



HEADS OF UNIVERSITY CENTRES OF BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES

Minutes of meeting of the Executive Committee held on 10th February 2021 via Microsoft Teams.

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), Professor Hilary MacQueen (HUBS; Open), Dr Claire Pike (Anglia Ruskin), Dr Lynne Lawrance (UWE), 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).

Apologies: Dr Lowri Mainwaring (Cardiff Metropolitan), Dr Simon Fox (Plymouth)

In Attendance: Ms Jill Rodney (IBMS), Mr Alan Wainwright (IBMS).

1. Minutes:

The minutes (approved by previous circulation) of meeting on 13 November 2020 were noted.

2. Covid-19 pandemic:

It was noted that all institutions are grappling with similar issues and challenges especially those relating to practicals and trying to fit all of the curriculum and its delivery into the academic calendar. Placements are going ahead.

COVID testing Hubs have been opened at a number of institutions. There has been variation in the levels of on-campus and online attendance across different universities. Face-to-face lectures have been suspended until September at least.

As a result of the joint HUCBMS/IBMS letter to the Universities Minister, it had been confirmed that biomedical sciences students are permitted on-campus for essential laboratory practical work. The Chair and Ms Rodney both noted the importance and impact of HUCBMS and IBMS working together on issues of mutual concern.

3. UK Government policy statements:

Professor McLeod reported on a wealth of policies, review responses and consultations.

- a) Augar report outcome – response to fees will be included in CSR (August 2021). Introduction of life-long learning allowance for 4 years of post-18 education from 2025; funding of FE; Local Skills Improvement Plans (repeats Skills White Paper). Modular study (on/off) is deemed desirable; more flexible study is encouraged.
- b) TEF – as part of HERA, will continue. Provider level TEF will take place every 4 years or so but alongside new minimum absolute quality baselines re continuation, completion and progression. Four grades instead of three will be awarded – one (sub-bronze) being unacceptable. Introduces concept of Limiting Factor – poor student outcomes will trump any other good TEF data. Consultation will report in spring 2021. Anticipated TEF exercise likely for Nov – Feb 2021/22.
- c) Teaching Funding - not much change proposed to overall funds but reprioritisation with more funding for High-Cost subjects.

4. REF Update:

The President, Professor Yvonne Barnett, updated the Committee on REF developments. Main panels and sub-panels have initial meeting dates and are working to the July 2020 updated REF 2021 timetable.

The Committee welcomed the appointment of Dr Locke and Professor Gault as UoA 3 output assessors.

5. Knowledge Exchange Framework and the KE Concordat:

Professor MacQueen and Professor Barnett updated the Committee. Publication of the results for the first KEF iteration has been delayed, and they are now not expected until mid-March. Nevertheless, a Forum has been convened on February 23rd to discuss and explore the results, so there may be some early data forthcoming. HEIs have been invited in early 2021 to sign up to the principles of the KE Concordat and/or the Development year. A series of 'deep dive' workshops are being run to explore how best to consider the principles and self-assessment of performance of individual institutions in light of these.

Institutional submissions for those participating in the Development Year are due by July 2021 – with a review on the outcomes of the approach undertaken after individual institutions have received commentary on their self-assessments.

6. Data Compliance Officer:

The Hon Executive Secretary, Professor McKenna, informed the Committee that he had examined the legislation and rules regarding the appointment of a Data Protection (Compliance) Officer including documentation from the Information Commissioner's Office. He has completed the questionnaire to check if HUCBMS is required to have a data protection officer which confirms that it does not. (HUCBMS does not collect and hold data on individuals; it simply gathers data for generic monitoring purposes). The Committee noted and approved this position.

7. Equality and Diversity:

Dr Sue Jones attended the RSB MO EDI Forum on 9th December. She gave an update on activities; this was focussed on reviewing recent activity and future direction of DIWG in 2021. All documents from these meetings have been passed on to the Hon Executive Secretary to disseminate to the member institutions. The next RSB MO EDI Forum meeting will take place in early March.

Dr Linda Walsh attended the HCPC forum. There was little to note as it was the first ever meeting for this forum.

A response led by Dr Claire Pike and Dr Jones was made in response to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Diversity and Inclusion in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) inquiry into ***Equity in the UK STEM Workforce***.

Dr Jones will recirculate the EDI questionnaire to all Executive Committee members.

8. Brexit Update:

Professor McKenna updated the Committee on the potential impacts of the UK-EU Trade Agreement. This includes: associate membership of Horizon Europe, withdrawal from Erasmus (and its replacement by the Turing Scheme; the Irish Government will fund continued Northern Ireland participation in Erasmus), loss of EU Structural Funds (and replacement with UK Shared Prosperity Fund).

9. Ireland, Northern Ireland, Wales, Scotland matters:

- a. Professor McCormack outlined that the newly formed Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in ROI has undertaken a further public consultation on its strategy.

Professor McKenna gave an overview of the work and themes of the RIA Higher Education Futures (All-island) Taskforce which is due to report during 2021.

<https://www.ria.ie/news/policy-and-international-relations-policy-working-groups-higher-education-futures/call-input> .

- b. Professor Victor Gault reported on issues relating to Northern Ireland. The Department of Health NI recently announced one-off payments for placement students (AHP) who had helped during the COVID pandemic. Unfortunately, this list did not appear to include Biomedical Sciences students. This was brought to the attention of the IBMS. Ulster University is currently engaging with the Department and awaits the outcome of these conversations. IBMS is also seeking further background information on this matter.
- c. Dr Linda Walsh reported that in Scotland there are three NHS Covid hubs now opened; in Glasgow , Edinburgh and Aberdeen. They are staffed by Biomedical Scientists, NHS employees on secondment, and some on fixed-term contracts for twelve months. Final (4th year) students are employed as Bank staff working evenings and weekends at Band 3.

