Summary of key issues

Separation of teaching and research: The creation of two distinct bodies focused separately on higher education (OfS) and research (UKRI) presents an unprecedented division between policy responsibilities for higher education and research and risks a lack of integration between teaching and research. This is further augmented by the recent reorganisation in Whitehall, resulting in policy responsibility now being split between the Department for Education and the new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Greater holistic oversight of teaching and research and strengthened cooperation between UKRI and OfS is essential. The Minister for Universities and Science should continue to be a joint post between the two departments, with both UKRI and the OfS reporting to the Minister – who should have an explicit remit to maintain a holistic overview of universities and their functions – as well as their respective Secretaries of State.

Institutional autonomy: We are concerned that the Bill creates a number of new powers for the OfS which undermine the principle of institutional autonomy, including: the OfS’s new power over standards; the OfS’s power to compel universities to validate other institutions; the OfS’s power to revoke degree-awarding powers, and powers of search and entry. We would strongly advise that there should be a full Parliamentary debate on the issue of university autonomy.

Research degree awarding powers: We are concerned that at the Bill currently gives sole powers to the OfS to grant research degree awarding powers (RDAP) without consultation or oversight from research funders. We suggest that the OfS should have an obligation to consult with UKRI and the national academies before granting RDAP.

Dual support: UCL welcomes the recognition of the balanced funding principle in the bill but would like to see it strengthened to ensure the block grant remains a significant funding stream.

Knowledge Exchange: UCL welcomes the simplification of the impact funding landscape but it is vital that support for knowledge exchange is provided by both UKRI and Research England, reflecting the importance of support for both knowledge exchange infrastructure and specific activities. Within Research England’s knowledge exchange responsibilities, UCL would advocate continued support for enterprise education and student entrepreneurship. UCL would also UCL welcome a commitment from Research England to continue such support via the continuation of HEIF or another similar scheme. UCL has also welcomed the principles of IAA introduced by some Research Councils and would be pleased to see UKRI make institutional IAA awards to be invested strategically by institutions.

UKRI Governance arrangements: UCL is concerned at the possibility for confusion over lines of accountability between UKRI and Councils and SoS. UCL also suggests that the SoS and UKRI should consult other relevant bodies over Council appointments.

Functions of UKRI: UCL would like to see these include support for cross-disciplinary collaboration and research training (the omission of the latter is particularly concerning).

Introduction

1. UCL is the UK’s largest multidisciplinary university, with 840 professors, more than 6,000 academic and research staff, almost 18,000 undergraduate students, and nearly 20,500 postgraduate students. UCL has the greatest number of prestigious Doctoral Training Centres and is the top-rated university in the UK for research strength in the Research Excellence Framework 2014 by a measure of average research score multiplied by staff numbers submitted. UCL also has the best academic to student ratio in the UK (1:10), enabling small class sizes and outstanding individual support and is one of the top two universities in the UK for the number of professors, which means that our students are taught by the most highly qualified experts in their field.

2. This submission raises a number of issues where we would like to see amendments relating to research to the Bill in its current form. These are considered in chronological order, according to where they appear in the Bill. Where we have proposed amendments, new text is shown in italics.
Research degree awards

3. We do not believe that the Office for Students should have powers over the authorisation of research awards without apparent reference to any other body with expertise in and responsibility for research funding. We would suggest that rather there should be additional oversight or checks and balances via a stipulation to consult with academies and learned societies and UKRI. We therefore propose the following amendment to clause 40:

Clause 40 – Authorisation to grant degrees etc.

Suggested new subsection (13):
The OfS must consult with UKRI, including Research England, and the appropriate National Academies and learned societies before authorising any provider to grant research awards.

Maintaining an overview of teaching and research

4. Teaching and research is a joint and intertwined endeavour and it is important that there is a holistic overview. The creation of two distinct bodies focused separately on higher education (OfS) and research (UKRI) presents an unprecedented division between policy responsibilities for higher education and research and risks a lack of integration between teaching and research. This is further augmented by the recent reorganization in Whitehall, resulting in policy responsibility now being split between the Department for Education and the new Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy.

