UNIVERSITY OF YORK
York Graduate School Board
POLICY AND PROGRAMMES SUB-COMMITTEE

Meeting held on Wed 15th Feb 2017, 10:00 - 12:00 - H/G09 (Heslington Hall)

MINUTES

Present: Prof. Tom Stoneham (Chair), Dr Alun Kirby, Ms. Helen Poyer (Secretary), Dr Kate Stephenson (GSA), Ms. Rasha Ibrahim (GSA), Dr Marjan van der Woude, Dr Dani Ungar, Prof. Marilyn Vihman, Dr. Juliet James, Dr Steve King, Prof. John Robinson.

Apologies: Dr Beatrice Szczepek-Reed, Prof. Mike Bentley, Dr Karen Clegg, Dr Jenna Ng, Dr Carolyn Snell, Dr Jen Wotherspoon.

M16-17/30 Welcome

The Chair welcomed back Prof. Marilyn Vihman from sabbatical.

M16-17/31 To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2016

The minutes were approved with the following minor amendments:

- Prof Steve King was amended to Dr Steve King.
- Ms Kate Stephenson was amended to Dr Kate Stephenson.
- The numbering was checked.

M16-17/32 Matters Arising:

32.1 YGRS Community on Google + / YGRS webpages (M16-17/04 4.3 refers)

To report that the Chair requested that Google+ was added to the Staff Digest however it was not thought suitable for the very broad audience and therefore was not advertised.

32.2 Departmental PGR Progression Proposals (M16-17/06 refers)

To report that all of the departments had now submitted and had approved their departmental progression proposals with the exception of Physics which was nearing completion. RSAT was also near completion with an overview of the PGR progression requirements in each department which will come to the Committee in the summer. The Head of RSAT had been communicating with Biology with regards to their reporting concerns. The Chair reported that Skills Forge was currently unable to implement departmental milestones and it was unclear as to when this would be available. In the short time, he had asked for some extra resource for the task to be manually implemented for those departments who needed it urgently. In the longer term, this would need to be resolved and automated.

32.3 Four Year PhD programme - framework (M16-17/09.1 refers)

To report that a paper on a 4 year PhD framework appears later on the agenda.
32.4 Change to PoRD in response to OIA recommendation (M16-17/18.1.2)

To report that the Head of RSAT has updated the PoRD in line with the suggested wording in the previous minutes and it will be updated on the PoRD webpages in due course.

32.5 Two issues from the recent Russell Group PGR SIG (M16-17/19 18.5 refers)

i) Tier 4 students and wording of progression resit

To report that JJ had agreed the necessary changes to the PoRD with the Chair so that it was no clear that the second attempt was not a resit. This would be updated on the web as soon as possible. The Head of RSAT would also identify what needed to be changed in Skills Forge and action this by the next meeting.

ii) Parental leave for institutionally supported PGR students

The Chair reported that no further progress had been made with this. The University of Manchester had begun a consultation and it was therefore prudent to wait for the outcome of this and for a discussion to take place at the next Russell Group PGR SIG in April 2017.

32.6 To consider a proposal for PGR examiners and right to work implications (M16-17/26 refers)

To report that it had been agreed by the Chair / Dean of YGRS that a question would be added to the Recommendation for the Nomination of Examiners form whereby external examiners would be asked to confirm that they had the Right to Work in the UK. Subject to confirmation by HR, no further checks would take place following.

**ACTION**: Head of RSAT to check with HR

M16-17/33 To receive an oral report from the Chair (including report on Chair’s Actions)

4.1 Chair’s Actions -

4.1.1 To report approval of the proposal for a PhD in Education by Distance Learning following amendments. The Chair reported that Education had omitted to include the PhD in Applied Linguistics route in their DL pro-forma and therefore this would need to be approved at PPSC in due course.

4.2.1 AHRC DTP2

The Chair reported that the bid for the new AHRC doctoral training partnership was underway. York will remain the lead institution. A bid writing team was in place. Expressions of interest must be made by 13 April 2017 and the AHRC require details of the Director who will be in place when the DTP starts recruiting in October 2018. As the current WRoCAH Director was stepping down, recruitment would take place for a new Director prior to the April deadline.
4.2.2 Leverhulme Trust bid

14 expressions of interest had been received for the Leverhulme grant. Feedback had now been given and all 14 invited to pitch. A shortlist of three would then be interviewed in May and a single bid chosen for submission to the Trust in July 2017.

4.2.3 British Council SPHEIR

York is in the process of submitting a bid to SPHEIR (Strategic Partnerships for Higher Education Innovation and Reform) which is a new DFID programme to support higher education transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Three other WUN institutions (Rochester, Ghana and Nairobi) are partners in the project. If successful for funding, Skills Forge would be involved to create an online app to support the project.

