UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 25 February 2003.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.W. Ellis (Chair)
Professor G. De Fraja
Professor E.R. Hancock
Professor G.J. Hitch
Professor S. Jackson
Dr P.M. Lee
Dr S.J. Marshall
Dr L. Smith
Professor J.C. Sparrow
Dr E.M. Tyler

In attendance: Mr D.D. Lauder (European Liaison Officer) (for M03/19 only)
Dr F.M.K. Campbell (Graduate Recruitment Officer)
Miss N.J. Cooper-Harvey (President, Graduate Students’ Association)
Ms K. Halliday
Dr S.J. Hutchinson (Graduate Student Training Officer)
Ms C. Rees (Careers Director)
Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Professor B.C. Gilbert
Professor C. Godfrey
Miss A.E. Hollings

03/18 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2003, amended by the addition of the name of Professor E.R. Hancock to the list of those present, were approved and signed.

03/19 EU mobility programmes (Marie Curie Fellowships)

Mr David Lauder, the European Liaison Officer, gave a presentation on EU mobility programmes (Marie Curie Fellowships) (agendum 3).

Under the latest round (Framework VI) of these programmes, the University was invited to submit applications for the funding of projects, at PhD and postdoctoral level, by early April 2003. Applications should be submitted through Mr Lauder. It was important to ensure that the funding for PhD fellowships covered the tuition fee. Eligible areas were predominantly in the sciences, but also included the social sciences and humanities. Candidates for funded projects had to be non-UK, though not necessarily EU, nationals.

Mr Lauder was to lead a workshop on writing applications on 12 March.

03/20 HEFCs report on improving standards in postgraduate research degree programmes
Arising out of M02/46, the Board received (agendum 5a) a draft response to the HEFCs report on improving standards in postgraduate research degree programmes, which had now been issued as a consultation document. With minor amendments, the draft response was approved.

03/21 Draft policy on research degree programmes

Arising out of M03/3, the Board received a further draft of the policy on research degree programmes (agendum 5b).

The Board approved the following amendments:

**Thesis advisory panels**

The second paragraph to end: “Meetings of the thesis advisory panel will be additional to formal supervisory meetings. The thesis advisory panel is required to meet only during the student’s normal registration period.”

**Upgrading**

The third paragraph to read: “Decisions on whether or not a student should transfer to PhD registration will be made on the basis of a recommendation by the thesis advisory panel. To inform its judgement, the panel should have available to it (i) evidence that the research is under way and that appropriate research training has been completed; (ii) a substantial piece of written work by the student; (iii) a coherent and realistic plan for the completion and submission of the thesis within the registration period.”

**Suspensions of registration**

This section should make it clear that suspensions of registration would be granted subject, where appropriate, to the approval of the research council or other funding body concerned.

**Dissemination of research results**

This section should make reference to students’ being encouraged to make presentations in the University and at external meetings, as well as to different audiences (e.g., academic peers, undergraduate students, school pupils), and to their receiving appropriate training for this purpose. It should also refer to students’ being encouraged to submit work for publication during the course of their studies, if appropriate.

**Feedback from students**

This section should make reference to the requirement that the recommendation for transfer to PhD registration should include a report based on the student’s comments on the quality of the supervision and on the student/supervisor relationship.

**Evaluation of programmes**

This section should make reference to the role of the Board for Graduate Schools in monitoring submission rates, training, and upgrading and examiners’ reports.
Role of research students in teaching and demonstrating

Dr Marshall and Miss Cooper-Harvey agreed to prepare an expanded draft of this section based on the paper by the Graduate Students’ Association and the Staff Development Office on the role of graduate teaching assistants.

It was agreed that the draft policy should be completed by the end of March and circulated to departments in time for their comments to be considered at the Board’s next meeting. The final version of the policy should be submitted to the Senate for approval in July.

