

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

Policy and Programmes Sub-Committee

Annual Programme Review 2014/15: Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes and Students

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This paper provides a summary of issues identified from the 2014/2015 APR process that relate to postgraduate research degree programmes and students. The report aims to identify where issues require action, and also note where issues have been, or are the process of being, resolved.
- 1.2. This paper only highlights issues that are common across a number of departments or are of sufficient interest or concern to be raised at University level.
- 1.3. As part of the APR process, departments were asked to reflect and comment on their PRES results, with a particular focus on any areas where the results appeared to be particularly high or low compared to the institutional average. For the most part, departments have done as requested, although the level of detail varies considerably.
- 1.4. A final version of this report (incorporating any comments from the Committee) will be circulated to Chairs of Boards of Studies and Graduate School Boards, and relevant support offices.
- 1.5. Departments will also receive a brief individual response to their APR report that references this report where appropriate.

2. MAJOR ISSUES

Funding and fees

- 2.1 Several departments (Chemistry, Computer Science, Economics, History of Art, Language and Linguistic Science, TYMS) highlight concerns about the ability, due to funding constraints at departmental and/or University level, to offer competitive PhD studentships and thus to attract a sufficient number of high quality PhD students.

ACTION: Chair to raise departmental concerns with the Awards and Funding Sub-Committee, as part of ongoing discussions around funding for research studentships.

- 2.2 Chemistry has concerns that the increase in the PGR overseas tuition fees will make it difficult for the Department to compete internationally (especially in the light of recent global economic uncertainty).

ACTION: Chair to notify the Chair of Planning Committee about concerns raised over international competitiveness.

- 2.3 Chemistry also notes that it would like to charge bench fees when external funding bodies are prepared to pay for these. The Committee should note that action has now been taken to enable departments to charge bench fees *if they wish*.

Space

- 2.4 Access to appropriate desk space for research students features in a significant number of reports (Education, Environment, Health Sciences, History, Language and Linguistic Science, Law, TYMS, Mathematics, Politics, Sociology, SPSW). Whilst some departments (e.g. Education, Environment, Law) note improvements in the availability of desk space, others (e.g. Mathematics, SPSW) feel the situation is not improving or getting worse. Furthermore, there is some concern (e.g. Education, Mathematics, Health Sciences) that the space that is available (e.g. 'hot desks' split across several buildings or in inter-departmental spaces such as ReCSS and HRC) does not meet student or departmental expectations (permanent desk spaces with networked computers within a department's

main building). Language and Linguistic Science also notes the impact of a lack of a communal area on informal research student and staff interaction (though acknowledging that this should improve as other space comes on stream).

ACTION: Chair to work with Directors of ReCSS, HRC and Library to ensure effective use of existing space, and to commission a PGR space review during 2016-17 (when the new teaching block is in use).

Research degree provision delivered in partnership

- 2.5 The Biology report highlights a need to streamline the management, administration and financing of inter-departmental and inter-university partnerships for research degree provision. Given that the partnership model of research funding is likely to increase, it is important that University policies, procedures and systems facilitate successful partnership working. The Committee should note that for future partnership bids, YGRS approval is required and this should help to ensure that good practice is adopted and mistakes avoided.

ACTION: Graduate Administrators Forum to identify current practical difficulties relating to delivering research degree provision in partnership, and to put forward suggestions for how such partnerships could be dealt with more efficiently and effectively in future. Issues identified, and suggestions made, by the Graduate Administrators Forum to be discussed at the YGRS executive group. Open meeting for departments to discuss working in partnership (future plans, perceived challenges etc.) to be held in 2016/2017.

Changes to annual progression

- 2.6 A couple of reports (Education, CMS) are positive about the introduction of annual progression points for PhD/MPhil programmes but some (Education, Chemistry, History) flag concerns about the workload implication. History's report also raises some concerns about staff involvement in the process but the Committee should note that these concerns were addressed in the final version of the annual progression procedure.

ACTION: Chair to work closely with departments to ensure that the implementation of annual progression points is successful and does not create an unmanageable burden for staff.

Progress monitoring

- 2.7 Practical difficulties relating to the recording and monitoring of formal supervision meetings and/or TAP meetings feature in a number of reports (Archaeology, Education, Environment, History, Philosophy, Physics, TFTV). The Committee should note that the introduction of SkillsForge for the recording of supervision and TAP meetings should address the concerns raised.

Research skills and professional development

- 2.8 Some departments (Education, Health Sciences, Psychology) highlight research students' desire for more training in research skills, and/or provide information about the training provided (Economics, Electronics, TYMS, Mathematics, Physics, TFTV). Chemistry provides details of its new cohort based training programme. Two reports (Archaeology, CMS) highlight the need to improve careers support and advice for research students.

ACTION: Chair to lead, in 2016/2017, the development of a University approach to Training Needs Analysis and its monitoring for research students covering research skills, professional skills, and employability.

Postgraduates Who Teach (PGWT)

- 2.9 A number of reports (Archaeology, Environment, History of Art, Politics, Psychology, TFTV) note concerns about the support that PGWT receive for teaching (although it should be noted that the numbers responding to this question in the PRES survey are often small), and action (also English) being taken to improve support for PGWT. The reports from Chemistry and History highlight good practice in PGWT training.

ACTION: Good practice with respect to PGWT support and training to be shared at the Graduate Administrators Forum and with PGWT Coordinators. Chair to ask RDT to look

at whether History's Preparing to Teach VLE site might be a model that could be rolled out more widely across the University. Chair to ask UTC to review the University Policy on PGWT to check that it is sufficiently robust, and to remind departments of their responsibilities regarding the implementation of the Policy.

Integration into an active research community/culture

- 2.10 A number of reports (Archaeology, Environment, Health Sciences, Language and Linguistic Science, Sociology, SPSW, TFTV) highlight feedback from the PRES survey indicating that some research students do not feel part of an active research community/culture and/or highlight action being taken to improve research student integration (additionally History, Music, Philosophy). Some reports (Environment, Health Sciences, Philosophy, Psychology, Sociology, TFTV) note that students do not feel they have sufficient opportunity to engage with a wider research community beyond their department.

ACTION: Chair to work with research students and the GSA to identify what an active research community/culture looks like from the perspective of a research student, in different disciplines, and to use this information to advise departments. Chair to remind departments to identify for students (e.g. at induction, in handbooks, through the supervisory process etc.) how they can become involved in a broader research culture (e.g. inter-departmental and inter-university networks, events and other opportunities).

Supervision

- 2.11 Positive PRES feedback on supervision is highlighted in several reports (Archaeology, Language and Linguistic Science, SPSW) but Computer Science and TFTV report that the PRES raises some concerns about supervision. TYMS highlights the need to grow its pool of supervisors to reduce the load on certain individuals.

ACTION: Chair to offer support to departments where appropriate, and to encourage all departments to send their research supervisors, both new and experienced, on the research supervisor masterclasses offered by RDT.

PhD completion rate statistics

- 2.12 Questions are raised about the University's data on PhD completion rates e.g. around the treatment of students granted leave of absence (Archaeology) and the benchmarking of data (Education).

ACTION: Chair to flag queries to the Business Intelligence Unit, though some of this may be due to erroneous data being provided by BIU to Senate last year.

New programme developments

- 2.13 A number of departments flag new research degree programmes in the pipeline:
- Education: distance learning PhD
 - Health Sciences: a PhD targeted at nurses, midwives and other allied health professionals
 - Health Sciences: distance learning PhDs (clinical and non-clinical)
 - TFTV: Masters by Research (submitted to Planning Committee).