

External Review of Research Trent University March 2020

Summary

A review of research at Trent University was conducted at the request of President Groarke and in accordance with a clause in the recent collective agreement. This report has been prepared based on feedback provided by numerous written submissions, two days of on-site meetings (including an open forum for faculty and staff), and additional telephone interviews. Trent has many areas of excellence in research and an overwhelming commitment to the importance of research was evident throughout the process. Despite this, research performance as quantified in terms of research funding has been falling for almost a decade. Concerns were raised with respect to a very wide range of issues but particularly with respect to research culture and the operations of the Vice-Principal Research and Innovation (VPRI) portfolio. Based on the information received as part of the review process, we have concluded that the issues giving rise to the situation go beyond the remit of the VPRI portfolio. Over time the rate of growth of research activity has been much faster than the rate of change to the University structure and practices needed to effectively accommodate the increasing prominence of research. It is a multifaceted University-based problem that will require fundamental changes to effectively address. Changes to the VPRI portfolio are only part of the change required to achieve the desired outcomes of a more research-oriented culture and consequent improvements in research performance. While more money is always desirable, the only foreseeable additional funding will be from improved performance in attracting grants, contracts, and indirect costs, and by having a compelling case for industry and benefactors to invest or donate money to support research activities. Furthermore, it is our opinion that much better outcomes can be achieved with the funds already available to Trent University if there is a careful reorganization and reallocation of duties and, when appropriate, funding. We respectfully provide 46 Recommendations for consideration by Trent in its efforts to achieve the objective of being “the best we can be in all aspects” of its research activities.

Introduction

Trent has undergone tremendous growth since it was established in 1963. The number of students and research-intensive faculty has grown considerably. The amount of research being conducted, and the complexity, has increased substantially compared to the early days. Trent’s research ambitions continue to expand with it seeking greater industrial and community engagement and relevance through initiatives such as the Cleantech Commons, the Centre for Community Based Research, and the Centre for Aging. This is all happening while resources are shrinking, competition is increasing across the university sector, and as Trent works to maintain its research strengths in core areas such as the basic sciences, social sciences, and humanities.

Trent has many areas of excellence in research. An overwhelming commitment to the importance of research was expressed by most of the people with whom we met. Members of the Board of Governors expressed their support for the University Strategic Plan. They recognize the importance of research to Trent in achieving its mission while having a very real appreciation for the challenges. The President of Trent University is deeply committed to Trent's research success and is fully supportive of the external review being conducted.

Despite an expressed commitment to research, research performance data reveals a decrease overall in federal granting council funding and a decrease in comparison to Trent's peer group. Faculty have expressed concerns regarding the research culture at Trent and the actual support for research. An external review of research activities, with a view to improving the University's support of faculty researchers, was specified in the 2019-2022 TUFA agreement. This is an unusual provision in a faculty collective agreement and signals the importance of this matter to faculty.

The review process brought forward several issues of concern from individuals across the University community. Many of the concerns were directed at "research" or the Vice-President and Innovation (VPRI) portfolio. While there are issues associated with the activities of the VPRI portfolio, there are university-wide policy, structural, and funding matters that are responsible for, or contribute to, the challenges impacting the research enterprise.

Trent prides itself on being an excellent undergraduate teaching university with a strong research enterprise. President Groarke's aspiration is "to make us the best that we can be in all aspects of our research activities". Amongst those with whom we met there appeared to be overwhelming support for advancing research and research opportunities at Trent. The recommendations of this report are provided in the context that Trent is indeed serious about its desire to be a leading university with respect to research amongst its peer group and that the University as a whole aspires to be the "best we can be in all aspects" of its research activities. This cannot be accomplished by making changes within the VPRI portfolio alone.

Every University is unique in its focus, structure, and culture. The "Trent way" was mentioned frequently by respondents in explaining why things are done as they are. Despite being a small university, there is a lack of cohesiveness, collegiality, and support across some sectors of the university (both between administrators and different administrative groups and in faculty both within and between departments). The recommendations below are provided in the spirit of encouraging Trent to consider new and different ways of collaborating across the University to support research and researchers. Faculty, administration, and the VPRI portfolio are all passionate about research success for Trent. We are encouraged by this and hope the recommendations are helpful to Trent in envisioning how it might collaboratively and successfully move forward in improving the research enterprise.

