Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 23 June 2009.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.H. Fitter (Chair)
The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment, Dr D. Efird
Dr P. Ansell
Mr D.G. Carr
Dr J. Clarbour
Professor G. Griffin
Dr I. McIntosh
Dr F.G. Özkan
Dr R. Vann
Dr R. Wooffitt

In attendance Dr D. Kazakov, Computer Science (M09/38 only)
Dr P.B.J. Wakeling, Educational Studies (M09/40 only)
Dr J. Winter, Graduate Training Unit (M09/42 only)
Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit)
Mrs R.A. Goerisch (Assistant Registrar, Student Progress)
Mrs A.M. Grey (Planning Office)
Mrs R. Pendlebury (Assistant Registrar, Registry Services)
Ms R.J. Royds (Manager, Student Administrative Services)
Mr P. Simison (Student Administrative Services)

Apologies: Professor T.A. Sheldon
Dr M.J. White

09/35 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2009 were approved.

09/36 Proposed new MPhil/PhD programme in Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine

Arising out of M09/6, the Board received a further response from the Graduate School Board in Biology concerning the proposed new MPhil/PhD programme in Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine. This provided responses to the Board’s concerns regarding (i) the timing of the selection of supervisor and project; (ii) the definition of satisfactory progress during the preliminary year; and (iii) the procedure to be followed should no supervisor be identified.
It was reported that the University of Leeds had drawn up a Memorandum of Understanding for consideration by the partner institutions (Sheffield and York); and that comments on the Memorandum prepared on behalf of the University were about to be sent.

09/37 Proposal concerning e-submission of theses

Arising out of M09/22, the Board received the final version of the proposal concerning the e-submission of theses, together with proposed consequential amendments to Regulation 2.8, to be submitted to Senate for approval.

The Board agreed that candidates for the MA/MSc (by research) should be required to meet the same requirements for the presentation of dissertations as MPhil, PhD and EngD candidates for the presentation of theses, and that Regulation 2.8.3 should be removed and 2.8.2 amended accordingly.

It was noted that consequential amendments were also required to Regulations 1(d) and 2.6(k), to the code of practice on research degree programmes, and to the guidelines on MA/MSc programmes by research.

The Board approved the final proposal and the proposed amendments to the Regulations.

ACTION: PS, Library

09/38 Proposed joint PhD programme in Computer Science with the National Polytechnic Institute, Mexico City

Arising out of M09/23, the Board received a revised proposal for a joint PhD programme in Computer Science with the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), Mexico City. Dr Dimitar Kazakov (Computer Science) was in attendance for this item.

Under the revised proposal, students, after selection and admission to registration for the programme jointly by both institutions, would spend the first year at IPN. No fee would be paid to York in this year, but students would receive joint supervision, and would have access to computing and online library facilities at York. They would also prepare a document equivalent to the York department’s qualifying dissertation; if this was acceptable to the department, a student would progress to the second year of the programme. During years 2 and 3, students would be resident in York, and would pay tuition fees to York. During the second year, a decision on upgrading to PhD would be taken. If upgrading were not approved, a student might be offered the option of completing a thesis for an MPhil to be awarded solely by York. Full-time registration would end at the end of the third year. The deadline for submission of the PhD thesis for examination would be the
end of the fourth year. A continuation fee would be payable for the fourth year. One internal and one external examiner would be appointed by York; it would be open for IPN to appoint a silent observer to attend the oral examination to be held in York, either in person or by videolink. The options open to the examiners would be (a) pass (possibly subject to minor corrections); (b) referral for resubmission for PhD; (c) referral for resubmission for MPhil (to be awarded solely by York); fail. Following a pass at PhD level, a student would return to IPN to participate in a formal public defence of the thesis; it would be open to the internal examiner to participate in the formal public defence, either in person or by videolink. Following a successful public defence, a PhD in Computer Science would be awarded jointly by York and IPN. The degree would be conferred, and a joint certificate issued, by the University of York.

It was noted that it was intended that the joint degree programme should reinforce existing research links between the two institutions, and lead to joint research publications, applications for research funding, and the sharing of best practice, including teaching materials and the delivery of short graduate courses.

In the course of discussion, the following points were agreed.

(a) The appointment of examiners would be approved by the Standing Committee on Assessment according to the University’s normal procedures. It was agreed that the relevant paragraph in the proposal should be amended to reflect this.

(b) The public defence at IPN should take place no more than three months after the oral examination at York.

(c) It should be specified that both institutions’ crests and Vice-Chancellor’s or Rector’s signatures should appear on the degree certificate.

(d) Students should have access during the first year to York’s online training materials and to other online materials, including the online plagiarism tutorial.

