

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN
TRINITY COLLEGE

GRADUATE STUDIES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held at 9.00 a.m. on Thursday 11th June, 2009
Boardroom, Provost's House

Present: Prof. Carol O'Sullivan, Dean of Graduate Studies (*Chair*),
Directors of Teaching and Learning (Postgraduate) as follows:
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
Dr Darryl Jones, School of English
Dr Hazel Dodge, School of Histories & Humanities
Prof. Cormac Ó Cuilleaináin, School of Languages, Literatures & Cultural Studies
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 Andrew Harkin, School of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences
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
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 Richard Porter, School of Biochemistry & Immunology
Dr Joe McDonagh, School of Business
Dr Anne O'Connell, School of Dental Science
Prof. Brian Broderick, School of Engineering
Dr Fintan Sheerin, School of Nursing and Midwifery
Prof. Stefano Sanvito, School of Physics
Dr Eoin O'Sullivan, School of Social Work and Social Policy

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

The Dean advised that Dr Jacqueline Potter is leaving her position as Academic Development Manager for CAPSL and so this will be her final Graduate Studies Committee meeting. The Dean thanked Dr Potter for her contribution to the GSC.

GS/08-09/047 Minutes of 14th May 2009

The minutes of the meeting of 14th May 2009 were approved by the Committee after a query on point 039 regarding advanced payments to overseas students. It was clarified that this issue was noted by the Graduate Students Union representatives and will be discussed at the Student Services committee and/or the International committee.

GS/08-09/048 Matters Arising

A query was raised concerning the amended Taught Course Regulations discussed in the previous meeting (Item 042) and the oral examination that is to be held if the student is going to fail. There is concern that by the time it is decided that an oral examination is required, the student may no longer be in Dublin or

even in the country. It was also felt that there is a very short time frame in which to notify the student that the oral examination is to be held. The following points were clarified:

- The oral examination can also be held during the exam board as well as before which should provide additional time for the oral examination to take place.
- The internal examiner(s) should signal whether there is a problem with the thesis and the School should have access to the external examiner results prior to the exam board. At this point the School should notify the student that, if they wish to defend their thesis, they need to present on a set date.
- At the start of the year it should be made clear to the students that if there is any doubt over whether their thesis will pass, they will be called for an oral examination.
- If necessary, the date of thesis submission may also need to be brought forward, particularly if extensions are required.

GS/08-09/049 Module Descriptors

The Dean explained that Module Descriptors had been requested for the GSC meeting, not only for the purpose of noting and approving the modules, but to start the process of formalising the quality review processes for such provisions as the move to a more modular structure is being put in place.

Generic Skills Modules

The Generic Skills modules noted and approved were:

- Teaching and Support Learning
- Planning and Managing your Research and your Career
- Graduate Information Skills
- Linking Innovation and New Venture Creation – Module 1 (Entrepreneurship Training Programme)
- Creating the Knowledge-Driven Venture – Module 2 (Entrepreneurship Training Programme)

It was clarified that the Innovation Academy will not be providing the generic skills modules, but will oversee their coordination. In addition, the Innovation Academy will provide modules and interdisciplinary projects on innovation, entrepreneurship, creativity, teamwork, etc. PRTL1 funding has been requested for the consolidation of existing and provision of new generic and advanced courses.

These modules will be available to all PhD students as all incoming TCD students are now registered onto a structured 4-year PhD programme. A requirement of a “structured” PhD programme is for students to take modules such as these and although the modules do not count towards the PhD, the student can gain credit for their diploma supplement and list these on their CV.

These modules will eventually be officially listed on each student’s record and this will enable a transcript to be produced by the Exams Office or Student Records Office. For the present time, and until the system has been correctly set up, each School should keep a record locally and the students will be able to receive credit retrospectively.

Advanced Disciplinary Modules

Proposals for Advanced Disciplinary modules developed with the support of the SIF2 DRHEA Graduate Alliance were noted and approved for Physics, Engineering, Social Sciences and Philosophy. It is planned that all further modules under development, e.g., for PRTL15, will also be available and will be approved during the coming academic year.

GS/08-09/050 DRHEA Collaborative Agreement

The Dean explained that the aim of the DRHEA is to develop and deliver advanced disciplinary modules. The circulated document has been developed to create an inter-institutional agreement and this is now ready to be signed by all university representatives. The Dean pointed out that students will have access to the expertise and modules in other institutions.

The Dean referred to the Guiding Principles section of the document and listed some of the main points, including:

- The same modules will not be offered at more than one institution.
- Each institution will have ownership of their modules.
- Each student will only be registered with one institution.

