



**York Graduate Research School
Awards and Funding Sub-Committee**

Thursday 11 March 2021, 2.30pm

By video-conference

MINUTES

- Present:** Dr K Arnold (KA, Chair, Dean of YGRS)
Prof J Finch (JF, Deputy Director of the HRC, on behalf of Prof R Ogden)
Dr R Grant (RG, Planning Officer)
Mrs A Grey (AG, Research Strategy and Policy Manager)
Prof M Ruth (MR, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research)
Prof S Thompson (ST, Associate Dean for Research in Sciences)
- In attendance:** Miss G Kirk (GK, Secretary, Research Student Administration)

20-21/19 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed committee members and apologies were noted from Prof Y Birks (YB, Associate Dean for Research in Social Sciences) and Prof R Ogden (RO, Associate Dean for Research in Arts and Humanities).

20-21/20 Minutes from last meeting (November 2020)

The Minutes from November's meeting were approved as an accurate record.

20-21/21 Matters arising

a) Update on funding extensions [KA]

The Chair noted that 10 applications to the COVID-19 PhD Scholarship Fund (CPSF) had been received under round 1. A smaller initial round was a useful experience as some tweaks to improve the process could be made for the subsequent round. Decision-making was straightforward with the panel able to distinguish individuals based on need.

The second round has now closed and there are 70-80 applications. This is somewhat fewer than expected though there are two more rounds to go. So far three month extensions have been awarded which is in line with UKRI guidance.

The Fund was expanded to include UK self-funded PhD researchers in most need in the form of a three month fee waiver, but this was not extended to international candidates for a number of reasons which caused some backlash. The Chair confirmed that that particular area of need is currently being looked at.

ACTION: RSA to make clear in the promotion of Round 3 that UK self-funded PhD researchers are now eligible to apply for support.

UKRI Phase 3:

The Chair noted that UKRI have announced what they are now calling Phase 3. There is £7million unspent from Phase 1 and now institutions have spent time devising a fair and transparent process for managing funding extensions based on need under Phase 2, UKRI have decided they are now going back to training grant holders to manage Phase 3. There is no detail yet as to how it will happen and they are still consulting but it is likely to go to those grants that are single student or single cohort. Those that are larger will be able to fund potential future extensions via 'other flexibilities' which would come from underspend, not doing as much training or not offering as many studentships in future rounds.

The Chair is talking to several DTPs and CDTs about this as there are general concerns about this as a widespread approach.

b) Update on support for self-funded students [KA]

The Chair noted there are some sources of support as noted above. The allocation from Research England still needs to be clarified and whether or not there is scope to spend this on international PGRs or whether it is already earmarked so there is some work to do in this regard.

c) Update on UKRI funding for international PhD students [KA]

As previously noted, up to 30% of studentships can now be awarded to international PhD researchers and there is a process on managing this being rolled out which went through Planning Committee. There will be a bedding down period as this is managed.

Offer letter wording to PGRs has been updated to reflect that while a candidate may hold international fee status, and their UKRI scholarship only covers the Home rate, they will not be expected to cover the fee differential themselves.

d) Update on renewal of agreement with China Scholarship Council [KA]

The Chair confirmed 48 candidates indicated they wish to be considered under this scheme.

The CSC covers the stipend element of these awards and the University agrees to provide a full fee waiver.

There were 28 departmental nominations and 14 preferred candidates were put forward to the CSC nomination stage. York has a maximum of 10 per year that we can award and updates are expected at the end of April.

As noted previously, the contract with CSC was recently renewed, including accepting a number of topics that seemed a slightly odd selection.

ST noted that the theme of medical technologies is obvious by its omission. This is a priority area for the Jang-Su Consortium with which she is involved, and the CSC is billed as one of the main routes by which we can forward this Consortium, hence this seems somewhat out of kilter.

The Chair noted that YGRS needs to be better integrated into how these decisions are made and priorities are set.