4.2.4 DL programmes

The Chair reported that York now has six registered Distance Learning students. Four were from Saudi Arabia (King Saud University) and two were from North America.

4.2.5 Research Special Cases

The Chair reported that, unlike taught programmes, there was currently no policy on confidentiality with regards to PGR Special Cases activity and the handling of sensitive data. It had been agreed at a recent SCC Policy Meeting that such a policy would be created and guidance on handling sensitive PGR data would be disseminated to departments. It was likely that each Department will need to nominate an academic and administrative contact (plus deputies) who will be responsible for handling of sensitive data in the department prior to coming to RSCC for consideration. PPSC will have sight of the policy proposal and have a chance to give feedback however the final sign off would rest with SCC.

4.2.6 Academic misconduct policy

The Chair reported that the academic misconduct policy did not currently align with PGR processes and needed review. The Research Integrity Tutorial and the Academic Misconduct Policy both reference the issue but it is unclear as to which one PGR processes should be aligned to. The Chair was in discussion with the Chair of SCA to improve the guidance to departments and provide an internal process for suspected academic misconduct prior to the viva. What this would be was not yet decided. It was noted that the University of Sheffield required their PGRs to submit a copy of their Turnitin report at the same time as submission for examination which puts the responsibility on the student.

Action: TS/SK

M16-17/34 Annual Programme Review (PPSC/16-17/21)

The Chair asked the group if there were any examples of good practice or department specific issues in the departmental responses section that they wished to highlight followed by any concerns (the Chair informed the group that he would be going back to each department separately to alleviate any immediate concerns or issues that he could assist with or clarify). The following was noted for good practice:
Archaeology was praised for their breakfast club idea, their annual progression day for first year PGRs (which other Departments also hold) and the amount of publications arising from their PGR community (again, also a feature of other Departments but not mentioned in the APRs).

The following were noted as concerns:

- Economics - issue of external examiners. It was noted that there was guidance available on nominating examiners to help departments and that there was always the possibility that a case could be made to mitigate any SCA concerns regarding perceived conflict of interests. Informal advice could also be sought from RSAT / SCA.
- Chemistry - issues re funding. The Chair commented that most of the big funders (RCUK, Wellcome) were now demanding match funding which had impacted on the central YGRS pot of money earmarked for helping match fund internal/departmental studentships. This was an issue which was to be part of an institutional review which is being managed by Prof. Debbie Smith, PVC for Research. The Chair remarked to the group that once departments had reached their recruitment target, fee waivers could be offered as it would then in effect be cost neutral to the department.
- The Office of Philanthropic Partnerships and Alumni (OPPA) had asked the Chair for any YGRS priorities for Alumni funding and the Chair reported that he had pointed to supplementing the new Doctoral Loans (from 2018) which only cover ~50% of the cost of to the student of a PhD.

The Chair then asked for any comments on the overview / report from ASO:

- The issue of PGR space (Issue 2.3 refers) was prominent and the Chair reported that Stuart Jolley, Operations Manager, was to undertake a review of space as it seemed likely that more was available since the last space audit.
- Tracking students (Action 2.11 refers) was an issue which resonated in particular with ResearchFish. The Alumni ‘email for life’ was not proving popular with PGRs. It currently bears no resemblance to the student’s York email address and students are reluctant to sign up as they don’t feel it is at all helpful to them. It was suggested that a more beneficial ‘email for life’ would be to retain the student’s York username and simply add @alumni.york.ac.uk and then the student could enable forwarding from their primary York email address to the alumni address. The Chair agreed to contact Heidi Fraser-Krauss to explore this option. The Head of RSAT also suggested using the ORCID ID might be useful.

**Action:** Chair

It was agreed that the report could go out to departments and a full response would go out from ASO to each department in due course.

**M16-17/35 Departmental Reporting on PGRs**

The group agreed with the proposal with the following remarks:

- Why were submission rates referred to in both reports? The Chair clarified that submission rates were needed for the ADDR report as rates of on time submission
were required for HESA and RCUK reporting, which affects funding. The APR required comment on completion rates (pass without referral) for quality assurance.

- It would be important to ensure that departments were aware that an APR was ‘by exception’ reporting only.
- Departments should be reminded as to where each report goes to.
- It was noted that coordinating the writing of the reports will probably make the report writing process easier.
- RI noted that procedures of Department Ethics Committees, especially over the summer months, were impacting negatively on student experience in some Departments.

The group approved the proposal. The Chair reported that the ADDR aspect of the proposal would need to go to UTC for approval. Once received, the information would be circulated to departments.

