

YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL BOARD

Tuesday 28 May 2019, 10:00-12:00

H/G15 (Heslington Hall)

MINUTES

Present: Professor Tom Stoneham (Chair, TS), Professor Brian Fulton, Professor Stuart Bell, Dr Wayne Campbell, Sehrish Shafi, Charlotte Chamberlain, Nigel Dandy, Susanna Broom (SBr), Dr Jeremy Goldberg,

Apologies: Professor Debbie Smith, Professor John Robinson, Professor Judith Buchanan

In attendance: Kirsty Holley (Secretary, KH), Sarah Kirkup (Postgraduate Admissions Manager, SK), Dan Cashdan (Acting Head of Business Intelligence Unit, DC)

Category I Business

M/18-19/15 Apologies were received as above.

M/18-19/16 TS invited comments on the Minutes of the meeting of 25 February 2019 (YGRSB/18-19/19). The Minutes were **approved** as they stood.

M/18-19/17 The Action Log (YGRSB/18-19/20) was reviewed. It was **noted** that:

- M/17-18/29 - WC commented that, although the request was received outside of MTP schedule, the Professional Services Operational Board were very supportive of the proposal. The proposal is being discussed with Professional Services' financial representatives with a view to organise formal agreement in near future.

M/18-19/18 There were no matters arising from the Minutes not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

M/18-19/19 TS **reported** that:

- PGR mental health wellbeing - Sarah Masefield, who organised the '*How to survive your PhD (and enjoy it)*' event and booklet, attended UKGCE's 1st International Conference on PGR mental health and wellbeing (attendance supported by YGRS). Sarah gave a presentation to 40 delegates and produced a blog post for conference website. TS is looking to extend the programme, in discussion with RETT and Paul Tunbridge (SLAW) on where the initiative best sits.

- Examination processes - SBr secured a Rapid Improvement Event (RIE) to look at the whole process to make administrative efficiency and student experience improvements. RIE to start 03 June 2019.
- PGR Overseas (PGRO) funding - A paper currently being drafted for International Committee will highlight that University money is being recycled to provide large numbers of full and 'top up' fee waivers.

The second largest PGRO funder is Saudi Arabia via UK Saudi Arabia Cultural Bureau (UKSACB). This is despite York being listed as a 2nd choice university. TS is meeting the UKSACB Academic Director in June to reassure the Bureau about how York monitors and disseminates academic performance information on UKSACB-funded students. It is hoped that this may lead to York being placed on the 1st choice list.

- Overseas Research Scholarships - The first cycle of the competition providing full awards (fees + stipend) has concluded. Four awards made to PGR students in English, Psychology, Sociology, and the Centre for Women's Studies. Many strong applications were received. The new process will be reviewed in due course.
- A BBSRC DTP application was submitted in May as part of White Rose consortium bid led by the University of Leeds. There were no significant changes from previous successful bid.
- A Statement of Intent (Sol) regarding the University's use of its next 2-year EPSRC DTP allocation is due in early July 2019, several months earlier than the previous Sol was required. The Sol guidance indicates that EPSRC is placing greater emphasis on the strategic use of funds and equality and diversity in this round. The former may necessitate substantial changes to how the University manages its EPSRC DTP training grants. EPSRC is also inviting bids for collaborative projects with industry, as part of their 2.4% target in investment in non-academic research.
- Off-site PhDs now have an improved and approved set of guidelines. These are being reviewed at Policy and Programmes Subcommittee (PPSC)
- Research Special Cases (ref. M/18-19/10) - in order to address the recent pattern of request rejections at SCC meetings, the Chair of Special Cases Committee, TS and SBr conducted a training session for academic departments on 21 May 2019. Departments were required to send at least one delegate to the event, which had nearly 50 attendees. TS has been in contact with the three departments that did not send a delegate. The event was very well received. WC suggested that this could be an annual event, due to its success. SBr confirmed that a review of the event will be part of the agenda for the next SCC meeting.
- The 2019 PRES has now closed, with York achieving a 40% return rate. This was an improvement on 2017, but still lower than the 48% return rate peak achieved in 2015 (which was the highest in the country). York has agreed to be part of a pilot scheme to benchmark an open comments question. Results will be provided in the summer.

M/18-19/20 SS reported that:

- GSA are working with the ASO to ensure that current policy and GSA provision adheres to the UK QAA's *Advice & Guidance on Research Degrees*, which was revised in November 2018.
- There has been a rise in PGR students attending GSA drop-in sessions, seeking advice on difficult and complex issues. This will be raised and discussed in the GSA PGR forum on 03 June 2019.
- SS has been conducting department visits. Several have requested that more information on visa Doctoral Extension Schemes be made easier to obtain. SBr noted that if students searched the term on the York website, the information for PGRs was listed on the 'Graduate jobs in the UK' webpage, and agreed that the information should be more easily attainable.
- GSA is currently researching and consulting on a proposal to reinstate the 6 month 'major corrections' outcome as an outcome of PGR examinations. The next step is to survey university staff about their experience as internal and external examiners.
- GSA elections have started, with four candidates for President, three for both Vice President roles (Academic and Wellbeing and Community), and one for Trustee. Voting closes on 31 May 2019, with results due to be announced on the same day.
- It was noted that, due to the elections, this was the last YGRS Board meeting attended by SS and CC. The Chair and Board thanked them both for their contributions and work with the GSA.

