

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 13th November, 2003
Room 2026, Arts Building.

Present: Dean of Graduate Studies (Chair), Dr Maryann Valiulis, Dr Alan Kramer, Prof. David Singleton, Dr John Donegan, Dr Evelyn Mahon, Ms Margaret Carroll, Dr Alan Moore, Dr Trevor Orr, Mr Michael Dowling, Ms Susannah Scott, Ms Mairead De Roiste, Dean of Arts (Humanities), Dean of Arts (Letters), Dean of Engineering and System Sciences, Dean of Business, Economics and Social Studies, Dr Andrew Loxley (School of Education);

In attendance: Mr Trevor Peare (Library), Ms Gail Hogan (ISS), Ms Ewa Sadowska (GSO), Ms Nicky Saunders (GSO);

Apologies: Dean of Research, Dr Christine Morris, Dr Trevor Hodkinson, Dr Joseph McDonagh, Dr Frederick Falkiner, Dean of Health Sciences, Dean of Science, Dean of Dental School, Dr James Hyland (Dept. of Political Science);

The Dean began the meeting by welcoming Faculty Deans and other staff members especially invited to the meeting.

173.0 Minutes of the meeting of the 16th October, 2003.

The minutes were approved by the Committee with an amendment proposed by Dr Kramer to be inserted under item 172.3 to reflect his suggestion that the maintenance award element of the new studentships is at €4000 still too low, compared for example with the current Government of Ireland award of €12,700. The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that he would sign the amended minutes at the next meeting.

173.1 CHIU project on PhD Good Practice

The meeting was devoted to a discussion of the sole item on the agenda, the CHIU project on PhD Good Practice. The Dean introduced the item by explaining that the meeting had been called in response to both internal and external initiatives. With regard to the former, he identified two issues: the development of non-traditional doctoral programmes and the growing interest in inter-institutional collaboration at doctoral level. The Dean referred to the Doctorate in Political Science and the Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, the two doctoral programmes currently in place in Trinity which comprise a significant practical component. The question arose as to whether these programmes should be termed "research" or "taught". The Dean also referred to informal discussions he had had with colleagues who are considering introducing new professional doctoral programmes with similar taught components in education, neuroscience and dentistry. Referring to collaborative programmes, the Dean recalled that the Committee had recently approved a European Doctorate in Sound and Vibration Studies in the Dept of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering.

The Dean explained that the immediate external stimulus for this meeting had come from the Conference of Irish Universities (CHIU), which had received HEA funding for a sectoral project: establishing principles for good practice in PhD programmes. He also noted that a future focus of interest in the Bologna process will be the doctoral level or 'third cycle'. Also, the Coimbra Group, a network of 37 long-established European academic institutions to which College belongs, had set up a task force to survey PhD programmes in terms of collaboration and student mobility. The Dean then spoke to a tabled document which outlined principles of a new academic initiative in the U.K. called "The New Route PhD", in operation at over 30 universities, offering a novel integrated approach to provide PhD students in the U.K. with the highest quality of taught materials and practical experience alongside advanced research. The scheme is proving very successful in marketing the British PhD internationally and is supported by the UK Ministry of Education. The Dean also referred to another tabled document called "US National Science Foundation 5 Year doctoral programme". He explained that the US National Science Foundation has funded the establishment of new 5-year integrated PhD programmes in leading universities, comprising essentially three years of taught components and research methods followed by two years devoted to writing up a research thesis.

In the ensuing discussion a number of views were expressed:

The Dean of Arts (Humanities) suggested that in view of the variety of interests people have when they are embarking on a PhD, it might not be reasonable to proceed from the assumption that one type of doctoral programme should satisfy all demands. He also alluded to psychology, where the standard for a doctorate needs to be accredited by a professional body which approves the level of practical training required and ensures that the research component remains equivalent to a standard PhD by research in other academic areas.

Dr Evelyn Mahon suggested that a survey of what is currently done in College departments should be carried out to establish how they operate with regard to best practice in terms of duration for completion, practice for transfer to the PhD register and establishing numbers of those students completing Masters and those progressing to the PhD register. Such a survey should also be supplemented by findings with respect to European universities before any non-European models can be meaningfully analysed.

