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

Meeting held on 21 June 2016 14:00 - 16:00 H/G17 (Heslington Hall)

MINUTES

Present: Prof. Tom Stoneham (Chair), Dr. Alun Kirby, Ms. Helen Poyer (Secretary), Ms. Rasha Ibrahim (GSA), Dr. Marjan van der Woude, Dr. Juliet James, Jen Wotherspoon, Steve King, Mr. Peter Gorbert (GSA), Dr Dani Ungar, Jane Iddon

Apologies: Mr. Nigel Dandy, Ms. Kate Dodd, Dr. Beatrice Szczepak-Reed, Prof. Marilyn Vihman, Karen Clegg, Dr Jenn Ng, Prof. John Robinson

M15-16/57 Welcome

The Chair welcomed the meeting and apologies were noted. The Chair thanked the attendees for responding to the rescheduled meeting date so quickly and confirmed that the June meeting of 2017 would be moved to the week after the end of term to ensure all members were available this time next year.

M15-16/58 To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16th May 2016

The minutes were approved with the following amendment:

M15-16/53 - ‘King Saudi University’ should read ‘King Saud University’. It should also be amended to read that ‘some’ staff in Computer Science were reluctant to travel to Saudi Arabia.

M15-16/58 Note changes to membership agreed by YGRS Board

This was noted and the Chair agreed to ensure the membership is updated for the next academic year.

M15-16/59 Matters Arising

M15-16/59.1 To approve the revised PGR Progression Policy - update

The Chair informed the group that the PGR Progression Policy had been revised as per the recommendations from the last meeting.

M15-16/59.2 To approve the proposed PoRD 2016 - update

The Chair informed the group that there were still some changes to be made to the PoRD following revision of Regulation 2 and so would be completed as soon as possible.

4. To receive an oral report from the Chair (including report on Chair’s Actions)

4.1 Chair’s Actions -

4.1.1 Approval of part time mode of study option for the MPhil in Sociology

4.1.2 Approval (subject to amendments) of a proposal for the implementation of the PGR Progression Policy from the Department of Music
4.1.3 Approval (subject to amendments) of a proposal for the implementation of the PGR Progression Policy from the Department of Economics

4.1.4 Approval (subject to amendments) of a proposal for the implementation of the PGR Progression Policy from the Department of Electronics

4.1.5 Approval (subject to amendments) of a proposal for the implementation of the PGR Progression Policy from the Department of TFTV

4.1.6 Approval (subject to amendments) of a proposal for the implementation of the PGR Progression Policy from the York Management School

4.1.3 Approval of a PhD / MPhil in Human Geography and Environment in the Department of Environment

- The Chair updated the group on the progress of departmental PGR progression policies. All had been received and were in the process of final approval except for Archaeology, Biology, Education, PEP, Physics, Women’s Studies and York Law School. Of the latter, the Chair was aware that all were progressing well and would be submitted shortly except for Archaeology and Education. Both would be contacted.

  Action: Secretary to contact department

- The PGR Handbook 16/17 template had gone out to departments for completion. Each would submit a copy of the completed version to RSAT for the records.

**M15-16/60** To receive an oral report from the GSA representative/s

The GSA confirmed that their elections were going ahead as planned and the results would be announced in due course. The GSA President also informed the group that the GSA caseload was the highest it had ever been. YUSU were also experiencing a high volume of PGT cases but the PGR casework was often very complicated due to the uniqueness of each case and could take up a substantial amount of time. The planned building move for the GSA was set to take place in August.

**M15-16/60** To consider a proposal for a continuation year to be permitted in the Four year PhD in Intelligent Games and Games Intelligence (IGGI)

The Committee discussed the proposal that the four year PhD in IGGI be allowed a further continuation year. This was a result of the partner institutions (Essex and Goldsmiths) already allowing their students to have a further continuation year and the concern was that this would create inequity and an unfair disadvantage within the consortium cohort. The Committee agreed that on balance the proposal should therefore be approved, but this was an exceptional situation arising from poor planning when the CDT was created.

  Action: ASO to inform department and request a programme variation form to be approved by Chair’s action

The Committee also agreed that a review of the four year PhD programmes at York would be a useful exercise as the set-up of such programmes often differed widely in terms of length of the funded period and expectations for writing up time. Given that bids for Wellcome Trust and NERC were in progress and both utilised four year PhD programmes, a review in the light of external drivers (Bologna Phase 3 and RCUK harmonisation) would be timely.
To consider a proposal from the Department of History of Art for a PhD by Distance Learning

Two members of the Committee had read the proposal in preparation to feedback at the cancelled PPSC meeting however they instead met with the Chair. Informal feedback was sent to History of Art following this meeting which was as follows:

- **English requirements.** It was noted that students who don’t have English as a first language won’t have the advantage of being based in the UK, and this means that it’s particularly critical that these students have an appropriate level of English to start with. We suggest specifying a minimum of 6.5 in each individual component (to ensure that writing and speaking are of a good standard). It also underlines the importance of the interview process for non-native speakers. If an issue with English isn’t spotted until after a student has started the Department should liaise with CELT for advice and support on what steps to take.