The Board then approved the proposal.

**ACTION: PS, DK**

**09/39 Four-year PhD programmes**

Arising out of M09/24, the Board received the comments of departments on the proposal for the introduction of four-year PhD programmes.

It was noted that some departments approved the proposal. Others, while not intending to take advantage of it, raised no objection. One department
proposed that there should be variable periods of registration up to four years’ duration; with regard to this, the Board agreed that it would be difficult to construct coherent and equitable rules governing the content of programmes that were differentiated only by the duration of funding available.

The Board then approved the proposal, as it had been agreed at its meeting on 17 March 2009, drawing attention to the following points.

(a) The proposal did not mean that three-year PhD programmes were being removed; nor were departments obliged to take advantage of it.

(b) Students on four-year PhD programmes would be required to submit their theses by the end of the fourth year. There would be no additional ‘writing up’ year. Among other reasons, this was because a four-year PhD programme (i) would be not be required to contain more than six months of material that was not in a three-year programme, and (ii) was intended by its very nature to accelerate completion and to increase the prospects of submission within four years.

(c) A four-year programme would be distinct from a 1+3 programme (masters year followed by three-year PhD programme) in that students would be engaged in a supervised research programme from the start. The distinctive elements could be spread over the four years.

(d) While both three-year and four-year programmes would lead to the same qualification (PhD), four-year programmes would need to bear a distinctive title which indicated the longer duration or enhanced nature of the programme.

(e) Four-year programmes would not attract additional HEFCE funding, but would bring in additional tuition fee income.

(f) In all respects other than duration of registration, four-year PhD programmes would need to comply with the existing requirements of the code of practice on research degree programmes.

The Board also agreed the proposed consequential changes to Regulation 2.5. It also approved a change to Regulation 2.4, intended to make provision for three years of MPhil registration where this formed part of an EngD degree. (This issue had been discussed at the Board’s meeting in January 2008 (M08/11)). At the same time it gave formal approval to the three-year MPhil programme in Large-Scale Complex IT Systems (as the initial stage of the EngD programme of that name), to which effective approval had already been given in October 2007.

It was agreed that the code of practice on research degree programmes should be amended to accommodate four-year PhD programmes.
It was agreed that the proposal should be submitted to Senate for approval, after revision and abbridgement of the explanatory sections of the paper prepared by Dr Vann.

It was suggested that a meeting of departmental graduate chairs might be convened during the summer to draw attention to the proposal.

**ACTION: RV, PS**

09/40  **Proposal for an integrated PhD programme in Education**

The Board received the proposal from Educational Studies for a four-year integrated PhD programme in Education. Dr Paul Wakeling (Educational Studies) was in attendance for this item.

Dr Wakeling explained that the proposed programme, which was based on models at other universities in the UK and elsewhere, integrated research training and a research project in a four-year programme. It anticipated developments to establish ESRC doctoral training centres, and was intended to accommodate the needs of overseas sponsors for a four-year PhD programme.

In the course of discussion, the Board noted that it was proposed:

(a) that students on the programme would take a taught component comprising modules totalling 240 credits (including a 40-credit research project and a 40-credit research proposal and literature review) over the first four terms;

(b) that a separate external examiner would be appointed for that taught component of the programme;

(c) that a student who successfully completed the first year would qualify for a masters degree as an exit award;

(d) that a PhD supervisor would be appointed, and students would embark on the PhD research project, only in the fifth term;

(e) that students would have until the end of a fifth year to complete and submit a PhD thesis.

The Board agreed that in these respects the proposal did not meet the requirements of a four-year PhD programme as approved above (M09/39). This envisaged that students would take at least six months (but not as much as four terms) of additional material; would begin work on a supervised PhD project from the beginning of the programme; would upgrade to PhD registration by the end of the second year; and would submit a PhD thesis by the end of the fourth year.
The Board advised that the programme might better be reformulated as a 1+3 (masters + PhD) programme, or that the taught material might be spread over a four-year PhD programme. It was also suggested that the department might be advised to await the outcome of the ESRC’s doctoral training centre proposals before pursuing a four-year programme. It was open to the department to submit a revised proposal in the autumn term, following discussion with Professor Fitter and Mr Simison.

**ACTION: PS, Educational Studies**

09/41 Implementation of policy on postgraduates who teach

Arising out of MM08/26 and 55, the Board received responses from departments to a questionnaire on the implementation of the policy on postgraduates who teach.

It was noted that the questionnaire had been issued in the name of both the Board for Graduate Schools and the Teaching Committee. The former was interested in ensuring that research students appointed to teach were treated in an appropriate way which benefited them; the latter in ensuring that they provided an appropriate quality of teaching.

