Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 21 November 2006.

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 C.J. Fewster, The Provost of Wentworth Graduate College Dr C. Thompson, Professor A.G. Burr, Dr D. Efird, Dr B.J. Keely, Dr G.D. Low, Professor M.A. Maynard, Professor J.C. Sparrow, Ms A. Takshe, Mr A.W. Underwood, Miss J. Winter

In attendance: Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit), Ms R.J. Royds (Manager, Student Administrative Services), Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Dr R.J. Partridge, Dr G. Tsoulas, Dr R. Wooffitt

06/60 Membership of the Board

It was noted that the following student members had been appointed to serve on the Board for 2006/07:

Jennifer Winter (research student member)

Alan Underwood (taught programme student member)

Aseel Takshe (Overseas Students’ Association member)

The Chair welcomed the new members.

06/61 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 October 2006 were approved, subject to the amendment
of M06/48(c) to read: “concern that the move from students identifying research areas to academic staff identifying research areas might have a destabilising effect on disciplines, by requiring students to apply to do research in a defined area rather than on a topic of their own choosing”.

06/62 Regulation for degree of Engineering Doctorate

Arising out of M06/49, the Board received a report from the meeting of Senate held on 31 October 2006, at which the Senate had approved the proposed regulation for the degree of Engineering Doctorate. It was noted that the regulation made provision for a general category of degree qualification. Proposals for specific programmes leading to that qualification would need to be submitted by Boards of Studies to the Board for Graduate Schools for consideration and approval.

06/63 Terms of reference of the Board

Arising out of M06/43, the Board received proposed revised terms of reference, showing the effect of the proposed changes considered at the previous meeting.

It was noted that the Board’s concerns regarding the proposed changes had been considered at the meeting, on 7 November 2006, of the chairs and secretaries of the committees concerned. This had felt that the concerns were addressed through cross-membership (the Deputy Chair of the Board being an ex officio member of the Standing Committee on Assessment, and the Chair of the Committee being an ex officio member of the Board), and through the membership of the Standing Committee on Assessment including a postgraduate student.

In this connection, the Board agreed to recommend that the membership of the Standing Committee on Assessment should be amended, to include a postgraduate student member (rather than a “taught” postgraduate student member). It was suggested that the Standing Committee might wish to review its membership to include both a taught and a research postgraduate student.

It was also reported that the Standing Committee had agreed to consult with the Board on matters affecting postgraduate student education.

Regarding its own proposed terms of reference, the Board agreed:

(a) that it should retain responsibility for considering amendments to the Ordinances and Regulations regarding research degree programmes, excluding assessment and examination (proposed term of reference 10);
(b) that it should retain responsibility for higher doctorates, including the appointment of assessors and the recommendation of awards (*proposed term of reference 18*);

c) that, in cases of academic misconduct, the Board should hear recommendations regarding taught postgraduate students “where necessary” (*proposed term of reference 12*).

It was noted that the transfer of several terms of reference from the Board to the Special Cases Committee remained to be discussed at a later stage.

The agreed revised terms of reference are attached as **Appendix 1**.

**06/64 Priorities for 2006/07**

Arising out of M06/46, the Board revisited its priorities for 2006/07.

It was agreed that Professor Sparrow, Dr Fewster and Mr Simison should meet to discuss the implementation of the remaining provisions of the code of practice on research degree programmes, and should report to the next meeting.

The Chair agreed to reconvene the group considering proposals for a York Graduate School, and to report back to the February meeting.

It was noted that the Roberts Review Group (consisting of the Chair, Professor Sparrow and Dr Clegg) would send reports to the Board on the development, implementation and monitoring of research skills training. Dr Clegg agreed to prepare a report for the next meeting.

It was suggested that as one of its priorities the Board should consider extending registration for full-time PhD students to cover a fourth year, with a view to securing benefits such as NUS discounts and Council Tax exemption for students in that year. Members of the Board expressed serious reservations about this proposal, pointing out that it could cause confusion about the nature of the fourth year and lead to delays in the submission of theses. It was agreed to invite the student members to provide information for a future meeting to enable the Board to consider whether it wished to explore this further.

