Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 22 January 2008.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.H. Fitter (Chair), The Chair of the Teaching Committee, Professor T.A. Sheldon, The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment, Dr C.J. Fewster, Dr P. Ansell, Professor A.G. Burr, Ms E.C. Cooper, Dr D. Efird, Professor G. Griffin, Dr F.G. Özkan, Professor J.C. Sparrow, Ms A. Takshe, Miss R. Tayara, Professor M. Taylor, Dr R. Wooffitt

In attendance: Dr N.T. Carter (for M08/12 only), Dr J.C. Lovett (for M08/12 only), Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit), Ms T.M. Driffield (Scholarships Officer), Mrs A.M. Grey (Research Policy Officer), Mrs R.J. Royds (Manager, Student Administrative Services), Dr R. Vann (Member, Robert's Review Group), Mr P. Simison (Graduate Schools Office)

Apologies: Dr B.J. Keely, Dr C. Thompson

08/1 Membership of the Board

The Chair welcomed Ms Emma Cooper, who had been appointed to serve as taught programme graduate student member for 2007/08, and Mrs Anna Grey, who was attending as Research Policy Officer, to their first meeting of the Board.

08/2 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2007, amended by the replacement of “Section 13(a)” by “Section 13(i)” in the penultimate paragraph of M07/116, were approved.

08/3 Council Tax and students in continuation year

Arising out of M07/86, it was reported that the Student Support Office had approached York City Council about the possible exemption from Council Tax of MPhil/PhD students in their continuation year. A reply was awaited.
08/4 Revised University policy on postgraduates who teach

Arising out of M07/96, the Board received the comments of the Teaching Committee on the draft revised University policy on postgraduates who teach.

It was noted that the Committee had asked whether the policy was applicable to all postgraduates who teach or whether an amended version should apply to those who operated only under the immediate supervision of a member of staff (e.g., demonstrators in laboratory classes or workshops supervised by a member of staff). The Board recognised that postgraduates who teach were given different degrees of responsibility, but felt that this very diversity made it desirable to have a single policy. It agreed that, while it did not intend that the policy should distinguish between different degrees of responsibility, it would be prepared to consider suggestions from departments that would minimise procedural requirements while maintaining fairness.

In Section 1(b), the Board agreed to retain the suggested IELTS requirement, pending the review proposed by the Teaching Committee, along with the specific assignment of responsibility to course organiser and Chair of Board of Studies for ensuring that postgraduates who teach had an appropriate level of spoken English.

Other proposed amendments, designed to address points raised by the Committee, were approved. In addition, it was agreed to make it clear that the policy applied to postgraduates who were appointed solely to assess work, rather than to teach. It was noted that an appropriate web reference needed to be inserted in Section 4(a).

In conclusion, it was agreed that the proposed revised policy should be drawn to Senate’s attention as an item of Category II business.

Action: PS

08/5 QAA in stitutional audit 2007

Arising out of M07/118, Professor Sheldon reported that, following the QAA audit visit on 3-6 December 2007, the University had received a ‘headline letter’ from the QAA which had confirmed that confidence could be placed in the University’s present and likely future management of standards and the quality of learning opportunities for students. The QAA’s draft report was expected by the end of February, and the final report would be published in April.

08/6 Revision of University Regulations affecting postgraduate students

Arising out of M07/118, it was noted that the Pro-Vice-Chancellors concerned (Professor Sheldon,
Professor Fitter and Dr Grenville) had met with Dr Fewster, Ms Kennell and Mr Simison to consider how the proposed revision of Regulations 2-6 should be taken forward. It had been noted that the outcome of the modularisation review would have implications for these Regulations, but it had been agreed, nevertheless, that progress could be made on some aspects of the Regulations meanwhile.

It had been agreed to invite a group consisting of the following members to embark on a review of these Regulations: Dr Chris Fewster (Chair, Standing Committee on Assessment), Dr David Efird (member, Board for Graduate Schools), Mrs Sue Clarke (Academic Support Office), Ms Wendy Shaw (Secretary, Special Cases Committee), and Mr Philip Simison (Secretary, Board for Graduate Schools). It had been agreed that the group should report to meetings of the Chair and Secretaries of the Teaching Committee, the Board for Graduate Schools, the Standing Committee on Assessment and the Special Cases Committee. Ms Sue Hardman (Academic Registrar) would be kept informed of the group’s progress.

**Action: PS**

### 08/7 Implementation of code of practice on research degree programmes

Arising out of M07/115, the Board received the responses from departments which appeared not to have implemented, or not to have implemented in full, a number of requirements of the code of practice.

It was noted that in almost every case the departments concerned had given assurances that these requirements had been met, or would be met by October 2008.

