Unreserved Business

Board Meeting on 15 March 2011

Present: Professor Rallison (Chairman), Professor Barker, Dr Cook, Professor Gelsthorpe, Professor Heal, Professor Hewett, Dr Hiley, Dr Padman, Dr Sargan and Mr Ward. Dr Maxwell attended as Secretary with Mrs Benton, Dr Biggs, Mr Bennett, Ms Gannon and Ms Pickard in attendance.

Professor Harvey attended for minute 3720.

Apologies: Professor Cardwell, Professor Coakley, Professor Goldhill and Dr Lasenby

3718 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2011 were approved.

3719 Declarations of interest

No declarations of interest were expressed.

Matters for discussion

3720 MPhil in Economics 2010-11: Lent term examinations of core modules

(Papers 4394, 4395)

Professor Harvey, the Chairman of MPhil Examiners and Chairman of the Degree Committee for the Faculty of Economics, attended the meeting for this item.

The Board considered a Paper submitted by the Faculty of Economics outlining the position of the high level of failure and applications for examination allowances received for students on the MPhil in Economics in this academic year. The Board also received a statement from the Graduate Tutors Committee expressing concern that those students who failed Lent term examinations had received a letter suggesting that they might consider withdrawing from the course.
before the division of Lent term, or applying for an examination allowance. In some cases, the letters were not received until the day before the division of Lent term. The Graduate Tutors requested that students in receipt of an examination allowance should be provided with additional support by the Faculty and allowed to re-sit the examinations in the current academic year rather than return to the course in Michaelmas term 2011.

Professor Harvey reported that 23% of the cohort (26 students from a total of 112) failed to achieve the pass mark of 60 in the Lent term examinations. Nine students had been ill, nine students were close to the pass mark and eight students appear to have failed irremediably. The Board had already approved one student for intermission and one for an examination allowance at the meeting held on 8 February and five applications for an examination allowance were considered under the reserved business at this meeting.

Professor Harvey informed the Board that numbers on the course this year had increased somewhat and that the Faculty had recently restructured the course with effect from October 2010, which had involved the introduction of formal examinations at the beginning of the Lent term. He also explained that the introduction of the common marking scheme had created some difficulties. He was satisfied that despite the heterogeneity in student background, the teaching in the Michaelmas had added value.

Professor Harvey reported that the majority of students who had failed to achieve the required pass mark had decided to continue with the course.

Professor Harvey commented that there would undoubtedly be some students who will fail the course, but the Faculty were expecting that many students who had failed the Lent term examinations would, as in previous years, be able to redeem their position by receiving continued support from the Faculty and completing work to a satisfactory standard during the remainder of the course. He also explained that the oral examination may be used where appropriate, to re-examine failed core modules and that the MPhil Examining Board, with the input of the External Examiners, will also have discretion, once all marks were available, to recommend the award of the degree based on the overall performance.

Professor Harvey reported that the intake for admission onto the course was heterogeneous in nature with students arriving with many different skills sets and a variety of background knowledge. He agreed that when the Faculty undertakes a complete review of the course, consideration would be made as to whether students could, after undertaking only one term, be assessed formatively rather than summatively at the end of the Michaelmas or the beginning of the Lent term.
Professor Harvey reported that letters had only been sent to students who had failed irremediably and had been in order to give them as full information as possible and noted the Board’s concern regarding the content of the letter and the lack of any consultation with the Graduate Tutors Committee.

The Board agreed that the same situation should not be able to happen in the next academic year, that re-sits in the same academic year were not possible and that where examination allowances were approved, students would be informed that the precise form of allowance, if required, would be determined in light of their final examination results. The Board also agreed that there was a broader policy question regarding the validity of summative assessments in the Lent term.

The Board invited the Faculty to reconsider its admissions standards (should a test of mathematical competence be part of the conditions for admission?) and its ability, given the increased numbers taking the course, to provide remedial classes for those having difficulties. If this is not possible then course numbers should be reduced. The Board requested a report from the Faculty on the outcome of the 2011 examinations and changes intended in the course for 2012.

3721 Board of Graduate Studies Meeting Dates 2011-12

The Board approved dates for meetings of the Board of Graduate Studies in the academical year 2011-12 as follows:

- 4 October 2011
- 8 November 2011
- 10 January 2012
- 7 February 2012
- 6 March 2012
- 10 April 2012
- 8 May 2012
- 12 June 2012
- 3 July 2012

3722 The Role and Future of the Board of Graduate Studies
(Paper 4368)

Mrs Benton reported that the Heads of Student and Educational Policy and Student Operations have been charged with a re-organisation of activities into two streams:

1) Student Operations, with work underway to establish:

- A Student Registry (bringing together Student Administration and Records Office and part of the office of the Board of Graduate Studies);
• An integrated Examinations Office (bringing together the office of the Board of Examinations and part of the office of the Board of Graduate Studies);
• A Student Complaints, Appeals and Mitigating Circumstances Office;
• An integrated Fees and Funding unit to service both undergraduates and graduates.

2) Educational and Student Policy, with work underway to rationalise and integrate all relevant matters of educational policy.

