

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 22nd January, 2004
Room 2026, Arts Building.

Present: Dean of Graduate Studies (Chair), Dr Maryann Valiulis, Dr Alan Kramer, Dr Christine Morris, Prof. David Singleton, Dr Evelyn Mahon, Dr Trevor Hodkinson, Dr Trevor Orr, Dr Frederick Falkiner, Mr Michael Dowling, Ms Susannah Scott, Ms Mairead De Roiste, Dean of Arts (Humanities), Dean of Engineering and System Sciences,

In attendance: Ms Ewa Sadowska (GSO), Ms Nicky Saunders (GSO);

Apologies: Dean of Research, Dr John Donegan, Ms Margaret Carroll, Dr Alan Moore, Dr Joseph McDonagh, Dean of Health Sciences, Dean of Science, Dean of Arts (Letters), Dean of Business, Economics and Social Studies, Mr Trevor Peare (Library), Ms Gail Hogan (ISS), Prof. Mona O'Moore (School of Education), Prof. Michael Laver (Dept. of Political Science);

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

175.0 Minutes of the meeting of the 13th November, 2003.

The minutes were approved by the Committee with 3 minor amendments. The Dean of Graduate Studies stated that he would sign the amended minutes after the meeting.

175.1 Matters arising

There were no matters arising.

175.2 CHIU project on PhD Good Practice (2nd meeting)

This was the second meeting devoted to a discussion of the sole item on the agenda, the CHIU project on PhD Good Practice. The Dean briefed the participants on some actions resulting out of the CHIU meeting in Dublin in December 2003 which he attended. Firstly, the CHIU had undertaken to prepare a report on a current situation with regard to PhD teaching in Ireland and the proposal on PhD Good Practice was intended as a part of that report. He explained that the Graduate Studies Office had already been requested to provide some statistical data for that purpose. Secondly, the Dean extended an invitation to participate in an experts' meeting to take place on 28-29 April in Dublin where international experts from main European countries and Australia and the USA would hold presentations and workshops with the purpose of familiarising participants with developments and current PhD practices. Dr E. Mahon volunteered to participate in the meeting. There was a general feeling that, given Trinity's significant contingent of postgraduate research students, the College and Irish universities in general should be more proactive in order to maximise Irish input into the review of PhD practices within this international context and inform policy discussions. It was acknowledged that there were differences in terms of funding available to research students in Ireland and that on offer to students in countries like Denmark and Germany which had an impact on the financial situation of the students and opportunities open to them in respective countries.

In addition to 5 reports circulated, 6 documents were tabled before the meeting. Those included: "A brief report on postgraduate research students in Social Sciences" prepared by Prof. Robbie Gilligan, "A brief report on postgraduate PhD practice for the GSC for Departments of Computer Science and Electronic and Electrical Engineering" prepared by Dr Alan Moore, a memo on "PhD Good Practice" compiled by Fedelma McNamara on behalf of the Faculty of Health Sciences, "Information on doctoral programmes in the Faculty of Arts (Humanities)" prepared by Dr Maryann Valiulis and Dr Alan Kramer, "Procedures for handling PhD programmes in the Faculty of Engineering and Systems Sciences" prepared by Dr Trevor Orr. The Dean tabled European University Association call for applications for a "Doctoral Programmes Project".

