



GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9am on Thursday 20th October 2016
Boardroom, Provost's House

XX = Council relevance

- Present:**
- Professor Neville Cox, Dean of Graduate Studies (*Chair*)
 - Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
 - Professor Richard Porter, School of Biochemistry and Immunology
 - Professor James Quinn, School of Business
 - Professor Dónall Mac Dónaill, School of Chemistry
 - Professor Lucy Hederman, School of Computer Science and Statistics
 - Professor Michael O'Sullivan, School of Dental Science
 - Professor Ruth Barton, School of Drama, Film and Music
 - Professor John Walsh, School of Education
 - Professor David O'Shaughnessy, School of English
 - Professor Christine Morris, School of Histories & Humanities
 - Professor Giuliana Adamo, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
 - Professor Andreea Nicoara, School of Mathematics
 - Professor Elizabeth Fahey McCarthy, School of Nursing and Midwifery
 - Professor Louise Bradley, School of Physics
 - Professor Jean Quigley, School of Psychology
 - Professor Benjamin Wold, Confederal School of Religions, Peace Studies and Theology
 - Professor William Phelan, School of Social Sciences & Philosophy
 - Professor Virpi Timonen, School of Social Work and Social Policy
 - Mr Shane Collins, Graduate Students' Union President (*Ex officio*)
 - Ms Elisa Crespo Miguez, Graduate Students' Union Vice-President (*Ex officio*)
 - Ms Patricia Callaghan, Academic Secretary, CAPSL Representative (*Ex officio*)
 - Ms Siobhan Dunne, Sub Librarian for Teaching, Research and User Experience (in attendance *Ex officio*)
 - Ms Helen O'Hara, Information System Services Representative (in attendance *Ex officio*)

Apologies:

- Professor John J Boland, Dean of Research (*Ex officio*)
- Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
 - Professor Richard Reilly, School of Engineering
 - Professor Seamus Joseph Martin, School of Genetics and Microbiology
 - Professor Caoimhín MacMaoláin, School of Law
 - Professor Jeffrey Kallen, School of Linguistic, Speech & Communication Sciences



Professor Stephen Smith, School of Medicine
Professor Patrick Wyse Jackson, School of Natural Sciences
Professor John Gilmer, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical
Sciences

In attendance:

Ms Ewa Sadowska (Trinity Teaching and Learning), Temporary Secretary (*Ex officio*)
Ms Helen Thornbury, Office of Dean of Graduate Studies (*Ex officio*)
Prof. Paul Ryan (School of Business) for item GS/16-17/65

GS/16-17/63 Minutes of 22nd September 2016

The minutes were approved by the committee as circulated.

GS/16-17/64 Matters Arising

Re: GS/15-16/42 A new MSc course proposal in Operations and Supply Chain Management: The Dean of Graduate Studies advised that Council had approved this proposal at its last meeting in September.

Re: GS/15-16/49 A new MSc course proposal in Computer Science: The Dean of Graduate Studies advised that Council had approved this proposal at its last meeting in September.

Re: GS/15-16/50 A new validated Master in Education Studies course in Inquiry-Based Learning from Marino Institute of Education (MIE): The Dean advised that the course had been submitted to Council for its meeting in October.

Re: GS/15-16/52 E-Theses submission: The Dean advised that a new research module currently being added to SITS as the last element of the e-theses submission process would go live at the beginning of December and would enable tracking research student progression. Mr Peter Hynes, Head of Business Support and Planning in the Academic Registry, had been invited to the next meeting of the committee to discuss the implementation phase. Local training would take place afterwards in the Schools.

Re: GS/15-16/58 QQI Statutory guidelines for the QA of research degree programmes: The Dean advised he had recently participated in a meeting of Deans of Graduate Studies organised by the Irish Universities Association. The QQI had withdrawn their statutory guidelines and was planning to release shortly a new slimmed down version of the guidelines focusing on minimum standards. The Deans had been tasked to work together to produce high level guidelines specifically for the Universities. Any future discussion on this issue by the committee would be informed by those new forthcoming documents.

