Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 25 January 2005.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.H. Fitter (Chair)
The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment, Dr T.J. Crawford
The Provost of Wentworth Graduate College, Dr P.M. Lee
Professor C.A. Godfrey
Mr O. Lisagor
Dr G.D. Low
Professor J.C. Sparrow
Professor M. Taylor
Dr G. Tsoulas
Miss J. Winter
Dr R. Wooffitt

In attendance: Dr F.M.K. Campbell (Graduate Recruitment Officer)
Dr K.V. Clegg (Senior Graduate Training Officer)
Miss C. Rees
Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Miss C. Bell
Professor E.R. Hancock
Dr J.E. Nuechterlein
Professor T.A. Sheldon

05/1 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 November 2004 were approved.

05/2 Periodic review visits and research students

Arising out of M04/54, the proposed procedure for the inclusion of the research student experience in periodic review visits was approved (agendum 3a).

05/3 Membership of Working Party on Academic Misconduct by Research Students

Arising out of M04/74, it was noted that Professor Graham Hitch (Psychology), Dr Ros Temple (Language) and Miss Jennifer Winter (GSA) had agreed to serve on the Working Party on Academic Misconduct by Research Students, and the Board approved their appointment (agendum 3b). A further member of staff, from a social sciences department, was to be appointed.
05/4 Working Party on Feedback

Professor Sparrow reported that he was to serve on the Teaching Committee’s Working Party on Feedback.

05/5 Priorities of Special Cases Committee and Standing Committee on Assessment

The Board noted the priorities for 2004/05 of the Special Cases Committee and the Standing Committee on Assessment (agendum 05).

05/6 Proposal for joint doctoral programme in Archaeology with l’Université Paul Cézanne (Aix-Marseille III)

The Board received a proposal from the Graduate School Board in Archaeology for a joint doctoral programme in Archaeology between the University of York and l’Université Paul Cézanne (Aix-Marseille III) (agendum 5). It also received a copy of the University’s agreed procedure for proposing joint graduate programmes. Dr Kevin Walsh (Archaeology) was present at the meeting to answer questions.

In the course of discussion, a number of points were raised:

(i) in paragraph (c)(1), the relationship between l’Université de Provence and l’Université Paul Cézanne (Aix-Marseille III) needed to be clarified. In addition, this paragraph should specify the minimum period to be spent by students at each of the two universities. The proposal should also specify (paragraph (d)(1)) that the two universities would co-ordinate arrangements for research training;

(ii) in paragraph (g), the fees payable to each university needed to be clarified, not only for AHRB-funded students, but for all other funded and self-financing students, whether UK, EU or overseas, who might register for the programme. The actual sums payable should be specified in the department’s annual graduate handbook. The word “minimal”, with reference to fees at l’Université Paul Cézanne, should be omitted;

(iii) with regard to appeals procedures, paragraph (i) appeared to conflict with paragraph (h);

(iv) in paragraph (j), clarification was needed that what was proposed was a joint programme leading to the award of a single joint degree, not two degrees;

(v) it should be made clear that the University of York’s policy on research degree programmes applied to students registered for this programme.
The Board thanked Dr Walsh for his attendance, approved the proposal in principle, but asked him to prepare a revised proposal for final approval by the Chair on the Board’s behalf.

05/7 Graduate student application and entrant statistics 2002-04

The Board received graduate student application and entrant statistics for 2002, 2003 and 2004 (agendum 6).

It was noted that applications had risen by 3% between 2003 and 2004. This increase was markedly lower than increases in previous years (over 20% each year), but had nevertheless resulted in a substantial number of applications (8,089). Most of the increase was in overseas applications.

The number of entrants in 2004 had remained almost steady but, because the increase in 2003 had been exceptional, still constituted a substantial increase (13%) on 2002. The very slight decrease on 2003 was due to a decrease in home entrants (40 fte), which reflected the national pattern.

Table 4 showed entrants by course in 2003 and 2004. The Chair agreed to write to departments which had courses with five entrants or fewer for their comments.

Graph 3 showed entrants by department over 2002-04. It was agreed that to ask that next year this information should be plotted against the size of the department, in terms of staff numbers.

A student member raised the question whether increases in student numbers in some departments were adequately matched by staffing levels. It was noted that staffing levels were a matter for the Planning Committee.

It was agreed that the application and entrant statistics should be sent for information to heads of departments and departmental graduate chairs.

