



YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL BOARD

Tuesday 22 June 2021, 15:00 - 17:00 via Zoom

Present: Kate Arnold (Chair, KA), Susanna Broom (SB, Secretary), Wayne Campbell (WC), Jennifer Gilmartin (JG), Ambrose Field (AF) Kelly Redeker (KR), Carolyn Snell (CS), Jane Baston (GSA, JB), Cecilia Lowe (CL)

Apologies: Jeremy Goldberg, Matthias Ruth, Stuart Bell, Purnur Altay

In attendance: Jessica Main (Minute Secretary), Karen Payne (KP)

Category I Business

M/20-21/20: The minutes of the meeting of 25 February 2021 were approved.

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

- M/20-21/16 is ongoing.
- M/20-21/10 is ongoing.
- M/20-21/17 can now be closed.

Matters arising from the Minutes

- SB reported that progress on the Risk Register is underway and will become part of the YGRS Board annual cycle of business, with oversight and maintenance held by YGRS Operations Group. The register is an evolving document scrutinising YGRS strategic and operational risks.
- The Chair confirmed that strategic risks in relation to the Research Excellence Training (RET) team will fall within the register.

No further comments.

M/20-21/22a: Chair's oral report

- The Chair reported that there had been three 3 Minute Thesis winners from the Faculty of Science this round and extended thanks to Karen Clegg and the RET team for working with the finalists and delivering a successful event alongside the AV and Events team.
- The application for the Medical Research Council (MRC) DiMeN DTP (Discovery Medicine North) was a success, however the amount of funding and number of studentships has not yet been clarified.

- A funding application on vulnerability and policing futures has been submitted to ESRC with positive feedback but no decision has been made as yet.
- There has been an influx of departments applying to set up Distance Learning variants.
- There was an appetite to engage more with surveying PGRs on their experience throughout the pandemic, but concerns that the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is not the correct tool. PRES was not promoted through departments or the GSA during the last academic year, which may account for the 30% response rate, which represents a decrease compared to earlier surveys.
- The Chair thanked the PGRA and RET teams for their ongoing support for students throughout the pandemic, such as financial support and flexibility in annual progression, amongst other contingency measures.

M/20-21/22b: GSA's oral report

The GSA president, Jane Baston, reported that:

- 60 online and in-person events have been held to welcome PGT/PGRs back to campus.
- 2 new GSA advisors have been appointed.
- Work is underway to revise the Academic Representation Strategy.
- This is JB and PA's final meeting with the YGRS Board. Thanks were extended to Kate, PGRA and RET for their ongoing work to support PGRs.

The Chair noted on behalf of the Board, immense gratitude to JB, PA and GSA colleagues for being a valuable part of the YGRS team, community and for their Board contributions.

M/20-21/23: YGRS draft strategic plan

The Chair proposed the plan for the next 18 months, based on discussions with key stakeholders across the University.

- The following wider aims were outlined:
 - For York to be the best place in the world for attracting, developing and inspiring diverse talented PGRs.
 - To develop YGRS to create a global centre for postgraduate research and training.
 - To foster an environment of curiosity, creativity and community.
 - To co-create a vibrant and inclusive culture that values open communication and collaboration.
 - To improve the accountability and sustainability of support for postgraduate research.
- The Chair noted that the key focus over the next 18 months will be:
 - To establish YGRS as a fully-resourced graduate school, with updated governance structures.

- To review postgraduate recruitment and selection processes to widen access to postgraduate research.
 - To diversify programmes and enhance postgraduate supervision.
 - To improve financial management and transparency of PGR scholarships.
- The Chair noted that there is work underway with departments to develop professional doctorates, and to rethink part-time provision and how programmes can be made more flexible.
 - Recruitment processes across departments will be looked at in detail and pockets of best practice identified.
 - The diversity of the PGR population will be improved by changing policies and processes to encourage applications and increase the offer rate to candidates from underrepresented groups.
 - The Chair is working alongside Paul Wakeling (Education) to create a training workshop for staff involved in recruitment and selection.

