

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Graduate Studies Committee on Thursday 9th January,
2003 in Room 2026, Arts & Social Sciences Building.

Present (Chair)	Dean of Graduate Studies
Dean of Research	Prof. M. Gibney
Arts (Humanities)	Dr. M.-A. Valiulis
Arts (Letters)	Prof. D. Singleton
Business, Economic & Social Studies	Dr. K. Benoit
	Dr. E. Mahon
Engineering & Systems Science	Dr. A. Moore
Health Sciences	Ms. A. Higgins
Science	Dr. P. Kruger
	Dr. T. Kavanagh
<i>GSU</i>	Mr. D. Scammell
	Mr. C. Travis
	Mr. T. O' Donnell

In attendance: Ms. G. Hogan (ISS), Ms. E. McGlade (Library), Ms. L. Donnellan (GSO), Dr. Y. Scott (History of Art).

Apologies: Dr. A. Chantler; Dr. T. Orr ; Dr. C. Morris; Dr. F. Falkiner

165.0 Minutes of the meeting of the 14th November, 2002

Dr Valiulis requested a change to the wording of the last sentence in paragraph 1 of item 164.3 to read '...students who had completed the M.Phil. in Women's Studies were more suitable for further study..'. The minutes were then approved.

165.1 Matters arising

The Dean of Graduate Studies reported that the change to the entry requirements for the Ph.D. Economics, which had been approved by the Committee at their meeting of the 17th October 2002, was on temporary hold while discussion were being held at Departmental level. The Dean said that he would report back to the Committee on the progress of these discussions.

165.2 Graduate Studies Annual Report

The Dean presented the Graduate Studies Annual Report for 2001/2002 to the Committee for approval. He said that the concept of a Graduate Studies Annual Report had been initiated by the previous Dean of Graduate Studies, Prof. John Parnell and that its aim was to inform the College about what was happening in the area of Graduate Studies. He reported that this year, for the first time, the report would go the Academic Affairs Committee for approval before being forwarded to Council. The Dean thanked the staff of the Graduate Studies Office for their work on the report. He also

acknowledged Prof. Parnell's groundwork in enabling such forms of data on postgraduate affairs to be collected.

The Dean then outlined the layout of the report and highlighted a number of sections for comment. From section 3.2 'registered postgraduate student numbers', the Dean highlighted the fact that the number of registered students had increased by 6% on the figures for 2000/2001. However, only 38% of the postgraduate student body were undertaking research degrees and he felt that more effort would be required to increase these numbers. The Dean also highlighted the fact that the number of postgraduate students coming from outside the state had increased on the previous year but that while the countries of origin were quite diverse, the overwhelming majority of students were still coming from the EU and north America.

He then moved on to section 4 'Maintenance of Academic Standards' and from sub-section 4.1, highlighted the fact that of the 264 research theses examined in 2001/2002, 83% required minor revisions, for which two months were allowed, without a fee. The Dean noted that this two-month period was causing some problems, with many students appealing for extensions to it. He felt in many cases the revisions required by examiners were too substantial to be made within the two months. Moreover, since this period attracts no fee, there is a danger that students might view it as an informal extension to their overall period of registration. Dr Kruger queried whether students were actually using this period as an extension and felt that the new fee refund scheme should alleviate some of the abuse of this revision period. The Dean reported that the high number of theses being referred for minor revisions was putting pressure on the internal examiners, who were charged with verifying that the minor corrections suggested by the examiners had been made within the prescribed 2-month period. Prof. Gibney said that in his experience it was unusual for a thesis to have no corrections. Prof. Singleton concurred and said he did not think that this was an indication that the supervisor had been less attentive. The Dean agreed but said that the time-scale was important and that the majority of minor corrections, by their definition, should not require more than a few weeks to be implemented. Dr Mahon suggested that the fact that the first submission was soft-bound may encourage students (and examiners) to view it with less finality and that if a hard-bound first submission was required, students might examine it more thoroughly before submission and examiners may be less inclined to pick out so many corrections. Dr. Moore felt that the advantage of a soft-bound copy was that corrections could be made directly onto it by the examiner. Dr. Kruger felt that the two-month period was too long as, in his experience, students often had their corrections carried out within a few days. Prof. Singleton wondered whether a third category should be introduced which would allow for a shortened revision period. The Dean of Graduate Studies suggested that the Committee might come back to this issue at a later stage for further discussion.

The Dean then highlighted the fact that there was an overall decrease in the completion times for research degrees and, commenting on the period for examination of a thesis from submission date to approval by Council, highlighted the fact that only seven theses took longer than 12 months to examine.

From section 5 'College Awards & Travel Grants', the Dean highlighted the increase in the number of students applying for postgraduate awards and said that this was partly due to the fact that Departments seemed to be working them into a patchwork of awards. He then informed the Committee that the postgraduate application form was now available to download from the Graduate Studies web site. Ms. Higgins asked whether it would be possible to put some of the application forms for

nursing courses on the web-site and Ms. Donnellan said that she would discuss that further with her. The Dean then opened the report to discussion by the Committee.

