

Unreserved Business

minutes

Board Meeting on 7 July 2009



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Board of Graduate Studies

Present: Prof J Rallison (Chair), Dr H Babinsky, Prof D Cardwell, Dr GMW Cook, Prof EH Cooper, Prof PJ Ford, Ms J Harcourt, Prof PC Hewett, Dr R Padman, Prof SK Rankin, Prof BJ Sahakian, Mr MR Younger with Dr K Maxwell as Secretary with Ms SJ Pickard in attendance.

Apologies: Prof RJ Bennett, Dr CR Hiley, Dr DR Sargan

Dr LRR Gelsthorpe is on sabbatical leave.

3380 **Minutes**
The minutes of the meeting on 9th June 2009 were signed as a true record.

3381 **Expressions of interest**
The following declarations of interest were received:
Professor Cardwell and Dr Babinsky (3383.1).
Mr Younger (3383.13).
The Board agreed that it was appropriate for these members to contribute to discussions of the items in question.

Matters for report

3382 **Chairman's report**

The Chairman reported that the Vice-Chancellor had written to Lord Mandelson and other Ministers to express in detail, the University's concerns regarding the Points Based Immigration system.

3383 **Straightforward Business**

3383.1 **Application for a new MRes in Photonic Systems Development**
(Paper 3658)

The Board noted that funding constraints had resulted in the application for the new MRes to be made late in the academic year. Although EPSRC funding was only guaranteed for five years, the department hoped that funding would continue to be available beyond the academic year 2013-14. The Board approved the proposal for the new MRes to commence 1st October but stipulated that this was subject to the Secretary receiving a Memorandum of Understanding between the University of Cambridge and University College London which had been approved by the Legal Services Office.

Action: Secretary

3383.2 **Application for a new MPhil in Conservation Leadership**
(Paper 3661)

The Board approved the proposal for a new MPhil with effect from 1st October 2010.

3383.3 **Application for a new MPhil in Scientific Computing**
(Paper 3690)

The Board approved the proposal for a new MPhil with effect from 1st October 2010.

3383.4 **Proposed changes to the special regulations for the MPhil in Architecture & History of Art**
(Paper 3659)

The Board approved the proposed changes with effect from 1st October 2009.

3383.5 **Choice of options: MPhil in Development Studies**
(Paper 3689)

The Board approved the choice of options.

3383.6 **Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA): Student admissions equality**
(Paper 3660)

The Board received the report and noted that

- 1) graduate admissions decisions were constrained in large measure by the availability of funding;
- 2) it was important that Faculties who intended to interview candidates should have relevant disability information available to them in order to put in place any requisite special arrangements for interview;
- 3) Cambridge has a high English Language admissions requirement which should be preserved.

The Board was not prepared to sanction the recommendations made in the report and considered that when the report appears on the University website an accompanying note should express reservations about the recommendations.

3383.7 **Ad hoc vacation meetings for the approval of MPhil degrees**

The Board agreed to meet weekly throughout the vacation period and for the first two weeks in October, as required, to approve MPhil degrees. Action: Secretary

3383.8 **Points based immigration: deadlines for graduate applications**

The Board agreed that overseas students should be advised that if they applied later than four months before the start date of the course there could be no *de facto* guarantee that their visa applications would be processed in time for them to attend the start of the course. Applications received after this date may be refused. Departments should be informed that they may reject late applicants and both Departments and Colleges informed of the tight deadline for processing overseas applications.

Action: Secretary

3383.9 **Late arrival of students in 2009 due to circumstances beyond their control**

The Board agreed that it was likely that a significant number of new overseas graduate students will not be able to arrive in Cambridge at the start of the Michaelmas term 2009 owing to circumstances beyond their control e.g. slow processing of visas in the home country (periods of up to 16 weeks are presently reported), visa rejections under the new points based immigration system and swine flu.

The Board was agreed that:

1) Since graduate courses with taught elements are so different it is not possible for the Board to provide all-encompassing guidance on arrival deadlines, though only in exceptional circumstances should a student be permitted to start the course after the division of the Michaelmas term.

