UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 23 November 2004.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.H. Fitter (Chair)
The Chair of the Teaching Committee, Professor T.A. Sheldon
The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment, Dr T.J. Crawford
The Provost of Wentworth Graduate College, Dr P.M. Lee
Miss C.A. Bell
Dr D. Efird
Professor C.A. Godfrey
Professor E.R. Hancock
Mr O. Lisagor
Dr G.D. Low
Dr J.E. Nuechterlein
Professor J.C. Sparrow
Professor M. Taylor
Miss J. Winter

In attendance: Dr F.M.K. Campbell (Graduate Recruitment Officer)
Dr K.V. Clegg (Senior Graduate Training Officer)
Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Dr G. Tsoulas
Dr R. Wooffitt

04/72 Membership of the Board

It was reported that Miss Jennifer Winter and Miss Chloe Bell had been appointed by the Graduate Students’ Association, and Mr Oleg Lisagor by the Overseas Students’ Association, to serve as members of the Board for 2004/05.

It was also noted that Dr Karen Clegg, Senior Graduate Training Officer, was attending her first meeting of the Board.

The Chair welcomed the new members.

04/73 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 October 2004 were approved.
04/74 Working Party on Academic Misconduct by Research Students

Arising out of M04/56, it was reported (agendum 4b) that Dr Wooffitt had agreed to chair the Working Party on Academic Misconduct by Research Students. The Board approved Dr Wooffitt’s appointment. It was noted that Dr Crawford would also be a member, and that three other members of academic staff and a student member would also be appointed.

The Board approved terms of reference for the Working Party, as follows:

To formulate, for the consideration of the Board for Graduate Schools, a procedure for dealing with academic misconduct by research students, having regard to (a) the forms of academic misconduct likely to be committed by research students; (b) what constitutes assessed work; (c) the possible absence of an external examiner at the time the academic misconduct is committed; (d) the nature of the penalties that might be imposed; (e) the existing policy on academic misconduct by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students; and (f) practice at other universities.

04/75 Committee on Research Skills Training

Arising out of M04/57, the Board agreed the appointment of the following members to serve on the standing Committee on Research Skills Training:

Professor J.C. Sparrow (Chair)
Dr K.V. Clegg (Senior Graduate Training Officer)
Dr D. Efird (Graduate Chair, Philosophy)
Dr B.J. Keely (Graduate Chair, Chemistry)
Miss J. Winter (Graduate Students’ Association)

04/76 Report by ESRC Training Panel: role of Wentworth Graduate College

Arising out of M04/58, the Board received a paper (tabled at the meeting) prepared by Dr Lee (Provost, Wentworth Graduate College) on the suggestion in the report of the ESRC Training Panel that more emphasis should be placed on the role of Wentworth Graduate College (agendum 4c).

Dr Lee, who had consulted with members of the College, was of the view that it was not easy to see how the College’s role could be expanded. The Graduate and Overseas Students’ Associations were located in the College, which to that extent served as a centre for social and welfare provision. However, skills training programmes had developed outside of the collegiate structure, nor was it self-evident that the collegiate structure should reflect academic provision. Students’ academic and social life was largely conducted outside the college.

It was suggested that one course of action might be to encourage use of the College for interdisciplinary exchange rather than formal skills training (e.g., by adding a social dimension to skills training, or by developing research
colloquia). Dr Lee, Dr Clegg and the GSA might prove the most effective at developing such activities. The target would be students across the University, not simply those resident in Wentworth College.

04/77 QAA revised code practice on research degree programmes

Arising out of M04/59, the Board received a proposal from the Chair, Deputy Chair and Secretary concerning the University’s response to the QAA revised code of practice on research degree programmes (agendum 4d).

The Board agreed that a comprehensive institutional code of practice should be developed which corresponded to the sections of the QAA code, and brought together material from existing documents. The code of practice would include responsibilities to be placed on departments (heads of departments and graduate chairs).

It was agreed that there remained a need for a short guide for examiners, to be sent out with theses for examination, and that short guides should also be prepared for students and for graduate chairs. These guides, and the University’s policy on research degree programmes (which set out guiding principles), would need to conform to the institutional code of practice. It was noted that the QAA revised code might necessitate changes to the University’s policy or regulations.

With regard to individual issues raised by the QAA revised code, the Board agreed as follows:

(i)  
**Supervision**

Where more than one supervisor was appointed, one named supervisor should be the single clearly identified point of contact for the student.

