Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 28 October 2008.

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 D. Efird, The Provost of Wentworth Graduate College, Dr C. Thompson, Dr P. Ansell, Dr J. Clarbour, Professor G. Griffin, Dr I. McIntosh, Dr F.G. Özkan, Dr R. Vann, Dr M.J. White, Dr R. Wooffitt

In attendance: Ms N. Berberoglu, Mr T.W. Flynn, Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit), Mrs A. M. Grey (Planning Office), Mrs R.J. Royds (Manager, Student Administrative Services), Mr P. Simison (Graduate Schools Office)

08/51 Membership of the Board

The Chair welcomed new members to the Board: Dr Jane Clarbour (Psychology), Dr Ian McIntosh (Mathematics) and Dr Roddy Vann (Physics), who had been appointed by Senate to serve for three years until 31 July 2011; and Dr Michael White (History of Art), who had been appointed by Senate to serve for one year until 31 July 2009. He also welcomed Ms Naile Berberoglu and Mr Tom Flynn, who were attending as officers of the Graduate Students’ Association pending the appointment of student members to the Board, and welcomed back Dr Karen Clegg.

It was noted that Professor Miles Taylor had been seconded to an appointment as Director of the Institute of Historical Research, and was therefore unable to continue as a member of the Board. Since his period of service was due to end on 31 July 2009, it was agreed not to ask Senate to appoint a replacement member.

It was agreed that the membership of the Board should be amended to include three members appointed by the Graduate Students’ Association, comprising a research student, a taught student and an overseas student (rather than two members appointed by the Graduate Students’ Association and one member appointed by the Overseas Students’ Association).
08/52 Terms of reference of the Board

The Board noted its terms of reference for 2008/09.

08/53 Annual timeline for business

The Board approved the proposed annual timeline for business. It was noted, however, that the ORS-related items should be deleted, following the discontinuation of ORS funding by the HEFCE.

08/54 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2008 were approved.

With regard to M08/23, it was reported that it was expected that a procedure enabling research students in the continuation year to apply for exemption from Council Tax would be finalised before the next meeting.

With regard to M08/26, it was agreed that a review of implementation by departments of the policy on postgraduates who teach should be a priority for 2008/09.

With regard to M08/34, it was agreed that the Board should receive further proposals for the introduction of four-year PhD programmes.

ACTION: AHF, PS

08/55 Priorities for 2008/09

The Board agreed to adopt the following priorities for 2008/09:

(a) To keep the code of practice on research degree programmes under review
(b) Review of Regulation 2 on higher degrees (in collaboration with the Standing Committee on Assessment) (*a working group is carrying this forward*)
(c) Formulation of policy on collaborative research degree programmes
(d) Consideration of proposals for submission of e-theses (*a working group has been set up to prepare proposals for the January 2009 meeting*)
Formulation of a formal, comprehensive admissions policy for postgraduate programmes at the University

To formulate responses to information from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey and from other feedback routes

To review the implementation by departments of the policy on postgraduates who teach.

08/56 Proposed changes to code of practice on research degree programmes

The Board approved the following changes, arising out of discussions with the Manager of Disability Services, to the code of practice on research degree programmes:

**Section 3: Selection and admission of students**

(d) Applicants are invited to indicate on their application forms if they have any support needs arising out of a disability. An indication of support needs will not affect the academic consideration of the application. Through its Disability Services ([http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/disability/](http://www.york.ac.uk/admin/disability/)) the University offers advice and support to applicants and students who request it.

**Section 6: Supervision, sub-paragraph (d): Responsibilities of supervisors of research students**

(d) ensuring that the student is aware of sources of advice within the University, including careers guidance, disability services, health and safety legislation and equal opportunities policy;

**Section 13: Assessment**

(g) Before the oral examination the supervisor should ensure that the examiners are informed if specific arrangements need to be put in place because of disability or exceptional stress or cultural differences. At the request of the candidate, and with the consent of the examiners, the supervisor or another member of academic staff approved by the Board of Studies concerned may be present at the oral examination as a silent observer.

08/57 Collaborative research degree programmes

Arising out of M08/25, the Board received a paper on collaborative degree programmes which sought to list the issues to be resolved if approval were to be given to a proposal for a collaborative research degree programme.

