UNIVERSITY OF YORK

Senate

BOARD FOR GRADUATE SCHOOLS

Minutes of the meeting of the Board for Graduate Schools held on 17 March 2009.

Present: The Chair of the Standing Committee on Assessment, Dr D. Efird (Chair)
Dr P. Ansell
Mr D.G. Carr
Dr J. Clarbour
Dr I. McIntosh
Dr F.G. Özkan
Miss R. Satti
Dr R. Vann
Dr M.J. White

In attendance Ms E.A. Harbord (University Library; for M09/22 only)
Miss H.B.A. Richardson (Careers Service; for M09/25 only)
Dr K.V. Clegg (Director, Graduate Training Unit)
Mr D.J. Clubb (Student Administrative Services)
Mrs A.M. Grey (Planning Office)
Mr P. Simison (Student Administrative Services)

Apologies: Professor A.H. Fitter
Professor G. Griffin
Professor T.A. Sheldon
Dr C. Thompson
Miss K. Wicker
Dr R. Wooffitt

09/17 Chairing of the meeting

In the absence of the Chair and the Deputy Chair, Dr Efird agreed to chair the meeting.

09/18 Membership of the Board

It was reported that Miss Rabab Satti had been appointed by the Graduate Students’ Association to serve as overseas student member in 2008/09. The Chair welcomed Miss Satti to the meeting.

09/19 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 27 January 2009 were approved.
09/20  PhD submission rates

Arising out of MM08/59 and 09/4, the Board received and noted the report from the Chair following receipt of comments from departments with low submission rates.

09/21  Proposed new MPhil/PhD programme in Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine

Arising out of M09/6, it was reported that a further response from the Graduate School Board in Biology concerning the proposed new MPhil/PhD programme in Tissue Engineering and Regenerative Medicine had not yet been received. It was agreed to defer this item until the next meeting.

ACTION: PS, Biology GSB

09/22  Proposal concerning e-submission of theses

Arising out of M09/9, the Board received comments from departmental graduate school boards, the Graduate Students’ Association and the Standing Committee on Assessment on the proposal concerning e-submission of theses. Ms Elizabeth Harbord (University Library) was in attendance for this item.

In the course of discussion, the Board agreed the following points:

(a) the CD (or other portable data storage unit) accompanying the thesis submitted for examination should normally be in pdf format, but might be in another format required by the medium and acceptable to the University;

(b) that departments could not individually stipulate that the final version of the thesis submitted after examination should be hardbound; that would be a matter for University regulation. In this connection, Ms Harbord commented that a softbound copy should normally be adequate unless the thesis was frequently used.

(c) that, while it was necessary under current procedures for students to observe copyright, under the new procedure there would be an increased need to train students in the observance of copyright, because e-submission of theses would make theses more readily available and copyright observance easier to check.

Mr Carr reported that the proposal had received a positive response from research students, who nevertheless saw value in retaining the requirement for a print copy of the final version of the thesis to be submitted.
The Board agreed to ask the working group to prepare a final version of the proposal, having regard to the comments received, for approval at the Board’s next meeting, together with proposed amendments to the Regulations.

**ACTION:** PS, Library

**09/23 Proposed joint PhD programme in Computer Science with the National Polytechnic Institute, Mexico City**

The Board received a proposal for a joint PhD programme in Computer Science with the National Polytechnic Institute (IPN), Mexico City. Dr Dimitar Kazakov (Computer Science) was in attendance for this item.

The proposal was that students admitted to the joint programme would spend the first year at the IPN, where they would complete a report equivalent to the Qualifying Dissertation required of PhD students in Computer Science at York. If this was satisfactory, students would be admitted to the second year of the PhD programme at York, where they would complete 30 months of study. On successful completion of both the oral examination at York and a public defence of the thesis at IPN, the student would qualify for a jointly awarded PhD. A student who was successful in the examination at York but not at IPN would qualify for a York PhD only. A student who was successful in the examination at IPN but not at York would qualify for an IPN PhD only.