It was noted that a separate questionnaire had been administered to postgraduates who teach.

It was also noted that the Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning had held a strategic meeting and a workshop at which the results of these surveys had been discussed.

The Board recognised that it was important that there should now be a single process for considering the results and for bringing forward recommendations for the benefit both of research students who taught and of the quality of the teaching they provided. The Chair agreed to discuss with Professor Sheldon, as Chair of the Teaching Committee, the setting up of a working party, which would include students and a representative of the Board. Dr Ansell agreed to represent the Board on this working party.

**ACTION: AHF, PS**

09/42 Proposal for identifying and supporting staff in the development of communication skills

The Board received a proposal, formulated by Dr Jennifer Winter (Graduate Training Unit) in consultation with Professor Trevor Sheldon (Chair, Teaching Committee), Pat Lofthouse (Director of Human Resources) and Nigel Dandy (Academic Support Office), for identifying and supporting staff in the development of communication skills. The Board was asked to comment on
the proposal in so far as it concerned postgraduates who teach. Dr Winter was in attendance for this item.

The proposal suggested that those responsible for appointing postgraduates who teach should identify those who might benefit from additional English language proficiency support. It was suggested that those with an IELTS score below 7.5 should normally be put forward for additional support.

The Board agreed that identification of those needing additional support should not be made on the basis of the IELTS score. Instead, Boards of Studies should be responsible for satisfying themselves that postgraduates appointed to teach had sufficient English (and should certify that they had so satisfied themselves), and for identifying those who needed additional support. The policy on postgraduates who teach should be amended to make this clear.

The Board was also asked for its view on whether postgraduates appointed to teach should be paid while receiving additional English language proficiency support before taking up a teaching appointment. The Board agreed that postgraduates should not be appointed to teach unless their English was sufficient; in cases where their English was judged to be sufficient to take up a teaching appointment, but where additional support was nevertheless deemed to be beneficial, then students should be paid for teaching performed while receiving that additional support. Only those appointed as Graduate Teaching Assistants as an integral part of their PhD programme should be eligible to receive payment while receiving additional support in preparation for teaching; it is presumed in such cases that the employing department has accepted the need for the additional training in advance of appointment.

**ACTION: PS, JW**

09/43 Extracts from periodic review reports

The Board received extracts from periodic review reports for the Departments of English, Environment and Sociology. The extracts concerned the quality of their provision for research students and for postgraduates who teach. The Board agreed that the reports were satisfactory and raised no issues.

Two of the reports raised the question whether postgraduates who teach should be separately represented on Boards of Studies or Graduate School Boards, or whether their interests should be represented by the existing research student representatives. It was agreed to discuss this at a later date.

09/44 Implementation of guidelines on MA/MSc programmes by research

The Board received responses from departments to a questionnaire on the implementation of the guidelines on MA/MSc programmes by research.
It was noted that departments had for the most part implemented, or were about to implement, the requirements set out in the guidelines.

However, it was not clear whether departments had put in place satisfactory mechanisms, in the absence of an oral examination, for verifying that work submitted by candidates for examination was their own. The Board agreed to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Assessment.

It was agreed to request responses to the questionnaire from those departments (Economics, Electronics, English, History, Language and Sociology) which had MA/MSc programmes by research, but had not so far responded.

**ACTION: PS, RAG**

**09/45 Teaching Committee review of effectiveness**

The Board received a request from the Teaching Committee, arising out of the Committee’s review into its effectiveness, to consider the issue of research student office space. In this connection, the Board received extracts from 2007/08 annual programme review reports, from recent periodic review reports relating to Environment and Medieval Studies, and from the Graduate Students’ Association’s submission for the QAA audit in 2007.

It was noted that the problems regarding research student office space that had been reported concerned humanities and social science departments. It was expected that the opening of the Humanities and Educational Research Centre in September 2009 would greatly alleviate these problems for the departments concerned. In addition, active discussions, aimed at reducing these problems, were taking place with some social science departments.

It was agreed that the Chair should send a brief note of the Board’s discussion to Elizabeth Heaps (Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Estates and Strategic Projects) and to the Registrar.

**ACTION: AHF**

**09/46 Implications of UK Points-Based Immigration System**

The Board received a paper from Rosemary Royds (Manager: Student Administrative Services) on the implications of the UK Points-Based Immigration System.

In April 2009 the UK Border Agency (UKBA) had begun implementing the student tier of the points-based immigration system. This placed certain legal requirements on universities with regard to non-EEA students to whom they
offered places, both before and after they arrived in York. Such students would be issued with a visa only for a named programme at a specified university. In addition, from October 2009 universities would be required to report to the UKBA certain information relating to such students, including information on changes of programme, and on suspension of registration for or withdrawal from their programme of study.

