

Unreserved Business

minutes

Board Meeting on 17 November 2009



**UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE**

Board of Graduate Studies

Present: Prof J Rallison (Chair), Dr H Babinsky, 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, Prof BJ Sahakian, Mr Y Xia with Dr K Maxwell, as Secretary and Ms A Nelson, Ms EL James, Ms SJ Pickard, Ms J Wilkinson in attendance.

Apologies: Mr MR Younger, Prof RJ Bennett

Mrs C Fage attended for minute 3412.

3408 Minutes

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

3409 Expressions of interest

The following declaration of interest was received:

Dr Cook 3428

The Board agreed that it was appropriate for Dr Cook to contribute to the discussion of the item in question.

Matters for report

3410 Chairman's report

The Chairman reported that Cambridge City Council had agreed to extend exemption from Council Tax to the fourth year of the PhD programme.

3411 Report of the Cambridge International Studentship Scheme (CISS) 2009

(Paper 3821)

The Board received the report and noted that 48 CISS awards had been made and that there had been a good level of co-funding from Departments and Colleges. The Board thanked the Director of the Cambridge Commonwealth and Overseas Trusts and the CISS Committee.

Matters for discussion

3412 Points Based Immigration (Paper 3826)

The Head of the PBI Office, Mrs Fage, provided a summary of the main issues surrounding the introduction of the Tier 4 of the Points Based Immigration (PBI) System. She explained that approximately 2600 visa letters had been issued which was a larger figure than expected, as a consequence of an unexpectedly high number of requests from visiting students and students wishing to extend their visas.

In response to the recommendations, the Board agreed:

1. to remind Departments and Degree Committees that the Board had already agreed that it could not guarantee that applicants would obtain a visa if they applied less than four months before the start date of the course. Departments and Colleges should also be made aware that confirmed offers of admission should arrive at the PBI Office within two months of the start of the course;
2. to support the development of CamSIS to facilitate the work of the PBI office;
3. where visiting students are not admitted through the Board of Graduate Studies, then the admitting Department must take responsibility for monitoring attendance and visitors should only be accepted on that basis;
4. the status of intermitting students was a sector-wide problem and that further advice should be sought from Universities UK before a policy decision could be made;
5. to recommend that the PBI working group seeks changes to student records to ensure that all relevant information is entered onto CamSIS at the appropriate time;
6. to recommend that the PBI working group identifies and introduces expected contact points in line with previous recommendations;
7. to recommend that Colleges understand and comply with deadlines as specified by PBI Office in compliance with UK Border policy.

The Board asked Mrs Fage to produce a paper to clarify the position of visiting students.

Action: Head of the PBI Office

3413 Universities UK Research Report: Taught Postgraduate Students
(Paper 3805)

The Board agreed to consult the report and to refer items of interest back to the Board later in the academic year.

3414 Universities UK Research Report: Promoting the UK doctorate
(Paper 3806)

The Board agreed to consult the report and to refer items of interest back to the Board later in the academic year. The Board also agreed to refer the report to the Transferable Skills Committee.

3415 Department of Business, Innovation and Skills Postgraduate Review
(Paper 3807)

The Board agreed to forward any responses to the Chair or Secretary. The University response would be submitted in early December.

3416 RCUK Policy and Code of Conduct on the Governance of Good Research Conduct
(Paper 3808)

The Board approved the Code of Conduct insofar as it relates to research students.

3417 Quality and Standards of Postgraduate Research Degrees
(Paper 3809)

The Board agreed to consult the report and to refer items of interest back to the Board later in the academic year.

3418 Plagiarism Steering Group
(Paper 3810)

The Board received the minutes and agreed:

- 1 to clarify the role of examiners when dealing with cases of alleged plagiarism;
2. to require all students to sign declarations which state that their assessed coursework is not plagiarised.

Action: Secretary

3419 **Increase in word limit for essays and exercises: MPhil in Theology & Religious Studies**
(Paper 3811)

The Board agreed to increase the word limit from 4000 to 5000 words with effect from 1st October 2010.

Action: Secretary and University Draftsman

3420 **Request to rescind MPhil programme**
(Paper 3812)

The Board noted that the request had the approval of the Council of the School of the Physical Sciences and agreed to rescind the MPhil in Statistical Science with effect from 1st October 2010.

Action: Education Committee

3421 **Conflicts of Interest for PhD examinations**

The Board agreed that a second External Examiner (and thus also an independent Chair) should be appointed in any circumstance where there was a potential conflict of interest between the Internal Examiner and the Supervisor or candidate.

Action: Secretary

3422 **Request to rename MPhil course**
(Paper 3819)

The Board agreed to approve the request to rename the MPhil in Biotechnology as the MPhil in Chemical Engineering with Biotechnology with effect from 1st October 2010.

Action: University Draftsman

3423 **PhD under special regulations**
(Papers 3822, 3823)

The Board agreed that the regulations were sufficiently robust to permit Degree Committee's to exercise academic discretion when recommending a candidate for the degree, but were concerned that the degree may not meet the QAA's requirements for a doctorate. The Board asked the Secretary to prepare a briefing document.

Action: Secretary

3424 **Application to introduce bench fees: MPhil in Environmental Policy and MPhil in Planning, Growth & Regeneration**
(Paper 3824)

The Board were concerned that the proposal ran contrary to the Ordinances, in that much of the list of activities would be classified as covered by the University Composition Fee and as such are those to which a student is entitled by right. The Board was therefore unwilling to approve the proposal but would prefer that such costs are recouped via an application to increase the University Composition Fee. Similar considerations may also apply to other courses charging bench fees. The Secretary was asked to investigate.

Action: Secretary

3425 **The future of postgraduate information on the CamDATA website**
(Paper 3825)

The Board agreed in principle that provided resources permit, a website which contained statistical information was a potentially useful resource for internal and external bodies. However, it was concerned that the website did not allow for the data to be extracted or easily interpreted. For its part, the Board recommended that the website should be reviewed and redesigned and it agreed that this matter should be referred to the Student Data Management Group.

Action: Secretary

3426 **Graduate Admissions Report: 2008-09 and 2009-10**
(Paper 3841)

The Board noted that there had been an increase of 19% in the number of applications received for entry in 2009-10 as compared to 2008-09 and that applications for 2010-11 were already 27% higher than at this time in 2008. The Board was concerned that despite such increases, the number of home PhD student confirmations had fallen.

The Board acknowledged that much of the increase in the number of applications was attributed to the economic climate but was concerned that the Admissions Office would be unable to cope with the volume of applications. It agreed that partial devolution of the admissions process to departments, albeit with appropriate resourcing, was now a priority.

Action: Chairman

3427 **English Language requirement: TOEFL internet-based test (iBT)**
(Paper 3844)

The Board approved the recommendation that the minimum overall score should be set at 100 and at 25 for each Section.

Action: Head of Graduate Admissions

3428 **Application for a new theme for the MRes in Biological Science**
(Paper 3845)

The Board approved the request for a new theme for the MRes in Biological Science, entitled *In vivo* Imaging in Biology & Medicine, to be introduced with effect from 1st October 2010.

Action: University Draftsman

3429 **Abbreviated Code of Practice for research degrees**
(Paper 3849)

The Board agreed to approve the Code of Practice and to request an amendment to regulation 8(e) of the General Regulations for Admission as a Graduate Student to require supervisors to submit progress reports on a termly basis. The Board further agreed an abbreviated code as a simplified and accessible summary for students.

It agreed that the Code of Practice should be revised on an annual basis and to revisit the issue of the responsibility for attaching a skills training progress log to the report.

Action: Education Committee & Secretary