

Research Committee

Minutes of 14th December 2001

Present: Michael Gibney (Dean of Research), Doris Alexander, Deirdre Savage, Hilary Tovey, John Saeed, Elizabeth Drew (GSU), Clive Williams, David Dickson

In attendance: Maria Treanor

Apologies: Dermot Kelleher, John Dillon, John Fitzpatrick, Jim Sexton, Margaret O'Mahony, Sheila Greene

1. Apologies

Apologies noted.

2. Minutes of meeting 9th November 2001

Revised minutes approved and signed by Chairperson.

3. Matters Arising

Staff from Information Systems Services have been looking at ways to modify InfoEd for College.

College Centres will raise a lot of interesting challenges regarding policy. The Children's Centre is being reviewed. The resulting report may raise issues that will need to be addressed by other existing and new Centres in College. Therefore it was decided not to proceed further with the matter of College Centres until this report is available.

The Research Office is preparing a finance paper for the Committee. Doris Alexander will ascertain if Ecumenics contributed to the *Cista Communis*, and if they are likely to contribute in future through research grants. It was noted that they have been successful at securing research grants in the past.

The Good Research Practice Working Group met on 4th December 2001 and will meet again in January 2002. The members are: Michael Gibney (Dean of Research), Doris Alexander (Research Office), Sean O'Briain (Histopathology and Morbid Anatomy), Darragh Walsh (postdoctoral fellow), Anne Molloy (Clinical Medicine), Greg Biegel (postgraduate student), Tom Turpin (Freedom of Information Office), James Wickham (Sociology, instead of Brian Torode), Cyril Smyth (Senior Dean), Fiona Newell (Psychology) and Kingston Mills (Biochemistry). Five sub-groups will draw down information from the web and prepare reports on the following areas: ethics,

integrity, supervision of research, good publication practice, and primary data & samples.

4. Start-up Fund & SFI replacement staff

As departments get the full salary and employers' PRSI for staff on SFI contracts, they can appoint more junior staff on higher salaries than usual and still have a substantial amount remaining for the departments. This could be used to give a start-up contribution to those SFI replacement staff. There will be a new SFI call for proposals at the end of January 2002, and it may be possible to channel some of the overhead money from the SFI back for Start-up funding. However, Start-up funding from the Research Committee for SFI replacement staff will be the exception rather than the rule, and an argument would have to be made on an individual basis. This issue was first discussed at a Research Committee meeting on 01 March 2001 as follows:

It was agreed that replacement staff for SFI PIs were not eligible. The Committee felt that as involvement in SFI was intended to be cost neutral to College there should be no financial implications for the Research Committee. The Committee also felt that as the SFI funds are targeted to two specific areas – Biotechnology and ICT – and the number of SFI PIs is likely to increase significantly in the coming years, this could result in a highly distorted distribution of the Start-up grants across College. College has agreed that the full salary of the PI will be available to Departments to cover costs of replacement staff. This should include the provision of Start-up Funds.

The Committee reaffirmed that savings made in departments should go towards getting new researchers going. Funding may, however, be made available in exceptional circumstances. It was noted that some Departments may be playing the system by no longer providing departmental start-up packages.

The Research Committee has a budget of £1m per year for allocation of Maintenance Grants, Start-up Funding and Berkeley Fellowships. Two years ago, there were 48 applications for Start-up Funding and 43 were awarded at a cost of £493,100. Last year, there were 28 applications and 25 were awarded a total of £464,720. This year, there were 58 applications. In order to fall within the budget, a mechanism is needed on funding which will be used this time and improved for the next round.

It was felt that as College is research-led, the budget should be increasing. The increase in applications was also queried, as was the percentage of applications from those who were eligible. There is no more money available from the Provost but the Finance Committee may be able to provide a one-off handout. It may also be possible to cut back on the number of Berkeley Fellowships awarded next year. Some of the better applications could be sent to the Foundation to see if they can help. It was agreed that M Gibney would discuss the budget with the Provost before the Committee mounts a case to the Finance Committee. This funding is essential for implementing the research plan (originally costed at IR£8m) agreed by Board and Council. If extra funding is not available, the Committee needs to know what can be done. The Committee needs a five-year budgetary perspective and a budget which increases annually.

The Start-up evaluation method needs to be very clear to facilitate Freedom of Information. Staff who wish to buy in time, etc. need guidelines regarding what constitutes fair use of money awarded. There should also be a template for applicants. Conference travel should be excluded with exceptions made for a few departments e.g. Mathematics. Special equipment should be included. It is difficult for reviewers outside an area to judge the quality of projects. They can consider the number of publications and make a judgment about the fit between money requested and the plan. It was suggested that all successful applicants should receive a minimum amount and but may ask for more for laboratory costs. Shared equipment proposals from applicants in the same departments should be encouraged. The Committee will have to agree standardised criteria for applications and evaluation.

A discussion paper will be prepared in 2002 on the points raised and the College community will be informed through a newsletter or via the web. The financial situation regarding College grants and spending on SFI refurbishment must be explained so that morale does not go down. This will include software issues for Computer Science and the implications of the relationship with Ecumenics & Nursing for the Finance Committee.

5. Start-up Fund Evaluations

Two members of the Research Committee have now evaluated each application. A mechanism is needed on funding which will be used this time and improved for the next round. As the Committee needs more time to reach a decision on allocation of the budget which will be as fair as possible, M Gibney will contact all applicants letting them know that there will be cuts and that the decision will be made at the next meeting in January 2002.

6. AOB

The PRTLTI results have still not been received from the HEA, and no reason has been given for the delay.

The next meeting will be held in January 2002.

Signed: _____

Date: _____