Newcastle University Humanities Research Institute

Strategic Plan
2017/18 and 2018/19
1. **Institute Vision**  
*Set out the Institute’s three to five year vision in no more than 500 words.*

The need for structures that support interdisciplinarity is now more urgent than ever. Many of the most important intellectual and social challenges can be faced only by research that draws on a range of expertise and methodologies, and is based on collaboration across traditional boundaries. Government and other funders increasingly recognise this; the REF is being redesigned to encourage and reward interdisciplinarity, and funding schemes now often mandate transdisciplinary cooperation. Among researchers too there is an awareness of the power and potential of collaboration, both across disciplines and beyond the University. Central to NUHRI’s vision is the determination to provide a context in which this interdisciplinary collaboration can thrive.

NUHRI exists to catalyse and coordinate excellent research across the humanities at Newcastle, and to link the humanities with other areas. In particular, NUHRI seeks to foster interdisciplinary research projects, and, in support of the University’s civic mission, to generate beneficial collaborations between humanities researchers and wider society. The Institute’s principal instrument is its power to convene academics and research partners.

NUHRI supports research in all areas of the humanities. Its activities have been designed to achieve a balance between prescription and responsiveness. The Institute’s principal task is to identify incipient, promising ideas, from wherever they might derive, and to nurture them so that the grow into innovative, excellent projects. The drive for innovation may involve intellectual risk. Some ideas may fail. But NUHRI provides a space in which experimental collaboration can take place.

The Institute supports researchers at all career stages, but with a particular focus on nurturing the best early-career academics. It will afford a supportive and inclusive culture for academics, students, professional service staff and colleagues from outside the University. It aims to sponsor cooperation across all boundaries, not only disciplinary and professional, but also social, cultural and national. Among its principal functions is the celebration of achievement. NUHRI aims to enhance the visibility of humanities research within the University and to advance public engagement with humanities research.

In accord with this vision, by the end of 2019 NUHRI aims to have:

i. appointed an annual series of Postdoctoral Fellows whose work exemplifies the Institute’s commitment to interdisciplinarity, who have helped to develop other research projects, and whose careers have been supported;

ii. supported 2-3 major collaborative research projects each year, developing initial ideas into mature projects, often resulting in applications for external funding;

iii. fostered research activity in areas of existing and emerging strength by implementing new structures and convening events;

iv. nurtured new research activity in areas of the Faculty without a history of large research projects or collaboration with internal and external partners;

v. developed new areas of cross-disciplinary research at Newcastle University, including work that that forges new links across the three faculties;
vi. engaged undergraduate and postgraduate students with the excitement and potential of cross-disciplinary research;

vii. encouraged and supported the use of the University’s rich research resources;

viii. continued to build partnerships with non-HEI organisations, particularly with strategically crucial partners, developing shared plans for successful long-term collaboration;

ix. helped to prepare for interdisciplinary aspects of the REF;

x. initiated activities that boost the profile of, and engagement with, the humanities within and beyond the University.
2. Research Culture and Strategy

*Set out the research strategy over the next three to five years in no more than 1000 words, ensuring that it is clearly linked to the overall vision. Please include some text describing how the Institute will influence the development of research culture across the university, particularly around the fostering of interdisciplinarity.*

**Culture and strategy**

Research institutes can be directive (‘top-down’) or responsive (‘bottom-up’). NUHRI’s programmes and activities have been designed to achieve a balance: encouraging innovative and risk-taking research ideas, within a strategic framework. A set of highlighted areas of established and emerging strength, and strategic importance, have been identified (see below). Yet the Institute will have no demarcated research strands. It will be project-led, not theme-led.

NUHRI exists to identify and develop incipient and existing research collaborations, and to foster innovative and potentially excellent work derived from researchers’ ideas. The added value that NUHRI provides is in connecting researchers, both across the humanities and beyond, including outside the University. NUHRI’s principal strategy is to convene multi-disciplinary teams to meet academic and real-world challenges. In the context of Newcastle University, where individual humanities units have different capacities and research track records, the cross-pollination of ideas and the dissemination of good practice, are particularly important.

