Terms and Reference and Membership of the YGRS Awards and Funding Sub-Committee (AFSC)
Received: Paper AFSC 1516/1

It was noted that the Associate Deans for the three faculties would be likely to attend this group in lieu of the deans. Two of the three were now in post, with the third appointment imminent.

There was discussion of whether this group would be making or ratifying decisions on where to spend money, and what budget came within its remit, noting that the studentships element of the Research Development Budget was now being disentangled from the rest of that budget. It was noted that historical commitments to fund studentships were still coming to light.

It was agreed that the YGRS AFSC should receive recommendations from the PVC Research and the Dean of YGRS on the use of these studentship funds, and that this should be added to the group’s terms of reference.

It was agreed that the submission of expenditure to the University’s quarterly budgeting process should come formally from this group. It was also agreed that the Research Student Admin Team (RSAT) would plan a schedule for the summary reporting to this committee of the data detailed in the Terms of Reference.
There was discussion of the proper “home” for PGT scholarship funding and related issues, especially as it was raised that the formal membership of this committee, unlike UACG, did not contain representation from Student Support and the Student Financial Support Unit. It was noted that the University was in an interim period with regards to PGT, and that the exclusion of PGT from YGRS had been about operational reality in the time available rather than a long-term plan. A new group had been convened to discuss PGT strategy and related issues, although it was commented that that group had not so far discussed management and support of the PGT community. The group was due to report in the next 6 weeks to SMG, and it was agreed that that report should also be fed back to this committee. However, it was agreed that it would not be appropriate to amend this committee’s formal Terms of Reference to include ownership of PGT scholarship funding and issues.

It was agreed that the AFSC Terms of Reference should be amended to include the receipt of recommendations on the use of studentship funds, as noted above; with this amendment, the committee accepted the Terms of Reference and Membership as laid out in Paper AFSC 1516/1.

Action: Helen Jones

15-16/2 Minutes of the meeting of the University Awards and Co-ordinating Group (UACG) held on 16 June 2015
The minutes were agreed to be an accurate record.

15-16/3 Matters arising from the last UACG minutes
UACG 14/15/49. It had been investigated whether it was correct to pay out in the 14-15 financial year funding for Biology studentships that had been pledged but never paid for an earlier year. It had been concluded that this was the correct course of action financially, and the payments had been made before the end of the 14-15 financial year.

15-16/4 HEFCE Postgraduate Support Scheme & future HEFCE PGT loan scheme
Peter Quinn spoke to papers AFSC 1516/2a and 2b.

It was noted that York had received the most applications to the scheme of all the universities in the group, which might have been a result of our strong marketing of the scheme at our own graduates.

It was noted that employers had some ambivalence about the scheme, and that many failed to recognise the distinctiveness, or added value, of taking a PGT degree. In some sectors, the particular university attended was of more importance in the employment market than the level of the degree. This might be related to the popularity of “upgrading” to a York Masters among students whose first degree was from a non-Russell Group university.

There was some discussion of the effect of the scheme on PGT recruitment, and on the debate about whether cost or debt was a larger driver in students’ decision-making over PGT study; the view was noted that the increased debt of PGT study is more of a deterrent in particular socio-economic groups, and to some extent the findings of the PSS scheme bear this out. It was also noted that the outcomes of the scheme will have had a contribution to national thinking on PGT and PGR loans.
There was discussion on York's position in the PGT market, including the lack of recent bench-marking data. There is concern that York may not be attracting as large a pool of new students at PGT level as we might hope, and that we are in fact a net exporter in the UG to PGT transition phase. However, it was felt that these debates were not within the remit of this committee.

In conclusion, it was noted that the PSS scheme had created a pot of money to help an under-represented group go on to higher level study and thus boost them in the jobs market. Although this group was undoubtedly still under-represented in the jobs market, the scheme had been a step in the right direction.

15-16/5  **“Bench Fees” for PGR students**  
Tom Stoneham and Simon Willis tabled a paper, “Bench Fee Proposal”, together with a further paper outlining practice on bench fees at other Russell Group institutions.

The proposal would establish, from October 2016, a scale of “bench fee” charges which departments could levy where there was justification for the fee, and where its inclusion would not act as a deterrent to registration. The proposed scale, to be approved by Planning Committee, would be based on Research Council levels of research support grant, and it was suggested that this or a similar label should be attached to the charge, rather than “bench fee” noting the potential bad currency of this term with some funders.

It was noted that while practice in the rest of the Russell Group is varied, this proposal is along the lines of what some other institutions do, including the move away from the terminology of “bench fee”, although other institutions still use this. The main driver for York is that at present we are missing out on funding, most notably from Overseas Government scholarships, where funders are prepared to pay a bench fee or research support grant, but we have no mechanism for charging one. It was noted that aligning our proposed charges with the RCUK research support grant would bring transparency to how the charges had been set.

There was some discussion over the principles behind the proposal, and the issues surrounding bench fees, both in terms of the use of the label and the legitimacy of the charge. It was noted that many PhD degrees involved significant costs, including those associated with lab work and research training, and that charging funders a fee to help meet those costs, along the lines of what RCUK provided for this use, was entirely legitimate; but that waiving that fee e.g. for self-funded students would also be legitimate, especially as not to do so would be a major barrier to recruitment. There was also discussion over how the fee should be set, noting that some PhD programmes currently received funding from several different Research Councils, depending on the nature of the project, and that their levels of research support varied; ranges per programme might be necessary in some cases.

