Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 19 October 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
Dr D. Efird
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 H. Lawrence (Graduate Training Officer)
Ms C. Rees (Careers Director)
Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Professor C. Godfrey
Miss C. Hamieh
Dr R. Wooffitt

04/53 Membership and terms of reference

The membership and terms of reference of the Board for 2004/05 were noted.

The Chair welcomed new members to the meeting.

04/54 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 June 2004 were approved, after amendment of M04/38 by the substitution of the following for the final sentence of paragraph 3:

“It had to be recognised that the PhD programme constituted research training as well as an opportunity for conducting original research, and that there was an expectation that the research project should be capable of successful completion within three years.”
04/54 Periodic review visits and research students

Arising out of M04/33, the Board approved a proposal from the Deputy Chair that the Teaching Committee’s periodic review visits should also seek information on research and skills training provided by the department.

It was agreed that Mr Simison should liaise with the Academic Support Office about the procedure for these visits and the inclusion of the research student experience.

04/55 New MA/MSc course in Music Technology

Arising out of M04/41, it was reported that the proposed new MA/MSc course in Music Technology (by research), reformulated as required by the Board, had been approved by the Chair.

04/56 Priorities for 2004/05

The Chair set out the following priorities for the Board in 2004/05:

(a) to respond to the QAA’s revised code of practice on research degree programmes (see M04/59 below);

(b) to ensure the implementation by departments of the University’s policy on research degree programmes;

(c) to put in place a mechanism for the communication of information from departments to the Board.

It was agreed that these three priorities should be pursued together. To this end, it was agreed: (a) that the Chair, Deputy Chair and Mr Simison should review the extent to which the University already conformed to the QAA code of practice, and identify areas where the University’s policy needed to be amended or supplemented; (b) that information on the extent of conformity by departments to the QAA code of practice and to the University’s policy should be sought as part of the annual programme review in 2005; (c) that the annual programme review should also be used to collect other data from departments, as required; and (d) that occasionally the Board might invite graduate chairs to an open forum on a particular issue.

(d) to implement an enhanced programme of skills training for research students (see M04/57 below);

(e) to improve English language provision in the University (see M04/60 below);

(f) to formulate a policy and procedure for dealing with academic misconduct by research students.
It was agreed that the Chair should invite members of the University, including a representative of the Graduate Students’ Association, to join a working party for this purpose. Dr Crawford, who had chaired the working party on academic misconduct by undergraduate and taught postgraduate students, agreed to serve on the working party. It was noted that the working party would wish to consider issues such as (a) the forms of academic misconduct more likely to be committed by research students (e.g., fabrication or falsification of results); (b) what constituted assessed work; (c) the possible absence of an external examiner at the time the academic misconduct was committed; (d) the nature of the penalties that might be imposed; and (e) practice at other universities.

(g) to review arrangements for continuation fees paid by students on the long-term register. Mr Simison would be pursuing this.

Finally, the Chair invited members to raise, at the next meeting, problems or opportunities they had identified in the graduate area, supported, if possible, by papers to be circulated with the agenda. The Chair stated that in addition he would be visiting departments and asking them for views.

04/57 Enhanced programme of skills training for research students

The Deputy Chair reported on progress in implementing an enhanced programme of skills training for research students, in response to the additional funds provided by the research councils and the AHRB.

Two members of staff had been appointed: Dr Karen Clegg as Senior Graduate Training Officer (in place of Dr Steve Hutchinson), and Dr Eleanor Loughlin as Graduate Training Officer. Dr Helen Lawrence, Graduate Training Officer, had become full-time. Dr Clegg would attend the next meeting of the Board, and would take up her appointment in December.

Information about the programme and its requirements had been circulated to departments by the Deputy Chair, together with details of the central Research Student Skills Programme for 2004/05 from Dr Lawrence, and an explanation from Dr Partridge of a scheme for recording the training undertaken.

Departments had been asked to provide, by the end of October, outline plans of their training provision for 2004/05, so that a report could be sent by the University to the research councils by mid-November.

The research councils had not made it clear how much funding each research student had attracted. However, it had now been decided how the University should allocate the funding on a per capita basis.

The Board agreed that the Working Party on Research Skills Training should become a standing Committee on Research Skills Training.
In conclusion, Dr Lawrence stated that a question had arisen over the training requirements for part-time students, and for mature students who already possessed relevant skills. The Committee would need to consider these questions.

04/58 Report by ESRC Training Panel

The Board received the report by the ESRC Training Panel on its visit to the University on 7 May 2004.

The Chair noted that the report’s conclusions contained points which required serious consideration, e.g., the University’s application rate for ESRC studentships; cross-departmental masters training provision; a University-wide induction process; access to the Research Training Support Grant; and a regulated limit on the number of students each member of staff could supervise.

It was agreed that the Chair, Deputy Chair and Mr Simison, in consultation with Professor Mendus (as academic co-ordinator for the social sciences) should determine how these points should be addressed.

It was also agreed to ask Dr Lee, in consultation with the Graduate Students’ Association, to prepare a paper for the next meeting on how more emphasis might be placed on the role of Wentworth Graduate College.

04/59 QAA revised code of practice on research degree programmes

The Board received the QAA’s revised code of practice on research degree programmes, published in September 2004.

The Chair also reported that a letter had been received from the HEFCE stating that from 2005/06 funding would be related to how universities were conforming to the precepts contained in the QAA code of practice. More details would be provided by the QAA in the spring of 2005.

