

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH & INNOVATION COMMITTEE
21 October 2025

MINUTES

Present:

Estelle Blanks (EB) – Director of Business Development & Enterprise
 Rich Dawson (RD) – Dean of Research and Innovation, SAgE
 Justin Durham (JD) – Dean of Research & Innovation, FMS
 Johanna Gascoigne-Owens (JG-O) – Head of Research Funding Development
 Luke Gaughan (LG) – Deputy Dean of Postgraduate Research, FMS
 Matthew Grenby (MOG) – Pro Vice Chancellor, Research and Innovation (Chair)
 David Hill (DH) – Director of Research Strategy & Development
 Pauline Howie (PH) – Director of Service Delivery, NUIT
 Alex Hughes (AH) – Dean of Research & Innovation, HaSS
 Phil Lord (PL) – Dean of Postgraduate Research, SAgE
 Jemima Repo (JR) – Senate Representative
 Nicola Simcock (NS) – Research Culture Manager
 Lorna Taylor (LT) – Head of Faculty Research, HaSS
 Jill Taylor-Roe (JTR) – Director of Academic Services & University Librarian
 Gina Tindale (GT) – NUSU Academic Officer
 Beverley Wilkinson (BW) – Deputy Head of Faculty Research, SAgE

Apologies:

Tim Cheek (TC) – Dean of Postgraduate Research, FMS (Luke Gaughan deputising)
 Eve Cosgrave (EC) – Head of Faculty Research, FMS
 Louise Jones (LJ) – Research Integrity & Governance Manager
 Kate McGill (KM) – Head of Faculty Research, SAgE (Beverley Wilkinson deputising)
 Candy Rowe (CR) – Dean of Culture and Inclusion (Nicola Simcock deputising)
 Alison Williams (AW) – Dean of PGR Studies, HaSS

In attendance:

Sarah Carey (SC) – Executive Assistant (Minutes)
 Nick Collins (NC) – Chief Financial Officer (item 5)
 Neil Bonnington (NB) – Director of Financial Performance (item 5)
 Pete Wheldon (PW), Head of Research Policy Intelligence and Ethics (item 6)
 Stacey Wagstaff (SW), Research Integrity & Compliance Manager (item 8)
 Chris Emmerson (CE), OD Lead – Researcher Development (item 9)

1. Welcome and Chair's Update

Noted:

- a. The post-16 education and skills white paper, jointly fronted by DSIT, DE and DWP was issued yesterday. Headlines include:
 - a proposed increase in UG fees,
 - a commitment to work with Universities to increase cost recovery of research, recognising that will come with a lower volume of research funded,
 - indications that REF 2029 will take place as originally timetabled but with reduced institutional administrative burden,
 - a commitment to review and invest in the sustainability of PhD programmes, and
 - a commitment to protect and allow curiosity driven research (QR) to grow, alongside funnelling investment to supporting Government priorities around the Industrial Strategy.

The underlying message is one of specialisation and collaboration with other institutions, incentivised through research funding reform. Hopefully in time the clarity and detail of these proposals will inform careful consultation on Newcastle's future direction of travel.

- b. Hannah Lynch has been appointed as Research Strategy Manager, starting in January 2026.
- c. Newcastle has received excellent outcomes from KEF5, improving on last year's impressive results particularly in areas of local growth and engagement.

2. Notes and Actions

Received:

- a. Doc Ai: Draft Minutes of URIC 16 September 2025, and
- b. Doc Aii, Actions Log, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- c. Minutes of URIC 16 September 2025 accepted as a correct record.

3. Research Strategy/Culture Update

Received:

- a. Doc B, QR Enhancing Research Culture (ERC) Project Fund update, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- b. NS asked URIC for views on the wording, timing and appropriate use of funds for this £60,000 Research Community and Network Opportunity.

Discussed:

- c. Wording: Colleagues requested inclusion of examples where community building would be particularly appropriate, and suggested broadening of the criteria point on interdisciplinarity to encompass specialisation.
- d. Timing: URIC approved the proposal to open applications in early December with a deadline of 23 January and suggested the opportunity be publicised imminently.
- e. Appropriate use of funds: Reasonable internal catering and booking costs were agreed. Cognisance of Faculty level financial directives is needed for example in relation to the suggested use of JobSoc. A steer towards internal facilitation was requested; while making clear this can involve external collaboration.