Mr Scammell asked whether there was any possibility of the Category I awards being increased in value and number, and offered to lobby the appropriate bodies for additional funding. The Dean said that he would welcome any representation that the Graduate Student's Union could make in order to secure additional funding. Dr. Mahon said that it would be interesting to see data included in the report on other awards that T.C.D. students were in receipt of. The Dean agreed, but said that as it was difficult to collate accurate information on such a diverse range of awards, it may be misleading to include the information, as it would not provide a comprehensive list. Dr Mahon also suggested that sources of funding such as Development Aid had not been tapped into at postgraduate level. The Dean noted that there was evidence, historically, of reluctance by the State to channel development aid through university awards and that suggestions to source funding from governmental development aid had not received a positive response.

Dr Valiulis queried whether it would be possible to provide a breakdown by Department of the gender figures presented in Appendix J. Ms. Hogan said that it should be possible and that she would liaise with Ms Donnellan about obtaining this data. Dr Mahon queried whether the figure of 167 Ph.D.'s presented in Appendix E represented the number of Ph.D.s awarded. The Dean explained that the figure represented the number of Ph.D.s approved by Council but not the number commenced in the relevant period. Dr Mahon said that a gender breakdown of this figure would also be interesting.

Ms. Higgins felt that the low return of external examiners reports on taught courses was worrying. The Dean said that in nearly all cases the reports were eventually received but that they were often late. Prof. Singleton commented that confusion often exists regarding external examiners reports on research theses as there is often an informal version, which is produced before the *viva voce*, followed by the formal version produced after the *viva voce* is held. The Dean agreed that this could possibly lead to confusion but said that he was following the college tradition that allowed a considerable level of autonomy to Departments in organising the *viva voce* examination and to examiners in their method of reporting. Prof. Singleton felt that although it could lead to confusion, there was a definite advantage to having a preliminary report, as it highlighted areas for discussion for the *viva voce*. The Dean of Research raised the issue of the level of power that external examiners have and a discussion ensued on the merits of the Departments having more of a say in setting more specific criteria for external examiners. The issue of whether a *viva voce* was required also arose, and Dr Benoit reported that in the University of Essex, a Ph.D. could be passed without a *viva voce* being required. Dr. Kruger said that he felt that students often welcomed the opportunity to defend their work to the examiner during a *viva voce*. Dr. Mahon felt that the *viva voce* allowed the examiner to test a number of vital elements; such as whether the students had conducted to work themselves and how much control they had over their work etc. Dr. Kruger wondered whether the fact that a thesis was being examined by *viva voce* did not signify that it was of passable standard. The Dean said that this was not necessarily the case and that all Ph.D.s involve a *viva voce* examination, even where it seemed likely that they would not be of an adequate standard. In such cases, the candidate is informed beforehand. The Dean then closed the discussion and invited the Committee to email him with any further suggestions or corrections to the report.

165.3 M.Phil. in Irish Art History proposal

The Dean of Graduate Studies began by reminding the Committee of the procedure for the approval of a new course. He then reported that this proposal had been approved by the Library Committee and informally by the Treasurer, and that it was being funded by external private donors. He noted that the Committee's approval would be subject to formal approval by the Finance Committee. He then welcomed Dr Yvonne Scott and invited her to present the proposal to the Committee. Dr. Scott outlined the background to the proposed course and how it would fit into the research strategy of the History of Art Department. She reported that it was part of the development of the new Irish Art Research Centre and that there were no comparable courses running elsewhere in the country. She briefly outlined the structure and content of the course for the Committee. Members of the Committee sought clarification on a number of points. Dr Mahon asked whether the course would be running any modules on Georgian architecture in Dublin. Dr. Scott said that they hoped to but that it would depend on the availability of Dr. McParland. She said if this were not possible, an alternative would be a module on patronage or urban landscape. Prof. Singleton queried the entry requirements and asked whether the course could be completed by someone with no background in Art History. Dr. Scott said that a background in Art History was not required but that the mixed ability of students on the course would need to be carefully managed. It was possible for new-comers to take a 1st year survey course which would give them the basics and the small number of places on the course would allow for individual help if required. Dr Valiulis asked whether there was money to fund staff for 3 years on the course and Dr. Scott confirmed that there was. She said that she was confident of continuing funding but that if the funding ceased after 3 years, she felt that it would be possible to continue the course. Finally, there was discussion of the likely applicants to the course. The Dean asked, given the likely appeal of such a course abroad, whether the course designers had in mind an ideal balance of overseas and Irish students. Dr Scott stated that while it was hoped to have a diverse mix of students, in the end, places would be offered to the best eight candidates. The Dean thanked Dr Scott and after discussion the Committee then approved the proposal.

165.4 Any other business

As there was no further business, the meeting closed.

Signed :

Date :