



Meeting to be held on Thursday 8 December 2022, 10:00 - 12:00 - via Zoom

**Present:** Kate Arnold (Chair), Wayne Campbell, Andy Dougill, Andrew Jackson, Tom Richens, Matthias Ruth (first hour), Hannah Smallpage-Hurst, Peter Smith, Sean Sweeney, Sethina Watson, Zhangteng (TZ)

**Apologies for absence:** Viviane Cao, Ambrose Field, Tracy Lightfoot, Karen Rowlingson

**In attendance:** Maria Adlam (note-taker), Hannah Smallpage-Hurst (for the report on PGR recruitment, selection and admission), Adrian Lee (for the report on the OFS regulation on student outcomes)

**M22-23/01: Minutes of the last meeting**

The meeting of the meeting on 13 June 2022 were **approved**. There were no matters arising that were not dealt with elsewhere on the agenda.

**M22-23/02: Approving the revised terms of reference**

The revised terms of reference were approved. It was noted that the Annual Supervision Compliance report, the PGR Outcomes report and the Complaints report will all be included as Category II papers in future.

**M22-23/03: Action Log**

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

- M21-22/28: Departmental breakdowns of the PGR Submission Rates Report is available to contacts in academic departments.
- M21-22/30: A paper is being considered by Faculty Deans to extend waiving the PhD continuation fee past 31 December 2022.

**M22-23/04: Oral report from the Chair**

Key updates:

- Work is ongoing for the recommissioning of the ESRC White Rose DTP. Discussions are being led by Sheffield. A full draft of the proposal is being considered over the Christmas period and will be submitted in February 2023. Discussions are aiming to understand the true cost of running the DTP after factoring in the cost of fee waivers, training and complex administration that will be required.
- MR and KA are on the internal panel for the EPSRC DTP and CDT. The panel now knows how many applications can be submitted and an internal triaging system is in place. EPSRC are currently looking for the innovative delivery of CDTs, which fits with the ongoing institutional work on widening access and introducing new PhD formats.
- The UKRI is cutting the number of studentships on offer by approximately 5%, due to the overall level of funding being fixed and the stipend amount increasing.
- KA gave some updates on PGR numbers at York:
  - PGR Home enrolment numbers are down on previous November. There is some indication that Home recruitment is down and this is similar at PGR level.
  - PGR Overseas enrolment numbers are somewhat down on previous years. There was a rise in 21/22 due to delays in previous years.
  - The figures and projections for the future indicate that the board may need to start thinking more strategically about the planning process with regards to PGR numbers.
  - MR noted that students will now get longer to finish their work due to Covid-19 extensions and will therefore spend longer in the system. With Covid-19 and the move towards semesterisation, many people in the institution are at their limits to deal with additional challenges. To what extent is the decline in intake a constraint on the University's aims, and do we have a way of assessing that?
  - KA noted that the ratio of PGRs per FTE academic staff member has been declining, and that York is behind other Russell Group institutions.
  - AD responded that a decrease in PGRs would be a constraint on the University's aims, regarding the QR uplift and the research outputs for the next REF. He proposed that proactive studentship schemes may be needed to reverse the downturn in PGRO recruitment, and that increases in relationships with charities and industry partners to make up for the reduction in UKRI funding.

- PS highlighted that there was an increase in enrolments for 21/22 in previous years due to delays in previous years caused by Covid-19, which made it unlikely that numbers would continue to increase in 22/23. PS also noted that York has historically not matched other institutions with regards to scholarships. In Social Sciences, there is more of a focus on teaching experience than PGRs contributing to research outputs.
- WC noted that Covid is still an issue in some countries where York is recruiting PGROs. Could this be impacting on PGRO enrolment? It would be useful to see a breakdown of the data by country. **ACTION: Board to request that recruitment teams provide more data to present at the next Board.**
- KA noted that recruitment from China is slightly down, and the UK sector has taken a hit due to Australia opening up to international students and offering attractive studentship deals.
- SS queried whether there is data on the number of awards applied for by the institution vs the numbers that are successful. **ACTION: RIKE to provide data to the applications for DTPs etc bring to the next Board meeting.**
- MR echoed previous comments made which underline the vital contribution of PGRs in the delivery of research. The Office for Global Programmes is aiming to considerably increase Overseas recruitment and it may be worthwhile to have conversations with OGP to ensure PGR is prominently featured in these activities. **ACTION: YGRS to meet with Rohit Ramesh Kumar and Gwion Sims to discuss options.**
- KA noted that this echoes previous conversations with OGP. PGR may operate as a loss leader because it attracts PGTO.
- AD proposed that more joint PhD programmes, such as hosting PGRs from a partner university or 2+2 awards would have the benefits of research connections and PGR students arriving later down the line. Any partnership would need to have some element of fee waiver/discount or bursary.