- **Attendance** – it was noted that the proposal envisages two visits a year. It’s important that these visits add up to the University minimum requirement of two weeks per academic year and so a duration should be added to the attendance requirements. Also, for students on a Tier 4 visa – the visits have to fall within a 6-month window for visa purposes so it is important to check.

- **Supervision.** It was felt it would be helpful to give an indication of how often students might have informal contact with their supervisors in addition to the formal supervision meetings on a 6/7 week cycle as required by the University.

- **It was suggested that the Department might think about what non-departmental (particularly Library) training might be useful for students beyond year 1, to get a sense of what might need to be factored into visits and/or provided remotely.**

- **Library resources** – it was felt that it is really critical to ensure that any students accepted onto the DL programme do have the library resources they need for their project – whether locally based, electronically from York or a combination of the two. A greater emphasis should be placed on the supervisor and Department in determining this as part of the admissions process.

- **It was felt that DL students should be encouraged to take part in departmental skills training workshops and that the Department should endeavour to ensure that the skills workshops are as accessible as possible to DL students (including for those in different time zones for example).**

- **Community building** – in the first year, attendance at the conference is optional which means that first year DL students would not necessarily have this opportunity to build links in person with their peers. Has the Department thought about moving the conference to later in the year?

- **It was felt it would be helpful to have some clarity regarding DL student access to travel funds – what would be the criteria for distribution?**

- **It was noted that the Department might consider whether it should pay for any specific resources for DL students e.g. whether there were any online repositories of images that might be useful for the students to be subscribed too?**

Committee approved in principle subject to the implementation of the changes requested above and also had the following comments:
Replace any reference to Skype with 'video-conferencing' and clarify what would happen if the student had limited access to the internet or it was difficult (i.e. using Google Hangouts in China wouldn’t be an option).

It should be emphasised that the viva should normally be face to face and that a video-conferencing alternative should be only in exceptional circumstances.

PPSC also recommended that each DL student should have an individual agreement that both student and supervisor will sign that will help to set out the expectations on both sides in terms of supervision, access to resources etc. Juliet James can advise in due course.

The Committee agreed that the revised proposal could be reviewed and approved by Chair’s Action.

Action: Secretary to forward feedback to department

M15-16/61 To consider a Periodic Review of the Department of Computer Science

The Committee had the following comments:

- Point 9.5 - The guidance from RCUK varies greatly between research councils and so it is difficult for YGRS to advise at present. There is an RCUK working group concentrating on aligning the guidance across the main research councils. General guidance should be that even if the student is funded to the maximum submission deadline, they should be ready to submit before then. A minimum of two months contingency should always be built in to any PhD plan to completion regardless of funding length.
- Point 9.7 - The PGR progression proposal for IGGI has been signed off by YGRS so this action has been achieved.
- Point 9.8 - The Committee felt that half an hour of face to face supervision every week was excessive and unachievable. PPSC recommends that a review of the policy is undertaken as it is too demanding on supervisors and encourages poor quality interactions with students.
- Point 9.13 - PGWT’s are now under the remit of UTC however it seems likely that UTC did not consider this part of Section 9. PPSC recommended a reminder be forwarded to UTC when considering Periodic Reviews. The Committee were also concerned that the department did not appear to be utilising experienced PGWT’s as mentors and moderators for new PGWTs which is just as important as improving policy and process documentation.

Action: Secretary to forward recommendations to ASO

M15-16/62 To consider the changes to Regulation 2

The Committee considered the regulations and offered recommendations for change or clarification which were recorded by the Assistant Registrar: Student Progress and will be taken to Senate.

It was noted that the inclusion of ‘on-call’ time in working hours might cause a problem for College Tutors who were also students and this needed to be taken into account by College Heads.

Action: Chair to alert the Director of Colleges

M15-16/63 AOB
There being no other business, the Chair closed the meeting and informed the group that the final version of the PoRD 2016 would be circulated before going live on the web.

**M15-16/64**

To note the confirmed dates for 2016/17 (all in academic timetables):

- Thurs 6th October 2016, 10:00 - 12:00 · H/G09 (Heslington Hall)
- Fri 25th November 2016, 10:00 - 12:00 · H/G09 (Heslington Hall)
- Wed 15th February 2017, 10:00 - 12:00 · H/G09 (Heslington Hall)
- Wed 19th April 2017, 10:00 - 12:00 · H/G09 (Heslington Hall)
- Fri 16th June 2017, 14:00 - 16:00 · H/G09 (Heslington Hall)