

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE
GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9.00 am on Thursday 23 October, 2008
Boardroom, Provost's House

Present: Prof. Carol O'Sullivan, Dean of Graduate Studies (*Chair*),
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Dr Richard Porter, School of Biochemistry & Immunology
Prof. John Kelly, School of Chemistry
Dr Matthew Causey, School of Drama, Film & Music
Prof. Biswajit Basu, School of Engineering
Dr Darryl Jones, School of English
Prof. Seamus Martin, School of Genetics and Microbiology
Dr Hazel Dodge, School of Histories & Humanities
Dr Stefan Sint, School of Mathematics
Prof. Cormac Ó Cuilleanáin, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Dr Thomas Connor, School of Medicine
Dr Paula Murphy, School of Natural Sciences
Dr Fintan Sheerin, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Dr Andrew Harkin, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
Dr Gillian Wylie, Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics
Dr Robert Thomson, School of Social Sciences and Philosophy
Dr Eoin O'Sullivan, School of Social Work & Social Policy
Mr Michael McGrath, Acting Manager of MIS (*Ex officio*)
Mr Ronan Hodson, Graduate Students' Union President (*Ex officio*)
Ms Alexandra Murphy, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (*Ex officio*)
Dr Jacqueline Potter, C.A.P.S.L. (in attendance)
Mr Trevor Peare, Keeper of Readers' Services (in attendance *Ex officio*)

Apologies: Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Dr Joe McDonagh, School of Business
Dr Siobhan Clarke, School of Computer Science and Statistics
Prof. Stefano Sanvito, School of Physics

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

210. The Dean welcomed new members of the Committee: Dr Darryl Jones (School of English), Dr Andrew Loxley (School of Education), Dr Jeffrey Kallen (School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences), Dr Stefan Sint (School of Mathematics), Dr Paula Murphy (School of Natural Sciences), Dr Andrew Harkin (School of Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences), Dr Gillian Wylie (Aspirant School of Religions, Theology and Ecumenics), Dr Robert Thomson (School of Social Sciences and Philosophy)

The Dean thanked Ms Ewa Sadowska for her support as secretary to the Committee for the last five years and advised that she would be moving to the office of the Vice-Provost.

210.1 Minutes of 12 June 2008

The minutes of the meeting of 12 June, 2008 were approved by the Committee as circulated.

210.2 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

210.3 Overview of Graduate Studies Committee

For the benefit of new members, Dean provided an overview of the Graduate Studies Committee terms and conditions of the committee as laid down in Calendar part 2 for 2008/09.

210.4 Discussion document on postgraduate fees

Dean spoke to the circulated discussion document on postgraduate fees and explained that the aim of the document was to rationalise and simplify the fees structure, to simplify analysis, modification and future planning of fees and to ensure an academic perspective to the process. All agreed in a discussion which followed that this was a worthwhile initiative and exercise.

GSU members were especially concerned that higher fees should also ensure enhanced academic value for money and not create a situation where prospective students would be excluded from the chance of postgraduate education. Care should be taken that education is not made unaffordable for many, especially self-financing students whose fees are not

paid by companies or funded externally, thus leading to increased exclusion from education. Concerns were raised in relation to certain taught Masters courses and also for non-EU applicants. The view was expressed that there was no clear rationale in the draft for restricting disciplinary weightings for non-EU fees only. The GSU representatives agreed broadly on fee banding related to disciplines but were concerned about the current level of student services.

A further issue was raised that some EU institutions are refusing to cover the fee component of the student's grant allocation on the grounds that the fees appear to be charges for services (e.g. training costs) that are separately paid by the grant provider anyway. Dean explained that the IUA is already looking at this issue of what is covered by the fee at a sectoral level.

The special case of nursing was raised. Currently, the HSE pays the fees for taught courses to Trinity but has been looking for new partnerships with FETAC to see if they can provide training at a lower cost. Increasing clinically-based course fees may leave College vulnerable to lose courses and students to prospective new partners and thereby to lose valuable grants from HSE. A related issue is the current non-EU fee charged for nurses/midwives from overseas recruited to work in Ireland and willing to enrol on postgraduate courses to up-skill. Hospitals are currently not in a position to pay the non-EU fees for such students. The Dean pointed out that College receives no state grant for non-EU taught students. The concern was also expressed that, for schools who receive a block grant from HSE, if fees were to be significantly increased the HSE would question the continuation of the grant to TCD.

In the School of Engineering, a number of postgraduate diplomas are supported by part-time lecturers from outside who are hourly paid, while the School only coordinates the courses. Should the course fee increase, the concern is that the number of students would decrease and the hourly-rate payment, which is directly related to the level of uptake, will also decrease, thus making the course non-viable.

The view was also expressed that research students occupy a special position in College and charging them a high economic fee would mean de facto that in most cases the Schools would need to find more funding internally to cover such fees, thus leading to an increased cost on the Schools. However, it was also noted that the fee would be returned to the school as an ARAM credit. A further concern was that increased non-EU fees would lower the competitiveness of TCD applications for external grants and would also constitute a disincentive for PIs to choose the best applicant, irrespective of status.

The Dean invited all committee members to consider further the document in the light of the issues raised the discussion and to share feedback with her by email so that it could contribute to the final version for submission to the Finance Committee.

210.4 International Research Students

Prof. John Kelly spoke to this item and discussed his experience of recruiting non EU students who had visa difficulties. The ISA office's view was that their remit was only related to undergraduate students and they did not deal with postgraduate students in terms of assisting them with visa and/or accommodation difficulties. However, despite this view, the ISA Office was in fact very helpful and did assist. Prof. Kelly wondered if it would be possible to clarify and improve the supports to non-EU students, e.g., to reserve accommodation for them, or to arrange a special orientation event. The GSU president expressed a willingness to look into the latter event. Prof. Kelly also expressed some concern of the low level of English in some of newly admitted non-EU applicants and wondered if some English language support could be provided for them. The Dean explained that CLCS are planning to open up a language course from next October to offer such supports to such students.

209.5 Any Other Business

- a) Dean advised that she will be bringing forward with CAPSL a proposal for an award of excellence in research supervision.
- ii) The Dean raised the issue of lifelong learning as it relates to postgraduate study. She indicated that discussions had recently taken place to consider the possibility of acknowledging prior learning in some way for those who satisfied some of the requirements of a course. Furthermore, it was felt that College should investigate other mechanisms for accumulating credits towards a postgraduate qualification, outside the current timelines. Several members of the committee expressed concern that they were losing students, as they currently cannot allow students who already have a PgDip to return and continue towards a Masters degree, without repeating the Diploma element. The meeting was in support of exploring such initiatives further, and agreed that the Dean would set up a working group.
- iii) In response to the query about an update of the current SIF 2 funding situation the Dean explained that Trinity is still awaiting confirmation from the HEA on funding levels for this and future years.
- iv) Trevor Peare advised that the library will be launching an event on information literacy on 12 November 2008 to roll out a SIF 1-funded generic module.

b) The Committee noted and approved the Nomination of the Henry Flood Scholarship for 2008 as listed in Section B on the agenda.

c) The Committee also 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 11.20 am.

Prof. Carol O'Sullivan

Date: 20 November 2008