



## HEADS OF UNIVERSITY CENTRES OF BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

Minutes of meeting of the Executive Committee held on 26 May 2020 held by Teams online.

**Present:** Professor Yvonne Barnett (President, and chair; Anglia Ruskin), Dr Linda Walsh (Glasgow Caledonian), Professor Valerie Randall (Bradford), Professor Jacqueline McCormack (Sligo IT), Dr Esther Bell (KCL), Dr Sue Jones (York St John), Dr Simon Fox (Plymouth), Professor Hilary MacQueen (HUBS; Open), Dr Claire Pike (Anglia Ruskin), Dr Lowri Mainwaring (Cardiff Metropolitan), Dr Claire Wynne (TU Dublin), Professor Victor Gault (Ulster), Dr Selwa Alsam (Essex), Professor Julie McLeod (Birmingham City), Dr Ian Locke (Honorary Treasurer, Westminster), Professor P Gerry McKenna (Hon Executive Secretary).

**In Attendance:** Mr Alan Wainwright (IBMS).

**Apologies:** Mr Andrew Usher (IBMS), Ms Jill Rodney (IBMS).

1. The minutes (approved by previous circulation) of the Executive Committee meeting on 12 February 2020 were noted.
2. The President, Professor Barnett welcomed members to the online meeting and thanked Professor Jacqueline McCormack for organising the Teams set-up arrangements.
3. **Covid-19 pandemic.** Members noted the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on teaching and learning, examinations and assessments, student recruitment, and research in their respective universities. The exceptional efforts of staff at

all levels to seek to ensure that students were not severely impacted by the UK-wide lockdown was noted. Also noted was the significant impact on research students and research staff on fixed-term contracts. Much uncertainty remains concerning the extent of campus openings at the start of the next academic year, the continued use of online teaching as a major form of programme delivery, the impact on student recruitment including from overseas, and the overall financial implications both short and longer term for teaching and research.

4. **Final Year Research Projects.** The implications of continued on-campus restrictions for final year undergraduate research projects were discussed. Dr Dave Lewis of Leeds University has produced a list of alternative options to laboratory-based projects in the biosciences. It was agreed that Dr Sue Jones, Professor Val Randall, Dr Linda Walsh and Mr Alan Wainwright would consider the list and amend it to exclude options not suitable for biomedical sciences programmes. The amended list will be circulated to the HUCBMS membership.
5. **IBMS matters.** On behalf of Jill Rodney, Alan Wainwright reported that the IBMS President Allan Wilson has been very active with media interviews and contributing to discussion on Covid-19 testing and raising the importance of trained biomedical scientists and quality assured laboratories. Sarah Pitt (University of Brighton) has also done much to raise the profile of the profession when her expertise has been called upon.

Although the headquarters are closed, IBMS continues to offer a full service to its membership, providing additional support and advice as required by the current situation. Face to face meetings have been cancelled but full use is being made of social media and virtual meetings and processes have been adapted accordingly.

6. **TEF Update.** Professor Julie McLeod reported that TEF has been postponed by the OfS. The publication and response to the Independent review which was due last year is still awaited. The subject level TEF year 2 pilot outcomes will follow the publication of the independent review and a consultation is planned on future direction.
7. **REF Update.** Professor Barnett informed the Committee that the UK HEI sector is awaiting the decisions of Research England (and the HE funding bodies for the devolved nations) on the timings for REF 2021 submissions and any other relevant adjustments which might be made. This will be in response to the information provided by HEIs and others into the recent national consultation on making appropriate logistical adjustments to REF 2021 on the

basis of current HEI priorities on student support and their education. The announcement by Research England had been promised for end of May 2020.

Professor McKenna informed the Committee that nominations had been made for an additional biomedical sciences output assessor for UoA 3 in response to a request from the REF Team.

8. **KEF Update.** Professor Barnett and Professor Hilary MacQueen provided information on the current status of the Knowledge Exchange Framework. The Committee was reminded that Hamish McAlpine is undertaking a review of the future priorities for Knowledge Exchange and how this will be linked to KEF and funding. The KEF submission deadline for those HEIs receiving HEIF funding has been moved twice; the current deadline is 16 October 2020.

