**Minutes of the School Policy and Resources Committee (SPRC) meeting**

**Wednesday 02 February 2022**

**12:00 – 14:00 [via Zoom]**

**Present:** Mark Baker, Martin Banks, James Evans (first hour), Martin Evans (Chair), Kay Hodgson, Laura Ingleby, Steve Jones, Lizzy Langton, Kerry McCann, Khalid Nadvi, Jonny Huck, Sarah Lindley, Stephen Walker, Isabella Machin (minutes)

1. **Apologies:** Tania Smith, Edita Pymm, Laura Black, Juup Stelma, Kelly Osgood &

Lorna Pontefract

1. **Minutes of SPRC Meeting held on 10 November 2021**

The minutes were approved.

1. **Head of School Report (ME)**

Research related travel is picking up, with ME signing off the majority of risk assessments.

The process for all colleagues is to send risk assessments to Fidel Peacock (FP) to streamline the information and triage to the most appropriate departments. It was advised that high risk travel can be approved at SEED level however, extremely high risk travel will require approval from the Faculty.

To minimise on approvals delays, it was suggested that an automated response should be applied to email requests, in order to manage expectations and ensure assessments are submitted in a timely manner. The current form specifies that around a month is advisable, with a longer period to be considered if ethical approval is needed. This text can be reviewed and updated.

**Action: Information to be added to Academic Absence automatic response, linked to risk assessment turnaround.**

**Action: Confirmed list of high risk and extreme risk countries to be circulated to all staff for information when compiling risk assessments (Kerry to raise with Fidel).**

Currently, fieldwork should be signed off via a risk assessment if taking place off campus. There is currently no generic risk assessments for focus groups/interviews though, this may be looked into as the University moves closer to business as usual. It was stated that the beginning of term should give a clear indication on how close the University are to this however, if this results in an increase of COVID cases, there will be a substantial impact on operations.

A University letter signed by ME is due to be circulated to those members of SEED staff who are yet to define the measures that were put in place to cover any missed intended learning outcomes (ILOs), as a result of the industrial action. This is currently being cross referenced by Martin Banks (MB), with the list of those that joined the strike. This is due to be sent this week.

ME was requested to provide numbers around SEED Size & Shape activity for the Faculty Size & Shape project. SEED has already budgeted for this but it was suggested that this was required by Faculty as part of a major project for University funding which, if approved, means that departments can advertise for new appointments. These will not require budget approval in May to be progressed. This may also result in a difference in contribution on the finance model, to the benefit of Humanities.

KH advised that all Estates projects from a School perspective have been included in the Size & Shape feedback to allocate the budget accordingly.

Elizabeth Langton (EL) advised that not all the information has been received and a list of PCMs to be approved should be received in February.

1. **Head of School Operations Report (written report)**

Please refer to paper circulated.

A thorough Estates report will be provided at SLT on 16th February but brief updates include:

* The Kantorowich library – KH will meet with Estates on 3rd February to discuss the new designs received from the Architect. These will be shared with SLT in due course.
* B15 workshop – work has commenced on an extension into the B12 area. FP has met with Scott Miller to ensure the smooth running of this project. SEED have also applied for the space to become part of a useable remit, as this is currently owned by IT.
* EWB – Bee Hughes has met with Estates to discuss potential plans for the A and C wing within the current financial year.
* Longer term projects including the EWB quad are on the list submitted to Size & Shape.

**Risk and Compliance / Health & Safety / Information Governance (FP)**

It was advised that the main concern remains the completion of risk assessments in accordance with planned travel.

**Finance (EL)**

Management Accounts for January show a year-to-date variance of £5.7m better than budget. The majority of this increase is due to additional student fee income. Current work is on the Q2 forecast so a full update will be provided on this at the next meeting.

1. **SEED Email Use Guidance (KM)**

The Email Use Guidance and Core Hours policies were previously approved under Rosie Williams’ tenure. It is now a requirement for these be updated and reviewed, and staff to be made aware of protocol.

Links to these policies have always been included in the academic induction checklist but we should remind all staff and replace the current policies on the SEED intranet with revised versions.

**Action: SEED Email Use Guidance to be redrafted to emphasise that staff do not need to respond out of hours working.**

Steven Jones (SJ) suggested that the policy should reference that responsibility should be on both the sender of the email and the receiver, in order to protect everyone’s work/life balance. Because of the issues also presented with overseas staff, SJ suggested point 1 of the policy to read: It is considered best practice that emails are not responded to in the evenings (after 6.00pm UK time), on weekends or on public holidays. There is no expectation that you open your inbox during these times.

KH agreed, and noted that SLT should be leading by example when managing emails. The use of delayed replies is one solution, as is leaving emails as draft in the drafts folder, to send at a later time.

It was agreed that the policy should stress at the outset that responses are not expected outside of core hours. SPRC approves the policy with these changes, which will be made by KM.

**Action: KM to update Email Use Guidance policy as discussed.**

**Action: Possible automated response timing issues [linked to MS Form usage for example] to be reported to ATOM project by KH.**

Louise Gorton (LG) raised the issue of Key Travel approvals received out of core hours. This can impose an unattainable deadline of 12 hours, at the weekend especially, for approvers. Bookings that are not approved within the required timeframe are cancelled and must be resubmitted. KM has since sent LG guidance about KT backup approval process.

1. **Core Hours Policy (JH)**

JH reported to the Committee that there had been high numbers of complaints around the awareness of core hours, stating that this was due to staff confusion on how to apply the policy to their current schedule. In light of this, JH has provided further detail in the policy to clearly define core hours, how it should be applied and what it is applied to.

