



Academic Board

RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2025 in Room 7X111 on Frenchay Campus.

Present: Amanda Coffey (Chair), Fiona Cramp, Gareth Edwards, Olena Doran, Andrew Geary, James Green, David Greenham, Bernhard Gross, John Hancock, Tracey John (Secretary), Jessica Lamond, Helena Lewis-Smith, Daniela Paddeu, Jenna Pandeli, Noelle Quenivet, Robin Thorn

Apologies: Amanda Conway, Khadiza Hossain, Philippa Shelton, Danielle Sinnett

In attendance: David Young (Officer), Steph Constantine (item 4.4), Darren Reynolds (4.5), Alison Weeks (item 4.2).

RKEC.25.01.1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

RKEC.25.01.1.1 Members were welcomed to the Committee and apologies were noted.

RKEC.25.01.1.2 No declarations of interest were noted.

RKEC.25.01.2 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

RKEC.25.01.2.1 Previous minutes

Paper RKEC.25.01.01 was received.

RKEC.25.01.2.1.1 Members received the minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2024.

RKEC.25.01.2.1.2 The Chair noted that the Open Research Services Manager has suggested that clarificatory amendments be made to the following section of the minutes: RKEC.24.10.3.2.4 and RKEC.24.10.7.3.2.

RKEC.25.01.2.1.3 Following satisfactory completion of these amendments, the minutes from 17 October 2024 will be confirmed via Chair's action [**Action:** Officer].

RKEC.25.01.2.2**Action sheet and matters arising**

Paper RKEC.25.01.02 was received.

The following items were noted as being in progress:

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| RKEC.25.01.2.2.1 | RKEC.23.11.5.2.3 To review and report on monitoring of central and College-led investment schemes. |
| RKEC.25.01.2.2.2 | RKEC.24.02.3.3.3 To investigate internal allocation of where QR funding is spent, accompanied by funding modelling up until the next REF. |
| RKEC.25.01.2.2.3 | RKEC.24.02.4.2.2 To liaise on developing research partnerships from existing international academic (learning and teaching) partnerships. |
| RKEC.25.01.2.2.4 | RKEC.24.02.7.1.2 To address access to staff email addresses for PhD students. |
| RKEC.25.01.2.2.5 | RKEC.24.07.3.3 To establish a working group to consider how we could be more strategic in relation to research income generation. The group will report to the RKEC committee. <i>Action in progress to be more strategic in relation to research income generation, with the new PVC RKE to take this forward as a priority objective.</i> |
| RKEC.25.01.2.2.6 | RKEC.24.10.5.3.5 All relevant staff to have access to the main Power BI app, with some permission groups for different areas. Access lists to be checked for those staff who need to quickly action this data. |

RKEC.25.01.3**THEMATIC DEEP DIVE****RKEC.25.01.3.1****PGR at UWE Deep Dive**

Presentation was received.

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| RKEC.25.01.3.1.1 | The Committee received a presentation by the Academic Director of the Doctoral Academy. The purpose of the presentation was to develop shared understanding of both the current state of PGR at UWE Bristol and the wider context of PGR within the UK higher education sector, to identify opportunities and challenges for development of PGR at UWE, and to explore next steps. |
| RKEC.25.01.3.1.2 | The following observations were made: |

- 1) Supervisor capacity is a complex issue and only a quarter of academic staff currently supervise. However, assessing actual growth capacity requires local knowledge around individual as well as expertise at scale.
- 2) Student representation is a challenging area for PGR, one currently explored as part of the UWE-wide Reimagining Student Representation Project.
- 3) Higher PRES response rates and prompt sharing of results are both desirable.
- 4) It is unclear if the target metric, as outlined on the Purpose Scorecard, of 120 PGR completions by 2030 will be met. The BI team has been asked to project PGR completions from current recruitment patterns. An uptick is expected in 2026/27 and 2027/28, but then a decrease is projected for 2028/29.
- 5) A key question is how much appropriate and strategic work can be done with the QR investment that is going into PGR.
- 6) Relevant strategic alignment needs to be considered, such as mapping to the UKRI's "New Deal" for PGR.

RKEC.25.01.3.1.3

The following comments were also made in the discussion:

- 1) Incorporating PGR students into the research environment is key to improving PRES scores. In this context it is important to be aware when new PGRs start.
- 2) A strategic approach is needed for encouraging and supporting self-funding PhD students.
- 3) Exploring and expanding the PGR offer through our existing TNE UGT/PGT partnerships was perceived positively, including the possibility of Partnership PhDs.
- 4) Determining the development experience of PGR at UWE will help us narrow our focus and identify areas of expansion.