**06/65 AHRC review of postgraduate funding mechanisms**

Arising out of M06/48, the Board received a copy of the response sent to the AHRC regarding its consultation document on postgraduate funding mechanisms.

**06/66 Disability Equality Duty**
The Board received the paper from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Disability Manager on the new Disability Equality Duty, which was to come into force in December 2006, and its implications for the University.

The new Duty required the University actively to identify and remove barriers to equality, and to publish a Disability Equality Scheme which included a three-year Action Plan. A working group chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor was preparing the Action Plan, which was being structured around the University’s Corporate Plan headings. The Chair of the Board for Graduate Schools (as Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Research) had responsibility for actions to be taken involving research, including research students.

The Teaching Committee had set up a group to consider the implications of the new Duty regarding undergraduate and taught postgraduate students (including assessment). The group would address the implications for all students except research students. It was proposed that a member of the Board should participate in this group, to advise on implications specific to research students.

The Board identified a number of areas regarding research students which it believed would need to be considered by the group. These were:

* extensions of submission deadline: should reasons of disability, as well medical reasons, be explicitly included in the Regulations?

* the nature of the assessment, i.e., thesis/dissertation and oral examination

* financial issues

* skills training

* dyslexia

It was agreed that the Board would need to seek information from focus groups of research students with a disability.

**06/67 Proposed MSc programme in Environment (by research)**

The Board received the proposal from the Board of Studies in Environment for an MSc programme by research in Environment. The programme would be available either full-time over twelve months or part-time over two years.

The Board made the following comments:
(a) the dissertation should be submitted within twelve months (full-time) or twenty-four months (part-time) after the start of a student’s registration;

(b) the length of the dissertation should be not more than 40,000 words;

(c) the Board agreed that the use of the mark scale for the dissertation of a research degree programme was inappropriate.

Subject to resolution of these points, which it was agreed to authorise the Chair to approve, the Board approved the proposal.

It was agreed to ask Ms Royds, Mrs Goerisch and Mr Simison to prepare a paper, for consideration by the Board and by the Standing Committee on Assessment, containing guidance on MA/MSc programmes by research, in particular the criteria for passing (and, if deemed appropriate, for passing with distinction) and the requirements for the appointment of examiners.

06/68 Deletion of Regulation 2.7 (Degrees of EngDip, MPhil and PhD on a collaborative basis)

The Board received a proposal that Regulation 2.7 (degrees of EngDip, MPhil and PhD on a collaborative basis) should be deleted.

It was noted that the Engineering Diploma, which had had no students since 1994, was no longer offered. The distinctive provisions of the degrees of MPhil and PhD on a collaborative basis (namely, concurrent employment away from York, and the appointment of a second, non-University supervisor), were otherwise covered in current Regulations (2.1(d), (e) and (g)).

The Board agreed that Regulation 2.7 should be deleted, and should be replaced by the recently approved Regulation for the degree of Engineering Doctorate (EngD).

It was agreed that references to the EngDip in Regulation 2.1(a), (d), (f) and (g) should also be removed.

06/69 Proposed amendment to Regulation 2.1(d)

The Board considered a proposed amendment to Regulation 2.1(d), intended to permit members of academic staff who were members of the Hull York Medical School but employed by the University of Hull to supervise students registered for postgraduate programmes at the University of York.
The provision was intended in the first instance to allow members of HYMS employed by the University of Hull to supervise York MPhil/PhD students (for example, in the Departments of Archaeology or Biology), but would also allow them to supervise York students registered for other postgraduate programmes. It was noted that, because of the collaborative nature of HYMS, its members were distributed in terms of employment contracts between the Universities of Hull and York. The proposed change would increase the pool of academic expertise available to students registered at York.