The Board considered a proposal that the Education Committee should consider all matters relating to graduate education provision (e.g. approval of new courses, changes to the special and general regulations for degrees), quality assurance (e.g. scrutiny of the PRES and PTES) and graduate educational policy in lieu of the Board of Graduate Studies with effect from 1 October 2011:

The Board broadly supported the proposal and noted that the Education Committee should expand to include graduate student representation and to accommodate representatives from each of the Schools. The Board also noted that care should be taken to ensure fair representation from the undergraduate and graduate perspective and agreed that the Schools will need to make informed membership decisions. It also agreed that a representative of the Graduate Tutors Committee might be nominated to the Education Committee.

It noted that the Board of Graduate Studies would continue to consider reserved business relating to approval of the MSc, MLitt, PhD degrees, the PhD by special regulations and higher doctorates and complaints submitted under the Review Regulations.

The Board broadly agreed that the proposed division was logical and provided a clear remit for each committee, and that it would welcome further discussion of the proposal, following its consideration by the Education Committee.

Action: Education Committee

3723 Payments to Internal Examiners of PhD degrees
(Paper 4369)

The Board noted that in some departments it may be difficult to recruit the specific Internal Examiners who are most expert in the field should the pay incentive be removed.

The Board agreed that removal of the payment would be unpopular, but that examining was generally perceived as an interesting and integral part of academic life.
The Board agreed to recommend to the General Board that it takes forward a recommendation to cease payments to UTOs for examining PhD theses but on the basis that this is part of a larger programme of economies.

Action: Education Committee

3724 Payment of External Examiners

The Board noted that following consultation with the University’s Legal Services Office, the Human Resources Committee have now agreed that:

- External Examiners and visitors should be advised to enter through the Business Visitor Route
- The University does not consider External Examiners to be employees and therefore right to work checks would not be required for any individual whether they were from inside or outside the EEA. Any payments made to External Examiners should be paid directly to their home institution rather than to the individual.

The Board noted the clarification but agreed that payment to the home institution was not feasible without specific permission in each case and that other alternatives should be explored.

Action: Secretary

3725 Timing of the Transfer of Graduate Applications to Colleges

(Paper 4370)

The Board agreed that the proposals fell outside its remit and would not be welcomed by every College. They suggested that the Graduate School of Life Sciences should pursue this matter with the Graduate Tutors Committee directly.

Action: Secretary

3726 Proposed Amendment to the Regulations for the PhD Degree: Practice-Based Disciplines

(Paper 4255 and 4371)

The Board noted the responses from the School of Arts and Humanities and the Faculty of Music. It agreed that all Schools should now be consulted prior to the amendment of regulation 6 of the General Regulations for the PhD degree.

Action: Secretary
The Board received the draft documents and agreed that it would not respond to the QAA.

The Board agreed to refer this matter to the Graduate Schools and to highlight examples of good practice. It also agreed to contact those departments who had failed to submit a response.

Action: Secretary

The Board approved the proposal from the Degree Committee for the Faculties of Clinical Medicine and Veterinary Medicine for a new MPhil in Clinical Science with effect from 1 October 2011, subject to the School confirming: 1) that it would introduce a premium fee in place of the bench fees; 2) that the course will comply with any cap imposed on Masters student numbers for entry in 2012-13 and thereafter. The Board also noted that the MPhil in Translational Medicine & Therapeutics would be rescinded with effect from 1 October 2011.

Action: Secretary and Education Committee

The Board approved the proposal from the Council of the School of Technology that the overseas Composition Fee for 2012-13 is maintained at the 2011-12 rate of £17,184, the Home/EU Composition Fee is increased by £4000 on the 2011-12 rate and that the bench fee surcharge is discontinued with effect from 1 October 2012.

The Board approved the proposal from the Degree Committee for the Faculty of Business & Management that the University Composition Fee for the MPhil in Technology Policy is decreased from £17,184 for Home/EU and overseas students to £15,480 for the academical year 2011-12.

Action: Secretary
Graduate Admissions Report
(Paper 4397)

The Board received the report and noted that compared to the same period last year, there has been an 11% rise in applications and a 6% fall in conditional offers. In total, 10 Colleges had notified the Board of an additional 100 places, 89 of which had already been allocated to Schools.

Application Fee Waivers and Discounts

The Board approved the proposals.

Action: Head of Graduate Admissions

Request to Amend Special Regulations: MPhil in Epidemiology
(Paper 4398)

The Board approved the amendment to the special regulations and agreed to the reclassification of the MPhil in Epidemiology as PGR with effect from 1 October 2011.

Action: University Draftsman

Request to Amend Special Regulations: MPhil in History, Philosophy and Sociology of Science, Technology and Medicine
(Paper 4399)

The Board approved the amendment for the special regulations with effect from 1 October 2011.

Action: University Draftsman

Cap on Graduate Admissions: MPhil by thesis and oral only
(Paper 4400)

The Board noted that an earlier proposal to exclude a class of average MPhil courses from the cap had not been accepted by the UCJC/PAC working group on graduate numbers.