ACTION: ST to drop KA and Elisha Witcomb an email to flag the slight mismatch in priority areas.

e) Review of Wolfson Scholarships in the Humanities selection process [GK]

This was raised at the November meeting as a scholarship selection process that was due for review and revision. Discussions and follow-up decisions from that meeting were taken outside of the Committee between the Chair and JF.

GK noted that the competition was opened up from the list of named departments to all Arts and Humanities departments. It was also decided to run the competition similar to the YGRS Overseas Research Scholarship process, whereby departments submit nominations including supporting statements, which are then graded individually by Selection Panel members, with individual scores collated and averaged into a ranked list thereafter which is then discussed and ratified.

As is often the case with Wolfson nominees, the application quality and thus scores were very high, however the process did reveal two front runners, to whom the Panel agreed to offer the available scholarships. Both candidates have received informal offers and indicated their enthusiastic acceptance. The final stage involves receiving formal approval from the Wolfson Foundation of York's selected candidates.

One of the candidates will be based in the Department of History and the other will be based in Archaeology, which is a welcome outcome given Archaeology is a new department to this scheme in the 2021 competition.

20-21/22

Chair's actions:

a) New agreements since last meeting:

Ref.	Date agreed / notified:	Staff member / department	Application details / project title	Support agreed	Expected start
AFSC 04/01	June 2020	Computer Science / Mathematics / York Law School	EPSRC Trustworthy Autonomous Systems - Research Nodes Call - REASON: REsilient Autonomous SOcio-cyber-physical ageNts	RDF: 1 x PhD Home rate studentship (fees & stipend, no RTSG, costed at £66,719)	April 2021
AFSC 04/02	Jan 2021	Bob Doherty / TYMS & Katherine Denby / Environment & Geography	“Transforming to a Regenerative Food System”	RDF: 2 x PhD Home rate studentships (fees & stipend, costed at £140k)	TBC

20-21/23 PGR scholarships database [KA]

Recognition that the University’s lack of oversight of PGR funding is problematic resulted in a UEB action on the PVC-R in April 2020: “To develop a central record system of PhD students and their associated funding.” (A19-20/139).

Some work has already been undertaken to determine the scope of such a requirement, including a stakeholder meeting in summer 2020.

Following advice from Andrew Male and Arthur Clune, the next steps are understood to be to apply for Business Analyst support to undertake a full assessment of needs in order to inform decision-making on System options.

Susanna Broom (Assistant Registrar: Research and Financial Support) has submitted a request for BA support to the next ESSG meeting, and briefed Wayne Campbell and the Operations Managers, all of whom are supportive. Further updates will be provided following the outcome of this request.

If successful, engagement from all key stakeholders will be required to ensure that the needs and preferences of all groups utilising the data consolidated in a potential system meet their needs.

Susanna has also been working on a policy document on PGR funding data, on the basis that any technical solution is only as useful as the data which is input into it, and we need to require individuals/departments/teams to engage with the system, once implemented. In due course, following a consultation process, the policy will come to this committee for approval.

The update on the PGR scholarships database was well received by the Committee, with members supportive and seeing the business need. Concerns from AG were noted around ensuring that whatever system is selected will integrate with existing systems such as SITS and Agresso and a new database won’t be implemented that does not feed into other systems or does not incorporate the whole PGR lifecycle.

20-21/24 CITY College [KA]

York has a partnership with CITY College and will be recruiting joint PhD researchers there from around September across four departments at the University:

- Computer Science
- Language and Linguistic Science
- York Management School
- Psychology

The working group is currently putting together the operating procedure that will sit under the agreement. There is still a lot of detail to be ironed out, including decisions on finances that will come to this Committee in the future.

‘Getting to know you’ sessions will be run for the York and CITY departments over the coming weeks so areas of potential overlap can be identified in terms of developing PhD projects.

