

## Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences (DEES) Research Committee

Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> May 2022

### ACTION MINUTES

**Attendees:** Professor Gordon Mcfiggans (Director of Research and Chair)  
Professor Mike Burton (Head of Department)  
Dr Margaret Hartley (Geosciences)  
Professor Cathy Hollis (Petroleum and Basins)  
Professor Jamie Gilmour (Planetary Sciences)  
Cassandra Kenny (Research Support Manager)  
Dr Jon Pittman (PGR Director)  
Professor Sam Shaw (Molecular Environmental Sciences)  
Professor Suzanne Shultz (Ecology and Evolution)  
Dr Cathy Walton (EDIA)  
Prof Roy Wogelius (Ancient Life)

**Apologies:** Hugh Coe, David Johnson, Ray Burgess

### Reports:



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### Previous Actions Update:

- 1) GM fed back comments regarding the new Research IT structure.
- 2) Capital equipment – the ESEM is in the shortlist. HoD included in deliberations. No news on small equipment.

### Key points and Actions:

- 1) iCASE studentships: The BE team are willing to talk to PI's about enhancing business engagement, obtaining industry match funding. Research Group Leads (RGL's) asked to let JP know about potential iCASE opportunities or funders. **(Action: RGL's)**. CH highlighted opportunities for self-funded studentships, of which there are several in the Basins group.
- 2) PGR PS restructure – this aims to provide more PS support overall. More details will be circulated shortly.
- 3) REF results were excellent. This will provide a funding boost to DEES and may partly compensate for lower award revenue.
- 4) New NERC funding schemes – five Pushing the Frontiers bids (as lead) and six Exploring the Frontiers bids planned.
- 5) Application values overall remain low and DEES research activity is recovering slower than other FSE departments following the dip in the pandemic. It is appreciated that many PI's are low on time due to recent teaching and other activities **(Action: CK to provide additional data.)**
- 6) Research Finance restructure – named support for PI's is promised. The two RF teams are

effectively merging back to be similar to the pre-Covid structure.

Discussion regarding technical services concerns – RGL’S reported concerns about quality and high cost of services compared with external service providers. These providers may offer better quality services too. Some lab facilities were shut due to safety reasons, these are now functioning sub-optimally. The EO’s are under pressure and have limited resources, and PI’s are not sure who the key contact is to raise these concerns with. RGL’s were also concerned about the impact on student projects also. MH confirmed similar concerns have been raised by the Geosciences group previously, and MB has flagged issues too. Water supplies should be fixed soon, and he has been advised the other issues are being investigated. JG advised that costings should also be available on PPMS, but aren’t. RGL’s felt a DEES academic contact about these issues was needed.

**(Action: RB to discuss with Brian O’Driscoll and see if he’s willing to be a point of contact)**

**(Action: JG to raise issues at technical steering group)**

- 7) Discussion about improving application rates – Several reasons were suggested for low proposal rates, including technical problem, poor research finance support and the curriculum review. RGL’s felt leadership needed to focus on supporting staff, building morale and positive messaging. SS suggested an away day would be beneficial to help academic staff reconnect and network with colleagues. CH suggested staff should be given 2-3 days break and a discretionary fund to support when preparing research bids. RW stated that the workload model doesn’t take into account time spent preparing proposals. JG has found leadership roles were very time consuming and generated a lot of admin. CH suggested mentoring, peer review and writing workshops would be beneficial at developing relatively inexperienced academics skills. JG felt some initiatives were already in place to foster a collaborative research environment, such as coffee mornings, but staff needed to be encouraged to support these.

**(Action: RGL’s to discuss proposal plans with groups and bring ideas on what to apply for to next Research Committee.)**

**(Action: ALL - Discussion to be continued at next Research Committee and pre-DLT catch up meeting)**

**(Action: Dept away day to be planned)**

#### **Dates of next meetings:**

- Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022, 2-4pm
- Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023, 2-4pm