5. We are pleased to see the close coordination between OfS and UKRI stipulated in the Bill (clause 103). However, we do not believe the Bill at present fully delivers on the White Paper’s commitment to close joint working between the OfS and UKRI and to ensure that this cooperation is supported by capacity for a holistic overview of the higher education system within Government. Proposals for REF and TEF to take more account of the interaction between teaching and research are welcome but insufficient to ensure sufficient integration.

6. We therefore suggest that:
   - The Minister for Universities and Science should continue to be a joint post between the two departments
   - The Minister for Universities and Science should have an explicit remit to maintain a holistic overview of universities and their functions.
   - Both UKRI and the OfS should have an obligation to report to the Minister as well as their respective Secretaries of State.

   We would be keen to see a commitment to this by Government in subsequent discussions of the Bill.

7. We propose the following amendment to clauses 70 and 97:

Clause 70: Power to require information or advice from the OfS

(1) The OfS must provide the Secretary of State with—
   (a) such information regarding any of its functions, or obtained in the performance of any of its functions, including its cooperation with UKRI, as the Secretary of State may require it to provide, or
   (b) such advice regarding any of its functions, including its cooperation with UKRI, as the Secretary of State may require it to provide.

Clause 97: Power to require information and advice from UKRI

(1) UKRI must provide the Secretary of State with—
   (a) such information regarding any of its functions, or obtained in the exercise of any of its functions, including its cooperation with OfS, as the Secretary of State may require it to provide, and
(b) such advice regarding any of its functions, including its cooperation with OfS, as the Secretary of State may 20 require it to provide.

(2) UKRI must provide information or advice under subsection (1) in such form as the Secretary of State may require it to be provided.

Functions of UKRI

8. We are highly concerned that research training is not included in the delineated functions of UKRI. A key function of the Research Councils at present is to support the training of researchers, in particular via PhDs, and it will be important that this is continued. We are also concerned that despite the intensions of the White Paper, the functions of UKRI as currently laid out in the Bill will not encourage cross-disciplinary research. There should be an additional function for UKRI to encourage collaborative research between disciplines. We therefore propose the following amendments to clause 85:

Clause 85: UK research and innovation functions

(1) UKRI may—
   (a) carry out research into science, technology, humanities and new ideas,
   (b) facilitate, encourage and support research into science, technology, humanities and new ideas,
   (c) facilitate, encourage and support the development and exploitation of science, technology and new ideas,
   (d) collect, disseminate and advance knowledge in and in connection with science, technology, humanities and new ideas,
   (e) promote awareness and understanding of science, technology, humanities and new ideas,
   (f) provide advice on any matter relating to any of its functions, and
   (g) promote awareness and understanding of its activities.
   (h) facilitate, encourage and support collaborative research between science, technology and humanities disciplines
   (i) facilitate, encourage and support the training of researchers in all disciplines

Knowledge exchange

9. The dedicated support for enhancing knowledge exchange via both sides of the dual support system is a core part of the UK’s research success. UCL would like to see acknowledgement of the importance of supporting both knowledge exchange infrastructure and specific activities, and greater clarity on Research England’s role in supporting institutional capacity for knowledge exchange and research dissemination, in line with that set out for UKRI. The exercise of functions by Research England should explicitly include reference to dissemination and exploitation of research. We propose the following amendment to clause 89:

Clause 89: Exercise of functions by Research England (Research Impact)

(1) UKRI must arrange for Research England to exercise such functions of UKRI as UKRI may determine for the purpose of giving financial support within 15 subsection (2) or (3).

(2) Financial support is within this subsection if it is given to the governing body of an eligible higher education provider in respect of expenditure incurred, or to be incurred, by the provider for the purposes of either or both of the following—
   (a) the undertaking of research by the provider;
   (b) the provision of facilities, or the carrying out of other activities, by the provider which its governing body considers it is necessary or desirable to provide or carry out for the purposes of, or in connection with, research, including its dissemination and exploitation..

