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University Research Committee (URC)

Minutes

date: 28 February 2014
time: 09:30 am
location: G5.05 - High Wycombe Campus

14.01 Welcome / Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received and noted separately.

14.02 Minutes of meetings held on 28 June 2013 and 18 October 2013

The minutes of the meetings held on 28 June 2013 and 18 October 2013 were accepted as an accurate record.

14.03 Matters arising

All actions had been completed except for those items on the agenda.

14.04 University Research Strategy (Paper URC 14.1)

The Chair presented a first draft of the new Research and Scholarship Strategy. The Strategy linked to the University's vision and mission and had a number of goals:

1. To achieve Research Degree Awarding Powers (RDAP)
2. To build a reputation as a provider of first choice through research-informed curricula.
3. To have clear aims of discipline areas in which the University intended to submit under in the next Research Excellence Framework. These would map on to teaching strengths and partnerships.
4. To support the careers of academics by facilitating research and scholarly activity.

The Committee supported the draft Strategy and made further suggestions:

- The metrics for RDAP could be used to set milestones for Faculties and Departments to enable locally set targets.
- The relationship between research and scholarship should be revisited to enable academics to position themselves on a scholarship to research trajectory.
- A separate HR policy could be required in relation to staff development pertinent to research and scholarship which would feed into the People Strategy.

- Commitment would be needed from line managers, particularly where a current focus is teaching delivery.
- A greater understanding of the balance of teaching and research and how research informs teaching needed to be resolved at a number of levels.
- Appropriate staff development was considered important not just for early career researchers but also for line managers who could be enablers or blockers.
- The goals should be turned into Key Performance Indicators to ensure that they remain a priority and a greater emphasis on achieving research and scholarship goals should be given to line managers, with clarity over what this would mean in practice.
- The value of externality needed to be recognised.
- An event should be held for academics in a managerial role who do not have research backgrounds to demystify the requirements of the Strategy.
- All Heads of School and Heads of Academic Departments should be invited to the Research Conference in March.
- The Strategy should be a topic for the Managers' Forum.
- The library should have a greater role in promoting scholarly activity through avenues such as the Research Gateway and academia.edu.
- A representative from Marketing & Student recruitment should be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to discuss requirements for capturing ongoing research activity through video and other media

Action: Secretary

The Chair agreed to make amendments to the Strategy in light of the above discussion. A second draft could then be discussed at a number of fora, including the Managers' Forum, with an aim of taking a final version to Senate in June.

Action: Chair

14.05 Institutes and Centres (Papers URC14.2a-m)

- a** The University currently had a number of Institutes, Centres and Research Groups and it was considered that clarity was required with regard to the taxonomy of these and the type of web presence they should have. The following points were made in discussion:
- Each grouping needed to declare their mission, against which their performance could be measured.
 - A more clearly defined process was needed regarding the formulation of mission statements.
 - Groups should be able to demonstrate a strong alignment between research, partnerships and curricula.
 - The legalities around the use of the term institute needed to be ascertained.
- Action: Chair**
- Institutes should be vehicles to achieve institutional goals
 - Institutes should have the potential to be interdisciplinary and be able to cross structural boundaries without hindering activity.
 - The principle of rewarding both parties should be adopted where departmental staff have had a role in achieving outputs through an institution.
 - The same marketing material could potentially be used in different places to maximise profile. The nature and positioning of the Institutes would be considered, so that Institutes who deliver training, for example, would be appropriately marketed and not appear on the Research pages.

A list of all institutes and groups was considered by the Committee. Clarification of the activity of some of these groups would be sought.

Action: Head of Research (S&H) & Chair (RDC)

The reports from the Institutes would be reviewed against the mission statements and financial data and a report would be sent to the next meeting of the Research Committee and FMTs.

