



York Graduate Research School Board

Monday 2 December 2019, 10am

H/G/15

MINUTES

Present: Professor Tom Stoneham, Professor Stuart Bell (SB), Dr Wayne Campbell, Ms Pürnur Altay, Ms Jane Baston, Mr Nigel Dandy, Ms Susanna Broom (SBr), Dr David McBeth

Apologies: Professor Debbie Smith, Professor John Robinson, Professor Brian Fulton, Professor Ambrose Field, Dr Jeremy Goldberg, Dr Sally Hancock, Dr Kelly Redeker

In attendance: Ms Maria Adlam (secretary)

Category I Business

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

M/19-20/02 TS invited comments on the meeting of 28 May 2019. WC noted a correction to 18-19/17. It should read: "WC commented that, although the request was received outside of MTP schedule, the *Heads of Professional Services* group was very supportive of the proposal." The rest of the minutes were **approved**.

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

- M/18-19/19- the annual Research Special Cases training for postgraduate administrator requires organisation.
- M18-19/21 Sarah Kirkup (PG Admissions) has provided an update on Admissions turnaround times. Her comments are as follows: *Admissions are working with the technical team to generate a live turnaround times report. Can expect to be able to report more fully & more regularly in the next few months. Currently 15 of 132 pending applications for 2020/21 PhD entry are outside of six-week turnaround period.*
- M18-19/21 Sarah Kirkup has also provided an update on the PG Admissions Conversion Working Group. Her comments are as follows: *The Conversion and Yield Working Group, with a particular focus on international conversion at UG and PGT, was wound up at the end of the last academic year, having achieved some early objectives in communications to offer holders. In its place the International Recruitment, Marketing and Admissions Working Group has been established, to commission, coordinate, prioritise and evaluate international recruitment, marketing and admissions operational projects. The primary focus of this group will be UG and PGT recruitment, marketing and admissions however it can be expected that the activity of this group will generally promote international recruitment, improve processes, raise marketing profile, etc., to benefit of PGR, both directly and through improving the PGT -> PGR pipeline.*

[Action for Secretary: WC proposed for SK to ask Russell Group colleagues for examples of good practice around PGR conversion.]

- M18-19/23 TS noted that the Personal Relationships Policy will be amended and will go to UEB for approval on 14 January 2020 and to Senate for information on 27 January 2020
- M18-19/20: WC noted that there had been no update on this minute. TS replied that the event did not take place.

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

M/19-20/05 The terms of reference and membership were **reviewed**:

- TS proposed that the Director of Research and Enterprise (currently David McBeth) be added as ex officio member of the YGRS Board. The Board supported the change and it will be reported at the next Senate meeting. **[Action: MA to notify Philip Evans]**
- SB proposed that the Annual Cycle of Business be amended so that the scholarships can be brought to the May meeting in future years. This will allow the report to coincide with the availability of benchmarking data in April. The Board supported the change. TS noted that he will be visiting faculty research groups to discuss contextualising the data in the report.
- ND noted that number 11 on the terms of reference might be amended to include determining a survey strategy. **[Action: TS and ND to discuss bringing a paper on a survey strategy to the February meeting .]**

M/19-20/06 TS **reported** that:

- BBSRC DTP3 (White Rose, lead RO Leeds) bid was funded at a slightly lower level than DTP2. .
- Second round bid of the EPSRC mobility pilot proposal has been submitted. The aim of the pilot is to recruit two PhD students from those already working outside the sector. Students on the programme will have individual learning contracts and may be able to RPL their accredited professional experience for direct entry into the second year of the programme.
 - WC queried whether that might be too challenging and whether prospective students may be disadvantaged as a result.
 - PA expressed concern that prospective students may be under pressure from their employer to complete early.
 - TS responded by noting that students would be carefully selected senior scientists who wish to further their careers by obtaining a PhD and are put forward by their employers. They would complete a three-way contract between York, their employer and themselves covering time and financial arrangements.
 - Only a small number of students will be included in the pilot and TS will be York signatory on their learning contracts.
 - York will know by early January if there is funding and a named PhD route will be set up for them.
- TS thanked RSA for their work on the implementation of the new electronic thesis submission process. 170 electronic thesis submissions have now taken place.
- TS noted that the Policy on Research Degrees has been amended so that the option for examiners to require resubmission for a downgrade to MPhil no longer exists (so all resubmissions will be eligible for the original award). This option has only been used rarely, but has a big impact on the students affected.
- TS noted that we plan to increase the number of four-year PhDs available. Integrated PhDs include 120 taught credits in Year One plus three further years of enrolment and a 12-month continuation

period. This route is geared towards applicants whose Masters level award does not adequately prepare them for a UK PhD. Additionally, there are overseas sponsors who are willing to provide four years of funding for the student, but can only do so if the student will be registered at York for four years. All departments can now offer a four-year PhD with no continuation period. This route should only be used in cases with sponsor support.

- WC noted that Home students are usually limited to three years of funding, and suggested that Overseas students receiving four years of funding could lead to perceptions of inequality.
- TS replied that most Research Councils are funding on a four-year basis and specify that students must submit within their funded periods. We already have a lack of parity between internally and externally funded home students in many Departments.
- WC asked how much it would cost to create parity between PGR students.
- TS replied that this would cost approximately £1million per year. The University is working to align internal terms and conditions with UKRI policy.
- SB noted that many PGR students are self-funded. There was some discussion around the different priorities and perspectives of these students.

