UNIVERSITY of York

GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL (YGRS) BOARD
Monday 21 February 2022, 15:00 - 17:00 via Zoom

Present: Kate Arnold (Chair), Viviane Cao (GSA), Martin Cockett, Andrew Jackson, Cecelia Lowe, Susanna Broom (Secretary), Peter Smith, Kelly Redeker, Mattias Ruth

Apologies for absence: Stuart Bell, Wayne Campbell, Ambrose Field, Brian Fulton, Tracy Lightfoot, Daryl Martin, Richard Ogden, Sarah Thompson, Jane Warne

In attendance: Debbie Wilkinson (note-taker), Janice Simpson (for the Careers and Placements report), Sarah Kirkup (for the Admissions report), and Christopher Carr (for the GSA Casework report)

M21-22/11:   Minutes of the Last Meeting

The meeting of the meeting on 6 January 2022 (**YGRSB/21-22/09**) were **approved**. There were no matters arising that were not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

M21-22/12:   Action Log

With respect to the action log (**YGRSB/21-22/10**) it was **noted** that:

- M20-21/25: Worktribe was looking to develop its PGR capacity and might be the best technical solution for providing a PGR scholarships database for York. **ACTION: Andrew Jackson to meet the Dean and Head of Student Administration on his ongoing discussions with Worktribe**
- M21-22/05a and 05b: the actions relating to the YGRS governance structures could be closed
- M21-21/06a: The UKRI's New Deal for PGRs consultation announcement had been postponed
- M21-22/06b: Members of Student Careers & Systems and the Knowledge Exchange Team would be brought together to discuss the coordination of placements for ESRC-funded students
- M21-22/08a: Supervision compliance rates would be added to the PGR annual review process
- M21-22/08b: Targeted communications to departments on supervision compliance rates had been drafted.

M21-22/13:   Chair's Report on the YGRS 18-month Plan.

YGRS Governance Structures - The Chair **reported** that the approved changes to YGRSB and its sub-committees would be implemented as soon as possible, with all changes in place by October 2022. The new PGR Experience Committee (replacing Operations Group), PGR Forum and DTP/CDT Forum would meet for the first time in the Sumer Term. Members were asked to let the Chair know of any possible candidates to chair the new PGR Experience Committee.

Diversifying PGR programmes - The Chair **reported** that work was underway on diversifying PGR programmes, including increasing distance learning provision, encouraging industry-based PGRs, and enhancing the experience of part-time PGRs.

Enhancing and celebrating PGR supervision - The Chair **reported** that there was a clear mandate for mandatory continuing professional development for PGR supervisors and the details would now be developed. Work was also being undertaken by RETT on supervisory communities of practice, and ways of recognising and rewarding good supervision.

Yorkshire Consortium for Equity in Doctoral Education (YCEDE) Project - The Chair **reported** that YCEDE:

- Was a prestigious project funded by a research call from the Office for Students and Research England
- Would transform the way Black, Asian and Minority Ethic (BAME) PGRs were recruited and supported at York and within the other four HEIs (Sheffield, Leeds, Sheffield Hallam and Bradford) within the YCEDE consortium
- Had had its internal consortium launch with those involved in the operational delivery
- Had four workstreams: nurturing the pipeline; PGR recruitment and selection for equity and diversity; enhancing the on-course PGR experience; and evaluation and dissemination of interventions and principles/framework
- Would be managed by the YCEDE Management Board (Dean level from the five institutions), with representation from the YCEDE Scholars Board (BAME PGRs), and advice from the YCEDE Delivery Group (those involved in the operational aspects) and the External Advisory Board (foundations, industry etc.)
- Was led by York, which had appointed a project manager, project administrator, and a postdoctoral research associate. Other institutions were also in the process of appointing support staff to the project
- Would be fully and externally evaluated and the first evaluation meeting had been held with the Office for Students
- Workstream 1 was now underway, including the setting up of the YCEDE BAME Scholars Network and the YCEDE Research Internship Scheme.

York's PGR Recruitment, Selection and Admissions Project - The Chair **reported** that:

- This was a large and lengthy project, complementary to YCEDE, which would look at York-specific recruitment, selection and admissions policies and

processes, with the aim of widening participation at PGR level across a range of under-represented groups

- Initial steps in the project included: setting up a steering group; ensuring appropriate equality, diversity and inclusion data collection; using the data to identify sources of bias in current policy and practice; and consultation with stakeholders around current policy and practice
- Follow-on steps in the project would include: reviewing current policy and practice to identify best practice at York and in the sector; piloting evidence-based interventions to improve application, offer and enrolment rates for individuals from underrepresented groups; and improving institutional policies and practices.

