

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9.00 a.m. on Thursday 14th May, 2009
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 Carl Vogel, (*Acting*) School of Computer Science and Statistics
Dr Matthew Causey, School of Drama, Film & Music
Dr Carmel O'Sullivan, School of Education
Prof. Brian Broderick, School of Engineering
Dr Darryl Jones, School of English
Dr Hazel Dodge, School of Histories & Humanities
Prof. Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
Dr Neville Cox, School of Law
Dr Jeffrey Kallen, School of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences
Dr Stefan Sint, School of Mathematics
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
Prof. Stefano Sanvito, School of Physics
Dr Kevin Tierney, School of Psychology
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 and Social Policy
Mr Trevor Peare, Keeper of Readers' Services (in attendance *Ex officio*)
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*)

Apologies: Dr David Lloyd, Dean of Research
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
Dr Joe McDonagh, School of Business
Dr Anne O'Connell, School of Dental Science

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

The Dean advised that Mr Robert Otway-Norwood has moved back to the Office of the Vice-Provost and introduced Ms Jennifer Hill who will be in attendance for the meetings of the GSC.

GS/08-09/038 Minutes of 26 March 2009

The minutes of the meeting of 26th March 2009 were approved by the Committee after a discussion on point 037. This concerned the use of the name ISE and it was clarified that this referred to the Irish School of Ecumenics. It was also clarified that while not all courses have the same closing date, 26th June 2009 has been set as a final closing date to guarantee that all decisions have been made in time for registration mid-September and, in particular, to ensure timely notification of decisions to non-EU students. It was noted that

the Graduate Studies Office will consider extending closing dates for taught courses beyond this date, but on a case by case basis.

GS/08-09/039 Matters Arising

A question was raised regarding advance payments to overseas students. It was agreed that this issue falls within the remit of the Student Services committee and/or the International committee.

GS/08-09/040 Discussion document on IUQB Good Practice in the Organisation of PhD Programmes in Irish Higher Education Consultation Draft

The Dean explained that this is a pre-publication consultation draft from the IUQB. It had been brought to the Graduate Studies Committee for discussion only at this point. While the committee supported and welcomed many of the excellent examples of good practice, they agreed that some of the language used was too prescriptive and resembled regulations rather than guidelines. It was felt that the document could be very confusing for students and staff.

The Committee were asked for any additional feedback and some of the comments made include:

- The document is too specific and, as it is, may conflict with our own regulations. Many of the points in the document are acceptable as guidelines, but not as regulations.
- The language used in relation to special needs education is very tense and could be disempowering of students with disability.
- There is very little information in relation to inter-institutional programmes which is disappointing.
- The text indicating that dissertations must be submitted electronically is overly prescriptive.
- The expectation for viva committees to be gender-balanced is very problematic.
- The document as it currently stands could give rise to legal challenges if it conflicts with our own regulations.

In summary, the Committee's view is that, while there are many of the guidelines that we support, the prescriptive nature of the language and the potential for conflict with our own regulations means that the purpose of the document must be made much more explicit in the introduction before we can accept it.

GS/08-09/041 Innovation Academy

The Dean explained that following the Innovation Academy PRTL bid the next step for her and her counterpart in UCD is to consult with relevant parties (including the Graduate Studies Committee) to further define the Academy. In the first instance, the goal of the Innovation Academy is to deliver innovation and entrepreneurship training and education to PhD students, and to coordinate the provision of generic, transferable and advanced disciplinary courses across the two institutions and beyond.