4. Internal Audit Report re Trusted Research Evaluation Framework (TREF)

Received:

- a. Doc C, Internal Audit Report - TREF, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- b. IA have reviewed our TREF self evaluation and highlighted three priority areas for improvement:
 - ensure Cyber Security policies address requirements
 - internal processes on record keeping and due diligence
 - a shift from awareness raising in high risk disciplines to targeted training and general awareness across the University.
- c. DSIT research collaboration advice team have visited and found our processes to be good. There is a need for pragmatism and recognition that only one colleague is working on this (Keith Sibbald has left the University and Bec Scane has been appointed to continue the work). DH will report to URIC on progress in due course.

5. TRAC and Research Finances

Received:

- a. Doc D, Research finances and TRAC: NU TRAC analysis presentation, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- b. NH and NB presented information on Research impact on finances using TRAC data from 2023-24, which has been presented to UEB and will go to Finance Committee.

Discussed

- c. Data shows that Teaching recovers in excess of its costs but Research makes a loss. It is important to understand the limits of the TRAC methodology and reporting framework, and outcomes need to be seen in balance with the University's commitment to research and the reputational gains it brings.
- d. NH and NB are meeting with Faculty Deans of R&I to review data at that level.

6. REF 2029 Principles

Received:

- a. Doc E, REF 2029 Principles, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- b. PW outlined the need to set broad strategic decisions and principles on how to organise the University's REF return in the Code of Practices, which will be due for submission shortly after the 'unpausing' of the REF in December/January. These principles are brought for URIC's approval. Onward trajectory is UEB.

Discussed:

- c. Pragmatism and flexibility is required given differing Faculty perspectives and changes to RE's wording on Research Independence.
- d. On the inclusion of SRAs members discussed broadly following the recommendation to assess cases individually where there is any doubt on research independence, given that returns are decoupled and anonymous, negating the need for appeal.
- e. An optimised case by case analysis approach is also agreed for UoAs, with default amalgamation of small units.

Agreed:

- f. URIC agreed with the recommendations.
- g. MOG to review approach with Jackie Scott, Executive Director of People Services ahead of UEB discussion.

7. Digital Research Subgroup update

Noted:

- a. This group, including 16 academics from across the University, has been brought together to give academic voice and oversight on work being undertaken by NUIT around research. The group has identified 12 priority topics and are developing a plan which URIC will be updated on in December/January.

Agreed:

- b. PH will discuss planned work with AH and join a future HaSS FRIC,
- c. PH will share the membership and terms of reference with URIC.

8. Research Integrity Statement

Received:

- a. Doc F, Annual Statement on Research Integrity 2024-25, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- b. SW introduced the Statement, presented for URIC's review. Onward trajectory is Senate in January.

Discussed:

- c. Data in the paper doesn't reflect the level of enquiries received given the number of informal enquiries which do not meet the criteria to progress to research misconduct and are followed up elsewhere in the University.

Agreed:

- d. SW to include a line acknowledging the number of informal enquiries.

9. Annual Research Development Concordat update

Received:

- a. Doc G, Annual Report for the Concordat to Support the Career Development of Researchers, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- b. The Annual Report is presented to URIC for feedback and approval prior to publishing online. It outlines progress against the Concordat action plan.

Discussed:

- c. Suggested RFD team offerings to be included.
- d. The Concordat action plan is due for renewal early next year through the Developing Excellent Researchers (DER) committee and will come to URIC for approval.

10. Updates and 'white space'

Noted:

- a. JGO updated on UKRI Fellowship investment framework.
- b. MOG updated on institutional withdrawals (including Newcastle) from Leverhulme ECRs due to funding levels and the difficulty in budgeting in advance. Leverhulme have reviewed and made some concessions but affordability is still an issue. This will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- c. JTR updated on open access negotiations with publishers, carried out by Jisc on behalf of the Sector. The first offers were uniformly rejected but positive amendments are now coming in, hopefully an acceptable resolution can be reached for this three year agreement period with a view to more sustainable options in the future.
- d. EB updated on the UKRI Local Innovation Partnership Fund (LIPF). The NECA convened LI steering group met last week for initial discussion on area submissions to the £500,000,000 UK programme. Funds are split between earmarked and competitive funds. £30,000,000 is earmarked for the North East region over 5 years. Applications need to show a triple helix model and one submission can include several projects. A decision was made to submit in the second wave, next February. A 3rd party consultant will be appointed to carry out a cluster framework analysis.

Agreed:

- e. JGO to share information on UKRI Fellowship investment framework with URIC.

