



The
University
Of
Sheffield.

Office UEB/2019/0312/03
Of
The President &
Vice-Chancellor.

Minutes University Executive Board

- Date:** 15 October 2019
- Present:** Professor K Lamberts (KL) (in the Chair),
Professor J Derrick (JD), Mrs H J Dingle (HJD),
Professor S Fitzmaurice (SF), Professor M J Hounslow (MJH),
Professor C Newman (CN), Professor D Petley (DP), Mr R Sykes (RS),
Professor G Valentine (GV), Professor C Watkins (CW)
- In attendance:** Dr T Strike (TS), Dr N Harris (NH) (item 1), Professor L Maltby (LM) and Mrs D McClean (DM) (both items 1 and 2)
- Apologies:** Professor W Morgan (WM)
- Minute Secretary:** Mr M Borland (MJB)

1. Researcher Development

(Neil Harris, Lorraine Maltby and Deborah McClean in attendance for this item)

- 1.1 UEB considered a paper which summarised the work of the cross-faculty Researcher Development Strategy Working Group and made recommendations for a Researcher Development strategy that would both support the strategic aims of the University and Faculties and develop the skills necessary for researchers, at all career stages, to flourish in a challenging external environment. The proposals set out: overarching principles of provision; delivery mechanisms; and an overarching governance structure. It was highlighted that the focus of the work was on Early Career Researchers (ECR). The proposals appeared to fit well with the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, which had been revised and published in September.
- 1.2 Comments made during discussion included:
- Whilst a consultation would take time, it would assist in influencing the cultural changes that were associated with the work.
 - The paper should better reflect that the purpose of a PhD is not necessarily an academic career as many individuals choose to move into industry.
 - It was clarified that the proposed governance structure was developed as ECRs were underrepresented in current structures and in response to feedback that the ECR voice was not always heard. The focus in the proposed governance structure on research and the exclusion of teaching was a reflection that most ECRs only undertook research work.
 - The consultation should have a greater focus on the changes and anticipated impact for ECRs, rather than the governance structure.
 - Regarding the recommendations on career development, the communications for the consultation should refer to the existing suite of available activities in relation to this.

- Issues related to a bridge fund included the potential cost and the risk of increasing expectations that would not then be met. The case for such a fund was not viewed as compelling.

1.3 UEB agreed:

- (a) The overarching principles of provision, as set out in 5.1 of the paper.
- (b) The delivery mechanisms, as set out in 5.2 of the paper.
- (c) The overarching governance structure, as set out in 5.3 of the paper.
- (d) The proposed next steps, as set out in section 6 of the paper, which included a wider consultation on the strategy recommendations and new governance structure, and developing the operational elements required for implementation of the recommendations.

ACTION

- (a) To feed in the two recommendations regarding ECRs and annual reviews to the SRDS Working Group.

2. PGR Update (including 'What is a PhD?')

(Lorraine Maltby and Deborah McClean in attendance for this item)

2.1 UEB considered a paper which provided a brief update on the progress of detailed work undertaken through five work streams commissioned by the University PGR Committee. UEB was asked to focus on three issues:

(a) Mandatory development

UEB considered in principle a recommendation that mandatory development for PGR supervisors be introduced. Whilst the benefits of training for PGR supervisors were recognised, concerns were expressed with regard to having mandatory training, given the volume of training they were asked to undertake.

UEB agreed to request a training proposal be developed which supported the principle of training for PGR supervisors and also addressed the concerns regarding mandatory training.

(b) Recruitment

UEB discussed the medium term aspiration for PGR numbers. Attention was drawn to the context that UKRI had accepted the case that there would need to be an increase in the number of funded students to contribute towards meeting the target of 2.4% of GDP spent on R&D. The following points were noted:

- Ensuring the institution recruited PGR students at quality might be more significant than the number of PGR students recruited.
- The culture within some departments could be to focus more on recruiting funded students, rather than recruiting based on quality.
- The approach to PGR recruitment could be more strategic, for example, with departments stating that they aimed to recruit a specific number of students from a particular country over a given time period.
- In relation to widening participation for PGR students, there was a potential risk if the University were to have its own definition and the Office for Students were to use a different definition.

UEB provided a steer that it would wish to see the overall number of PGR students increase. UEB agreed that there would be discussions with each faculty regarding how to achieve the optimal number of high quality PGR students.

(c) Wellbeing

UEB considered in principle whether the provision of PGR stipend during periods of medical absence ('sick pay') should be extended to University-funded PGRs. It was highlighted that UKRI had made the payment of a stipend during medical leave of absence standard for its studentships. The University's policies for University funded students (whether shared costs, faculty or departmentally funded) usually mirrored those of UKRI. The following points were noted:

- The data was imperfect, but it did appear to indicate that the funding required would not be insignificant.
- International students could also face a disadvantage regarding sick pay depending on their international funder's sick pay arrangements.
- Clarity would be required regarding an international student whose stipend from a sponsor was paid via the University as to whether the risk would be carried by the university, department or the sponsor.

UEB agreed:

- (i) Further work be undertaken to provide:
 - An analysis of the parameters, including: complete alignment with the UKRI position for University funded students; and options greater and less than the UKRI position.
 - Total anticipated cost.
 - An estimate of unknown sick leave within the current system.
- (ii) To engage with international funders regarding how the sick pay arrangements for PGR students who they funded could be enhanced.

3. Semester Dates: Senate Consultation Proposal

3.1 UEB considered a paper that provided proposals for Senate on how a consultation on semester dates could be undertaken. At its June 2019 meeting, Senate requested a consultation on semester dates from 2024/25, for report back to Senate prior to making a recommendation to Council for agreement. Attention was drawn to the previous consultation on semester arrangements in 2012, which showed support for the existing approach, and if there were to be any changes to semester dates there would be a need to avoid any unintended consequences.

3.2 Points made during discussion included:

- The issue needed to be viewed in terms of what was in the best interest of the whole University.
- There were other aspects of the semester dates that could be reviewed at the same time as examining the arrangements in relation to Easter, for example the length from the beginning of the academic year to Christmas.
- The semester dates linked in to other aspects of the University, for example, the Programme Level Approach.
- Practice across Russell Group universities was varied.

3.3 UEB:

- (a) Noted that the semester dates up to and including the 2023/24 academic year had already been set.
- (b) Agreed the consultation should enable consideration of the semester dates more broadly and a range of views to be fed in.

- (c) Agreed that Learning and Teaching Committee should lead the review of the academic year from the student perspective, linked to the Programme Level Approach (PLA).
- (d) Noted that following the consultation, proposals would be brought back to Senate in due course.

3.4 **ACTION**

- (a) The University Secretary to revise the paper and to seek input from the Vice-President Education.

4. **Roundtable**

- 4.1 (a) Staffing:
 - KL reported on the process to appoint a Chief Financial Officer.
 - RS gave an update on staffing arrangements in Student Recruitment and Admissions.
- (b) Research Award: JD reported that Professor Neil Hunter was part of a team awarded a research grant from the European Research Council. The project was one of only 37 across all subjects in Europe to receive a grant.
- (c) Survey reminder: GV asked if FVPs could remind those Heads of Department who had not yet returned time allocation survey data to do so.
- (d) Sustainability: GV asked members of UEB who were Chairs of a PEG to record project decisions regarding sustainability when the PEG reported to the Estates and Capital Sub-Group.