Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 2 March 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
Professor J.C. Sparrow
Mr S.I. Stafford
Miss J. Winter

In attendance: Dr F.M.K. Campbell (Graduate Recruitment Officer)
Dr S.J. Hutchinson
Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Professor B.C. Gilbert
Ms. C. Rees
Dr L. Smith

04/18 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2004 were approved (agendum 2), subject to the addition of the name of Professor B.C. Gilbert to the list of those who had tendered apologies for absence.

04/19 Report from the Senate

The report from the meeting of the Senate held on 3 March 2003 was received (agendum 3a).

04/20 Policy on research degree programmes

Arising out of MM03/92 and 04/1, the Board reviewed the proposed policy on research degree programmes in the light of Senate’s comments, and of a comment from the graduate chair in Biology (agendum 3b). The following changes and additions were approved.
Thesis advisory panels

The fourth paragraph of this section to read:

“Students will be given an opportunity to comment confidentially on the quality of their supervision, either in writing in advance of the meeting or orally at the meeting in the absence of the supervisor.”

Students who exceed the normal period of registration

The second sentence of this section to be replaced by:

“Extensions of this period, if requested by the student and recommended by the department, may be approved by the University. Such extensions are granted only in exceptional circumstances, namely, where the candidate's work has been hampered by medical or personal or unexpected academic circumstances for which supporting documentary evidence can be made available. For full-time students, the need to take employment in the fourth year of registration is not sufficient justification in itself for an extension of registration.”

It was agreed to add the following section:

“Availability of theses

Following approval by the examiners, all research theses shall be available for consultation, and copies will be lodged in the University Library and in the student’s department. Exceptionally, if the student requests it and if the department concerned so recommends, the Board for Graduate Schools may agree that access to the thesis should be withheld for a period not exceeding twelve months from the date on which the award of the degree is approved.”

Subject to these amendments, the policy was approved.

04/21 Policy on postgraduates who teach

Arising out of MM03/94 and 04/1, the Board reviewed the proposed policy on postgraduates who teach in the light of Senate’s comments (agendum 3c). The following amendments were approved:

Preamble

To read:
“The activities of postgraduate students who carry out teaching or demonstrating on modules within academic departments are governed by the following policy.”

Section 4: A fair rate of pay

The second sentence to read:

“There should be pay for all teaching responsibilities and hours of work, except where these are performed as a requirement of a University research award.”

Section 6: Clear and regular procedures for assessment and review

“...by a full member of academic staff...” to read “...by a member of academic staff...”

“...from a senior member of staff...” to read “...from an experienced member of staff...”

It was agreed to forward the policy to the Personnel Director for comments.

04/22 Review of postgraduate recruitment strategy

The Board received the 2004 review of the postgraduate recruitment strategy, prepared by the Graduate Recruitment Officer, Dr Campbell (agendum 4). It was noted that the review had been submitted to the Planning Committee.

In connection with Section 2b, it was reported that the Chair received proposals for new courses and was able to comment on them before they were considered by the Teaching Committee.

In connection with Section 2c, it was reported that the panel which allocated University overseas scholarships appeared to exclude from consideration candidates who had been successful in the competition for Overseas Research Student awards. It was suggested that in some cases a candidate might need both awards in order to be able to take up a place at York. It was agreed to suggest that the Graduate Recruitment Officer should attend the selection panel’s meetings. It was also suggested that departments should be given an opportunity to rank candidates for University overseas scholarships.
In connection with Section 4, it was noted that the request for an increase in the budget for course promotion would need elaboration with regard to additional activities that an increased budget would allow.

**04/23 Submission rates 1997/99**

The Board received information on the submission rates of full-time PhD students who had started in 1997, 1998 and 1999 (agendum 5; attached as Appendix 1).

It was noted that in each year the figures in column (a) indicated the number of students who had submitted within four years; the figures in column (b) indicated the total number of starters in that year who should have submitted (i.e., excluding those who, because of suspensions, had not yet reached their four-year submission deadline).