Observations and Recommendations

Part I: University-Wide Issues

Research Culture

Observations.

Despite the strong commitment to the importance of research noted earlier, there are many concerns about the research culture at Trent. Perceptions included research not mattering at Trent, senior administration not being committed to research, and insufficient recognition of research, both funded and unfunded. A shift in culture over the years was identified, moving from risk management to risk avoidance, and faculty feeling more policed than supported in their research activities. There is a perceived struggle between teaching and research. There is recognition of the many faculty at Trent who engage in and support research; however, there were indications of a lack of collegiality among faculty in some areas of the University and in some cases faculty resenting or discouraging their colleagues who engage in research (including regular faculty, teaching faculty, adjuncts, and contract faculty).

A disconnect between senior administration and faculty was mentioned, as was less communication across the University. Concerns were expressed by both senior administration and faculty with respect to morale declining, especially in the social sciences and humanities, as external funding has been more difficult to obtain.

Trent's branding and promotion around research could improve.

Recommendations.

Trent should rethink and re-state its commitment to research and faculty conducting research. Additional measures to recognize and promote research that could be considered include:

1. Deans (and where appropriate Associate Deans; see recommendation #5) should work with their faculty to understand the research being conducted (externally funded or not) and its impact. They should regularly communicate promotion/recognition opportunities regularly to senior administration and recognize faculty within their own departments and faculties.
2. Senior administration (including the VPRI and Deans) should develop or improve upon measures to promote researchers and their research, from nominating faculty for external research recognition to better promotion of experts at Trent by seeking media and outreach opportunities for faculty.
3. VPRI and Deans (and, where appropriate, Associate Deans) should recognize and congratulate faculty when they are successful in their research programs, including obtaining external funding.
4. The means by which research activity and excellence are factored into merit and promotion of faculty should be reviewed, and other measures to incentivize and reward research faculty considered; the motivation of faculty to engage in research is critical to Trent's research success and resources available to support research (i.e., indirect costs of research).

Engaging Academic Leadership with Research

Observations.

Deans and Department Chairs appear to focus almost exclusively on teaching while the VPRI portfolio is considered responsible for all things related to research. There was much emphasis on Department Chairs being collegial chairs and being part of the faculty union; however, this not uncommon in many other universities and yet at those universities, chairs do much more with respect to many of the tasks assigned to VPRI than appears to be the case at Trent. Examples of these tasks include signing off on expenses, signing off on grant submissions, encouraging and celebrating the research success of the faculty in their department; none of which are disciplinary matters but rather are to help and/or support their faculty.

All Deans with whom we met were very supportive and active in research and very knowledgeable of the issues related to conducting research. Despite this, faculty perceived Deans as not caring about research, while in some cases Deans expressed little opportunity to meaningfully engage (e.g., minimal role in the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) process; lack of resources, lack of awareness of what grants have been submitted, and access to indirect costs). Deans seem to have minimal authority and responsibility when it comes to research, and little interaction with the Office of Research and Innovation (ORI) was reported. Several respondents brought forward the need for Graduate Studies and the VPRI portfolios to collaborate more.

Deans and Department Chairs do not review grants before they arrive at the ORI. This presumably means that in addition to not having an opportunity to become aware of the research being proposed, they would have no idea what resources might be needed if the grant application is successful (e.g., teaching release, space, graduate students, etc.).

Increased teaching loads were a common concern as was the perception of insufficient teaching release for research-intensive faculty. This has been an issue of concern at most Ontario universities due to the reduction in the funding for universities and increases in the number of undergraduate students required to balance budgets. Some departments at other universities, and possibly at Trent, have found that maintaining research quality and teaching quality requires a rationalization of how many courses, and especially very small enrolment courses, can be justifiably taught given today's realities. This has resulted in streamlining programs with more core courses and fewer elective courses, but also in high-quality teaching and research. This approach has been adopted based on the philosophy that it is better to do fewer things very well than many things less well.

Recommendations.

Trent should review how the academic leadership engages with research. It will be difficult to change how research is valued and supported across the university without meaningful engagement beyond the VPRI and ORI. Measures to consider include:

5. Appointing an Associate Dean or another similar position in the Faculties/Divisions to support and

advocate for research. Associate Dean Research is a common role in many universities and may be especially needed at Trent where Department Chairs do not have responsibility for overseeing or supporting research as part of their job description.