Re: GS/15-16/60 Postgraduate studentships: The Dean advised that a small working group had been established to work with him, and with Trinity



Development and Alumni, on new studentships project. He was shortly due to email the group to set up the first meeting.

XX GS/16-17/65 A new course proposal – MSc in Entrepreneurship

The Dean of Graduate Studies welcomed Prof. Paul Ryan, the prospective course director, from the School of Business. Prof. Ryan spoke to the circulated document and explained that the proposed MSc course in Entrepreneurship was a product of a teamwork headed by Prof. Andrew Burke, Dean of the School of Business. He explained that the new proposal is one of a portfolio of courses in the School of Business developed in furtherance of the Trinity Business School's Strategic Plan agreed by the College Board. Additionally, it underpins the University strategy to substantively expand its focus and activities in the entrepreneurial domain. Prof. Ryan further noted that the rationale for offering a specialised Masters programme in Entrepreneurship was to enable Trinity to answer an identified market demand, take full advantage of its unique location and reputation while achieving economies of scope and scale. He emphasised that although the number of Masters courses offered in the Entrepreneurship area was growing in number both in Ireland and the UK, there was still considerable opportunity given the demand from graduates seeking this specialist expertise. The proposed MSc in Entrepreneurship at Trinity Business School was therefore designed to compete in the marketplace in two distinct ways, by offering a strong foundation in entrepreneurship within the shared core modules, and delivering specialist content in the key topic areas that students require to develop a successful career in the broadest entrepreneurship domain. The new course also aimed to equip students with this specialist knowledge and the practical ability to start or support new businesses.

In a short discussion which followed a number of issues were raised and clarifications offered. Prof. Ryan explained that the main competitors to Trinity in the postgraduate area of entrepreneurship were the University of Limerick specialising in international entrepreneurship, UCD in innovation in entrepreneurship, and UCC in commercialisation while Trinity's new course would focus on a broader spectrum of technological and social entrepreneurship which might evolve in the future into distinct specialisms. It might also be possible to consider setting up a directly entry into a postgraduate diploma. The committee approved the new course without any changes.

XX GS/16-17/66 Dean of Graduate Studies' Annual Report 2014/15

The item was deferred.

XX GS/16-17/67 Role of External Examiners in postgraduate taught courses

The Dean of Graduate Studies noted that an issue which arises regularly (and especially by reference to practices in other jurisdictions) is what the proper role of an external examiner on *taught* courses should be. In particular, should the external examiner act as a moderator of examination results (in effect a second marker) or should the role be more in relation to course development and more high level issues? The Dean also put a further question to the committee whether there should be any homogenisation of the external examiner's role across College or whether, instead, different schools should use their external examiners having regard to what they feel their role could most usefully be. The Dean invited the members to share



their views on both issues and also to explain what roles external examiners currently have in their schools, disciplines and courses.

In a discussion which followed a number of views were expressed on the local scope of the external examiner's role. In the School of Business, the external examiner's role appears to be shaped up by whether the examiner comes from the UK or from the USA as the examiners would bring along the scope of their role from their respective countries. The examiners coming from the UK concentrate on moderating marks while the American ones on a broader quality overview. Professional bodies require specific expertise in external examiners which limits the number of possible candidates and places a heavy workload on those suitable to be recruited. In the School of Education external examiners act as final moderators for borderline and contentious marks, and their sign off on the marks appears to mitigate the growing culture of appeals especially on professional courses. External examiners' recommendations build consensus amongst internal markers at court of examiners. In Political Science external examiners are only used for dissertation grading where fails, marginal marks and distinctions are being considered. External examiners' recommendations assist with resolving internal disagreements as their views are generally accepted. In Computer Science external examiners come twice during the year: to moderate examination marks and then again dissertations. They also attend oral examinations. It was emphasised that individual examiners bring their own emphasis to the role which offers complementary perspectives on quality issues to the School over time.