03/22 Working Party on Research Training

The Board agreed to appoint the following as members of the Working Party on Research Training (agendum 5c):

Professor A.W. Ellis (Chair)
Professor R. Burrows (subject to his agreement)
Professor G. De Fraja
Dr S.J. Hutchinson
Ms C. Rees
Dr L. Smith
Professor J.C. Sparrow

The purpose of the Working Party was to compare the training currently offered to research students - centrally and by departments - with what was required by external bodies including the research councils, with a view to developing an institutional policy.

The Board agreed that the Working Party should work in tandem with the Teaching Committee’s Student Skills Working Party - of which Dr Hutchinson and Ms Rees were also members - with a view to putting forward unified recommendations.

++03/23 Degree of MPhil: draft criteria

Arising out of M03/8, the Board approved the proposal (agendum 5d) that the criteria for the MPhil degree should consist of the those required for masters courses in the National Qualifications Framework, with the addition of the following:

• a good general knowledge of the field of study;
• a comprehensively particular knowledge of some part or aspect of the field of study;
• the general ability to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the generation of knowledge, applications or understanding of the discipline; and
• some original contribution to knowledge or understanding.

(The third additional criterion was adapted from the descriptors for qualifications at doctoral level in the National Qualifications Framework. The other additional criteria...
were drawn from the formulation previously agreed by the University regarding the level of attainment required for the MPhil. The Board agreed that the following criterion, drawn from the descriptors for qualifications at doctoral level in the National Qualifications Framework and proposed by the University’s NQF Working Group as an additional criterion for the MPhil, should not be adopted:

- [the ability to] continue to undertake research and development at an advanced level, contributing to the development of new techniques, ideas or approaches.

With regard to the options available to examiners, the Board agreed that the PhD examiners’ report should include the criteria for the award of both PhD (as set out in the National Qualifications Framework and in Regulation 2.5(a)(iii)) and MPhil degrees (as set out above), and give examiners the option (as at present) of recommending the award of the MPhil degree rather than the PhD, providing the candidate has satisfied the criteria for the MPhil degree set out on the report form. The criteria for the award of PhD and MPhil degrees would also be included in the Notes of Guidance on the Degrees of MPhil and PhD.

The proposed criteria for the award of the degrees of MPhil and PhD are set out in Appendix 1, and are recommended to the Senate for approval.

03/24 Postgraduate recruitment strategy

The Board received the draft report from the Graduate Recruitment Officer on progress with implementation of the postgraduate recruitment strategy (agendum 6). The report was to be submitted to the Planning Committee.

The Board approved the following amendments:

Section 2a
Add that submission rate statistics would be submitted to the Board for Graduate Schools.

Section 2b
Add that proposals for new taught postgraduate courses should include information on the number of applicants and entrants to other courses offered by the department concerned, and on whether admissions to other recently approved courses had met forecasts.

Section 4a
Add the number of applications per day received at the same time in the previous year.

Section 4b
Specify the budget required for the same number of awards in 2004/05 and 2005/06 as in 2003/04.

Section 4c
Omit.

In connection with section 4b, it was suggested that the Awards Sub-Committee should consider whether some University research awards should consist solely of fee waivers.
03/25 Annual report on activities of Graduate Student Training Officer

The Board received the annual report on the activities of the Graduate Student Training Officer, Dr Hutchinson (agendum 7).

The Board noted the very substantial increase (120%), since 2000/01, in the numbers of Graduate Teaching Assistants for whom Dr Hutchinson provided training, either centrally or through departments. The Board was reminded that the post of Graduate Student Training Officer had been established with funding secured by the Teaching Committee from the HEFCE’s Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund. Dr Hutchinson had also been given responsibility for the Research Students Transferable Skills and Research Management Programme.

The Board agreed in principle that the post of Graduate Student Training Officer should be a permanent one, with secretarial support and a budget to cover operational costs; and that the funding from the Teaching Quality Enhancement Fund should be used to provide an assistant to help deliver Graduate Teaching Assistant training. It was agreed that, before a proposal to this effect was formulated, the original job description for the post should be revisited, and that the proportion of time to be spent on departmental training should be specified. The question whether departments should be charged for departmental training should also be considered, and a comparison made with the provision at other institutions.

