Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 20 November 2007.

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, Dr P. Ansell, Professor A.G. Burr, Dr D. Efird, Dr B.J. Keely, Professor J.C. Sparrow, Ms A. Takshe, Professor M. Taylor

In attendance: Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit), Ms T.M. Driffield (Scholarships Officer), Mrs R.A. Goerisch (Assistant Registrar, Student Progress), Mrs R.J. Royds (Manager, Student Administrative Services), Dr R. Vann (Member, Roberts Review Group), Mr P. Simison (Graduate Schools Office)

Apologies: Ms E.C. Cooper, Professor G. Griffin, Dr F.G. Özkan, Miss R. Tayara, Dr C. Thompson

07/112 Membership of the Board

It was reported that Ms Emma Cooper had been appointed to serve as the taught course student member for 2007/08.

The Chair welcomed Dr Roddy Vann (Physics), who had agreed to attend meetings as a member of the Roberts Review Group, to his first meeting of the Board.

07/113 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 October 2007 were approved.

07/114 QAA institutional audit 2007
Arising out of M07/90, Professor Sheldon reported that the QAA audit team’s briefing visit had taken place on 29-31 October 2007.

The audit visit would now be shorter than planned, and would take place on 3-6 December 2007.

The audit team wished to have four meetings: (i) with Heads of Departments, Chairs of Boards of Studies and Chairs of Graduate School Boards from two departments (Environment and Philosophy), the Academic Co-ordinator for the Humanities (Professor Local), and the Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment (Dr Fewster); (ii) with undergraduate and postgraduate (taught and research) students; (iii) with members of the University with responsibilities for the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning and of student support; and (iv), with the Pro-Vice-Chancellors for Teaching and Learning (Professor Sheldon) and for Students (Dr Grenville) and Ms Kennell (Academic Support Office).

Two departments (Biology and Language) would be used as ‘sampling trails’ to test the effectiveness of the University’s policies and procedures.

The audit team would scrutinise documentation only from two further departments, Chemistry and Politics.

The audit team would send a letter containing its key findings on 21 December 2007.

07/115 Research degree programmes: circular to departments

Arising out of MM07/91, 94 and 97, the Chair reported that he had sent a circular to chairs of departmental graduate school boards concerning implementation of the code of practice on research degree programmes, the findings of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2007, and PhD submission rate data for students starting in 2000-2003. A copy of the circular had been sent to members of the Board.

Where the Board had had concerns about the implementation of specific requirements of the code of practice on research degree programmes, the departments concerned had been asked to provide, by 11 January 2008, an assurance that the requirement would in each case be implemented, and a statement of the steps they proposed to take to implement it. Departments had also been reminded of the key requirements of the code of practice, and had been given an indication of the revisions so far agreed. They had been asked to note the current requirements of the code of practice, and to take steps to implement the agreed changes by October 2008 at the latest, in time for the next annual review of the implementation of the code of practice.

The findings of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2007 had been circulated with a department-by-department analysis, raising specific issues at departmental level. Attention
had also been drawn to areas of generally weak response, including careers advice and teaching questions. It was noted that departments with small numbers of respondents, along with questions which had been answered by small numbers of respondents, had been excluded from the circular, although an accompanying spreadsheet provided the raw data which could be interrogated more closely if desired; it was agreed to draw this to the attention of the departments concerned. Departments would be asked to respond to the issues raised as part of their annual programme review. It was agreed to request that a member of the Board should be allowed to attend the meeting of the Teaching Committee at which annual programme reviews were considered. Responses to the issues raised would also be forwarded to the Board for consideration. It was reported that the national findings of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey would be published in December 2007. The Survey would be repeated in 2008.

Attention had been drawn to the variation in PhD submission rates between and within subject areas, and to a correlation between submission rates and withdrawal rates. Departments had been asked to consider these data.

**ACTION: AHF, PS**

**07/116 Revised version of code of practice on research degree programmes**

The Board received a proposed revised version of the code of practice on research degree programmes. This incorporated the revisions agreed at the last meeting (M07/91), as well as a number of others, including reference to the degree of EngD, the new guidelines on MA/MSc programmes by research, and agreed adjustments to assessment procedures.

The following further amendments were agreed:

**Introduction**

Section 1(c) to read: “The Standing Committee on Assessment monitors comments made by thesis advisory panels when students transfer from MPhil to PhD or EngD registration, and comments made by MPhil, PhD and EngD examiners. The Standing Committee reports to the Board for Graduate Schools where appropriate.”

**Research environment**

The first sentence of Section 2(c) to read: “Generic research and transferable skills training will be provided by the University’s Graduate Training Unit, while individual departments will be responsible for subject specific research training.”

**Selection and admission of students**
Section 3(b) to read: “The University has an Equal Opportunities Policy for Students at [http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/aso/eqopps/code.htm](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/aso/eqopps/code.htm). This aims to ensure that no prospective student or existing student is treated less favourably on the grounds of age, race, colour, nationality, ethnic origin, creed, disability, HIV status, sexual orientation, gender, marital or parental status, political belief or social or economic class.”

Following a question regarding Section 4(b), and the requirement that the departmental induction programme for MPhil, PhD and EngD students should include (where appropriate) health and safety, including health and safety while on placement or undertaking work away from the University (including fieldwork and research visits), it was agreed to ascertain whether students on placement or undertaking work away from the University were covered by the University’s insurance policy.