M/19-20/07 PA and JB gave a report on behalf of the GSA:

- PA noted that she views the integrated PhD positively and believes it will help students coming from different institutional backgrounds.
- PA reported that welcome week was a success. 4,579 tickets were sold.
- PA reported that the GSA is working with Careers to map the PGR student journey
- JB reported that there are approximately 193 course reps at PGR level. A significant number have been trained and there are working groups for GTAs, PG Community and the PhD journey.

M/19-20/08 The Board was invited to comment on the annual YGRS report

- WC queried whether the University can be doing more than what is mentioned in the report. TS responded by noting that YGRS input will always be limited due to lack of staffing/resource and that the majority of wellbeing support takes place within departments. An audit on PGR wellbeing support resulted in more than 460 entries. An intern is being recruited to complete analysis of the results. YGRS will then identify how to present existing support more clearly to PGRs.
- WC asked whether an objective will be to engage with the new welfare model whereby ODT advisers are embedded in academic departments. **[ACTION FOR SBr: Invite Natalie Armstrong to present on the department-embedded model for Open Door support at the next YGRS Operations Group].**
- PA suggested that some guidance should be created for students for awareness on what examiners expect from a viva. After some discussion it was agreed that any guidance should be in reference to the general format and not to any specific questions that may be asked, as they can vary greatly between disciplines.
- SB noted that some departments organise mock viva examinations for PGR students. TS noted that, while a mock viva may be helpful, some departments may be unable to offer this to all students because of workload implications. **[ACTION: TS to speak to RETT about creating guidance on the format of vivas.]**

M/19-20/09 The Board was invited to comment on the annual supervision compliance report

- TS noted that York's supervision compliance rate is currently low (66%) and referred the Board to the four possibilities for action outlined in section three. PA stated her disagreement with point four (*Consult on whether the policy requirements on formal supervisions are too arduous and should*

be reviewed) and reported that supervision records are important to students to highlight cases where things are going wrong. She queried whether it would be possible to send automated e-mails as soon as an action in SkillsForge was required. TS replied that currently weekly reminders were based on a survey conducted in 2018 and advised that students should informally remind their supervisors about overdue supervisions or forms.

- WC suggested that a combination of option two (*Provide departmental-level analyses to Heads of Department, highlighting areas of concern, and ask for an action plan to address those concerns*) and three (*Work with Faculty Operations Managers to identify and remove barriers to compliance*) would be suitable.
- There was some discussion around the definition of compliance in relation to internal policy and UKVI. It was concluded that 100% attendance should be the aim for all students.
- The Board discussed each of the options. It was noted that there is a wide disparity between departments, however as 100% compliance is the goal, it was agreed all departments should be involved in the action plan. It was therefore agreed that a combination of options two and three was the preferred decision. **[ACTION: Secretary to request an action plan from departments in time for February PPSC] [ACTION: TS/SBr to take forward with Jamie Holliday]**

M/19-20/10 The Board was invited to comment on the annual PGR outcomes report

- WC noted that the number of downgrades is low. TS notes that it has dropped slightly since last year and that the number of awards is increasing year on year.
- WC asked why DNS (Did Not Start) withdrawals are choosing not to attend. TS replied that all respondents to a survey two years ago cited funding reasons.
- WC requested that next year's report includes a breakdown of all reason for withdrawal (including those noted as 'other'). **[ACTION: SBr to update next year's report].**
- TS commented on the post-2016 progression process and noted that departments are now able to intervene at an earlier stage if a student is not making adequate progress. He noted that extension to progression requests should not be made on the grounds of inadequate progress by the student (e.g. needs more time to collect data). A three month revise and resubmit decision is the appropriate outcome in this case.

M/19-20/11 The Board was invited to comment on the annual report of academic complaints

- WC informed the Board that the Complaints Officer has completed guidance on complaints for staff, which will be supported by workshops.
- TS noted that the informal stage of the process can be problematic because the HoD is linked to the case. In these cases, the PoRD notes that students may speak to TS instead.
- **[ACTION: Secretary to check with Complaints Officer that the written guidance contains advice on informal procedures for PGRs]**
- TS noted that the two complaints that were escalated to the OIA were not justified.
- Overall numbers are low.

M/19-20/12 The Board was invited to comment on the biannual PRES report

- PA noted that she will be attending an event on The Wellbeing Thesis which is a collaboration between Kings College and Student Minds. The GSA Wellbeing rep will also attend. The GSA will potentially promote to PGR students.
- TS noted that Sarah Masefield (founder of 'How to Survive your PhD (and enjoy it)' project) presented at the International Conference on PGR Wellbeing in May 2019. The conference resulted

in a publication - Pinchpoints and Good Practice in PGR Well-Being - which has been circulated to Departments.

- TS noted that Professional Development was York's weakest area, though the questions focussed on support provided by supervisors and Departments, not central services.
- WC suggested that a mentoring scheme could be set up for PGR students. TS responded that the practical hurdle is training enough people to provide support for 2000+ PGR students. WC suggested speaking to other institutions to see if there is a model for best practice. **[ACTION: TS to request that Karen Clegg (RETT) find examples of best practice in similar institutions for reporting at the next meeting].**

M/19-20/13 The Board was invited to comment on the biannual PRES report