Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 17 October 2006.

Present: The Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Professor A.H. Fitter (Chair), Professor A.G. Burr, Dr D. Efird, Dr B.J. Keely, Dr G.D. Low, Professor J.C. Sparrow, Dr G. Tsoulas, Miss J. Winter

In attendance: Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit), Mrs A.M. Grey (Research Policy Office, for M06/48 only), Ms R.J. Royds (Manager, Student Administrative Services), Mr P. Simison (Assistant Registrar)

Apologies: Mr C. Chen, Dr C.J. Fewster, Professor M.A. Maynard, Dr R. Partridge, Professor T. A. Sheldon, Dr C. Thompson, Dr R. Wooffitt

06/42 Membership of the Board

The membership of the Board was noted.

06/43 Terms of reference of the Board

The current terms of reference of the Board were noted.

It was noted that the Standing Committee on Assessment, at its meeting held on 6 October 2006, had proposed that, following the recent reorganisation of the Academic Registry, its remit should be extended to include responsibility for the assessment and progression of all students, including those on research degree programmes. The Committee had recommended to the Teaching Committee consequential changes to its terms of reference.

The terms of reference of the Board for Graduate Schools would need to be reviewed as a consequence of these proposed changes. The Chair explained that the Chairs and Secretaries of the Board for Graduate Schools, the Teaching Committee, the Standing Committee on Assessment and the Special Cases Committee were to meet on 7 November to review their...
terms of reference and to prepare proposals for Senate. The intention was that responsibility for individual students should be removed from the Board, but that it should retain oversight of the general postgraduate student experience.

As a consequence of the changes proposed by the Standing Committee on Assessment, responsibility for the following would be transferred from the Board to the Committee: approval of examiners, special examination arrangements, and examination results for research students; transfers of registration; advising departments on academic misconduct cases involving research students; and proposing amendments to the regulations on research degree programmes.

It was likely that responsibilities for approving extensions and suspensions of registration and for hearing appeals would be transferred to the Special Cases Committee.

It was agreed that responsibility for University postgraduate studentships should remain with the Board, pending further discussion with the Research Committee.

It was proposed that to the Board’s terms of reference should be added:

- the consideration of the policy implications of summary data on transfers of registration; submission, pass, referral, fail and withdrawal rates; academic misconduct cases; and appeals and complaints;
- responsibility for policy on research student skills training;
- the consideration of any matters concerning “postgraduate study” (rather than simply “research students”) that might be referred to it; and
- a provision that the Deputy Chair should represent the Board on the Standing Committee on Assessment as an *ex officio* member.

It was noted that, under the proposals, the Board would no longer have direct responsibility for the transfer of students from MPhil to PhD registration. Members felt that it was important that the transfer procedure should remain a formative assessment rather than a formal examination, and that the Board should receive statistical data on transfers.

It was agreed to propose that the Standing Committee on Assessment’s terms of reference should include consultation with the Board for Graduate Schools on matters affecting the postgraduate student experience.

In the course of discussion, concern was expressed that the Board would no longer have direct involvement with research students, and that the interests of research students, for example with regard to transfers of registration or the conduct of the oral examination, might receive insufficient attention. There was also concern that the Board might have insufficient input into the education of taught postgraduate students. It was agreed that these concerns should be
raised at the meeting of the chairs and secretaries of the committees concerned.

06/44 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2006 were approved.

06/45 Review of priorities for 2005/06

The Board reviewed its priorities for 2005/06.

It was noted that (a) (to respond to the QAA’s special review of research degree programmes) and (c) (to finalise and implement the procedure on academic misconduct by research students) had been achieved.

With regard to (b), it was noted that the University’s code of practice on research degree programmes had been finalised but not yet fully implemented.

No progress had been made on (d) (to consider proposals towards a York graduate school), and the University had withdrawn from (e) (consideration of proposals towards a Virtual Graduate School).

It was agreed that (f) (formulation of a code of practice on taught postgraduate programmes) should, if desired, be taken forward by the Teaching Committee.

06/46 Priorities for 2006/07

The Board agreed to adopt the following priorities for 2006/07:

- implementation of code of practice on research degree programmes;
- to take further proposals for a York Graduate School;
- to review impact, and formulate strategy for the sustainability, of research skills training.

It was agreed to ask Professor Sparrow, Dr Fewster and Mr Simison to take forward the implementation of the remaining items in the code of practice, including the introduction of pre-examination examiners’ reports, the formulation of guidelines on the conduct of the oral examination, and the piloting of audio-recordings of oral examinations.

It was agreed to revisit these priorities at the meeting on 21 November 2006.

06/47 Final report on QAA special review of research degree programmes
The Board received the final report on the QAA’s special review of research degree programmes. The review team’s judgement had been that the University’s arrangements to secure and enhance the quality of its research degree programme provision were appropriate and satisfactory overall and in every particular.

The report raised three issues for consideration or report.

