

TUS NEWSLETTER

May 11th 2011

University Units

On the 23rd March Council discussed the policies and principles that govern the implementation of the MRC's strategic decision to create more University Units (see *MRC Delivery Plan 2011/12 to 2014/15*). We publish here (boxed) the MRC trade unions' submission to the March Council meeting.

The MRC trade unions are currently engaged in discussions with the MRC on the implications of University Units for MRC staff, both those that are to be extramurally funded via University Units, and also those that are to remain in the intramural funding realm. As part of this process the MRC are addressing our concerns and we will pass on responses as the discussions develop.

University Units: Policies and Principles for transferring MRC Units to University Units

The creation of more University Units as announced in the *MRC Delivery Plan 2011/12 to 2014/15* will significantly shift the balance of research investment in the MRC from intramural to extramural funding. Such a change (together with the UKCMRI) is likely to change the nature of the MRC both as a research organisation and as an employer. The MRC trade unions (TUS) are beginning discussions with the MRC management on the implications of such change.

While recognising some of the potential benefits of the University Unit funding model, we do have some concerns and would like to like to take this opportunity to invite Council to consider them in their discussions.

o MRC units have proven particularly successful in providing a stable research and training environment from which to deliver strategic aims and produce international competitive research; the MRC is rightly proud of these achievements. It is generally accepted that a focussed strategic need is best met by the unit model rather than grant funded university setting. However, we are concerned that the uncompromising nature of the 5yearly review process (and New Director Reviews) may mean that scientific positions in University Units will be viewed as being similar to researchers on program grants and less attractive than core funded posts held by university colleagues.

How will the University Units attract and retain the best scientists and how will such a funding model be able to promote long term 'blue sky thinking' research?



How will the MRC ensure that a constant high standard of management, training and regulation is maintained across a portfolio of University Units?

Will University Units support career structures for junior researchers and those providing technical support?

o Some MRC units are carrying out research that will likely not be best suited to the University Unit model. Increasing use of extramural funding models, both via University Units and the UKCMRI, has the potential to increase the core costs of supporting this research.

How does the MRC plan to be able to continue to provide for research that is best served by intramural funding?

Will the MRC communicate to units currently doing such research that they will be able to compete for funds on an equal footing to University Units?

o MRC employees in intramural units and institutes are likely to become a significant minority of researchers funded by the MRC.

How does the MRC plan to ensure these employees continue to feel both valued and not disadvantaged by remaining in the intramural research sector?

o We understand that in some cases it may be possible for current MRC employees to stay in the MRC Pension Scheme (MRCPS) after transfer to university employment but that new staff would have to join a scheme appropriate to the host university. A large reduction in the numbers of MRC employees and potential scheme members could have negative implications with respect to the continuing viability of the MRCPS. Can Council reassure the NTUS that this shift in the funding balance will not adversely affect the viability of the MRCPS?

o The TUS would like to see a commitment from the MRC (at the corporate level) to communicate to staff its strategic approach to University Units and the implications for the organisation. We are aware that preliminary discussions have begun with a number of universities and we would like to see a consistent and robust approach to local communications and staff consultation.

MRC Trade Unions (BMA, FDA, PCS, UCU, Unite)

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On behalf of the MRC Trade Unions (BMA, FDA, PCS, UCU, Unite)