6. Routing all grants through the Faculty/Divisions (e.g., to the Associate Dean Research) before they arrive at ORI. The responsibilities for review at this level should be determined internally at Trent; however, at a minimum, this will provide Faculties/Divisions with an understanding of what research projects are being pursued and an opportunity to consider any impact it may have on their Faculty/Division, as well as an opportunities to promote or support the research.
7. Routing all grants having implications for resources such as teaching release or space through Deans before they go to ORI.
8. Providing Deans with more decision-making capabilities for resources such as indirect cost generation and allocation, and space allocation. At a minimum, increasing the engagement and awareness of Deans in resource availability and allocation are worthy of consideration.
9. The Dean of Graduate Studies, the VPRI, and the Provost should explore mechanisms to ensure their portfolios collaborate more. Issues such as teaching release, graduate student funding, foreign graduate students, and allocation of CRCs are areas where more collaboration may be beneficial.
10. Departments with concerns about teaching loads impacting research and/or their inability to provide teaching release (when justified) should carefully examine the number of course offerings, number of students in courses, and how central the courses are to the primary mission of the department. They should focus on what will give the best overall outcomes; sometimes doing less provides better outcomes. The objective should be to increase the efficiency and quality of the courses that are offered by eliminating unessential courses and those with unjustifiably low enrolment. The primary objective of courses should be to benefit student education and the special interest of faculty for teaching a course should not be a factor unless they coincide with the primary objective.

Funding for Research Supports and Indirect Costs of Research

Observations.

The VPRI budget is primarily a “soft budget” with almost total dependence on indirect costs (or research grant/contract overhead dollars) which can fluctuate from year to year. It was noted by some respondents that there is a lack of transparency across the University regarding the research budget and where overheads are spent. It is unclear in some cases if and how indirect costs flow to functions other than ORI that support research (e.g., library); if they do receive indirect costs it is not obvious to them. Internal funding of seed research from the University operating budget has decreased substantially over the past two decades (est. \$140,000 – 1999; \$90,000 – 2009; \$11,000 – 2019).

Internal awards for research seemed especially of concern in the social sciences and humanities. Concerns were mainly in two areas: 1) not enough internal research funding, and 2) internal funds not being sufficiently targeted towards preparing and incentivizing (or requiring) faculty to apply for external research funds. There was also a perception amongst several researchers that the allocation process currently in place is biased because the same people receive funding on a regular basis. We are not able to assess the validity of these concerns but raise them here as they may warrant further inspection by Trent.

Related to supports for research, it was noted by several respondents that there is limited financial support for foreign graduate students. It can be difficult to recruit domestic graduate students, and Graduate Studies has a limited number of \$12,000 scholarships they provide to make up the full tuition differential for foreign graduate students.

Recommendations.

The budget model and support for research across the University should be revised. Specific recommendations for consideration are:

11. Ensure the VPRI portfolio has a predictable base budget. This does not mean that part of the base budget of the VPRI cannot come from indirect costs; however, the budget should not be as dependent on this unpredictable source of funds as at present.
12. Policy around both the generation/collection and distribution of indirect costs should be revisited by senior administration, including Deans. It is important that indirect costs are focussed on supporting funded research (from which they are generated) and getting more funded research (which would provide more indirect costs) across the university.
13. Consider the allocation of some indirect costs to Deans and/or Departments to support and incentivize research within their faculties/schools.
14. Consider revenue generation measures outside of the indirect costs. The VPRI identified several possibilities in their report to the reviewers, and other ideas likely exist across the University. Engaging and incentivizing entities across Trent (e.g., Faculties, Departments, service units, etc.) to develop and implement rational business plans to generate revenue to support research is advised.
15. Review all programs providing internal research funding to existing faculty and ensure they are unbiased and focussed on funding activities that prepare faculty to be successful in obtaining external research funding. If, and until, internal funds are more available to support research across the University, in our experience, this is the best use of internal research funding.
16. In addition to considering increasing the overall support for international graduate students, consider reducing the scholarship amount from Graduate Studies (currently \$12,000) and expect faculty to contribute a portion of the funding differential from their research grants, so that Graduate Studies can offer more scholarships and, in so doing, assist more students and researchers.

Faculty Recruitment

Observations.