05/8 Report from Senior Graduate Training Officer

Dr Karen Clegg, the Senior Graduate Training Officer, drew the following items to the Board’s attention (agendum 7, papers tabled at the meeting):

New HEFCE funding arrangements for research degree programmes

HEFCE was streamlining the way it funds postgraduate research degree programmes. From 200/5-06 it would operate a support stream for RDPs as a single element within quality-related (QR) funding, and pay from it a standard contribution to the costs of supervising home and EC research students.
Allocations from the new stream would be made by reference to numbers of home and EC postgraduate research students registered in units rated 4 or above at the 2001 RAE. New funding bands had been calculated which took into consideration the costs of supervision and central training in line with the QAA’s revised code of practice on RDPs. The funds were to be distributed as part of the block grant, and it would be at the institution’s discretion to decide whether a percentage was top-sliced for central training provision.

Proposal for the implementation of Graduate Professional Development

A proposed structure for the introduction of Graduate Professional Development portfolios was tabled for the Board’s information. The intention was to provide a framework, supported by the Graduate Training Office but in the hands of research students and thesis advisory panels, for research and professional development. It comprised induction, monitoring of progress before and at the time of transfer to PhD registration, and a final review of evidence of achievement, by the supervisory team and the examiners, at the time of the oral examination. The proposal was to be considered by the Committee on Research Skills Training, whose minutes would come to the Board in due course.

QAA special review of research degree programmes

At the request of the HEFCE, the QAA was to conduct a special review of postgraduate research degree programmes during 2005/06 in England and Wales. The QAA would be consulting institutions in February 2005 on the method to be used in this review, and it was expected that a questionnaire would be issued in October 2005 for return in March 2006. Following the review, the QAA might highlight good practice, make recommendations for an institution’s consideration, or - where provision was judged unsatisfactory - require further action.

05/9 Proposed changes to arrangements for continuation fees for MPhil/PhD students

The Board received a proposal for changes to arrangements for continuation fees for MPhil/PhD students (agenda 8).

Currently, students who exceeded the normal period of registration paid annual fees to retain their names on the long-term register, and to retain access to computing and library facilities, if required. Students paid these fees separately: the continuing registration fee to the Fees Office, the library and computing fees directly to the Library and Computing Service respectively.
The Board for Graduate Schools had agreed that a review of these arrangements should be a priority for 2004/05. Following consultation involving staff from the Graduate Schools Office, the Library, the Computing Service, the Fees Office and the Student Records Office, it was proposed that the current arrangements should be changed, as follows:

(a) There should be a single annual fee for MPhil/PhD students who exceeded the normal period of registration, rather than separate long term register, computing and library fees as at present. This would streamline the payment procedure for students, and would also reduce the administrative burden on the Computing Service and the Library. This change should take effect from October 2005.

(b) The fee would cover continuing registration, and access to computing and library facilities (borrowing only); access to inter-library loan facilities would be by separate payment to the Library.

The Board approved these proposals.

In addition, the Board agreed that - taking into account the costs of the continued supervision of these students, of the continued administration involved, and of the computing and library facilities provided - the annual fee should be set at £200 for 2005/06. (This figure was endorsed by the student members of the Board.)

It was agreed that the Graduate Schools Office should explore the feasibility of waiving, or refunding, the continuation fee where a student submitted a thesis, with the approval of the supervisor regarding the examinable quality of the thesis, within three months of the end of the normal registration period.

05/10 AHRB survey on the UK doctorate in the arts and humanities

The Board received the questionnaire on the UK doctorate in the arts and humanities, circulated by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (agendum 9). Comments on the questionnaire from the Centre for Women’s Studies were also received.

The Board agreed to ask Professor John Local, as academic co-ordinator for the arts and humanities, to prepare a response to the questionnaire on behalf of the University.

05/11 HEFCE report on PhD degrees: entry and completion
The Board received, for information, a report from the HEFCE on PhD research degrees: entry and completion (agendum 10). The report examined the rates of completion of a cohort of students at UK universities who began PhD programmes in 1996/7, and the factors affecting their success in completing their degree within four years. It was noted that the report defined the completion date as the date on which the award of the PhD was approved by the institution, rather than the date on which the thesis was submitted.

05/12 ORS award selection panel

It was agreed to appoint Professor Sparrow (as chair), Professor Godfrey, Professor Hancock, Professor Taylor and Dr Yongbing Xu (Electronics) to serve on a panel to select candidates for nominations for ORS awards in 2005 (agendum 11).

05/13 Next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 1 March 2005.