The committee agreed in principle to the proposal, noting that some fine details would need to be worked out before the proposal went to the Planning Committee.

Action: Tom Stoneham, Simon Willis, Brian Fulton
15-16/6  Fee waivers for AHRC/ESRC funded taught MA students
Alun Kirby spoke to paper AFSC 1516/3.

It was noted that the increasing discrepancy between the maximum fee-waiver paid by the AHRC and ESRC for MA students, and York’s actual MA fee, had created some financial problems in the past few years because of a lack of clarity over how this discrepancy should be made up. There was discussion over whether this was a real financial issue for the Departments concerned, or whether it was essentially about reporting. It was noted that if these students were recruited above a Department’s intake target, then in effect there was no cost to the Department of “charging” the discrepancy to them, because each student still represented income on top of their plan. However, it was noted that in some cases, these students were in Departments who needed/expected these students to be part of their planned intake numbers.

It was agreed that this was a financial/planning issue, and a proposal was made that the discrepancy should be dealt with by amending the students’ fees to the lower level, rather than actively charging Departments for the deficit. It was noted that there was a danger of Departments in effect being charged twice if this was not handled properly.

Action: Gary Sheen

15-16/7  Budget updates

a. The budget formerly known as UACG budget
The UACG budget for 2015/16 and 2016/17 was received.

It was noted that all students on new scholarships in the 2015/16 budget had been recruited and registered, except for the project in Health Sciences, where a delay because of staffing changes meant that a student should be recruited later in this academic year. However, it was noted that the Marshall Scholarship had been removed from the 2015/16 budget because it had not been recruited to; Tom Stoneham was investigating why this was the case. It was asked whether the right amount of Fulbright funding was in the budget, as it was thought that more scholars than expected had been recruited. Helen Jones would look into this and amend the budget as required.

Action: Tom Stoneham, Helen Jones

It was noted that the NSIRC project would be unlikely to go ahead for 2016/17, so could be removed from the budget.

It was requested that budgets for 2017/18 and 2018/19 also be prepared. It was noted that it was useful for the budget to be broken down into fees, stipend and research support grant, as at present, but that it would also be useful to separate out match funding for DTCs from that attached to individual scholarships.

Action: Helen Jones

It was noted that written guidelines would be forthcoming for Departments over the principles of where the University would be willing to agree match funding.
b. Development Fund budget
Part of the Research Development Fund budget had now been separated out as a studentships budget, and this would now come under this committee’s remit. The budget for this fund, up to 2018/19 was received.

It was noted that the outcome of the MRC bid would soon be known; and that this was currently replicated in the UACG and Development Fund budgets, so could be removed from one. The new NERC bid should also be added to the “bids awaiting” section.

It was noted that there was no surplus in the budget, which was set to match our commitments. Any underspend on the budget could therefore arguably go into either the UACG budget or back to the Development Fund. However, it was also noted that having two studentship budgets made little sense, and that combining the old UACG budget and this new portion of the Development Fund would make sense.

The committee agreed that the two budgets should be combined into a single Studentships Budget. This budget would be operationally managed by RSAT, but its ownership should ideally sit within Finance, not Registry. It was agreed that before this move was activated, it should be checked that this would not disadvantage the institution.

Action: Gary Sheen

It was agreed that it was appropriate to this committee’s remit to receive and discuss requests for funding from the Studentships Budget, both for smaller projects and for large-scale match funding, but it was also noted that large-scale match funding for DTCs would have to be at a level set and approved by Senior Management Group. This committee could advise SMG on this, but it was noted that high-level principles were being planned on the principles behind match-funding major bids.

Action: Jamie Holliday, Helen Jones

15-16/8 Faculty updates
a. Science
The EPSRC DTP report was now ready to be returned to the EPSRC, and Brian Fulton thanked RSAT for their hard work in preparing this report. It was noted that this report would feed into future EPSRC studentship funding models, and that we might expect to see future funding models more constrained by value judgments on the quality of our processes.

b. Social Sciences
The White Rose DTP had not performed very well in the recent ESRC audit with regard to +3 awards and training, and our 2016/17 allocation would now depend on our response to the points made in the audit. In particular, the ESRC wanted all funded students to receive a general Social Sciences training, not just discipline-specific training. This was a particular issue with some Departments on the “fringes” of Social Sciences who have often felt that general Social Sciences training is not applicable to their students, and whose incoming PhD students may not have a Social Sciences background.

Expressions of Interest for the call for the new round of ESRC DTPs were due in at the end of October. A meeting later this month would agree on the pathways, and it was possible that there would be fewer pathways, meaning fewer studentships for some Departments, in the new bid; and that there
may be a college-style approach to allocations across the consortium, giving the DTP tighter control over allocations.

An ESRC CDT bid led by Sheffield was also being considered; it was not yet certain whether this would go forward.

c. **Arts and Humanities**

The AHRC had issued a consultation survey for BGP3 due back at the end of November. The survey indicated that characteristics of the new block grant would include: no upper limit on the size of DTPs; a requirement for 100% match-funding; more funding per student, with the potential to fund four years either as 1+3 or as integrated 4-year PhDs also with higher research support grant; and that only consortium bids would be acceptable.

The University would be working with White Rose over whether the existing White Rose collaboration, or a wider partnership (e.g. N8) might be our preferred approach. There would be separate responses to the survey from York and WRoCAH.

15-16/9 **YGRS AFSC Meeting dates for 2015/16**

Paper AFSC 1516/4 was received, and the meeting dates noted.