**ACTION: YGRS to develop a paper on options for financial incentives/scholarships to attract applications for PGRO.**

#### **M22-23/05: YGRS Annual Report and update on vision and strategy (Kate Arnold)**

- Key successes in the PGR community during the 2021/2 academic year have been the PGR contributions to the REF, schemes for financial support during Covid-19 and

during the cost of living crisis. Increased support is now on offer for supervisors, in recognition of the increased complexity of the role, with a light-touch element of mandatory training.

- Priorities for 2022/3 academic year:
  - reinventing the form and function of PG education to meet the needs of individuals for the workplace and society. This may include more flexibility on the format of PhDs, in order to become more relevant to PGRs and interact with industry.
  - Increase diversity of PGR population.
  - Better incorporate the PGR community into governance and management structures.
- AJ queried how the structure has evolved across the various teams that are part of YGRS. Are things working well and is there anything that needs to change? KA noted that there have been some key changes in personnel in the PGR Admin team and the BRIC team. There may need to be some development within the core YGRS team. One challenge is the fact that the school is a virtual entity. Another challenge is the fact that PGRs fall under the categories of researcher, teacher and student, and on a practical level this means that KA is looped into a wide number of areas. There needs to be some personnel who can do the coordination between these areas.
- WC made reference to the predicted future decline in PGR recruitment. What is York's plan in terms of packages to recruit overseas PGRs that could be put together in a similar way to successful Australian institutions? KA is not currently involved in planning as it sits within faculties, so there isn't any coordination. There is currently no resource for this in YGRS as it would be a large-scale piece of work. WC suggested there should be a meeting with the Deans as a group, in terms of what can be done in faculties and ideas around scholarships. **ACTION: KA and MR to discuss how to move forward with this point.**
- TZ raised the issue of difficulties around PGR course rep engagement. The new PGR forum is running well, however there is a lack of contact and engagement between YGRS and PGRs and GSA. How can we encourage PGRs to be more engaged? **ACTION: MA to respond to TZ with responses on this subject after the Graduate Chairs Forum has taken place on 13 December.**
- SS noted that in the past some centralised PGR recruitment has cross cut efforts in departments. Could there be a facilitator appointed for DTP-funded/charity-funded applicants? KA responded that the admissions and recruitment project aims to simplify the policies and processes, so that central teams can support with the recruitment and facilitation. However, there could be a role for a cross-faculty position focusing on recruitment and marketing for PGRs.

**ACTION:** KA to work with Deans and MR to identify whether a business case could be developed to create a new role focusing on PGR marketing and business planning.

**M22-23/06: Report on PGR contributions to the REF (Kate Arnold on behalf of Andrew Taylor)**

- The paper summarises PGRs' positive contributions to the REF and there is some specific feedback on York's PGR contribution. Are there any suggestions from the Board for future actions/investments?
  - AD queried whether a Sciences-specific studentship scheme may be required, as the Sciences faculty is responsible for a higher proportion of PGR research outputs. Could there be targeted schemes for departments with lower outputs, such as Health Sciences? Do PGR recruitment and forecasting numbers need to be more incorporated into the planning system?
  - PS highlighted that PGR supervision in Social Sciences is considered to be teaching activity rather than with contributing research outputs.
  - SW noted that this is similar in Arts and Humanities. PGRs are still at the heart of research culture, even if they are not contributing to research outputs at this point of their career.
- **ACTION: During the next PGR annual review process, YGRS will ask departments to reflect on how they will ensure that PGR-related activity will contribute to future REF activities. YGRS will then feed these reflections back to the Board.**

**M22-23/07: Report on OFS Regulation on Student Outcomes (Adrian Lee)**

- The paper contains an overview of where there are areas of below-threshold compliance.
- The new regulation came into force in October 2022. OFS will investigate the non-compliance of universities below the threshold according to criteria, but currently are only looking at UG and PGT conditions. This is intended to also be the case in 2023, however this is subject to change, and OFS could choose an indicator relating to PGRs. York therefore needs to keep up-to-date and vigilant, to ascertain levels of risk, if York were a chosen uni for investigation.
- In the longer-term, York will ascertain a plan for continuous monitoring and reviews of performance against various metrics.
- The majority of areas that are below threshold are not statistically significant.
- WC: noted the lack of statistical significance. WC queried what the total size is of the mature student and disabled PGR population, to get a better sense of the scale of the issue. **ACTION: MA to look up these figures and report back at the next Board meeting.**
- AD noted that the data may suggest some issues around disability. A workshop on disability in research has taken place in Chemistry and highlighted a key issue of physical accessibility on campus. There may be work to do with estates to make

campus more accessible. AD is having ongoing conversations about this on EDI committees.