With respect to YCEDE and widening participation, it was **noted** in discussion that:

- YCEDE should ensure that BAME staff and PGRs contributing to the project were properly supported
- PGR scholarships were vital for widening participation.

In response, the Dean **noted** that:

- YCEDE had a budget to cover staff buy-outs and pay for PGRs working on the project
- The YGRS Scholarship for BAME PGRs was now in place and would look at applicants holistically
- The University would be reviewing its approach to the funding of scholarships, including how to increase income for scholarships and how to manage them more strategically
- At the moment, some interventions (e.g. scholarships for care-leavers) could not be justified due to a lack of data so it was a priority to fill this data gap
- Work was being undertaken with DTPs to encourage the ring-fencing of scholarships for BAME PGRs.

With respect to PGR project work more generally, it was **noted** that:

- There was some central resource within YGRS for project work but also a clear steer from UEB that PGR matters should, where appropriate, be embedded within existing structures and services, for example within Faculties
- Matrix management would be key to ensuring success in PGR projects and would involve YGRS working closely with RIKE and other parts of the University involved with PGRs
- With respect to matrix management, the Dean had already had input into PGR-related goals for a range of individuals and teams.

M21-22/14:   Graduate Students' Association (GSA) Report

The GSA President **noted** that there was nothing new to report.

M21-22/15: **Annual Report from Student Careers & Systems**

The Committee **received** the annual report (**YGRSB/21-22/13***)* from Student Careers & Systems on its PGR-focused work. Janice Simpson, the Careers Consultant for PGRs, attended the meeting to present the item.

It was **reported** that:

- Graduate Outcomes survey:

  - This was the second year of Graduate Outcomes survey, which reported the destinations of PGR graduates who completed between August 2018 and July 2019, with a survey response rate of 56% (all domiciles), slightly below the 60% target set by HESA
  - Responses from international PGR graduates would not be followed up by HESA in future and the University would need to consider if it wished to have an alternative means of obtaining good data on international PGR graduate destinations
  - Overall, 91% of PGR graduates reported being in a 'positive destination' (graduate/professional level employment or further study): this was a very slight dip compared to the previous results (2017/18 PGR graduates) and could be due to the Covid-19 pandemic
  - Breakdown of the data by protected characteristics was currently only possible for gender due to the small sample size for the other characteristics. Males were more likely to be in a positive destination than females, particularly in the Arts and Humanities
  - The Graduate Voice questions showed a noticeable decrease in 'my activity is on track' but this could be due to the impact of Covid-19
  - BIU was purchasing comparative data to enable comparisons with other institutions

- Engagement:

  - 130 PGRs had participated in individual careers appointments/queries (nearly half from the Art and Humanities Faculty) and 134 PGRs had attended central careers events (nearly half from the Science Faculty). PGRs had also engaged with other opportunities such as the Volunteering and Student Internship Bureau (SIB) and as facilitators for undergraduate Community Projects teams
  - Careers provided a range of workshops for PGRs via RETT and by invitation, many of which had proved very popular

- Future priorities for Careers and Placements:

  - Catering for a diverse PGR audience, including international PGRs
  - Ensuring PGRs and their supervisors know about, and engage with, the central Careers support.

In course of discussion it was **noted** that:

- Careers and Placements would like to work more closely with the GSA. **ACTION: Janice Simpons and GSA to meet**
- It might be helpful to include data on PGRs serving as GTAs, which should be obtainable from Human Resources
- International students had particular needs, e.g. finding work in their home countries. In response, it was noted that this was an area that Student Careers & Systems was looking at, including a new role within the Faculty of Social Sciences that would support international students looking for employment
- Supervisors were not necessarily good careers advisors. In response, it was noted that supervisors could provide general support, e.g. encouraging PGRs to think about careers at an early stage, but they should refer PGRs to the Student Careers & Systems for specialist advice.

The Chair **noted** that it was important to think about PGR placements more strategically. Funders were increasingly expecting all PGRs to be offered placement opportunities but at York PGR placements tended to be arranged on an ad hoc basis which was not efficient. **ACTION: Dean to discuss PGR placements with Student Careers & Systems.**

M21-22/16: **Annual Report on the GSA's Advice Service PGR Casework**

The Committee **received** from the GSA its annual report on the GSA's Advice Service PGR Casework (**YGRSB/21-22/14**)*.* Christopher Carr, GSA worker, attended the meeting for this item.

The GSA **reported** that:

- It had been a busy year for the GSA Advice Service and, in the light of the increased workload, the GSA had increased the staff allocated to casework
- There was some incomplete data but this issue was being addressed
- Less than 15% of the cases raised (where complete data were available) related to PGRs and there was no increase on the previous year
- The issues raised by PGRs were similar to those in previous years e.g. extensions, supervision etc.