RKEC.25.01.3.1.4

The Chair thanked the Academic Director for a provocative and detailed presentation. As well as challenges, RKEC saw opportunities in UWE becoming increasingly efficient and strategic with its resources, as well as focused, distinctive and confident in its academic offer for graduate research students.

RKEC.25.01.4

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS

RKEC.25.01.4.1

Progress on the Concordat to support the Career Development of Researchers

RKEC.25.01.03 was received.

- RKEC.25.01.4.1.1 The CHSS Dean in Research and Enterprise, the institutional Concordat lead, introduced a paper updating the Committee on UWE's progress in implementing principles ahead of the publication of the action plan on 25 July 2025.
- RKEC.25.01.4.1.2 As well as a summary of activities to date (such as meetings with key personnel), and a draft 2024-27 action plan that embeds the three core principles of the Concordat, the update included a RAG-rating of actions, timelines for delivery, and the identification of task owners.
- RKEC.25.01.4.1.3 The documentation also outlined challenges, such as the capacity of PGR supervisors, the ringfencing of adequate time for research and personal development, and mechanisms to ensure open, transparent and merit-based recruitment of researchers. In terms of practical and logistical challenges, administrative support and managerial oversight will be required to ensure the timely delivery of the action plan and subsequent progress.
- RKEC.25.01.4.1.4 It was confirmed that RKEC was assured of progress to date. The Chair commented positively on the substantial nature of this update and reminded members that, while RKEC receives detailed assurance on the Concordat (feeding into Academic Board), the entire University needs to take an active, interlinked and pragmatic view of this important institutional commitment.

RKEC.25.01.4.2 Health and safety assurance and the role of RKEC

Paper RKEC.25.01.04 was received.

- RKEC.25.01.4.2.1 The Head of Health and Safety introduced a paper that highlighted the importance of health and safety within the research space. The role of key research leaders within RKEC should be to seek assurance and to ensure that any significant health and safety risk in this area is being effectively managed.
- RKEC.25.01.4.2.2 The following comments were made:
- 1) Moving into more automated/digitised systems should be part of an improved process. The Head of Health and Safety agreed, but the key change should be that risk is effectively managed and integrated into the academic research space (i.e. not "othered").

- 2) Enhancing technical support could form part of the process going forward, particularly for non-lab-based activity. The Head of Health and Safety again agreed, but while the development of technical protocols is important, the focus needs to be on the responsibility of research leaders following through on actions.

RKEC.25.01.4.2.3 The Chair reminded members that the role of RKEC is to receive assurance regarding research strategy, so clarifying the most robust health and safety assurance lines from the Colleges is essential. RKEC to revisit the Head of Health and Safety's recommended "next steps" at a future meeting.

RKEC.25.01.4.3 Update on Research Excellence Group (and REF preparation work)

Paper RKEC.25.01.05 was received.

RKEC.25.01.4.3.1 The Head of Research Excellence updated members on the meetings and activities of the REG since the last report.

The report included an update on the REG membership (James Green nominated as professorial research leader for CBL), a summary of updates from Research England (PCE Pilot panel recruitment, open access policy, delays to guidance release), and a summary of key discussion items and work underway (submission size survey, REF 2029 Code of Practice).

RKEC.25.01.4.3.2 Also included in the paper was the REF preparedness update that went to VCE in January (including REF 2029 timelines and key points, changes to volume reported to HESA, REF oversight and governance, UWE 2025 REF review, REF panels, and priorities/key decision points for the year).

RKEC.25.01.4.4 Corporate Research KPI: Insight and Assurance

Papers RKEC.25.01.06, 6a, 6b and 6c were received.

RKEC.25.01.4.4.1 The Business Intelligence Analyst (RBI) introduced an insight piece into the latest activity in research income and external net funding.

RKEC.25.01.4.4.2 It was confirmed to members that the revised 2030 KPI income target of £25m per annum was still some way off. In the 2024/25 year to date, UWE is £6m behind in research income and £2.3m behind in research net funding, across stepped targets. As regards the nature and outcome of external funding bids, a small number

of high value bids represents a disproportionate amount of the intake. Meanwhile 90% of the bidding remains at a low level.

RKEC.25.01.4.4.3 Updates were presented from the College Deans Research and Enterprise to assure RKEC on current and future plans for sustaining and growing research income.