Two departments had questioned the relevance of research ethics as part of the induction programme for their research students. The Chair had replied to the Department of History of Art; it was agreed that a similar response should be sent to the Department of Mathematics, and that both departments should be asked to confirm that ethical issues would be raised during their induction programmes. The Board agreed that research ethics was relevant to all research degree programmes, as evidenced by the University’s code of practice on good ethical governance and by the establishment of ethics committees covering all subject areas and departments.

With regard to supervision, two departments (Computer Science and Sociology) had expressed the view that, since supervisory meetings took place weekly or fortnightly, to record them would place an undue administrative burden on staff and students. The Board agreed to make it clear that the code of practice required only that formal supervisory meetings, at which substantial discussion of research progress and plans took place, should be held at least twice each term, and should be recorded. It was therefore open to departments where supervisory meetings were held frequently to designate a minimum of two as formal for this purpose, and for these to be recorded. It was noted that a record of supervisory meetings could be conveniently maintained using SkillsForge. The Board agreed that a record of formal supervisory meetings was essential in the event of any complaint or appeal involving the adequacy of supervision.
With regard to thesis advisory panels, it was agreed to ask the Departments of Educational Studies and Mathematics to confirm that their procedures would meet the requirements of the code of practice. It was also agreed to ask the Department of Politics for a response on this issue.

**Action:** PS

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**08/8 Code of practice on research degree programmes: compliance with Disability Discrimination Act (2005)**

The Board received a report of the discussion of the University’s Disability Equality Scheme (DES) at the meeting of the Teaching Committee held on 10 December 2007. The Committee had agreed to ask the Board to review the code of practice on research degree programmes to ensure that it took account of the Disability Discrimination Act (2005).

The Board agreed to pursue this in the first instance by asking for the comments of the disability forum convened by Mrs Penn Snowden. If necessary, departmental graduate chairs could be asked at a later stage if they were aware of any adverse implications the code might have for disabled students. In the meantime the Chair and Secretary would check the code for compliance with the DES.

**Action:** PS, AHF

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**08/9 Collaborative research degree programmes**

The Board noted that, at its meeting on 5 November 2007, the Teaching Committee had approved revised procedures for the approval of collaborative provision involving taught programmes, and had recommended that the Board should adapt these to meet the specific needs of collaborative research degree programmes.

The Board received for reference the previous procedure for the approval of programmes of study leading to joint postgraduate qualifications.

The Chair pointed out that only three collaborative research degree programmes had been approved, and that a total of no more than four students had enrolled on them. He expressed the view that such programmes brought little or no institutional advantage, and that, where collaboration was desired, this could best be achieved by students’ registering for the qualification at one institution and spending periods as visiting students at the other.

Other members pointed out that other well-regarded UK universities seemed to see advantage in collaborative research degree programmes, and that not to make provision for them might have financial consequences for the University.
It was agreed that advice should be sought in the first instance from the International Office. The Chair also undertook to take soundings among other 94 group universities. It was agreed that, at a later stage, comments could if necessary be sought from departments.

It was agreed that any proposal for a collaborative research degree programme would need to include an assurance that a substantial number of students would enrol.

**Action:** PS, AHF

### 08/10 Policy on transfers from masters programmes to MPhil/PhD, and on masters degrees held in abeyance

Arising out of M06/73, the Board received a proposed policy on transfers from masters programmes to MPhil/PhD, and on masters degrees held in abeyance.

Under the proposed policy, transfer to MPhil/PhD both from masters programmes by research and, under stricter conditions, from taught masters programmes would be permissible; where such transfer took place, the masters degree (if awarded) would be held in abeyance, and would be conferred if the candidate subsequently withdrew or failed to achieve the MPhil or PhD degree.

Concern was expressed by some members of the Board about transfers to MPhil/PhD from taught masters programmes, on the grounds that taught masters programmes were quite different from masters programmes by research; that the amount of research done by taught masters students was relatively small and might be reduced; that students might press for such transfers for financial reasons; and that invidious judgements between candidates might be made.

The Board agreed that transfer to MPhil/PhD from taught masters programmes should be permissible, but under more stringent conditions than those proposed. A preamble should make it clear that this was an exceptional provision for outstanding students who departments judged were likely to achieve the masters degree with distinction, and a transcript of taught modules should be required demonstrating marks which supported such a judgement. It should be a requirement that transfer to PhD must take place between the sixth month and the end of the second year. Transfers would be considered only where a single dissertation forms a substantial part (at least 80 credits) of the masters programme, and where the candidate showed outstanding promise as a researcher.

It was agreed that the policy, thus amended, should be implemented from October 2008 for a trial period of two years, and reviewed by the Board during 2009/10.

