

YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 18th February 2016

Present: Prof. Tom Stoneham (Chair), Ms. Kate Dodd, Mr. Nigel Dandy, Dr. David Duncan, Prof. Debbie Smith, Prof. Marilyn Vihman, Prof. Matthew Festenstein (for Prof. Stuart Bell), Ms. Rasha Ibrahim, Prof. John Robinson, Prof. Brian Fulton, Dr. Marjan van der Woude, Dr. Beatrice Szczepk-Reed.

Apologies: Prof. Mark Ormrod, Mr. Peter Gorbart

Attending: Dr. Alun Kirby (Secretary)

CATEGORY I BUSINESS

M15-16/11 Welcome

The Chair welcomed the Members to the meeting and received apologies as above.

M15-16/12 Minutes of the meeting of 30th November 2015

The minutes were approved without further amendment.

M15-16/13 Matters arising from the Minutes

M15-16/7.1 Regarding the RSAT Submissions Report it was noted that extensions are being controlled via SCC and through supporting departments to correctly implement policy by agreeing timetables with students which include contingency. Board requested that this report is provided annually, and should include data on withdrawals and non-completions. Questions relating to Tier 4 students and Leave of Absence were directed to the Guidance recently provided to the Policies and Programmes subcommittee by Jim Irving.

Action: RSAT to note as annual reporting requirement.

M15-16/7.2 Regarding the SRA PGR Cohorts Report, it was agreed that this meeting was the correct time to receive such a report, to include January intake. That intake of overseas students exceeded predictions was also of note. Discussions were had around data on p.89 of the report, between the relationship between applications, offers and acceptances, with high departmental variation reported, predominantly due to faculty-specific circumstances.

Action: SRA to note as annual reporting requirement. To revise format with departmental information as a 'dashboard' and to include an integrated table of numbers and percentages from 1st table on page 89 of current report.

Action: TS to request reflection from departments as to why conversion rates (application through to acceptance) may be low, with positive reference to good practise at departmental and Faculty level.

M15-16/9 TS queried the Skillsforge tender process with Rob Hunt. Prior commitment to the supplier meant no open tender was required.

M15-16/10 The AHRC consultation was returned, with no response as yet. TS visiting AHRC next week, and a call likely in September 2016.

The minutes **M14-15/5** and **M14-15/6** relating to the Subcommittees of the Board were addressed elsewhere (see M15-16/8, below).

M15-16/14 Oral report from the Chair

The Chair provided an oral report as follows:

The ESRC DTP bid was due for submission, with the prediction of around 35 studentships / year for 6 years. Match-funding was agreed as equal across White Rose partners at around 1:3 students (with minor partners match-funding at 2 studentships / year), giving an expectation of around 9+3 students / year at York. Match-funding for staff time was also agreed.

MRes Soc Sci for 1+3 students; the requirement is for 50% of awards to be 1+3. Tracey Lightfoot heading a working group for this programme.

Action: Copy of the ESRC Bid Document to be included in the next papers.

An EPSRC call is expected in 2018, with Colin Brown currently leading. A NERC bid may be made for 24 studentships in modelling ecology and evolution. All bids should consider management and governance seriously due to increased RC focus in this area.

The YGRS Conference Funding budget has been set up at £10k / year.

Six £5k YuFund PGT scholarships are being advertised to departments.

The student newspaper, 'Vision', covered the PhD spotlight competition. A good example of engaging with the student press about PGR.

3MT finals will be 16th June, in conjunction with the Festival of Ideas, and will involve local schools.

A charity 10km run is taking place for CARA, an opportunity to enhance the CARA profile in the UK.

Induction event will be 23rd September, with a PGR public engagement event at Kings Manor. Ideas are welcome.

The subcommittees to the Board are working well, but will review their membership and process over the next term.

M15-16/15 Oral report from the Graduate Student representatives

Two GSA projects were noted. (1) A review of academic facilities, including conference funding available and inter-library loan funding. (2) A supervision review, including quality of relationships, expertise, pastoral care, careers support and personal development issues.

M15-16/16 Skillsforge Business Plan

The business plan for the Skillsforge project was accepted and it was proposed that an application was made to Planning Committee. It was noted that some funding would come back to the University through its share in Skillsforge.

The possibility of a rollout for PGT was discussed, with correlative savings not immediately clear. However, the benefits in user experience and the 'upgrade' from evision were significant, as were the ability to manage external supervisor and examiner information and access.

Action: TS to contact Saul Tendler and David Muckersie to update and initiate the Planning Committee process. The existing Business Case to be added as an appendix to any Investment Case.

The pilot is ongoing with some departments involved, some wanting to be involved as early adopters, and others needing to be guided into the new process to ensure the University has access to all required information.

M15-16/17 Continuation Fees

With comparison to the sector, York charges at the lower end of continuation fees. It was proposed for discussion that continuation fees be absorbed by funders where students were offered a 'fully-funded' studentship.

Concerns were raised about the effect on University income and that clarification through communication to students would be preferred, especially at the time of offer.

The concern that departments may encourage submission post 36 months was raised.

It was proposed that clarity was needed as to;

- the period covered by funding
- the fees covered

And that;

- a departmental standardized wording should be in place in FUNDING letters
- any existing cases should be worked through.

The status of students entering their writing-up period may be changed to better reflect the situation (PoRD section 7.8; with implications for SITS).

The issue of monthly payments for fees was raised during the discussion.

Action: The YGRS Executive Group to put together a proposal for YGRSB to consider prior to Planning Committee consideration.

Action: TS/RSAT to contact all CDT / DTP managers and the White Rose office for copies of offer letters to ensure CMA compliance.

M15-16/18 PG Student Loans

It was noted that interest on UG loans accrues while on PG courses, and both loans are paid concurrently when due. It was agreed that it would be best to wait and see what the student approach is to these changes in funding before deciding on any actions.

M15-16/19 AOB

The Tier 4 guidance provided by Jim Irving was raised, with a question of how to best display the information to students.

Action: to note that any public display should be labelled as 'current and subject to change' due to possible rapid UKVI changes. RI to contact Jim Irving to discuss publicity by GSA.

There being no other business, the meeting was closed.

The next meeting is scheduled for **Monday 23rd May 2016, 14.00 - 16.00 in H/G17**