17-18/01 Welcome and Minutes of the 23 June 2017 meeting

17-18/01.1 The Committee approved the minutes from the meeting held on 23 June 2017 (PPSC/17-18/01)

17-18/01.2 The Chair welcomed the group to the first meeting of the new academic year and, as new members were in attendance, introductions were made. The Chair reported that both the previous Faculty representatives for the Sciences, Dr Marjan Van Der Woude and the Social Sciences, Dr Beatrice Szczepak Reed, had come to the end of their term. Professor Niall MacKay was the new temporary faculty representative from the Faculty of Sciences however there was currently a vacancy for the representative of the Faculty of Social Sciences. An election was currently underway.

17-18/02 Matters arising from the minutes

The Committee received the PPSC Action Log (PPSC/17-18/02) and PPSC APR Action Log (PPSC/17-18/03).

With respect to the PPSC Action log it was noted that the following actions were still open:
• (M16-17/26 refers) – *PGR examiners and right to work implications* - the Head of RSA confirmed that a self-declaration ‘right to work’ tickbox would be added to the Examiner Appointment form as part of a wider review of PGR forms which was being undertaken by RSA over the Autumn term.

• (M16-17/36 refers) – *Online thesis submission* – work on policy and technical issues regarding on online thesis submission was ongoing and an update would be provided to the Committee by the February 2018 meeting.

• (M16-17/46 refers) - *Student status beyond submission* – this was ongoing throughout the Autumn term and an update would be provided to the Committee by the February 2018 meeting.

• (M16-17/53 refers) - *Postgraduate Research Degree Academic Misconduct Policy* - this was ongoing and the Chairs of SCA and PPSC would meet to finalise the policy in October 2017.

• (M16-17/54 refers) - *Postgraduate Certificate in Advanced Social Research* - the Associate Dean for Research (Social Sciences) had reported that there were some issues with the setup of the modules within the programme and related problems with HESA reporting which still needed to be resolved. The Chair suggested that the Associate Dean for Research (Social Sciences), the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor for Teaching, Learning and Students and the Deputy Director: Student Services, should meet to discuss how to resolve the issues.

• (M16-17/54 refers) - *new research degree programme pro forma* - this was ongoing but would be completed before the end of the calendar year.

With respect to the PPSC APR 2016-17 Action Log, it was noted that the following actions were still open:

• (M16-17/42.4.3 refers) – *Space needs of PGR students* – the planned space review had not yet taken place due to resource constraints but PGR space remained a high priority. Work to increase the number of desk spaces in the Berrick Saul building was now complete. 56 new desks have been installed on the second floor of the Berrick Saul Building and were made available to PhD students in August 2017. 22 were allocated to Arts and Humanities PGRs and 34 to Social Science PGRs from the Department of Education.
• M16-17/42.4.6 refers) – Light touch review of formal reviews of progress – this would take place in Autumn 2017 and the Committee would be updated in February 2018.
• M16-17/42.4.7 refers) – SkillsForge usage – a report on the data within SkillsForge would be presented to the YGRS Board in November and then considered by the Committee in February 2018.
• M16-17/42.4.9 refers) – Tracking PGR students post award – an email for life was not an option but Graduate Administrators from departments would shortly receive training to enable them to access OPPA’s alumni database which held contact details for the vast majority of former students. OPPA would be invited to a Graduate Administrators Forum in 2017-18.
• M16-17/42.4.11 refers) – Light touch review of distance learning PhDs – this would take place in 2017/18.

17-18/03 To receive an oral report from the Chair

The Committee received an oral update from the Chair as follows:

• The Chair reported on the Chair’s Actions as noted in the PoRD amendments spreadsheet (PPSC/17-18/04)
• The Chair gave an update on the actions which came from the July 2017 Senate meeting where the PoRD was considered (PPSC/17-18/05). There were three actions outstanding:

  b) the proposal for an project to look at the quality assurance of off-site supervision - this was an action for PPSC to take forward in 2017-18 and would be discussed in due course.
  d) the need for greater clarity around employment and volunteering - this necessitates a minor change to Regulation 2.8.3 and has been requested.
  i) the modification of PGR examination outcome letters - the letters will be revised in Autumn 2017 and will be noted at PPSC at a future meeting.

• The Chair reported that he had approved, in principle, a request that the CDT in Fusion, 4 year programme now has an additional Continuation Year. This related to equity issues across the institutions forming the CDT. A formal request would be received from the CDT in due course.
• The Chair **reported** that the AHRC DTP bid, where York is the lead RO, is due to be submitted by 19 October 2017. A 2:1 ratio of match funding is required. The AHRC have requested that the bid includes a ‘per student variation on programme length’. The Chair has discussed the infeasibility of this with the AHRC, citing serious QAA issues however the AHRC remain undeflected. York are therefore writing a bid to make this a possibility but it is unlikely to be put into practice.