M21-22/17: **PGR Admissions Report**

The Committee **received** the annual PGR Admissions Report (**YGRSB/21-22/15**), which provided a breakdown of the PGR enrolments for 2019/20 to 2021/22 (as of 1 December of each year) by Faculty and by Home/Overseas recruitment. The report also provided data on applications, offers and rejections for the current 2022/23 application cycle by Faculty and Home/Overseas recruitment. Sarah Kirkup, Deputy Head of Admissions (Postgraduate), attended the meeting to present the item.

It was **reported** that:

- With respect to 2021/2022 PGR enrolments:

    - At institutional level (relative to 2019/2020), Home enrolments were down, but Overseas enrolments were up

- With respect to the current PGR applications cycle:

    - Home (all faculties) and Overseas applications (two faculties) had declined relative to the same point last year but the number of offers made was broadly comparable
    - The Home rejection rate was significantly lower than at the same point last year but it was too early to draw conclusions about this

- Postgraduate Admissions had a Google drive of relevant information for people to explore.

In discussion it was **noted** that:

- There were some strategic issues with respect to PGR recruitment and admissions that would need to be explored in due course:

    - University PGR fees were linked to UKRI fee rates and not to the full cost of hosting a PGR (according to TRAC data). Departments needed to be aware that PGRs (particularly Home) were not income-generating
    - PGRs on three-year PhD programmes were only charged full fees for three years (even when their funder would offer 3.5 years of funding) but often received four-years of supervision and support
    - Supervisors needed to ensure that PGR projects could realistically be completed within the standard enrolment period when full fees were payable.

ACTION: Dean and the Head of Student Administration (in consultation with Planning and Admissions) to consider whether York should offer 3.5 year PhDs, in line with some other Russell Group universities.

M21-22/18: **PGR Special Cases Committee Annual Report**

The Committee **received** a report from the Special Cases Committee (SCC) on PGR casework (this was an extended version of the report sent to Senate) (**YGRSB/21-22/16**). Martin Cockett, the Chair of SCC presented the item.

It was **reported** that:

- There had been a significant increase in requests to SCC relating to PGR progress (extensions, leave of absence, temporary remote research due to Covid-19) but this increase was almost entirely due to the significant of impact of Covid-19 on PGRs

- The number of PGR progress cases going to SCC was proportionally higher than the number of progress cases for undergraduate and taught postgraduate students but this was likely to be due to the lack of other options for PGRs dealing with extenuating circumstances
- The number of PGR appeals had remained small and fairly constant. Most appeals related to failure and a majority were upheld
- Computer Science and Education were significantly overrepresented in terms of the numbers of PGRs appealing
- International PGRs were overrepresented in terms of the numbers of PGRs appealing.

The Chair **noted** that SCC data:

- Demonstrated the need for PGRs to have projects that could be realistically completed within their funded period and have project plans that allowed for contingencies in order to reduce the number of extensions
- On Computer Science and Education had been triangulated with other data and as a consequence YGRS was taking targeted action with the two departments, including an intervention that should help to improve supervision practices
- On the overrepresentation of international PGRS had been triangulated with other data and suggested that the University needed to look at the support provided to this group.

In discussion it was **noted** that**:**

- Any increase in the number of international PGRs should be contingent on adopting best practice in their admission, expectation-setting and support to avoid an increase in SCC cases
- At institutional level, there was a process underway to map support for different groups of students to ensure appropriate provision. **ACTION: Cecilia Lowe to share mapping spreadsheet with the Dean**
- The fact that international PGRs were overrepresented in the appeals statistics could be due to higher exit barriers which discouraged earlier withdrawal.

M21-22/19:   New YGRS website

The Chair **reported** that the YGRS website was being updated, with the aim of making it more useful for PGRs and staff and more dynamic in terms of news updates. Any feedback on the new website would be welcomed.

It was **noted** that it would be helpful to have clearer sign-posting on the webpage to sources of PGR support, including for international students. It was also noted that the website should be tested by PGRs, including international PGRs. **ACTION: Christine Comrie.**

M21-22/20:   Policies and Programmes Sub-Committee

The Committee **received for information** the minutes of the Policies and Programmes Subcommittee held on 17 November 2021 (and previous minutes available online).

M21-22/21:   **Awards and Funding Sub-committee**

The Committee **received for information** the minutes of the Awards and Funding Subcommittee held on 9 September 2021 (and previous minutes available online).

M21-22/22:   **Date of the Next Meeting**

[*Secretary's Note*] The date of the next meeting is now confirmed as: **Monday 13th June 13:00 - 15:00.**