It was agreed that the Chair and Mr Simison should establish how far the University, through its policy on research degree programmes and its other regulations and procedures, conformed to the QAA code of practice.

It was also agreed to ask members of the Board to identify and report back to the next meeting on problem areas for departments in the QAA code of practice.

04/60 Report of English Language Working Party

The Board received the report of the English Language Working Party, which it had set up in January 2004 to review the University’s English language entry requirements and the provision of language support, and to produce costed recommendations.
It was noted that the Working Party had agreed that improvement to its in-sessional English language support should be a priority for the University, and that in-sessional support should be free to students. It had also agreed that appropriate language test scores for admission to a course should still be insisted upon. The Working Party had made recommendations accordingly. The estimated costs of the increased provision were appended. The Working Party recommended that tuition fees should be top-sliced to fund the provision.

The Board gave its broad approval to the report and its recommendations, subject to some adjustments and clarification, as follows.

(a) It was noted that the Working Party intended that specified TOEFL and Cambridge examination scores, equivalent to those specified for IELTS, should also be acceptable as satisfying entry requirements. (On Cambridge examination scores, see also M04/61 below). It was agreed that this should be made clear in the report (section 3.1). It was also agreed that consideration should be given to specifying minimum scores in each of the four components of IELTS.

In this connection, it was noted that the Working Party had agreed that publicity material should state that the normal requirement for most departments was a score higher than the minimum. The Board agreed that it would be useful to examine, when data was available, whether the incidence of plagiarism was higher, and the PhD submission rate lower, among overseas students in those departments which required only the minimum language score.

(b) It was noted that it was recommended that diagnostic testing for non-native English speaking students should be compulsory, and that students who fell below a specified level in those tests should be obliged to take in-sessional courses (sections 4.3 and 4.5). The Board considered what sanctions might be imposed on students who failed to attend obligatory courses: these could include - for research students - withholding of upgrading to PhD. Such students would also not be able to rely on a defence of inadequate English proficiency, in case of failure.

(c) It was agreed that recommendation 18 should be amended to read: “Certain times of the week should be kept free for classes, e.g., Wednesday afternoons.”

(d) It was agreed that, if the Policy and Resources Committee were to have sufficient information on which to base a decision on funding, the estimated costs needed to be presented in greater detail, and a rationale given for each element of the provision. The space requirements also needed to be quantified, and a proposal made as to how they would be met.

(e) It was agreed that the report should make it clear what the in-sessional language support was intended to achieve, in terms of improving students’
language proficiency, compared to the level of proficiency indicated by the attainment of the test score required for admission.

In conclusion, it was noted that the report would be considered by the Vice-Chancellor’s Advisory Group on 2 November and by the Policy and Resources Committee on 19 November 2004. The objective was to implement the proposals by October 2005.

**04/61 Change in recognition for Cambridge English language examinations**

The Board received a proposal from Mr Bill Soden of the English as a Foreign Language Unit for a change in University recognition for Cambridge ESOL (English language) examinations as meeting the requirement for admission.

It was noted that at present the University accepted grades of A or B in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English as meeting its minimum English language entry requirement, but did not accept the Cambridge Certificate of Advanced English.

Mr Soden proposed that, in order to bring York into line with other leading UK universities, the University:

(i) should accept grades of A or B in the Cambridge Certificate of Advanced English as equivalent to 6.0 in IELTS;

(ii) should accept grades of A or B in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English as equivalent to 7.0 in IELTS; and

(iii) should accept a grade of C in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English as equivalent to 6.5 in IELTS.

After careful consideration, the Board agreed that the University:

(i) should accept a grade of A (only) in the Cambridge Certificate of Advanced English as meeting its minimum English language entry requirement; and

(ii) should accept grades of A, B or C in the Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English as meeting its minimum English language entry requirement.

**04/62 Proposed change of submission deadline for MSc in Electronics (by research)**

The Board received a proposal from the Graduate School Board in Electronics that, under Regulation 2.2(a)(ii), candidates for the MSc in Electronics (by research) should be allowed a further period of three months beyond the registration period in which to submit their dissertations.

It was noted that the proposal was made on the basis that the majority of
candidates for the course were from overseas and were non-native English speakers. The Board did not accept this as a valid reason for invoking the provision of Regulation 2.2(a)(ii); it took the view that the department should rather raise the English language entry requirement. It therefore agreed not to approve the proposal.

The Board was also informed, by those members who approved individual recommendations on its behalf, that the majority of recommendations for extensions of registration for students on this course were made on the ground that the research project had been too large to be completed within twelve months. It was therefore agreed to suggest that the department should seek to reduce the scope of the projects undertaken by MSc students.

04/63 Awards Sub-Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Awards Sub-Committee held on 19 July 2004 were approved.

04/64 Membership and title of Awards Sub-Committee

The Board approved the appointment of Professor Fitter as Chair of the Awards Sub-Committee.

The Board also approved a proposal that the membership of the Sub-Committee should be changed, and should comprise, ex officio, the Chair of the Board for Graduate Schools (as Chair) and the three academic co-ordinators. It was noted that all these were willing to serve.

Finally, the Board approved a proposal that the title of the Sub-Committee should be changed to Graduate Awards Committee. It would remain a sub-committee of the Board.

04/65 Dates of meetings in 2004/05

It was noted that meetings in 2004/05 were to be held on the following dates beginning at 2.15pm:

- Tuesday 23 November
- Tuesday 25 January
- Tuesday 1 March
- Tuesday 21 June