



YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL BOARD

Thursday 17 December 2020, 09:00 – 11:00 via Zoom

MINUTES

Present: Dr Kathryn Arnold (Chair), Professor Tracy Lightfoot, Ms Jennifer Gilmartin, Dr Wayne Campbell, Dr Purnur Altay, Ms Jane Baston, Ms Cecelia Lowe, Ms Susanna Broom (Secretary), Dr Kelly Redeker, Dr Sally Hancock, Dr Jeremy Goldberg, Professor Sarah Thompson, Professor Yvonne Birks

Apologies: Professor Matthias Ruth, Professor Brian Fulton, Professor Stuart Bell, Professor Ambrose Field

Attending: Ms Maria Adlam (Minutes Secretary), Ms Isobel Hall (GSA; observing)

Category I Business

M/20-21/01: Apologies were received as above

M/20-21/02: The minutes of the meeting of 29 May 2020 were **approved**.

M/20-21/03: The action log was reviewed. It was **noted** that:

- M19-20/08 on creating viva guidance is complete and can now be closed
- M19-20/09 will be covered later in the meeting during the Annual Supervision Compliance report
- M19-20/10 will be covered later in the meeting during the Annual PGR Outcomes report
- M19-20/07 is ongoing. **(ACTION: Chair to seek an update on the outcome of the 6-month thesis mentoring pilot scheme)**
- M19-20/10 can now be closed
- M19-20/11 is ongoing
- M19-20/18 can be closed; Chair has been working with Communications to ensure PGR updates are delivered consistently
- M19-20/20 on Associate Deans acting as alternates for Faculty Deans at YGRS Board has been approved and can now be closed
- M19-20/21 on Leeds University's Early Career Publishing Prize is ongoing **(ACTION: Future queries on the award to be referred to kate.petherbridge@york.ac.uk due to a change in staff at Leeds).**

M/20-21/04: The amended terms of reference were **approved**.

M/20-21/05: Chair's oral report

- A strategic plan for YGRS is underway. Progress has been slowed due to changing priorities caused by the pandemic.
- The pandemic has prompted some beneficial changes for PG Research, such as increased uptake of training via online platforms. Some PGRs have been very successful in moving their research online.
- The pandemic has also caused several challenges, such as lack of access to facilities and student wellbeing and mental health.
- Changes to policy and guidance have been implemented to support PGRs ([15. Overview of PGR Contingency Measures](#)).
- By the end of 31 March 2022, UoY will have distributed and awarded approximately £2 million of additional financial support for PGRs through scholarship extensions and continuation fee waivers.
- KA acknowledged that the impact of the pandemic on the PGR community will be ongoing, however PGRs are able to look forward to more in-person interactions and increased access to facilities in the next year.
- JGil voiced enthusiasm for better, more holistic working across teams and directorates in future to support PGR students.
- TL noted the need to review the experiences and challenges of GTAs to ensure they receive the right support. She noted interest in seeing whether the scope for Distance Learning programmes across departments might be increased.
- ST commented that while the move to online research has been positive in some respects, in-person meetings and connections have been missed. She commented that online research should only be the default when it provides a benefit.

M/20-21/06: Oral report from GSA representatives

- All current sabbatical officers have been re-elected for a second term.
- The sabbatical officers have been involved with various elements of PGR contingency planning.
- Welcome week took place online; 35 events took place, both social and informative.
- A series of events across the holiday period have been planned.
- Autumn elections took place in October for over 200 officer and rep positions.
 - 21 part-time officers have been elected to council. This includes a PhD officer, Masters by Research officer and GTA officer.
- A motion has been approved for GSA to campaign for automatic submission extensions for PGR. The paper can be viewed on the GSA website.
- The GSA is working with KA and TL to develop the UoY student voice policy and ensure good PGR representation.

- Update on the GSA Advice service: (numbers are not broken down PGR/PGT, these will be provided at the February meeting) the service saw 30 new cases in July, 19 in August, 36 in September, and 26 in October.
- WC expressed a desire to hear the Board's view on the GSA's campaign for automatic PGR extensions to submission:
 - KA explained that all PGR students are currently able to request an extension within three months of their submission deadline, and that there is now a light-touch process for extension requests on grounds of Covid-19.
 - SBr noted that requests are being dealt with on a case-by-case basis in order to ascertain the level of impact that has been felt by each individual student.
 - PA noted that students who are earlier in their research would like reassurance that an extension will be approved further down the line to compensate for time lost.
 - KA noted that all contingency measures will be reviewed at the end of March. It may be the case that the current bespoke measures continue. There will be some reassurance moving forward.

