

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9.00 am on Thursday 24 April, 2008
Boardroom, Provost's House

Present: Prof. Carol O'Sullivan, Dean of Graduate Studies (*Chair*),
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Dr Joe McDonagh, School of Business
Prof. Biswajit Basu, School of Engineering
Mr Brendan Tangney, School of Computer Science & Statistics
Prof. Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Dr Hazel Dodge, School of Histories & Humanities
Prof. John Saeed, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences
Dr Richard Porter, School of Biochemistry & Immunology
Dr Kenneth Irvine, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Kevin Tierney, School of Psychology
Dr John Clancy, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Prof. Nicholas Grene, School of English
Prof. Stefano Sanvito, School of Physics
Dr Thomas Connor (Acting), School of Medicine
Dr Philip Matthews, School of Education
Mr Trevor Peare, Keeper of Readers' Services (*Ex officio*)
Mr Michael McGrath, Acting Manager of MIS (*Ex officio*)
Mr Alessio Frenda, Graduate Students' Union President (*Ex officio*)
Mr Gabriel Magee, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (*Ex officio*)
Dr Jacqueline Potter, C.A.P.S.L. (*In attendance*)

Apologies: Dr David Lloyd, Dean of Research (*Ex officio*)
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Prof. Seamus Martin, Vice Deanery of Genetics & Microbiology
Dr Anne O'Connell, School of Dental Science
Dr Gail McElroy, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy
Dr Richard Timoney, School of Mathematics
Dr Eoin O'Sullivan, School of Social Work & Social Policy
Prof. John Kelly, School of Chemistry
Dr Iain Atack, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Dr Matthew Causey, School of Drama, Film & Music
Dr Neville Cox, School of Law
Dr Fintan Sheerin, School of Nursing & Midwifery

In attendance: Ms Ewa Sadowska, Graduate Studies Office, Secretary to the meeting (*Ex officio*)
Ms Helen Thornbury, Graduate Studies Office

The Dean welcomed to the committee Mr Michael McGrath, Acting Manager of MIS who has replaced Mr John Lawlor, as a new *Ex officio* member.

207.0 Minutes of 20 March 2008

The minutes of the meeting of 20 March, 2008 were approved by the Committee as circulated.

207.1 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

207.2 Calendar Part 2 Regulations

The Dean took the Committee through all the proposed *Calendar Part 2* changes laid out in the circulated document and explained the grounds for the amendments. The following has been approved:

a) Amendment (1) with respect to Page 35, §2.13., *Transfer to the Ph.D. register* was approved as circulated.

b) Amendment (2) with respect to Page 34, §2.12 *Extensions and off-books* was approved as circulated to say that "An extension of the period within which the thesis can be presented may be obtained by application to the Dean of Graduate Studies by the student's Supervisor and must have a strong recommendation from the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate)."

c) Amendment (3a) with respect to Page 36, §2.14 [2nd paragraph from the top] *Procedure for examination of a [research] candidate* was approved as: “The *viva voce* would be chaired by the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) who may delegate that role to a head of discipline or other senior academic to act as an independent chair.”

d) Amendment (3b) with respect to Page 36, §2.14 [3rd paragraph from the top] *Procedure for examination of a [research] candidate* was approved as: “The conduct of the examination is the responsibility of the examiners, in consultation with the chair of the *viva voce*. The only parties who may be involved in any discussion of the proposed result of the thesis under examination prior to the *viva voce* are as follows: the internal and external examiners and the independent chair.”

e) Amendment (3c) with respect to Page 36, §2.14 [7th paragraph from the top] *Procedure for examination of a [research] candidate* was approved as circulated to delete the sentence saying that “When failure, referral of a thesis or the award of a lower degree is contemplated the candidate should be informed of this possibility in advance of the *viva voce*.”

The Committee debated this issue at some length and established that the actual practice had shown that there was no clear benefit to the student to know in advance whether failure, referral of a thesis or the award of a lower degree is contemplated. Furthermore, since the Calendar did not specify how much in advance the student should be notified of such a proposed outcome, there were considerable differences in practice from a couple of weeks to just informing the student at the beginning of the *viva voce* examination. It was emphasised that the *viva voce* must be viewed as an integral part of the whole examination process of the thesis, and hence the examiners should not go into the *viva voce* with an already formulated recommendation or a pre-judged outcome. It was recognised that there may be situations when it might not be possible for the examiners to inform the students before the day of the *viva* when failure, referral of a thesis or the award of a lower degree is contemplated. The retention of this stipulation in the *Calendar* may therefore be taken to imply that the examiners are not at liberty, because of a procedural technicality, in proposing such a result even though it may be justified on academic grounds. However, the *viva* is the forum at which such decisions are to be made and all options must be open to examiners at that point. It was agreed that in terms of a *viva* format, grounds for all problematic academic issues of the thesis should be explicitly laid out to the student at the start of the examination so that they can then be thoroughly debated, and that the student could be given a fair opportunity at the *viva* to raise any issues deemed pertinent to their thesis and research. The Committee recommended that this particular practice should be adopted with immediate effect where it is not yet present.

f) Amendment (4) with respect to Page 40, §3.1 *General* was approved as circulated to say that “Some Masters courses have the option of an exit Postgraduate Diploma when the taught component of the course has been satisfactorily completed. Such P.Grad.Dip. courses are, for completeness, listed under the appropriate Faculty entry but are not open to entry as separate options from their parent Masters course, *i.e.*, students apply for entry to the appropriate Masters course. Students opting to receive a P.Grad.Dip. are not permitted to submit subsequently for the corresponding Masters degree.”

