Ministers of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 17 June 2008.

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

In attendance: Dr T.T. Arvind (for M08/35 only), Ms T.M. Driffield (Scholarships Officer), Mrs R.A. Goerisch (Assistant Registrar, Student Progress), Mrs A.M. Grey (Research Policy Officer), Dr H. R. Lawrence (Graduate Training 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 R.J. Partridge, Professor T.A. Sheldon, Professor M. Taylor

08/22 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 January 2008 were approved.

08/23 Council Tax and students in continuation year

Arising out of M08/03, it was reported that York City Council had agreed in principle that full-time MPhil/PhD students in their continuation year should be eligible, under certain conditions, for exemption from Council Tax. A procedure for claiming exemption was currently under consideration. In the meantime, the Student Support Office was able to seek exemption on behalf of individual students.

08/24 QAA institutional audit 2007

Arising out of M08/5, the final draft of the QAA’s report on the 2007 in stitutional audit wa s received. It was noted that the audit team had taken a po sitive view of the Univer sity’s arrangement s for re search degree student s, which wa s supported by evidence from the QAA special review of re search degree programme s in 2006 and from the Higher Education Academy’s Po stgraduate Re search
Experience Survey. The Chair thanked all those who effective work had resulted in this positive outcome.

**08/25 Collaborative research degree programmes**

Arising out of M08/9, the Board received a comment from the Simon Willis, the International Officer, on whether collaborative research degree programmes were likely to bring institutional advantage.

Mr Willis pointed out that other universities, including some in York’s peer group, had developed such programmes. There were a number of government and other funding schemes which could support students, and the University might wish to take advantage of these in future. Collaborative research degree programmes might also be one strand in a wider relationship with a partner institution which might lead to other benefits.

Several members of the Board supported this view, and pointed out that there were pressures for such programmes from European institutions.

Other members pointed out that it was difficult to establish collaborative degree programmes which satisfied the regulatory requirements of two institutions, and asked whether it would not be equally satisfactory for a candidate, though jointly supervised under a collaborative agreement, to receive the degree from a single institution. The view was also expressed that collaborative research degree programmes would be sensible only if there was confidence that a substantial number of students would enrol.

It was agreed to explore what would be required to construct a checklist of issues to be resolved in giving approval to a proposal for a collaborative research degree programme, using as a basis the Teaching Committee’s procedure for the approval of collaborative taught programmes and previous experience, including experience of the EngD programme in Large Scale Complex IT Systems, which involved collaboration with other universities. It was also agreed to seek advice from the University’s Legal Administrator and Case Officer. A report was requested in time for the November 2008 meeting of the Board.

**ACTION: RJR, RAG, PS**

**08/26 Revised University policy on postgraduates who teach**

Arising out of M08/4, the Board agreed that implementation by departments of the revised policy on postgraduates who teach should be reviewed at the end of 2008/09. It was agreed to give departments notice of this review now.

**ACTION: PS**
08/27 Review of priorities for 2007/08

The Board reviewed the priorities it had set for 2007/08.

It was noted that the majority of the priorities had been achieved or were being addressed or were under active consideration.

It was agreed that EThOS (electronic theses on-line service) and the York Graduate School should be removed from the list of priorities, and that consideration of policy and procedures for oral examinations conducted with the external examiner or candidate remote from York now came under the remit of the Standing Committee on Assessment.

Members were invited to send suggestions of priorities for 2008/09 to Mr Simison before the end of September.

ACTION: PS, All members

08/28 Report from Senate

The Board received the report from the meeting of Senate on 29 January 2008 on discussion of the audio-recording of oral examinations and of the revised code of practice on research degree programmes, both of which had been approved.

It was noted that the report stated incorrectly that a recording of an oral examination would be used only in the event of an appeal, whereas the code of practice on research degree programmes specified that a recording would also be used by an additional examiner appointed if the original examiners were unable to agree whether or not a candidate had satisfied the requirements for a particular degree. It was agreed to draw this point to the attention of Senate.

It was reported that the guidelines on the conduct of the oral examination were about to be promulgated.

ACTION: PS, RAG

08/29 Implementation of code of practice on research degree programmes: report from Politics

Arising out of M08/7, the Board noted the report from the Graduate School Board in Politics confirming compliance with the requirements of the code of practice regarding thesis advisory panels.

It was agreed to remind the department that the code of practice required that a record should be made
only of formal supervisory meetings.

**ACTION: PS**

### 08/30 Compliance with Disability Discrimination Act 2005

Arising out of M08/8, the Board received comments from Disability Services on the compliance of the code of practice on research degree programmes with the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. It was noted that these comments were to be discussed at a meeting between Disability Services and Student Administrative Services on 19 June. Proposals for revision of the code of practice arising from that meeting would be submitted to the Board’s next meeting.

It was noted that further comments would be sought from a consultative group of disabled students when a new group was formed in 2008/09.