Recent reports by Government and funding bodies have all identified and welcomed a drive towards interdisciplinary and cross-sector research, noting that such research offers the best hope of addressing both complex social challenges and more purely academic questions.¹ The HEFCE/RCUK review also noted a number of barriers to interdisciplinary research, some of which derived from structural problems with funding and research assessment, while others concerned research institutions themselves. Major barriers to interdisciplinary research included the difficulty of ‘finding partners and establishing shared goals’, a lack of ‘institutional resources’, and a lack of ‘effective [interdisciplinary] leadership at project, department, and institution levels’. The report urged institutions ‘to consider how they may create research environments that support [interdisciplinary research]’ (8-11). NUHRI’s fundamental strategy is to help researchers to address and overcome these barriers, and to create a culture at Newcastle in which interdisciplinary research across and beyond the humanities can germinate and thrive. (See Figure 2.)

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NUHRI welcomes ad hoc enquiries and applications for support from individuals and teams, and provides backing for new projects. This includes catalyst workshops, networking events, advice on collaboration and funding options, all supported by the Director, Administrator and Fellows, and the Faculty’s Research Funding Support Manager and Research Impact Officer as required.

Small amounts of funding are available to catalyse emerging collaborative and interdisciplinary projects. Some have been developed ‘bottom-up’; others are the result of NUHRI attempts to build new partnerships across the University, as for instance with collaborations with the School of Marine Science and Technology (MAST) in the new field of ‘Maritime Humanities’. Current ‘Catalyst Projects’ include:
Not all NUHRI projects will lead to grant applications. But the Institute aims to make researchers at Newcastle ‘grant-ready’, with well-developed projects in train that can be adapted for relevant calls.

Key thematic areas

Focussed support will be provided for several areas of established and emerging research strength. These are overarching themes, often supported by external funding programmes. Notably, these areas demand challenge-led research, drawing on inter-/multi-disciplinary methods and expertise. The list may alter, but at present areas highlighted for NUHRI support are:

- Medical Humanities
- Global Challenges
- Archival Research
- Digital Humanities

In each of these areas, NUHRI will lead in establishing supporting structures, convening new collaborations, coordinating research and generating new projects. For example, for Medical Humanities the Institute has stepped up engagement with the Wellcome Trust, set up a mailing list, and a strategy has been developed for a Joint Committee representing the relevant academic units in HaSS and FMS (as well as colleagues from Durham), to revive the Pybus seminars to act as a forum for internal and external researchers can present existing and planned projects, and to hold workshops to develop new ideas. Similar strategies can be developed for other themes.

NUHRI continues to manage the Vital North Partnership, jointly funded by the University and the Arts Council England, to oversee and develop the relationship between the University, Seven Stories and the City Council. As well as developing models for future long-term collaboration, Vital North incubates new research and engagement projects and aims to develop collaborations between Seven Stories and a wide range of units within the University.

Funded programmes

In addition to this ad hoc and strategic support, NUHRI will launch two new programmes in 2017:

- NUHRI Banner Projects. Expressions of Interest will be invited for collaborative, inter/multidisciplinary projects addressing specific research challenges. NUHRI will support 1-2 per year, offering up to £3k on project incubation.
NUHRI Challenge Labs. Expressions of Interest will be invited from small teams of UG, PGT or PGR students for inter/multidisciplinary projects addressing specific humanities research challenges. The scheme will offer up to £1.5k for set-up, outputs and/or engagement/impact activities.

Existing NUHRI funding programmes will be retained:

- Follow-On Funding available to support further impact activities built on existing or completed project.
- Strategic funding for large cross-disciplinary projects.
- Funding for public engagement and impact events (see ‘Engagement Strategy’, below)

Early Career Academics

NUHRI prepares and empowers its postdoctoral Fellows and other Newcastle ECAs for successful careers. Development opportunities provided by NUHRI include workshops on funding opportunities, research skills sessions, and training for specific opportunities (eg. AHRC New Generation Thinkers).

The 2016 NUHRI Fellow (funded by the REA) was appointed from a field of 357 applicants. Two more candidates from the shortlist are planning to apply with Newcastle for externally funded postdoctoral fellowships (ECLS, SELS). The scheme is an extremely effective way attracting early career researchers of the very highest calibre.

