



YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL BOARD

Meeting to be held on Monday 13 June 2022, 13:00 - 15:00 - via Zoom

Present: Kate Arnold (Chair), Wayne Campbell (first hour), Viviane Cao, Brian Fulton, Andrew Jackson (first hour), Ekansh Kapoor, Sethina Watson

Apologies for absence: Stuart Bell, Susanna Broom, Ambrose Field, Tracy Lightfoot, Matthias Ruth, Peter Smith

In attendance: Maria Adlam (note-taker), Juliet James (for the report on PGR continuation fees), Karen Payne (for the annual PGR submission rates report), Hannah Smallpage-Hurst (for the report on PGR recruitment, selection and admission), Andrew Taylor (for the report on the REF results)

M21-22/23: Welcome from the Chair

The Chair noted that this was EK's last attendance at YGRS Board and thanked him for his contributions as GSA academic VP. The Board congratulated VC on her re-election as GSA president.

M21-22/24: Minutes of the Last Meeting

The meeting of the meeting on 21 February 2022 were **approved**. There were no matters arising that were not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

M21-22/25: Action Log

With respect to the action log, it was **noted** that:

- M20-21/25 The scholarships database project is ongoing
- M21-22/06a The institutional response to the UKRI has been submitted. The UKRI has received over 400 responses from across the sector, which will take some time to work through. No updates are

expected in the near future.

- M21-22/12 Susanna Broom intends to post queries to sector networks to gauge prevalence of 3.5 yr degrees across Russell Group Universities.

M21-22/26: Oral report from the Chair

Emerging Talent Initiative- This is a strategic priority for UEB. The VC has noted that PGRs are the crucial link between the taught student and staff communities. Work is being undertaken within the YCEDE project to better spot talent and reform doctoral admissions processes for equity. An aim is to apply the Holistic Review Framework to doctoral admissions at York. There is a combination of funding from YCEDE and research culture funding to implement this. 11 pilot departments across five Yorkshire universities, including three from York, are collaborating to work on creating guidelines for a more comprehensive assessment of PGR applications.

CITY college- A second cohort of PGR researchers at CITY college will be starting from October 2022. A meeting took place between the Dean of YGRS, PVC for Research and the Research Director of CITY college. The team at CITY college is aiming to set up some opportunities for doctoral training partnerships.

YCEDE (Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education) launch- Several projects have been started up, including work on recruitment, research internships and mentoring.

M21-22/27: Report on PGR recruitment, selection and admissions processes

The project aims to achieve the following:

- Enhance the fairness, transparency and effectiveness of the University's recruitment, selection and admissions processes;
- Create a beacon of best practice that can be used to widen access to postgraduate research for diverse candidates across the sector;
- Increase administrative efficiency, reducing the burden on departments and individual academics.

To date, the discovery phase has included:

- Initial draft of project charter;
- Process mapping with core YGRS/PGR-facing professional services staff;
- Briefing to Graduate Chairs;
- Discussion and call for involvement from PGRs with PGR reps at YGRS/GSA PGR forum;
- Circulation of surveys to departments and PGRs to seek feedback on current processes and potential next steps;
- Exploratory meetings with key stakeholder groups
- Briefing/update to PG Administrators at 'Gradmin' forum

The planned work packages for the project are the following:

- 2022: co-create and publish a University statement and action plan on widening access for PGRs;
- 2022/3: Develop a standard web-page design for departmental PGR recruitment to ensure that information is clear, consistent and meets University policy;
- 2023/4: Develop and trial a cohort-based approach to recruitment of internally-funded PhD researchers.

The planned work packages around the application processes are the following:

- 2022: Develop guidance, and potentially new policy, around references, focusing on language and the avoidance of bias. Departments have reported concerns about some of the references they receive, which include gendered language and other kinds of bias. There is a plan to implement clear institutional guidance on how references should be used.
- 2022/23: Expand the collection and analysis of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) data from PGRs at application and enrolment, in order to identify and address sources of bias in institutional recruitment, selection and admissions practices. The University is working with a project called Neon to collect different forms of data, such as socio-economic status and backgrounds in care.
- 2022/23: Review application requirements across the institution with a view to harmonising requirements, where possible (eg: word counts for project proposals)

- 2023/24: Review, in relation to internal requirements and best practice across the sector, the University admissions form to ensure that it is equitable and transparent regarding the type, format and amount of information required.
- 2022-24: Review administrative workflows (which cross MRAO and academic departments), with a view to identifying opportunities to reduce the burden on departments, central support teams and academics.