The Chair invited comments from the Board:

- JG noted that the objectives in the paper were not in a particular priority order and to identify 'quick wins' would be useful.
- WC agreed that it would be helpful to assign priorities and a delivery date. It was noted that more work was required around PGR supervision and it was identified as a high priority.
- The Chair noted a preference to prioritise recruitment and selection.
- JB queried whether the student life aspect would be included in the governance structure. The Chair acknowledged that there was a gap around the student voice and wellbeing, and that YGRS needs to work alongside the GSA to identify improvements.
- The Chair noted that the Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) perspective would be included in the governance structure.
- AF queried how some of the aspects link to the financial picture emerging with faculty-level budgeting and whether it needed to be elevated up the institutional agenda. The Chair confirmed that they would be meeting at a later date with Mike Clark (Head of Academic Accounting) to discuss finance and scholarships.
- KR was supportive of identifying supervision best practice cases, but noted concern that these would be used inappropriately as a metric by which all supervisors are judged. The Chair clarified that individuals would not be identified, but that the focus would be on departments who are demonstrating good processes and support.

The Board was in support of the priorities for the upcoming 18 months as laid out by the Chair.

Note: Jennifer Gilmartin left the meeting.

M/20-21/24: PGR Submission Rates Report

Karen Payne, Business Intelligence Unit (BIU) presented the annual PGR submission rates report and invited comments from the Board:

- SB noted being reassured by the figures - the withdrawal rate has fallen.
- The Chair was reassured by the data so far, noting that the impact of the pandemic may not become evident for some time to come.
- JB queried whether the BIU would be able to locate data relating to disabled students and whether they are more likely to apply for extensions. SB noted that Special Cases might have this information.

ACTION - Karen Payne to provide a one page update for the next Board meeting

M/20-21/25: Update: PGR Scholarships Database project

SB provided an oral update on the project:

- The concept summary was presented to the Enterprise Systems Strategy Group (ESSG) on 16 March 2021, and received support.
- Tim Andrew (TA; Head of Practice: Project Management) will be submitting a bid to the Capital, Enterprise Systems and Infrastructure Strategy (CESIS) Board by the end of June 2021 to request funding in order to recruit a contract Business Analyst (BA) to undertake discovery analysis work over a 3-month period. SB will work with TA to clarify outputs, agree day-to-day management of the BA and their activity during that period.
- The project will touch on the management of funds, how this will work with faculties, where strategic priorities lie in terms of international recruitment, working with funders, research priorities and managing risk.

Comments were invited from the Board:

- The Chair and SB observed that it would be useful to be more connected to the Institutional Change Project by increasing representation, in order to have an understanding of how the scholarships database project would fit in. AF acknowledged that a formal channel of communication into the institutional change project would be helpful and agreed to raise this.
- WC noted that the Deputy VC chairs both CESIS and the Institutional Change Project. WC suggested that the proposal going to CESIS should contain information from the report update (drawing particular attention to the vast amount of PGR funding - c. £29m pa) and drive the need to prioritise the project. WC noted that there should be a push for an end date.

ACTION - AF to raise the request to establish increased representation into the Institutional Change Project at the next meeting with Saul Tandler (Deputy VC). AF will follow up with a response for YGRSB.

ACTION - WC to take lead on advocating the scholarships database project with CESIS.

ACTION - The Chair to liaise with Matthias Ruth regarding the research funding component of the project.

M/20-21/26: Oral update regarding CITY College

- Advertises to recruit the first cohort of PhD researchers have opened.
- Participating departments include Computer Science, Language and Linguistic Science, Psychology, and the York Management School.
- PhD researchers will be based at CITY College, Greece, but enrolled at York on a Distance Learning mode.
- Three fees-only scholarships have been advertised. This will rise to five fees-only scholarships in future years.
- CITY College supervisors will undertake University of York supervisor training.
- CITY College PhD researchers will have access to Professional Development offerings run by RET.
- CITY College PhD researchers will automatically become members of the GSA.

Note: Wayne Campbell left the meeting.

Category II Business

M/20-21/27: The Board received the RET Buddy Evaluation report.

M/20-21/28: The Board received the PGR Mentoring Programme report.

- It was noted that both schemes have been well received.
- It was reported that the Policies and Programmes Sub-committee support their continuation.

M/20-21/29: AOB

- It was confirmed that future meetings will continue online.
- No other business was raised.

Date of next meeting(s): TBC