With respect to the question whether there should be homogenisation of the external examiner's role across College the predominant view was that the role should be shaped locally. It was noted that clinical courses would have different demands to those of theoretical research-based courses.

An issue was raised that some external examiners had expressed uncertainty about the processing route of their annual reports in College. The Dean clarified that he receives and reads all the reports, attaches comments where necessary, and passes them on to the relevant Faculty Dean and the Head of School and the Quality Committee, and that his office staff follow up on particular concerns with relevant parties.

Finally, the Dean referred to a particular issue of the lack of supplemental assessments and the ability to pass by compensation on the MSc in Computer Science, which was in contrast to the progression provisions on the M.Sc. in Operations and Supply Chain Management, and that the difference had been commented on at the last Council meeting in September when both courses were discussed (L/16-17/009). The members agreed that such differences were legitimate as different postgraduate courses had different focuses, and a certain level of discretion was justified in the context of the specific course.

XX GS/16-17/68 First qualified applicant admissions policy for Non EU applicants across postgraduate taught courses

The Dean of Graduate Studies noted that this item was a continuation of a discussion initiated at the previous meeting under the agenda item GS/16-17/59 with reference to Council's approval on 29 June (CL/15-16/235) of an amended



admissions process for Non EU applications which stipulates that the 20% Non EU quota on each postgraduate course must be filled on a *first qualified applicant* basis. The Dean reminded the members that the Council memo from June 29, (a) required that a course's quota of Non-EU students be filled with *first qualified applicants*, and (b) that if a School did not make a decision on a Non-EU student's file within a prescribed period of two weeks, the Dean would authorise Academic Registry to make an offer to the applicant.

The Dean noted that the purpose of the discussion was to formulate a response to the Council Memo which would be submitted to next Council for consideration.

A number of concerns were raised. Firstly, it was noted that the memo submitted to Council on 29 June had not been underpinned by an earlier discussion of the issue by the Graduate Studies Committee. Secondly, a definition of what constitutes a *qualified applicant* was ambiguous. The Dean explained that given that both the Dean who had brought the memo to Council in June and the Council committee itself had been replaced since it was not possible to obtain legitimate clarification of what the term meant when the memo was being discussed in June. A member who had been present at the June meeting confirmed that the term was not clarified at the time. It would therefore follow that that particular issue would need to be returned to the current Council for clarification. Two interpretations of *qualified applicant* were proposed. First, that it is an applicant who fulfils general College admission requirements laid down in the Calendar or alternatively that it is one who is deemed qualified within the discretion of the relevant course committee and according to the admission rules for the course. It was agreed that the first clarification would be too general and would enable everybody irrespective of their academic background to apply for any postgraduate course in College in whatever discipline. It was therefore agreed to adopt the second interpretation of the *qualified applicant* as the person who is deemed qualified within the discretion of the relevant course committee.

The issue of delays in formulating a decision within two weeks was discussed at length. Some members explained that delays at the School level were normally caused by the absence of applicants' documentation, such as IELTS English language results, references, written pieces, research samples, etc., relevant to the admissions committee to make a provisional offer. Delays were also caused by the applicant's unavailability for an interview by phone or skype. It was noted that considerable exchanges between the applicants and the primary assessors might be taking place, but this would not be visible on SITS although this created an impression in SITS that no communication was taking place. All members expressed an utmost concern about maintaining recruitment standards and agreed that it might not be possible to sufficiently screen applicants within the two weeks. It became apparent from the discussion that Schools do not "sit on" applications. Rather, whether they make offers or not, they actively liaise with applicants a fact which is simply not visible on SITS.