M/20-21/07: The Board was invited to comment on the annual update from Careers and Placements

- JGil welcomed Careers and Placements joining the institutional action plan in the area of Professional Development and Careers. .
- WC asked Janice Simpson for her view on what the greatest area of need is for PGRs. JS noted that students who are least likely to be on campus are the most likely to be detached or disengaged from the events and opportunities in their departments and faculties. She also noted that PGRs are sometimes unaware of the career options that are open to them outside of academia. PGRs often need support in changing their perspective to not see careers outside of academia as 'second-best' or 'alternative'.
- WC asked what plans are in place to support PGRs who are not on campus. JS noted that the pandemic has prompted more online provision for PGRs and helped those who would not usually be able to attend events or access appointments.
- KA acknowledged concerns around the survey data, but noted that the information was still useful, as patterns have become visible. KA would like to ascertain what the predictors are for transitioning to a positive career after PGR study: are there differences among disciplines, a gender bias etc.
- JB asked whether there was a breakdown by faculty under the Graduate Reflection Responses section. **(ACTION: JS to ask for the data from the Business Intelligence Unit for future reports).**

M/20-21/08: The Board was invited to comment on the annual YGRS report

- JB asked whether there is an understanding of how Brexit might impact January 2021 starters. KA replied that the main challenges are likely to be travel disruptions, delays at borders and issues around documentation. Longer-term issues will affect funding for PGRs and Early Career Researchers. Temporary Remote Research will still be an option for January starters. TL noted that the Planning Board has been reviewing a Risk

Register. Ian Wiggins is leading on contingency against the short-term challenges and Rebekah Desport is leading on the long-term impact and opportunities.

- PA asked what can be done for PGRs to advise EU students on what will be required of them when they become Overseas students. **(ACTION: Chair to look into move from EU to Overseas student status and how best to inform and advise PGRs).**

M/20-21/09: The Board was invited to comment on the annual supervision compliance report

- SBr invited the Board to consider when would be the right time to address low compliance rates and request action plans from departments.
- ST noted that lower levels of supervision compliance may be related to issues with recording on SkillsForge and queried whether the recording of this information could be managed differently.
- KR noted that supervisory meetings are sometimes not recorded on SkillsForge because supervisors do not receive notifications that sign-offs are pending. **(ACTION: SBr to check that the system is working properly and that fortnightly digests are still being sent to supervisors to remind them of pending supervision milestones).**
- TL commented that supervision needs to be meaningful and that SkillsForge is not always user-friendly. ST commented that the Review of Supervision document that is filled out after a student's TAP meeting is a more meaningful document. KR queried whether this was not a more useful document with regards to any future OIA Complaints. SBr noted that evidence is still required that supervisory meetings have been taking place regularly.
- JG commented that now is not the time to request an action plan from departments, due to the increased workload that the majority of staff are currently experiencing. He proposed that it would be better to address the issue after the Covid-19 crisis has passed.
- PA noted that forms on SkillsForge are sometimes incomplete because the student disagrees with something that the supervisor has written and therefore does not wish to 'sign-off' on the milestone. She queried whether the GSA advice line might be added to the automated SkillsForge chaser e-mails so that students know they can contact the GSA for advice or support in cases like this. **(ACTION: take idea forward)**
- KA proposed picking up action plans with departments in the new academic year. WC noted that in some departments the compliance rate is only 15% and queried whether earlier action might need to be taken in those cases. SBr noted that the low rate might be attributable to those departments having a very small number of students. **(ACTION: KA to raise the issue of low compliance during visits to individual departments).**

M/20-21/10: The Board was invited to comment on the annual PGR outcomes report

- SBr invited feedback on how best to take observations forward.
- ST proposed sharing the report at the next Graduate Chair Forum. SBr confirmed that EDI is due to be an item for discussion at the Spring forum. **(ACTION: RSA to bring EDI as a topic of discussion to the Spring Grad Chair Forum).**

- WC asked how many years worth of EDI data is available. SBr replied that analysis of previous years would be feasible. WC noted that this might improve the robustness of the findings. The current report shows some concerning trends with regards to disability, ethnicity and sex which could use a deeper analysis. WC voiced support for arranging an internship for a PGR student to complete a deeper analysis of the available data, as long as the budget allows. KA was in support. **(ACTION: Look into feasibility of arranging an internship for completing more in-depth analysis).**
- SBr noted that numbers were not provided alongside the reasons for students withdrawing, as some numbers were so low that students might have been identifiable. Point M19-20/10 of the action log can therefore be closed.

M/20-21/11: The Board was invited to comment on the annual Complaints report

- KR asked Sam McElhinney whether complaints made by PGRs are usually adequately addressed by formal supervision records on SkillsForge, or whether information needs to be captured differently. SM replied that complaints are usually made near the end of a PGR's programme and it is not usually the case that concerns are captured within SkillsForge records, because students fear that doing so might impact negatively on their future career opportunities.
- TL queried how the number of complaints link to the overall number of students. SM noted that this is something that could be looked at more closely in future years.
- TL noted that this was the first she had seen of the report and asked whether it could be brought to the UTC in future, given its focus on taught students. SM replied that the report will also be brought to UTC in the new year. The report is the same for each Committee.
- TL noted that deeper analysis of certain areas would be beneficial, in order to come up with an action plan. SM noted that deeper analysis of trends can be completed for the report in future years. WC noted that data can be segmented by UG/PGT/PGR in future years. **(ACTION: Sam McElhinney to segment data by UG/PGT/PGR at next annual Complaints report).**
- JB noted that Regulation 7 has been amended to include updated guidance on anonymous reporting of misconduct.

M/20-21/12: No other business was raised.