

UNIVERSITY OF YORK

YORK GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

Policies and Programmes Sub-Committee

**Annual Programme Review (APR) 2016/17 Summary Report:
Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes and Students**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This paper summarises issues identified from the 2016/2017 Annual Programme Review (APR) reports that relate to postgraduate research (PGR) degree programmes. The paper aims to identify where issues require action, and also note where issues have been, or are the process of being, resolved. A number of actions have been carried over from the last academic year.
- 1.2. This paper only highlights issues that are common across a number of departments or require consideration or action at University level. A final version of this paper (incorporating any comments from the Committee) will be circulated to Chairs of Boards of Studies and Graduate School Boards.
- 1.3. Departments will also receive a brief individual response to their APR report that references this paper where appropriate but also addresses departmental issues that are not covered here. Where departmental issues are considered to be of particular concern (e.g. the issue of supervision raised by Computer Science, collegiality in the PGR community raised by Philosophy, or the low PRES scores recorded by Sociology) the Chair will contact the department concerned for a discussion. Issues for the attention of relevant services (e.g. Information Services, RSA, Marketing, Student Recruitment and Admissions) will be referred on for information and/or response.

2. ISSUES RAISED

Focus of the APR reports

- 2.1 The 2016/2017 PGR APR questions were revised to avoid duplication with the Annual Departmental Research Review (ADDR) process. A small number of departments (CMS, English, History, Psychology) raised issues around PGR recruitment and funding that should instead be raised via the ADDR process.
- 2.2 The Postgraduate Research Student Experience Survey (PRES) was conducted in 2016/2017 and the majority of departments provided (as requested) a helpful commentary in their APR report on significant issues arising from the survey. Many departments acknowledge the poor response rate on this occasion.

Desk space for PGR students

- 2.3 As in previous years, concerns about access to appropriate desk space for research students feature in a number of reports (Archaeology, CMS, Environment, Health Sciences, Law, TYMS, Mathematics, Philosophy, Physics, Politics, Sociology), with several departments highlighting the negative impact of the lack of desk space and/or highly distributed desk space on the sense of PGR student community.

ACTION: Timetabling will undertake the planned PGR space review during 2018.

Progression policy

- 2.4 The first year of the implementation of the new PGR student progression policy appears to have been a success, with many departments reporting positively on this issue (Archaeology, Biology, Chemistry, CMS, CWS, Computer Science, Economics, Education, Electronic Engineering, Health Sciences, History, Language and Linguistic Science, Philosophy, Politics, Sociology, TFTV). Challenges, including strict deadlines (History of Art), running two systems concurrently (TFTV) and staff workload (English, History of Art) are noted, and one department (History of Art) suggests that that new policy has led to increased pressure on students. A number of departments (English, Health Sciences, Law, Philosophy) are considering making changes to their department's PGR progression procedures in the light of their experience.

ACTIONS: RSA will undertake the planned light touch review of the policy on PGR student progression in 2018 to identify required policy and systems improvements.

RSA will remind departments that they can make changes to those aspects of PGR student progression that fall under departmental control but that approval for any changes must be sought from PPSC (NB these will normally be dealt with by Chair's action for speed and convenience).

SkillsForge

- 2.5 A significant number of departments (Archaeology, Biology, Chemistry, Economics, Education, History of Art, TYMS, Mathematics, Philosophy, Physics, Psychology) note that whilst the use of SkillsForge (and the associated system YellowFin) is becoming more embedded, there are practical issues that need to be resolved. Detailed comments, including suggestions for system improvements, will be sent to RSA for consideration.

ACTION: RSA will continue to work on improving the functionality of SkillsForge and Yellowfin, taking into account departmental feedback, and communicating changes to departments via the regular SkillsForge newsletter.

Research training and professional development

- 2.6 A commendable number of departments (Archaeology, Biology, CMS, Economics, Education, Health Sciences, History, Language and Linguistic Science, Mathematics, Physics, Psychology, Sociology) comment on employability and careers advice for PGR students, highlighting action being taken to improve provision in this area (e.g. for non-academic career paths) and/or acknowledging the need for further input.

- 2.7 A small number of departments (Biology, Chemistry, Psychology) provide updates on the provision of research skills training, whilst others (CSW, English, History, Sociology) raise questions about what research skill training should be delivered at University or Faculty level rather than at departmental level.

ACTIONS: YGRS to develop a University approach to Training Needs Analysis and its monitoring for PGR students covering research skills, professional skills, and employability.

A summary of the careers-related comments from APR will be sent to the Employability Operations Group as a paper from PPSC; this will highlight the need for dedicated

specialist resources within Careers to support departments in their work with PGR students.

Research community

- 2.8 An encouraging number of departments (including Education, Environment, Language and Linguistic Science, Mathematics, TYMS, Philosophy, Politics) report on ongoing work (often prompted, at least in part, by PRES results) to ensure that PGR students feel integrated into an active research community.

Student well-being

- 2.9 A number of departments report on new initiatives to enhance PGR student well-being, including Graduate Office drop-in sessions (Biology), cohort meetings (Biology, Electronic Engineering), a welfare session as part of the PGR training programme (Chemistry), additional support for international PGR students (Chemistry), weekly socials (Environment), and a greater focus on the needs of part-time students (Health Sciences). Two departments flag PGR student mental health (Education, Physics).

ACTION: YGRS to add PGR student well-being and mental health to its key objectives.

New forms of PGR provision

- 2.10 Archaeology, Computer Science, Education, and History of Art highlight work being undertaken to establish their distance learning PhD programmes. Economics and Physics are considering whether an integrated PhD programme might help to accommodate essential training. Archaeology, Biology, Chemistry, and Health Sciences note collaborative PhD provision, with Archaeology and Chemistry highlighting the need for specialist advice and support.

ACTION: It is proposed that the planned light-touch review of distance learning PhD provision will now take place in 2018/2019 when all of the approved distance learning PhD programmes will be in full operation, and the planned light-touch review of joint and double PhD provision will now take place in late 2018 after the first joint PhD students have undergone their final examination.

Availability of Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) positions

- 2.11 A small number of departments (Archaeology, English, CWS, Music) report on attempts to maintain or increase GTA opportunities for PGR students. Conversely, some departments (Chemistry, Computer Science, Electronic Engineering) are struggling to attract sufficient GTAs.

PGR representation and administration

- 2.12 A number of departments report positively on the role of PGR student representatives (Computer Science, Education, Environment, Health Sciences, Language and Linguistic Science, TYMS, Philosophy, Physics, Sociology, SPSW). Three departments report on new administrative (English) and governance (Law, Sociology) structures to give PGR matters greater focus/prominence.
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