Board for Graduate Schools Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 16 October 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, The Provost of Wentworth Graduate College, Dr C. Thompson, Dr P. Ansell, Professor A.G. Burr, Dr D. Efird, Professor G. Griffin, Dr B.J. Keely, Dr F.G. Özkan, Ms A. Takshe, Miss R. Tayara

In attendance: Dr G. Luetttgen (for M07/89 only), Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit), Ms T.M. Driffield (Scholarships Officer), Mrs R.A. Goerisch (Assistant Registrar), Mrs R. J. Royds (Manager, Student Administrative Services), Mr P. Simison (Graduate Schools Office),

Apologies: Professor J.C. Sparrow, Professor M. Taylor, Dr R. Wooffitt, Dr R.J. Partridge

07/80 Membership of the Board

The Chair welcomed new members to the Board: Dr Pat Ansell (Health Sciences), Professor Gabriele Griffin (Women’s Studies) and Dr Gülçin Özkan (Economics), who had been appointed by Senate to serve for three years until 31 July 2010; and Miss Rana Tayara, appointed by the Graduate Students’ Association as research student member for 2007/08.

It was noted that Dr Efird, Professor Taylor and Dr Wooffitt had been reappointed by Senate to serve for two years until 31 July 2009, and that Ms Takshe had been reappointed by the Graduate Students’ Association as Overseas Students’ Association member for 2007/08.

07/81 Deputy Chair arrangements

It was reported that, following the retirement of Professor Sparrow as Deputy Chair, the following arrangements had been agreed by the Chair and the members concerned:
● Dr Wooffitt to serve as Deputy Chair, with particular responsibility for considering appeals and chairing postgraduate student hearings by panels of members of the Board;

● Dr Efird and Dr Ansell to approve recommendations for suspensions of registration and extensions of submission deadline on behalf of the Board;

● Dr Efird also to serve, as a member of the Board for Graduate Schools, on the Standing Committee for Assessment.

The Board approved these arrangements. It was agreed to recommend to Senate the appointment of Dr Wooffitt as Deputy Chair to serve for two years until 31 July 2009, and the consequential amendment of item 23 of the Board’s terms of reference, to read:

“The Deputy Chair of the Board to chair meetings of the Board in the absence of, or at the request of the Chair; to advise the Chair on request; and to have particular responsibility for the consideration of appeals by postgraduate students.”

The Chair also reported that Dr Roddy Vann (Physics) had agreed to be a member of the Robert’s Review Group to help promote the spread of good practice regarding graduate training among departments, and in that capacity to attend meetings of the Board.

07/82 Terms of reference of the Board

The Board considered its terms of reference for 2007/08.

It was agreed to recommend, in addition to the change to item 23 recorded in M07/81 above, that the words “academic misconduct cases” should be deleted from item 8. This reflected the transfer of responsibility for monitoring the incidence of academic misconduct cases to the Standing Committee on Assessment.

It was agreed that the Board’s terms of reference (and in particular item 15: “To consider recommendations regarding academically unsatisfactory students”) should be reviewed to ensure that the responsibilities of the Board and of the Standing Committee on Assessment were clearly distinguished and consistent.

07/83 Annual timeline for business

The Board approved the proposed annual timeline for business. It was noted that the review of submission rates, pass, referral and withdrawal data, and appeals and complaints data for the previous academic year were in the current year being dealt with at the present meeting, rather than at the November meeting.
07/84 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2007 were approved.

07/85 Supervisor training and development

Arising out of M07/54, the Chair reported that he would shortly be taking action on the matters arising out of the report on supervisor training and development. ACTION: AHF

07/86 Proposal to regard continuation year as registered study

Arising out of M07/58, it was reported that no approach had yet been made to the local Council Tax authority regarding possible exemption for MPhil/PhD students in their continuation year, because the Student Welfare Adviser responsible for Council Tax matters was on long-term sick leave. It was agreed to ask if the Student Support Office could make an approach in her absence. ACTION: PS

07/87 Review of priorities for 2006/07

The Board reviewed the priorities it had set for 2006/07.

