York Graduate School Board

POLICY AND PROGRAMMES SUB-COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 05 February 2018

Present: Professor Tom Stoneham (Chair), Dr Steve King, Dr Dani Ungar, Dr Juliet James, Ms Susanna Broom, Ms Fatma Layas (GSA), Dr Jenna Ng, Professor John Robinson, Dr Kelly Redeker, Dr Jeremy Goldberg

In attendance: Mrs Helen Poyer

Apologies: Ms Jane Iddon, Dr Carolyn Snell, Ms Charlotte Chamberlain (GSA), Dr Karen Clegg, Dr Sally Hancock

17-18/09 Welcome and Minutes of the 09 October 2017 meeting

17-18/09.1 The Committee approved the minutes from the meeting held on 09 October 2017 (PPSC/17-18/01)

17-18/09.2 The Chair welcomed the new representative of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr Kelly Redeker, and the new representative of the Faculty of Arts & Humanities, Dr Jeremy Goldberg.

17-18/10 Matters arising from the minutes

The Committee received the PPSC Action Log (PPSC/17-18/02), APR Action Log (PPSC/17-18/03) and the Senate Post PoRD changes 2017-18 action log (PPSC/17-18/04).

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/Spring term 2017/18.

- (M16-17/36 refers) – Online thesis submission – work on policy and technical issues regarding on online thesis submission was ongoing, the Chair had met informally with the Library regarding this since October 2017 and a full meeting of the various stakeholders was planned for the Spring term. An update would be provided to the Committee at the April 2018 meeting.

- (M16-17/46 refers) - Student status beyond submission – a paper with an update to the Committee is an agenda item for the 05 February 2018 meeting.

- (M16-17/53 refers) - the Chair of SCA was in the process of revising the policy and a paper would be submitted to the April 2018 meeting.

- (M16-17/54 refers) - new research degree programme pro forma - Juliet James reported that this was underway and would be submitted to the Chair for approval in due course.

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 – Due to lack of resource, the space review did not take place as hoped in 2016/17. To be undertaken by Timetabling in 2017/18. **Action**: to close and subsume into APR Action Log.

- M16-17/42.4.6 refers) – Light touch review of formal reviews of progress – a paper on this is an agenda item for the 05 February 2018 meeting. This action is now closed.

- M16-17/42.4.11 refers) – Light touch review of distance learning PhDs – Student numbers on DL programmes need to increase first. **Action**: to close and carry over to APR action log.

With respect to the Senate Post PoRD changes 2017-18 action log, it was noted that the following actions were still open:

- (a) quality assurance of off-site research undertaken away from the University - this was a substantive action which required some planning. It would remain on the Committee’s agenda to be revisited in due course. **Action**: to close and subsume into PPSC Action Log.
• (d) greater clarity the section on Home Office requirements for sponsored international students could be enhanced, especially as regards restrictions on paid employment and volunteering - a change to the guidance in Regulation 8.2.3 to ensure it was clear that volunteering work was included in the maximum 20 hours of employment had been approved at Senate in January 2018. This action can now be now closed.

• (i) tone of communication of outcomes to students would be modified in accordance with the revised language used in the policy, especially as this related to work that had “not yet” satisfied the examiners’ requirements. - examples of the revised outcome letters were an agenda item for the 05 February 2018 meeting. This action can now be now closed.

17-18/11 To receive an oral report from the Chair

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

• The Chair reported that the European Universities Association (EUA) had conducted a survey on doctoral education and York had contributed. EUA will be reporting back in June and Chair will update the Committee in due course.

• The Chair reported that Universities UK had invited expressions of interest working with South African universities and that he had completed an expression of interest. The Chair will report back in due course.

• The Chair reported that the Wellcome Trust Masters scholarships in A&H and SS for 2018/19 had been announced. A single institutional nomination was required. Last year, the process was not dealt with well and therefore YGRS was handling nominations from departments this year.

