



## York Graduate Research School Board

Monday 26 February, 2018, 9am

H/G/09

### MINUTES

Present:	Professor T Stoneham (Chair; TS) Professor Deborah Smith Professor John Robinson Professor Stuart Bell Heidi Fraser-Krauss Charlotte Chamberlain (GSA President) Fatma Layas (GSA Vice President) Nigel Dandy
Apologies:	Jo Horsburgh Professor Brian Fulton Professor Judith Buchanan Dr Kelly Redeker Dr Sally Hancock Dr Jeremy Goldberg
In attendance:	Susanna Broom (Secretary; SB) Robert Simpson, Secretary to SCC (Minutes)

### Category I Business

#### **M/17-18/12 Minutes from 27 November 2017**

The minutes of the meeting of 27 November 2017 (YGRSB/17-18/02) were **approved**.

#### **M/17-18/13 The Action Log (YGRSB/17-18 /11)**

The Action Log was reviewed. It was **noted** that

- The casework report from GSA is on the agenda and will become part of annual cycle of reports;

- The Head of RSA has carried out a survey about notification to staff about SkillsForge forms via the SkillsForge newsletter. The survey received over 120 responses, and the actions to be taken forward are increasing the frequency of the current notifications about forms to sign, and also trialling automatic notifications to TAP and Progression Chairs when the main forms have been generated following completion of the preparation forms.
- At the previous YGRS Board there was a discussion about a SkillsForge relaunch. TS and SB have agreed on the value of a marketing push and will suggest that SkillsForge create some marketing materials to be used by YGRS.
- The DHLE report proposal is to be incorporated in to the next annual report.

### **M/17-18/14 Chair's Report**

The Chair **reported** that

- The Leverhulme bid was unsuccessful. No feedback was provided by Leverhulme and it was hard to discern a pattern from successful bids, but given the importance of this funding body, efforts will be made to improve future bids.
- The AHRC WRoCAH 2 bid has had generally positive peer reviews, a response to which has now been submitted. The outcome will be confirmed in July.
- EPSRC has provided feedback on statement of intent for York's DTP, indicating that greater linkage is required between the central strategy and departmental studentship allocation. EPSRC also noted for all bidders that responses around Equality and Diversity contained insufficient specific examples of initiatives.
- A call has gone out for the EPSRC CDT bids, with a deadline of 13 March for expressions of interest. York is expected to lead on 6, partner on 1.
- There is a separate call for CDTs from UKRI for Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is the first UKRI-badged funding call. The call gives a steer towards interdisciplinary centres regarding AI. The scope of the call is for funding for about 40 students, with a minimum funding match for 10 students, over 5 years.
- NERC has issued an open call for DTPs. York is participating in ACCE and SPHERES, albeit not leading on either, and work is ongoing.
- York has put in a bid to the HEFCE catalyst fund for mental health support, but has not yet heard back from this.
- York is putting in a bid to the GCRF QR fund to work with African partners, to develop an African three-minute thesis competition. The intention is to raise the profile of high-quality doctoral training happening in Africa, initially with partners in Kenya and Ghana.
- A call has been issued by The Health Improvement Studies Institute (THIS) with demand-management. They are funding PhD fellowships with clinical salaries, up to £200k for a fellowship, and bids are invited from York. There is a limit of 2 per institution and the bid criteria are a mixture of institutional strength and project proposal. Departments have been asked to send in proposals by next Tuesday, and two will be identified to be taken forward.
- Supervisor training:
  - Next term TS will be trialling the supervisor self-evaluation form, where there are issues around supervisory practice, to encourage departments to be more self-reflective.
  - Next year, the all day supervisor masterclasses will be moved away from, in favour of shorter thematic sessions on topics such as international students and mental health/wellbeing. The Information Directorate will put on a programme re: resources.
  - A Blackboard module from Imperialis being considered for adaptation for York.

### **M/17-18/15 GSA Report**

It was **reported** that GSA are:

- Working on welcome week for September and PGR induction day.
- Setting up a Graduate Teaching Assistant network, launching on 1 March. [Secretary's note: The launch has been postponed due to the adverse weather. It will now launch in the next couple of weeks.]
- Have started coffee and tea sessions in the library.
- Have started a project looking at the roles and rights of college tutors, specifically their contractual arrangements and remuneration.
- Fatma Layas is running a SkillsForge survey, which has had 54 responses so far, and will be stopped once it reaches 100 responses. She is also working with Dean McMillan on PGR stress workshops.
- Together York are running sessions on issues specifically affecting research students.

### **M/17-18/16 PGR Admissions Report (YGRS 17-18/12)**

The Board **received** the annual Admissions Report on YGRS. The Chair welcomed comments.