**Action: Chair**

**M16-17/36  Online final submission**

The group were on the whole supportive of the proposal but concerns were still evident regarding the format and digital preservation of long term storage of e-theses. The group agreed that a further discussion would take place following further clarification from the Library / WRRO on:

- A report was needed on the current formats accepted on WRRO (especially for non standard theses and accompanying material).
- Further information was needed as to the perceived risks of moving to online submission
- Further clarification required as to the timeline of when the infrastructure will be available and ready and a timeline from RSAT as to how their processes will align

Following the receipt of this information and a further discussion at the April PPSC meeting, a consultation would be undertaken within departments to ensure nothing had been missed.

The group also agreed that it would be appropriate for the current guidance for thesis format to be revised as it was perceived as old fashioned and out of line with current sector requirements.

**Action: RSAT**

**M16-17/37  Distance Learning programmes and English Language requirements**

(PPSC/16-17/24)

The group discussed the paper and unanimously disagreed with the proposal. The following comments were made:

- It appeared to the group that SRA were not accepting that the PhD by Distance Learning programme was a separate programme to the PhD programme.
- The reference to learning outcomes was not appropriate for PGR programmes and could not be reasonably used as justification.
The group felt strongly that being in York was beneficial to the student whereby every chance would be available for the student to attend additional training and support from CELT and to immerse themselves in the English language around them.

The group also felt very strongly that communicating at a distance in itself brought challenges for both native and non native English speakers.

A question was raised as to what guidance is given to departments by SRA on how to set English Language requirements for new programmes?

The group did not agree that requiring a higher English Language score resulted in group discrimination. Current language requirements could feasibly already been seen as discriminatory. USA applicants did not have to prove their English Language ability whereas an applicant for Nigeria, for example, did.

A different concern may be indirect discrimination against those students who cannot afford to come to York to study would be subject to the higher English Language requirement. This would be considered further given that the requirement is to protect students from commencing courses they may not be able to complete satisfactorily given the lower level of support available.

Admitting a DL student on a lower English Language score who also had no access to English speakers (outside of their supervisory meetings, which could be as much as six weeks apart) was actually an academic disadvantage to the student compared to those based in York.

Not demanding the higher English Language score may impact on academic quality.

GSA were fully supportive and strongly agreed the higher score was solely for the benefit of the student.

Department should be aware that they can request an English Language requirement waiver on a case by case basis.

The group did not approve the proposal at the meeting and determined to postpone their decision pending:

- Legal advice on potential discrimination (PPSC action)
- Further information on the policy / guidance which allows departments to set their English Language requirements for new programmes. (SRA action)
- Clarification from SRA on why they do not accept that the DL programme is a separate programme. (SRA action)

Action: RSAT

**M16-17/38 Four Year PhD programme (PPSC/16-17/25)**

The Chair informed the group that Research Councils were moving towards monitoring submission rates within the funded period but will also be extending funding into the Continuation Year. Some PhDs are already funded for 3.5 years. The group discussed the paper and had the following comments:

- Point of clarification (point 3.5 a refers) - the 600 hours referenced here actually equates to one third of an academic year, not half.
- Amendment - the M-level element of an Integrated PhD should not be referred to as an ‘integrated Masters’ to avoid confusion with undergraduate integrated MAsterts programmes.
- Point 3.7 was slightly confusing and should be reworded (section in brackets).
- Minimum enrolment periods in the PoRD would need to be revised. The current policy states that the minimum enrolment period for a 4 year PhD is 3 years and 9 months. This would not help a 4 year PhD student who has funding for 3.5 years to be able to submit when their funding ceases.
- If RC’s do begin to fund into the Continuation Year, given that York charges only a small nominal fee for the whole year, will we be missing out on additional funding?
- York could potentially bring in 4 year PhDs as the only option and introduce in a monthly fee charge for the 4th year. This would mean the money could be recouped from the RC’s but self funded students potentially would be disadvantaged.

The Chair commented that any major changes were some time away and considerable consultation would be required. The group agreed to accept the interim recommendations but recommended that point 3.7 was revised.

Action: ASO

M16-17/39 PPSC meetings for 2017/18 (PPSC/16-17/26)

To note the dates of the confirmed PPSC 2017/18 meeting dates.

M16-17/40 AOB

11.1 Examination outcomes - PGR joint examiners report

The group considered an issue raised by a member regarding examination outcomes. It was felt that the outcome of ‘referral’ was often confusing and worrying for students, especially international students, who frequently perceived it as a fail. It was agreed that it would be beneficial to amend the layout and / or wording on the joint examiners report to make it clearer that a referral was not a fail and was in effect a ‘revise and resubmit’ decision, which is common in research publishing. It was suggested that the outcomes could be separated into 2 sections with the current options of straight pass, corrections and referral in one section and then any other outcome in a second section. It may also be prudent to reword the outcome letter for a referral which refers to the student ‘not having met the requirements’.

Action: ASO to amend, Chair to approve, and online version of PoRD to be updated

M16-17/41 Date of the next meeting: Wed 19th April 2017, 10:00 - 12:00 - H/G09