Several respondents expressed concerns regarding faculty hiring practices and how they may impact Trent's research performance. Although evidence did not support many of these concerns, it is important to note that such perceptions exist. For example, it was communicated to the reviewers that 50% of new hires are teaching-focused faculty and when non-teaching focused faculty are hired there are efforts to reduce starting salaries, teaching releases are rare and start-up funds are not competitive. There was a perception by some that tenure-track faculty are hired primarily based on being able to fill a particular teaching spot, with their research skills a secondary consideration. Possibly, due to the transition of limited term teaching faculty to full time tenure track positions, a misperception may exist with respect to how many new faculty are research focussed hires. (We noted that 38/43 or 88% of new tenure track

appointments since 2015-16 have been research appointments.)

Recommendations.

For research performance to improve at Trent, it is important to recruit faculty that are interested in and have the training and publication experience to write successful grants and conduct successful research programs, and to support these faculty in getting their research programs off to a strong start. Even though there are budgetary restrictions and realities at Trent that may make this challenging, this must be addressed to the extent possible. Recruiting for research excellence is a core component of research success. Measures to consider are:

17. Trent University, including the Board of Governors, review its recruitment activities and ensure faculty renewal efforts are competitive with similar sized universities and will support research success into the future. Activities to review include salaries, start-up funds and teaching release.
18. Deans engage with existing faculty to see what collegial measures they might pursue to better support new faculty hires. This could include conveying a clear message to all faculty of the importance of supporting their colleagues in pursuing their research interests.
19. Communications regarding faculty hires across the University be improved so that the continuing commitment of Trent to focus on research excellence (while maintaining a high quality undergraduate program) is widely recognized.

Research Policy

Observations.

How research policies are developed and revised was not completely clear. The Research Policy Committee (RPC) is established by the Senate and has a clear mandate, including advising on policy and procedures. However, the Committee seemed unsure of its mandate and its role with respect to research policy. Research policies are drafted by the ORI (the VPRI chairs the Research Policy Committee) and it is unclear the extent to which draft policies are distributed for input across the University either before or after they arrive at the RPC. It appears that research policies can be impacted by discussions and negotiations with TUFA. While changes being introduced into a collective agreement may indeed be well-intentioned in concept and acceptable to the representatives of both parties at the bargaining table, the specific choice words to represent those concepts matter; the end result must be consistent with applicable external policy(s), for example, Tri-council policy. The reviewers noted that the level of detail is that creeping into Trent collective agreements is unusual. This would appear to be a symptom of the broader problems this report is seeking to address. This level of involvement by TUFA in bargaining regarding issues that would be more appropriately dealt with by robust University policies may be a signal that the process of developing research-based University policies is failing. We suspect this could be avoided by having a more robust review system of University policies and procedures required for their implementation. Unless this is addressed, one can expect that the collective agreement will continue to be used as an alternative means of addressing issues.

The Conflict of Interest (COI) policy and procedures to manage COIs are of concern. The policy is dated 1 February 2008, was last reviewed on 6 December 2012, and was intended for another review in December 2019 (we are unsure of the outcome of any such review if indeed any such review was conducted). The

current policy includes some definition and examples, but does not specify procedures to manage COIs other than to indicate “The University will establish procedures for evaluating conflict of interest”, and to note that when COIs cannot be avoided entirely how they “may be mitigated through compensating internal controls or third-party involvement”. An appeals mechanism is not described. When the Policy has been applied to the research portfolio this has been problematic. There appears to be agreement that the VPRI portfolio should initially assess and evaluate any declaration of a COI as it relates to research; however, there are justifiable concerns regarding how the ORI processes are managed when potential COIs are identified. There is concern regarding the definition of COIs, and a desire for actual COIs, including those considered potential or perceived, to be clearly specified when the VPRI believes a COI needs to be managed.

Recommendations.

20. The University should review the Terms of Reference, membership, and procedures of the Research Policy Committee and ensure it is performing its function in a manner consistent with the expectations of Senate, and ensure that research policy reflects granting council requirements and that its development has wide stakeholder engagement and vetting prior to being submitted to Senate review and approval.
21. A revised COI policy is recommended with more detail provided around potential conflicts (acknowledging that not all conflicts can be envisioned a priori). Detail should also be provided regarding how COIs will be managed, including an appeals process. At other universities, it is not uncommon for Department Chairs or Deans to be involved in evaluating and managing COIs; other universities should be consulted regarding policy and best practices. The applicable external policies should be reviewed to ensure compliance. In addition to the VPRI, the Provost and Deans should be involved in this policy drafting process, and there should be broad consultation with faculty across the university before it is finalized.