HEIs will be required to produce 3 narrative statements in support of their KEF data which detail the HEI achievements in serving the economy and society for the benefit of the public, business and communities. No further changes have been made to the institutional clustering or to other aspects of the process. Although there is a clear link between participation in the KEF process and subsequent HEIF funding, the algorithm for this has not been defined.

9. **Equality and Diversity.** Dr Jones provided an update on EDI matters including a forthcoming workshop 'Bulldozing Bias' - a community of practice webshops (online workshop) investigating radically effective methods for fighting bias in higher education. The event will be held on 15 July 2020.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/bulldozing-bias-a-community-of-practice-webshop-tickets-105392018364?aff=ebdssbonlinesearch>

Dr Jones also shared the HUCBMS member organisation EDI questionnaire data and it was discussed. It was agreed to move to annual data collection of an EDI questionnaire, as part of conference registration, or at the conference itself.

10. **Brexit.** Professor McKenna informed the Committee of the continued lack of clarity concerning the UK's participation in Horizon Europe and Erasmus+, or the proposed UK Shared Prosperity Fund to replace EU Structural Funds.

#### **11. Reports from Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.**

- I. Professor McCormack outlined the current lockdown restrictions in Ireland. Due to the uncertainty concerning government formation following the recent election, no further dialogue had taken place with the regulatory body, CORU,

or the Health department regarding recognition of qualifications awarded from outwith the State.

- II. Professor Victor Gault updated the Committee on developments in Northern Ireland including the approval for the development of a medical school at Ulster's Magee campus.
- III. Dr Walsh informed the Committee that all HEIs in Scotland, bar St Andrews, have announced a 2-week delay to the start of Semester 1 and that delivery will be mainly on-line for the rest of 2020.

The Scottish Government has announced a one-off award of £75 million to Scottish HEIs to protect research impacted by COVID-19. This has been distributed amongst all HEIs to specific projects.

- IV. Dr Lowri Mainwaring informed the Committee that Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW; commissioning body) is going ahead with a programmes and numbers tender process but with a slightly adjusted timeline to account for the COVID-19 challenge. The deadline for universities to submit their bids is end of December 2020. Successful Universities will then be able to roll out programmes from September 2022. There are both opportunities and threats associated with the new tender process.

In terms of current students, HEIW have committed to extending bursary and travel costs to enable students to complete their programmes of study. In some cases there is a need to extend the programme due to disruption to placements

**12. IBMS Education and Professional Standards Committee.** Professor Val Randall and Mr Wainwright reported that a formal meeting of the Committee not held but essential business and update reports were dealt with electronically. The following items were noted:

- I. University of Salford now has an accredited apprenticeship degree.
- II. The IBMS has been sensible and helpful in its responses and advice given to HEIs as they adapted to the Covid-19 situation.
- III. The introduction of a virtual verification process for the IBMS Certificate of Competence had been very successful. Work on qualification reviews and development continues.

IV. The HSD (Higher Specialist Diploma) review continues. It was noted that although the pass rate for the 2019 cohort of the HSD in Haematology & Transfusion Science appeared low, there were no concerns around the marking process.

13. **Royal Society of Biology Education Policy Advisory Group (EPAG).** Dr Claire Pike highlighted two issues:

- I. In April 2020, the RSB EPAG responded to the Ofqual consultation on exceptional arrangements for GCSEs and A-levels.
- II. At the time of the Executive Committee meeting, the RSB EPAG was drafting a submission to the House of Commons Education Select Committee inquiry on the impact of Covid-19 disruptions on all education settings. Dr Pike presented five points from the draft paper that are relevant to HUCBMS:
  - a. RSB supports the adoption of No Detriment policies. Universities remain responsible for upholding academic standards.
  - b. A discussion on practical skills teaching that students may be missing, and concerns pertaining to the delivery of practical classes under social distancing conditions in the 2020/21 academic year. The RSB encourages the Government to produce guidance for universities specifically considering learning and teaching in a laboratory.
  - c. University entry for 2020/21 may be disrupted by student deferrals, and autumn A-level exams. Alterations to the timing of admission cycles may be required.
  - d. Students' transition to HE may be especially difficult in September 2020, given recent educational disruptions.
  - e. Up to three-fifths of apprentices have faced a loss of work experience or learning as a result of the pandemic.

