

Committee on Research Infrastructure

22/10 A meeting of the Committee on Research Infrastructure was held on Monday 16 May 2022 at 11am via Teams.

Present:

Carol Wagstaff (CW), Chair
Guy Baxter (GB)
Luke Bell (LB)
Steven Bosworth (SBo)
Stuart Brown (SBr)
Anastasia Christakou (AC)
Robert Darby (RD)
Aanisah Ehsan (AE)
Jon Gibbins (JG)
Karen Henderson (KH)
Gunter Kuhlne (GK)
Emilia McDonald (EMcD)
Jenny McGrother (JM)
Kirsty Withers (KW)
Tash Easton (Secretary)

Apologies were received from Eugene McSorley and Phil Newton.

22/11 Minutes of the last meeting held on 26 January 2022

The minutes of the last meeting held on 26 January 2022 were approved, subject to the following amendment:

22/04 Annual Research Equipment and Infrastructure Fund 21 / 22 Call

ii. ECR capital competition for 22/23 AREI

The total competition value would be £150k, with a single item limit of £10-20k for science areas and £5-10k for non-science areas. It was suggested that the applicants would present their case in person (following submission of a written application), as historically these are more impactful than written submissions.

22/12 Matters arising and actions

19/12/03 – Governance – Terms of Reference

CW had not had confirmation from the Planning Committee regarding the amount of funding allocated for the next infrastructure call. The guidance would be written over the summer and released in the autumn, prior to RDLs writing their research plans. Any requests must meet the strategic needs of the School and fit in with Research Division Operating Plans (RDOPs). Applicants should also have discussed their proposal with relevant other departments such as Estates etc. Action ongoing.

20/04/01 – Strategy – Discussion on issues arising from 2019 RDOPs

GB was working on a project to identify the academic needs for digital humanities – progress had been made but work was still ongoing. GB reported that the University had recently received £500k of capital funding from AHRC. There were changes taking place around the approach to digital infrastructure around the collections which would impact on storage requirements. Action ongoing.

GB reported that he would be submitting an application to the Design Authority Group (DAG) this week. Software would be needed to help with databasing for research in the Arts and Humanities, which should be in place by the summer.

20/04/02 – Strategy – Update from CAF

KW reported that Anne-Marie van Dodeweerd had contacted platform leads in Jan to establish the biggest issues and how to address these – only food processing and BESS had not responded. She had clarified price and policy with leads and had put template agreements in place with CAF and CINN. It was noted that the process was different for each platform, but that progress was being made and the action could be closed. AC added that understanding the differences between facilities has been important for the operation of these facilities.

20/14/03 – Projects and Programmes Portfolio - REDCap

RD reported that he had not received an invitation to attend a meeting as yet – TE to follow this up.

ACTION: TE

21/19/03 – Governance – Terms of Reference

The amended Terms of Reference had been circulated and were approved. Action closed.

21/25/01 – CRI budget spending priorities

It was important to make sure that all the relevant checks and balances are done before spending is allocated. EM queried what the rules were around installation/structural costs associated with new equipment – applicants should be having conversations with relevant departments before applying. Sometimes associated costs may be covered by the relevant School but the Committee needed assurance that this has been discussed. CW would rewrite the guidance for the next infrastructure fund and circulate to the Committee offline for approval. Action ongoing.

22/05 – Strategy - CAF

KH confirmed that she had sent the current equipment list to GK. Action closed.

22/05 – Strategy - UMASCS

GB would revise infrastructure guidance for the October meeting. Action ongoing.

22/13 Strategy

a. CAF

GK reported that they were working on developing a suitable booking system and a process for instruments that need to be updated. New academic leads needed to be recruited in microscopy, NMR and for archaeology. It had been agreed to split out optical and thermal platforms. CAF would manage a suitable incentive for staff putting

themselves forward for this – perhaps by allocating them dedicated instrument time. There were ongoing problems with building the lab in JJT. GK was working on the 2026 CAF strategy – it was agreed to bring this to CRI in October.

ACTION: GK

b. CINN

The Committee received and noted the CINN report.

c. Estates

EM reported that they were revising the authorisation to work form which is relevant to a number of platform leads when installing new kit. The revised form will help users provide more information needed by Estates to avoid competing projects or Construction Design and Management (CDM) issues. EM would provide further updates on this as work progressed.

The team was working on a new Estates Strategy – this was still in its infancy and would be presented to UEB in August. The general aims and objectives would not change, but there would be further detail on exploring the key themes underneath these.

It was noted that members on this committee tended to be involved in high energy kit which would impact the University's carbon usage. The Committee discussed ways in which it could help the University meet its net zero target and was informed that there would be opportunities for joint working between Sustainability Services and the academic community. CRI may also have to amend its guidance around applications, as the cheapest option may not always be the most energy efficient. GK added that he had been approached regarding a lab efficiency assessment which may be worthwhile. KH added that Technical Services was taking part in the national pilot of the Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (LEAF) and would soon be assessing some labs in SCFP. It was suggested that GK could join the group on this to represent CAF.