It was agreed that the opening sentence of Section 13(a) (“The University will pilot the audio-recording of oral examinations in selected volunteer departments, as a means of providing an objective record of the oral examination in the event of an appeal”) would need amendment, subject to approval by the Senate of the Standing Committee on Assessment’s proposal regarding the audio-recording of oral examinations, to: “From October 2008, audio-recordings will be made of all oral examinations, as a means of providing an objective record of the oral examination in the event of an appeal.” The Board agreed to retain the provision that the recording of an oral examination could also be listened to by an additional examiner subsequently appointed where the examiners had failed to agree between themselves whether or not the candidate had satisfied the requirements for a particular degree and the departmental Graduate School Board had been unable to resolve the disagreement.

It was agreed that the revised code of practice should be promulgated following approval by Senate, and changes implemented as soon as practicable and in any case by October 2008.

**ACTION: PS**

**07/117 Revised notes of guidance on the degrees of MPhil and PhD**

The Board received a proposed revised version of notes of guidance on the degrees of MPhil and PhD for students, supervisors and examiners. This incorporated amendments designed to bring the notes into line with the code of practice on research degree programmes, and to reflect the introduction of the degree of EngD and other changes to Regulations and procedures.

It was agreed that Section 7 should be amended to read as follows:

“Academic misconduct”
The University's rules on academic misconduct are set out in Regulation 5.4. Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, collusion and fabrication. Candidates must not, by implication or otherwise represent the work of others as their own, represent work done in collaboration with others as their own unaided work, or present work for assessment which suggests that factual information has been collected which has not in fact been collected, or which falsifies factual information. All sources, whether published books or articles or unpublished material of any kind, must be explicitly acknowledged, and quotations or close paraphrases correctly attributed. The University regards any form of academic misconduct as an extremely serious matter. The procedure for dealing with academic misconduct by research student, at http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/gso/exams/AcadMisconductResearch.htm, contains an illustrative list of offences and penalties; penalties include termination of candidature for the degree.”

It was agreed, with reference to Section 12(c), that the special permission required for a candidate’s thesis to be referred on more than one occasion should be given by the Board for Graduate Schools rather than the Standing Committee on Assessment.

**ACTION: PS**

**07/118 Revision of University Regulations affecting postgraduate students**

The Board received the report from a working group of the Standing Committee on Assessment set up to consider the amendment of Regulation 2, which governed higher degrees of the University.

The group had agreed that Regulation 2 needed to be seen in the context of the Regulations covering programmes as a whole, including Regulations 3, 4, 5 and 6. It therefore proposed that it should act on behalf of both the Standing Committee on Assessment and of the Board for Graduate Schools to review Regulations 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. It further proposed that the content of these Regulations should be re-ordered to cover (a) general matters, (b) research degree programmes and (c) taught programmes, and harmonised as far as possible to avoid duplication.

The Board agreed that the Pro-Vice Chancellors concerned (Professor Sheldon, Professor Fitter and Dr Grenville) should be asked to decide (on behalf of the Teaching Committee, the Board for Graduate Schools, the Special Cases Committee and the Modularisation Review Implementation Group) how the group’s proposal should be taken forward.

**ACTION: AHF, TAS**
07/119 Roberts funding allocations 2007/08 and departmental use of Roberts funding in 2006/07

The Board received reports on the allocation to departments by the Roberts Review Group of Roberts funding for 2007/08, and on the departmental use of Roberts funding in 2006/07.

It was noted that departments which wished to offer more training activities than their current allocation would allow had been invited to submit bids for additional funding to support activities exemplifying good practice. The report listed additional allocations made to date as the result of successful bids. These had been funded from surpluses arising from departmental underspends, which it had been agreed should revert to the centre.

In answer to a question, it was reported that previous under spending by departments did not mean that training had not been delivered. All departments had delivered training. In some cases, under spending was the result of economies of scale. The allocations for 2007/08 were based on good plans submitted by departments.

It was suggested that the Graduate Students’ Association might wish to consider submitting a bid to the Roberts Review Group for funding to support training by students of other students.

07/120 Report on Graduate Training Unit activities

The Board received the report on Graduate Training Unit activities.

It was noted that, in response to feedback from users, revisions had been made to the Skills Forge system, including the provision of a diary function and of forms to record supervisory meetings and action points. It was agreed that the Graduate Training Unit should make introductory sessions available to all departments.

It was reported that it seemed likely, from indications received from Research Councils UK, that ring-fenced Roberts funding would continue until 2010.

07/121 English for Academic Purposes programme 2006/07

The Board received for information the report made by the Centre for English Language Teaching to the Teaching Committee on the English for Academic Purposes programme and the English Language Testing Scheme in 2006/07.

The Board endorsed the recommendation that from 2008 applicants for the English Language Testing Scheme should be required to have achieved a score of at least 5.5 for the IELTS.
writing component as well as a score of 6.0 overall.

The Board also endorsed the Teaching Committee’s proposal that the Centre for English Language Teaching should explore the implications of the University’s gradually increasing its English proficiency admission requirement.

07/122 EPSRC Collaborative Training Account Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the EPSRC Collaborative Training Account Committee held on 24 September 2007 were approved.

07/123 Next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 22 January 2008 at 2.15pm.

Philip Simison
Student Progress Officer

PS/November 2007