- The report stated (Paragraph 17) that, beyond the thesis advisory panel, there appeared to be no other mechanism for third-party monitoring in which an academic not involved in the academic progress of the research degree was available for the student to turn to for independent and confidential advice. The Board noted that the University, in responding to the earlier draft report, had pointed out that this statement was inaccurate, in that other sources of support, outside the supervisor and the thesis advisory panel, were already indicated to research students, both in the Code of practice on research degree programmes and in the Notes of guidance on the degrees of MPhil and PhD. These included the Chair of the departmental Graduate School Board or Board of Studies, and the Chair (or another member) of the Board for Graduate Schools. It was agreed to write to the QAA to reiterate this point. It was also agreed that the Notes of guidance on the degrees of MPhil and PhD should be amended to indicate that students should first have recourse to other members of the thesis advisory panel.

- In connection with Paragraph 30, it was noted that the audio-recording of oral examinations was about to be piloted.

- In connection with Paragraph 31, it was noted that the procedure for investigating academic misconduct by research students had been approved by Senate and circulated to departments.

**06/48 AHRC review of postgraduate funding mechanisms**

The Board considered a report from the AHRC on postgraduate funding mechanisms, which proposed that a procedure under which institutions submitted bids for allocations of funds ("block grant payments") to cover studentships should replace the present student-led open competition. It was noted that institutions were invited to respond by 3 November 2006.

Dr Grey, of the Research Policy Office, attended for this item, and reported that three departments had conveyed comments to her. These included:

- concern about the allocation of studentships to departments within the University;
- concern that departments and centres which did not attract large numbers of students might be disadvantaged.
The Board agreed that the University’s response, while welcoming the proposal, as giving institutions greater control over the allocation of studentships, should draw attention to the concerns raised.

**06/49 Proposed regulation for the degree of Engineering Doctorate**

The Board received a proposed Regulation for the degree of Engineering Doctorate (EngD) (attached as Appendix 1).

It was noted that the University of York (led by Professor John McDermid, Department of Computer Science) was bidding with four other universities for an EPSRC grant for a research programme in Large Scale Complex IT Systems (LSCITS). The programme had an overall value of £9M; it included an Engineering Doctorate (EngD) component worth £4M. The other consortium members had agreed that the Department of Computer Science at York should lead the EngD element. This made necessary the introduction of an EngD qualification and regulation. The EngD qualification could be of more general utility, for other research programmes in Computer Science and possibly in Electronics.

It was noted that the Engineering Doctorate was a professional doctorate. A professional doctorate was defined by the UK Council for Graduate Education as ‘a n award at a doctoral level where the field of study is a professional discipline and which is distinguished from the PhD by a title that refers to that profession. Such doctorates are typically characterised by a significant taught element and by delivery to cohorts rather than to individual students. A Professional Doctorate may be described as one where the field of study is a professional discipline and where students are supervised within professional contexts and/or within the university but in relation to that context.’

The draft Regulation had been formulated in consultation with Professor McDermid, but with a view to being of general application. Although based on the existing PhD regulation, it contained a number of provisions specific to the EngD, as set out below.

It provided for a four-year programme (paragraph a i-iv) including a taught programme, and an alternative three-year programme (paragraphs a v-vii) for candidates who held a masters degree which was deemed equivalent to the taught programme contained within the four-year programme.
It provided for periods of professional or industrial practice and training (paragraph b).

It contained a requirement (paragraph c) for an industrial supervisor in addition to the University supervisor, and made provision (if desired) for a third supervisor, who might be a member of another university.

The options open to the examiners were limited to award of the EngD (with or without minor corrections), referral for resubmission for the EngD, or fail. The taught component of the four-year EngD would not in itself qualify a candidate for the award of a masters degree. However, candidates who do not wish to proceed to the EngD might, before submission, request transfer to registration for an MSc (by research) and submit a dissertation for examination.

The Board approved the draft Regulation, and agreed to recommend its approval by Senate.

It was noted, however, that the intended meaning of paragraph (i), which was drawn from the existing PhD regulation, was unclear, and it was agreed that the intended meaning should be clarified.

06/50 Summary of academic misconduct cases in 2004/05

The Board received and noted the summary of academic misconduct cases involving taught postgraduate students which had been completed in 2004/05.

06/51 Committee on Research Skills Training

It was agreed that, following the successful implementation of research skills training, the Committee on Research Skills Training should be disbanded, and that relevant business should henceforth come direct to the Board.

It was reported that the Student Skills Implementation Group was developing a scheme of Personal Development Planning for masters students (taught and research, but excluding MPhil). This would extend the provision of PDP to all the University’s students. Following consultation with departments, the scheme would be laid before the Teaching Committee.

06/52 Dates of meetings in 2006/07

It was noted that meetings in 2005/06 were to be held on the following dates beginning at 2.15pm:

- Tuesday 21 November
- Tuesday 23 January
- Tuesday 27 February
- Tuesday 19 June

Philip Simison
Assistant Registrar

PS/ October 2006