03/26 Generic training opportunities for research students

The Board received for information a paper from the Graduate Student Training Officer clarifying the generic training opportunities for research students (agendum 8).

03/27 Overseas postgraduate students and language training

The Board received a paper from the Graduate Student Training Officer and the Graduate Recruitment Officer on the rise in overseas postgraduate student numbers and their English language proficiency (agendum 9). The paper drew attention to the numerous approaches received by the Graduate Student Training Officer from departments to offer help to research students whose English proficiency was inadequate for writing a thesis. The Graduate Student Training Officer also felt that many overseas students who attended generic training sessions were unable to communicate effectively in English.

It was agreed that the Graduate Student Training Officer should not be offering support for students who had difficulties with English, or one-to-one training.

The Board noted the minimum levels of English proficiency required for admission to postgraduate programmes at York. These were comparable with those set by some other universities, but lower than those set by others. It was agreed to consider at the next meeting raising the required levels, after seeking the views of the International Officer on the effects this might have on overseas recruitment.

03/28 Proposal for accreditation of prior learning for MA course in Education (by research)
The Board received a proposal from the Department of Educational Studies that candidates who had completed the Postgraduate Diploma in Literacy and Dyslexia (offered by the Dyslexia Institute and validated by the University of York) or the National Professional Qualification for Headship (offered by the National College for School Leadership) should be admitted to a shortened version of the MA course in Education (by research). Such candidates would be registered for four terms (rather than six), pay two-thirds of the tuition fee, and would submit a dissertation of 15,000 words (rather than 25,000).

It was noted that a similar proposal, for exemption from three 20-credit modules of the taught MA course in Primary Education, had been approved by the Teaching Committee, under Regulation 2.2. The Chair of the Teaching Committee had referred the proposal regarding the MA course in Education (by research), as a research course, to the Board for consideration.

The Board noted that Regulation 2.2 provided for exemption from specified modules, not exceeding 50% of the total credit value of the course, on the basis of equivalent prior learning. Where such exemption was granted, candidates completed the remaining modules in the normal way.

The Board felt that there was a difference between a taught course and a research course in this respect. Given that a research course was assessed wholly on the basis of a thesis or dissertation of specified scope and length, it was felt that it would be inappropriate to award the degree for a thesis or dissertation of reduced scope or length. The Board was prepared, however, to approve a reduction in the duration of the course or of the fee payable.

It was agreed to inform the Department that the Board was prepared to review this matter in the light of any comments the Department wished to make.

03/29 Annual report on academic appeals and complaints

The Board received a report on academic appeals and complaints lodged by graduate students in the year 2001/02 (agendum 11). It was noted that ten appeals had been received; in five cases, *prima facie* grounds of appeal had not been established in the judgement of the Chair of the relevant committee; in one case the department had agreed not to contest the appeal; in three cases the appeal had been heard and dismissed; and in one case the appeal had been withdrawn. Five complaints had been received.

It was noted that the number of appeals received annually over the last eight years had shown no trend either towards increase or decrease. The average number of appeals received each year was just under 7.

03/30 Selection panel for ORS awards

It was noted that a panel (comprising the Chair and three members of the Board, one from each subject area) would need to be appointed to select candidates for nomination for ORS awards in May (agendum 12). It was agreed to authorise the Chair to appoint members to the panel.
++03/31 Membership of the Board

It was reported that the Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment had agreed to serve as a member of the Board. It was agreed to recommend to the Senate that the Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment should serve as an ex officio member of the Board, pointing out that the Chair of the Graduate and Undergraduate Studies Committee had served as an ex officio member of the Board until September 2002.

03/32 Next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 17 June 2003 at 2.15pm.