• The Chair **reported** that the RCUK changed their training guidelines in April 2017 and there was now the expectation that students would complete within their funded period. At present, the RCUK gave each RC the flexibility as to implementation however the merging of the current RC’s to the UKRI in 2018 will likely mean this is progressed quite quickly.

• The Chair **reported** that a working group including the GSA and the external relations team have produced some guidelines on social media use for researchers. The guidance went to URC and, pending some minor changes, was approved in principle and will be signed off by Chair’s Action. It is a short document acts as a reminder of the potential reputational issues around being a researcher at York and promoting / publishing research online.

**17-18/03 PPSC framework for integrated PhD programme (PPSC/17-18/06)**

Juliet James (JJ) reported that she had acted upon feedback from some members of PPSC and has revised as per suggestions however there were no substantive changes since the last circulation at the 23 June 2017 meeting. JJ also confirmed that the PoRD and Regulation 2 had already been modified to allow the framework and to clarify that PPSC is the body to approve taught elements of research programmes.

The following comments were made in relation to the re-submitted paper:

• A query was raised as to the progression from taught element to remainder of the PhD - a 50% mark at taught Masters pass level is the norm. JJ reported that she had suggested for the integrated PhD that it should be higher at 60% however feedback suggested this would be inequitable and a higher mark would likely require resits which could be a complicated procedure.

• The Chair remarked that point nine of the paper, which refers to the University admissions policy for PhDs. The requirement for admission to a PhD is a 2:1 or equivalent first degree
whereas the requirement for admission to a Masters is a 2:2 or equivalent. Departments can normally request an academic waiver for applicants to the PhD who have a 2:2 and a Masters at 60% to demonstrate higher level achievement. Thus the admissions requirements for an Integrated PhD will be effectively higher than a 1+3 route, though the progression hurdle from the taught element lower. This will have to be handled carefully on a case by case basis to avoid inequities.

- Departments will need to have a clear criteria for the research element assessment at department level since the University cannot provide a generic one to cover all subject areas. Departments must advise students of these criteria and of the process for progression decisions being made at start of the programme.
- JJ confirmed that students could be awarded the Postgraduate Diploma element of the integrated PhD with distinction or merit as per a standalone Postgraduate Diploma.
- JJ also confirmed that the taught modules would need to be in the module catalogue.
- The Committee requested that point 19 be rewritten/restructured as it was currently hard to follow.
- JJ confirmed that the rules on compensation would also be relevant and would be added to point 23. JJ would also add that any Honours level modules taken would be on a pass/fail basis.
- Point 29 needed clarification and further thought. There was agreement that the supervision meetings should take place every 6-7 weeks and be recorded on SkillsForge but the nature of the supervision meetings, and consequently what was recorded, would be different when the student was undertaking the taught component. The Chair and Head of RSA would discuss this further outside of the meeting.

The Committee agreed this was approved subject to the changes above and any feedback from consideration at Faculty Learning and Teaching Groups.

17-18/03 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) (PPSC/17-18/07)

- The Chair introduced the report and apologised that the appendices had not been included in the circulation but that they would be circulated following the meeting. The appendices in question were:
- Appendix 1 – copy of questionnaire.
- Appendix 2 – per Q breakdown of HE response. Showing changes since 2013 and 2015 and looking at 2017 data re Russell Group and benchmarking.

- The Chair also wished to thank David Gent, ASO, for his valuable assistance in writing the report which had needed a structural change from the last PRES due to HEA changes and also that the University had to attempt to align some results to faculties.
- The Chair reported that overall, York did very well. The HEA now benchmark by groups of questions not just individual ones and this allowed the realisation that York were top of several categories (as outlined in the body of the report). HE’s cannot publish results against the benchmark maximum, only against quartile and average, however internal reporting can be rated against the benchmarks available.
- The Chair warned however that the PRES 2017 uptake for York was considered a low response rate and so York has take this into context. However, the low response rate did not harm York’s results, which raises an interesting question about whether we should always aim for higher response rates.
- The Committee discussed that the main negative outlier appeared to be Library resource and that it was a faculty wide issue in particular reference to access to journals and interlending costs. The Chair commented that departments often have an allowance available to pay for interlending costs for staff and some for PGRs. A per department analysis of interlending use took place after the last PRES in 2015 and this could be replicated - however the Committee felt it wouldn’t explain why there is little uptake. The GSA President also reported that they were actively pursuing discussion of the current interlending policy with Library.
- The direction of travel towards open access scholarly publishing should address many issues with journal access in future. The Chair reported that York was part of a pilot scheme for a Scholarly Communications Licence - this enables the University to have automatic copyright on any research published by staff at York (while giving the author unrestricted use) meaning that individual journals cannot claim the copyright for themselves and thus making open access easier.
- The Head of RETT reported that a new White Rose Universities agreement meant that York staff and students can now become full members of the libraries at Leeds and Sheffield, which may help with accessing resources.

