



POLICY AND PROGRAMMES COMMITTEE

9th February 2022 10:00 - 12:00 via Zoom

Present: Professor Kate Arnold (Chair), Ms Susanna Broom, Ms Charlotte Chamberlain (minute taker), Dr Claire Chambers, Ms Viviane Yuxin Cao (GSA), Dr Karen Clegg, Dr Patrick Gallimore, Dr Sally Hancock, Dr Juliet James (Secretary), Mr Ekansh Kapoor (GSA), Dr Kelly Redeker, Dr Dani Ungar

Apologies: Dr Carolyn Snell, Dr Andrew Pickering, Dr Michelle Alexander, Dr Martin Cockett

21-22/18 **Welcome from the Chair**

Apologies were **noted** as above. The Chair welcomed the Committee's new members - Dr Andrew Pickering and Dr Michelle Alexander - who would provide a link to University Teaching Committee.

21-22/19 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 November 2021 were **approved**.

21-22/20 **Matters Arising**

No matters arising were **noted** that were not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

21-22/21 **Action Log**

The action log (**PPSC/21-22/2**) was **noted**, along with the following updates:

- The PhD in Intensive Science (approved in principle at the last meeting) had been considered for funding by the STFC but the outcome was not yet known
- The Secretary had produced draft guidance on journal-style theses. This would be shared with departments which had prior experience of these, and then with the Standing Committee on Assessment.

Action: JJ to share the draft guidance on journal-style theses with interested parties for comment.

21-22/22 **Report from the GSA**

The GSA Vice-President Academic **reported:**

- A spike in cases to the GSA Advice service following the recent release of assessment results
- The GSA Council had voted to maintain a neutral stance in upcoming industrial action, although this could be amended by a future vote
- The GSA were expecting to provide daily drop-in sessions for both students and academic representatives, as well as study spaces during industrial action
- The GSA and YGRS had been working together to set up the new PGR Forum,

to feed into the new YGRS committee structure.

ACTION: GSA VP Academic to share with KC details of the GSA supervisor of the year scheme.

21-22/23

Chair's Report

The Chair **reported** that:

- Updated research integrity and ethic codes from the University Research Committee would come to a future meeting of PPC
- Interviews for the YCEDE project manager and administrator are next week
- The BAME scholarship had gone live
- Industrial action was scheduled from 14th February to 2nd March. This was not expected to heavily impact PGRs, with the possible exception of progression points and vivas. Members were encouraged to highlight any other areas of potential disruption which might need addressing.

21-22/24

YGRS Governance Update

The Committee **received** an oral report from the Secretary on the YGRS governance reforms. York Graduate School Research Board had approved the paper previously brought to the Committee (**PPSC/21-22/3**, M21-22/7 refers) on the YGRS governance reforms, including the establishment of a new PGR Experience Committee. The new structures would be in place from the start of the 2022/23 academic year, with components going live before this where possible.

21-22/25

PGR Annual Review Reports

The Committee **considered** a draft summary report on the PGR annual review process, and individual annual review reports from each department (**PPSC/21-22/15a, b and c**). Comments had been received from some of the members not present and these were fed into the meeting.

Discussion centred on the following themes:

- The usability of PRES data in this process, with small response rates in certain cohorts giving undue influence to individual responses. There was a need to triangulate PRES data with other data and the possibility of a monthly PGR pulse survey was raised
- That departmental changes (such as relocation and mergers) can have a significant impact on PGRs and their sense of community.
- Interdisciplinary, particularly cross-faculty research needed better University support, as highlighted by the difficulties experienced by PGRs in the Centre for Women's Studies in terms of accessing resources
- Online and blended approaches for training sessions and other PGR support present opportunities (particularly for distance learning PGRs) and challenges
- It was important to have ways to bring together solitary researchers, primarily in the Arts and Humanities and Social Sciences Faculties.

ACTIONS: JJ to amend the draft summary report in the light of comments made by the Committee and to provide guidance to departments on the detail required in annual review reports through the provision of good examples.

RETT to conduct a gap analysis of training and support across departments and

DTPs/CDTs, and also to consider the possibility of an institution-wide PGR symposium.

JJ to pass on PPC queries around a monthly PGR survey to the Internal Communications team.

21-22/26

UK Research Supervision Survey and its Implications for York

The Committee **considered** a paper (**PPSC/21-22/16**) from the Head of RETT and the Dean on the UK Research Supervision Survey and its implications for York. The survey ran in Spring 2021, gathering over 3000 responses from 158 UK Higher Education providers, including 80 returns from York. Key themes from the paper for York included mandatory PGR supervision CPD for supervisors (with York being a clear outlier in not having any mandatory PGR supervision CPD for supervisors), other support for supervisors, the use of supervisory teams, supervision of PGRs from diverse backgrounds, and interdisciplinary supervision.

In response to the paper, it was **noted** that:

- There were no objections to making PGR supervision CPD mandatory for supervisors
- Training for supervisors should include training on recruitment, including from the PGR enquiry stage where applicable
- There was an appetite for further support for the supervision of PGRs from diverse backgrounds
- There was significant variation across the University in terms of the composition and role of the TAP, vis-a-vis the supervisory team and progression panel, with some departments viewing the TAP as providing additional supervision, and others viewing the TAP as providing challenge to the supervisory team.

In the course of discussion, it was also **noted** that:

- Some departments, whilst welcoming the focus on recruiting UK BAME PGRs, missed the Overseas Research Scholarships and the opportunities this offered for recruiting international PGRs
- The administrative process for dealing with scholarships was not clear for prospective PGRs or staff.