NUHRI also provides a supportive home for postdoctoral researchers without academic posts (eg. Dr Katie Cooper, an AHRC New Generation Thinker). We would like to expand this provision, formalising non-stipendiary fellowships for interdisciplinary ECAs and members of the local research community without academic posts.

REF 2021

In REF2014, over 80 percent of impact case studies were underpinned by multidisciplinary research. Interdisciplinarity will be encouraged (indeed required) to a greater extent in the next REF.

NUHRI staff will model new REF interdisciplinarity processes as they are announced, identify likely institutional case studies in the humanities, offer support during their development, and advise on interdisciplinary outputs.

Working with other HaSS units

NUHRI collaborates on cross-disciplinary projects and events with the other research institutes and centres, e.g. co-funding (with NISR) ‘Of race, beyond race: African Americans in Pittsburgh then and now’ for Freedom City, and co-hosting events on Forced Displacement, education, and in the ‘Civic Humanities’.

HaSS’s Research Groups are predominantly humanities focussed. NUHRI aims to provide a forum for research group directors to meet and coordinate research and programmes.

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3. Teaching and Learning contribution

Set out the Institute’s intended contribution to learning, teaching and the student experience over the next three to five years in no more than 500 words. Note that several subject areas have recently been asked to articulate their educational philosophy as part of Learning and Teaching Review and it could be helpful to consider how the Institute could add value here.

NUHRI seeks to foster inter- and multi-disciplinarity among students as much as at postdoctoral level. Students often work within strict disciplinary boundaries (and frequently believe that doing so is essential to their employability). They are commonly unaware of interdisciplinary opportunities at doctoral and postdoctoral level. They may in fact be correct in thinking that Doctoral Training Centre procedures militate against cross-disciplinary projects.

NUHRI encourages student involvement in all its programmes, and most of the Institute’s funding schemes are open to applications from students.

In addition, from 2017 NUHRI will invite Expressions of Interest from small teams of students at any level for projects addressing specific humanities-based multi/interdisciplinary research ‘challenges’. Successful applicants will be supported in setting up these ‘Challenge Labs’, receiving advice and administrative backing as well as up to £1.5k to cover set-up costs, activities and outputs.

The Institute is endeavouring to build new projects to bring interdisciplinary postgraduate students to Newcastle. An example is a pending application to the Horizon 2020 Marie Sklodowska-Curie Innovative Training Network scheme for ‘Youth Empowerment And Resilient Societies’ (YEARS) (2016, resubmitting 2017). If successful, it will bring new interdisciplinary, inter-sectoral PhD students to the School of English and the Law School, with placements with Seven Stories and the Youth Justice Legal Centre and the Children’s Rights Alliance for England.

NUHRI also seeks to build collaborations between students and external organisations. The Vital North Partnership provides a model for doing so, engaging students from a wide range of disciplines with Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children’s Books. So far the Partnership has worked with students on the BA in Education (stage 1 students visiting Seven Stories); the BA in English Literature (stage 3 students); the BA in Music (project opportunities for stage 3 students); the MA in Museums, Galleries and Heritage Studies (placement opportunities); the MFA in Digital Cultures (project opportunities). This range will expand, and NUHRI will be seeking to support the extension of this model to other cultural and third-sector partners.

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3 British Academy, Crossing Paths: Interdisciplinary Institutions, Careers, Education and Applications (2016).
4. Engagement Strategy

This section should include the Institute’s strategy for engagement in no more than 500 words. This could cover, but is not limited to, innovation activities, community or third sector engagement.

In concert with the University’s mission to build its international, national and regional profile and to play a leading role in the economic, social and cultural development of the North East, a key part of NUHRI’s mission is to engage different publics with the University’s humanities research.

The Institute has supported contributions to the AHRC/British Academy national festival of the humanities, ‘Being Human’. In 2016 events ran at the RVI maternity unit, Laing Gallery, Seven Stories, and in the north tower of the Tyne Bridge, and attracted large numbers of visitors (including Chi Onwurah MP). ‘Being Human’ Director, Sarah Churchwell, another visitor, has invited NUHRI to apply for hub status in 2017, which we plan to do as part of our own programme of public events.