- The Head of RETT also commented on the presentation of the report, stating that although it is clear that the remit of RETT has contributed to excellent scores on specific questions as seen in Appendix 2 (e.g. regarding formal training for GTAs, York’s score of 86% was 16pp above RG average), this was not highlighted in the summary sections of the main report. Though it was mentioned in the body text, the summary mentioned clusters and some other specific questions where we had been best in the Russell Group. The Head of RETT would have liked different questions to have been emphasised. The Head of RETT also expressed her concern about the need to provide an explanatory note about what the 'Professional Development' section includes, because many of those questions refer to activities outside RETT’s remit but the low scores could be seen to reflect badly on RETT. The Chair noted both that the positive open comments about RETT were mentioned in the report and that the role of the supervisor in professional development was heavily stressed with the RCUK Guidelines on the matter being quoted twice, so some effort had been taken to clarify the situation.

- The Committee agreed it was not appropriate to highlight the formal training for teaching as a specific success in the report. The GTA policy states that every GTA must have undergone formal training prior to teaching and if 86% of GTAs reported that they had, there were 14% who hadn’t, which meant we were not complying with our own policy. This led on to a more general discussion regarding York’s compliance with the policy on GTAs. Currently this is not officially recorded or tracked and the reliance is on the department to ensure checks have been made prior to appointing a GTA.

- The Committee agreed that this needed further investigation and the Chair would discuss the current GTA policy, in terms of oversight of mandatory training, with the PVC for Teaching, Learning and Students. It was unclear how departments currently check their GTAs have undertaken the mandatory training. It was suggested that once the training has been undertaken via the RETT and added to the student’s training record in SkillsForge, this could then be linked up to a field in SITS.

- The Chair of SCA remarked that the current GTA policy is not clear re exemptions to mandatory training requirements.
The Chair of SCA also felt that the use of ‘benchmark’ in the report should be made clear as to what context it was being used - in the PRES report, it means comparison with the sector. TEF benchmarking however is very different.

17-18/04 Periodic Review of the Department of Economics & Related Studies (PPSC/17-18/08)

The Committee commended the department on the support and environment they create for students. Students clearly value the provision. Section 7.6 and remarks on the ESRC requirements were noted and the Committee suggested that the new integrated PhD programme model may help to meet both the ESRC and their own dept disciplinary requirements. Section 3 (a) in the external’s report which commented that GTA’s were being recruited to teach prior to undertaking formal training was not good practice.

17-18/05 Periodic Review of the Department of Language & Linguistic Science (PPSC/17-18/09)

The Committee noted the comments in 3.4 regarding a possible approach to Computer Science and Psychology re collaboration and suggested that co-supervision might be more helpful and provide a simpler route to collaboration than a joint degree. The Committee noted that the external’s report flagged up that there was a lack of academic writing courses at PhD level and the department needs to investigate further. The Committee wished to feedback that standard writing skill courses are available via CELT who are also able to design bespoke courses upon request. The Committee also noted that the level of training for GTAs was a concern (8.7).

17-18/06 Periodic Review of the Department of Mathematics (PPSC/17-18/10)

The Committee noted that the executive summary and external’s report had not been included. Some members of the Committee suggested that the comments regarding SkillsForge should be referred to the YGRS Board and a discussion ensued amongst some of the members of the Committee who had had positive and negative experiences of the progression process via SkillsForge. The Chair reported that a review of the progression scheme and SkillsForge would be
considered at the YGRS Board in November 2017. The Chair also suggested it would be useful to ask David Gent, the ASO panel member for the Periodic Review, if he can clarify what the exact issue was.

17-18/07 Periodic Review of the Department of Physics (PPSC/17-18/11)

The Committee noted the comments on PGR induction and suggested that the department also utilise YGRS induction information. YGRS now has separate page for new students which has video of central induction. The Chair has previously asked all departmental Gradmins to include link to this page in their comms with all their new students for 2017-18.

17-18/08 Date of the next meeting: Monday 20 November 2017 09:00 - 11:00 H/G09