ACTION: KH/GK

GB noted that museums and collections were also not very sustainable due to the large amounts of digital and physical storage space required.

It was agreed that it would be useful to have a joint paper from Estates/Technical Services in the future on sustainability, how CRI can help support this agenda and what CRI should be considering when reviewing funding applications. This would be added to the Spring term agenda.

ACTION: EMcd/KH

d. DTS

DTS have set up a Research Software Engineering (RSE) Group for RSE communities in the South, in order to network, collaborate and share skills and resources. Plans to migrate the Lyle Research Data Storage Centre were progressing, with an aim to complete the move by mid-July.

The provision of an Archive Data Storage platform has unfortunately been delayed whilst we await Smart Tiering technology to help archive items that are rarely used, and save money on storage needs.

Research cloud migration needed to take place urgently, as if the University did not move to the new Nutanix VMs by the end of month there would be serious financial

consequences. DTS would be contacting those affected this week.

Longer term, DTS would be testing out a replacement for NX for Linux systems and be aiming to provide free personal research storage space for staff. There were also plans to develop a hybrid conferencing capability – DTS was working with Events and John Gibbs on this. DTS was also working on a new Digital Strategy with a similar timeline to that of Estates.

JG added that as the infrastructure was being refreshed, it would be good opportunity to remind researchers about good practice regarding storage and archiving. RD/SBr will work on some Comms on this, as well as encouraging planned approaches to data management. Systems should be designed to facilitate good practice.

ACTION: RD/SBr

It was agreed that RD/GB/SBr would meet to discuss some of these plans further and put a paper together on a joined-up approach.

ACTION: RD/GB/SBr

e. UMASCS

It was noted that the Digital Preservation Policy had been approved. GB added that data storage was not limited to research and that record management was also heavily reliant on changing technologies. Subject to DAG approval, the UMASCS and MCE digital asset management systems will move to a shared hosted infrastructure.

The Herbarium move was progressing well, with much being moved to offsite storage. These provided workspaces for PhDs to easily access the material. In addition, a plan was being finalised and costed for moving material out of the citadel.

f. Technical Services

KH would bring a report to the next meeting on recruitment, training and resilience of Technical Services staff. She would also be looking at the roles of these staff and how they can get more involved in research to develop them over the summer.

g. Biological Safety and Radiation Safety

JM reported that the University must apply for a new radiation permit to the Environmental Agency by the end of August. The Scientific Safety Advisor would be getting in touch with Schools to ask about future radiation use and storage needs to include in the application. It was noted that if a new project arose which was not covered by the permit, then the University would need to submit a variation request. Although the work involving radiation had decreased, it was still a lot of work to monitor and maintain, so thought was needed about whether it was more appropriate to use external partnerships instead.

In April, HSS had hosted a meeting with Technical Services and Estates to consider interactions/sharing of comms and ensure that everyone knew when to communicate with each other and who was responsible for what. One item that came out of this meeting was the importance of engaging users early on and throughout any processes.

22/14 Projects and programme portfolio

a. BESS

The Committee received and noted the BESS report. The Lab would be relaunching

shortly, with an in-person event at the end of summer. Discussions about continued support are taking place.

b. RedCap

It was agreed that this would be monitored as 'business as usual' and could be removed from the agenda.

c. Capital Equipment Fund

KW reported that for the last AREIF call, Nandini Vasudevan submitted an application for a Vevo system (small animal ultrasound). The application was not successful under this call but Angela Clerk in SBS has now submitted an Expression of Interest to the MRC mid-range equipment call (<https://www.ukri.org/opportunity/purchase-mid-range-equipment-for-biomedical-research-mrc-equip/>) to purchase this equipment.

22/15 Policy

CW encouraged members to present papers to the Committee which could provoke in-depth discussion and fully utilise the collective expertise of those present. Members should let the Secretary know if they wanted to submit anything to the next meeting.

ACTION: All

22/16 Any other business

AC raised an issue that she had become aware of based on feedback she had received from ECRs. They had clear ideas about equipment needs but were unclear around how to tap into resources. RDLs tend to disseminate information on funding calls, write research plans and set priorities so they need to ensure that ECRs were making requests that related to strategic aims. The University may lose some early career researchers if they cannot access the equipment they need to progress their careers.

It was queried if we could have a separate call that was not tied so tightly to the Schools' long term strategies. There had previously been a ring-fenced fund for ECRs which allowed this flexibility. However, the current fund required that items be strategically important to several areas. It was added that there were external funds that could be bid for but there was often a requirement to demonstrate strategic alignment to be successful. CW agreed to raise this issue at the next Strategy Group.

ACTION: CW

AE reported that this would be her last meeting. The Chair thanked her for her input and wished her well in the future. TE to include Marie Misselbrook on the membership (or representative).

ACTION: TE

22/17 Provisional date of next meeting

Tuesday 25 October 2022, 11am