

Summary of the UKRI Research Organisation Consultation Group (ROCG) Meeting Thursday 22nd April 2021 (Via Zoom)

Following a recent recruitment exercise, five new members have been appointed to ROCG, with two more reappointed for a further term. Four members will be stepping down following this meeting, and thanks were recorded for their input during their time on ROCG. Yvonne Fox has been appointed as Vice-Chair of ROCG, and will assume the role of external co-Chair when Lita Denny steps down from ROCG at the end of 2021.

A list of current members is appended at [Annex 1](#).

Covid-19 Update

Members were provided with an update on the Post Graduate Researcher (PGR) Covid allocation, which emphasised that UKRI has had to try and balance supporting existing students, while maintaining funding for future ones. The challenging circumstances in which UKRI has been operating were acknowledged, but members noted that there remains a significant burden on ROs in planning and ongoing reporting on the allocation.

On the Covid Allocation (CoA) for Grants, it was noted that there have been three recent updates with the introduction of more flexibility around no-cost extensions; more clarity around use of CoA for ODA projects; and the announcement by UKRI of CoA extension awards. The next stage will be final reporting, and guidance is being developed. UKRI will ask for volunteers from ROCG members to review the guidance. Members welcomed the increased flexibility but highlighted some of the ongoing challenges in managing the funding, particularly in relation to the spending deadlines and the disciplinary split.

The Group agreed that a lessons learnt exercise should be undertaken for both the PGR and COA funds to ensure that UKRI can understand both the successes and challenges of the funding mechanism.

Simpler & Better Funding update

Members were given an update on the Simpler and Better Funding programme, and in particular the development of The Funding Service (TFS). Members noted that input from RO administrative functions will be critical to support any decisions on which elements of the application process can be streamlined. Application information captured may be used to support other activities, so it's important to consider that reducing bureaucracy in one area may increase it in others instead. Interoperability with other systems was recommended to enable a single input of information. UKRI confirmed this is part of the longer-term plan, but the system is being built iteratively so basic functionality will be introduced first. It was agreed that members would identify individuals at their ROs who could help UKRI with the next stages of the system development.

Research Integrity/Bullying and Harassment - Handling Complex Cases

ROCG was given an update on an upcoming project to look at the handling of complex cases involving research integrity and bullying/harassment issues. It was noted that the approach taken would be to put in place advice and guidance in support of culture change, although it was acknowledged that the volume of cases is small. ROCG members recommended that the work should take a broad view across the sector and must acknowledge the competitive nature of research funding as a possible root causes in some cases. The development of 'bitesize' materials to help ROs in communicating with and training staff was suggested as a useful output.

EU/Horizon Europe

ROCG received a presentation from the Director of UKRO on the UK's participation in Horizon Europe. Ongoing restrictions remained in a handful of areas (specifically Space and Quantum research) and it was noted that UKRI is working closely with partners to make the case for ongoing UK participation in these critical areas. There was strong encouragement from members for UKRI to continue to champion issues for the UK research community's position in European schemes once Horizon Europe has launched.

Funding Assurance

Members were advised that UKRI has updated its Memorandum of Understanding with the Wellcome Trust, and has put in place a data sharing agreement with NIHR. The result of this is that UKRI will be able to undertake joint assignments with these funders, with a number planned during 2021 and 2022 - the first of these will be piloted soon – which should result in a single set of recommendations covering all three funders. A pilot joint assignment with Research England has also taken place, and a research integrity assurance exercise will also be undertaken with Research England.

It was noted that The National Audit Office (NAO) has shown interest in Covid related funding, particularly looking for potential fraud. The self-assessment questionnaire has been adjusted in several places to cover issues related to the Covid pandemic like furlough and risk management from the pandemic e.g. what mitigations are in place, and this has been helpful in responding to the NAO.

An assurance piece on doctoral training awards is developed and UKRI will be piloting this as part of current scheduled reviews. UKRI will be reviewing how much funding assurance should use physical visits, and how much should be desk-based reviews in the future as there are clear benefits to both approaches.