Observations and Recommendations

Part II: Vice-President Research and Innovation and The Office of Research and Innovation

Culture and Focus

Observations.

The leadership of the VPRI portfolio and the ORI are committed to facilitating research across the university. They understand their role is to support faculty in achieving their research objectives. They believe their portfolio is successful when faculty succeed in research. They are focussed on optimizing research in the context of budget restraints. In addition to pursuing opportunities, ensuring compliance is a priority. It was emphasized by the VPRI and ORI that research activities must be compliant with applicable external policy. A focus on ensuring compliance within the ORI may be intensified by the belief that compliance audits of the ORI are conducted annually on the behalf of the Board of Governors.

It is important to note that the VPRI and the ORI team were frequently acknowledged as hard working and providing value. A great deal of praise was expressed for their dedication and efforts; however, concerns also were expressed. The VPRI and ORI are viewed by many as being overly focussed on risk. There are struggles around determining what is an acceptable risk with respect to external partnerships (industry, government, or community). Some feel the University now considers industry-funded research too risky. TUFA insistence on an external review of research being conducted would appear in large part to be a result of a perceived rigidity in the ORI, and a desire by TUFA that grants administration at Trent be more in line with that at other universities. Faculty expressed the feeling that they were being policed rather than supported. A change in culture has been perceived; it has moved from risk management to risk avoidance, from protecting researchers to protecting the institution. A sentiment expressed was 'everybody tries to stop you from doing research'. Several times it was noted that faculty researchers are avoiding the ORI by administering their grants through other universities when possible.

Based on our discussions, and with a few notable exceptions, there was a pervasive sense that there has been a poor history of communication with faculty. Although there are many individual faculty members with an excellent relationship with ORI, there were also many instances where relationships between faculty and the ORI were not positive. There is concern that the ORI is inward in its focus, and it is unclear the extent to which it consults and collaborates with colleagues at other universities. There was concern that the ORI staff (both the research facilitation and accounting roles) were insufficiently knowledgeable about granting council or CFI policies. There was also a sense that staff were reluctant to acknowledge gaps in knowledge and call the granting councils or other universities with more experience to seek advice. It is important to note that it was frequently acknowledged that over the last nine months (July 2019-March 2020) or so things have improved, with the improvement being attributed to new hires being made in the ORI. Faculty are concerned about these improvements continuing in the long-term.

Much needs to be done for the ORI to be viewed consistently across the university as being there to support the advancement of research vs. hindering researchers. It is important to note that faculty at

Trent also have a role to play in improving the relationship with ORI and support for research. There were a notable number of Faculty who had a very positive engagement with VPRI but also many with the contrary experience. There was also a perception among some that ORI acted, either consciously or unconsciously, in favour of some faculty and not others. Several times throughout the review process TUFA was brought forward as a reason why changes to process or policy could not be made. TUFA obviously has strong interests in improving the research enterprise at Trent as evidenced by their negotiation of an external review. TUFA engaged positively and constructively in the review process and continuing to engage positively and collaboratively as issues around research are resolved and changes are implemented will be important.

Recommendations:

The Office of Research and Innovation should be focussed on delivering quality programs and services that a) support researchers in achieving their research goals, and b) enable researchers to understand and comply with external and internal research requirements. Specific measures to consider:

22. The Office of Research and Innovation should change its name to demonstrate and prioritize the concept of 'Service'. The 'Office of Research Services' (which was used previously by the office) or a similar name may be more appropriate. (It is noted that positions more related to innovation report directly or indirectly to the VPRI; no innovation focussed positions report to the Director of ORI).
23. The Faculty should be supported in pursuing external partnerships that will help drive their research programs. Note: This does not set aside the need for compliance with applicable external policy and University policy.
24. If any research activity is to be restricted by the ORI, this decision should be supported by a clear policy with specified procedures followed, and there should be an appropriate opportunity for appeal. Applicable policies should be developed and/or revised as necessary, with broad stakeholder engagement (as noted above re: RPC).
25. Research faculty and other stakeholders across the University should be consulted (through a survey or otherwise) to gather information regarding what supports are needed, and what can be improved. The ORI, as a service office, should regularly consult with their constituents on how services can be improved.
26. Collaboration and consultation with other universities should be emphasized. Many universities across Ontario and Canada have struggled with the same issues that arise at Trent. Participating in OCUR and CARA activities are helpful, but more extensive outreach and collaboration can help when issues are more complex. The university community is a collaborative community and should be leveraged to the extent possible.

