



## GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

### York Graduate Research School Board

Monday 24 February 2020, 10am

H/G/15

#### MINUTES

**Present:** Professor Tom Stoneham, Professor John Robinson, Professor Ambrose Field, Dr Wayne Campbell, Dr Pürnur Altay, Ms Jane Baston, Ms Susanna Broom

**Apologies:** Professor Debbie Smith, Professor Brian Fulton, Professor Stuart Bell, Dr David McBeth, Mr Nigel Dandy, Dr Kelly Redeker, Dr Sally Hancock, Dr Jeremy Goldberg

**In attendance:** Ms Maria Adlam (minutes), Dr Karen Clegg, Ms Janice Simpson, Ms Kelly McDonald, Ms Sarah Kirkup

#### Category I Business:

**M/19-20/01** Apologies were received as above.

**M/19-20/02** The minutes from the last YGRS Board meeting (2 December 2019) were **approved**.

**M/19-20/03** The Action Log was reviewed. It was **noted** that:

- M18-19/23: TS took the guidelines on Personal Relationships to the July Senate meeting. Senate was supportive but raised some concerns about having two policies. Further work is being undertaken led by the Academic Registrar..
- M19-20/08: Natalie Armstrong will present on the welfare model at the YGRS Ops Group meeting in June.

**M/19-20/04** There were no matters arising from the Minutes not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

**M/19-20/05** TS **reported** that:

- The bid for Fusion CDT funding has been approved, following negotiations after the initial bid was unsuccessful. EPSRC has approved advertising and recruiting to studentships with immediate effect and it will be badged as EPSRC funding.
- The University has been awarded a grant from NIHR on multimorbidity. Two students on the grant will be physically based in York and two will be based in Pakistan. All will receive University of York degrees and will work as a cohort.

- The University is still awaiting the outcome of a Green Chemistry bid to the EPSRC mobility pilot fund. The panel met on 30 Jan 2020 but have not yet decided on the level of funding. *[Secretary's note: the bid was confirmed as successful and will start recruiting for October 2020]*
- An institutional bid for the Leverhulme Doctoral Training Scholarships scheme (three cohorts of five studentships) is being selected. There were 11 expressions of interest involving all faculties.
- The University hopes to be part of an MRC DTP bid, which would make UoY a junior partner with the University of Sheffield as lead RO.
- Some Marie Curie Fellows have encountered issues with academic progress which have impacted on their employment status. The job description has been amended to include passing the annual review of progress and submitting the thesis.

**M/19-20/06** JB and PA gave an update on behalf of the GSA:

- The GSA has been running course rep socials in an informal environment.
- Faculty forums have taken place for all three faculties.
- The GSA has run several wellbeing sessions for students.
- An all-inclusive Rent Guarantee Scheme for international students is now in place. Under the new scheme, which is regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, students will be signposted to a third party company and international students will pay 3.5% interest. Progress will be monitored over the next two years.
- A YUSU/GSA consultation with students about sexual harassment and misconduct is being planned.

**M/19-20/07** The Board was invited to comment on the report on PGR mentoring best practice, presented by Karen Clegg.

- UoY already has a scheme in place for PGR students, run by Wentworth College, but this is focussed primarily on engagement and community, rather than mentoring.
- The only formalised mentoring process that was identified in the wellbeing audit was in the Department of Chemistry.
- The University of Sheffield has a focussed thesis mentoring programme for PGRs which is aimed at final years. Post-docs act as trained mentors and complete a formalised, four-month paired relationship with a student.
- KC gave an overview of the five proposals in the paper: proposal one is to explore a Sheffield-style programme; proposal two is to explore a scheme similar to the one in Wentworth College; proposal three is to develop a thesis mentoring scheme, along with wellbeing retreats; proposal four is to develop a careers mentoring portal; proposal five is the continued support and continuation of 'Surviving your PhD' programme.
- KC noted that, in the Sheffield mentoring scheme, PhD students are deliberately not matched with a Post-doc from their own department.
- AF raised the need for academic writing training in certain departments, and asked how a mentoring scheme would achieve this. KC replied that the suggestions would need to be tested to see how it can meet this need.
- WC noted that he would support a blended approach of the proposals. He noted that each would need to be costed.
- PA expressed a preference for a combination of objective-led and thesis mentoring.