Dr Alan Kramer noted that the common perception is that a doctorate is generally a PhD by research. However, this view had been gradually changing to mean also a scheme which incorporates teaching. He suggested that a good way to start could be by having a closer look at the PhD in the Department of Political Science in order to establish how many students had completed it and whether it has proved to be financially viable. Some thought would need to be given to finding out whether the move towards a professional PhD can be taken as a general trend within European universities. He also suggested that the already established links between Trinity and various European third-level institutions should be explored for that purpose.

The Dean of Arts (Letters) noted the usefulness of the guidelines on PhD supervision which are published on the Graduate Studies Office website. She indicated that it might be useful to set up a Graduate School in the Faculty of Arts (Letters) which would monitor the postgraduate students' taught track record while on the research register, and would issue certificates for every taught component students have successfully completed in any department, such as an additional language course.

Mr Michael Dowling stated that rather than discussing a standard for an Irish PhD in general, it might be more useful to establish a standard for a particular type of PhD within a given academic subject with its own specific criteria and guidelines, such as an Irish Business PhD or an Irish History PhD. The standards would be developed locally by departments and would be ratified by the Graduate Studies Committee.

Prof. David Singleton wondered whether the current financial climate is opportune to a discussion of a move towards a taught PhD given the fact that College's budget is being significantly reduced for the second consecutive year and that any new taught programmes would require additional resources in terms of recruiting new teaching staff. He also noted that, welcome as they seem to be, taught doctorates should not be taken as the only option available, given that in practice there are a lot of part-time PhD students who would most likely not be interested in taking a taught component in addition to a purely research one.

The Dean of Engineering and System Sciences noted that in practice a traditional PhD takes longer to complete than the prescribed 3 years. He wondered whether this might be addressed by the incorporation of an obligatory taught element into the initial year of the programme thereby enhancing the student's chance of getting started more effectively and reducing the completion time.

The Dean of BESS stated that there is a definite trend in economics towards incorporating a taught component into doctorate programmes, and that change is dictated by the requirements of the business sector. It is expected that a student should acquire a core of professional knowledge before he/she embarks on a specific research path, and that the university should ensure both. He suggested that it might be advisable to devise a specific title for a taught PhD course. The issue of additional staff resources could be addressed by pooling them between College departments and even outside institutions whose staff might be invited to teach specific courses in College.

Dr John Donegan confirmed that students in the Physics Department are required to complete taught courses before they are allowed to proceed to a PhD on the research register. He stated that in his department experts from abroad are brought in during the summer to give courses within the graduate programme.

Ms Mairead De Roiste noted on behalf of the graduate students that they do not seem to want too formalised a training as part of their PhD programme, but valued the opportunity to develop a pool of specific skills such as statistical competence or the skill to draw maps, which would assist them in their research work.

Dr Alan Kramer noted that student-driven demand for tailor-made doctorate programmes might be the best approach. It might not be advisable to introduce a compulsory taught component at the start of a doctorate programme, given that Trinity has a four-year undergraduate programme in place and that the fourth year is in fact devoted to some initial research in a specific subject area.

The Dean raised the question of how best to invite contributions from the departments both on their current practice and their aspirations for development at doctoral level.

It was agreed that

- a) the Deans will take the issue to their respective Faculty Executive Committees for comprehensive discussion and report back to the Graduate Studies Committee in due course about the current Faculty practice and future aspirations with regard to the PhD;
- b) following the example of Dr Evelyn Mahon, who volunteered to carry out an informal survey of current practices in her Faculty, each team of two Faculty representatives with their Dean undertook to produce a report for discussion by the Graduate Studies Committee at an additional meeting to be scheduled in mid-January 2004;
- c) the Graduate Students Union representatives on the Committee undertook to produce a report for the January meeting reflecting views and aspirations of the graduate students in Trinity;
- d) the Dean proposed that the Graduate Studies Office produce statistical data with respect to the two professional doctorates, i.e. the D.Clin.Psych and the PhD in Political Science for the January meeting;

173.2 Any Other Business

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10.00 am. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 27th November 2003.

Prof. John Saeed

Signed:

Date: 22 January 2004