It was noted that (a) the implementation of the code of practice on research degree programmes and (b) the formulation of a strategy for the sustainability of research skills training were complete, or largely complete.

Pursuit of proposals for a York Graduate School had been deferred because of the changes associated with departmental reviews, but would be taken forward in 2007/08.

07/88 Priorities for 2007/08

The Board agreed to adopt the following priorities for 2007/08:

(a) review of code of practice on research degree programmes
(b) review of Regulation 2 on higher degrees (in collaboration with the Standing Committee on Assessment)
(c) progress on EthOS (electronic theses on-line service)
(d) consideration of policy and procedures for oral examinations conducted with the examiner or candidate remote from York
(e) Graduate Professional Development
(f) further consideration of York Graduate School
(g) guidelines on MA/MSc degrees held in abeyance
(h) policy on transfers from taught MA/MSc programmes to MPhil/PhD
(i) review of joint degree/“co-tutelle” arrangements
(j) exploration of possible Council Tax exemption for “writing up” MPhil/PhD students.

With regard to (f), the Chair proposed to reconvene the working group to consider further the possibility of a York Graduate School, in liaison with stakeholders in the University (e.g., Wentworth Graduate College, the Graduate Students’ Association, the administrative offices (including Student Support Office), the Graduate Training Unit) and with other universities, and to report to the Board by June 2008. It was agreed that the report should identify issues requiring attention (e.g., in the light of the findings of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey) and how its proposals satisfied the University’s institutional goals.

It was agreed that (i) should be taken forward in liaison with the Academic Support and International Offices, in the context of collaborative provision.

Professor Sheldon proposed that an additional priority should be the formulation of a code of practice on the supervision of dissertations and research projects forming part of taught masters programmes. It was agreed that he and Professor Fitter should decide whether this fell into the remit of the Board or for the Teaching Committee. **ACTION: PS, CJF, RAG, KVC, AHF, TAS**

**07/89 Proposal for EngD programme in Large Scale Complex IT Systems**

The Board received a proposal from the Board of Studies in Computer Science for an EngD programme in Large Scale Complex IT Systems. Dr Luettgen was in attendance for this item.

It was noted that, in accordance with Regulation 2.7, the proposed programme was of four years’ duration full-time and comprised a taught programme (equivalent to one year full-time, but to be completed normally within two years) and a programme of research. The taught programme consisted of modules taught mainly at York but also at four partner universities (Bristol, Leeds, Oxford and St Andrews). The research project would be largely undertaken in industry over the four years. The programme would be funded by the EPSRC, subject to the successful outcome of a bid to be submitted in November 2007, and begin in autumn 2008.

In the course of discussion, a number of points were raised:
(a) It was noted that applicants would be either recent graduates in Computer Science or experienced engineers already working in a related field. It was agreed that the department should provide an assurance that adequate support mechanisms would be in place for candidates in the latter category, and that these mechanisms would be set out clearly in a student handbook. It was noted that the admission of candidates without an appropriate degree would need prior approval by the Board.

(b) It was noted that candidates would have an academic supervisor and an industrial supervisor. If the academic supervisor was a member of one of the four partner universities, the candidate would also have a third ("pastoral") supervisor who was a member of the Department of Computer Science at York. All supervisors would be appointed on the recommendation of the Board of Studies in Computer Science at York. It was agreed that the appointment of external supervisors should require the express approval of the Board for Graduate Schools. It was also agreed that the agreements with the partner universities and industrial partners should include a procedure to be followed by the University should an external supervisor prove inadequate.

(c) It was agreed that the proposal should include reference to skills training, including skills need analysis and the recording of training undertaken by candidates.

(d) The Board questioned whether the requirements for upgrading from MPhil to EngD registration, based largely on a satisfactory EngD thesis proposal and production of a 5000-word essay on group working, were sufficient. It was agreed that the department should provide a more detailed statement of the requirements, which should include completion of a substantial piece of research-based work and a timetable for completion of the EngD thesis, for the approval of the Chair.

(e) It was agreed that the agreements with industrial partners should include an undertaking by the industrial partner that the candidate would be allowed to work full-time on the EngD programme.

(f) It was agreed that the agreements with partner universities and industrial partners should include a satisfactory statement about intellectual property rights.

