UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 15 June 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
Dr L. Smith
Professor J.C. Sparrow

Mr S.I. Stafford
Miss J. Winter

In attendance: Dr A.D. Hunt (for M04/41 only)
Dr F.M.K. Campbell (Graduate Recruitment Officer)
Dr H. Lawrence
Ms C. Rees (Careers Director)
Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Professor B.C. Gilbert

04/31 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 March 2004 were approved (agendum 2).

04/32 Report from the Senate

The report from the meeting of the Senate held on 11 May 2004 was received and noted (agendum 3).

04/33 Periodic review visits and research students

Arising out of M03/78, the Board received a report on arrangements agreed by the Chairs of the Board and of the Teaching Committee following the decision to include the experience of research students in the remit of the Teaching Committee’s periodic review visits to departments (agendum 4a).
It was noted that the review panel would interview a number of research students during the periodic review visit. This meeting would be conducted in parallel with the meeting with postgraduates who teach.

The Board agreed to recommend that the review panel should include two members of the Board for Graduate Schools.

The Board also agreed that the panel, at the meeting with research students, might ask a general question about any dissatisfaction with resources or facilities for research.

It was noted that the role of the Teaching Committee would be to alert the Board to any problems or potential problems with regard to the experience of research students identified as a result of the visit. The Board would remain responsible for ensuring that the experience of research students was satisfactory, and for taking action where appropriate.

04/34 Report on visit by ESRC Training Board

Arising out of M04/5, the Chair reported on the visit by a panel of the ESRC Training Board on 7 May 2004 (agendum 4b).

The formal report on the visit from the ESRC was still awaited.

The University had expressed dissatisfaction at the paucity of 1+3 quota studentships it had been allocated for October 2004, given that it currently held around £3m in ESRC research grants and that the ESRC had contributed £4m towards the cost of the new Alcuin Research Resource Centre. The ESRC panel members had conceded that the allocation of studentships had not been linked to the provision of funding for infrastructure, and had described this situation as “inadmissible”. The ESRC would be reviewing the method of allocation of studentships; however, the current method was to remain in place for a further year. The Vice-Chancellor had subsequently written to the ESRC to protest about this.

At the final meeting, the panel had stated that they would convey the University’s concerns to the ESRC. The panel had expressed some criticisms of the University:

(a) four out of nine departments had not bid for a competition 1+3 studentship for October 2004, while only six had bid for +3 awards. A total of only 17 bids for +3 awards had been submitted.

(b) there was relatively little interdepartmental provision of training.

(c) the panel was concerned at the addition of a research methodology element to masters courses, which in some cases made the total student workload very high.
(d) one student appeared not to know about the thesis advisory panel system.

(e) the panel felt it was desirable for the University to offer a University-wide induction programme for research students, and another for masters students. (The Board agreed to ask Dr Lawrence to consider whether such programmes could be mounted on dates, to be specified in advance, in October 2005.)

(f) the panel was concerned about the use to which the research training support grant was put, and the apparent disparity of practice between departments. (The Board agreed to ask Mr Simison to clarify the requirements of the ESRC and the other research councils in this regard.)

(g) it was desirable that the University and departments should increase their involvement and improve their communications with the ESRC.

It was agreed that the formal report, when received, should be submitted to the Board.

04/35 MRC studentships

The Chair reported that the Medical Research Council had informed the University that, following the transition to Doctoral Training Grants calculated on the basis of MRC research grant and fellowship income in the previous year, York had not qualified for funding under the new scheme for October 2004 because its level of research funding was too low. The University could be eligible for doctoral training funding in future, if it succeeded in winning more grant and fellowship funding from the MRC.

04/36 Appointment of Deputy Chair

Arising out of M04/6, it was reported (agendum 4c) that the Senate had approved 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. Senate had also approved consequential amendments, with effect from October 2004, to the regulation and procedures concerning academic appeals by graduate students.

Senate had approved the appointment of Professor Sparrow as Deputy Chair of the Board, with immediate effect, to serve until 31 July 2005 in the first instance.

04/37 Proposed policy on postgraduates who teach

Arising out of M04/21, the Board received the letter from the Personnel Director, who, at the Board’s request, had commented on the proposed policy on postgraduates who teach (agendum 4d).
At his suggestion, the following amendments had been made to the proposed policy:

(a) The following sentence had been added to the preamble:

“Postgraduate students who teach are not members of academic and related staff and do not fall within the scope of Statute 24.”

(b) The first sentence of section 4 had been amended to read:

“There should be a transparent and regularly reviewed base pay rate across the University, which should conform to the Working Time Regulations.”

The Board approved these amendments.

It was agreed that there should be separate hourly rates of pay for teaching and for demonstrating. Departments would determine the hours of work attached to each teaching or demonstrating assignment, including where appropriate time to be spent on preparation and marking.