The HUCBMS Executive discussed the points raised and agreed to support the RSB draft paper. It was felt that further emphasis and detail was required in relation to:

- Students who have not been examined may be under-confident upon entering HE.
- Online practical simulation tools may be especially useful in the transition to HE phase.
- Staggered starts/entry points caused by autumn 2020 A-level exams present particular challenges to transition/cohort identity.

- Student-led endeavours to support social transition to HE will be especially important.  
(Post-meeting: Dr Pike conveyed the suggested additions to the RSB, which were accepted).

14. **Apprenticeship Update and matters relating to Council for Healthcare Science Education.** Mr Wainwright reported that as far as he was aware there is no formal representation on these workstreams. It was noted that the level 7 apprenticeship were now available.

15. **Joint HUBS/HUCBMS workshop on 'alternatives to laboratory projects'.** It was noted that the joint HUBS/HUCBMS workshop scheduled for 15 May has had to be cancelled due to Covid-19 restrictions. An online workshop 'Re-imagining non-traditional Final Year Research and Honours Projects' is scheduled to take place on 25 June.

<https://www.eventbrite.com/e/delivering-final-year-projects-remotely-in-a-post-covid-environment-tickets-108659635896>

16. **Report from HUBS.** Professor MacQueen reported that:

- The HUBS meeting in April has been postponed until next year. The date is the 12-13 April 2021, and the hope is to hold the meeting at the Crick Institute. However contingency plans will be put in place to hold the meeting online if necessary.
- The HE Biosciences Teacher of the Year award is normally made at the HUBS meeting, where short-listed candidates present their work. It is hoped that this year's candidates - or at least the winner - can make their presentations at next year's meeting instead.
- The L&T workshop planned by Royal Holloway and Kingston Universities for the 2nd July 'Closing the attainment gap in the Biosciences' will now be held online.
- The ELC Bio work on the OER continues, and it is hoped to launch the new collection on the Advance HE website soon. This resource bank should be helpful for colleagues needing to teach online for the first time.
- The next edition of HUBS Watching Briefs will be available after the next Exec meeting in July.

17. **Social Media.** Professor McCormack reported on the Social Media strategy. It was noted that the twitter outputs should include more comments/statements from HUCBMS and HUCBMS Executive Committee members on important

policy and scientific matters. It was felt that the Committee would benefit from receiving basic training in how to communicate effectively using this medium. It was agreed that options and costs of having a dedicated training session be explored.

18. **HUCBMS 2020.** The Committee discussed the final planned programme for HUCBMS 2020 scheduled for 2-3 September at York St John University. The Committee noted the excellent range of speakers and social programme that had been arranged. However it was noted that due to the pandemic, the University was unlikely to be open for large gatherings in early September, the social programme would have to be severely curtailed and there may be travel difficulties for some delegates and speakers.

The Committee decided reluctantly, but in light of the probable prevailing circumstances, to postpone the conference until 1-2 September, 2021 at York St John. Some of the proposed contributions to the postponed conference may be rearranged as webinars during 2020-21. Professor McKenna agreed to write to the conference speakers informing them of the postponement. Dr Jones will write to sponsors and providers of social programme facilities accordingly.

Professor McKenna will also write to HUCBMS colleagues at Coventry University, who had planned to host HUCBMS 2021, to ascertain their willingness to host HUCBMS 2022.

19. **HUCBMS AGM 2020.** It was agreed that the HUCBMS 2020 AGM should be held online on 2 September. It was agreed to possibly coincide the event with a suitable webinar.
20. **Finances.** The Hon Treasurer, Dr Ian Locke, updated the Committee on HUCBMS finances. It was agreed that annual subscriptions would remain unchanged for the 2020-21 academic year.
21. **AOB.** There was no other business.