

Unreserved Business

minutes

Board Meeting on 13 October 2009



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Board of Graduate Studies

Present: Prof J Rallison (Chair), Dr H Babinsky, Prof RJ Bennett, Prof D Cardwell, Dr GMW Cook, Dr LRR Gelsthorpe, Prof SD Goldhill, Prof PJ Ford, Prof PC Hewett, Dr IB Kingston, Dr R Padman, Dr DR Sargan, Mr MR Younger with Dr K Maxwell as Secretary with Ms J Harcourt, Ms S-A Gannon, Ms SJ Pickard, Ms A Nelson and Ms J Wilkinson in attendance.

Mr Parsons and Dr Reid attended for item (3399.1)

Apologies: Prof BJ Sahakian

3394 **Minutes**

The minutes of the meetings held on 7th July were approved.

3395 **Expressions of interest**

The following declarations of interest were received:

Dr Cook and Sargan (3399.3)

Mr Younger (3399.6)

The Board agreed that it was appropriate for these members to contribute to discussions of the items in question.

Matters for report

3396 **Chairman's report**

The Board congratulated Professor Ford on his election to the Fellowship of the British Academy.

The Chairman reported that on present information approximately 28 MPhil students (2% of total) were still delayed due to difficulties obtaining a visa and 12 MPhil students had arrived late. In total 18 PhD students were still delayed, but expected to start prior to the division of

term. The Chairman thanked the PBI office for their hard work. A full report on the impact of PBI on graduate admissions will be provided for discussion at the next Board meeting.

3397 **Board Membership**

The Board noted that Professor Goldhill has joined the Board as a co-opted member and that Dr Kingston would join the Board as the Graduate Tutors' representative for the academic year 2009-10 as sabbatical cover for Dr Hiley.

3398 **Cambridge Supervision Reporting System (CSRS)**

The Secretary reported that CSRS had been launched at the beginning of October and had so far been well received.

3399 **Straightforward Business**

3399.1 **Council Tax**
(Papers 3752, 3753)

Dr Reid and Mr Parsons summarised the main issues. Dr Reid stated that following extensive discussion with Cambridge City Council over the summer it had appeared that they would be willing to extend exemption from Council tax to the day of the oral examination, but that a letter issued on 5th October 2009 stated that exemption would now cease at the end of the third year of the PhD programme. Mr Parsons asked the Board to determine the end of the PhD programme and pointed out that the Code of Practice did not specify a formal attendance requirement in the fourth year of the PhD.

The Board agreed that

- (i) the current stance of the City Council was not acceptable, in particular for students who were funded for four years.
- (ii) it would be useful to determine the position of other Universities and that students should consult the local MP and or their City Councillors;
- (iii) litigation should be avoided if possible;
- (iv) the end of the PhD programme was the date of approval for the degree;
- (v) a minimum period of four weeks should be applied to undertake minor corrections after which students should be removed from the register, and that examiners should be aware of this stipulation when making a recommendation;
- (vi) the attendance requirement of the fourth year should be included in the Code of Practice.

Action: Secretary

3399.2 **Annual Report of the Hardship Awards administered by the Board of Graduate Studies**
(Paper 3743)

The Board received the report.

3399.3 **Application to re-designate the MPhil degrees as MRes degrees**
(Papers 3746, 3747)

The Board approved the proposal to re-designate the MPhil Option B in Biological Science and the MPhil Option B in Medical Sciences as the MRes in Biological Science and the MRes in Medical Sciences respectively, with effect from 1st October 2010

The Board noted that in accordance with the Regulations for the MRes degree, both programmes offered training in research and were designed as a platform for the PhD degree. It agreed that the General Regulations for the MRes degree should be broadened to remove the requirement for a dissertation and allow the possibility for this to be replaced with similar research-orientated coursework such as an extended project or critical appraisal.

Action: University Draftsman

3399.4 **Level of service by the Institute of Continuing Education for MSt degrees**
(Paper 3748)

In line with the General Board's review of ICE the approved the principle of each MSt agreeing to a level of service to be provided by ICE. However, the Board was concerned that in places, the proposal was at odds with the Regulations for the MSt degree and also agreed that the finances of the proposal would require scrutiny. The Board agreed to refer the proposals to a sub-Committee.

Action: Secretary

3399.5 **Application for a new MSt in Sustainability Leadership**
(Paper 3749)

The Board approved the introduction of the new MSt with effect from 1st October 2010 subject to the Secretary receiving notice of formal approval of the course by the ICE Strategic Committee and confirmation that the new MSt would subscribe to at least the minimal level of registry service to be provided by ICE, albeit once these terms and related financial matters have agreed with the Subcommittee.
(3399.4)

Action: Education Committee

3399.6 **Application for the introduction of a degree of Doctor of Education (EdD)**
(Papers 3750, 3751)

Mr Younger was asked to speak to this item. He explained that the EdD was a professional doctorate offered by all other Russell Group Universities, with the exception of Oxford University and that the proposal was modelled on the existing part-time PhD in Education and the EdD elsewhere. He stated that the target students are senior education figures in schools or local authorities who would not be attracted to a part-time PhD. The Faculty aimed to target students who have taken the MEd and who currently enrol for the EdD at other institutions. He stated that the programme was a rigorous professional route to the doctorate which would serve a constituency of people working in the education sector and as such would contribute to the University's outreach and diversity agenda.

