UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 26 January 2010.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.H. Fitter (Chair)
Dr D. Efird (Chair, Standing Committee on Assessment)
Mr K. Alden
Dr P. Ansell
Dr J. Clarbour
Professor G. Griffin
Mr R. Huang
Dr G. Özkan
Dr R. Rowland
Dr R. Vann
Dr M.J. White

In attendance: Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit)
Mr N. Dandy (Senior Assistant Registrar) (for M09-10/36 only)
Mr P. Simison (Student Administrative Services)

Apologies: Dr I. McIntosh
Professor T.A. Sheldon
Professor R. Wooffitt

09-10/33 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 December 2009 were approved.

09-10/34 E-deposit of theses

Arising out of M09-10/21, it was reported that the White Rose repository had yet to make the changes that had been requested to the screens that would be viewed by York students, to reflect the University’s particular requirements. Once these changes had been made, instructions on uploading theses to the repository would be published on the web. In the meantime, the Examinations Office had been able to accommodate those students who had asked to deposit theses electronically.

09-10/35 Statistical data on full-time PhD submission rates

Arising out of M09-10/20, the Board received amended data on full-time PhD submission rates, together with a report on the discussion of the issue that had taken place at the graduate chairs’ forum held on 20 January 2010.
It was noted that the forum had discussed ways of encouraging timely submission, for example, by limiting the circumstances when extensions were granted, charging late submission fees, or setting different rates of continuation fee. The Board agreed that its preferred way was to change the culture by setting a clear expectation from the beginning that the duration of the PhD programme for full-time students was three years, and that the thesis should normally be submitted by the end of this period. To the same end, upgrading should involve a timetable for completion and submission within this period. It was agreed that a discussion paper should be prepared for circulation to departments, and that a draft of this should be considered at the next meeting.

It was agreed to recommend to the Standing Committee on Assessment that the regulation requiring students to obtain permission to submit their theses more than three months before the end of their full-time or part-time registration period should be relaxed.

**ACTION: PS, AHF**

**09-10/36 Future arrangements for quality assurance**

The Board received a draft University response to an HEFCE consultation paper on future arrangements for quality assurance in England and Northern Ireland. Nigel Dandy (Senior Assistant Registrar) was in attendance for this item.

Mr Dandy explained that the consultation encompassed not only the quality assurance and review method to be used in institutions after 2011, but the quality assurance system as a whole. It followed a number of government, HEFCE and QAA reports and publications over the previous year. It was due to be followed by a follow-up consultation (in autumn 2010) on a new structure for institutional audit, by a QAA consultation on the academic infrastructure (February 2010), by an HEFCE consultation on information available to the public (autumn 2010), and by a UUK review of the external examiner system.

In the course of discussion, the Board made the following comments on the consultation paper and the draft response:

(a) The response to Question 3 should be more explicit on the variety of institutions.

(b) Greater flexibility in the topics examined by institutional audit - between institutions (section 41) and over time (section 63) - might result in inequity in the judgements on different institutions.

(c) Section 31 made no reference to the needs of staff. The quality assurance system should be supportive of staff, not only of institutions.
A principle of the audit system should be to enhance the autonomy of institutions. As autonomous institutions, they should have the right to determine their own quality assurance procedures.

09-10/37 Additional English language entry qualifications

The Board considered the proposal from Paul Roberts (Director, Centre for English Language Teaching) and Rosemary Royds for the addition, in principle, of the Pearson Education Group test to the English language qualifications satisfying the requirements for admission to the University’s postgraduate programmes. It was proposed that the test should be piloted in one or more departments.

It was agreed to make it clear that, while the Board could comment on the proposal, it could not make a recommendation. The Board’s comments were as follows.

(a) It was only according to Pearson’s own table of equivalences that a score of 60 was regarded as qualifying candidates for University programmes. It was suggested that approaches should be made to other universities which had accepted the Pearson test, asking them to share the evidence on which they had done so.

(b) Volunteers from current overseas students could be paid to take the Pearson test and an IELTS test simultaneously, to provide an indication of equivalent scores.

(c) The IELTS test provided discrete scores for the separate components of the test. It was not stated whether the Pearson test did this.

(d) If the Pearson test were piloted, it would be a sensible precaution to specify a higher score than 60.

09-10/38 Payment and monitoring of studentships

The Board received the paper from Rosemary Royds on the payment and monitoring of studentships. The paper reported on a procedure that had been adopted to prevent continued payments being made to students who had left the University.

The Board endorsed the procedure, but suggested that payments should be made quarterly rather than termly.

09-10/39 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2008/09

The Board received the summary of findings of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2008/09.

It was noted that this was the second PRES survey. The response rate at
York was 34%, which was greater than the national average. York performed better than the national average in the responses to most questions, with the exception of those on examinations, where the sample size was very small.

The responses in some cases were unclear or seemed contradictory. It was suggested that discussion should take place in departmental staff-student liaison committees to clarify what the responses meant.

The Board agreed that the summary of findings and the detailed data on responses should be circulated to departments with a general commentary by the Chair, and with a request that the findings should be discussed in departments and in staff-student forums. Departments would be asked to prepare short responses, which would come to the June meeting of the Board, setting out their understanding of what the findings meant, what the department intended to do as a result, and what the department thought that the University should do. The Chair agreed to discuss with the Chair of the Teaching Committee whether this request could form part of the procedure for annual programme review.

09-10/40 Report to Research Councils UK on use of Roberts funding

The report to Research Councils UK on the use of Roberts funding in 2008/09 was received and noted.

09-10/41 Next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 16 March 2010 at 2.15pm.