- TS suggested a blended approach of proposals two, three and four. The Board was supportive. **(ACTIONS: KC to cost Thesis Mentoring Scheme at York and send to WC and DM. Secretary to notify Wentworth College and Careers that the Board would like to see those schemes expanded.)**

**M/19-20/08** Survey strategy report was postponed until the May meeting as there was no one to present.

**M/19-20/09** The Board was invited to comment on the update from Careers and Placements, which was given by Janice Simpson and Kelly McDonald:

- The bid for a PG careers consultant post was approved and Janice Simpson has now taken on this role.
- JS is looking to develop a programme with Karen Clegg and the RETT team for international postgraduate students who are returning to their home country. The supporting objectives for this project are linked to the University's employability strategy. The project is currently in its research phase. Good practice in other institutions is currently being identified.
- WC queried whether there is a need for online careers provision for PGRs students. JS replied that other institutions do have online tools, but these often overlap with resources that already exist. This will be clearer once the research phase is complete.
- KM noted that the graduate outcomes coding has been delayed by HESA. Since November/December 2019 Universities have been challenging HESA on how graduate outcomes are coded. Systemic errors have been identified and the data will therefore not be available until March 2020.
- HESA are currently aiming for a 60% response rate from FT first degree graduates. The figure is 49% for the sector and 54% at UoY. For PGR the response rate is 55%.
- KM requested for the annual update from Careers and Placements to come to the Autumn meeting in future years. **(ACTION: Secretary to adjust the annual cycle of business accordingly.)**

**M/19-20/10** The Board was invited to comment on the annual PGR Admissions Report, which was presented by Sarah Kirkup:

- Home applications are up from this point last year and Overseas applications are broadly the same.
- Oversight of visiting students will move from the Centre for Global Programmes to the PG Admissions team.
- The process for approving ATAS statements has been improved. Obtaining one will be a condition of the offer for Tier 4 students in the relevant departments. These students will not be able to apply for a visa until they have obtained an ATAS statement. TS queried how it is decided that a student requires an ATAS statement. SK replied that it is linked to the programme code. The prospective supervisor then flags on Select whether the student will be researching a sensitive subject.
- The process for obtaining academic and language waivers will be reviewed.
- There are now four Postgraduate Admissions managers: one for each faculty and another for Distance Learning students. This is working well.

- PA queried what Bench Fees are used for. TS replied that Bench Fees are paid by the sponsor and go directly to the department. There were some previous complaints from funders who felt the bench fee was arbitrary, so the bench fees are now made clear in the student's offer letter. Upon request, evidence can be sent to the funder that the fee is being spent on the student.
- PA asked whether tuition fee increases for PGR students can be removed. Currently the fee increases each year due to inflation. SK clarified that the increase is capped at 2% and has been since 2014. PA asked whether it could be capped at the original amount. WC advised that this could be referred to the Fees and Charges Working Group for consideration.
- AF asked whether fees for visiting students have been reviewed. SK replied that this was included in the annual fees review. Fees for visiting PGRs are prorated on the basis of months and quarters rather than terms.
- SBr noted that she welcomes the move of visiting students to the PG Admissions team. **(ACTION: SBr and TS to give SK a briefing on earlier work on visiting students.)** SK noted that the Centre for Global Programmes and PG Admissions are currently in a transition period. PG Administration will take full responsibility for visiting students from September.
- TS noted that there is strong support for the availability of part-time routes for PGR Tier 4 students, not as an entry point but as a way of managing health/caring responsibilities during their registered period of study. The previous decision not to offer part-time study to Overseas students will be revisited and will go through the Tier 4 Programme Board. **(ACTION: SK to report back to next Board meeting)**
- SK presented some examples of good practice in conversion of offers to acceptances. The University of Sheffield holds an open evening for PG study, which is attended by Overseas students and students from other universities, as well as UG students from Sheffield. It was also noted that the speed and interest with which supervisors respond to e-mail proposals from potential applicants is key.
- The Board supported reviewing UoY's current PGR open days and further investigation into doing something closer to the Sheffield model in future. **(ACTION: SK to notify Recruitment team.)**