KN registered his agreement with the principle however, questioned the flexibility of the system when establishing core activities outside of the proposed core hours. Colleagues should not be systematically excluded from meetings due to scheduling outside core hours. However where necessary there can be flexibility as long as we align with this principle.

JH advised that discretion would be needed around the size of the group and how difficult scheduling would be within the core hours. ME added that there was an obvious need for a distinction between school and departmental meetings and smaller groups with formal school/department meetings taking priority within the core hours.

Mark Baker suggested that, due to hybrid working, we may need to establish the increased scheduling of dual meetings. ME proposed the revised policy was to be approved and discussions will continue on dual meetings and hybrid working, with emphasis on the importance to attend some meetings in person, despite the increased amount of dual meetings. PS staff pilots are currently in progress to maximise engagement in the range of hybrid meetings. SLT confirmed their approval and these discussions will be returned to.

1. **T&L update (CG)**

Please refer to presentation circulated.

CG confirmed that the TAs are currently happy currently and there are no current issues are regarding SEED processes.

Geography and GDI are having issues with availability of GTA’s, with the latter using more than other departments especially. Suggestions were made for both an increase in funding for PGRs through the School budget and to identify a regular group of Senior Tutors to conduct TA activities. This has occurred in MIE and Geography however, this generated further issues with career progression. It was also noted that this would require meticulous work on budgeting and costs. Going forward, SEED may need to think more strategically about Senior Tutors and external support from other Universities TAs.

**T&L update (AB)**

AB established partnerships with five schools for WP purposes:

* Blackrod Primary
* Waterhead Academy
* Laurus Ryecroft High School
* Trinity
* Ashton Sixth Form

The aim is to organise a MIE school visit, allowing students from the above schools to visit the campus in the Spring and receive mini lectures from five MIE staff). Ideally, all the lecture recordings and the SEED visit will be uploaded to the SEED website, along with recordings of open days and student testimonials, to boost recruitment. The SEED WP budget will also be used to fund post offer holder visits. AB will continue work with the SEED study skills sessions, SEED writing centre, and outreach.

It was observed that AB’s final day is 31st July 2022 and thanks were noted.

Suggestions for the priorities for AB’s successor included the continuation of reaching out to Schools for potential partnerships and the practical use of funding, as the colleague sees fit.

**Action: Document on T&L projects to be cascaded to SLT for information.**

1. **PREP form revision (SL)**

SL confirmed that both the updated SEED policy on Research ‘Buy-Ins’ and Research-linked Workload Adjustments and the Research Group application form are now available on Teams. The Prep form and Sabbatical guidance documents were submitted to the Research Committee for approval.

The Research ‘Buy-Ins’ and Research-linked Workload Adjustments paper has been slightly amended to emphasise that applying for grants is part of the core academic duties and that colleagues should be in conversation with HoDs to negotiate workload relief if they receive grants outside of the policy timeline.

The Research Group application form received a positive response from SPRC. KN raised concerns around new research groups increasing without others closing down and the need for recognition from the Research Committee and departments to continually revise this. SL advised that this was the reasoning behind instructing departmental coordinators to sign these off as this would encourage negotiation at this level. KN agreed with SL that this should not be specifically detailed in the form but the Research Committee and departments should consider this. The reference to critical mass in the document may also help to address this and SJ welcomed further guidance around this and what we are aiming for in terms of our research group structure. From a strategic point of view, information is needed on the criteria to be used when signing and practically, what critical mass should be.

SPRC agreed with the requirement of the HoD and departmental Director’s sign off.

ME suggested further questions should be added to form to emphasise the need for negotiation, including:

* Has this been discussed at a departmental forum?
* Has this been discussed with a School Research Director?

Indicative numbers of research groups per department will be referenced the document but this will be for guidance only. To ensure the groups are monitored in terms of output, it was confirmed that there is scope for Research group leads to attend research committee every few years. SL stipulated that applications will only be accepted from research coordinators.

The SEED policy on Research ‘Buy-Ins’ and Research-linked Workload Adjustments for staff on T&R contracts was approved by SPRC.

The SEED Prep template has been updated with guiding questions to prompt people to consider the resources available to them and to aid discussions with research groups. It was agreed that in addition to departmental coordinators and School research Directors, HoDs and the Head of School should see the completed forms.

It was agreed that the document repository would be managed by departmental administrators and stored in secure central School Office folder. Copies may then be sent to the Research office for information.

Pending adjustments, the Committee were in agreement with the updated form remaining a pilot and the need to instate this process imminently. To aid this, a list of Prep reviewers will need to be matched with colleagues and the School should be made aware that we are in Prep season via a School wide communication. HoDs agreed to amend lists and ensure forms are useable within 1 week, ensuring completion before the Easter break. Colleagues that HoDs can identify as looking for more support should be prioritised and completed by end of February.

Stephen Walker (SW) will make a decision to use Architecture research mentors as Prep reviewers; KN stated that GDI PDR mentors are the same as their Prep reviewers.

**Action: MB to circulate list of colleagues with increased interest in Prep, for completion by end of February.**

KM advised the committee that Melissa Markauskas circulated information to HoDs and departmental administrators on 31st January, with an updated staff list, for working to begin on allocation of mentors.

**Action: SL to send the up to date Prep document to MM for information for HoDs.**

1. **Sabbatical policy, form and process (SL)**

Louise Gorton (LG) and SL edited this document to confirm that sabbaticals are to be taken as a calendar year rather than an academic year to avoid issues with courses, due to staff absence. A request was added for more information to be provided, to ensure the smooth running of eligibility checks as well as a qualifier, that the School expect particularly larger grants to be submitted.

1. **Any Other Business**

No other business was noted.