This raised particular issues with regard to research students, including:

(a) **Initial MPhil registration**

Intending PhD students were initially registered at MPhil level, and upgraded to PhD subject to satisfactory academic progress. Under the new UKBA requirements, non-EEA students granted entry for MPhil might be required to apply for an extension of visa in order to progress to PhD. It was therefore recommended that reference to initial MPhil registration should be removed from offer letters, and that a new procedure should be considered for managing student progression through the PhD programme. The Board agreed to ask for a proposal to be submitted to its next meeting.

(b) **Suspensions of registration**

The University would be required to report to the UKBA, within ten days, the dates of any suspension of registration it approved for a visa-holding student, and the student would be expected to leave the UK during the period of the suspension. This would have implications with regard to retrospective suspensions, and the Board agreed that the guidance given on applying for suspensions should be reviewed, and that departments should be advised that retrospective suspensions of registration would not be approved.

(c) **Changes to programme**

The University would be required to report to the UKBA any significant changes to a visa-holding student’s programme of study. This included any shortening of a student’s programme (e.g., through withdrawal or transfer to a shorter programme). It was agreed to seek clarification from the UKBA of whether this also included absence on research visits or fieldwork trips.

(d) **Visiting students**

Visiting students in the UK for over six months must be following an approved programme of study in the UK or at their home university. The Board agreed that current guidance on postgraduate visiting students should be reviewed.
It was agreed that further proposals arising from the UKBA’s requirements should be submitted to the Board’s next meeting.

**ACTION: RJR**

**09/47 Graduate Awards Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Awards Committee held on 4 June 2009 were approved.

**09/48 Future handling of EPSRC Doctoral Training Grant**

Arising out of M09/28, the Board received a paper from Dr McIntosh concerning the future handling of EPSRC Doctoral Training Grant (DTG).

Dr McIntosh proposed that the Committee should in future years return to the system of allocating the DTG to each department using the Research Support Office’s calculations based on active EPSRC grants (and should request the EPSRC Mathematics Programme to specify the value of its contribution). Dr McIntosh also questioned the Committee’s procedure of setting aside part of the DTG as a Strategic Fund, and inviting departments to bid for allocations from this Fund. He argued that because departments had research strategies that dovetailed with the University’s research strategy, the setting aside of a Strategic Fund was unnecessary, and delayed the allocation of funds to departments, which in turn delayed the recruitment of students.

As Chair of the Graduate Awards Committee, Professor Fitter said that he had no objection to using the Research Support Office’s calculations for determining DTG allocations to departments, but stated that in his view the Strategic Fund served a valuable purpose. Nevertheless, he would report Dr McIntosh’s view to the Committee.

**ACTION: AHF**

**09/49 Review of annual priorities for 2008/09**

The Board reviewed the annual priorities it had set for 2008/09.

It was noted that the review of the implementation by departments of the policy on postgraduates who teach had not yet been completed: information had been received from departments, but had yet to be acted upon.

It was agreed to invite members to propose priorities for 2009/10, for consideration at the next meeting.
09/50  Family accommodation allocations

The Board received a report from the meeting of the Student Services Committee held on 18 June 2009 concerning the allocation of University and York Housing Association family accommodation. The Committee had been concerned that, owing to a long waiting list of current students with families, the University was usually unable to offer accommodation to students with families who were new to the University. The Committee had therefore decided to increase the turnover of student families in family accommodation by limiting family lets to a period of twelve months only for all new offers of accommodation. (Hitherto, students had been allowed to remain in family accommodation for the duration of their full-time registration.) Students would be informed of this limit at the time accommodation was offered, and information about the limit would be communicated to applicants. Consideration would be given to requests for extensions if the student could demonstrate exceptional welfare or other circumstances. The Committee had in addition agreed to explore ways of increasing the availability of family accommodation both in the University and in the private sector.

The Board, which had been asked to comment on this decision, agreed that it was a fair way of enabling a greater number of students to benefit from family accommodation, and at a time when they most needed it.

ACTION: PS

09/51  Dates of meetings in 2009/10

It was noted that meetings in 2009/10 were to be held on the following dates beginning at 2.15pm:

Tuesday 27 October
Tuesday 8 December
Tuesday 26 January
Tuesday 16 March
Tuesday 22 June

09/52  Dates for possible appeal hearings in 2009/10:

Members agreed to seek to keep free the following dates for possible appeal hearings in 2009/10:

Tuesday 17 November
Tuesday 19 January
Tuesday 23 February
Tuesday 23 March
Tuesday 27 April
Tuesday 25 May
Tuesday 29 June