- WC proposed putting together a focus group of PGRs in order to better understand difficulties being experienced by disabled PGRs in terms of engagement of research project and career options. **ACTION: MA to pass this suggestion on to Careers team.**
- Z noted his support of the proposal to bring together a focus group for disabled PGRs. Z also noted that disabled PGRs commonly note being less able than non-disabled PGRs to complete their thesis on time, and therefore need to pay more than one continuation fee. Can YGRS help with this? KA noted that the decision to continue to waive continuation fees past 31/12/22 is currently with Faculty Deans.
- SW queried whether the disaggregated data suggests a structural issue in Arts and Hums. **ACTION: SW to pick up with Richard Ogden and Jonathan Finch in the Humanities research centre.**
- KA raised the need to take work further on pathways for disabled PGRs with Grad Chairs. **ACTION: MA to add to the next Grad Chair Forum agenda.**
- AL: noted that in some disciplines it can be inherently more difficult to meet the criteria that OFS has set. It may be that Arts and Hums statistics relate to a sector-wide challenge regarding employment, and may not be York-specific. OFS would ask for context if York was a chosen institution.

#### **M22-23/08: Progress report on YGRS PGR Recruitment and Admissions project (Kate Arnold)**

- The objectives of the project are now more specific and the scoping is complete. The new YGRS governance structure is now in place.
- The Funding and Recruitment Committee will be the steering group for the project.
- Work is taking place with YCEDE and YGRS is learning a lot about recruitment issues.
- There are three pilot departments at York and eleven across institutions in Yorkshire. An implementation plan is in place for training in departments.
- The Board approved the proposal to operate as the project sponsor.
- WC welcomed the more focussed plan for future action and input from faculties.
- AD noted that if local support for PGR admissions is to be expanded, there needs to be a conversation about where that additional resource will sit.
- AJ agreed that there needs to be a review at how external training grants are managed pre- and post-award, and how to factor in additional support for admissions and recruitment.
- WC proposed that there needs to be a business case for additional business activity and the additional resources required. All relevant stakeholders, with Joss Ivory, should talk through. **ACTION: KA to meet with Joss Ivory and other stakeholders.**

- PS noted that the Admissions for PGR is very different than for UG or PGT, PGR very different from PGT and UG. There is nearly always an interaction between applicants and potential supervisors about how to make an application better. It is hard to unpick these interactions and to know what someone's characteristics are. Someone from a more prestigious UG background is likely to know more about how to submit a good application for a PGR than someone with a less prestigious background. KA noted that there are some ideas for combatting this which will be reported at future Board meetings. UKRI is clear that processes need to change.
- SS noted that training on recruitment may need to be quite granular for staff, due to its informal nature. KA noted that York is an institutional outlier in having no mandatory training before interviewing prospective PGRs.

#### **M22-23/09: Risk Register draft (Kate Arnold)**

- A concept summary was approved for a system to centrally store details of PGR scholarships, however this is one of many institutional priorities and IT may not have the capacity to implement it. **ACTION: Change the revised risk rating to amber instead of green: scoping would not be enough to fully mitigate the risk.**
- **ACTION: Change revised risk rating from green to amber under recruitment (point number 9).**
- WC asked whether there has been a discussion with MR about linking to the corporate risk register. KA confirmed that no discussion has taken place, and asked whether the rest of the board is happy enough with the initial iteration to move forward to corporate level. The Board approved this proposal. **ACTION: KA to discuss with MR.**

#### **M22-23/10: Annual Report on PGR Outcomes (Tom Richens)**

- TR gave an overview of the report's key findings.
- KA noted that a higher level of withdrawal is sometimes not a negative outcome, if it is the right route for the PGR. Lack of withdrawal could be due to potential punitive actions by the PGR's funder, such as a requirement to repay any funds paid up to the point of withdrawal.
- WC noted that the overrepresented groups in Revise and Resubmit and Fail outcomes have remained fairly consistent. Is there a common theme that can be identified and better support these groups of PGRs? **ACTION: TR to review figures for PGR Outcomes report in 2022/3 and identify trends that have been identified in 2021/2 report. If outcomes remain consistent, consider actions by PGR Experience Committee.**

- SS queried whether delays in visa processing have contributed to the increase in no shows? TR acknowledged that there have been issues with delays, but is not aware of anyone who could not start their course due to delays.

**M22-23/11: The Annual Supervision Compliance report was moved to Category II.**

**ACTION: Report and feedback on mandatory supervisory PGR training to be brought to the next Board meeting.**

Dates of the remaining meetings in 2022/2023:

- Thursday 16 March 2023, 10:00 to 12:00 (Zoom)
- Thursday 15 June 2023, 10:00 to 12:00 (Zoom)