Grounds for the amendment were based on a recommendation from the Bologna Desk. The current Calendar entry is ambiguous with respect to the award of the PG Diploma in this case, as the wording suggests that the P.Grad Dip. can only be awarded to students who successfully complete the taught elements but do not submit a dissertation for the Masters degree. It does not explicitly cover the situation where a student submits but fails the dissertation. This should not be left to interpretation, but should be clearly covered in the Calendar entry.

f) Amendments (5 and 6) with respect to Pages 23, §1.22 *Regulations for re-checking/re-marking and retention of examination scripts* and 41, §3.7 *Appeals* [for taught courses] were approved as circulated to bring the *re-checking/re-marking* regulation in line with the *Appeals* regulations for taught courses which require the student first to bring a case to the course committee, and if the course committee refuses to grant the appeal, the student may make the request to the Dean of Graduate Studies who may refer such case to the Academic Appeals Committee for graduate students.

g) All miscellaneous amendments under point 7 (a-f) were approved as circulated.

h) Amendment 8 with respect to a proposal to amend duration on the research register.

The Dean explained that currently for M.Sc./M.Litt. students, the minimum period of research before which a thesis can be submitted is one year from the date of registration, and the maximum period is three years. In the case of part-time registration it is two and four years respectively. In case of Ph.D. students, the minimum period of research before which a thesis can be submitted is two years from the date of registration, and the maximum period is five years. In the case of part-time registration it is three and seven years respectively.

After a discussion the Committee approved that for M.Sc./M.Litt. students the minimum period of research before which a thesis can be submitted is one year from the date of registration, and the maximum period is two years. In the case of part-time registration it is two and three years respectively. In the case of Ph.D. students, the minimum period of research before which a thesis can be submitted is two years from the date of registration, and the maximum period is four years. In the case of part-time registration it is three and six years respectively.

The Committee acknowledged that, in terms of eligibility of research students to attract funding, externally to College under RGAM and internally to Schools under ARAM, only Masters students on years one to two and PhD students on years one to four are recognised, and the current change reflects this funding mechanism. It was confirmed that the new cessation dates will be implemented from October 2008 for new entrants to year 1 on the research register whereas continuing students will not be affected. It was noted, however, that current 4th year students are already being encouraged to submit by the end of the academic year without going to year 5, not only for reasons of funding, but also because it is not to the benefit of the student's research or career prospects to allow them to prolong the submission of their thesis. An additional issue of part-time research students was raised in terms of part-time fees and their costs to the Schools. A concern was voiced that there is a discrepancy between the College policy to support life-long education and the practice of charging Schools the same ARAM costs for part-time and full-time research students, which is seen as a significant disincentive against recruitment to the part-time register. The Committee was of the view that this situation should be reviewed by the ARAM Task Force as a matter of priority.

207.3 Any Other Business

- a) The Dean noted that research students are currently admitted to the Masters register and undergo a transfer procedure, normally at the end of year two, to the PhD register. The Dean indicated that most other Irish Universities admit students directly to the PhD register from year 1, and have adopted this practice recently as a result of national and international developments in graduate education and new funding and budgetary mechanisms introduced. In particular, a strong concern was voiced that Ph.D. transfer practices in Schools are such that they cannot guarantee that all eligible students, especially on year 3 of Masters, have been dealt with by the deadline when the College is required to return student statistical data to the HEA for funding purposes. This leaves College in a particularly vulnerable position financially.

The Committee subsequently debated the issue of a possible policy change to admit directly to the Ph.D. register from year 1. There was unanimous support for this policy change on the following grounds:

- (i) there is an increasing number of students who apply to the research register as graduates with a taught Masters degree, and it would be more appropriate academically to recruit them directly to the Ph.D. register;
- (ii) the Committee expressed their view that, should students be admitted to the Ph.D. directly, the first two years would be probationary and the students would need to undergo a strict and robust academic assessment process, equivalent to the current transfer procedure, in order to ensure that they have the potential to successfully complete a Ph.D.; a transfer down to the Masters register could be recommended at this stage for those students who do not reach the required standard. The Committee was therefore satisfied that the new admissions procedure will not impair but adequately safeguard academic standards on the Ph.D. register.
- (iii) Remaining the only Irish University with an entry, practically exclusively, *via* the Masters register can be seen as a promotional disadvantage for the College in terms of international recruitment of research students, particularly in a situation when it is likely that a sectoral promotion under the 4th Level Network of all Irish Universities is set up for EU recruitment of research students in Europe.
- (iv) There will still be entry to the Masters register for new entrants who aim to submit a Masters thesis but an opportunity to transfer to the Ph.D. register will remain open in terms of regulations to these students as well.

The Committee was happy to support the debated change and recommended that the Dean brings a full proposal for the change of the policy to the next Council for approval so that resulting *Calendar Part 2* regulations can be amended for approval by the Graduate Studies Committee at its last meeting in June 2008 for implementation from October 2008.

- b) The Committee noted and approved the proposed *Calendar Part 2* changes for 2008 as listed in Section B on the agenda.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11.00 am.



Prof. Carol O'Sullivan

Date: 22 May 2008