The following was **noted** from the Board's discussions:

- Enrolments against target were slightly down in 16/17 but are already up in 17/18 in both PGRH and PGRO, indicating a healthy position.
- PGRH seems healthy except in Social Sciences, and the reverse in PGRO. This is a noteworthy pattern - it may be that Social Science departments need to provide more support for international students if this is their primary market.
- Informal approaches by candidates to prospective Supervisors are not captured in the Admissions Report data.

The final point above led to a broad discussion about the value of the statistics in the report and what other data may be of use. The limitations of funding, quality of applications and differences in recruitment between different disciplines were all considered. In particular:

- The quality of applicants is important, but this is not captured by the data. The financial value of PGR students was noted (approximately £17m income from PGR students). However, PGR students are also very important to the academic work of the university, and the quality of applications ought therefore to be captured.
- Determining the number of applicants for funded studentships would be very helpful, but this information is not readily available; there is no central resource stating who is funded from what source (M17-18/09 refers to the discussion of a paper on this point).
- Looking at Annual Department Research Reviews, and adjusting feedback, including recruitment and now students per FTE, as well as commenting on how their PGR students help deliver their research strategy.
- As noted above, feedback from the EPSRC DTP statement of intent noted that departments' allocation of studentships may not be linked back to the University's strategic goals.

**ACTION** : TS to look at what information is available on applications for funded positions and report back to YGRSB. Also to scope out terms for a wider review.

### **M/17-18/16 GSA Advice Service PGR Casework Report (YGRS 17-18/13)**

It was **reported** that:

- The data for the 2016/17 academic year runs only to July 2017 and is therefore incomplete.
- There is a mismatch between University-held data and GSA data, since some students do not seek GSA support whilst others seek support but never generate a case within the University.
- TS noted that of the 7 PGR appeal outcomes, only one was over the 90 days limit, which suggests that the team is doing a good job, and offered thanks to RSA. At the Formal stage, PGR appeals handled quickly, albeit 2 Review stages have gone over the 90 days.
- The Head of RSA acknowledged that 2 Review Stage appeals had gone over 90 days, and noted that she is putting measures in place to avoid a repetition.
- There was a jump in cases from 2015 and this has continued - this may be due to the advertising of services, and working with RSA and Special Cases to ensure staff are signposting students to GSA and that wording of outcome letters, particularly about the student's right to appeal, is clear. PGR cases are generally more complex than PGT cases as they often relate to ongoing issues such as the supervisory relationship.

### **M/17-18/17 SCC Annual report to Senate (YGRS 17-18/14)**

The Board **received** that SCC Annual report to Senate.

It was **noted** that:

- Point 2.6 in the report identifies the main features which were positive.
- Research SCC now considers extensions to Confirmation of Enrolment: there was no mechanism for applying for an extension previously.
- There has been an increase in the number of leave of absence (LoA) requests and a decrease in extension requests. This is positive and shows students are dealing with difficulties earlier.
- Research students have always had upper limits on the amount of LoA and extension they may take, and hearings are now being triggered for applications beyond these limits in order for SCC to be able to determine what is happening. In all cases this has been very positive and productive and has helped students to get more support. One of the main reasons for the upper limits relates to the currency of research - whether after 2 or more years break, is there still a research project to complete.
- At point 2.4 it was noted that there are OIA time limits, albeit this relates to taught cases as well as Research. There are no issues for meeting the 90-day target at research stage, except where cases have gone to Review, as already noted above.
- Departmental ECA are granting extensions for taught students, but all extension and leave requests go straight to SCC for research. This ensures consistency in the application of the rules across the University. RSA produced a presentation for departments on the process and why some cases are being rejected, to improve the quality of the applications, in particular around extensions, and to ensure that evidence is aligned to the request.

### **M/17-18/18 Oral report on retention project as it relates to PGR students**

It was **reported** that:

- Following meetings with the GSA and TS about retention, SB and Jamie Holiday are focussing on:
  - Clarifying the on process for raising concerns around supervision. The wording in the Policy on Research Degrees will be updated, and information will also appear in handbooks.
  - The departmental induction process, to ensure students experience consistency across the University, and that there are no gaps in information given to students. A survey has been sent out to Research Student Administrators, and SB is to run a small working group to collate and

analyse the survey results, and devise a good practice guide, in collaboration with the Research Excellence Training Team.

- TS noted that retention is not a major problem at the PGR level, but that students do not always feel confident in raising concerns as they occur, which on occasion come to light at the end of their studies. One purpose of this retention work is to empower students to come forward early enough to get support.

#### Category II Business

No Category II Business was discussed at the meeting.

**M/17-18/19 Minutes of the Awards and Funding Subcommittee (YGRS 17-18/15)**

**M/17-18/20 Minutes of the Policies and Programmes Subcommittee (YGRS 17-18/16)**

**M/17-18/21 AOB:** None

It was **noted** that the date of the forthcoming meeting will be:

- Monday 11 June 2018, 09:00-11:00, H/G09