

The Committee considered the University's response to the [REF 2021 Survey: initial views on REF timetable](#), submitted for the 5 May 2020 deadline. The views gathered through the online survey would inform the decision as to whether an early single submission deadline of 31 March 2021 was feasible. Other approaches might involve a phased deadline, starting with staff and outputs in March 2021, or a delay of six months or more for all aspects. Decisions would take into account the effects of the impact of any delay, as well as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and any subsequent resurgence. Views and preferences across the sector were divided.

The Convener confirmed that the draft *University-level environment statement (REF5a)* would be finalised shortly.

There was still time to consider newer outputs, although they had to meet open access requirements, which the Library Service could help with. It was also possible that the current COVID-19 situation provided new opportunities in emerging areas but it was unlikely there would be sufficient time to develop such opportunities to their fullest advantage.

Eligibility for inclusion remained unaffected due to the unchanged census date.

The Convener confirmed that the draft impact case studies would still be required by the end of May/early June, as previously advised.

Research
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Members

The Head of Research Strategy and Policy **agreed** to circulate the guidance from the main panels on multi-authorship and determining individual contributions and the definition of an early career researcher.

Dr E Gillibrand

Secretary's Note: subsequent to the meeting, the Head of Research Strategy and Policy posted the Panels' guidance on multi-authorship, and the definition of an early career researcher at the [Research Committee's Teams file page](#).

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4. **RESEARCH STRATEGY AND RESEARCH INVESTMENT**

4.1 **Research Strategy and Investment**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

4.2 Orkney Project

Consideration was given to a short update from the Research Funding Manager on progress and activities since early March 2020. Highlights included:

- the Orkney Project Team agreed to rename the initiative, **RGU Orkney**. This move was made following feedback from local stakeholders and aimed to provide greater clarity that *RGU Orkney* supported a series of inter-connected activity strands, rather than a single research project;
- although many planned events had been cancelled or postponed indefinitely, progress had continued on several projects following moves to virtual meetings and increased levels of online collaboration. Local stakeholder engagement continued, albeit at a reduced level, and awareness-raising of *RGU Orkney* continued locally, through a series of connected press releases and social media posts;
- Gray's Mobile Art School was due to visit Orkney in the week beginning 16 March 2020, with a series of events planned with local schools and community groups. Unfortunately, this had been postponed amid growing safety concerns at the time and would be re-scheduled.

4.3 Key Performance Indicators

The Committee considered the *Research Activity Analysis*, including COVID-19-related proposals submitted or in development.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The future, however, would be challenging as the implications of Brexit on funding sources became known and the longer-term impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy. In respect of the latter, whilst health and social care areas were likely to benefit it would likely be at the cost of putting other subjects at risk.

Although of lower value and the fact that intellectual property was transferred to the company, Innovation Vouchers were often valuable introductions to new opportunities, and higher education institutions' performance was monitored by the Scottish Government.

Prior to the University's lockdown there had been plans to launch an internal Research Leaders' Network, and it was **agreed** this might be a valuable forum for the peer review of proposals and applications.

5. RESEARCHER DEVELOPMENT

The Committee received a presentation from Ms Paula Sledzinska, Research Training Coordinator, on current activities and plans for the future. These included:

