Present: Pro-Vice-Chancellor Professor Fisher (Chair), Professor MK Atack, Dr LJ Cameron, Dr PE Kneale, Dr M Manogue, Dr SP Marsden, Professor MJ McPherson, Dr PA Millner, Professor NJ Smith, Professor EM Spiers, Miss Elspeth Steele (Vice-President of the PGRC), Professor DA Sugden, Professor CP Walker and Professor MJ Wilson.

In attendance: Professor M Collins, Mrs JY Findlay, Dr K Hodgson, Mrs C Murray and Miss S Throp

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Professor Collins (representing the Business School) and Miss Elspeth Steele (Vice-President of the PGRC) to the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 April 2003 were confirmed.

Matters Arising on the Minutes (and not mentioned elsewhere on the Agenda)

M 02/134 Improving Standards in Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes

REPORTED: that HEFCE would be inviting formal consultation on “Improving Standards in Postgraduate Research Degree Programmes” in the period May – September. (The report was subsequently received, with responses invited by no later than 30 September 2003).

MM 02/137-139 Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees

RECEIVED: the core terms of reference for Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees which had now been approved by the Graduate Board and by the Group on Faculty Restructuring (GB/02/79).

It was noted that individual Faculties may supplement the core terms of reference in accordance with the particular needs of the Faculty.

In addition, the Board gave further consideration to the constitution of Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees. The “core” constitution was approved as set out in Appendix I. Faculties would be able to supplement the membership in accordance with their particular circumstances.
Information was received about the terms of appointment of the Head of the Graduate School, Faculty of Biological Sciences (GB/02/81), which might be helpful to those considering appropriate arrangements in other Faculties.

02/141 Trends in Recruitment of Research Degree Students

REPORTED: that information from the Academic Planning and Performance Office about the performance of Leeds, compared to peer universities, in terms of numbers of postgraduate research students and trends would be available later in May for Strategy Group and then would be available at the September meeting of the Board.

The Chair indicated that there was concern about the recruitment of research students and this would be a major issue for discussion at the next meeting.

M 02/144-45 Research Postgraduate Targets for 2005-6

It was noted that the Office had written to Research Deans requesting them to review and revise the targets as appropriate. A related exercise was also being carried out by RSU.

M 02/163 Tutors for SDDU Training Courses for Supervisors

Members of the Board were asked to bring forward names of individuals who would be qualified and willing to act as Tutors for SDDU training courses for supervisors.

M 02/166 EPSRC - Collaborative Training Accounts

It was reported that a Working Group had been established to consider and formulate the strategic direction of the University’s bid for funding under the CTAs. There would be consultation with relevant sections of the University in June.

M 02/195 Revised Ordinance and Regulations

REPORTED: that the Chairman, acting on behalf of the Board, had sent forward to the meeting of Academic Development Committee (14/05/03) a recommendation for the restructuring of the Ordinance and Regulations for Research Degrees with effect from Session 2003-2004. The revisions had been prepared in detail by a Joint Group of the Graduate Board and Learning and Teaching Board in order to rationalise existing provision under the same Ordinance and to provide for developments expected in the future and are attached as Appendix III.

Further work would now be undertaken to review research Programmes of Study and statements of learning outcomes and to implement any consequential amendments.

M 02/196 Terms of Reference of the Graduate Board

REPORTED: that the Chairman, acting on behalf of the Board, had sent forward a recommendation to Academic Development Committee (14/05/03) for amendments to the terms of reference of the Graduate Board arising (a) from the discussions
between Graduate Board and the Learning and Teaching Board about the relationship between the two Boards and (b) as a result of the establishment of Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees (GB/02/83).

The revised terms of reference are set out in Appendix II.

The Board noted that, particularly as the new Faculty structures developed, the terms of reference of the Graduate Board would be subject to review from time to time.

Amended Terms of Reference for the Following Groups of the Graduate Board

The Board reviewed and approved, subject to some further discussion and clarification in the case of the Programmes of Study and Audit Group, revised terms of reference for the following Groups of the Graduate Board as set out in GB/02/84 (a) – (d):

(a) Examinations Group
(b) Group on Higher Doctorates
(c) Programmes of Study and Audit Group
(d) Group on Scholarships, Studentships and Prizes

QAA Issues and the Continuation Audit of the University in 2004

RECEIVED: for information, copies of the following Documents:

(i) An outline of the process of Institutional Audit
(ii) The on-going work in preparation for the Audit of the University (GB/02/85)

Dr Kath Hodgson, Director of Teaching Quality Support, attended the meeting to give further information and guidance to the Board. She explained that the Audit would take place in February 2004 and would consist of two stages (a briefing followed later by the formal Audit). 7 Disciplines would be audited and the Audit Team would decide upon the scope and type of audit. It might, for instance, follow a theme or a discipline trail.

Time scales would be tight for the preparation of documents and all sections of the University should be made aware of the situation. Discipline self evaluation documents would have to be produced within a period of seven weeks and Schools / Faculties would have to be in a position to meet these deadlines. The main University self evaluation documents would have to be ready by November and work would start soon in preparation.

The University Union would be preparing a written submission (which might be contained in the main University submission or be sent in confidence to QAA depending on the Union decision). The University had assisted with funding to enable the Union to undertake a sample questionnaire.