The planned work packages around selection are the following:

- 2022/23: Review and update policies, processes and guidance around interviews for PGR Admissions.
- 2022/23: Develop training for staff involved in shortlisting and interviewing PGR applicants.
- 2022-24: Co-create and co-deliver opportunities, professional development workshops and incentives for academic and PS colleagues to critically reflect upon and change longstanding practices in recruiting, admitting, and mentoring PGRs from diverse backgrounds.
- The Chair noted that there is no suggestion for there to be less academic freedom around decision making as a result of these changes.
- BF, WC, AJ and SW voiced positive feedback on the proposals.
- The Committee approved the proposal to establish a steering group to retain and oversight of process, and provide strategic-level decision making and support, as required.

ACTION: Regular progress reports to be presented at future meetings of the YGRS Board.

- BF queried whether best practice could be shared with those involved with EPSRC CDT recruitment. The Chair noted that those who currently lead on CDT and DTPs are involved in the project.
- The VP-Academic of GSA raised some issues around scholarships for masters students that were outside the scope of YGRSB. **ACTION: to be discussed at the next meeting between GSA and the Dean of YGRS.**
- WC welcomed the work being done within the scope of the project and noted the high number of work packages. He queried which work packages are the highest priority. KA noted that some of the larger pieces of work will be taken to Planning Committee to request additional resource and that greater detail on the work packages will follow at later YGRS Board meetings.

- SW noted that funded MAs could help to widen participation in Arts and Humanities. KA responded that although funding is currently only for PhD scholarships, some future funding may be allocated for Masters by Research scholarships.

M21-22/28: Annual PGR submission rates report

- KP reported that 57% of 2017/8 PhD starters submitted within the usual four-year period. This is down from 63% timely submissions by 2016/7 starters and 86% timely submissions by 2015/6 starters. Chair noted that York has supported its PGR community by approving extensions for PGRs who were negatively impacted by the pandemic, and this is likely the cause of the fall in timely submissions.
- WC enquired about the departmental view of these results and queried whether other Russell Group institutions have seen a similar decrease in timely submissions.
- The Chair noted that results have not yet been shared with departments. **ACTION: KP to share data from the report with departments. Chair to speak to Russell Group contacts for sector insight on this subject.**

M21-22/29: Oral report on Research Excellence Framework results

- AT reported that York came joint tenth overall in the 2021 REF as opposed to joint 14th in 2014.
- Absolute performance increased in all areas, as well as the rankings.
- The biggest increase was seen in the areas of research environment and strategy.
- All units were in the top 30 for their respective submission.
- Modern Languages and Linguistics was ranked 1st and Philosophy was ranked 2nd.
- York had eight units in the top 10 positions and a further seven in the top 20.
- Chemistry and Maths had 100% of outputs in 3* and 4* categories.
- PGRs contribute to the REF through their research outputs, research environment and submission rates.

ACTION: AT to share analysis of best practice for PGR support or where there are areas for improvement. AT to share some statistics on PGR contributions to the REF, to be used in a short summary for PGRs and supervisors. AT to be invited to next YGRS Board meeting for an update.

- SW noted that environment is likely to be the most important area of PGR contribution.

M21-22/30: Report on PGR Continuation Fees

- Continuation fees were waived during the pandemic in recognition of the impact of Covid on PGR research.
- The fee waiver stopped from July 2021. Liable PGRs have not yet been invoiced.
- GSA has been campaigning for the fee waiver to continue, on the basis that those liable for the fee were significantly impacted by the pandemic.
- Three options are proposed: to waive the fee for all liable PGRs up to 31 December 2022, to consider waiving on a case-by-case basis, or to charge those PGRs who became liable from July 2021.
- KA noted that continuation fees are charged directly to PGRs, not to funders. The budget sits at departmental level and this is therefore a decision for Faculties. The total amount waived would be £90,000 over a period of 18 months.
- JJ noted that PGRA's preferred option was A, as it is equitable and recognises the impact of Covid-19 on PGR research. Waiving on a case-by-case basis could be complex and divisive.
- EK thanked the Chair and JJ for taking PGR concerns into consideration
- BF queried whether the timings could prove an issue, as the financial year has closed for July 2021. JJ noted that the continuation fees are additional income and therefore there is no budget line for them. No PGRs have been charged yet. BF noted that he would be happy to approve option A, but that the final decision is with the Faculty Deans.

ACTION: BF to discuss the issue with fellow Faculty Deans at their next meeting.

- SW voiced support for option A due to disruption caused by the pandemic on intellectual opportunities for PGRs, especially those who have completed the majority of their PhD study during the pandemic.
- The Board approved option A subject to the Faculty Deans' approval as budget holders.

M21-22/30: Policies and Programmes Sub-Committee

The Committee **received for information** the minutes of the Policies and Programmes Subcommittee held on 25 April 2022.

M21-22/31: Date of the Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting is now confirmed as 8 December 2022, 10:00 - 12:00, via Zoom.