Changes to ODA Funding

Thanks were recorded to the sector for working with UKRI on the ODA reductions. This has been the one of biggest challenges UKRI has faced since it was formed, and unfortunately there was very little time to plan before having to enact changes. UKRI is continuing to explore any options with joint funders and within internal budgets to lessen the impact of the reductions. Members flagged concerns that this uncertainty is impacting on RO finance teams and would welcome early notice of any reductions in future years. UKRI believes there is a strong case to be made at autumn spending review around helping deliver the Government's aspirations. Members noted that making the case for the last spending review was a significant collective effort, but that if there is more ROs can do then UKRI should call on them.

Annual Report

Members received a presentation on Annual Report data and the associated website dashboard, which introduced the new 'Fields of Research' classification tool which will be available from July. This is designed to allow applications to be classified on a UKRI-wide level and will classify each application into a single or multiple 'level one' division (22 in total) which covers the full range of UKRI portfolio. These are then broken down internally into level two sub-divisions (157 in total). Title and abstract is being used to classify, and it has so far proved effective for around 90% of the applications UKRI has received last year, and this could be improved in future through improvements in the information captured in abstracts. Using the amount awarded alongside this classification tool will enable people can see how much funding has been awarded in different areas. Based on feedback from members, it was agreed that the option to add these to Gateway to Research (GtR) should be explored in future. Members also recommended that these tools should be more widely promoted to the community.

Trusted Research and Innovation

Members were provided with an update on UKRI's work on trusted research and innovation, noting that work is underway on an update to the T&Cs in the summer. It was confirmed that UKRI is joining up with other work ongoing elsewhere in this space, including UUK and ARMA. Members indicated a willingness to engage further as required.

AOB

A number of areas were highlighted under AOB, including:

- *UUK Effectiveness and Efficiency of University Research Advisory Group, Independent review of Research Bureaucracy* – this group is feeding into the wider review of bureaucracy, and has highlighted the need to take a whole system approach and not just move issues around.
- *ARMA research culture review* - <https://arma.ac.uk/arma-research-culture-survey-report/>
- *UKRI review of the Policy and Guidelines on Governance of Good Research Conduct* – a separate workshop will be organised for ROCG members to input into this policy review.

Annex 1 – ROCG Membership

Member	Organisation	Job Title
Vicki Crossley (Co-Chair)	UKRI	Associate Director of Funding Policy
Lita Denny (RO Co- Chair)	University of Manchester	Head of Research Services
Yvonne Fox (RO Vice Co-Chair)	Lancaster University	Associate Director of Research Services
Andrew Massoura	University of Kent	Head of Research & Innovation Support and Governance
Ann-Marie van Dodeweerd	University of Reading	Director of Research Services
Cheryl Smythe	The Babraham Institute	Head of Strategic Research Development
Julia Sheldrake	University of East Anglia	Head of Research
Julie Williams	Swansea University	Associate Director and Head of Research Development
Lorna Wilson	Durham University	Head of Research Development
Navdeep Bains	University of Warwick	Assistant Director of Research & Impact Services
Sapna Marwaha	LifeArc	Senior Legal Counsel
Elid Morris	Cardiff University	Head of Research Grants & Contracts
Sally Puzey	Coventry University	Director of Research Services
Jo Dekkers	University of Cambridge	Head of Research Operations
Jo Gascoigne-Owens	Newcastle University	Head of Research Funding Development
Lisa Boyce	University of Surrey	Head Pre-Award/Deputy Director of Research and Innovation Services
Linsey Dickson	University of Stirling	Head of Research Development & Performance
Ian McArdle	Imperial College London	Head of Research Systems and Information
Stephanie Maloney	University of Lincoln	Head of Research & Industrial Partnerships & Assistant Director (Research & Enterprise)
Steve Smith (Secretary)	UKRI	Funding Policy Manager