Where the University had approved a suspension of a student’s full-time registration, the period of the suspension had been added to the four-year submission deadline. Where, however, an extension had been approved, for whatever reason, the extension had not been added to the four-year submission deadline. (This was because it was not feasible to distinguish between more or less compelling reasons for an extension, nor were the reasons recorded on the computer record. In any case, the University’s stated policy was that a doctoral thesis was a piece of work that could be completed within three years)

Students who had withdrawn within one year, students who had transferred to another institution, and students who had died, had been excluded.

It was agreed that criteria needed to be developed regarding the inclusion or exclusion of MPhil/PhD students who elected to submit for an MPhil instead of a PhD, or who submitted for a PhD but failed to achieve one.

The Chair expressed concern at the low submission rates of some departments. It was agreed that he should write to those departments which had submission rates of 50% or lower, averaged over three years. It was also agreed that such departments should not in future be eligible to receive University research studentships, unless the Awards Sub-Committee was persuaded that there were compelling reasons for the low submission rates. It was agreed that a similar sanction should not be applied in the selection of candidates for nomination for ORS awards, since ORS applications were to be considered individually on their merits; it was agreed, however, that the ORS selection panel should in future receive departmental submission rates for information.
Finally, it was agreed that departments should be given a further opportunity to confirm the submission rates, which should then be submitted to Senate for information.

04/24 Report of Working Party on Academic Misconduct Procedures

The Board received, for its comments, the report of the Working Party on Academic Misconduct (agendum 6). The Working Party had been set up by the Standing Committee on Assessment, under the chairmanship of Dr Crawford, to review the academic misconduct procedures. The report and the proposed new procedures were introduced by Dr Crawford.

It was noted that the proposed new procedures were intended to address deficiencies in the existing procedures. Emphasis was placed on ensuring that students, particularly postgraduate and international students, received timely advice on academic misconduct and how to avoid it, together with warnings of the penalties involved. Principles were set out for the establishment of an academic mark for work affected by academic misconduct and for determining a penalty. It was proposed that the sub-committee set up to investigate a case of academic misconduct should act on behalf of the Board of Examiners and should report direct to the Board of Studies.

The Board made the following comments on the proposed new procedures:

(i) the reference to the Board for Graduate Schools in paragraph 3.3(j) was inappropriate, since the paragraph came under the procedure for undergraduate work.

(ii) it was noted that paragraph 4.3 was intended to require that, if the final penalty was not greater than 5, a brief anonymous report should be submitted to the Board for Graduate Schools, and that the candidate should be invited to submit grounds of appeal, if he or so wished, to the Chair of the Board for Graduate Schools, who would determine whether or not the appeal should be heard. Paragraph 4.4 was intended to require that, if the final penalty was greater than 5 (or if the candidate had a previous record of academic misconduct), a full report should accompany the recommendation to the Board for Graduate Schools, and that the candidate should always be given the opportunity to appear before the Board for Graduate Schools (or a panel of members of the Board for Graduate Schools) in order to appeal against the recommendation, if he or she so wished, whether or not grounds for appeal were established before the hearing. It was agreed that the wording of paragraphs 4.3 and 4.4 did not make this intention sufficiently clear.
it was felt that the mechanism for hearing appeals by graduate students, which involved convening a panel of four members of the Board on each occasion, might become burdensome if hearings arising from cases of academic misconduct were to occur frequently. Two suggestions were made:

(a) a separate committee might be constituted, to hear all appeals, by both graduate and undergraduate students, arising from cases of academic misconduct;

(b) a graduate candidate should always be given the opportunity to appear before a panel only if the effect of the penalty for academic misconduct was that the candidate failed the course.

in the case of candidates covered by paragraph 4.3, the Board questioned what sort of grounds a candidate might put forward or the Chair of the Board for Graduate Schools accept as requiring a hearing, given that the circumstances of the academic misconduct had already been investigated by a sub-committee of the Board of Examiners.

It was agreed to refer these comments to the Working Party.

Finally, it was noted that, following approval by the University of the Working Party’s proposals, the Board should develop a procedure covering academic misconduct by research students.

04/25 Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 15 June 2004.