(g) It was agreed that the proposal should include mechanisms for obtaining feedback from students on the programme, and correct statements on the University's complaints and appeals procedures.

(h) It was agreed that the exit-point qualifications of Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma and MSc should, as taught programmes, have specific titles.

(i) It was agreed that the words "The limit is advisory rather than mandatory" should be omitted from the statement on the maximum word limit for EngD theses.

The Board approved the proposal, subject to satisfactory assurance being received on the matters referred to above. It was noted that the proposal, since the programme contained a taught component, would also go to the Teaching Committee for approval.

**ACTION: PS, Department of Computer Science**

**07/90 QAA institutional audit 2007**
Professor Sheldon confirmed the arrangements for the QAA institutional audit.

The QAA audit team would be visiting the University on 29-31 October 2007 (for the briefing visit) and on 3-7 December 2007 (for the audit visit).

The audit team would have a particular interest in the University’s institutional approach to quality enhancement, and in postgraduate research students.

During the briefing visit, the audit team would identify a small number of departments or centres (probably two) which it would use as ‘sampling trails’ to test the effectiveness of the University’s policies and procedures.

The audit team would reach conclusions about the degree of confidence (categorised as ‘confidence’, ‘limited confidence’, ‘no confidence’) that could be placed in the soundness of the University’s present and likely future management of standards and the quality of learning opportunities for students. It would also make recommendations for ‘essential’, ‘advisable’ or ‘desirable’ action.

07/91 Review of code of practice on research degree programmes

The Board initiated a review of the code of practice on research degree programmes.

It was reported that, in August/September 2007, departmental graduate chairs had been asked to complete an online questionnaire on the code of practice and its implementation. The purpose of the survey was to enable the Board both to have the assurance that the code of practice was being implemented and to conduct a review to ensure that it reflected best practice and was responsive to departmental experience. All departments had responded. A copy of the request and a summary of responses were received.

The Board concluded that, on the whole, the code of practice had been well implemented by departments. Particular comments are listed below.

(a) Departmental handbooks
It was reported that all departments had now submitted weblinks to their handbooks for research students.

(b) Selection and admission of students
It was agreed to remind departments that it was a requirement of the code of practice that, before any offer of a place on an MPhil or PhD programme was made, applicants based in the UK should normally be invited to attend a formal interview.

(c) Information and induction
It was agreed that it should be a requirement that induction programmes should include information on research ethics and on the avoidance of academic misconduct.

(d) Facilities
It was noted that the University was seeking to improve the provision of space for personal study by research students.

(e) Supervision
It was agreed that the final sentence of Section 6(b) of the code of practice should be amended to read: “Heads of Departments should notify Chairs of departmental Graduate School Boards of forthcoming resignations from the University of members of staff with supervisory responsibility for research students. Chairs should as soon as practicable inform research students formally in writing if their supervisor resigns, giving information on the arrangements for continued supervision.”

It was agreed that the procedure for recording formal supervisory meetings should be amended as follows: “A record of each formal supervisory meeting should be drawn up by the student and approved by the supervisor. The record should include the date of the meeting and a summary of the content of the meeting and of future actions to be performed, including agreed training.”

It was agreed that Section 6(h) should be amended to read: “If students are unhappy with their supervision, they should follow the procedures set out in their departmental handbook. Students should feel free to talk confidentially about the problem with another member of their thesis advisory panel, or the Chair of their departmental Graduate School Board or Board of Studies. If the problem remains unresolved, the student should arrange to speak in confidence to the Assistant Registrar in the University’s Student Progress Section.”

(f) Thesis advisory panels
It was agreed to reaffirm the requirement regarding the frequency of thesis advisory panel meetings.