Workload and Responsibilities

Observations.

The VPRI portfolio has a total of 12 employees, including the VPRI, and excluding the individuals working in Research Accounting (this will be addressed separately below). This is a very small number of employees considering the breadth and complexity of responsibilities (e.g., grants facilitation and administration, internal awards, policy, CRCs, contracts, innovation and the research park, international activities). The

broad nature of the responsibilities of the VPRI, and especially the ORI, appear to have originated from the days when Trent had half the number of students that it has today and less research prominence and activity.

Many commented on the ORI being understaffed, not unlike many other offices at Trent. There were also concerns about competencies aligning with responsibilities in some cases. It was noted that changes in team members seemed to only occur when people retire. The ORI team understood the importance of their role of providing service; however, they are concerned with the number of activities with which they are asked to deal. It is difficult for them to do all the things currently expected of them and provide the level of service one might expect from a research office. There are concerns regarding limited communication with researchers, and the lack of standardization in procedures. Some of the duties undertaken by the ORI could be managed elsewhere (see Research Finance and CRCs below), and the office continues to be asked to manage new activities that should be managed elsewhere (e.g., student visas).

Staff were spending too much time on administrative activities that should be done elsewhere and this reduced the time available to be assisting faculty in seeking research funding. It was also reported that the workflow was unwieldy and poorly understood across the departments with who ORI must interact to support the research function.

Recommendations.

27. In conjunction with the results of consultation around research services, and with consideration of any planned or executed changes in ORI responsibilities and budget availability, the number of team members and responsibilities and required competencies should be reviewed and revised as appropriate to ensure the VPRI portfolio and ORI are well equipped to provide high-quality services and support to faculty researchers.
28. The Provost and the VPs of research, finance, and advancement, and the Dean of graduate studies create a working group to examine the activities currently being undertaken by the ORI team, and look for an appropriate way to reallocate duties unrelated the promotion of research to the most relevant sector of the University (e.g., visa applications for foreign students, approval of faculty expense reports, approval of the spending of research funds that have been awarded, etc. etc.) and to also develop recommendations around improving workflow between departments, ensuring that all groups responsible for overseeing various aspects of administering research understand the relevant granting Council requirements and other regulatory requirements in context. We expect that this should result in a substantial reduction in workload and ORI and should be accompanied by the plan to improve and expand the support of research at Trent.
29. Standardization and documentation of procedures should be done when possible; this can help to support current and new employees in executing their roles.
30. Formal staff performance reviews be conducted annually and, where appropriate, it should include consultation with service recipients.
31. Educational and training needs and opportunities should be reviewed at least annually, and team members supported in developing their skills and knowledge as needed

Grants Facilitation

Observations.

Supports for grant writing were described as improving substantially over the past year. Two new facilitators have been hired, both with PhDs and research experience, to replace administrators who had recently retired. Researchers have been assigned to facilitators according to the first letter of their last name (the “alphabet method”) however, the facilitators already are demonstrating different areas of expertise according to faculty. Workload was reported as being very high, with little to no time for proactive activities such as creating tools and templates to assist researchers, and information/educational sessions for researchers. Faculty are concerned the new facilitators will not be adequately supported to grow and flourish in their roles, and that the success of the office cannot be carried by only these two individuals.

The research mentor program was generally viewed as positive. There are two research mentors, one for NSERC and the other for SSHRC. The SSHRC mentor is also the SSHRC leader at Trent. Valued activities included the mentors keeping up to date with granting council changes, providing helpful tips and tricks (vs. a substantive reviews of content), and sending proposals to external reviewers. In addition to supporting individual proposals, the mentors provide educational/information sessions. The education/information sessions were viewed as valuable by faculty. It was noticed by faculty that mentors do not provide substantive feedback and external reviews can be hit or miss. The mentor positions are meant to be for a fixed period, but it appears there has been difficulty in finding others to serve the role, and the mentors have been reappointed.