**ACTION: PS**

### 08/31 Proposed further revisions of code of practice

The Board approved proposed further revisions of the code of practice on research degree programmes, as follows:

**Upgrading: (Section 8(b))**

To read:
"Upgrading to PhD registration should be considered within eighteen months (for full-time students) or within three years (for part-time students); a final decision whether or not to recommend upgrading must be taken by the end of the second year of study (for full-time students) or of the fourth year of study (for part-time students). Upgrading to EngD registration should be considered within two-and-a-half years (for students on a four-year full-time programme); a final decision whether or not to recommend upgrading must be taken by the end of the third year of study."

**Assessment: timing of oral examination (Section 13(e))**

To read:
“The oral examination shall normally be held within three months of the date of submission of the thesis. Permission to hold the oral examination more than three months after the submission date must be obtained from the Standing Committee on Assessment.”

It was agreed that the letter of appointment of the examiners and the letter accompanying the thesis when sent to the examiners should state the expectation that the examination should take place within three months of the submission of the thesis. Permission for the examination to be held more than three months after submission of the thesis should be sought at the time of appointment and on the basis that the examiner was the only suitable candidate but was unable to examine within the normally required period.

It was agreed to suggest that the Standing Committee on Assessment might consider monitoring the timeliness of oral examinations.

Assessment: procedure when there is no internal examiner (Section 13(j))

To read:
“Where two external examiners are used, or there is no internal examiner, one examiner shall be asked to act as chair, as well as being an examiner. Where both examiners are external examiners, the department concerned shall provide an internal observer. The internal observer should be a member of academic staff in the relevant discipline other than the candidate’s supervisor. The examination shall follow the University’s Guidelines on the conduct of the oral examination.”

ACTION: PS

08/32 Report from group reviewing University Regulations affecting postgraduate students

Arising out of M08/6, the Board received the report from the group set up to review University Regulations (Regulations 2-6) affecting postgraduate students.

It was noted that progress had been made on combining the Regulations covering graduate and undergraduate appeals and hearings, and on revising the Regulation on academic misconduct to include definitions of misconduct by research students. Work was now in train on the Regulations covering residence, attendance, leave of absence and suspension of registration.

08/33 On-line plagiarism tutorial and revisions to Regulations

The Board received a report (in a revised version tabled at the meeting) from the Standing Committee on Assessment which, at its meeting on 13 June 2008, had considered the decision by the Teaching Committee that all first-year undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) students should be required to pass the on-line plagiarism tutorial.
The Committee had approved the following additions to Regulations 2.1 and 5.4:

**Regulation 2.1**

Add:
“(n) All students are required successfully to complete the University Online Plagiarism Tutorial before the end of the first stage or year of their programme of study. Students will not be considered for upgrading or thesis examination or award of a degree until confirmation of successful completion of the tutorial has been received. Failure to comply with this regulation may result in termination of registration with the University.”

**Regulation 5.4**

Add, as the second paragraph of sub-paragraph (d):
“The University’s procedures for investigating and penalising instances of academic misconduct in taught programmes of study are contained in the booklet Academic Misconduct: Policies, Guidelines and Procedures for taught programmes of study [weblink] available from Student Administrative Services. In the case of suspected academic misconduct by a research student, the Procedure for dealing with academic misconduct by research students [weblink] will be followed.”

Also add:
“(e) Any student found to have committed plagiarism and who is continuing on a programme of study will be required to take or retake the University Online Plagiarism Tutorial and successfully complete it.”

The Board endorsed the Committee’s approval of these additions to the Regulations.

It was noted that a student admitted to more than one programme of study in succession would need to satisfy this requirement on each occasion.

It was agreed that this requirement should be added to the code of practice on research degree programmes.

**08/34 Four-year PhD programmes**

The Board received a discussion paper on four-year PhD programmes. The paper set out the current position on registration for PhD study at York; described the pressures emanating from the Research Councils and other sources; outlined constraints and other considerations which the Board would wish to take into account; and put forward proposals (a) regarding existing three-year PhD programmes and (b) to allow departments to put forward proposals for four-year PhD programmes. An appendix to the paper proposed amendments to Regulation 2.5 designed to accommodate the proposal regarding four-year PhD programmes (if approved), and to Regulation 2.4 designed to provide for a three-year MPhil programme (necessitated by the introduction of the EngD degree).

Introducing the proposal, the Chair explained that it arose because research councils and some other
funding bodies were prepared to pay tuition fees for more than three years: for four years in some cases, for more than three but less than four in other cases. It was anomalous that the University should accept more than three years' fees for students enrolled on a three-year programme. The proposal would provide for four-year PhD programmes, provided they contained qualitatively different activities and materials from three-year programmes; submission of the thesis by the end of the fourth year would remain a requirement. Such a qualitative difference was essential; it would be unfair for some students to be allowed a longer period of full-time registration than others for the same programme.

Some members of the Board proposed that, since some research councils provided an average of 3.5 years’ funding for tuition fees, 3.5-year PhD programmes should also be introduced. It was argued that the only reasons set out in the paper for not doing so were administrative ones.

