Minutes

Summary

These are the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting of 12 October 2010

Recommended action

The Committee is asked to confirm these minutes

Trevor Pearce
December 2010
MINUTES OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
12 October 2010

Present:
Dr Tracy Barrett, Dr Rick Cooper, Professor Stephen Frosh [Chair], Dr Oscar Guardiola-Rivera, Professor Patrick Hanafin, Professor John Kelly, Professor John Kraniauskas, Professor Esther Leslie, Professor Joni Lovenduski, Professor Alex Poulovassilis, Professor Li Wei

Apologies
James Emmott, Tricia King, Dean Pateman,

In attendance:
Robert Atkinson (Deputy Librarian), Liz Francis (Head, Research Grants & Contracts), Martin Hodkinson (School Manager – Arts), Trevor Pearce (Deputy Academic Registrar (Academic Services),

1 MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (RC1 2010/11)
Noted:
1.1 (i) the membership for the Committee for 2010/11, together with the terms of reference;

(ii) the Chair welcomed Dr Rick Cooper (Assistant Dean, Research – Science), Professor Joni Lovenduski (Assistant Dean, Research – Social Sciences, History & Philosophy) and Dr Oscar Guardiola-Rivera (School representative – Law) to their first meeting of the Committee.

2 MINUTES RC2 (20010/11)
Confirmed:
2.1 the Committee confirmed the minutes from the meeting of 13 May 2010.

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES RC3 (2010/11)
Noted:
3.1 (i) that, following confirmation that IT support would remain in place to support it, the Robert Boyle project was no longer considered by the College to be a Research Centre according to the College definition;

(ii) that the Academic Board had approved the report from the Review of the College Research School, including the change of name of the School to Birkbeck Graduate Research School;

(iii) that the Academic Board had approved the proposal that all publications produced by College staff should be deposited within the College Institutional Repository where possible.
4. REPORT TO THE ACADEMIC BOARD RC4 (2010/11)
Noted:
4.1 that Academic Board had received the report of the Research Committee meeting of 13 May 2010 and endorsed the recommendations made in that report.

5 CHAIRMAN’S REPORT
Noted:
5.1 that there were no issues to report other than items already featured elsewhere on the agenda.

6 RESEARCH CENTRE APPROVAL RC5 (2010/11); RC6 (2010/11)
Noted:
6.1 the criteria for approval of proposals for new research centres.

6.2 (i) that the proposal to establish a new Centre for British Political and Public Life had been developed over the previous two years;

(ii) that there was no comparable research centre in London despite there being a large number of Politics departments at other Higher Education Institutions there;

(iii) that the vision for the Centre was a slow growing public activity, which would initially concentrate on public events to raise the profile of the Centre, but which, it was planned, would be in a position to develop income-attracting research grants, possibly after the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework.

(iv) that the proposal had been circulated to departments previously, and had attracted interest from other departments within the School of Social Sciences, History & Philosophy and the Department of Management, among others; other Schools including the School of Law would consider whether to affiliate to the Centre;

(v) that the College had appointed Tony Wright as a practitioner fellow, for 3 years from September 2010; his work would be based within the Centre, if the Centre were approved.

(vi) that it was envisaged that a small group of people within the Department of Politics would run the centre on a day-to-day basis, with an advisory board established including Birkbeck graduates with a high profile in the area.

(vii) that Professor Lovenduski would be the Director of the Centre, with support from Dr Jason Edwards and Dr Rosie Campbell.

Agreed:
6.3 the Committee recommended that Academic Board approve the proposal to establish the new Centre for British Political and Public Life.

7 RESEARCH CENTRE REVIEW RC7 (2010/11)
Noted:
7.1 that the Department of Economics, Mathematics & Statistics considered that neither the World Economy and Finance Research Centre nor the Theoretical Physics Research Unit functioned according to the College definition of a research centre, and should be removed from the approved list of College Research Centres.

7.2 (i) that the Sports Business Centre was an enormously productive research centre. It had two linked Masters programmes, ran regular seminar series’ and had attracted research grant income.

(ii) that the centre had a link in place with the Political Studies Association and had run a conference with them during 2009/10.

(iii) that the Centre had a high profile externally to the College and would support the College’s efforts to increase the impact of its research.

(iv) that the Centre would benefit from further links with other departments of the College where research in sport was being undertaken; this would be particularly beneficial to research students. The Birkbeck Graduate Research School could also review methods of disseminating work from research centres to research students to ensure that all students were aware of the resources available to them within the College.

Agreed:
7.3 (i) to remove the Centre for World Economy and Finance and the Theoretical Physics Research Unit from the list of approved College Research Centres;

(ii) to recommend that the Sport Business Centre circulate Departments with details of its research and to invite interested parties to discuss collaboration with the work of the Centre.

8 COLLEGE RESEARCH STRATEGY (RC8 2010/11)
Noted:
8.1 (i) that the Strategy was intended to replace the previous strategy, with a more externally facing Strategy, which would give more specific direction to schools and professional services on the measures agreed by the College to support its research;

(ii) that the Strategy Working Group, which included representatives from all Schools, had met on five occasions and had invited representatives from the professional services to discuss support methods. This had led to immediate changes in communication practices and also to clarification of resource commitments and the impact of the income distribution model on support for research.

