Open Business

minutes

**Board Meeting on 24 October 2006 held in
Seminar Room G, 17 Mill Lane**

**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Board of Graduate Studies

Present: Professor WA Brown (Chair), Dr GMW Cook, Dr LRR Gelsthorpe,
Professor LF Gladden, Professor GP Hawthorn, Dr PC Hewett, Dr CR
Hiley, Professor ML Jacobus, Professor RG Osborne, Professor SK
Rankin, Dr J Runde, with Dr LE Friday as Secretary, Dr C Maxwell, Dr
N Tooke, Ms CL Burton, and Miss KJ Wilkinson.

Apologies were received from Professor BJ Sahakian, Ms B Bowers and Mrs L
Whitebread.

1098 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 October 2006 were signed as a correct
record.

Matters for report

1099 Membership of the Board
Dr Hiley (as Graduate Tutors' Committee representative) and Miss Wilkinson
were welcomed to their first meeting.

1100 AHRC review of studentship competition
(Paper 2514 refers)

It was agreed that opinions should be sought from the Degree Committees
concerned and that the Chairs of the two Schools concerned should meet to
draft a response in the light of those comments. The Secretary reported that
the Degree Committees had already been asked to provide responses and
she agreed to co-ordinate the response.

The Board, for their part, expressed a cautious welcome for the new proposal
given that it offered a chance to plan and mould graduate research in arts and
humanities across the University. However, it was agreed that it would be
helpful if the institutional response was not too prescriptive, allowing room for
further planning of the mechanism by which the bid is made and the grant

administered. The AHRC paper was vague about the degree to which the grant would be tied to specific projects. The Board agreed that flexibility would be desirable for the protection of small subjects and in order to respond to changes in demand or new opportunities.

The Board also felt that it would be helpful if the AHRC could set a nation-wide deadline for the acceptance of awards, to make it impossible for candidates to keep offers open throughout the summer and so tie up awards at more than one institution.

It was noted that a block grant would require central co-ordination; this burden would be likely to fall on the Board's studentship office

1101 QAA special review of postgraduate research degree programmes
(Paper 2524 refers)

The Board noted with satisfaction the QAA's positive report on the University's self-assessment of its research degree programme.

Matters requiring discussion

1102 MPhil Degree in Computer Speech, Text and Internet Technology
(Papers 2452 & 2508 refer)

The Board noted the Degree Committee's recommendation of the number of modules required and agreed for their part to approve the change for the current year's course.

1103 Plagiarism

   1103.1 Proctor's report to the Board of Examinations
          (Papers 2525, 2526 & 2527 refer)
and
   1103.2 Trial of plagiarism detection software

The Board expressed appreciation of the Senior Proctor's efforts to co-ordinate the new plagiarism procedures for the 2005-06 examinations. However, they recognized some shortcomings of the system and agreed that further progress was needed on several fronts:

Education

A *notice* by the Proctors would seem to be suitable as a warning and should be distributed as soon as possible.

There is a case for more effective *induction* with a view to providing a compulsory course for all incoming graduate students on the academic conventions expected in their studies, the nature of plagiarism and how to avoid it. Students should be required to state in writing that they had taken the course and understood the material. The Board agreed that all Faculties should be encouraged to review their induction arrangements.

Detection

The Board endorsed the plan to try out Turnitin© software and noted that three masters courses have already agreed to take part. They further noted that the software is most effective in conjunction with an online teaching and learning tool, such as CamTOOLS, and agreed to work with CARET to explore the use of this medium in masters courses.

The Board noted that electronic submission is already used by some Faculties for checking word limits. They had no objection to electronic submission becoming *compulsory for all candidates*, but noted that paper submission should normally run in parallel. The way in which the work so submitted is used should to some extent be at the discretion of the Faculty.

Deterrence and punishment

The Board expressed concern about the level of penalties for proven cases. They noted that a number of examiners, including an External Examiner for one MPhil, have pointed out that reduced marks, or a requirement to revise the work, were, in their view, inadequate.

The Board did not think monetary fines would be appropriate in cases of academic misconduct, but felt that, in the least serious cases, the record of reduced marks on the transcript could be a deterrent, even if the candidate does not then fail the degree.

The Board agreed that the investigative panel should be in a position to fix an appropriate penalty in terms of reduced marks in minor cases (or to agree that the reduced marks given by the examiners for poor scholarship are appropriate penalty). The panels consist of a Proctor, who acts across all Faculties, and experts in the subject, and would provide a basis for reasonable judgment on the appropriate severity of a penalty at this level.

Cases in which the use of unfair means is suspected should all be referred to the Advocate and the Board agreed that swift action is then needed and stiff penalties handed down for demonstrable plagiarism. However, the Court of Discipline proceeds very slowly and has handed out some low penalties. A major revision of the operation of this Court would seem necessary.

Feedback on the outcome of cases

The Board expressed concern that feedback on individual cases did not always reach the Board in time for important decisions. They agreed to consult the Proctors, the Advocate and the Court of Discipline about how information should be fed back to the Board.

1104   Admissions
(Paper 2509 refers)

(i)   Admissions 2006
The Board congratulated Ms Burton and her team on an excellent year, in which admissions processes had worked well and long delays had been eliminated. The number of applications and admissons were very similar to 2005, and, as usual, some courses and some Colleges reported a significant drop in numbers while others reported a rise.

(ii)   charging for paper applications

It was agreed not to re-open the question of charging for paper applications. The Board noted that the income from the online applications was not being used for graduate support as had been strongly advocated and agreed that, in order to encourage online applications, it would be better to reduce the online fee to a minimum to fulfil the technical requirements of the process.

(iii)   English language conditions

It was agreed that, where a candidate is below the minimum in *both* English language and academic results, *no* application for special consideration would be entertained.