During the subsequent discussion, the following points were made:

- Academic staff will participate, together with "ideas people" (from business and outside of College) but the Innovation Academy will be run by five "facilitators" and dedicated administrative staff who will coordinate and manage, overseen by the Deans of Graduate Studies (or equivalent) in TCD and UCD.
- Work on designing the format and contents of the courses are ongoing, and a taskforce is to be established to move this forward.
- The Innovation Academy does not necessarily require a designated space, however this may be considered desirable and options are being investigated.
- TCD and UCD will have full control over the Innovation Academy, i.e., the Innovation Academy will not become an autonomous entity.
- The Innovation Academy will allow us to scale up our activities and students will be given an option of participating in modules held at UCD.
- Concerns were raised that the Innovation Academy may not be attractive to the student body. The point was made that the intention is to make it as attractive as possible so that students will wish to participate.
- Concerns were expressed that the activities of the Innovation Academy may not be compatible with the ethos of the University, while others were worried that significant areas may be excluded. The issue was raised that if a student does not fit into this model they might feel less important. However, it was explained that the aim is that 80% of TCD students will take some part in the Innovation Academy, with wide-ranging courses offered, such as statistics, ethics or creative writing. The remaining 20% did not represent "excluded" students, but rather allowed for certain students to opt out of the Academy if its activities were not attractive or suitable for them.

- It will be essential to keep the Innovation Academy fresh with, for example, ad hoc sessions on communication skills, networking, and creativity.
- There are concerns that this will be a serious commitment to the time of the students; however, it is planned that participation can be flexible, and could be in the form of a two week intensive session over the summer.
- There were concerns over the exclusion of other universities. TCD will be collaborating with UCD in areas where it makes sense to work with them, but will ensure we retain our strengths so we are not in competition with them.
- There may be dangers in modelling the Innovation Academy on something like the D.School at Stanford. Stanford is well funded and receives endowments which TCD cannot match. However it was explained that Stanford is just one example; there is also an Innovation Club in MIT and examples across Europe. The taskforce plans to draw on as many examples as possible and to create something unique to Dublin.
- The point was made that the Innovation Academy needs to be ambitious if it is to succeed.

GS/08-09/042 Taught Course Regulations

There have been some changes made to the taught course regulations as it was felt that the examination of the dissertations was being treated like an examination of a research student and this is not necessary. The expectations for taught course dissertations do not need to be so high.

The main changes are:

- There should no longer be a need for a period of 6 months for major revisions.
- The student should instead be given a period of one month for corrections.
- Every student should be given the right to an oral examination if they fail (some courses may already have a required oral examination as part of their overall examination).
- If the oral examination is required it should take place prior to or during the exam board.
- It will be up to the course committee / School to decide if the external examiner is to be part of the oral examination.

Several points were clarified:

- These regulations only refer to taught Master's courses and do not include doctoral programmes or M.Ch, M.D – this will be made clear in the regulations.
- If there is contemplation of a fail, the student will have to be given an oral examination, and will not need to request this.
- The original examiner should be present at the oral examination for the student to be able to defend their dissertation to them. However, if the student feels the exam has been examined unfairly, there are still grounds for appeal after the oral examination.
- If, after the oral examination, the student has failed, they fail and will either exit college with nothing or with a postgraduate diploma. However, the School may have a regulation which allows the student to register for a continuation year and this will still be allowed. These new regulations should not conflict with the existing School regulations. If, however, the School regulations currently allow for a 3 month or 6 month extension, this should be amended to correspond with the new general regulations.
- These new regulations will be in place for the academic year 09/10.
- There are no changes in relation to extensions for medical or *ad mis* grounds which will still be dealt with on a case by case basis and can still be given a 3 month or 6 month extension.

GS/08-09/043 Appeals Process

The appeals process has recently been coming under strain and there is confusion over whether the role of the Dean of Graduate Studies is to give advice, or to be the Chair of a Committee.

It has been agreed that the appeals process will change and there will now be several levels of appeal with increasing formality. The Dean explained these changes, outlined in the distributed document.

Some of the changes include:

- In relation to transfers / confirmation, the Schools should have a committee in place, and a formal decision should be made before the student can meet with the Dean of Graduate Studies.
- In relation to thesis examination, appeals should be brought to the Dean of Graduate Studies in the first instance.
- Taught and research will each have their own appeals committee.