The Dean thanked all those who had submitted their reports for the meeting and invited those authors present to present a verbal report. Dr Evelyn Mahon spoke on behalf of the BESS Faculty and explained that at a faculty meeting in November 2003 each department was invited to send in a brief account of its local PhD practices which were subsequently submitted for this meeting. She undertook to collate those reports for further discussion at a forthcoming faculty meeting in order to identify commonalities in the so-called Social Studies mainstream PhD programme, to emphasise the significance of the professional-executive aspect of this PhD model, to underline the strategic mission of research programmes and focus also on the issue of inadequate space marred postgraduate performance in departments in the faculty. Prof. David Singleton spoke on behalf of the Faculty of Arts (Letters) and explained that the faculty briefly discussed the CHIU project in November and supported the traditional research PhD degree, recommending that it would not be necessary to introduce a taught component in the area of Arts (Letters). The argument was that while a taught element could form part of a PhD programme in some areas, it would not necessarily apply to all disciplines in the Faculty; also given the fact that foreign students often register at Trinity to follow a "pure" research degree. The Dean of ESS spoke on behalf of his faculty. Dr Brian Foley stated that all departments had returned their reports and that these showed a general agreement on the usefulness of a taught component in the PhD programme. He emphasised, however, that there were significant differences in terms of practice in departments where in some this element was compulsory while in others it was optional. Apart from reasons of an academic nature there were currently no resources available for making a taught component uniformly compulsory in the faculty. Dr Maryann Valiulis and Dr Alan Kramer spoke on behalf of the Faculty of Arts (Humanities) and emphasised that their report was a result of an informal survey, that taught doctoral programmes are either already in place in some departments (such as the DClinPsych in Psychology), being finalised for submission to the Graduate Studies Committee (such as the DEd in Education) while other departments (such as Medieval History, Modern History) already required their research students to participate in taught courses available there. Dr Frederick Falkiner spoke on behalf of the Faculty of Health Sciences and stated that practices there varied significantly between departments. Entry standards were different for graduates with a Science undergraduate degree to those with a medical degree and hence the students' subsequent teaching needs varied as their research skills and knowledge were related to their primary degree. Many PhD students tended to be part-time. There was a recognisable need to introduce a training module in the first year in terms of a taught programme on statistics, ethics and experimental design that would encompass biomedical and clinical research projects and to develop postgraduate training in scientific presentation skills through the implementation of a formal training workshop. Those initiatives were also being proposed in an effort to link the postgraduate student's frequently specialist expertise to a more holistic medical context. Dr Trevor Hodkinson spoke on behalf of Science Faculty and explained that, unfortunately, he

was not able to report on the CHIU PhD Good Practice as the item had not been discussed at the last Science Faculty Executive meeting because of lack of time, but that it would be included as an item in the next meeting (Wed 28th January). Michael Dowling, the President of the GSU, apologized for not being able to submit the results of their survey report of students and stated that more information would be available shortly, in particular from faculty meetings due to start soon. He suggested that two issues pertinent to postgraduate study in College should be looked into in particular, namely the practice of transfer to the PhD register and student funding.

The Dean stated that Funding Councils were supporting the CHIU project and were monitoring the developments towards the establishment of PhD good practice guidelines and that once those were in place external pressure might be applied in time to include a requirement for a taught component in a standard PhD programme.

Dr Evelyn Mahon stated that in the Faculty of BESS practice seems to be that a PhD candidate should either have completed a Master's degree or that there should be a taught component introduced in the 1st year. The need for a taught component seems to derive from the recognition to ensure solid foundation of research methodology at the start of every student's research programme and in that the academic requirement of the BESS Faculty seems to be akin to those in the Faculty of Science and Health Sciences rather than in Arts (Letters). The fee structure in BESS with fees higher for taught courses than for research programmes reflects the intensity of teaching provision for students on those programmes.

Dr Frederick Falkiner confirmed that there was a variety of practices in terms of transfer to the PhD register in his faculty which required a review in its own right and possibly some standardization. He did not support a 4-year PhD programme as a compulsory model since its taught component might not always be necessary for those applicants who already possess the requisite knowledge at the point of entry. He noted a separate issue with regard to uniformity of entry criteria for admission in medicine.

Dr Alan Kramer pointed out that undergraduate programmes in the continental universities were not as intensive as those in Trinity and in Ireland in general which might present an additional difficulty in terms of standardization of entry requirements under the Bologna initiative and suggested that a scheme of exemptions might be necessary. However, some views were expressed that this might not be possible as the essence of the Bologna process was to ensure mobility via a uniformity of programmes and schemes. It was agreed that it was important to examine the issue of the PhD Good Practice within the Bologna context and in the context of what a European doctorate was. The Dean notified the meeting that College had just set up a separate Office to deal with Bologna-related issues.

The Dean concluded the meeting by confirming that it was the last additional one solely devoted to PhD Good Practice and that the issue would subsequently be incorporated into regular meetings of the committee. The Dean invited comments on the circulated EUA call for applications for a "Doctoral Programmes Project".

It was agreed that the Faculty representatives should conclude the process of surveying departments for information on their local PhD practices and report back to the GSC by collating the information into a separate faculty response for a meeting in March.

175.3 Any Other Business

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 10.00 am. The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 5th February 2004.

Prof. John Saeed

Signed:

Date: 4 March 2004

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Saeed', written in a cursive style.