The paper, which had been drawn up by Rosemary Royds, Rosemary Goerisch and Philip Simison, set out the features which any collaborative agreement should contain, and proposed a two-stage procedure to be followed if a department wished to propose a collaborative research degree programme, comprising an outline proposal to be followed by a detailed proposal and agreement.

In the course of discussion, the following points were made.
It was suggested that the features which any collaborative agreement should contain should be (a) participation of students from both the UK and, where applicable, from the country of the other institution; (b) evidence of existing research and teaching collaboration, for example: joint research programmes, staff exchange visits, visiting professorships, joint teaching of modules; and (c) evidence of the availability of funding to support the programme.

In connection with (a), it was pointed out that students from outside the UK and the country of the other institution should not be excluded from the programme.

It was further suggested that departments should be required, when submitting an outline proposal, in the first place to satisfy the Board for Graduate Schools that the proposed programme was low-risk and to identify the benefits it would bring to the department and to the University.

Finally, it was noted that the term ‘collaborative research degree programmes’ covered a range of possibilities, including:

(a) students taking research degrees at York who spent time at another institution as visiting students, or *vice versa*;
(b) York research degree programmes in which collaboration with other institutions was a required part; and
(c) research degree programmes offered in collaboration with another institution leading to a jointly awarded qualification.

It was agreed to ask Professor Fitter and Mr Simison to consider the issues further and to bring forward a revised proposal.

**ACTION: AHF, PS**

**08/58 Procedure for dealing with suspensions, extensions and upgradings**

The Board received proposals from Mr Simison for streamlining the procedure for dealing with suspensions, extensions and upgradings.

It was proposed that departments should be asked to give departmental graduate administrators responsibility for checking that forms recommending suspensions, extensions and upgradings had been correctly completed and that necessary supporting documentation was enclosed. It was also proposed that departmental graduate administrators should be given responsibility for monitoring deadlines for upgrading and for submission of theses.

The Board agreed that responsibility for these matters lay with chairs of departmental graduate school boards, and that it was for them to make administrative arrangements for discharging that responsibility.
effectively. Nevertheless, it was agreed that chairs of departmental graduate school boards should be
urged to consider, and if they thought it appropriate, to implement the proposals for the involvement of
departmental graduate administrators.

It was agreed that Student Progress should monitor the timeliness of upgrading recommendations, and
where appropriate report to the Board, so that any issues could be pursued through periodic reviews of
departments.

ACTION: PS

08/59 PhD submission rates and pass/referral/fail/withdrawal data

The Board received and noted statistical data on PhD submission rates (2001-2004 starters) and pass/

It was noted that some departments had improved submission rates over the years in question, and that
several humanities departments had submission rates of 70% or over.

In general, the science departments had the highest submission rates (an average of 79% over the four
years), followed by the humanities departments (69%) and the social science departments (52%). In this
connection, it was noted that Environment should now be included among the science departments.

It was noted that in some cases there was an inverse correlation between a department’s submission rate
and its withdrawal rate. It was reported that there seemed also to be a correlation between submission
rates and positive responses to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey. It was also reported that
the predictors most associated with timely completion by HEFCE statistics were the availability of
funding and home (rather than overseas) fee status. It was also suggested that in some cases submission
was delayed because students secured prestigious employment in their fourth year.

With regard to theses examined, it was noted that for 2004/05 and 2005/06, where the final outcomes
were known, the pass rates across the University were 97.5% and 97.0%.

It was agreed that Professor Fitter should write to departments with low submission rates or high
withdrawal rates, asking for reasons or comments.

ACTION: AHF

08/60 Report on appeals and complaints 2007/08

The Board received and noted the report on appeals and complaints in 2007/08.
08/61 Graduate Awards Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Awards Committee held on 5 August 2008 were approved.

08/62 Dates of meetings in 2008/09

It was noted that meetings in 2008/09 were to be held on the following dates beginning at 2.15pm:

- Tuesday 9 December
- Tuesday 27 January
- Tuesday 17 March
- Tuesday 23 June

08/63 Dates for possible appeal hearings in 2008/09

Members agreed to seek to keep free the following possible dates for appeal hearings in 2008/09:

- Tuesday 18 November
- Tuesday 20 January
- Tuesday 24 February
- Tuesday 24 March
- Tuesday 28 April
- Tuesday 26 May

Philip Simison
Student Progress Officer

PS/October 2008