• The Chair reported that there had been two recent cases of examiner’s identifying ethics issues – both had been where fieldwork was conducted in (different) African countries. Internal ethics approval was sought and given but neither student had sought approval locally. Examiners recognised this and flagged it up at the examination stage. One student was still trying to get retrospective approval. The other cannot get retrospective approval so the decision was made that student could graduate but a permanent embargo had to be placed on the PhD. All ethics Chair’s have been notified and asked to be vigilant. The Chair has also discussed at Research Forum.
Juliet James gave an overview of the report and commented that there were four main issues, the majority of which has already been highlighted in the previous APR round:

- **Desk space** – ongoing issue regarding lack of suitable PGR desk space. The Chair reiterated that the Timetabling Office were to undertake a space review for 2018 in terms of quantity and quality.

- **PGR Annual Progression policy** – some departments were now, after going through the process for the first time in 2016/17, recognising the need to review and potentially make changes to their internal progression procedure. Any requests for minor changes can be submitted to the Chair for Chair’s approval.

- **SkillsForge** – this remained the biggest area of negativity. It was acknowledged that it was still a work in progress but that consistent improvements to the functionality and user experience were being made.

- **Employability** – it was evident that many departments felt that there was a gap in central careers provision for PGRs. The issue was recognised by YGRS as a valid one and continues to be high on the agenda for improvement.

One ‘new’ issue highlighted by most departments in the APRs was that of student well-being. The Chair commented that this was an issue high on the agenda for York (and HE) in general and was to become a particular focus of YGRS.

Juliet James confirmed that departments would all get individual responses from the Academic Support Office. Issues flagged with other support services at York will be sent directly to them to respond to.

There was a comment from a Committee member that some of the main issues raised were more of concern to particular faculties and that it might be more helpful to group issues raised by faculty rather than try to give an overall position. The Chair reminded the group that YGRS has oversight at institutional level – not faculty level - so it is relevant to consider issues that can be
considered University wide. Juliet James commented that for the next round of APRs, ASO can attempt to align issues to faculty (if a pattern is obvious enough to comment on).

APR Actions in PPSC/17-18/05:

- 2.3 – action agreed.
- 2.4 - action agreed.
- 2.5 - action agreed. Although SkillsForge sees continual improvement, some departments still struggle to integrate SkillsForge into their workflow and are awaiting new functionality but it is an ongoing and improving project. The bi-weekly / monthly newsletter and ‘How to’ guides have improved communication.
- 2.7 – action agreed. A YGRS sponsored review of training offered within departments in 2015/16 informed the current provision of central training. In April 2018 however UKRI will take over the RCUK Training and Skills Group – this group has historically allowed RCs to have different rules around training grants, with some RCs requiring roll out of said training to unfunded students in the same cognate area. The potential for harmonisation of the RC training requirements post April 2018 will make it more straightforward for research organisations to ensure their central provision of training is fit for purpose.
- 2.9 - action agreed. Although there is not much data available to consult, the data currently available at York have suggests that mental health it is less of a problem for PGRs than at UG level. York currently has a bid into the HEFCE catalyst fund to enable cohort studies to take place. Reliable data is required first to then decide how to approach the issue.
- 2.10 - action agreed.

The Chair confirmed that he will also contact any departments directly with any individually raised issues YGRS can help with.

17-18/13 To consider the responses to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 from the Library, IT Services, Careers and RETT (PPSC/17-18/06)

Library -

Interlibrary Loans - ongoing priority for the Library to look at this and YGRS continues to question the need for £2 charge. The Committee noted that the increase in e-books was extremely helpful, it makes it easier for PGRs who are not necessarily on campus as much and means no waiting lists. The Committee discussed that actually finding Library homepage is difficult, it should be a front
page link, and felt that a list of academic library liaison contacts on the staff and / or student homepages would also be very useful. The Chair agreed to feed this back to Liz Waller. **Action:** Chair to speak to Liz Waller, Library.