04/38 Submission rates 1997/99

Arising out of M04/23, it was noted (agenda 4e) that Senate had expressed concern at the reported level of PhD submission rates, and had noted that the recently approved policy on research degree programmes emphasised the importance of completion within the required period and the requirement for regular formal monitoring of research progress by supervisors and thesis advisory panels. On behalf of the Senate, the Vice-Chancellor had decided to ask the Board to consider how best to monitor the implementation of the policy at departmental level.

The Board agreed to ask Professor Sparrow to convene a working party to consider how best to monitor the implementation of the policy on research degree programmes at departmental level, in particular with a view to improving submission rates. The working party would consider what practicable measures might be required, would consider examples of practice at other universities, and would make recommendations to the Board.

It was noted that the view had been expressed at Senate that the PhD was advertised as a three-year programme for which three years’ fees were payable. Candidates should therefore be expected to submit within three years rather than four. In this connection, it was noted that for many years the University had endorsed the formulation that "a doctoral thesis is a piece of work which a capable, well-qualified and diligent student, who is properly supported and supervised, can complete within three years". It was agreed that, when PhD projects were approved, there should be a realistic prospect of the project being completed and the thesis submitted within three years. Archival work or fieldwork outside the
UK, for example, should only be undertaken if there was confidence that this would not prolong the planned duration of the research. It had to be recognised that the PhD programme constituted research training rather than an opportunity for conducting ground-breaking research.

It was suggested that statistics on the timing of upgradings and on the number of extensions might indicate where departments needed to exert tighter control over research student progress.

It was agreed that MPhil/PhD students who decided before the end of their second year to submit for the MPhil, and submitted their MPhil thesis within three years, should not be counted as non-submitters.

04/39 Working Party on Academic Misconduct Procedures

Arising out of M04/24, the Chair of the Standing Committee Assessment, Dr Crawford, reported on the current position regarding the recommendations of the Working Party on Academic Misconduct (agendum 4f).

The Working Party’s recommendations had been considered by the Teaching Committee, the Board for Graduate Schools and the Special Cases Committee. Each of these committees had broadly approved the recommendations, but had raised issues concerning the nature of the reports of investigations, the entitlement of a student to a hearing, and the roles of the Board for Graduate Schools and the Special Cases Committee.

These issues had been considered at a meeting held on 8 June 2004 of the chairs and secretaries of the Standing Committee on Assessment, the Special Cases Committee and the Board for Graduate Schools, together with the Academic Registrar. It had been decided to recommend to the Senate as follows:

(a) All recommendations from Boards of Studies arising out of academic misconduct should name the student and should be supported by a full report, including the minutes of investigative sub-committees.

(b) Recommendations and reports should be submitted to the Special Cases Committee (for undergraduate students) or to the Board for Graduate Schools (for graduate and postgraduate students). These committees would note the circumstances and would be able to comment on the outcomes, but would not be able to adjust the Final Penalty without a hearing taking place. Hearings would be held by the Special Cases Committee or the Board for Graduate Schools, as appropriate. The student would be invited to attend any hearing, according to the normal procedure set out in the Regulations.

(c) Where the recommended Final Penalty was not greater than 5, there should be no automatic hearing. However, if the student requested a hearing, a hearing would be held. The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment could also request a hearing, in which case a hearing would be held.
(d) Where the recommended Final Penalty was greater than 5, a hearing should always be held.

(e) The Special Cases Committee and the Board for Graduate Schools should monitor the implementation of the new academic misconduct procedures during the academic year 2004/05. At the end of the academic year, the chairs and secretaries of the Standing Committee on Assessment, the Special Cases Committee and the Board for Graduate Schools, together with the Academic Registrar, should meet to receive an analysis of the recommendations and reports received (whether or not a hearing had taken place), and to consider possible modifications to the procedures, in particular whether the Final Penalty boundary of 5 referred to above was appropriate and whether a new committee should replace the Special Cases Committee and the Board for Graduate Schools to conduct hearings.

The Board approved these recommendations.

It was noted that a final version of the Working Party’s report and recommendations on academic misconduct procedures would be submitted to Senate on 6 July 2004.

04/40 Working Party on Research Training

The Board received the record of the meeting of the Working Party on Research Training held on 1 June 2004 (agenda item 5).

It was noted that the Working Party had considered the final report of the Working Party on Student Skills, and had agreed to recommend section 9 of the report (on personal development provision for research students) together with sections 12 and 13 (on implementation and on future organisation and management) for the approval of the Board. The Board approved these recommendations.

It was noted that Professor Sparrow, the Chair of the Working Party, had held meetings with Academic Co-ordinators and their respective groups of Heads of Departments in the Sciences, Humanities and the Social Sciences at which skills training and the additional funding arising from the Roberts Report had been discussed. Professor Ellis had subsequently written to departments regarding the allocation of Roberts funding and training responsibilities. He had proposed that the centre should provide PhD students with six days training a year in Years 1 and 2, while departments provided four days in those years. In Year 3 all research council/AHRB-funded students would attend a five-day residential course funded by the research councils/AHRB. The remaining five days would be made up within departments or through further central courses. The Working Party had agreed that Professor Sparrow should now consult with the Academic Co-ordinators for the Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences, in order to determine how departmental provision should be organised, and in particular the scope for provision at subject area level.
Finally, it was noted that it was intended that all students should use the ‘points’ scheme for the recording of skills training from 2004/05.