(iii) that the Strategy was intended to be a combination of aspirations and detailed targets with projects put in place with a view to enabling the College to review the implementation and success of the Strategy.
(iv) that the Strategy had been circulated for consultation prior to the meeting. Views expressed included the view that targets relating to research income were unrealistic given the likely reductions in funding available from research councils, while the targets relating to PhD supervision and submission could be more challenging; that some of the projects would be more appropriately located within schools rather than professional services; that the focus should be on producing better quality research grant applications rather than higher quantity; that the College should seek to provide “seed corn” funding for research grants; and that the dissemination section should also consider how to disseminate publications written in “academic” rather than “everyday” language.

(v) that contrasting views were expressed as to whether the College should seek to provide extra incentive to staff to develop research grant applications;

(vi) that support was expressed for including “aspirational” targets that committed the College to attempting to increase grant income even against challenging external circumstances. It may however be more realistic to include a target for raising the number of staff attracting research grant income, rather than raising the income itself.

(vii) that it would not be appropriate to include the proactive identification of research grant opportunities in the role of Assistant School Manager (Research).

Agreed

8.2 The Strategy was recommended for approval by the Committee, subject to minor amendments as identified in the consultation period. The final version of the Strategy would be agreed by the Working Group prior to submission for consideration by Academic Board.

9 REF (RC9 2010/11)

Noted:

9.1 (i) that the REF would now take place in 2014, with census dates in 2013;

(ii) that the HEFCE Impact Pilot would report in November; the Working Party would review the College’s preparations in relation to impact once the Report had been received;

(iii) that it was likely that any new research funding model would include greater concentration of lower levels of funding; the College would need to consider whether to adopt a more selective strategy in the context of the financial model likely to be adopted. This would require the College to ensure that any selective policy was in accordance with equality law, and an Equal Opportunities Code of Practice would need to be adopted;

(iv) that the College had now committed to submitting to the Sociology unit of assessment; the College had provisionally committed to submitting to the Geography, Environmental Studies & Archaeology unit of assessment subject to the results of the 2010 Dry Run. The external review of Geography had
concluded that the department had significant areas of potential but also weaknesses that would need to be addressed in order for a successful submission to be made. It was unlikely that the College would submit any archaeologists within this subject area, as they would be entered more appropriately into the History unit of assessment;

(v) that the College had decided not to submit to the Communication, Cultural & Media Studies, Library and Information Management unit of assessment; researchers within the Department of Media & Cultural Studies would be submitted to other units of assessment including Art & Design and Sociology;

(vi) that the 2010 Dry Run was not intended to replicate the REF itself, but was instead intended to provide a basis for judgements on the strength of submissions and areas of improvement to inform the College’s planning for the exercise.

10 LIBRARY SUPPORT FOR RESEARCH RC10 (2010/11)
Noted:
10.1 (i) that the Library was now working on developing the Institutional Repository to support the REF. Guidance was being produced to enable staff to submit their publications and to avoid infringing copyright; in addition the Library had introduced a “take down” policy to implement where complaints about the publication of articles were received;

(ii) that the Library had reviewed policies at other Higher Education Institutions in relation to unrefereed papers, and as a result was proposing to include these papers within the Repository, incorporating clear guidance that these papers were unrefereed.

(iii) that the UCL Institutional Repository included usage statistics on publications; it was hoped that the Birkbeck Repository would be able to develop similar functionality;

(iv) that it was planned that the Library would begin the process of including all publications within the Institutional Repository from 2011/12.

Agreed:
10.2 to recommend that Academic Board adopt the proposals from the Library to include publications published by colleagues who leave the institution, and previous publications from colleagues joining the institution, within the Repository.

11 RESEARCH STUDENT MATTERS
ESRC DTC Application (RC11 2010/11)
Noted:
11.1 (i) that the ESRC had written to the consortium indicating that a decision on accreditation for DTC and DTU status had been delayed until January 2011, pending the government’s comprehensive spending review. The consortium
had been asked for further information in relation to the bid, and the College remained optimistic that the consortium would achieve DTC status;

(ii) that the college had not received any open competition studentships from the ESRC for 2010/11.

Research Student Sub-Committee (RC2 2010/11)
Noted:
11.2 (i) that the sub-committee had held its first sub-committee meeting in May 2010; the sub-committee had agreed to review the Code of Practice for Postgraduate Training and Research and reviewed preparations for the assumption of responsibility for research degree examinations;

(ii) that the College would need to adopt an appeals procedure for research degree examinations, which would be likely to be based on the old University process; the College could consider whether any panel should include a qualified lawyer or a reviewer from an external institution.

12 SCHOOL RESEARCH COMMITTEES RC13 (2009/10)
Noted:
12.1 The reports from the School Research Committees. Future reports would include details of the implementation of the College Research Strategy at School level.

13 EXTERNALLY FUNDED RESEARCH GRANTS RC49i-iv (2010/11)
Noted:
13.1 (i) that research income received by the College had declined from £10.8M to £10.2M in 2009/10; a more detailed trend analysis would follow to the Summer meeting of the Committee.

(ii) that the College had submitted 211 research grant applications during 2009/10; 153 results had so far been received, and of these, 60 had attracted funding, a success rate of 39%.

(iii) that the success rate in 2002/3 had been 55% and had shown a downward trend ever since; this was however in line with the trends shown by comparable institutions.

(iv) that it would be helpful to show statistics relating to research grant income per staff FTE; this would follow in the Summer term report.

14 FUTURE MEETINGS
Noted:
14.1 That the next meeting of the Committee would take place on 11 January 2011.