Selection of students for admission to the programme would be agreed jointly. Students would have two supervisors throughout the programme, one at York and one at IPN, who would communicate by email and teleconferencing. Day-to-day supervision would be conducted at IPN in the first year and subsequently at York.

In reply to questions, Dr Kazakov explained:

(a) that students would be registered for 30 months in York;

(b) that students would be registered at MPhil level on arrival at York, but would upgrade to PhD within 15 months of the start of the programme;

(c) that the MPhil was not a possible exit qualification, since the award of an MPhil would be regarded as failure in Mexico;

(d) that some existing students had transferred to York after completing a year at IPN; the purpose of the current proposal was to raise the profile of York at IPN by promoting a joint degree arrangement to which
students were admitted from the start of their studies at IPN, and thereby to increase the number of students from IPN at York;

(e) that the research project, to be jointly supervised at IPN and at York, would be determined before admission to the programme;

(f) that students would be expected to have met the York English language proficiency requirement before admission to the first year of the programme at IPN;

(g) that students would pay overseas tuition fees to the University during their period of attendance at York, i.e., from the beginning of the second year of the programme;

(h) that skills training offered at IPN was based on input from supervisors;

(i) that the assessment procedure was proposed in the knowledge that IPN would not be prepared to depart from its normal PhD assessment requirements; equally, it was proposed that York should adhere to its own requirements;

(j) that he and a member of the International Office had visited IPN, but that there were no research links between IPN and the Department of Computer Science at present.

The Board agreed that it was not ready to approve the proposal as it stood. Particular issues included:

(i) the duration of the registration period (during which tuition fees were paid) and of the writing up period for the programme needed to be clearly defined;

(ii) concern over the proposal that the assessment procedure could result in three possible outcomes (the award of the PhD jointly by both institutions or singly by one or the other), the Board took the view that the assessment procedure should result in a jointly awarded degree, or none at all;

(iii) concern that the proposed programme appeared not to result from collaborative activities between the two institutions.

It was agreed that Mr Simison should compile a list of the Board’s concerns, in consultation with the Chair and other members, and that Dr Kazakov should be invited to submit a revised detailed proposal, in the form specified in the policy on collaborative research degree programmes, for consideration at the Board’s next meeting.
Arising out of M08/34, the Board received a discussion paper on four-year PhD programmes prepared by Dr Roddy Vann.

Introducing the paper, Dr Vann explained that the motivation for the introduction of four-year PhD programmes should be seen as primarily academic, rather than as a result of changes in research council funding (though these were themselves motivated by academic concerns). Academic reasons included broadening the student’s experience; increasing the University’s ability to compete nationally and internationally; and increasing the productivity of research students.

The paper proposed that departments should be allowed to propose four-year PhD programmes, where appropriate, in addition to the department’s existing three-year PhD programme(s). A four-year programme must be qualitatively different, and include additional material.

In the course of discussion, it was agreed that part-time variants of four-year full-time programmes should be permissible. It was also recognised that, while it would be open to any department to propose a four-year programme, it was likely to be those departments where four-year funding was available which would submit proposals. It was agreed that a four-year PhD programme would need to have a distinctive title to distinguish it from existing three-year PhD programmes. It was agreed that the prospect of four-year full-time programmes should be brought to the attention of the Accommodation Office, since there would be implications for the number of students eligible for accommodation. It was recognised that only students in the first three years of a PhD programme attracted HEFCE funding and were recognised for RAE purposes.

The discussion paper contained a number of options. The Board agreed that the following options should be adopted:

5.3.a A four-year programme must contain at least six months of material that is not in the three-year programme.

5.8.b Students must submit their theses within four years from initial registration.
6.1.a The full-time registration period for students on three-year PhD programmes remains three years, and the submission deadline remains the end of the fourth year. A continuation fee is payable for continuation beyond the third year.