2) Course Directors should have the discretion and authority to apply deadlines for new arrivals in the light of the disadvantage that late starters are likely to suffer (e.g. as a result of failure to attend induction courses, dates and arrangements for Michaelmas Term examinations etc.) The extent to which a student can 'catch up' over the vacation will vary from course to course. Students who arrive late should be told that there are no blanket arrangements to provide compensating examination credit for the period lost.

3) Course Directors should be encouraged to think flexibly and to develop mitigating strategies where possible if a student is unable to attend the start of the course (e.g. on-line material, reading which a student could undertake, shifting early course-work or examination deadlines for those affected, remedial teaching). Some preliminary thought about these issues is needed now rather than at the start of term.

4) Course Directors should be asked to consider the consequences if students are not able to attend for this academic year and wish to defer to the next- is the Faculty obliged to accept them and if so, how will this affect admissions numbers in the following year?

5) The problem is less critical for research courses. Such students should arrive no later than the division of term, failing which they should defer to the following term where possible.

6) It is important that the students' Colleges are kept aware of their situation by the Course Directors concerned.

Action: Secretary

3383.10 **Independent Chairs for PhD examinations**
(Paper 3662)

The Board approved the guidelines subject to minor corrections and clarifications to be made by the Secretary. The Board agreed that since the Chair would be expected to oversee an examination outside their discipline, that a payment of £75 was appropriate.

Action: Secretary

3383.11 **The use of undergraduate Masters level courses in taught postgraduate qualifications**
(Paper 3665)

The Board considered that since all the courses concerned were designated Level 7 within the Masters Framework it was acceptable for material taught in integrated Masters courses to be used as part of MPhil degrees. The Board agreed that although a number of issues would need to be addressed, it should be relatively straightforward to overcome problems relating to marking schemes and supervision.

It was felt that the issues involved should also be considered by the Senior Tutors' Committee and the Education Committee.

3383.12 **Graduate working restrictions**

The Board decided that since CASE students are in receipt of a stipend and that they do not undertake paid work it was not necessary to amend the draft statement on graduate working restrictions.

3383.13 **Diplomas and Certificates awarded by the Institute of Continuing Education and other bodies**

(Paper 3657)

The Board approved the new awards offered by the Faculty of Education with effect from 1st September 2009.

3383.14 **Common marking scheme for the MPhil degree**

(Paper 3687)

The Board agreed that Degree Committees should be thanked for their responses to the consultation and informed that the marking scheme would now be formally required for all MPhils from October 2010. In response to specific queries the Board agreed to respond individually to PPSIS and Criminology, noting that: 2) the Institute of Criminology should have no difficulty in modifying their existing scheme to meet the common marking scheme that had been collectively agreed and 1) consultation with Degree Committees concerning the form of the common marking scheme had occurred as far back as 2002.

Action: Secretary

3383.15 **Formal adoption of the Code of Practice**

(Papers 3544, 3688)

The Board received the responses to the consultation received before the deadline and noted that most welcomed the adoption of the Code. In response to specific issues the Board agreed:

- 1) It was imperative that an Advisor was appointed for each student and indeed that this was required by the AHRC and other Research Councils;
- 2) The role of the Advisor requires further clarification in the Code of Practice.
- 3) Under no circumstances should the Supervisor be appointed as the internal examiner. It was acceptable in smaller Faculties for the Advisor to examine the student.
- 4) In the view of the Board, the Supervisor should not participate in the first year assessment. If Faculties failed to follow this procedure then they must have robust appeals procedure in place involving a fresh assessment to accommodate students who have, or claim to have, problems with their supervisor.
- 5) The Institute of Astronomy had made a number of valuable suggestions particular with regard to the requirement for access to resources.
- 6) CamGRAD reports should be produced on a termly basis.

The Board asked the Secretary (a) to revise the Code of Practice with a view to its formal adoption in a more concise form in October 2009, (b) to propose a change in Regulations to require termly reporting on PhD students and (c) to thank Faculties for their comments and to respond specifically to comments raised
Action: Secretary

3383.16 **ESRC Doctoral Training Centre (DTC)**

The Board received the update on the University's bid for an ESRC DTC.