Other recent NUHRI-led events have included European Commission funded presentations in the Central Library and on campus focussed on Forced Displacement, and the ‘Big Draw’ weekend at Seven Stories, in collaboration with the Newcastle City Futures Urban Living Partnership, devised to engage children with designing the future needs of the city (attended by over 500 people). The latter was part of a long series of engagement events run as part of the Vital North Partnership project, co-funded by the University and Arts Council England and managed by NUHRI, and designed to consolidate and plan the future of the University’s relationship with Seven Stories and the City Council. Vital North provides a model for similar projects linking the University with external partners.

Individual NUHRI research projects will often involve working with communities. The AHRC-funded ‘Living Legacies’ project managed by NUHRI has been working with local schools and community groups on the commemoration the First World War. A new £25k grant will now enable University researchers from HCA, SELS and MAST to engage with community organisations such as the Orkney Research Centre for Archaeology and a team of volunteers to commemorate, research and publicise the Scapa Flow scuttling for its centenary in 2019. Another project on eighteenth-century electoral culture has been established with collaboration from volunteers at the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle. We also plan a major public debate on Alternative Versions of Democracy.

NUHRI will be contributing the Freedom City programme. The Institute has part-funded (with NISR) a public exhibition, designed by Dr Ben Houston (HCA), to be installed in Pittsburgh and at the GNM (‘Of race, beyond race: African Americans in Pittsburgh then and now’). NUHRI also plans to fund production of comic book aimed at children and young people setting out the historical role of Newcastle and the North East in the history of civil rights.

Over the next year we are keen to develop the NUHRI website, in conjunction with social media channels, so that it provides a vibrant and durable interface between University researchers and the public. We will be working to ensure that each NUHRI project leaves an online legacy of some kind, such as a project microsite or short film.
5. Internationalisation

Set out the Institute’s three to five year strategy around internationalisation in no more than 500 words. This could include the identification of key strategic partners, issues around league tables and reputation, or other topics as you see fit.

The University’s Internationalisation Strategy 2016-21 has three key objectives: (1) to enhance the University’s international presence and impact; (2) to provide an international experience for University staff and students; and (3) to embed a consistent understanding of and approach to internationalisation across the University. NUHRI aims to support all these objectives. The Institute is particularly well positioned to support Strategic Objective (1).

The 357 applications for the 2016 NUHRI postdoctoral Fellowship (supported by the REA) came from 33 countries. Of these, 137 were from international candidates (38%), including 55 from the EU, 82 from beyond. These candidates carefully investigated the strengths of humanities research at Newcastle University. They explored possibilities of collaboration. They nominated international referees. All this makes the Fellowship an extremely effective tool for boosting the University’s international visibility and reputation.

NUHRI promotes activity to embed and grow a number of the University’s ‘Tier 2’ partnerships with key overseas institutions. The Institute is financially supporting Ben Houston’s collaboration with Pittsburgh University, and we are currently investigating ways to develop a humanities strand in the RENKEI programme of collaboration with Japanese universities, including Osaka, which will focus on developing and disseminating best practice in universities’ engagement with cultural organisations.

However, in accordance with the NUHRI research strategy, the Institute will chiefly seek to foster individual, project-based, academic-to-academic international partnerships (what the University’s Internationalisation Strategy calls ‘tier 3’). Inevitably, and advisedly, this will include work that accords with the aims of the Global Challenges Research Fund. One example includes the work of a Dr Nicki Kindersley, a shortlisted applicant for the 2016 NUHRI Fellowship, on educational cultures during times of conflict in Africa and the Middle East. NUHRI is currently supporting the development of a new collaboration with Professor Pauline Dixon (ECLS), with the aim of an application to the GCRF programme. The Institute is also now laying the ground for other projects on reading and storytelling in displaced persons camps.

6. Staffing Strategy

Set out the overall staffing strategy, over the next three to five years, for academic and professional staff in the Institute, including the overall size and spread of staff across the grades, any plans for leadership development and succession in no more than 500 words. Detailed short term (two year) staffing plans should be sent as an entirely separate document using the template provided and

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* UK (220); USA (26); Italy (15); Australia (13); Canada (12); France (10); Germany (8); Ireland (7); India (6); Netherlands, South Africa, Sweden, Turkey (3); Brazil, Denmark, Greece, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Singapore Switzerland (2); Argentina, Belgium, China, Egypt, Estonia, Iran, Iraq, Santa Lucia, Slovenia, Spain, South Korea (1).
submitted to Jackie Scott. Any requests for new staff should demonstrate how they help the school to meet the vision and strategy set out in this document and must indicate how the school intends to accommodate the new hires within their existing space footprint. If additional space would be required this must be clearly articulated in Appendix 1A.