Action: Chair, Heads of Research, & Chair (RDC)

Reports will be considered on an annual basis in future years at the Spring meeting of the Committee.

b Proposal for new Research Group (Paper URC14.3)

The Director of Learning & Teaching presented a proposal for a new Research Group entitled 'Higher Education Research & Development' (HERD). A call for expressions of interest brought a positive response from over 40 people and an initial meeting resulted in agreement to put forward the proposal. Potential overlaps with current research groups had been explored but it was believed that confusion of focus between groups would not be an issue. The group would have a number of thematic clusters reflecting the range of interests.

Members of the Committee warmly supported the proposal and approved the formation of HERD.

14.06 Fees for research degrees 2014-15 (Paper URC14.4)

A proposal was presented that rationalised the fee structure for clarity and fairness for 2014-2015. The proposed fees were approved by the Committee.

14.07 Finance and research projects

It was noted that there had been some confusion when compiling financial data for the REF and that there was scope for improvement in the way project information was recorded and coded. It was agreed that this should be taken forward by a Working Group to include the Heads of Research, the Finance Business Partners and the Secretary. In the first instance, a meeting would be convened with the Deputy Head of Finance to alert him to the nature of the issues to be addressed.

Action: Secretary

14.08 Office accommodation for research students and staff

It was noted that there were a number of issues around the provision of office accommodation for research staff and students. The lack of accommodation at Uxbridge had been resolved by use of space in the Research Office at High Wycombe. A query was raised about the number of hot desks versus dedicated user desks in the room. It was agreed that all desks should be set up for multiple users and that full time students should be informed that if they are not at their desk then others should be able to use the facility.

Action: Head of Research (DMM)

The Chair noted that additional space would be made available on the top floor of the South Wing as part of the Campus redevelopment.

An additional issue concerned not just office accommodation, but access to buildings at evenings and weekends. This was being resolved through allocating dedicated space for researchers in the library and extended opening hours.

14.09 Bucks Spring 2014 Research Conference

The Chair reported that preparations for the Research Conference were well under way. Videos were going to be made of 'talking heads' who would explain their intrinsic motivation to undertake research. An overview of the last REF would be presented plus discussion around impact case studies and the types of impact at the University. Two Early Career Researchers would present their research plans with the aim of then encouraging people to consider their own individual 5 year research plans.

It was agreed that a Research Conference should be held on an annual basis.

It was considered that it would be helpful to give PSEs a broader appreciation of research activity at Bucks and this could be achieved through a Bitesize session in the first instance.

Action: Principal Registrar

14.10 Bucks Knowledge Archive (Paper URC 14.5)

The learning resources representative put forward a proposal to the Committee to migrate the current Bucks Archive from a server purchased through JISC funding in 2007 on to more resilient hardware. Three options were put to the Committee:

1: Do nothing which could compromise the functionality and business continuity of the Archive.

2: Migrate the Archive to a dedicated repository on the CREST server. This would enable more efficient management of the Archive as technical support, system management and software upgrades would be managed by CREST. The cost would be factored into the learning resources budget.

3: Relocate the Archive to the CREST shared repository. This would mean that the individual identity of the Archive would be lost as a number of institutions were making use of the shared facilities. The cost would be factored into the learning resources budget.

The proposal favoured the dedicated repository on the CREST server and the Committee saw no reason not to choose the library recommendation. This option was agreed by the Committee. The Learning Resources representative was requested to report back to the Committee after the migration and provide a presentation on the use of the new facility.

Action: Secretary to contact Learning Resources representative

14.11 Report from Research Degrees Committee (Paper URC14.6)

The report from the Research Degrees Committee was noted. In particular the forthcoming periodic review of the research degree programme by Coventry University was flagged.

14.12 Report from University Ethics Panel (Paper URC 14.7)

It was noted that the University Ethics Panel was working well. Notification had been sent by the Deputy Chair to the Heads of School about the new departmental sub-committees and the next challenge would be to ensure appropriate support for the new system.

Prepared by: Minute Secretary

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