UNIVERSITY RESEARCH & INNOVATION COMMITTEE
9 December 2025

MINUTES

Present:

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Tim Cheek (TC) – Dean of Postgraduate Research, FMS
Eve Cosgrave (EC) – Head of Faculty Research, FMS
Justin Durham (JD) – Dean of Research & Innovation, FMS
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Hannah Lynch (HL) – Research Strategy Manager
Kate McGill (KM) – Head of Faculty Research, SAgE
Mallikarjuna Rao Pichika (MRP) – Director of Research, NUMed
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Lorna Taylor (LT) – Head of Faculty Research, HaSS
Gina Tindale (GT) – NUSU Academic Officer
Alison Williams (AW) – Dean of PGR Studies, HaSS

In attendance:

Sarah Carey (SC) – Executive Assistant (Minutes)
Jarlath McKenna (JM) – Senior Research Funding Development Manager, EU (item 5)
Lorraine Vincent (LV) – Senior Research Funding Development Manager (item 5)

1. Welcome and Chair's Update

Noted:

- a. REF announcements will be made tomorrow through at an event hosted online by Universities UK, and REF is expected to be 'unpaused'.
- b. The Government has confirmed that QR funding through UKRI will remain at the same level (allowing for inflation) over the next 5 year period.

2. Notes and Actions

Received:

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- b. Doc Aii, Actions Log, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- c. Minutes of URIC 21 October 2025 accepted as a correct record.

3. Research Strategy/Culture Update

Received:

- a. Doc B, Food Systems NUCoRE, circulated with the agenda.

Noted:

- b. Feedback from RSIG and Faculty Research and Innovation Committees and Executive Boards has been addressed including clarification on connections with the Healthier lives /Human Nutrition and Exercise NUCoRE. Onward trajectory is UEB and Senate.
- c. Interdisciplinary working opportunities highlighted.

Agreed:

- d. URIC approved the Food Systems NUCoRE proposal.

4. Finance Q1

Noted:

- a. Members encouraged to review figures for the fiscal year to date on the Strategic Insights Portal.
- b. Research Funding from awards is at our highest ever levels due to significant grants from the last few financial years. There is a significant drop off in funding awarded this financial year, however there is an upward trend in the number of applications being submitted.

5. Research Funding Discussion

Received:

- a. Doc Ci, How should Newcastle respond to the changing research funding landscape?
- b. Doc Cii, RFDM Priorities for 2025-26, circulated with the agenda.
- c. MOG gave a presentation on Research Funding including regional HESA data, NU Research applications, awards (size, volume and distribution) and income and the changing funding ecosystem.

Discussed:

- d. Government emphasis of specialisation, collaboration, and sustainability.
- e. Government announcements on funding 'buckets', and what this could mean for areas of the University.
- f. The impact on the data of colleagues leaving in recent years.
- g. NUCoRE metrics on research funding difficult to obtain and analyse.
- h. Issues with the peer review process, both internally and at UKRI level.
- i. TRAC cost recovery.
- j. Research infrastructure challenges: financial, strategic, internal processes.
- k. Diversity of funding: cost recovery, messaging, a strategy based on statistical modelling and optimising margins.
- l. International funding.
- m. Awareness of funder strategies and the impact of diversification of funding.
- n. UNEE as an opportunity for specialisation e.g. microbes.
- o. Grant costing behaviour and education: time, approach and match funding. Opportunity here for better training.
- p. Articulation of how we contribute to the sector using our specialisations and assets.
- q. Long term investments: leveraging future funding, economic viability, NUCoREs and Beacons. Industrial partners.
- r. Balancing decision making processes between data/qualitative reflections and academic freedom/cost of innovation.
- s. Improving guidance and principles on types of applications and approvals.
- t. Proactive planning, using data to target support for colleagues.
- u. How to encourage more higher quality applications from a larger pool of PIs: incentives and investment. Eg success of NUAcT cohort. Opportunities to reorganise Research Space.
- v. There are no good/bad grants, but we should be aiming to balance the portfolio.

- w. Earlier decisions on proposals aligned to strategic 'specialisations.'
- x. New research grant management system provides an opportunity for visibility of cost recovery.
- y. RFDM priorities reviewed. Investible propositions and demand management to be clarified.

Agreed:

- z. A working Group, including Deans of R&I to be formed to consider improving cost recovery on grants, and also best uses of data, education and prioritisation and establish principles and next steps. Justin Durham to chair.
- aa. Members to provide any further comments on RFDM priorities to JG-O before the end of the calendar year.

6. Updates and 'white space'

Noted:

- a. EB updated on the UKRI Local Innovation Partnership Fund (LIPF). A response to the call for evidence has been submitted. The long list of projects will be discussed at UEB on 16 December and the LIPF Steering Group on 18 December in preparation for the call for projects which will open on 22 December with a deadline of 16 January for submission.

7. Future meetings

13 January 2026

17 February

17 March

14 April

12 May

23 June