It was agreed that supervisors appointed under this provision should be made aware of and should agree to adhere to University Regulations, policies, procedures and codes of practice in relation to York supervisees, and that their appointment should be expressly approved by the Senate.

The Board then approved the proposal, as a result of which (and following deletion of the reference to the Engineering Diploma, as agreed in M06/68 above), Regulation 2.1(d) reads (additional words highlighted):

“Supervisors

Candidates for Higher Degrees are required at all times to pursue an approved course of study under the general supervision of a member of staff of the University (or of the University of Hull, if the member of staff is a member of the Hull York Medical School), appointed by the Senate on the recommendation of the Board of Studies concerned. The appointment of an additional supervisor other than a member of the University may be made when circumstances make such an appointment desirable.”

06/70 Interim report on postgraduate recruitment 2006

The Board received for information an interim report, prepared for the Planning Committee, on postgraduate student recruitment in 2006.

It was noted that the current total of registered students (2,310 fte) represented 87% of the aggregate departmental target. The shortfall was close to 10% in all categories except overseas taught, where it was 21%.

The generally static position of the market at York was reflected at other institutions. It suggested that departments needed either to re-evaluate their targets and reduce their cost base, or devise strategies to take market share from other institutions.

06/71 Review of risk management registers
Following a request by the Registrar and Secretary regarding the need for regular review of risk management registers by relevant personnel, it was agreed that the Board should review annually, beginning in January 2007, those parts of the registers relevant to postgraduate students.

06/72 Issues arising from annual report on undergraduate appeals and complaints

The Board received a note from the Standing Committee on Assessment on issues arising from the annual report on undergraduate appeals and complaints.

It was noted that the issues highlighted by the Academic Registrar and by the Standing Committee included:

* the University should follow its own procedures correctly

* appeals and complaints should be dealt with in a timely fashion

* there was a need for clarity in regulations, for equitable treatment of students, and for reasons for decisions to be substantiated

* departments should publish clear guidelines for staff and students, and retain comprehensive records of student progress

Mrs Goerisch would be tracking the progress of appeals and academic misconduct cases. With regard to the latter, it was noted that tracking could be difficult in cases where the student was not initially named by the department concerned.

06/73 Policy on masters degrees held in abeyance

The Deputy Chair sought the Board’s view on a case which arose from the practice of allowing students to hold the award of a masters degree in abeyance.

It was noted that there was a long-established practice whereby a student, having satisfied the requirements for the award of a masters degree, could hold the award of that degree in abeyance and count the registration period for the masters degree towards the registration period for the MPhil/PhD degree. The student could be awarded the masters degree if, for example, he or she subsequently discontinued registration for, or failed to obtain, the MPhil or PhD degree.

The case had arisen of a student who, having held a masters degree in abeyance, had reached
the end of the fourth year of study for the PhD and had applied for an extension of submission deadline of twelve months. The Deputy Chair had been willing to approve only a shorter extension. The student had therefore asked to take the masters degree and thereby to add a year to his period of PhD registration (for which he would pay an additional year’s tuition fee), so that he would have a fourth year to complete his thesis in lieu of the extension he had requested.

The Board saw no objection to his request being approved at this stage, on condition that the work submitted for the PhD did not include the same work he had submitted for the masters degree.

The Board felt, however, that there was a need to review policy on this issue. Relevant considerations were:

* a distinction needed to be drawn between upgrading to MPhil/PhD registration after completing a masters degree by research and doing so after completing a taught masters degree; the latter could be approved only if the student was of sufficient calibre to complete a PhD within the prescribed period including the taught masters year

* in no circumstances could a student submit the same work for the PhD as for the masters degree

* the PhD programme should conform to the code of practice on research degree programmes; for example, transfer to PhD registration should take place by the end of the second year (including the masters year).

It was agreed to ask Mr Simison to prepare a paper outlining policy on this issue for consideration at the next meeting.

06/74 Next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 23 January 2007.

Philip Simison
Assistant Registrar

PS/ November 2006