The following points were raised in the discussion:

- 1) An observation was made that small bids should not be discounted as they are positive for academic development. However, the value to early career academics of being part of a large bid proposal was also emphasised.
- 2) The Chair commented that a working balance should be made between small, medium and large bids. Too many failed large bids are an inefficient use of our resources, whereas too many small bids are not helpful either.
- 3) There has been a push into more interdisciplinary work between the Colleges, with cross-collaboration an increasing focus.
- 4) Sharing best practice on successful bidding was encouraged.

RKEC.25.01.4.4.4 RKEC acknowledged that the £25m is a stretch target. RKEC will receive appropriate Board-level assurance through continued close monitoring.

RKEC.25.01.4.4.5 The Chair concluded that there are sufficient commonalities in the College reports to indicate that concerted action is required. The REE team should be assisted by the Colleges to understand and break down the bidding data, to evaluate the human element behind it (i.e. the bidders), to focus on specific areas of success, and to leverage resources on a University-wide basis.

RKEC.25.01.4.5 **Spotlight on research centres: Centre for Sustainable Agri-Food and Environment (SAFE)**
Paper RKEC.25.01.07 was received.

RKEC.25.01.4.5.1 In the first of a series of spotlights, the Director of SAFE, Professor Darren Reynolds, was welcomed to the meeting. He informed RKEC members about the new Centre's aims and ambitions, and its vital role in driving contemporary impacts on food sustainability and biodiversity.

The Committee heard that SAFE works with key researchers and stakeholders in a complex space. The goal of the SAFE Director is to help facilitate a flourishing environment and develop a new generation of problem-solvers in the field.

RKEC.25.01.4.5.2 The collaborative nature of the Centre was commented upon, with opportunities discussed for further strategic connections with other areas of the University, such as expanding work with CBL.

RKEC.25.01.4.5.3 The Director of SAFE welcomed the real positivity being shown by RKEC and invited its members to visit the Centre. The Chair thanked the Director for the insight and the strategic role that SAFE could play in the leveraging of funding.

RKEC.25.01.5 ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

RKEC.25.01.5.1 Research Governance and Integrity risk Review Proposal
Paper RKEC.25.01.08 was received.

RKEC.25.01.5.1.1 The Secretary/ Director of RBI introduced a short paper proposing a moment-in-time "sense-check" of UWE's risk appetite in the research space.

RKEC.25.01.5.1.2 It was noted that the external environment is constantly changing and the University's appetite for risk in this area should be tested. An external review would show that UWE is following best practice and reflecting, in its appetite, the widespread diversity of industries, sectors, and regions of the world.

RKEC.25.01.5.1.3 The initiative was received positively, including by the Chair of the University Ethics and Integrity Committee (UEIC), where the outcome of the review will be communicated in due course. The proposal will now be actioned [**Action:** Secretary].

RKEC.25.01.6 ITEMS FOR ENDORSEMENT OR APPROVAL

RKEC.25.01.6.1 College Postgraduate Research Committee Terms of Reference
Paper RKEC.25.01.09 was received.

RKEC.25.01.6.1.1 The Academic Director of the Doctoral College presented for the consideration of members the Terms of Reference for the College

Postgraduate Research Committee (CPGRC), which has replaced the Faculty Research Degrees Committee (FRDC).

RKEC.25.01.6.1.2 After scrutiny, RKEC agreed that the CPGRC provides an appropriate level of assurance. Nevertheless, before endorsement could be granted, the Committee requested clarification as to why professional doctorates were explicitly identified in the Responsibilities section. Once suitable clarification is received, RKEC will endorse the Terms of Reference via Chair's Action for onward consideration by Academic Board [**Action:** Director of Doctoral Academy/ Officer].

RKEC.25.01.7 ITEMS FOR INFORMATION

RKEC.25.01.7.1 Update from University Ethics and Integrity Committee *Verbal update.*

RKEC.25.01.7.1.1 Members noted the decisions, debates and escalations undertaken in November 2024 by the University committee with oversight of research governance and academic ethics and integrity.

RKEC.25.01.7.2 Annual Statement of Research Integrity 2023/24 *Paper RKEC.25.01.10 was received.*

RKEC.25.01.7.2.1 The Research Integrity Statement was noted as having been endorsed at UEIC and Academic Board and then escalated to PCQSC and Board of Governors.

RKEC.25.01.7.3 Library Services report *Paper RKEC.25.01.11 was received.*

RKEC.25.01.7.3.1 The Committee noted updates on rights retention and JISC NextGen Open Access.

RKEC.25.01.8 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

RKEC.25.01.8.1 None to note.

RKEC.25.01.9 DATE(S) OF NEXT MEETING(S)

Next meeting dates for academic year 2024/25:

- Tuesday 29 April 2025
- Thursday 12 June 2025