It was also agreed that paragraphs (d), (e) and (f) of Section 8 of the code of practice should be amended to read: “(d) In preparation for thesis advisory panel meetings, students should be asked to complete a departmental form – or to submit equivalent documentation - summarising progress on their work during the review period and outlining their future objectives, and the supervisor should provide a written report on the student’s progress. (e) Students should be given an opportunity to comment confidentially on the quality of their supervision, either in writing in advance of the meeting or orally at the meeting in the absence of the supervisor. (f) Following each thesis advisory panel meeting a brief report on progress and future action, agreed by all the panel members, should be produced, if desired on the form referred to above. Copies of the
reports of panel meetings should be submitted to the chair of the departmental Graduate School Board, and placed on the student’s departmental file. A copy of the report should also be given to the student. Departments should record the dates of each TAP meeting on the SITS student record system.”

It was agreed that the Graduate Schools Office should prepare a thesis advisory panel meeting report form for use by departments if they wished.

(g) Upgrading
It was agreed to contact two departments which it was reported did not have a procedure for ensuring that upgrading was considered within 18 months, with a view to ensuring that this requirement was met.

(h) Research and professional training
It was agreed to refer the responses from departments on research and professional training to the Roberts Review Group.

It was agreed that Section 9(a) of the code of practice should be amended to read: “All MPhil/PhD students have access to the Research Students Skills programme offered by the Graduate Training Unit. Students who are research council-funded are required to participate in a minimum of ten days’ training per year, comprising centrally or departmentally provided training or other equivalent activities. The University will ensure that a similar level of provision is available to all other MPhil/PhD students who wish to avail themselves of it.”

(i) Feedback mechanisms
It was agreed that, since MPhil/PhD students had two thesis advisory panel meetings each year, it was unnecessary to adopt a system of end-of-year progress reports.

It was noted that the code of practice required departments to collect feedback from MPhil/PhD students and supervisors and to submit a summary of important issues arising from it annually to the Board for Graduate Schools. The Board noted the summary of such feedback submitted in response to the questionnaire.

(j) Student representation
It was agreed to remind one department which fell short of the requirement that each department should include at least one research student on its Board of Studies or Graduate School Board or both. **ACTION: PS**

07/92 Report on piloting of audio-recordings of oral examinations

The Board received the report from the Standing Committee on Assessment on the piloting of
audio-recordings of oral examinations, together with a procedure for recording oral examinations agreed by the Committee.

The Committee reported that opposition to recording on the part of external examiners had been minimal. The Committee had agreed that the form recommending the appointment of external examiners should include confirmation that the examiner had agreed to the recording of the examination; if not, the department would be required to nominate an internal observer to attend the examination. The internal observer would be a member of academic staff other than the supervisor, and would be required to submit a brief report to the Committee on the conduct of the examination. It was agreed that the examiners and the candidate should be informed before the examination if an internal observer were to be present.

It was agreed that recordings would be destroyed once the period allowed for submission of an appeal had elapsed or, if an appeal was received, after consideration of the appeal within the University or subsequently by the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education had been concluded.

It was agreed that the phrase “You won’t even know it’s there” should be removed from the information to be given to students before the examination, and that this information should make it clear that the recording might 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 noted that a proposal incorporating the Board’s comments would now be submitted to Senate by the Standing Committee on Assessment, with the object of making the recording of oral examinations a requirement for all departments from October 2008. **ACTION: RAG**

07/93 Guidelines on the conduct of oral examinations

The Board considered draft guidelines on the conduct of oral examinations.

It was agreed:

(a) that the words “Standing Committee on Assessment” should replace “Board for Graduate Schools” in paragraphs (ii) and (vi);
(b) that the final sentence of paragraph (vi) should read: “The examinations should be held in premises appropriate to an oral examination”;
(c) that paragraph (xix) should be amended to read: “The examiners’ report should be submitted to the chair of the Graduate School Board in the department concerned as soon as possible and in any case within two weeks of the date of the oral examination”;

(d) that paragraph (xxv) should be amended to read: “At the end of the examination, the audio-di sk should be removed from the equipment by the designated person and delivered by hand by the internal examiner or observer or by a departmental official to Student Administrative Services for secure storage.

Subject to further amplification to reflect the decision s taken in M07/92 above, the Board then approved the guidelines.

The Board also approved the proposed examiner’s independent preliminary report form. ACTION: PS

07/94 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2006/07

The Board received a summary of the findings of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2006/07.