- Since the beginning of lockdown, the Graduate School and the *Early Career Researcher Network (ECRN)* had focused on the development of researcher activities in an organic and community-led manner. The initial goal was to ensure research students and early career researchers could be brought together at a time of isolation. Some valuable projects have developed from these early sessions. Alongside the regular get-togethers with researcher wellbeing in mind, a *Quick Quarantine Colloquium* had been initiated, a weekly Tuesday Zoom session for research students to share their current projects with a wider academic community. Based on a '5 slides x 5 minutes' structure, these events had proven to be a great way to engage with fellow-students and research staff from across disciplines, allowing research students to develop diverse presentation skills, as well as strengthening a sense of research culture at the University.
- Aware of the many challenges working from home had posed to research students, an online version of the *Focused Study/Shut Up and Write* sessions were being run every Thursday. Providing writers with a 'virtual hub' space, these sessions had been helping researchers to keep their minds in the writing zone in spite of difficulties: motivating one another other and enjoying writing as a social process.
- Research training workshops devoted to NVivo, Worktribe and Scopus had also been run and very well attended and further sessions were being organised collaboratively with external trainers as well as RGU colleagues within the Research Strategy and Policy Office, Library, DELTA and Leadership Development and Careers Office. These would contribute to an annual researcher training programme, which would complement and expand sessions currently offered through different channels at the University and as part of the PgCert Researcher Development modules. Some of the upcoming researcher training sessions included: Data Management, Tackle The Thesis series: Writing and Thriving, Academic English, Plagiarism (to be confirmed) and Thesis Structure, Careers series (Academic and Non-Academic Pathways for PhDs in autumn), How to get Published?, Peer Review, Storytelling for Researchers, Elevator Pitch and Viva Survival.
- The Early Career Research Network had also re-established regular 'Catch-Ups' fostering interdisciplinary conversation with a view to developing future collaborations amongst RGU staff. The sessions were oriented around network members presenting their research to colleagues in an informal, peer-oriented setting, focusing on the early career researcher experience and academic career development. A Summer Programme of training sessions was currently being advertised to the early career researchers. Responding to a great demand, it would be oriented around various aspects of funding, personal effectiveness, and networking. In line with the feedback gathered from the ECRN members in March, these development sessions would be run in an interactive format encouraging greater engagement within the group and developing better understanding and awareness of the ECR experiences, goals and training requirements. As identity, trust and commitment to the Network's objectives developed, a more structured training programme would be gradually built and rolled out throughout the next academic season.

- While lockdown had certainly posed serious difficulties for higher education, the shift to online delivery had worked well in the context of researcher development at RGU. It was anticipated a relevant and exciting training programme would emerge out of the current experiences combining existing and new activities which will benefit the University’s researcher community and enrich campus life, hopefully in the not-so-distant future.

The Committee congratulated Ms Sledzinska on the significant progress achieved to date in challenging circumstances, and the exciting plans for the future that were gathering momentum. Members were encouraged to think about other ways in which she might be supported with new and existing initiatives.

Ms P Sledzinska
Research
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Members

The Head of Entrepreneurship and Innovation proposed that early career researchers could engage with the Elevator Pitch and other current initiatives being run by the Enterprise and Innovation Group and **agreed** to liaise with Ms Sledzinska.

Mr C Moule &
Ms P Sledzinska

6. RESEARCH INTEGRITY AND ETHICS

6.1 Concordat to Support Research Integrity

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A draft *Annual Statement* would be prepared for the Board of Governors meeting scheduled for 24 September 2020, and would involve the engagement of Research Committee members.

Prof P Hagan &
Dr E Gillibrand

7. AUDIT

The Committee noted the *UK Research and Innovation Funding Assurance Report 2019-20 (DBR-0908-1920)*, issued in May 2020 and confirming a *Substantial Assurance* rating. This was a considerable achievement as the audit had been significant task given the size of the University.

The *Terms of Reference* for the PWC internal audit of *Research Management*, scheduled from 4 May to 12 June 2020 were noted.

8. COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT: SESSION 2019-20

The Committee’s *Annual Report: Session 2019-20*, containing an analysis of responses from the *Committee Evaluation Questionnaire* and of members’ attendance, was noted. There were no items it wished to bring to the attention of Academic Council.

Academic
Council Report
[09.06.20]

Members were encouraged to forward suggestions for future agenda items to the Convener and the Secretary.

Research
Committee
Members

9. **DATE OF MEETING: SESSION 2020-21**

Wednesday 4 November 2020, 2.00pm, via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday 10 February 2021, 2.00pm, N204, Sir Ian Wood Building

Wednesday 12 May 2021 at 2.00pm, N204, Sir Ian Wood Building

Professor P Hagan, C

3 June 2020

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