In response to specific concerns, Mr Younger explained that:

- a) the 50 000 word limit on the thesis was comparable to other institutions and that the thesis was supplemented by a professional portfolio;
- b) the admissions standards would be comparable of that for the PhD;
- c) the faculty would abide by the Board's requirements for the provision of part-time students.

The Board agreed that there was a clear demand for the course and that it was a standard qualification elsewhere. The Board approved the proposal for the introduction of the EdD degree.

Action: Education Committee

3399.7 **Procedure for the consideration of applicants who have disclosed a disability**
(Paper 3754)

The Board approved the guidelines to be put in place for the academic year 2009-10. The Board further agreed to the proposed change to policy that i applicants for 2010-11 will be informed that the Personal data sheet will be made available to departments.

Action: Secretary

3399.8 **Proposal for a new Certificate of Postgraduate Study in Music**
(Paper 3755)

The Board approved the proposal with effect from 1st October 2010.

Action: Education Committee

3399.9 **Proposal for a change to the special regulations for the MPhil in Environmental Design Option B**
(Paper 3756)

The Board noted that there had been difficulties in securing professional placements and approved the proposal.

Action: University Draftsman

3399.10 **Extensions to MPhil submission dates**
(Paper 3757)

The Board was not willing to impose a centrally defined extension period and believed that every case should be considered on its own merits.

Action: Secretary

3399.11 **The Bologna Process and Master's provision**
(Paper 3758)

The Board received the paper.

3399.12 **MPhil course lengths**

The Board agreed that the end of an MPhil course with taught elements, should be defined as the final day on which the student might be expected to attend the course, i.e. the date of the oral examination (if allowed under the special regulations), the date of submission of the dissertation (if an oral examination is not allowed) or the date of the final examination (for taught-only only).

Action: Secretary

3399.13 **Report of the Domestic Research Studentships Competition, 2009-10**
(Papers 3764, 3765)

The Board noted that the majority of applications and awards related to students in the Schools of the Arts & Humanities and Humanities & Social Sciences. Professor Bennett voiced his concern that the four science Schools were not proportionately represented in awards made. The Board also noted that in the face of on-going reductions in AHRC funding, the contribution from the Colleges had been significant and that this was a feature of the scheme which the Committee hoped to develop in the future. The Board thanked Sally-Ann Gannon for her work for the DRS Committee.

The Board did not support the proposal that maintenance awards should be increased to Research Council levels on the grounds that

such an increase would i) result in the loss of approximately two studentships per annum and ii) increase the gap in maintenance levels between Home/EU students and overseas students funded by a CISS award. It was agreed that the current difference of £500 between CHESS awards and research council awards should be maintained.

The Board noted that the DRS Completion had been renamed as the Cambridge Home/EU Scholarships Scheme (CHESS from 1st October 2009). It agreed that the transfer of funds previously channelled via the Cambridge European Trust into the CHESS was welcome and would allow increased support to be provided to EU students. The CHESS Committee suggested a number of ways in which the funding could be allocated, but the Board agreed that this matter could be settled only when the level of funding was established. However, the Board agreed that funding for Masters students remained a priority and this must be factored into any future funding model.

Action: CHESS Committee

3399.14 **Approval of graduate degrees by the Board of Graduate Studies**

The Board received the following paper from its secretary:

“The Board of Graduate Studies is the body which is responsible for the formal award of the majority of graduate awards and degrees (some graduate Diplomas, CPGS, MSt, MPhil, MRes, MSc, MLitt, PhD, PhD by Special Regulations and Higher Doctorates). The Board does not approve the LLM, MBA, MFin or MAST degrees. The Board is also responsible for the informal stages of complaints or appeals relating to the examination process.

On average, the Board approves approximately 2500 degrees per annum of which the majority are straightforward. In 2007-08, 14 candidates (0.6%) were not approved for the degree.

The Board of Graduate Studies approves degree following a recommendation from the Degree Committee, which in turn act upon marks and recommendations made by Examiners. This process is extremely protracted as compared to the undergraduate examination system, particularly when the majority of recommendations are for straightforward approval for the degree (albeit subject to corrections).

The Board is asked to consider whether it is appropriate for it to continue to act as the degree awarding authority or whether this responsibility should lie with the Degree Committee, i.e. instead of making a recommendation to the Board of Graduate Studies, the Degree Committee would approve (or not) the degree. The Board would then maintain its role in the resolution of appeals with the advantage that it would no longer be investigating complaints against its own decisions. It would also mean a significant reduction in the time

taken for a candidate to be informed of the outcome of the examination.”

The Board agreed in principle, that it was appropriate for the responsibility for the award of graduate degrees to be devolved to degree committees or another body such as a graduate school. The decision was made on the grounds that i) the Board would be free to consider appeals without having been previously involved in the decision making process; ii) it would expedite the decision making process for the award of degrees and iii) the current process was a duplication of effort, not considered necessary for undergraduate examinations.

The Board noted that a disproportionate number of disputed examination results arose from degree committees responsible for small numbers of students and considered that arrangements would be strengthened by amalgamation of Degree Committees, whether in graduate schools or other structures.

Action: Education Committee

3399.15 **Annual Report of the Board of Graduate Studies**
(Paper 3775)

The Board approved the report.

Action: Education Committee