In conclusion, the Board agreed to consider a final proposal, together with proposed changes to the Regulations, at its next meeting. It was agreed that, in the meantime, comments on the proposal (as agreed above) should be sought from departments.

**ACTION:** RV, PS

**Proposal regarding York Award for Researchers**

The Board received a proposal from Dr Karen Clegg regarding a York Award for Researchers. Miss Heather Richardson (Careers Service) was in attendance for this item.

It was noted that the York Award was a certificated programme of transferable skills training and experiential learning currently offered to undergraduate students. The paper provided a draft framework for a similar award for research students.

Students would apply in or before their final year of study. They would need to be aware of the award from the start of their studies, so as to be able to begin meeting its requirements. Students would claim a specified number of points for training courses and experiential learning, and would attend a panel interview. The award would be structured around the existing Joint Skills Statement framework. The merits of offering two levels of award (a lower level confirming the student’s participation in skills training and providing a transcript, and a higher level reflecting participation in all three required activities) was under discussion. It was envisaged that the Graduate Training Unit’s current course offerings could be reconfigured to provide a developmental pathway of courses which contributed to the award. The award would require a higher level of performance than for undergraduates.

It was proposed to pilot the award beginning in October 2009, following consultation with departments and the approval of the relevant committees, and providing financial support was agreed.

The Board commented on the proposal as follows:

(a) there needed to be sufficient confidence, based on market research, that the award would be taken up by research students in sufficient numbers;
(b) an appeal procedure needed to be in place should applicants fail to achieve the award;
(c) offering the award should not be done at the expense of providing transferable skills training for students who most needed it;
(d) the scheme needed to incorporate greater flexibility, recognising that not all students were equally good in all areas;
(e) departmental courses could be integrated into the award scheme;
(f) academic development should not be given the lowest points requirement;
(g) the existence of the award could help draw students’ attention to the skills training offered by the GTU.

In conclusion, the Board gave the proposal its broad support, and agreed to encourage Dr Clegg to work with Professor Fitter to seek the necessary funding.

**ACTION: KC**

**09/26  Non-examining chair of oral examination**

Dr Efird reported that, at a recent meeting of the Standing Committee on Assessment, a member had proposed that it should be permissible for there to be a non-examining chair of an oral examination when the examiners were inexperienced. This non-examining chair would be neither an examiner, because non-examining, nor an internal observer, because chairing. The member concerned had proposed that the Regulations should be amended to make provision for a non-examining chair. The Standing Committee had agreed to ask for the Board’s comments on this proposal.

The Board did not support this proposal. In its view, at least one of the examiners appointed should have experience of the oral examination procedure. It also felt unhappy about defining the powers of a non-examining chair, and about increasing the number of roles of those taking part in an oral examination.

**09/27  Policy and procedures on collaborative research degree programmes**

Arising out of M09/8, the Board received for information the final approved version of the policy and procedures on collaborative research degree programmes.

**09/28  Graduate Awards Committee**

The minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Awards Committee held on 5 February 2009 were approved.
In connection with M09/09, Dr McIntosh stated that, rather than raise an issue at this meeting in the absence of the Chair, he would prepare a paper for the next meeting of the Board.

09/29 Amendment to code of practice on research degree programmes

The Board approved the amendment of the code of practice on research degree programmes by the addition of the following sentence to the end of the second paragraph of Section 13(b), which concerned the assessment of candidates for the MA or MSc by research:

“The copies of the dissertation (or other materials arising from research) submitted for examination (or, following referral, for re-examination) remain the property of the University.”

This addition corresponded to an existing similar sentence concerning the assessment of candidates for MPhil, PhD and EngD.

09/30 Continuation fee and staff fee for 2009/10

The Board noted that, in line with the formula agreed in 2007, the continuation fee and the staff fee for 2009/10 would be £227.

09/31 Next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting was to be held on Tuesday 23 June 2009 at 2.15pm.