Industry collaborations are supported by the Manager, Research Partnerships. The development of the CleanTech Commons was viewed as positive by many respondents, although it was emphasized that it will only succeed if appropriate relationships with industry are built and sustained. There is strong senior level support for the Commons and the President and Board of Governors realize this is a long-term commitment which may take some time to come to fruition. The amount of space occupied by a start-up company was raised as an issue but is understood this will be resolved when the first building is completed in the Commons. Apart from the issues of conflict of interest and contract research already discussed, the role of Research Partnerships section of the VPRI seemed to be accepted and was the subject of very little concern or comment and consequently does not receive much comment in this report.

Recommendations:

32. Continue to invest in resources to support competitive research applications.
33. The ORI Team should be provided with the support and resources it needs to plan and implement measures to improve services for the research community.
34. Through consultation with faculty (noted above) gain an understanding of faculty expectations for the grants review process – what feedback/advice would be most valuable to them and will help them to be successful
35. Abandon the “alphabet method” of assigning researchers to facilitators; research proposals would be better matched to ORI facilitators based on the facilitator’s expertise (while providing cross-training such that no area is neglected in event of vacation or illness).
36. Strengthen efforts to capture grants review committee members experiences and share them

throughout the university. For example, a luncheon could be held each year to recognize and appreciate those who have served on external review committees; ask what they learned in the process. This feedback could then be distributed to faculty across the University.

37. Carefully examine whether the mentor system, although serving an important role, is the most effective means of achieving that objective. Much of what they do could be done by facilitators, if funding being used to support external reviews of grants were re-allocated to a third facilitator position in ORI. There would still be a need organize meetings with people who recently served on granting councils to gain insight regarding current practice as well as whole workshops to aid in the preparation research grants. However, this is often organized by research facilitators at other universities. Adding an additional research facilitator would serve several additional roles including providing backup while others are on vacation, time to focus on special projects, and additional assistance and service to faculty.
38. Continue to support research partnerships in the development of the CleanTech Commons, and the extent practicable, accelerate the development of the first building on CleanTech Commons and facilitate movement of start-up companies to that building.

Contracts/Agreements

Concerns around contracts/agreements expressed by faculty centred around ORI's and the University's perception and management of risks with respect to industry, community, and government partners. Faculty were worried about losing partnership opportunities due to perceived risk issues, or due to the administrative burden partners experience when working with Trent. The VPRI emphasized the importance of negotiating contracts in a timely way and no concerns were expressed by faculty around the timelines for contract review, an often-cited irritant at other universities. Contracts with community groups were felt by some to be too long and complex.

The issue of publishing constraints on graduate students when conducting contract research was raised. When this was further explored it seems it was more a matter of contract work research providing a needed source of funding for graduate students when they exceed the time allowance for their degrees (when their funding runs out).

Recommendation.

39. ORI needs to recognize that there is a perceived barrier to seeking research contracts by many faculty and while appropriate procedures must be followed, every reasonable effort should be made to facilitate a successful contract. Where questions regarding the risk of doing research arise, they must be carefully evaluated against the risks and consequences of not doing the research. Where the processing of a contract is being inhibited by issues of risk (conflict of interest is addressed in an earlier recommendation) the issue should be brought to the VPRI's attention and resolved in consultation with the appropriate Dean (or, for example an Associate Dean Research in the researchers Faculty). In short, every reasonable effort should be made to facilitate the research while mitigating risk. Risk avoidance is not realistic; doing nothing is its own risk.

Research Finance

Observations.

Research finance operates under the ORI and reports to the ORI Director; the Manager of Research Accounts will be reporting to the AVP Finance in future. Positives ascribed to finance being situated in ORI included personnel being able to advise on research expenses and good communication between the research facilitation team and research accounting. Many instances of problems due to research accounting having a poor understanding of research and associated expenses were reported, although it also appears the relatively new manager of this unit has started to improve this; already there is progress. However, the accounting function could be contributing to ORI being perceived as 'over policing', and ORI team members with positions that should be focused on facilitating research are spending too much time addressing finance issues. Many respondents complained of the slow speed of processing and paying expense claims (they can take from 6-8 weeks to process). The speed of processing claims is expected to improve when a new system becomes active this spring. It was noted by faculty that reports from finance have improved substantially over the years; reports are more timely and easier to read. Faculty are assigned to research accountants based on the first initial of their last name; this helps to ensure all accountants are familiar with all programs.

