

# UNIVERSITY *of* York

## York Graduate Research School Board

Thursday 23rd February, 2017, 10-12 am

H/G/17

### MINUTES

**Present:** Professor Tom Stoneham (Chair; TS), Mr Nigel Dandy, Professor John Robinson, Professor Marilyn Vihman, Ms Rasha Ibrahim, Ms Kate Stephenson, Dr David Duncan, Dr Marjan van der Woude

**Apologies:** Ms Kate Dodd, Professor Judith Buchanan, Professor Debbie Smith, Professor Brian Fulton  
Professor Debbie Smith

**In attendance:** Dr Alun Kirby (Secretary; AK), Ms Helen Barrett (for M16-17/26)

#### Category I Business

**M16-17/21** Apologies were received as above. TS thanked AK for his work in establishing the Board over the last 18 months, and noted that Susanna Broom will be taking over as Secretary for the next meeting.

**M16-17/22** The minutes of the meeting of 28th November 2016 (YGRSB/16-17/14) were approved as they stand.

**M16-17/23** M16-17/5 The updated ToR for the YGRS Board (YGRSB/16-17/15) were approved subject to a change in section 8; 'QAA Higher Education Review' to be replaced by 'external review'.

M16-17/7 Colleagues have been notified about reports required by Board as appropriate.

M16-17/12 A Skillsforge Roll-Out report was circulated by AK following the November meeting, as requested.

**M16-17/24** TS reported that a first-stage bid (for £25k priming funding) has been submitted to the British Council, for Developing Doctoral Training in Africa. This bid is in collaboration with WUN partners in Ghana, Nairobi and Rochester, as well as non-HEI partners. The full bid (worth £2m) would include development of a mobile Skillsforge app.

Selection for the Leverhulme Trust bid is ongoing, with 14 expressions of interest, 12 pitches to be heard next week, which will be reduced to 3 for interview prior to selection of final bid. (Responding to a question about process) TS clarified that process was set out in Town Hall meetings in December and all PIs received individual feedback on their EoI with an

opportunity to rewrite prior to the pitches.

TS noted that there are now 6 students enrolled on Distance Learning programmes, which are working well. 4 DL students from Saudi Arabia are expected in York in the next 2 weeks.

The January YGRS induction event went well, with over 40 attendees, and will be rerun in January 2018. Dates for YGRS induction week events in 2017/18 will be set by April to give all depts fair notice.

Work is ongoing re the 4 year PhD policy, which will include review of the Continuation Fee - this aspect will go to Planning Committee once options are clear. The intent is to balance the effort of depts in providing supervision during continuation with the rewards, and to incentivise early submission during any continuation period.

**M16-17/25** The GSA has been running an Employability Focus Group. Initial findings indicate a change in career focus from academic to non-academic paths as a degree progresses, that there is very variable understanding of what support is on offer, but that the Careers presentation at the induction events was very well received.

The GSA has submitted their response to the PGR Loans consultation.

The structure of Ethics Committee meetings and processes has been reviewed, with the GSA hoping for improvements in some depts re timing and approval of applications. TS noted that SCC applications for extensions due to delays in Ethics Committee approval are relatively common, and students should be reminded that support is available and that developing project planning competence is an explicit part of a PhD.

Students who needed to make an appeal to SCC over the Christmas holidays had their 'clocks stopped' for the University closure, and this was appreciated. It is hoped that this approach will become business as usual.

The GSA are putting together a 'Supervisor's Charter' - a short summary of the expectations on both sides of the relationship. This is driven by students approaching GSA with queries. While at draft stage at present, it is likely to be short and non-prescriptive. DD noted that the University should carry out due diligence on any document, from a legal and compliance perspective.

***ACTION: KS to circulate draft version for consultation among Board members.***

The date for the next Careers and Researchers event for PGRs will be announced shortly, following good feedback on the first event. MvdW noted that care should be taken so that while central PGR Careers is improved, support in departments is not lost/diluted, and that good practise should be promoted.

**M16-17/26** The Board received a PGR Admissions Report, presented by Helen Barrett (YGRSB/16-17/16). The report was received well; very useful, particularly in reporting against targets. Comparison of 15/16 with current year figures indicates that we are likely to hit or exceed PGRH and PGRO targets before year end.

The possibility of an institutional target for increased PGR numbers was discussed. There is no set target for YGRS, but an emphasis on PGRO recruitment. Depts will be required to consider how PGR recruitment links to overall strategy in their departmental research reviews (ADRR) and TS will be attended Faculty panel discussions of those. It was noted that York is relatively strong in PGR, when we adjust for subject mix.

The issue of staff-student ratios was discussed as a concern as PGR numbers increase.

While, at 2.8:1 the ratio is quite high, TS indicated it was unlikely to increase.

It was suggested that volume was the wrong emphasis, and that the University should focus on quality through selection, leading to better research and improved supervisory productivity. It was agreed that taking a student should ensure a positive effect for the dept and should align with research strategy.

On conversion rates, Ms Barrett noted that a survey has been sent to all declined offers to ask why the offer was not taken up. The results will be available later in the year. This information will help depts, and TS will wait for it before discussing conversion rates with outlying departments.

***ACTION: HB / SRA and TS to follow up when data become available.***

It was noted that there are areas of good practise, where depts closely follow up each tentative enquiry through the application process. This is particularly effective when supervisors are directly involved. Similarly, more emphasis on the PGR community may benefit applicants.

Finally, this paper was very data rich and potentially hard to handle for Board members.

***ACTION: Susanna Broom (RSAT) to review preparation process for data-heavy papers.***

- M16-17/27** AK spoke to the Skillsforge Compliance Report (YGRSB/16-17/17), noting the successes in rollout and uptake in particular as reasons for continued support of the project. Further, it was emphasized that Skillsforge is likely to deliver on all the stated goals of the business case.
- TS noted that work on making milestones departmental-specific is ongoing, with work being done with departments having the most rigorous pre-existing processes. TS will also continue to meet depts to hear concerns where needed.
- MvdW noted that overall the process is now making the supervision recording process much easier.
- ACTION: To review the SUP and TAP forms and add student signature to the TAP Meeting form (AK/SB)***
- ACTION: To report again on 6 month TAP meetings for 1st year students at the May Board meeting (SB).***

- M16-17/28** TS spoke to the proposed change in programme approval process. Concerns remain that the proposal will not solve the issues, as programmes are essentially business cases which Planning Committee would need to approve.
- Several options were discussed, including delegating to Faculty Executive Groups, and pre-signing off by a Planning Officer.
- ACTION: TS will work with Faculty Deans to develop process further before approaching UEB.***

**M16-17/29** On the charge for the Doctoral Extension Scheme, it was proposed that this fee is removed and that the DES application costs are considered part of the tuition fees paid.  
***ACTION: AK to inform JI of the YGRS Board preference.***

**M16-17/30** The application for an AHRC DTP was discussed, with a focus on how many studentships the University should apply for and the costs associated with each strategy. It was noted that keeping numbers close to current levels would cost £524k/year, which is considered good value for a flagship programme and consortium. There was no appetite to reduce our level of support, and Sheffield are supportive of increasing to the maximum allowed (82 students/year).  
***ACTION: TS to take back to bid team that YGRS Board support growth as an option, but that there should be no reduction.***

Category II Business

No Category II Business was discussed at the meeting.