



YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL (YGRS) BOARD

Monday 10 July 2023, 11:00 - 13:00 via Zoom

Present: Kate Arnold (Chair), Tom Richens (Secretary), Sean Sweeney (SS), Steve King (SK), Jonny Exon (GSA), Andy Dougill (AD), Peter Smith (PS), Wayne Campbell (WC), Viviane Cao (GSA), Alison Laird (AL), Tom Banham (TB)

Apologies for absence: Jane Hill, Andrew Jackson, Karen Rowlingson, Matthias Ruth, Richard Ogden, Yvonne Birks, Tracy Lightfoot, Sethina Watson, Zhang Teng.

In attendance: Jessica Main (note-taker)

Category I Business

M22-23/25: Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 April 2023 (YGRSB/22-23/13) were approved, with one minor amendment to include Sean Sweeney on the record for those who were present.

M22-23/26: Review of the [action log](#)

- **M22-23/04** - Request for data on awards applied for vs successful awards will be raised at the next pre- and post-award Research Grants workshop, which will then be brought to the next YGRS Board meeting.
- **M22-23/07** - Janice Simpson has confirmed that a PT Research Assistant has been recruited in order to carry out the review of careers and employability for PGRs project. A report of the findings is expected to be provided by the end of the Summer.
- **M22-23/14** - Will be received during the meeting.
- **M22-23/15** - Information available on webpages.
- **M22-23/17** - Andrew Taylor will ensure that PURE will reflect co-authorship status for PGRs
- **M22-23/17** - Ongoing.
- **M22-23/20** - Ongoing - update expected for next YGRS Board meeting.

M22-23/27: Oral report from the Chair

a. Recruitment figures for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic applicants

The Chair provided figures regarding the uplift in applications to York from ethnic minority backgrounds:

- Figures are taken from data collected between 2019 - 2023.
- Applications increased from 160 to 200.
- Offers increased from 40 to 75.
- Unconditional firm acceptances increased from 25 to 55.

b. YCEDE events

- YCEDE has agreed a programme of activities for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic PGRs in collaboration with external widening participation partners.
- An event with the [Stuart Hall Foundation](#) is expected to take place later in the year, with widening access conversations taking place with CDTs and DTPs.
- The Chair will be speaking at an event with the [Aziz Foundation](#), who award scholarships to support British Muslims to undertake PhD programmes.
- Shared events will also be taking place with the [Reach Society](#), who encourage and support Black young adults into higher education.

c. Update on recruitment and admissions project

- Two current postgraduate researchers have been recruited to support the recruitment and admissions project.
- Former York PGR graduate, Zaynab Seedat has been appointed to focus on the development of a programme of engagement and support for PGRs, more specifically in regards to easing the transition into research and reducing the dropout rate of candidates accepting offers but not enrolling/starting their programme.
- Jenny Gonzalez-Hogg has been appointed for a 6 month Marketing and PGR Recruitment Manager role.

d. REF 2028 - update on role of PGRs

The Chair shared slides (provided by Andrew Taylor, PIP) looking at potential implications for PGRs in REF 2028 (NB. still in the consultation stage).

Key information to note regarding the PGR contribution:

- Institution level evidence-based statement
 - Description of support for PGRs and supervisors (e.g. wellbeing, PGR/supervisor training)

- Disciplinary-level evidence-based statement
 - Expect PGR completion data to be required
 - Description of support for PGRs and supervisors
- Research outputs
 - Co-authorship of submitted outputs
 - Sole-authorship of submitted outputs
- Impact case studies
 - Potential contribution to underpinning research or to generating impact

Consulting on:

- Should outputs sole-authored by PGRs be eligible for submission?
- If so, should PhD theses be included?

Implications for York to consider:

- PURE access would need to be provided for PGRs, should sole-authored outputs become eligible for REF inclusion.
- Potential open access implications - REF 2028 policy still under development.
- PIP will work with YGRS to understand full implications during Summer 2023.
- Accelerating conversations about access to PURE for PGRs. Note that there will also be cost implications.

The Chair requested comments from the board, and during the course of discussion it was noted that:

- Widening access to PURE, ensuring PGR and T&S staff contributions are captured is welcomed enthusiastically.
- Changes to REF may have more implications for Arts & Humanities, where sole-authorship is more typical. Changes may affect Sciences less, as it is common for outputs to be published as part of a team.