It was noted that 58 universities had taken part in the survey. The response rate at York had been 33%, compared to 25% nationally. Overall, scores at York compared well with the national average in the main ‘analysis topics’ (supervision, intellectual climate, infra structure, thesis examination, and goals and standards.)

The Chair pointed out that, in some in stances, positive responses in which York compared well with the national average nevertheless gave cause for concern, e.g, on the availability of supervisors, feedback on progress, and guidance on topic selection and refinement.

The Board also noted areas of poor positive response (under 50%) in some subject disciplines on matters such as working space, financial support, time taken for examination of thesis, integration into departmental community, stimulation offered by departmental research ambience, and opportunities for involvement in broader research. It also felt that positive responses of under 70% on other matters (listed in Table 2.8) and the responses on the intellectual climate at York (Table 3.3) were unsatisfactory. In addition, the responses on attendance at central and departmental skills training activitie s (Appendix 2) raised the question whether a significant proportion of candidates was not attending any such activities.

The Chair undertook to send a detailed response on the findings to individual departments. To this end, he invited members to submit further comments on the findings to him via Mrs Royds.

In conclusion, a member of the Board suggested that mock oral examinations, conducted by the supervisor, should form part of the code of practice on research degree programmes, or that information on the conduct of the oral examination, possibly including a video of a mock examination, should form part of training programmes. ACTION: members of Board, AHF
07/95 Outcomes of 2005/06 annual programme review process

The Board received a report from the Teaching Committee on the outcomes of the 2005/06 annual programme review process.

It was noted that the issue of research student access to appropriate desk space, which formed part of the requirements of the code of practice on research degree programmes, had also been referred to the Space Management Group and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Estates.

It was agreed that the Graduate Training Unit should contact the graduate chairs in Economics and Language about the issues concerning student dissatisfaction with GTU courses and the allocation of Roberts funding. **ACTION: KVC**

07/96 Revised University policy on postgraduates who teach

The Board received a proposed revised version of the University policy on postgraduates who teach. Revisions to the policy, which had been introduced in 2003, had been suggested by the Chair, Professor Sparrow, Dr Clegg and Ms Kennell.

A number of further revisions were approved at the meeting, including;

(a) a requirement that candidates should be interviewed before appointment, and that responsibility for ensuring that they had an appropriate level of spoken English should lie with the Chair of the Board of Studies concerned as well as with the course organiser;
(b) a requirement that a briefing on the course to be taught should be given by all those involved in delivering the module;
(c) a provision that postgraduates who teach should be encouraged to attend the lectures associated with the module;
(d) a provision that the outcomes of evaluation procedures should, as far as practicable, be made available to postgraduates who teach sufficiently promptly to be of value to them within the module concerned; and that departments should take appropriate action if the feedback was negative;
(e) a link to the current rates of pay for postgraduates who teach.

The Board approved the proposed revisions. It was agreed that the revised policy should be submitted to the Teaching Committee for comment. **ACTION: PS**

07/97 PhD submission rates and pass/referral/fail/withdrawal data

The Board received and noted statistical data on PhD submission rates (2000-2003 starters)

It was noted that three departments had four-year submission rates of less than 50% for students starting in 2000-2003.

The Chair agreed to include reference to submission rates in his responses to departments on the findings of the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. **ACTION: AHF**

**07/98 Report on appeals and complaints 2006/07**

The Board received and noted the report on appeals and complaints in 2006/07.

**07/99 HEFCE research degree qualification rates**

The Board received and noted the report from the HEFCE on research degree qualification rates.

**07/100 Graduate Awards Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Awards Committee held on 6 September 2007 were approved.

**07/101 Dates of meetings in 2007/08**

It was noted that meetings in 2007/08 were to be held on the following dates beginning at 2.15pm:

- Tuesday 20 November
- Tuesday 22 January
- Tuesday 26 February
- Tuesday 17 June

**07/102 Dates for possible appeal hearings in 2007/08**

Members agreed to seek to keep free the following possible dates for appeal hearings in 2007/08:

- Tuesday 27 November
- Tuesday 15 January
- Tuesday 19 February
Tuesday 18 March
Tuesday 22 April
Tuesday 20 May

Philip Simison
Student Progress Officer

PS/October 2007