At present the staff of NUHRI, responsible for delivering the programmes set out in this document, consists of a Director with 0.5fte buy-out, and a clerical officer (grade D) contracted to work only 0.2fte with NUHRI.

The Institute’s first postdoctoral research fellow was appointed for three years in October 2015. A second postdoctoral fellow, supported by the Research Excellence Academy, will join on 30 January 2017. The Vital North Partnership Manager (grade F) is also associated with the Institute, although funded separately and dedicated to developing collaboration with Seven Stories. NUHRI can also draw on ad hoc support from other HaSS professional service colleagues.

Postdoctoral Fellows

The first staffing imperative for NUHRI is to secure a continuation of the highly successful Postdoctoral Fellowship scheme. Fellows progress their own research, but also contribute to the development and coordination of Institute-supported research and engagement projects. Over the course of their three years, the Institute supports their progressive embedding in a host School, with the intention that successful fellows may proceed to full-time appointment.

When NUHRI was established funding was secured to support one three-year Fellow. The REA supported the appointment of the second. Since the Fellowship scheme attracts some of the very best early career academics to Newcastle, contributes so importantly to the University’s national and international reputation, and to NUHRI’s identity and programmes, a continuation of the scheme is a priority. Where funding might come from is uncertain.

Professional support

The second staffing imperative is to secure additional administrative support for the Institute. The current provision is inadequate to support the strategy and programmes set out in this document. Appendix A sets out all of the tasks that the Institute’s clerical officer currently seeks to undertake. To fulfil these tasks in one day a week is impossible. It also leaves unperformed many important strategic tasks, also set out in Appendix A. NUHRI will struggle to function effectively without further professional service support.
7. **Key actions for 2017-18 and 2018-19**

Include a list of actions relating to the strategies set out above. These will define major areas of work for the Institute over the next two years.

1. Support for ‘bottom-up’ initiatives for substantial and significant interdisciplinary, collaborative research projects. As part of this, the Institute will establish a ‘Banner Projects’ programme with a dedicated call for expressions of interest and ring-fenced funding. The Institute will support research projects in applications for external funding.

2. Establish a new programme of ‘Challenge Labs’ to encourage and support interdisciplinary projects devised and led by students.

3. Develop and implement coherent, realistic catalysing strategies to foster and coordinate collaborations in key strategic areas, including Medical Humanities, Archival Research, Digital Humanities and Global Challenges (Humanities).

4. Continue to support the Vital North Partnership, expanding its range of activities, developing a long-term strategy for collaboration between the University, City Council and Seven Stories, and investigate the project’s use as a model for partnerships with other non-HEI organisations.

5. Explore options for funding NUHRI postdoctoral fellowships from 2017-18.

6. Implement a programme of non-stipendiary fellowships for ECAs and members of the local research community lacking academic posts.

7. Provide a forum for Faculty research groups to coordinate activities and programmes.

8. Deliver support for the preparation of institutional-level impact case studies for the next REF.

9. Host events, run activities and lead new projects that enhance the profile of the humanities within and outside the University, encourage the engagement of a wider public with the humanities, and tie in with University programmes.

10. Develop the NUHRI website and social media channels to provide a well-used interface between researchers in the humanities, other academics, and the wider public.

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<tr>
<th>Document owner</th>
<th>Matthew Grenby</th>
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<tr>
<td>Date discussed with Institute Management Board or Steering Group</td>
<td>Awayday with external advisors: 16 May 2016  Steering Group: 29 November 2016</td>
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<td>Date of agreement with Faculty</td>
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A. Implications of Plans for Estate

Highlight major future estate requirements and significant areas of emergent need.

For short-term requirements, make a brief note below and complete the attached spreadsheet (HaSS Estates – 2017-18 and 2018-19). Please return alongside your strategic plan.

For longer term aspirational needs, refer to any ongoing faculty discussions around estate development and consider any collaborative opportunities with other areas across the University.