In reply, it was argued that the proposal was an attempt to address a problem caused by the introduction by different research councils of different periods of funding. The proposal opted for a simple solution involving whole years of study: three (the current length of a PhD programme) or four (the maximum allowed for submission by both the University and the research councils). It would be difficult to regulate for programmes of intermediate length determined by the amount of funding available. Where research councils offered an average of 3.5 years’ funding, the funds available could be divided between studentships for three- and four-year programmes, providing it was decided at the outset which programme an individual student was registered for. It was argued that it would be inequitable for students who had been originally registered for three-year programmes to be allowed an additional period of full-time registration.

The Board agreed that, as a matter of principle, PhD programmes of longer than three years’ duration should not only be qualitatively different but should also lead to distinctive degree titles.

In the absence of agreement on the proposal at the meeting, it was agreed that the Chair should give the proposal further consideration in the light of the issues that had been raised and in consultation with other universities. It was agreed that the Chair should then have the authority on behalf of the Board to take a proposal to Senate for approval.

**ACTION:** AHF, PS

**08/35 Proposed MPhil/PhD programme in Law**

The Board received a proposal from the Board of Studies of the York Law School for an MPhil/PhD programme in Law. Dr T.T. Arvind was in attendance for this item.

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

(a) the proposal made a number of references to the QAA code of practice for research, where the University’s code of practice on research degree programmes was meant;
(b) the proposal referred to “applications from students with special needs”; in the light of discussions with Disability Services, the Board advised that this should read “applications from students with support needs arising out of a disability”;

(c) supervisors and chairs of graduate school boards (not thesis advisory panels) had access to non-confidential information on the system;

(d) examiners were appointed by the Standing Committee on Assessment, not the Board for Graduate Schools;

(e) a complainant’s ultimate recourse was to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator.

Subject to these amendments, the proposal was approved.

The Board agreed that two paragraphs of the code of practice on research degree programmes should be reviewed:

Section 3(e): “Candidates who submit formal applications will be sent a response (though not necessarily a decision) within six weeks of their application, normally sooner.”

Section 13(c): “An external examiner will normally be a member of the academic staff of another higher education institution in the United Kingdom, or be of comparable academic standing.”

**ACTION: PS**

### 08/36 Proposed guidelines on company-sponsored PhD students

Arising out of M*07/124, the Board received proposed guidelines on company-sponsored employees on part-time PhD programmes.

The Board agreed:

(a) that the guidelines should also apply to company-sponsored employees on part-time MA/MSc (by research) and MPhil programmes;

(b) that the company should be required to inform the University department concerned if there was a change of company-appointed supervisor.

Subject to these amendments, the proposed guidelines were approved.

### 08/37 Review of University graduate awards scheme

The Board received and noted the report on the review of the University graduate awards scheme which was being undertaken by the Graduate Awards Committee. The review had three elements: scholarship strategy, scholarship management and scholarship advertising. The most important element was the
review of scholarship strategy, which involved careful consultation with departments, and was intended to ensure that awards were offered to maximum institutional advantage. The outcome would inform the allocation of awards for 2009/10.

08/38 Report on Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme 2008

The Board received and noted the report on the operation of the Overseas Research Students Awards Scheme in 2008.

The Board noted that the rate of acceptance of awards offered to new applicants (as compared to current students) was, at 20%, very low. It was suggested that either (a) the deadline for acceptance of awards should be shortened (although it was pointed out that an applicant who accepted an award might nevertheless subsequently withdraw if offered a more valuable studentship elsewhere); or (b) that consideration should be given to offering new applicants (though not current students) a University home tuition fee waiver in addition to an ORS award.

The Board thanked the members of the panel for their work in connection with the ORS awards scheme.

08/39 Postgraduate admissions policy

It was reported that this item had been deferred.

08/40 Policy on Marie Curie Fellowships

The proposed policy on Marie Curie Fellowships was approved.

08/41 Retired staff as examiners

The Board endorsed the approval by the Standing Committee on Assessment of the proposal regarding the appointment of retired members of academic staff as examiners.

08/42 Annual report of Graduate Training Unit

The annual report of the Graduate Training Unit for 2007/8 was received and noted.

08/43 Graduate Awards Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Awards Committee held on 25 February 2008 were approved.
**08/44 Dates of meetings in 2008/09**

It was noted that meetings in 2008/09 were to be held on the following dates beginning at 2.15pm:

- Tuesday 21 October
- Tuesday 25 November
- Tuesday 27 January
- **Tuesday 17 March***
- Tuesday 23 June
  * changed from Tuesday 3 March

**08/45 Dates for possible appeal hearings in 2008/09:**

Members agreed to seek to keep free the following dates for possible appeal hearings in 2008/09:

- Tuesday 18 November
- Tuesday 20 January
- Tuesday 24 February
- **Tuesday 24 March***
- Tuesday 28 April
- Tuesday 26 May
  * changed from Tuesday 17 March

**08/46 Retiring members**

The Chair expressed his thanks to retiring members for their service on the Board.

**Philip Simison**  
**Student Progress Officer**

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PS/June 2008