Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 27 January 2004.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.W. Ellis (Chair)
         The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment (Dr T.J. Crawford)
         Professor C.A. Godfrey
         Professor E.R. Hancock
         Professor G.J. Hitch
         Professor S. Jackson
         Dr P.M. Lee
         Mr O. Lisagor
         Dr J.E. Nuechterlein
         Professor J.C. Sparrow
         Mr S.I. Stafford
         Miss J. Winter

In attendance: Dr F.M.K. Campbell (Graduate Recruitment Officer)
               Ms C. Rees (Careers Director)
               Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Dr L. Smith
          Dr S.J. Hutchinson

04/1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2003 were approved (agendum 2), subject to the addition of the following as the final sentence of the third paragraph of M03/93:

“Other members of the Board expressed reservations about the extent to which skills training should be compulsory.”

It was noted that the policy on research training (M03/92) was to be considered at Senate on 3 February 2004. It was agreed that, following approval by Senate, the policy should be circulated to departmental graduate chairs and should be publicised on the web and through the University Magazine and a briefing note. It was also agreed that the Board should monitor implementation of the policy, e.g., through participation in the Teaching Committee’s departmental visits.

It was noted that the policy on postgraduates who teach (M03/94) was also to be considered at Senate on 3 February 2004.

04/2 Language support for overseas students

Arising out of MM03/47 and 67, the Board received a report from the Teaching
Committee on English language support for overseas students (agendum 3). It was noted that the Committee had agreed to bring the matter to the attention of the Student Welfare Committee and of the International Students Committee.

Given that the issue had particular implications for graduate students, and that an urgent review of provision was desirable, the Board agreed to set up a working party to review the University’s English language entry requirements and the provision of language support, and to produce costed recommendations before October 2004. It was agreed that the working party should consist of the following members:

- Professor A.W. Ellis (Chair)
- Professor R.J. Andrews (Head of Department of Educational Studies)
- Ms A.V. Hughes (Acting Director of the EFL Unit)
- Mr S.J. Willis (International Officer)
- Professor B.C. Gilbert (or another member of the Teaching Committee)
- A representative of the Graduate Students’ Association
- Dr F.M.K. Campbell (Graduate Recruitment Officer)

04/3 Graduate student application and entrant statistics 2001-03

The Board received graduate student application and entrant statistics for 2001, 2002 and 2003 (agendum 4; Appendix 1).

It was noted that applications had risen by 23% between 2002 and 2003. This followed a 26% increase the previous year and resulted in an overall increase of 51% since 2001.

The number of overseas applications had risen by 37% from 2002 to 2003 (following an increase of 50% from 2001 to 2002). The number of overseas applications for 2003 entry (5109fte) exceeded the total number of applications for 2001 entry (4932fte).

Applications from home students had increased by about 6% between 2002 and 2003, while applications from EU students had fallen by about 8%. This fall reflected a national trend, and was likely to be reversed with the accession of ten new countries to the EU in 2004.

MPhil/PhD applications had increased by 25% between 2002 and 2003.

The ‘conversion rate’ had worsened slightly from 4.9 applicants:1 entrant to 5.3 applicants:1 entrant, mainly due to an increase in overseas application numbers. In this connection, it was noted that 27% of applications had been for Economics, resulting in over-subscription for a few courses. The ‘conversion rate’ for home applicants had remained steady at 2.2:1, while for EU students it had improved to 4.9:1.

The number of entrants had increased by 13.7% from 2002 to 2003. Five departments had increases of over 20% in entrant numbers, and three had increases of 10%-20%. Two new courses - MA in Language Learning and Education, and MSc in Applied Forensic Psychology - had recruited 38 and 20 entrants respectively. A number of taught courses had recruited fewer than 3 entrants; some of these were to be withdrawn or significantly revised.

In the course of discussion, members of the Board questioned whether the provision of study facilities - particularly for taught masters students - was keeping pace with
the increase in student numbers. It was agreed to draw this issue to the attention of the Planning Committee, the Policy and Resources Committee and the Student Welfare Committee, and to ask them to consider the implications of increasing graduate student numbers.

It was agreed to suggest that, in future editions of the graduate prospectus, references to Communication Studies should be incorporated in the entries of the parent departments, rather than form a separate entry.

04/4 Working Party on Research Training

The record of the meeting of the Working Party on Research Training held on 16 January 2004 was received (agendum 5).

Professor Sparrow, the Chair of the Working Party, reported that the research councils (and the AHBB) were providing additional funding to enhance skills training for research students and postdoctoral researchers. It was possible that the HEFCE might provide additional funding in respect of research students who were not publicly funded. Provision for overseas students would need to be funded from overseas fees or by increasing the overseas fee. There was an expectation on the part of the research councils that enhanced skills training would be provided for all research students, but not at the expense of those who were publicly funded. The research councils required a single annual report on the use made of the additional funding; it was understood that universities were expected to develop their provision during 2003/04, but to make full provision during 2004/05. The Working Party’s remit was the provision of skills training for research students, but it was working in close consultation with the Teaching Committee’s Student Skills Working Party, chaired by Dr Allen Warren.

The Board noted that, in order to make cost-effective use of the additional funding, and given the need for a single annual report, it was intended that a substantial proportion of the funds should be used to enhance central generic provision, with some funds possibly disbursed to departments.

The paper from the Graduate Students’ Association appended to the record was noted. It was agreed that no decision could yet be taken on the extent to which skills training should be mandatory.

In conclusion, it was agreed to ascertain what additional funding was being provided by the Medical Research Council.

04/5 Visit by ESRC Training Board

It was reported that the ESRC Training Board would be visiting the University on Friday 7 May 2004 (agendum 6). Professor Ellis, Professor Mendus and Mr Simison were co-ordinating the arrangements for the visit.

04/6 Proposal for appointment of Deputy Chair

The Board approved the proposal for the appointment of a Deputy Chair, to chair meetings of the Board in the absence of, or at the request of, the Chair; and to have particular responsibility for matters affecting individuals (including the consideration of appeals by graduate students) and for amendments to the Ordinances and
Regulations (agendum 7).

The Board also approved the proposal for consequential changes to its terms of reference and to Regulation 2.9(e).

The Board agreed to recommend that Senate should approve the proposal (attached as Appendix 2) and should appoint Professor J.C. Sparrow to serve as Deputy Chair of the Board with immediate effect.

04/7 ORS awards scheme: interim report on 2003 competition

The Board received the interim report from ORS on the awards scheme in 2003 (agendum 8).

It was noted that York’s success rate in the competition had been 67% (10 out of 15), compared with an overall national average of 58%.

It was also noted that the deadline for applications in 2004 had been brought forward to 31 January, which might have an effect on the number of applications received. The scheme had been advertised at York through offer letters and on the web.

04/8 Appointment of ORS selection panel

The Board agreed to appoint the following members to serve on a panel to select applicants to nominate to the ORS Committee:

Professor G.J. Hitch
Professor E.R. Hancock
Professor S.F. Jackson
Dr J.E. Nuechterlein

04/9 Bologna Process

The Board received, from the Teaching Committee, a paper on the Bologna Process prepared by Ms C.K. Chima of the International Office (agendum 10).

It was noted that among the possible outcomes of the Process were the adoption of three-year undergraduate programmes and two-year postgraduate masters programmes as a norm. It was agreed that UK universities would need to be vocal in their defence of four-year undergraduate and one-year postgraduate masters programmes. In this connection it was noted that the Bologna Process had not been mentioned in the government’s recent White Paper on the future of higher education and that there had been no change in national legislation in response to the Process.

04/10 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 2 March 2004.