04/41 Proposal for new MA/MSc courses in Music Technology (by research)

The Board received the proposal from the Board of Studies in Music Technology for the introduction of five new MA/MSc courses in Music Technology (agendum 6). The five proposed titles were:

- MA/MSc by research in the Human Singing Voice
- MSc by research in Spatial Audio
- MA by research in Composition with Digital Media
- MA/MSc by research in Music Technology for Special Needs
- MSc by research in Audio Computer Interfaces

Dr Andy Hunt, the Chair of the Board of Studies, was in attendance for this item. He explained that the proposed new courses were intended to complement the existing taught MA/MSc programme in Music Technology. Each course was focused on the research expertise of members of staff. They were intended to meet the needs of graduates of music technology or other audio engineering courses who wished to do specialised research. The existing taught course would continue to attract students with no music technology experience. The proposed new courses would share a common structure. The proposed distinctive titles were intended to help students gain employment by more accurately indicating their research specialism than would be possible using a common music technology title.

In the course of discussion, the Board expressed concern about the proposed proliferation of course titles. There was an administrative cost in maintaining a large number of titles. Preparation of the prospectus began almost two years in advance of the year of entry to which it referred, so there was a danger that it would contain titles which were no longer available owing to staff changes. York was known for “music technology”. The various research specialisms that were available at the time the prospectus was prepared could be indicated in the body of the prospectus by way of example, without commitment. The research specialism pursued by an individual student, together with the project title, could be indicated in the references provided by members of staff.

It was noted that the external examiners for the existing taught MA/MSc course had sufficient breadth of expertise to cover all the proposed research areas. They could thus be appointed as required as external examiners for individual candidates for the research MA/MSc.

For the reasons given above, the Board, while approving the introduction of an MA/MSc course by research in the music technology area, declined to approve the proposed titles. Instead, it agreed to invite the Board of Studies to submit a reformulated proposal for a new MA/MSc course in Music Technology by research. It was agreed that, since all the other elements of the proposal were
satisfactory, the reformulated proposal could be considered and approved by the Chair on the Board’s behalf.

04/42 Outcome of ORS award competition 2004

It was reported (agendum 7) that a panel of members of the Board for Graduate Schools (Professor G.J. Hitch (Chair), Professor E.R. Hancock, Professor S.F. Jackson and Dr J.E. Nuechterlein) had met on 18 February 2004 to consider 66 applications for ORS awards beginning in October 2004. It had agreed that sixteen candidates (the maximum number permitted) should be nominated for awards. Six of the sixteen nominations had been successful (37.5%). This compared to 66.7% (10 out of 15) in 2003. Nationally, 64.4% of candidates had been offered awards. The panel had met again on 19 May 2004 to consider this outcome, and agreed to propose a number of changes in procedure for 2005.

The Board approved the proposed changes in procedure. These included: requiring departments to identify candidates they wished to see nominated, and to submit very strong references for those candidates; ensuring that candidates supported by departments were well qualified in terms of first degree and masters degree, or progress at York; and obtaining better information about the relative quality of Chinese universities. It was accepted that there were difficulties in obtaining appropriate references from overseas, especially given the short timescale for dealing with applications.

04/42 Funding for students to attend White Rose events

The Board received a paper from Dr Hutchinson (until recently Graduate Student Training Officer) concerning funding for students not funded by research councils to attend the White Rose Interpersonal Skills School (agendum 8). Dr Hutchinson’s concern was that, unlike Leeds and Sheffield, York provided no funding for students not funded by research councils to attend this training event. Instead, the University had asked departments, usually without success, to cover the cost of £200 per student. Dr Lawrence reported that of the 66 students from the three universities attending the current White Rose Interpersonal Skills School, only two were from York.

The Board agreed to request that a sum of £2,400 (to cover the costs of 12 students @ £200) should be set aside from the University’s total fee income for this purpose, on the understanding that the money would be returned if unspent.

04/43 Expiry of terms of service

The Chair thanked Dr Smith, Dr Evans, Professor Hitch and Professor Jackson, whose terms of service expired on 31 July 2004, and Professor De Fraja, who was resigning, for their work on behalf of the Board. He also thanked the student members of the Board for 2003/04, Professor Sparrow, as Deputy Chair, thanked Professor Ellis for his work as Chair of the Board over four years.
04/44 Dates of meetings in 2004/05

It was noted (agendum 10) that meetings in 2004/05 were to be held on the following dates beginning at 2.15pm:

- Tuesday 19 October
- Tuesday 23 November
- Tuesday 25 January
- Tuesday 1 March
- Tuesday 21 June

04/45 Demolition of Bleachfield housing

It was noted that the housing at Bleachfield was to be demolished. All those affected would be found alternative accommodation. A member of the Board expressed the view that it would have been helpful if departments had been given better information about these plans.