It was agreed that recommendations for transfers should be made on a form setting out the expectations agreed above, and signed by student, prospective PhD supervisor, and departmental graduate chair.
It was agreed that masters degrees held in abeyance could subsequently be conferred only on a candidate who either withdrew from the MPhil/PhD programme before completion or failed to satisfy the examiners for the award of either MPhil or PhD.

Subject to these amendments, the proposed policy was approved.

Action: PS

**08/11 Upgrading from MPhil to EngD**

It was noted that, in approving the EngD programme in Large Scale Complex IT Systems at its meeting in November 2007, the Board had agreed that a decision on upgrading from MPhil to EngD should be taken by the end of the third year of the four-year EngD programme. This raised the question of the student’s registration during the third year, since the registration for the MPhil degree was defined by Regulation 2.4 as two years (full-time).

The Board agreed that the initial registration for the EngD degree should be for a new degree of MPhil (Eng), which would need to be the subject of a new Regulation.

Action: PS

**08/12 Proposed MPhil/PhD programme in Environment and Politics**

The Board received a proposal from the Boards of Studies concerned for an MPhil/PhD programme in Environment and Politics. Dr Jon Lovett (Environment) and Dr Neil Carter (Politics) were in attendance for this item.

The Board noted that the proposal was intended to formalise an informal arrangement that had existed for several years, whereby PhD students in Environment or Politics had been jointly supervised by both departments. About 18 students fell into this category, several of whom wished to receive a joint degree qualification. The present proposal might also serve as a model for further joint programmes involving Environment and Social Policy or Law.

It was noted that the Board of Studies in Environment would be formally responsible for the proposed programme. However, day-to-day management of the programme would reside with a joint executive committee comprising the graduate chairs and other members from both Environment and Politics.

Students registered for the programme would have two supervisors, one from each department. Thesis advisory panels would consist of three members: the two supervisors and one other member of staff from either department. Recommendations for upgrading and for the appointment of examiners would be submitted by the Board of Studies in Environment.
It was reported that a programme of training would be identified for each student following individual discussion. Students on the programme would be informed of training available in both departments.

The Board asked for three amendments to be made to the proposal:

i. Under *Supervision arrangements*, the second sentence should read: “The student will meet with both supervisors together at least twice per term”;

ii. Under *Upgrading to PhD*, the word ‘normally’ to be deleted from the final sentence, to read: “The upgrading will take place by the end of the second year of study”;

iii. A final sentence to be added, to read: “All matters not explicitly referred to above will be dealt with under procedures laid down by the Board of Studies in Environment”.

The proposed programme was then approved.

The Board agreed to approve the retrospective transfer of students into the programme, providing no deleterious consequences were identified by Student Administrative Services.

**ACTION: PS, RAG, Departments of Environment and Politics**

**08/13 Proposed MA in Philosophy (by research)**

The Board received a proposal from the Graduate School Board in Philosophy for an MA programme in Philosophy (by research). Dr Efird was present to introduce the proposal.

In the course of discussion, the following points were made:

(a) Under *Criteria for admission to the programme*, the final sentence should begin: “All eligible UK-based applicants will have a formal interview”; and an additional sentence should state that the department would engage in dialogue by telephone or email with eligible applicants overseas who were unable to attend for interview.

(b) Under *Induction arrangements*, the resources available to students should be described as including “a room dedicated to student use”

(c) The wording of the section *Training in research methods and transferable skills* should be checked by the department to ensure that the entitlements and expectations specified could be sustained

(d) Under *Presentation and length of MA thesis*, the first sentence should begin: “The thesis should normally be between 20,000-30,000 words…”

It was agreed that the Planning Officer should be asked whether the proposal raised resource implications which needed to be considered by the Planning Committee.
Subject to the comments recorded above, the proposal was approved.

**Action: PS, DE**

**08/14 Graduate Awards Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Awards Committee held on 28 November 2007, including the Committee’s proposed revised terms of reference, were approved.

**08/15 Admissions statistics 2007**

The admissions statistics showing entrants to postgraduate and graduate programmes in 2007 were noted.

**08/16 Report to Research Councils UK**

The report submitted to Research Councils UK on the use of Roberts funding was noted.

**08/17 EPSRC Collaborative Training Account Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the EPSRC Collaborative Training Account Committee held on 22 November 2007 were noted.

**08/18 Appointment of ORSAS selection panel**

The Board approved the appointment of the following members to the selection panel for the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme in 2008: Professor Miles Taylor, Professor Alister Burr, Dr Gülçin Özkan and Dr Yongbing Xu.

**08/19 Next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 26 February 2008 at 2.15pm.

**Philip Simison**  
Student Progress Officer

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PS/January 2008