Suggested new subsection (6):
Arrangements under this section must require Research England, when exercising any function to which the arrangements relate, to have regard to the desirability of providers:
(a) contributing to economic growth in the United Kingdom, and
(b) improving quality of life (whether in the United Kingdom or elsewhere).
'Balanced funding' and preserving dual support

10. UCL welcomes the intention to enshrine the dual support funding system in legislation. Dual support underpins the excellence and success of the UK research base by ensuring a balance of funding and allocation that provides a stable basis for universities to invest in and plan research strategically whilst promoting strong competition amongst individuals and institutions. However, we are not convinced that the ‘balanced funding principle’ as currently defined in the Bill includes sufficient content to fully embody the dual support system. The ‘balanced funding principle’ should be defined to make it clear that it entails substantial portions of research funding being allocated both via the block grant and via Research Councils.

11. We would suggest the definition of the principle of balanced funding should be strengthened to make explicit reference to maintaining the values and customs of the research base, including a balance of retrospective and prospective assessment. We propose the following amendment to clause 95:

Clause 95: Balanced funding principle

(3) The “balanced funding principle” is the principle that it is necessary to ensure that a reasonable balance, suitable for maintaining the long-term excellence and efficiency of the UK research base, and preserving the values, customs, partnerships and practices that have underpinned these, including allocation based on both retrospective and prospective assessment is achieved in the allocation of funding as between—

(a) functions exercisable by the Councils mentioned in section 87(1) pursuant to arrangements under that section, and

(b) functions exercisable by Research England pursuant to arrangements under section 89.

Governance of UKRI

12. We welcome the enshrinement of the ‘Haldane principle’ in the Bill which gives welcome reassurance on some aspects of Governance. However, we do have concerns at the current governance arrangements, which could lead to confusion and undermine the structure and successful operation of UKRI.

13. At present, the Bill gives the Secretary of State power to issue directions to both UKRI and individual Councils. We suggest that the basic accountability model should be that Councils report to UKRI, which in turn reports to the Secretary of State, with clear delineation of lines of accountability. No appointments to UKRI Councils should be made without the agreement of the UKRI Chief Executives. We propose the following amendments to Schedule 9:

Schedule 9: United Kingdom Research and Innovation – Membership of the Councils

Membership of UKRI

2 (1) UKRI is to consist of the following members appointed by the Secretary of State—

(a) a chair (“the chair”),

(b) the Chief Executive Officer (“the CEO”),

(c) the Chief Finance Officer (“the CFO”), and 10

(d) at least nine and not more than twelve other members.

(2) In this Schedule, references to the “members of UKRI” are to the members mentioned in sub-paragraph (1).

(3) The chair may not also be the CEO or the CFO.

(4) Before appointing the members mentioned in sub-paragraph (1)(b) to (d), 15 the Secretary of State must consult the chair.
(5) The Secretary of State must, in appointing the members of UKRI, have regard to the desirability of the members (between them) having experience of—
   (a) research into science, technology, humanities and new ideas, 20
   (b) the development and exploitation of science, technology and new ideas, and
   (c) industrial, commercial and financial matters and the practice of any profession.

3 (1) Each Council is to consist of—
   (a) an executive chair appointed by UKRI (the “executive chair”),
   (b) at least five and not more than nine other members (the “ordinary Council members”).

(2) In this Schedule, a reference to the “Council members” is to the executive chair and the ordinary Council members of each Council.

(3) The Secretary of State may appoint one of the ordinary Council members of each Council. The Secretary of State should consult with the UKRI and Council executive chair and with Departments and other public bodies with remits that closely relate to those of the Council.

(4) The other ordinary Council members are to be appointed by UKRI after consulting the executive chair. UKRI should consult with Departments and other public bodies with remits that closely relate to those of the Council.

(5) A Council may include persons who are neither members, nor employees, of UKRI.

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