In response to questions from the Board, the following answers were given:

(i) It would be advisable to refer to the previous audit report and cover any
earlier issues raised in the documentation;

(ii) The discipline audit trails would cover documents from the previous two years;

(iii) Student numbers data would be required;

(iv) Attention should be drawn in the documentation to matters such as links with Professional bodies and collaboration with external organisations as well as any innovative or noteworthy developments (for instance the development of the Graduate School in the Faculty of Biological Sciences) or new research programmes being developed;

(v) The new Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees would play an important role in preparation for the Audit;

(vi) General workshops would be organised in the next few months to provide additional information;

(vii) The outcomes of the Audit could be a statement of either Confidence or Limited Confidence or No Confidence. In the event of a “limited confidence” statement there would be another QAA visit within a period of one year. Limited Confidence statements would be made if any weakness was observed.

University Scholarships Funding and Future Arrangements

RECEIVED: a report from the Scholarships Group (GB/02/86) 02/220

The Chair of the Scholarships Group presented the concerns about University Research Scholarships (URS) expressed at a meeting of the Scholarships Group on 2 May 2003. These concerns related to:

(i) the decline in the level of funds made available by the University for Research Scholarships which had meant that fewer awards could be offered;

(ii) the negative message conveyed to high quality potential research students by the University’s policy;

(iii) the new arrangements approved by the Senate for the University Research Scholarships competition, in particular the arrangements whereby Departments could, as their part of the contribution to the Scholarships, make a variable level of contribution to the maintenance of the student. In several cases this had resulted in students being offered Scholarships below the basic Research Council rate.

There was a lengthy discussion on the matter and note was taken of the concern of the Group that high quality candidates were either being turned away or were likely to decline offers of scholarships made at a lower rate than in other Universities. It was a matter of serious concern when competition amongst Universities for high quality research students was fierce. The discussion is set out below.

(a) Closing Date of University Research Scholarships Competition

Some discussion took place about the apparent decline in the number of applications which some had concluded was the result of the introduction of an earlier closing date. However, it was agreed that the closing date should remain as March for the competition in 2003-2004. There was a view that it
would attract good students at an early stage in the year, which would be beneficial for subsequent recruitment of students of the highest possible quality.

(b) Prestige of the Award

The overall view of the Board was that these awards should be prestigious, representing a “Flagship” offering designed to attract the very best students and therefore should be at least equivalent in maintenance levels to Research Council Studentships. The current policy which permitted Departments to provide levels of maintenance below the basic Research Council rate would inevitably lead to the best students taking up awards funded at a higher level elsewhere. The Board was of the view that maintenance grants should be tied to Research Council rates.

(c) Numbers of Awards Offered

Some members indicated that they considered that the numbers of new University Research Scholarships currently offered (15) was unacceptably low. The level of 30 and more new awards offered in 2000 and 2001 was more appropriate, given the size of Leeds and the nature of a research lead University.

The Chair indicated that the resource centres were now, under the current funding levels, receiving funds which had previously been “top sliced” to provide for University Research Scholarships. Central University funding for Scholarships could not, therefore, continue at previous levels without increased “top slicing”, especially given the very substantial increases in the maintenance level of national Research Council Studentships. Members expressed concern that if any change in the “top slicing” of funds at the Centre had taken place, it had not been transparent and there was no sense in which the academic community could clearly identify the situation. There was no apparent “paper trail” and the community felt disempowered. In order to improve the University’s profile by appropriate marketing and advertising, it was suggested that Research Scholarships funding should be protected from other budgetary constraints. There was strong support for this proposal.

The Vice-President of the PGRC stated that for students considering applying for research degree study, the existence of a healthy portfolio of scholarships was important in reaching the decision to apply. This was not only in respect of the availability of funds for individual students, but because it gave a clear indication of the priority given to research within the institution. The recent decrease in the number of awards could not be beneficial to future recruitment.

The Chair agreed to take the issues raised to a meeting of the Group of new Deans for further discussion. This move was welcomed as discussion of the issues involved had never before been discussed at Faculty level. The Chair would then report back to the September meeting of the Board and feedback would be given to the Group on Scholarships, Studentships and Prizes.
Policy and Procedures for the Consideration of Research Student Appeals

It was agreed that consideration of various procedural matters relating to the Regulations governing postgraduate research student appeals be referred to Professor Spiers and Professor Walker for consideration and report to the Chair for appropriate action.

Research Governance

REPORTED: that the Council had formally established a Committee on Ethics and Experimental and Practical Procedures and the Pro-Chancellor would Chair the Committee.

EPSRC Visit – DTAs and MTPs

The Chair reported that officers of the EPSRC would be visiting the University on 9 July 2003 in order to seek information about the implementation of Doctoral Training Accounts and Masters Training Packages within the University.

Dr Margaret Orchard

The Board sent its best wishes for a speedy recovery to Dr Margaret Orchard who had recently undergone a hospital operation.

Thanks to Members of the Board

The Chair expressed his thanks to members of the Board for their work during the current session.

Manager of the Graduate Centre: Mrs C Murray

The Chair expressed best wishes, on behalf of the board, to Mrs C Murray, who had resigned as Graduate Centre Manager in order to undertake a PGCE in the School of Education.

Audit and Review Information

RECEIVED: for information, detailed audit and review information, collected by the Examinations Group and the Programmes of Study and Audit Group (GB/02/87).

Faculty representatives were asked to note the type of information that was available centrally, which could form the basis for discussion at Faculty Postgraduate Research Committees.

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