The VPR is signing off on the research expenses of all faculty members, an unusual occurrence in the university sector. It is usual in other universities for a Department Head or Chair to sign off on expenses of faculty members as appearing reasonable from their perspective (research accounting should be responsible for the detailed review of expenditures and ensuring they are eligible according to university and external funding guidelines). The VPRI is very far removed from the daily activities of faculty. Acknowledging that Departmental Chairs are part of TUFA and this may prevent them from providing a 'one-up' signature on expenses (although this is done by Chairs who are also part of their Faculty Association in other universities), another one-up signatory should be considered instead of the VPRI (e.g., an Associate Dean or Dean).

Recommendations.

40. Research Finance be fully transferred to the VP Finance portfolio; measures should be implemented to ensure good communication between ORI and finance as appropriate; abandoning the alphabet assignment method and assigning accountants based on research funding agencies might help to create more expertise/knowledge with eligible expenses etc. by granting agency. The separation of the two offices can in some cases allow for the ORI to serve a stronger advocacy role for researchers when expenses are being questioned and clarification and support from the ORI is needed.
41. The 'one-up' signature on research expenses should not be the responsibility of the VPRI; this individual is too far removed from faculty for this to be meaningful; it should be provided by an individual closer to the day-to-day activities and current status of the faculty member, either Dean or, if implemented, an Associate Dean in the researchers Faculty.

Canada Research Chairs

Observations.

The ORI oversees and supports the nomination process for CRCs as well as the recruitment process. The nomination process begins with a call out to all centres and institutes, and the Presidents/Vice-Presidents committee (P-VPs) decides in what areas the Chairs will be allocated. ORI lets the departments know and works on then coordinates the recruitment. Supporting the recruitment process is a burdensome activity for the ORI and not obviously aligned with a research services function. Additionally, there have been complaints from faculty regarding the processes managed by the ORI and how these processes differ from regular departmental hires.

The Deans indicated that they are not very involved with the CRC process and not as up to date as they want to be. This is an issue as there are space and salary implications. Appropriately, they are interested in ensuring the CRCs being recruited are meeting research and teaching priorities.

Recommendations:

42. Revisit the value of all VPs participating in the CRC allocation process and consider alternatives such as having a CRC Allocations Committee comprised of the Provost, VPRI, and the Dean of Graduate Studies.
43. Improve consultation by the CRC Allocations Committee with the Deans in the process of making an allocation, and have the relevant Dean (Deans if it's a cross-appointment) involved in the hiring process once an allocation has been made to a specific area.
44. Remove the ORI from the management of the recruitment process, while implementing processes to ensure only candidates with a strong research record and worthy of a CRC appointment in the designated area are considered (e.g., a screening process for CVs to ensure CRC quality).

Durham Campus

Observations.

The number of students at Durham campus is growing (it will hit 2000 soon). It is in the greater Toronto area (GTA) and is a 50-minute commute from Trent. Traditionally the Durham campus has not focused on research; however, this could change as the student complement increases. A small number of faculty are supervising graduate students and faculty would like more research support. Durham could provide a meeting place for companies interested in learning more about the Cleantech Commons.

Recommendation:

45. The Dean of Trent-University Durham campus and the VPRI should further discussions regarding how faculty at Durham can be better recognized, supported and encouraged with respect to research, and what supports Durham campus can provide in linking the Trent campus to the GTA.

Research Ethics Board

Observations.

A review of the REB was not a specific mandate of this external review. However, once the reviewers arrived at Trent, they received a request from the REB to meet. An in-person meeting was scheduled for mid-March, but due to COVID-19 it was held by teleconference. The activities of the REB came up on occasion during meetings with the University community and the REB shared many concerns with the reviewers both verbally and in written submissions. As a full review of the research ethics review function at Trent was out of scope for this external review, information received will not be discussed. However, the reviewers are of the opinion that there are issues associated with ethics review process and the REB that are sufficiently serious to deserve its own review and appropriate recommendations.

Recommendation.

46. Trent undertake an external and focussed review of the research ethics review function in the near future. In our opinion, this review should include an examination and consideration of, inter alia:
- the review process including timelines and level of review,
 - REB workload,
 - the role of the Chair(s),
 - composition of the REB and the appointment process,
 - REB supports (include administrative support and education), and
 - compliance with external policies.

Respectfully submitted,



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