ACTION: YGRS to work with PIP to understand REF implications and push for PGRs and T&S staff to have PURE inclusion.

e. Update on latest funding applications

YGRS have been supporting a number of bids for funding, as follows:

- Leverhulme DTP application - *Future Homes*, led by Nick Carlaw - submitted
- Outline of a NERC CDT bid - *The business of biodiversity*, led by Colin Beale - submitted

- UKRI-funded DTP bid on AI - led by Ibrahim Habli (multi-disciplinary project) with match funding from the University and industry partners.
- EPSRC funding bids (5) to be submitted in September.

YGRS are currently at the stage of mapping out the process of applying for a CDT/DTP, to provide better clarity as it is too convoluted at present. YGRS will consider how faculties tie into match funding bids.

f. Next Generation Research SuperVision Project (RSVP)

Success for Dr Karen Clegg and collaborators across the sector, who have won a bid for over 4 million pounds from Research England to support the 'RSVP' project. York will be leading on the four-year project, which will focus on the transformation of the culture of PGR supervision and education.

M22-23/28: Update on YGRS Strategy and draft aims for the coming academic year

Conversations across YGRS, BRIC, PGRA, Careers and Comms have taken place to identify YGRS strategic priorities for 2023/24. Priorities take into account internal and external drivers, such as the *UKRI: New Deal for Postgraduate Research*; the *RSVP* project; and the *University of York Research strategy 2023-30*.

The *University of York Research strategy 2023-30* has 5 main objectives:

1. People and Culture: A Thriving Research Community
2. Ideas and Creativity: A Centre of Research Excellence
3. Impact: Delivery of Public Good through our research
4. Partnership and Place: A Trusted and Effective Partner
5. Support and Infrastructure: An environment that ensures we realise our ambitions

PGRs are specifically mentioned in two areas, People and Culture; and Support and Infrastructure:

- Meet the needs of our postgraduate research student community from recruitment to graduation and beyond (Priority 1.4)
- Ensure the York Graduate Research School provides and institutional focal point for postgraduate research students and their supervisors (Priority 5.5)

Taking into account the factors outlined above alongside the work already being undertaken by YGRS, the proposed areas of focus in 2023/24 are as follows:

- To work with departments to diversify the format of the PhD, e.g. portfolios and creative practice.
- To contribute to the UTC and URC working groups on the use of Generative AI in PGR assessment and research, as well as recruitment and admissions.
- To continue with Widening Access-related work, with the introduction of:
 - Changes to policies and processes in order to increase the application, offer and enrolment rates for candidates from under-represented group, e.g. Supporting Transitions into PGR Project (STiPP).
 - Marketing and recruitment strategies to attract high quality PGR Home and PGR Overseas candidates, and maintain/increase York's PGR numbers, led by the new PGR Marketing and Recruitment Manager role.
 - Development of the University's approach to PGR supervision and mentoring, particularly of PGRs from Widening Participation backgrounds.
- To review with HR and BRIC, the workload allocation for supervision and feed into research culture work.
- To continue to advocate for the PGR perspective to be included in the accommodation and service delivery and planning.
- Contribute to research on, and policy change to better support sexual misconduct by PGRs.
- To support delivery of the York Supervisor Programme, including the Being an Effective Supervisor Tutorial (BERST), workshops etc.
- To enhance PHD working conditions, including a review of compassionate leave and pay.
- To refresh the YGRS strategy, governance and staffing structure in line with internal and external drivers.
- To manage matters of compliance and high risk to the institution, i.e. PGR Funding Database Project and PGR Recruitment.
- To contribute to the changes of the PGR lifecycle to align with semesters from 2024/25.

The Chair concluded that YGRS will continue to refine the areas, and gather feedback from Faculties before bringing the proposed strategy back for consideration by the board. The Chair then invited the board to comment on the proposed areas of focus, and during discussion it was noted:

- Currently, a UTC working group is looking at the various facets (both positive and negative) of using AI for students on taught programmes, however a consultation with URC needs to take place to figure out a policy for PGRs on the use of AI.
- PSS, UTC and URC working groups are all undertaking pieces of work in regards to the use of AI.
- SS asked for charity applications to also be recognised within the CDT/DTP bid mapping piece of work.
- PS suggested that YGRS may wish to collect information regarding the level of University support for PGR studentships - as the future of University finances is not certain, it would

be useful to get a broader picture. TR noted that it was not easy to get hold of this information - the PGR scholarship database project work which is being undertaken will be able to support this type of query in the future.

