Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on Tuesday 9 December 2008 at 2.15 pm in Room HG15, Heslington Hall.

Present: Professor Alastair Fitter, PVC Research and Chair
Professor Trevor Sheldon, DVC and Chair UTC
Dr David Efird, Chair SCA
Dr Carl Thompson, Provost of Wentworth Graduate College
Dr Pat Ansell, Health Sciences
Dr Gulcin Ozkan, Economics
Dr Roddy Vann, Physics
Dr Michael White, History of Art
Ms Davita Berberogul, Graduate Students Association

In attendance: Mrs Rosemary Goerisch, Student Progress: SAS
Dr Jennifer Winters, Graduate Training Unit
Ms Gillian Lindsey, Registry Services, SAS
Ms Anna Grey, Research Policy Office

08/68 Apologies for absence
Apologies were received from Professor Gabrielle Griffin, Women’s Studies; Dr Robin Woffitt, Sociology; Dr Jane Clarbour, Psychology; Rosemary Royds: SAS; and Philip Simison SAS.

CATEGORY I BUSINESS
08/69 Minutes
The Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 28 October 2008.

08/70 Matters arising from the minutes
1. Council Tax Exemption (M08/23)
   A procedure for enabling research students in the continuation year to apply for Council Tax exemption is still outstanding.
2. Four–year Degree Programmes (M08/34)
   Further proposals will be received at the next meeting of the Board.
3. Collaborative Research Degree Programmes (M08/57, 08/25)
   A revised proposal is still outstanding.
4. PhD Submission Rates (M08/59)
   Professor Fitter has written to departments with low submissions rates or high withdrawal rates asking for reasons or comments.
Responses will be considered at the next meeting of the Board.

08/71 Proposed new MPhil/PhD programme in Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine

The Board received a proposal for a new programme in Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine from the Graduate School Board in Biology. Dr Leo Caves, Chair of the Graduate School Board in Biology was present for the discussion.

This new programme is a three year MPhil/PhD provided by the department of Biology as part of the White Rose Doctoral training Centre. Entry is restricted to students who have successfully completed a 'Probationary Research Student’ preliminary year of Research, Specialist Training and Professional Development Activities in the Doctoral Training Centre based in Leeds. This preliminary year’s study is based on 180 credits. The Board requested details of any early exit awards should candidates fail to successfully complete the MPhil/PhD programme. 

Action: Dr Caves

During the preliminary year and the first year of the MPhil/PhD programme students are expected to select from a range of training modules offered at York, Sheffield and Leeds. The Board requested details of the procedures for allocating financial resources between centres. 

Action: Dr Caves

The Board noted that a high proportion of the training modules offered at York were at undergraduate level and recommended that these were changed for modules more tailored to the needs of first year doctoral students; or, a rationale be provided for retaining the current list of modules.

Action: Dr Caves

It was further noted that no details were provided on the process for the allocation of supervisors for the MPhil/PhD. Information on this issue and a copy of the memorandum of understanding was requested to enable an assessment of the University’s commitment to the programme.

Action: Dr Caves

The Chair noted that there was no procedure currently in place to prevent a request for external funding going forward prior to the programme being approved by the Board, as had happened in this case. The Board requested that a small group be convened to submit a proposed procedure to the Board for consideration to ensure this situation does not arise again.

Action: R Goerisch
Postgraduate Admissions Policy and Procedures

The Chair noted that the University had not had such a policy previously and thanked the Assistant Registrar: Registry Services for the work she had done on constructing the policy. The policy would now ensure that equity and consistency was applied to the processing of applications and it would be available to both staff and students.

The Board decided that: an overarching statement stating that the policy should be read in conjunction with the Code of Practice on Research Degree Programmes should be added to the introduction; that ‘apply at least six weeks prior’ should be replaced by a more general statement recommending early applications; an insertion highlighting the need to apply early for funded places; and that in regard to the training of departmental admissions staff a statement be added that, ‘it is expected they will attend the training.’

Action: G Lindsey

The Board considered the need to retain two academic references in the application process. Academic transcripts are provided by most institutions which seems to negate the need for references that in some cases have little academic value. The Board decided that departments should be consulted on the matter and responses considered before a decision is made.

The Board also considered the recommendation that the need for applicants to provide evidence of funding for the duration of their programme be removed. It was decided that it should remain. The suggestion that deposits should be requested from students intending to study at York when they receive their offer of a place was considered. It was decided that this issue and that of academic references should be considered at a Graduate Chairs Forum to be held in February/March.

Action: A Fitter/P Simison

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2007/8

The Board received the summary of findings and thanked the Student Systems Manager for compiling the report. The Chair noted that this is the only the second year the survey had been conducted which made it difficult to assess trends and the significance of the results. The Board decided that it would be appropriate for the Chair to contact a number of comparator institutions to invite them to compare results and write jointly to the Higher Education Academy recommending a restructuring of the questionnaire. Action: A Fitter
Appendix 2 of the report details issues to be addressed by academic departments and support services. The Chair reported that the Careers Service is considering the feedback on career planning in their review of the service; and the Library is working with departments on an action plan to address the feedback on inadequacies in the library provision. The Chair will be inviting departments to comment on the ways they are going to address the issues raised in the survey. Their responses will be considered at a future meeting. Action: A Fitter

08/74 Teleconferencing of Research Students’ Oral Examinations
The Board received a copy of the policy on the teleconferencing of research students’ oral examinations previously approved by SCA. The Board requested that the SCA consider adding two further points to this policy; firstly, that departments must give assurance at the application stage that they have access to the appropriate technology to conduct the teleconferencing and that it is reliable; secondly, that the internal examiner is responsible for stopping the viva should any unforeseen problems occur. Action: D Efird

CATEGORY II BUSINESS

08/75 Departmental Allocation of Roberts funding 2008-9
The Board received details of the allocation for 2008-9 and the report on the use of Roberts funds in 2007/8.

08/76 Report on Graduate Training Unit Activities
The Board received the report and update on the GTU activities for 2007/8.

08/77 Graduate Awards Committee
The Board received and approved the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2008.

08/78 Date of the next meeting
The Board noted the date of the next meeting as Tuesday 27 January 2009 at 2.15 pm in Room HG15, Heslington Hall.