N/A.
## Appendix A: NUHRI professional support

1 Feb. 2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duties currently undertaken by Clare Graham, NUHRI clerical officer (0.2 fte on NUHRI, Grade D)</th>
<th>Duties currently undertaken as required by Faculty Office (chiefly Lorna Wilson)</th>
<th>Duties currently unperformed, and which could (i) be added to existing staff responsibilities, or (ii) fall under the responsibility of an Institute Administrator</th>
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</table>
| 1. Support for Director  
(i) convening, organising and preparing for meetings  
(ii) Director’s diary  
(iii) Director’s expenses  | 1. Additional support as required for major events and activities.  
2. Research Funding Applications:  
(i) support for the Institute Director with the development and delivery of research funding workshops and other activities  
(ii) organisation of research networking events as required.  
(iii) support for grant applications being submitted under the Institute’s banner.  
(iv) provision of costing and pricing support and expertise to academics in producing research proposals.  
(v) alerting Institute staff and contacts to funding opportunities.  | 1. Contribution to strategic planning  
(i) contribution to discussions and planning of the development of short, medium and long term plans  
(ii) with the Director, develop and implement strategic or business plans for continuous improvements in Institute activities.  
(iii) with the Director, contribute to the production of the Institute strategic plan and annual report.  |
| 2. Steering group and other NUHRI committees (e.g. Vital North Partnership)  
(i) convener  
(ii) minutes  | 2. Research project planning and management:  
(i) supporting the Director and Research and Enterprise Services team in the faculty office by contributing original ideas and innovative solutions to research and impact projects.  
(ii) taking a role in the feasibility, planning, co-ordination and implementation of large scale projects with internal and external stakeholders.  | 2. Research project planning and management:  
(i) supporting the Director and Research and Enterprise Services team in the faculty office by contributing original ideas and innovative solutions to research and impact projects.  
(ii) taking a role in the feasibility, planning, co-ordination and implementation of large scale projects with internal and external stakeholders.  |
| 3. Convene external committees and meetings as required, e.g. Advisory Board (as and when established).  | 3. Budget:  
(i) prepare business cases as required in liaison with the Director.  | 3. Budget:  
(i) prepare business cases as required in liaison with the Director.  |
| 4. Event organisation and coordination  
(i) convening  
(ii) room booking  
(iii) catering  
(iv) participants’ travel and expenses  | 4. Project Management:  
(i) taking a leading role in the initiation, planning and execution of activities in  | 4. Project Management:  
(i) taking a leading role in the initiation, planning and execution of activities in  |
| 5. Postdoctoral fellowships  
(i) administration of appointment process of NUHRI Fellow(s)  
(ii) administration of Fellows’ employment (salary, expenses, PDR, etc.)  |  |  |
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<th>7. Communications (inc. website and social media)</th>
<th>8. Implementing and maintaining the efficient running of the Institute.</th>
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<tr>
<td>(i) managing set-up and running of Institute website</td>
<td>support of the Institute, including campus activities, external events, media campaigns.</td>
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<td>(ii) managing and creating content for website</td>
<td>5. Representation of NUHRI:</td>
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<td>(iii) managing and creating content for Twitter feed</td>
<td>(i) In the absence of the Director, represent and promote the Institute to ensure that issues are presented and acted upon.</td>
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<td>(iv) liaison with Public Relations over press communications.</td>
<td>(ii) Represent the Institute on Faculty and University committees and working groups as required.</td>
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<th>6. Institute Governance:</th>
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<td>(i) produce papers for committees as required by the Director.</td>
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<td>(ii) supporting the Director by ensuring the satisfactory functioning of reporting structures for the Institute.</td>
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<th>7. Implement and maintain an efficient support and reporting structure within the Institute and in its larger network:</th>
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<td>(i) monitoring of Institute’s KPIs.</td>
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<td>(ii) liaison and follow-up with Institute stakeholders (e.g. those who have received funding or other support from NUHRI)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(iii) keeping records of the Institute’s contribution to Impact Case Studies, REF returns, and application for external funding.</td>
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<tr>
<td>(iv) managing the Institute’s relationship with the Research Excellence Academy.</td>
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| 8. Other duties in support of the Institute Director as required. |