- JE voiced that he would be keen to work with the Chair to align the goals and expertise of YGRS and the GSA to enhance PGR working conditions.

ACTION: YGRS to link up with PSS, UTC and URC working groups on the usage of AI, and be explicit about where PGRs should sit in relation to assessment.

ACTION: YGRS to include information regarding charity applications within the CDT/DTP bid mapping piece (KA and TR)

ACTION: Develop an implementation piece to align the goals and expertise of YGRS and the GSA to enhance PGR working conditions and advocate for the PGR perspective (KR and JE)

M22-23/29: Update on PGR recruitment ([YGRSB 22-23-24](#)) (KA)

Key information as of forecast against five-year recruitment target, as of June 2023:

- Under target for PGR Home and PGR Overseas applications.
- Home trend observations:
 - A sizeable decline in the number of applications to PGR programmes
 - Applications for Arts & Humanities remain stable, but have dropped for Sciences and Social Sciences
 - Social Sciences offers and acceptances are significantly down from last year
- Overseas trend observations:
 - Applications for PGR programmes still high
 - Offers are slightly down from last year across all faculties
 - Acceptances within Social Sciences and Arts & Humanities stable, but significantly down or Sciences

The Chair noted that the trend observations appeared worrying and invited comments from the board.

- AD noted that rather than being a worrying trend, the data shows that the target numbers are simply unrealistic.
- AD suggested that in order to sustain the numbers of overseas applications and offers, it would be beneficial for the University to enter into more partnership agreements with other institutions, i.e. flexibility of joint/dual programmes, and ensure that academics are supported in setting up these programmes.

- WC queried how York compares to other institutions. The Chair noted that anecdotally there are similar patterns across the UK, but the data York has is patchy.

ACTION: Ask Jenny Gonzalez Hogg whether she can provide benchmark data for the next YGRS Board meeting.

M22-23/30: YCEDE Year One Report ([YGRSB 22-23-14](#)) (KA)

The Chair presented the one year report, which had been given to Research England.

Overview of highlights in Year 1:

- Set up a YCEDE Research Internship Scheme in early 2022 that delivered 19 ring-fenced internships to taught students in 2022, with 34 positions advertised in 2023.
- Designed and delivered 9 workshops to potential PGR applicants to support them through the PhD application process, transition to PhD study and demystify research careers.
- Awarded 11 ring-fenced PGR scholarships in 2022 (5 in York) and advertised 13 scholarships for the 2023/24 academic year.
- Developed and beta tested training activities with 10 pilot departments and several DTPs to change how institutions recruit and select PhD candidates.
- Piloted a bespoke mentoring scheme for UK BAME PGRs which includes new training for staff volunteering to become mentors.
- Established a YCEDE BAME Scholars Network on Twitter and LinkedIn that helps PGRs of Colour to network across institutions.
- For Home PGRs from a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic background, from 2019/20 to 2022/23: applications rose from 160 (13%) to 200 (19%); offers from 40 (8%) to 75 (17%) and unconditional firm acceptances from 25 (8%) to 55 (18%).
- YCEDE won the University of York's Inclusive Partnerships Award.
- The issue of workloading support and recognition for staff, particularly minoritised staff members, involved in EDI activities is being raised with senior leadership teams across the five partners.
- Current race equity and EDI training for staff and postgraduate researchers has been reviewed and recommendations made to senior colleagues.
- Agreed a programme of joint activities with external WP partners including Stuart Hall Foundation, Aziz Foundation and Reach Society.

The Chair invited comments from the board.

- SK suggested that it was work sharing the YCEDE successes more widely, and expanding on the WP groups that YCEDE collaborate with.
- SS noted that Biology has a WP scheme - Generation Research (led by Gillian Barlow) - which would be useful for collaboration.

ACTION: Contact Generation Research to see how the WP scheme and YCEDE could collaborate. (KA)

Alison Laird left the meeting.