A few comments were raised and queries clarified, including:

- The student has to be heard by the School. A student's supervisor will not need to be involved and the student can appeal to someone independent.
- Committees should have the power to refuse to hear a case and provision should be made for it to be struck out.
- Certain situations can be dealt with pre-appeal, such as where a student is sick and does not notify the exam board. The idea should be to keep flexibility and not go to an appeal if there is no need to.
- The document will be amended to add further clarification on who can attend the appeals: supervisor, postgraduate advisor, etc.

The Dean confirmed that an amended version of this document, with fully drafted procedures, will be brought to the next Graduate Studies Committee meeting on 11th June 2009.

GS/08-09/044 Research Examination Process

There is an increasing problem with the length of time that the research examination process is taking. Clear guidelines need to be provided to determine at what point the length of time taken to examine a thesis is unacceptable and what should be done in that situation. There is currently nothing in place to define this. The Dean explained the agreed upon timeline, as per the distributed document and stressed the importance of the eight week examination period. She also made it clear that the Graduate Studies Office would meet their deadlines such as ensuring the thesis copies are sent out within one week of receiving the Nomination Form. The Dean ensured that the Graduate Studies Committee was made aware that this new process would be monitored and explained the subsequent escalation that would be put in place.

The Director's of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) were asked if they were in agreement with the Nomination Form being emailed to them as a Word document. They could then attach their electronic signature and return the document by email which for some Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) would save a significant amount of time. This format will be acceptable to the Graduate Studies Office if it has been sent from the personal Trinity email account of the Director of Teaching and Learning to ensure a high level of authentication. This was approved, however, it will not be mandatory as some Director's of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) may prefer to print the form, handwrite their signature and return by post and that will still be acceptable.

It was clarified that pre-approval of examiners was very much encouraged and should be made the norm. Following a query, it was also clarified that the examiners report form should be completed before the viva with additional comments added after the viva as it was unclear whether the entire report should be done after the viva.

The amendments to the Nomination Form were approved, however it was agreed that the space to put the name of the Chair of the Viva should be moved higher on the form.

GS/08-09/045 Confirmation / Transfer Panel Changes

The Dean invited Dr Thomas Connor to speak about the proposed changes. Dr Connor explained the proposed change is to the Departmental Recommendation Form which is the form for confirming acceptance of a student on the research register that is sent to the Director of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) with research applications. Dr Connor explained that he would like a space on this form to indicate the names of the nominated confirmation / transfer panel so that this is in place from the time the student registers. There was no objection to making this optional on the form for those Schools that wish to have this; however for some Schools this is not practical so it was agreed that it would not become a required part of the form.

GS/08-09/046 Any Other Business

a) The Dean invited Ms Helen Thornbury to speak to the Memo on Academic References for Applicants to the Research Register. Ms Thornbury explained that there is an increasing issue with research students applying from outside of Trinity who, as part of their application, supply references from their proposed supervisor and another member of the School and these referees may not have previously worked with the applicant or known them in an academic setting.

There was concern that this would exclude potential supervisors from writing the reference. It would not; however, there is a requirement for the referee to have had direct contact with the student.

A request was made for new guidelines to be put in place about the choice of referees and details on what should be included in the reference. For example, a referee from outside of an academic setting should be

given more guidance. As the Graduate Studies Office often have to spend a considerable amount of time following up on queries regarding references, it was suggested that the Departmental Recommendation Form should be amended to include a section for the supervisor to explain why a particular reference has been provided or why they wish to accept a student with poor references.

It was agreed that the above would be considered and another draft of the memo would be circulated.

b) Research Student Handbook: Handbooks will be accepted from Schools for approval at the next Graduate Studies Committee.

c) The Provost has agreed to the establishment of the Provost's Award for excellence in research supervision.

d) The Dean provided an update on "Flexi Masters", which would allow for modules to be taken over a longer period of time and would be an amendment to the existing courses (rather than an introduction of new courses). A student would take an existing course but spread out the modules over a number of years.

e) Module descriptors for certain PhD modules will be collated and brought for approval to the next Graduate Studies Committee.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11.16 am.

Prof. Carol O'Sullivan

Date: 21 May 2009