(ii)  
**Feedback mechanisms**

The feedback which the University chose to collect should be focused, manageable and useful. It might include feedback from students (possibly collected and summarised by departments, using on-line feedback systems; and also through periodic review visits); feedback from supervisors (also collected through departments); and feedback from major funding bodies. The sources of feedback suggested by the QAA appeared excessive.

(iii)  
**Desirability of separate examiners’ reports before viva**

Members of the Board could recognise advantages in requiring examiners to submit separate reports before the oral examination: it would ensure that they had read the thesis thoroughly, would prevent one examiner from exerting undue pressure on the other, and in the case of the external examiner could act as means of assessing the quality of internal procedures. On the other hand, the practice could lead to preliminary judgements
becoming entrenched, and could undermine the value of the oral examination. The Board reached no final decision on this matter.

(iv) Desirability of independent chair for viva

The Board felt that to require the presence of an independent, non-examining chair at the oral examination would be costly in terms of staff resources and could affect the conduct of the examination. Similarly, the presence of the supervisor could affect the conduct of the examination or inhibit the performance of the candidate, who might, for example, accept a criticism which was implicitly a criticism of the supervisor. The Board concluded that the best way of meeting the concerns of the QAA revised code would be to require an audio-recording to be made of the oral examination, on condition that the recording would only be used in the case of an appeal by the candidate based on the conduct of the examination.

(v) Availability of examiners’ reports

It was agreed that examiners’ final reports should be made available to candidates.

Members were asked to read through the QAA revised code and to draw attention to any matters on which they had strong views.

In conclusion, the Board received for information the letter of 30 September 2004 from the HEFCE on postgraduate research degree programmes: minimum standards and funding (referred to by the Chair at the previous meeting, M04/59), and a note from the UK Council for Graduate Education on the QAA’s intended procedure for auditing compliance with the revised code of practice.

04/78 Report of English Language Working Party

Arising out of M04/60, the Chair reported (agendum 4e) that the report of the English Language Working Party was being taken forward by the Vice-Chancellor’s Advisory Group, which had asked the EFL Unit to provide a clearer financial plan.

04/79 Lower awards in cases of academic misconduct

The Board approved (agendum 5) a recommendation from the Standing Committee on Assessment that the University might, in unusual circumstances, make an intermediate award to a student who had committed academic misconduct, where such an award existed within the programme of study, and where there could be certainty that academic misconduct had not occurred in any of the work contributing to that intermediate award. It was noted that the recommendation had been approved by the Special Cases Committee and the Teaching Committee.
04/80 Change of PhD title from Electronics to Electronic Engineering

The Board approved a recommendation from the Graduate Schools Board in Electronics (agendum 6) that the title of the PhD programme offered by that department should be changed from Electronics to Electronic Engineering.

04/81 Graduate Awards Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Awards Committee held on 3 November 2004 were approved (agendum 7).

04/82 Review of priorities for 2004/05 and general discussion of graduate activity

Arising out of M04/56, the Board reviewed its priorities for 2004/05 and held a general discussion of graduate activity (agenda 4a and 8).

In the course of the general discussion, members proposed the following items for further consideration or action:

*Training*
- Personal development plans
- York Graduate Award
- Combined PhD programmes (MD/PhD, MBA/PhD)
- Pre-term packaging of research skills training, to relieve pressure on research time

*Administrative and financial*
- Accredited programme for postgraduates who teach/demonstrate
- University-wide “showcase day” on enhancing academic practice
- Single web page with training links
- Advanced specialised language training for PhD students
- Advanced technical training for science PhD students

*Provision*
- Fee-waiver awards for overseas candidates
- Postdoctoral awards in humanities (open to those completing PhDs in three years)
- University policy on taught postgraduate programmes (including, e.g., admissions, supervision, training, language training, feedback on assessment, training to prevent academic misconduct)
- Academic misconduct: implications for one-year postgraduate students
- Panel to adjudicate on financial matters affecting individual students

*Structural*
- Provision of facilities for part-time research students
- Support for and integration of overseas students
- Orientation and induction arrangements for all postgraduate students

*Provision*
- Postgraduate Humanities Centre
- Interdisciplinary graduate schools to facilitate common action by departments
with related interests

*Opportunities to exploit further*
World Universities Network
White Rose Consortium

04/83 Next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 25 January 2005.