(ACTION - TS to seek for the profile of Doctoral Extension Scheme information to be raised on the University webpages)

M/18-19/21 Sarah Kirkup (SK) **presented** the PGR Admissions Report (YGRSB/18-19/21):

- SK noted that the central PG Admissions team have a 6-week turnaround target, taken from the point of an application submission to making an offer. With PGR applicants, the process often exceeds this target, due to delays within academic departments, where availability of academics (especially those on research leave) makes it difficult to arrange interviews and communicate a final decision. TS noted that delays can also arise from applicant's availability for interview.
- SK highlighted the collaborative working project between PG admissions and academic departments, which has been very well received. SBr confirmed discussions were ongoing for RSA to participate in initiative.
- The Chair welcomed the report and the review of part-time routes for Tier 4 visa holders as a potential alternative provision. TS noted that, from a Special Cases perspective, this would be invaluable, as it would provide Tier 4 visa-holding PGRs with additional flexibility when they felt they could not take an LOA, due to the current visa implications.
- Comments were made regarding the high number of applicant rejections based on the quality of the applicant or proposed project and the lack of suitable supervision

available. It was questioned whether this went against strategy to improve the quality and size of the PGR cohort. The Chair noted that there was no overall University strategy to increase PGR numbers, only the quality of students and their research, although departments are free to drive to expand numbers if they wish.

- Additional comments were made regarding the seemingly low conversion rates (A&H: 38%, Soc Sci: 34%, Sciences: 39%). It was suggested that External Communications should investigate improving post-offer communications in an attempt to strengthen conversion rates. However, it was also acknowledged that the costs of such endeavours needed to be carefully weighed against the potential overall benefit, especially with regards to the competitive PGR Overseas market. WC asked if any Russell Group institutions had good examples of post-offer communication strategies that York could learn from. SK noted that she would ask colleagues in the PG Admissions Conversion Working Group.

(Action: SK to inform TS of departments going over 6-week turnaround target; SK to provide feedback to the PG Admissions Conversion Working Group, and provide update for YGRSB)

M/18-19/22 Dan Cashdan (DC) **presented** PGR Submission Report (YGRSB/18-19/22):

- DC highlighted that at present 86% of full-time PGRs who started in 2014/15 had submitted within four years. This was the highest submission rate on record. There had been increases in submission rates across all three faculties, with marked increases in Arts & Humanities and Social Sciences. While there was no significant difference in gender, there was an increase in Overseas students submitting within four years. There was a decrease in failures for non-submission and withdrawal rates also fell for PGRs who started in 2014/15.
- The Chair welcomed the report, noting that previously this report was the only measure of PGR academic quality that Senate received. Senate now also receives annual reports on PGR progression and examination outcomes.
- The Board recognised the positive impact that SCC policy had had on the PGR submission rates. In 2015/16, TS and Mike Bentley, the then-Chair of SCC, implemented a policy to reduce the number of extension requests being made, by promoting academic departments to intervene at an earlier stage of a PGR student's enrolment. WC suggested that this positive outcome should be published across the University. The Chair noted that there was a lack of data to benchmark York's submission rates, which should be checked first before publicising results.

(Action: DC to investigate benchmarking data (perhaps with White Rose institution) and discuss promoting outcome with Marketing)

M/18-19/23 The Board **considered** the proposal to endorse a Policy on Respectful Supervisory Relationships (YGRSB/18-19/23):

- The Chair noted that no such guidelines were currently being implemented in the UK HE sector, although the 1752 Group is prioritising the release of a similar 'code of conduct'. Universities Australia's '*Principles for Respectful Supervisory Relationships*'

was published on 01 August 2018. These principles go beyond existing conduct policies for students and staff at York, by prohibiting sexual relationships between PGR students and their academic supervisors.

- It was questioned whether the guidelines should also apply to Progression Chairs, TAP Members and Internal Examiners, due to the influence these roles within a PGR student's progression. The Chair noted that these roles were covered by existing HR conduct policies, which requires those involved in the assessment of a student to declare and recuse themselves from assessing the student where there is a relationship between them and the student in question. The intention of these proposed guidelines is to strengthen existing policy in one specific area; the supervisory relationship, where existing policy is not as strong as that pertaining to individuals who are involved in the assessment of a student.
- Comments were also made regarding for what period of a PGR's enrolment the proposed guidelines would be implemented. The Chair clarified that the completion of the research degree was the clearest end point, as there would be no further assessment.
- The Chair proposed that the Universities Australia's guidelines be approved by the Board, edited as stated in the paper and added as an appendix to the PoRD. The YGRS Board **approved** the proposal. It was suggested that the wording of the first paragraph should be altered and the guidelines be referred to as a 'Code of Conduct', before submitting this to Senate.

(Action: TS to take Guidelines to Senate's July meeting)

Category II Business

No category II business was discussed at the meeting.

M/18-19/24 Minutes of the Awards and Funding Subcommittee held on 23 November 2018 and 18 February 2019 (YGRSB/18-19/24)

M/18-19/25 Minutes of the Policies and Processes Subcommittee held on 23 November 2018 and 8 February 2019 (YGRSB/18-19/25)

M/18-19/26 A.O.B. - None

M/18-19/27 It was noted that the date of the forthcoming meeting will be:

- Will be circulated on publication of the 2019/20 university timetable.