The Dean explained that under the new Council-approved process, it would be the Dean's role to direct the Academic Registry to make the relevant offer – nor could this be an action which the registry staff could make of their own volition. Prior to



doing so, he would consult the relevant course admissions committee to ascertain why decision had not been taken with respect to those Non EU applicants whose applications had not been assessed within the two week period. A thought experiment was advanced in which a scenario was outlined of the 20% quota being taken up by conditional offers for applicants who were then rejected at a later stage upon receipt of the outstanding documentation while other legitimate candidates had been lost in the meantime. It was recommended that the SITS admissions system should allow for a second primary assessor which would speed up the screening process while the first assessor was temporarily not available due to other work commitments. A suggestion was made to identify which courses had not been filling the 20% Non EU quota and possibly apply the Council-approved process to them first to try out how the new approach would work, and what amount of additional administrative workload it would generate.

The Dean undertook to write up all the concerns and recommendations, circulate them to the members for feedback and bring that feedback back to the forthcoming Council.

GS/16-17/69 Best practice in supervision of research students

The Dean of Graduate Studies noted that the last meeting had discussed the QQI white paper on research programmes (GS/16-17/58) and agreed that the following meeting would look at issues pertaining to research supervision and best practice thereof. However, in the light of the QQI withdrawing their statutory guidelines the item was deferred until new documentation became available to inform discussion.

XX GS/16-17/70 Criteria for EU Fee Status: for discussion

The Dean of Graduate Studies invited Professor Elizabeth Fahey McCarthy, DTLP from the School of Nursing and Midwifery to introduce the item. Professor Fahey McCarthy explained that she spoke on behalf of the Faculty Dean of Health Sciences. She noted that it appears that Trinity is stricter than its HEI competitors in Ireland when determining EU/Non EU fee status for professional applicants with medical background. Some competitors allow such applicants who had completed their schooling in Ireland to be granted EU fee status regardless of their location prior to applying, whereas Trinity's requirement is that applicants must be resident and working in the EU for three of the last five years in order to have the EU fee status. This disadvantages the large number of Irish applicants who have worked abroad but return to undertake postgraduate studies, particularly in the fields of Nursing, Midwifery, Medicine and Dental. An additional difficulty for Health Sciences was that Trinity's partner hospitals were disadvantaged during staff recruitment because staff chose to work and study in universities where the EU fee status was easier to obtain. Professor Fahey McCarthy was proposing a change to the current criteria on behalf of the Faculty.

The Dean explained that he had considerable discretion which he had extensively used this year to decide on the EU/Non EU fee status in particular life situations brought up to his attention by individual applicants. He agreed though that if such a discretion were used constantly under similar circumstances unfairness and lack of equity sets in with respect to other applicants in similar circumstances who had not



applied for a special consideration due to their lack of knowledge that it was available. The Dean undertook to draft a proposal for a change of fee status criteria with a view to emailing it to the members for their feedback and then passing it on for Council consideration in December.

GS/16-17/71 AOB

The Dean of Graduate Studies informed the members that at the last meeting of IUA Deans of Graduate Studies had been advised that SFI would be funding across the sector around five hundred PhDs over five years based on the existing SFI centres. PIs would have to apply for the funding but rather than for research projects they would be applying for individual studentships for PhDs to be carried out within the solidly structured PhD system. The HEA emphasised at that meeting that each university should have a clear set of metrics as a transparent system of standards of measurement for comparative purposes between the HEIs across the sector. It was noted that this was a reason why it is important for our standards for the structured PhD to be rigorous and that this is something which should be discussed at the next GSC meeting.

Section B for noting and approval

The committee approved the proposed *Calendar* changes for the LLM course for 2017/18 which included the title change of the LLM from “LL.M. (International and European Intellectual Property Law)” to “LL.M (Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law)”. This reflects the significance of an increased number of Information Technology Law modules on the course which should make the course more attractive to a wider audience of EU and Non EU students. The Law School had appointed an Ussher assistant professor in information technology who was contributing modules in this area on the LLM courses.

Section C for noting

There were no items.

There being no other business, the meeting ended.

Prof. Neville Cox

Date: 20 October 2016