20-21/25 YGRS Conference Fund — update [GK]

This is the annual £10,000 budget, split into two bidding rounds with deadlines on 1 December and 1 May, that self-funded PhD researchers can apply to, for funding towards conferences and training in support of their research projects.

December’s round saw understandably few applications, just two modest requests totalling £200 and both were approved. Therefore, most of the budget remains and no applications have been received to date for the 1 May round. Research Student Admin (RSA) are publicising this scheme further ahead of the next round’s deadline, but GK asked the Committee to consider whether any adjustments should be made at this stage to draw more interest by expanding the criteria.

It was agreed that, like last year, the scheme should be promoted as being broader in scope, permitting bids to cover online training, language courses and resource purchases etc as well as conferences to encourage more applications.

Should there be funds remaining after May’s round, this could again move to a rolling round where PGRs apply as the need is identified, with ad hoc consideration of applications by the Chair and awards made accordingly.

ACTION: RSA to further promote the YGRS Conference Fund scheme with expanded eligibility criteria.

20-21/26 YGRS Overseas Research Scholarships — update [GK]

GK confirmed that applicants had until the end of January to apply for this scheme, then departments nominated their preferred candidates by the end of February. These nomination packs are now with the Selection Panel members who are grading applicants individually, then scores will be combined and sorted into a ranked list for consideration and ratification at a

meeting in late March. The intention is that the top four candidates will be offered fully funded doctoral scholarships to commence in the 2021/22 academic year.

Given the change in fee status of EU students to 'international', EU students have been eligible to apply to this scheme in the 2021 competition. With this in mind, there was discussion around whether this scholarship scheme will continue to serve its originally intended purpose of attracting and awarding to academically excellent international PGRs or whether there should be a strategic shift in scope and criteria as a consequence.

The Chair noted there did seem to be a bias towards applicants from developed countries so there was a question around whether this was the most effective use of the budget.

MR noted we may wish to think of the Worldwide University Network or other partnerships that we are engaged in and target them, using this funding as a vehicle to gain extra links between us and some of these other institutions. For cases where we have already identified a subset of institutions with whom we want to work further, then this could be a way of cementing some of these relationships, developing the commitments we have already made and the strategic themes they entail.

The Chair noted that now we have the potential to recruit a greater number of international PGRs through UKRI, it poses the question of whether this remains the right investment to make or whether we could better invest in other strategic priorities such as widening participation.

Discussions indicated a desire to better align this scheme not just with international strategic objectives but to other strategic priorities like widening participation, and / or supporting existing institutional relationships. A short paper on some options around the use of this budget will be brought to a future committee meeting.

ACTION: GK to draft a short paper on potential future options for the ORS scheme to present to AFSC.

20-21/27 Faculty updates

a) Arts and Humanities

JF confirmed success in the faculty in terms of 20 WRoCAH awards and successful recruitment to the Wolfson scholarships.

b) Sciences

ST noted it is peak recruitment season and departments are extremely busy in this regard, and all working to different timelines.

c) Social Sciences

No faculty update was received in YB's absence.

20-21/28 Scholarship budget update — for information

GK confirmed the new agreements under Chair's actions have been added to the budget accordingly.

20-21/29 Any other business

RG noted that Off-Site PhD approval has finally been arranged, and effectively all types of PGR routes including distance learning and part time routes have been signed off. They may not all be set up in SITS yet, but they can be when required as the approval element has been granted. This marries up with AG's due diligence procedure, though the form needs to be looked at to ensure issues that don't come up under teaching but do under research are picked up to avoid the position where something is approved for a PGR course but by due diligence on research it was deemed incompatible to work with them.

Lastly, part of what the Chair is currently undertaking is a review of the various committees and the structure under YGRS and its governance. Funding underpins everything and it is not clear that this Committee is being as strategic as it could be. Additionally, the more we can streamline the process, the fewer committees we have along the way.

20-21/30 Date of next meeting: Wednesday 9 June 2021, 10.00am (subsequently cancelled)