

## **AHUA – Research England UKRI Liaison Meeting**

Tuesday 28th January 2025, 09.30 – 10.30

### **Attending:**

From UKRI: Daniel Moore, Kim Hackett

From AHUA: Mike Shore-Nye, Helen Galbraith, Niamh Lamond  
Ben Vulliamy

## **CONFIDENTIAL**

### **NOTES**

#### **1. General welcome**

- UKRI expressed that they were glad of the opportunity to meet and to re-establish regular liaison with AHUA. They noted that a further liaison is in the diary for March 2025 and they look forward to these becoming a regular contact point. They see the relationship with AHUA as a way of sharing any concerns, exploring future development and ensuring we respectively have a positive flow of intelligence and about relevant sector developments.
- They talked briefly through their specific roles and the wider UKRI structure and were keen to point out that their relationship and engagement with the sector is not as a regulator but should aim to include a degree of information exchange. They pointed out that, while UKRI splits into 3 directorates (Research directorate, knowledge exchange directorate and Insight and engagement directorate,). On this occasion AHUA were meeting with the knowledge exchange directorate.
- They apologised notes and slides had not been distributed in advance but pointed out that, at this stage they are exploring possible action plans and guidance materials they are planning to develop rather than consulting on specific proposals.
- They explained that on this occasion they wished to discuss specifically guidance on how / when / what institutions might notify UKRI of a significant incident and on their plans to develop an EDI action plan.

#### **2. Significant incident reporting**

- UKRI explained that currently the T& C's for funding from UKRI did include a requirement to notify UKRI of any 'major changes in strategic direction and how it might impact on research' though this requirement was not really codified. They are considering issuing guidance on that, perhaps particularly as we are currently in an operating context experiencing significant change and financial pressure. They acknowledged that currently its largely for institutions to consider how they interpret the requirement.
- They explained that they anticipate any report from an institution to be proactive, short (200 words and without appendices) and to allow for follow up if and where necessary.
- They acknowledged that there is an overlap with reporting requirements for OfS and they want to consider how that cross over is managed. They indicated they are talking with OfS about what, when, and whether reports to institutions to OfS as part of their reportable events policy might be shared with UKRI but that there might also

be some developments relevant to research that were separate and not reportable to OfS. They were clear the reasons that UKRI would want foresight of, for example, a plan to merge, is different to OfS and UKRI are interested to consider the impact of a change in research strategy on research funding both for the Department, the sector and individual institutions. Early reporting might allow consideration of how to avoid unintended adverse consequences to research funding distribution and priorities.

- UKRI confirmed that the change would be for England only but acknowledged that Nations may well intend to follow suit. With the nations operating with regulatory and funding powers unlike England where these are split, the solutions may be different. UKRI confirmed they are meeting with Nations about if and how they develop reporting requirements in the next week.
- AHUA mentioned that if the purpose was to gather insight and trends reporting might not be the best way to do that.
- There was some discussion about codifying the extent to which the inevitable frequent consideration of the balance between research and teaching in each institution or of which areas of research secured the best non reputational benefit V's the lowest subsidy might be considered reportable. AHUA suggested perhaps guidance might develop a set of scenarios (for example 'where an institution is considering a reduction of 10% or more in its research workforce this would be considered reportable) this would be helpful.
- AHUA pointed out that duplication would be a key concern but also that they would want the guidance to elaborate on the consequences of reporting / misreporting / not reporting and what institutions can expect in response. It was pointed out that when incidents are reported to OfS it is sometimes unclear if, what and when it should expect a response.
- UKRI confirmed they will look at an SLA approach as part of the guidance but want to also allow some independent interpretation for institutions.
- UKRI confirmed the discussion was very useful and that they would continue to develop the guidance cognisant of the feedback. They are committed to avoiding creating significant additional burden for institutions. They stressed that none of this is intended to influence REF policy or institutional REF approach.

### **3. EDI action planning**

- UKRI confirmed they are currently looking at how they develop an EDI plan. As a Council they do not currently have a single action plans setting out a coordinated strategic approach on what EDI outputs and outcomes they are looking for and how they achieve them.
- They are reviewing existing activity and trying to identify key priorities with a focus on the areas where they can effect the greatest positive EDI change and outcomes cognisant of the UKRI and sector resources and context.
- A summary slide of their intended approach was presented [insert slide].
- AHUA pointed out that many institutions are experiencing reductions in EDI staff and, as they prepare for the REF they are trying to lean more into a single institutional EDI strategy rather than a separate Research EDI plan. AHUA encouraged UKRI to be mindful of how research EDI might be integrated into wider institutional EDI work.
- AHUA pointed out the significant EDI work that already takes place, perhaps particularly with Advance HE (Athena Swan, REC etc) and more widely (Student Minds charter). AHUA suggested that maybe UKRI could support an alignment of the, sometimes disparate, programmes for efficiency and impact gains.
- AHUA asked about the extent to which UKRI's work on EDI action planning would be able to avoid being adversely impacted by wider geopolitical pressure on EDI.

- UKRI responded that they believe EDI remains a critical priority for the Department and the sector but that developments will be developed in ways that are mindful of shifting international perspectives.

#### **4. AOB**

- UKRI confirmed that they have re-constituted an Expert Advisory Group who they are starting to meet regularly with.
- UKRI confirmed they would share slides with AHUA
- UKRI welcomed AHUA continuing to engage its membership more widely on the 2 issues including engaging with specialist staff working with AHUA members.
- AHUA thanks UKRI for a positive and constructive discussion.

Meeting close.

BV, Jan 2025