10. Joint HUBS/HUCBMS workshop – ‘Robust online assessments’:

Two applications were received; from the OU and the University of Derby, respectively. As both applications were within the budget allocated and both approached the topic from different experiences and perspectives, it was decided to fund both. The workshops will take place in the Spring.

11. Report from meetings of IBMS Education and Professional Standards Committee:

The IBMS Educational & Professional Standards Committee met on 28.1.2021 by zoom. The Committee welcomed as observer, Debra Padgett, the IBMS President-Elect.

Items of particular interest to HUCBMS included reaccreditation of full and part-time MScs in Biomedical Sciences at Wolverhampton and five versions at Manchester Metropolitan University.

The Institute had reluctantly agreed to postpone their Institute examinations twice in Autumn 2020 due to covid-19 related issues. This involved over sixty people at forty locations. Local institutions were responsible for the invigilation of their own candidates which included a significant challenge. Professor Randall recommended the HUBS/HUCBMS forthcoming Workshop covering on-line assessment should be helpful.

Some time was spent reviewing the Institute examinations and qualification titles. A number have titles including 'Advanced' or 'Expert' which were agreed to be inappropriate as they not used in parallel professions. Portfolios for various qualifications are also going to be revised, aiming to break them into standard sized units/modules on specific and generic areas to reflect the current work experience.

Importantly for HUCBMS members, the Education Team is currently working on details of moving the Registration portfolio onto the e-learning platform and will report on this for April.

12. Other IBMS matters:

Ms Rodney reported that IBMS Council had noted at its meeting the value and added strength of working in partnership with HUCBMS in areas of joint interest. This had been most noticeable in the recent correspondence with the Universities Minister and the NI Health Department.

The Institute was grateful to Dr Selwa Alsam who had joined the small working group considering the potential for biomedical scientists to be able to supply and administer medicines under a PGD and the prescribing scoping exercise being led by the Department of Health.

It was noted that the Institute is inviting corporate members to consider standing for election. Executive members were encouraged to consider putting themselves forward.

The Committee received an update on the recruitment process for the new IBMS CEO.

Ms Rodney confirmed that this would be her last meeting and extended her thanks to the HUCBMS Executive for the friendship and support they had provided over the last ten years.

The Executive Committee members expressed their best wishes to Jill for the future and thanked her for her support and valued input to HUCBMS activities during her successful tenure at IBMS.

13. RSB – Education Policy Advisory Committee:

Dr Claire Pike has contributed on behalf of HUCBMS to the RSB's responses to Defra's consultation on the regulation of genetic technologies, and, in collaboration with Dr Sue Jones, to the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Diversity and Inclusion in STEM's inquiry into Equity in the UK STEM Workforce (see 7. Above). Dr Pike is currently engaged with the RSB on DfE and Ofqual's consultation on GCSE and A level grade awards, and welcomes the views of HUCBMS Executive Committee members on this matter.

14. HUBS:

Professor MacQueen summarised HUBS activities:

- The ECLBio group continues to be active, and has run a number of workshops. All Heads are encouraged to support their ECL (early career lecturers) to join the forum. Details can be found at <https://connect.advance-he.ac.uk/>. ECLBio have recently run a workshop on 'New to Teaching' in January. The next ECLBio workshop will focus on 'Academic Publishing.'
- HUBS has just established an Attainment Gap Working Group; more details later.
- HUBS learning and teaching workshops are planned:
 - Inspiring developing and supporting future stars of Bioscience Education. 24th Feb
 - Robust online assessment using the Moodle platform, and how to avoid plagiarism. 16th March
 - Teaching Biosciences in a pandemic: what lessons did we learn? 21st April
 - More details can be found on the HUBS website: <https://www.rsb.org.uk/education/hubs/hubs-news-and-events>
- HUBS Conference will be online 12-13th April – free to all HUBS member institutions <https://hubs2021.rsb.org.uk/programme.html>

15. Social media strategy:

Professor McCormack reported that the company that it was hoped would run a session re possibilities and practicalities of social media re unavailable. Another company has been approached. In terms of engagement with posts, from the Twitter perspective the most engaging ones seem to be items around things that are helpful to HUCBMS colleagues in relation to ideas and support with teaching.

16. EE Register:

Professor McCormack has forwarded the updated External Examiner Register for uploading to the website – there was a good response this year so the register is growing.

17. HUCBMS 2021 and future conferences:

There was discussion about the HUCBMS conference which is scheduled to take place at York St John University on 1-2 September. Consideration was given to the options available if Covid-19 related restrictions would still be in place then. It was agreed that the preferred option would be to have the conference on-campus but the final decision would be deferred until late April when the prospects should have become clearer. Some discussion took place on the academic programme and Committee members were asked to give further consideration to the potential list of speakers.

Professor McKenna indicated that he had written to Coventry University to confirm its commitment to hosting HUCBMS 2022.

18. Finances:

The Hon Treasurer, Dr Locke, indicated that HUCBMS finances remain satisfactory. He will be chasing a small number of outstanding institutional membership payments.

19. Date of next meeting:

The meeting of the Executive Committee will take place in May 2022; date to be confirmed.