**M/19-20/11** The Board was invited to comment on the annual GSA Advice Service PGR Casework Report:

- PA reported that the number of open cases increased by 68% in 2018/9 across PGT and PGR. A high number of students from TYMS, Education and Health Sciences have been accessing the advice service. The majority of the PGT cases relate to appeals, exceptional circumstances and academic misconduct. Feedback has been positive.
- SBr noted that the PGR population is higher than the paper suggests: nearer 2,200-2,300 (depending on the time of year). Thus the percentage accessing GSA services is considerably lower than the report states.
- SBr queried what constitutes a case, and noted that the proportion of PGR accessing GSA's Advice Service is low, and yet this group saw the highest percentage increase in cases. PA clarified that a case can range from anything from loneliness or bullying to an academic matter or process. It is any kind of contact with an adviser, whether it be an appointment or contact via e-mail. **(ACTION: Darryl Butcher to report back to YGRS Ops Group on trends in**

**PGR cases, given the increase in PGR numbers was not explicable by increases in appeals, exceptional circumstances, or academic misconduct cases.)**

**M/19-20/12** The Board was invited to comment on the report on the launch of The Wellbeing Thesis

- SBr and PA were present at the event, which was well attended by professionals from across the sector, as well as by students.
- RSA will work with the GSA to publicise the resources. They will also be embedded within the YGRS webpages. *[Secretary's note: a link to the resource now appears here: [https://www.york.ac.uk/research/graduate-school/support/.](https://www.york.ac.uk/research/graduate-school/support/)]*
- The paper suggested giving students the possibility to share their research in a non-competitive environment. SBr noted that this has been attempted in the past, but the events were not well attended. TS proposed that pop-up spaces could be used in empty shops in the city centre as a wider engagement opportunity. **(ACTION: TS to discuss with Joan Concannon.)**
- The report notes that UoY can do more for student inductions (although orientation may be a more appropriate term). It may be appropriate to give inductions at different stages of study, rather than only at the start of the course. A small working group will be set up to consider induction. **(ACTION: SBr to set up working group to report to YGRS Ops Group.)**
- It was suggested that, to provide real-models rather than role-models, some staff and students (current and former) could have profiles on the YGRS pages where they explain how they overcame challenges and balanced their commitments during their PGR study at York. This could be used to signpost towards available support.
- SBr noted that PPSC was supportive of all the report's recommendations. The Board also supported the recommendations.

**M/19-20/13** The Board was invited to raise any other business:

- In response to a question from the Academic Registrar, TS reported that the VC has been looking into UoY's policy on GTAs. The conclusion is that the policy is adequate if followed. TS clarified that those students who are on a 3-year teaching stipend are required to do a certain amount of teaching, however they are not classed as staff members and do not have employment status. They are covered by the policy on Paid Parental Leave. Good practice is for students to be informed at the start of each academic year of the minimum expected number of hours they can expect to receive. Bad practice is a zero hours contract approach (which would be against University policy). TS has had a meeting with Rachael Millhouse from HR to ensure alignment with other HR projects around low-pay and casualisation.
- AF asked how PGT teaching is managed, the number of hours is unpredictable. TS clarified that it requires sign-off from PVC-T&L. The GTA Policy is owned by UTC because the primary risk is poor quality experience for students being taught.