In response, the Chair noted that the ORS had not been successful in recruiting from the global south. It was hoped that the wider YGRS project on recruitment and admissions would help ensure that processes were streamlined for everyone involved.

The Committee **approved** the following recommendations from the paper:

- a. The Dean and Head of RETT to draft policy and process changes to strengthen York's supervisory effectiveness and capacity. The proposals would be brought to the next PPC meeting for consideration. The proposals paper should include a number of options around support and CPD for PGR supervisors including the provision of mandatory PGR supervision CPD for new and existing PGR supervisors;
- b. RETT to collaborate with external partners and internal stakeholders to develop specific CPD provision for supervisors of PGRs from diverse backgrounds.

The Committee **endorsed** the following recommendations from the paper:

- a. The Head of RETT to share with PPC her work on Communities of Practice for PGR supervisors;
- b. YGRS to review over the next 12-24 months issues including: the optimum number of supervisees; team supervision; mentoring; interdisciplinary PhD supervision; provision of initial and refresher training in areas around pastoral support, and ways of recognising and rewarding contribution.

**ACTION: KC and the Dean to take forward the above recommendations.
KC to review guidance on the respective composition and role of the supervisory team, TAP and progression panel.**

21-22/27

Supervision: PGR options for raising concerns

The Committee **considered** an initial consultation paper (**PPSC/21-22/17**) from the Secretary about the options available to PGRs who have a concern around their supervision. This had been a long running issue and had been raised by the University Complaints Officer.

In discussion it was **noted** that :

- A new faculty-based-contact reporting system was welcome
- A review of the presentation of the relevant information would be helpful
- The need to ensure that a 'no blame' option for ending a supervisory relationship could not be mis-used
- The importance of ensuring proper links with the GSA support and advice services.

The Committee **approved** the following recommendations from the paper, noting that this was a significant step towards solving a complex and long-running issue:

- a. Give the departmental and YGRS reporting route a name (e.g. *supervision review route*) to raise its profile and differentiate it more clearly from the complaints procedure;
- b. Align the *supervision review route* more closely with the review of supervision form, so that the two are seen as alternative approaches to achieving the same aim (i.e. enabling the resolution of issues with resorting to the complaints procedure);
- c. Provide more guidance to PGRs and staff on what options are available - and what the potential consequences are - if a PGR raises a concern about their supervision via the *supervision review route*/review of supervision form but does not want their supervisor to be made aware of the concern. Options may include interventions that do not target an individual supervisor (e.g. changing departmental policy or providing training for all departmental supervisors) or direct support to the PGR (e.g. training on difficult conversations or directing them to University or GSA advice and support services);
- d. Reduce the departmental contact points in the *supervision review route* to the non-supervisory TAP member and the Graduate Chair (plus alternate), ensuring that the Head of Department can be involved in any informal complaints case that subsequently arises;
- e. Introduce Faculty-level-contacts (e.g. the Associate Dean for Research and named alternate - from two different departments) for PGRs (or

departmental contact points) to approach in place of the Dean in the *supervision review route*, ensuring that the Dean can be involved in a formal complaints case if that subsequently arises. Give PGRs the option of the review of supervision form bypassing the Graduate Chair in favour of one of the Faculty-based-contacts;

- f. Explore with York's mediation service whether PGRs should have access to the University's formal mediation provision in addition to/or in place of the *supervision review route*/review of supervision form (note that currently this service is restricted to staff matters). Also to ascertain if key individuals in the *supervision review route*/review of supervisor form could or should receive some training in mediation to help them with their role;
- g. Retain the requirement for the non-supervisory TAP member to have a conversation about supervision with the PGR at the end of each TAP meeting but consult on the option of making the completion of the review of supervision form *within* the meeting optional;
- h. Ensure that it is clear to PGRs that the review of supervision form can be completed at any time and amend the form so that it does not require sign-off from the non-supervisory TAP member;
- i. Replace the paper-based review of supervision form with a departmentally-managed Google form that goes direct to the Graduate Administrator and then, if required, to the Graduate Chair (or alternate). Improve the guidance on form confidentiality;
- j. Consult on a set of revised questions for the review of supervision form to ensure it is easier to identify when action needs to be taken.

ACTION: JJ to take forward the above recommendations.

21-22/28

Changes Approved by Chair's Action

The Committee **received** for information changes approved by Chair's action since the last meeting as follows:

Environment and Geography

Approval with immediate effect of changes to the evidence requirements for PGR progression to allow for greater flexibility, acknowledging different research project trajectories.

21-22/29

Collaborative Update

The Committee **received** for information an update on collaborative provision, as follows:

CITY College

Further to M21-22/15:

- Three PGRs had successfully started on the collaborative off-site PhD programme
- The admissions round for 2022 entry was starting, with projects from all four participating departments
- The Joint Doctoral Executive Committee had held its first meeting and the [draft minutes](#) were available.

ChemArch double PhD

Further to M21-22/15, the individual double PhD studentship agreements were now in the process of being signed.

21-22/30

Covid-19 Contingency Arrangements

The Committee **received** for information an update on Covid-19 contingency measures. The PGR Academic Contingency Group had met again on 6th January 2022 and agreed updates to the PGR Covid-19 contingency arrangements in the light of the Omicron wave, including a new Temporary Remote Research option for incoming PGRs

21-22/31

Dates of the Next Meetings

- Monday 25th April 11am-1pm
- Tuesday 7th June 3-5pm