M22-23/31: Oral update on semesterisation

Key steps and information:

- PGRs will align with semesterisation from 2024/25
- Programme start dates will change to September
- The Mods & Sems task and finish group are working with Systems, PG Admissions and PGRA to ensure changes are accurately thought through and implemented for 2024/25. TR will provide updates on how this is going, in the future.

ACTION: Email Gradmins and Grad chairs to remind them that for 2023/4, PGR start date is 1st October, and not to timetable departmental induction until after the start date. YGRS will hold their induction on the 4th of October. (KA & TR)

Andy Dougill left the meeting.

- JE reported that the GSA is looking to spread out their programme of welcome activities across 4-5 weeks, to ensure that "late arrivals" will not miss out.
 - In relation, it was noted that the University is expecting to have approximately c.200 PG students (some of whom will be PGR) arrive late. This is due to a couple of the accommodation suppliers (Roost and Student Castle) who have links with the University being unable to provide rooms any earlier than the 16th and 23rd of September (in comparison, the earliest date PGRs can take up accommodation on campus is the 11th September).
 - WC confirmed that the Accommodation Director and Head of Accommodation were already working with their team on communications regarding the issue with late arrivals, and noted that the issues are only for this year, and a resolution has been found for 2024/25 and going forward.

M22-23/32: Verbal update on plans for the single union

JE provided an update, with key information as follows:

- A working group was set up in the Summer of 2022, to explore a move towards combining the student unions.
- The vision in having a single union is to broaden the quality and breadth of expertise and to ensure there is consistency, and a strong structure.
- The working group is running focus groups with PGT and PGRs.
- PG exclusive advice and activities will continue to be provided - PGRs who responded to the student consultation survey were concerned about being “lost” and have a strong desire that they are properly represented within the union.
- There will be a funded PhD scholarship as part of the new single union.

The Chair formally thanked JE and the GSA and YUSU for their commitment to the PGR voice and perspective.

The board agreed that the work being done was positive and constructive.

M22-23/33: Student Academic Engagement and Wellbeing Policy ([YGRSB 22-23-19](#)) (TB) - note p6

TB provided an overview of the Student Academic Engagement and Wellbeing Policy.

- UEB commissioned a project to look at wellbeing and engagement, which would ensure better coordination during the arrivals process and monitoring and providing support.
- *Check-In*, the attendance tool, will be useful as a data source for the University - enabling early identification of those who may be experiencing challenges which impact on their engagement.
- Supervision meetings will continue to be captured as part of the attendance and engagement policy for visa holders, but to clarify, the Check-In tool will be used for Home and Overseas PGRs.
- TB raised the query of whether the University should review the 6-7 week supervision meeting points and whether there should be more. The Chair noted that while 6-7 weeks is a set minimum requirement and PGRs can have more meetings as and when, but to formally introduce more check-ins would be contentious due to workloading implications.
- SS queried whether SkillsForge could be used more flexibly and to better effect.

The board agreed that they were content to endorse the policy and are happy to see that it is going to UTC for further policy consideration. The board would expect to be consulted on anything that would impact on the PoRD.

M22-23/34: ToR for next academic year ([YGRSB 22-23-16](#)) (TR)

Key points

- Membership-wise, there is a clear need for Deputies where possible to ensure representation.
- In general, there needs to be a way of formally recognising alternates.

ACTION: ToR to be circulated via email for feedback. Board to comment on whether we need a PGR lead or PGR representative, and stronger input from RIKE.

Category II Business

1. Minutes of the PGR Policies and Programmes Committee held on 7th June ([YGRSB 22-23-21](#))
Received.
2. Minutes of the PGR Experience Committee held on 16th May ([YGRSB 22-23-22](#))
Received.
3. Minutes of the PGR Funding and Recruitment Committee held on 25th May ([YGRSB 22-23-23](#))
Received.
4. Minutes of the BMS Subcommittee meeting (interdisciplinary programme where YGRS is serving as BoS) ([YGRSB 22-23-17](#))
Received.
5. Annual report on CITY College PhD Programme ([YGRSB 22-23-18](#))
Received.
6. Dates of future meetings for 2023/24: 11th December 2023, 21st March 2024 and 13th June 2024, 10am - 12pm, locations to be confirmed.