

## **Unreserved Business**

# *minutes*

Board Meeting on 10 February 2009 at Mill Lane



**UNIVERSITY OF  
CAMBRIDGE**

Board of Graduate Studies

Present: Prof J Rallison (Chair), Dr H Babinsky, Prof RJ Bennett, Prof D Cardwell, Dr GMW Cook, Prof EH Cooper, Prof PJ Ford, Prof PC Hewett, Dr CR Hiley, Mr S Mtimbiri, Dr R Padman, Prof SK Rankin, Dr DR Sargan, Mr MR Younger with Dr K Maxwell as Secretary with Dr LM Biggs and Ms SJ Pickard in attendance.

Apologies: Mr W Bortrick, Prof BJ Sahakian

Dr LRR Gelsthorpe is on sabbatical leave.

3323 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting on 13th January 2009 were signed as a true record.

3324 **Expressions of interest**

The Board agreed that in his capacity as Director of Graduate Education for the Graduate School of Life Sciences, it was acceptable for Dr Sargan to discuss matters arising from the Degree Committee for the Faculty of Biology.

**Matters for report**

3325 The Chairman reported that he had been involved in the School planning rounds and that he had reinforced the need to monitor and where necessary, improve PhD completion rates. Schools had also been encouraged to review their MPhil fee levels with full economic costing where appropriate.  
The Chairman reported that the University had agreed, subject to PRC approval, to increase its contribution to the Cambridge International Scholarships Scheme (CISS) and as a result, it was expected that up

to 80 fully-funded awards would be made towards the end of March 2009.

3326 **Straightforward Business**

3326.1 **Application to take part-time students: Animal Health Trust**

The Board approved the application subject to the consent of the Degree Committee for the Faculty of Clinical Medicine and Veterinary Medicine.

**Action: Secretary**

3326.2 **Notice to withdraw change to course structure: MPhil in History, Sociology and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine**

(Paper 3518 refers)

The Board received the notice and no objections were raised.

3326.3 **Code of Practice for research degrees**

The Board noted that the 2008-09 version of the Code of Practice had been published and distributed to all new students.

3326.4 **Draft religion and belief equality and guidance for students**

(Paper 3531 refers)

The Board received the draft document and did not identify any matters for concern.

**Matters requiring discussion**

3327.1 **Independent Chairs for PhD examinations**

(Paper 3515 refers)

The Board agreed in principle with the 2005 recommendation of the QAA, that the appointment of an Independent Chair could be good practice in certain circumstances and that there would be cost implications. The Board asked for further consideration of whether a candidate was able to request an Independent Chair or if this was limited to the Degree Committee. The Board recommended that:

- i) the Independent Chair should be paid a fee;
- ii) an Independent Chair should normally be appointed where two external examiners had been appointed;
- iii) an Independent Chair should be appointed as standard in the case of a re-examination or for any candidate for whom a Degree Committee had identified concerns with the examination.

The Board asked the Secretary to produce draft guidelines for consideration at the next meeting.

**Action: Secretary**

3327.2 **ESRC Postgraduate Training Framework**  
(Paper 3516 refers)

The Board noted that the ESRC was intending to adopt a Doctoral Training Grant arrangement, similar to that of most other Research Councils and that although this would increase flexibility, it would create a number of problems. It was agreed that this was a matter for the Pro Vice Chancellor for Research to take forwards in collaboration with the Schools concerned and the offices of the Board would need to take a central, co-ordinating role in putting together the application and subsequently administering the funds. The Board noted that more details and a draft application package were expected in May 2009. In the meantime, papers received by the Board should be sent to the Schools concerned.

**Action: Secretary**

3327.3 **Introduction of a Certificate of Postgraduate Study in Computer Science**  
(Paper 3517 refers)

The Board approved the proposal.

**Action: Education Committee**

3327.4 **Notice of intention to rescind MPhil course**  
(Paper 3519 refers)

The Board identified a number of concerns regarding the request to rescind the MPhil in Contemporary Chinese Studies for 2009-10. The Board did not approve of disappointing applicants who had been offered a place and who may have rejected offers elsewhere. The Board agreed that to depart from this policy it would need further particulars and support from the Council of the School. Questions were also raised pertaining to the relationships with donors to the course and with Peking University, especially in light of the forthcoming visit to China of the Vice Chancellor. The Board therefore agreed to remit this matter to the Degree Committee for further consideration of the concerns that had been raised.

**Action: Secretary**

3327.5 **Fee liability of graduate students: Fee for the course**

It was agreed that fee liability for stand alone four year PhD programmes and entitlement to use of facilities in year 5 would need to

be established in conjunction with the Degree Committees concerned. The Board agreed that the Secretary should liaise with the Bursars' Committee to clarify a number of technicalities with a view to introducing the fee for the course in either October 2009 if the detail can be quickly resolved or else in October 2010. The Board resolved that the fee for the course should apply only to the incoming cohort for the entry year concerned.

**Action: Secretary**

3327.6

**Proposed revision of the Regulations for the Review of Examinations for Postgraduate Qualification**

(Papers 3520 & 3520 refer)

The Board supported the proposed revision to the Regulations on the grounds that it would expedite the existing process and allow the Board to resolve complaints at an early stage with the caveat that full consultation (with examiners) must be made before resolution could be offered to the candidate.

The Board remained concerned that the remit of the Review Regulations was too narrow with the consequence that matters which impacted directly on the examination process, such as supervisor feedback on draft versions of the thesis or refusal of leave to continue could not be considered. The Board noted that the Review of Graduate Education had identified the student appeals/complaints processes as an area of concern and agreed to approach the Steering Committee with its concerns and to consult further with the Review Committee to consider whether a widening of its remit was desirable.

**Action: Steering Committee & Secretary**

3327.7

**The continuation process for graduate students**

(Paper 3532 refers)

The Board agreed with the general principle that the processing of continuation applications should mirror the process for new applicants and that a deadline of two months prior to the start date should be imposed for continuation applications. The Board also agreed that

- (i) on-line applications should be available to continuing students and that it was appropriate for the admission charge to apply on the same basis as for new applicants;
- (ii) in cases where an applicant was applying for a PhD (or equivalent) in a new Faculty, it was appropriate to request that copies of the MPhil (or equivalent) application papers should be requested from the original Faculty rather than the Board of Graduate Studies. Faculties should be warned in advance of this change in policy and given the opportunity to flag up any difficulties. It was also agreed that Faculties should be advised to

retain copies of application paperwork for those admitted for at least a year?

- (iii) Degree Committees should provide a clear indication of the pass mark required for continuation and that this should be published in the course handbook each year;
- (iv) Degree Committees should be asked to process degree recommendations as soon as possible to avoid late confirmations.

The Secretary was asked to consult with Faculties as appropriate on these matters.

**Action: Head of Admissions**

3327.8

**Scanned signatures on references**

Although mindful of the need for vigilance in the face of attempted fraud, the Board agreed that scanned signatures were acceptable provided that an original signature had been obtained on the referee's cover sheet.

**Action: Head of Admissions**

3327.9

**Deferral and resubmission of graduate applications**  
(Paper 3533 refers)

The Board acknowledged the issues arising from resubmitted applications and asked the Head of Admissions to quantify the numbers of successful resubmissions each year and to report back to the Board.

**Action: Head of Admissions**