**IT Services –**

The Committee noted that IT rightly pointed out a lot of the issues raised are out of their control. Printing limits and related charges are being reviewed at by GSA in their ‘Together York’ project. NiVio training was still the biggest concern and IT were working on that. The Committee felt that IT’s suggestion of giving all PGRs all a laptop was a helpful idea but it was not clear what the uptake would be given that some students would already have one (and may be better models anyway). The Chair proposed that a better solution might be to have laptop loans situated in PGR study space, rather than only being available from a central source (currently the Library hosts them). Working out where to locate them would also potentially assist in the desk space review. The Committee supported this proposal. **Action:** Chair to feed back to IT Services.

**RETT & Careers –**

The Committee welcomed the idea of thematic sessions in supervisor training and felt the sessions would be less time consuming and hopefully more useful. Departments should be encouraged to request ‘in house’ training as this guarantees good take up and also is a chance for the department to reflect and discuss their own practices. The Committee noted that an open comment from 7 (a – d) suggested that a student is unsure as to what the academic standards are for their PhD (or perhaps thinks they are not required until at the end!) and appeared to presume all would become clear ‘at some point’ – this is of concern to the Committee as York should be ensuring that all PGRs are aware of the academic standards for their programme of study from the outset. The Chair noted that the new annual progression policy will help with this, ensuring that consistent and clear feedback regarding standards are evident as the student progresses through their programme of study. Consistency of message and input from supervisors can also help in between formal reviews.

The Committee noted the specific recommendation from RETT regarding PDP activities such as 3 Minute Thesis and YorkTalks, and it was agreed that departments need to promote these excellent experiences a lot more. The Chair will take the recommendation through the ADDR process where it was more appropriate.

The Chair also reiterated that a question had been added to the TAP form to ask PGRs if the have teaching responsibilities which can then be correlated back to training records.

**17-18/14** To note revised PGR examination outcome letters following the 2017-18 Policy on Research Degrees review (PPSC/17-18/07)

The Committee noted the outcome letters and had the following comments:

- The ‘pass with no corrections’ letter wasn’t submitted and should be next time for noting.
• It was a pity that the appeal information text took up so much space in the letter but this was a necessary requirement.
• It needs to be made clearer as to what exactly the student is appealing against - the examiner’s recommendation or decision? This can depend on the outcome. All exam outcomes bar straight pass and corrections go to SCA for approval.
• If possible, it would be prudent to remove the hyperlink to Regulation 2.8 out of the corrections outcome letter and just add Regulation 2.8 as an attachment as with the others.

**ACTION:** Change all outcome letters to read ‘you have a right to appeal the examiner’s decision’ except for the corrections outcome letter whereby it would be ‘you have a right to appeal the examiner’s recommendation’. The revised letters, plus the straight pass outcome letter, should be resubmitted to the next meeting for noting.

**17-18/15** To receive an update to an ongoing PPSC project ‘PGR Status Post-Submission’ from Research Student Administration (PPSC/17-18/08)

The Committee noted the update and it was agreed that the ideal is for all PGR students to be considered academically engaged until they reach the final conclusion of their final submission. The GSA Vice-President reported that the previous President had had a successful discussion with the Council who had agreed that, upon production of a confirmation letter from the University that the student was still actively engaged in study, that they would permit an exemption to Council Tax extension between submission and viva. This needs to be discussed further with the Student Records and Visa Compliance (SRVC) team who would issue such letters to the student.

The Committee agreed that a clear recommendation that all support services take their feed from the current status, instead of feeding in from the current end date, should be taken to the Director of Information Services and Academic Registrar. It was also agreed that further investigation was required into student being on a Dormant mode of attendance as this should be avoided where a student was still academically engaged with the University.

**ACTION:** Chair to write to Director of Information Services and Academic Registrar. RSA to continue with the ‘next steps’ actions in the paper where relevant, and to potentially be updated once the Director of Information Services and Academic Registrar has responded, and to explore the Council Tax issue with SRVC further.

**17-18/16** To consider a review of the policy on annual progression points from Research Student Administration (PPSC/17-18/09)

The Committee noted the positive data in the report and agreed that the process had gone very well.

**17-18/17** Date of the next meeting: Monday 16 April 2018 09:00 - 11:00 H/G09