The committee welcomed the document and noted that it brought clarity to the process.

GS/08-09/051 Flexi Masters

The Dean explained that due to the increasing issue concerning the areas of lifelong learning, students returning to education and upskilling, etc, a working group was put together to discuss this and the idea of “flexi-masters” arose.

The Dean made it clear that the two documents circulated are to be treated differently. The M.Sc. Nursing / M.Sc. Midwifery is essentially a calendar change but should be seen as an example of how an existing course can be completed in a different mode – for example, spreading the studies out over a longer period of time. The committee approved this change, noting that the HEA will only fund students who are undertaking a minimum of 30 ECTS in any year.

The Dean invited Dr Carl Vogel to speak to the circulated document produced by the School of Computer Science. He explained that the School of Computer Science are proposing to accept students for a period of up to four years to take modules that already exist to build up their own Masters programme. The following points should be noted:

- There will be constraints in that the student will need to agree to a suite of courses.
- The student will be assigned an advisor who will be available to guide them and ensure that the chosen suite of courses is coherent.
- There will be an option for a student to proceed to the dissertation when they have completed the required number of modules and have achieved the required grades.
- This model will not be in direct competition with existing courses and so there will be no need to discontinue any current offerings.

This is not a concrete proposal, but was proposed in order to gain approval in principle for such an approach, and also to serve as an example for other schools who may wish to provide such an offering. In discussion, it was noted that the School of Education already offers a similar provision with the Postgraduate Diploma in Continuing Professional Development. It was again noted that the HEA will only provide skills funding for a student to a minimum of 30 ECTS in a year, and this should be taken into account when offering such courses. There would also be options within this model for students to take modules in several disciplines. The funding and ARAM implications for such courses must also be considered, as funding should be distributed equitably between participating Schools.

There was a query on whether such modular provisions would be imposed on the Schools and it was clarified that this is an optional pilot programme, in which schools will be encouraged to participate if appropriate.

The Dean asked for approval in principle for such “flexi-masters” to be offered, and also asked the committees permission to bring a proposal to Council, with the support of the Vice-Provost/CAO, to authorise flexible provision of postgraduate qualifications involving modules already on offer within each School on a pilot basis, from October 2009. The committee fully supported this proposal.

GS/08-09/052 Appeals Process

The Dean spoke to her circulated document, outlining the main changes to the appeals process.

Several of the revisions were discussed and clarified, including:

- Point N.2.1 (1) – it was confirmed that this should specify “arranged by course coordinator”, not Director of Teaching and Learning.
- Point N.2.3 (4) – it was discussed whether “four months previously” is a sufficient time frame or should this be extended. It was clarified that the “event” referred to would be the date of the exam board decision rather than, for example, the submission date of the essay in question. It was agreed that four months should be sufficient time for the student to appeal.
- Point N.2.1 (6/7) – it was emphasised that it is important for each School to put in place a School appeals committee, if they do not already have this.
- Point N.3 – there will be two types of appeal for research students:
 - N.3.1 - an appeal against the transfer/confirmation panel decision;
 - N.3.2 - an appeal against the thesis decision, for example the awarding of a lower degree.Regarding Point N.3.2 (1) it was clarified that the student’s name would not go to Council until any appeal had been resolved. Also on Point N.3.2 it was explained that the student can only appeal if the exam has been inherently unfair. A student can appeal against a decision of major revisions because registering for the 6 month revision period requires a fee.
- Point N.1.2 – the President and Vice-President of the Graduate Students Union proposed that the GSU could represent a student at the School appeals level, but not beyond.
- Point N.3.6 – it should be made clear that the advisor mentioned here is a representative from the Postgraduate Advisory Service.
- A discussion also took place concerning the Professional Doctorates and whether any appeals from students taking a Professional Doctorate should be dealt with under the section on Taught Course

appeals or Research appeals. The majority of appeals for these courses relate to professional aspects of the programme, rather than the dissertation. For many of the programmes, the dissertation is treated like a taught course dissertation rather than a research thesis (and is submitted locally to the School rather than to the Graduate Studies Office). However, some of the programmes are treated as purely research (such as the M.D.). It was agreed that no regulation should be put in place regarding this and each professional doctorate programme should clearly specify which procedures must be followed for their students.

GS/08-09/053 Research Handbooks

The Dean explained that these documents were provided as examples of the type of handbook that Schools can produce. It was mentioned that an option will be available for the handbooks to be reviewed by Michelle Garvey in the Disability Service to ensure they meet the Accessible Information requirements. The Graduate Students Union representative also requested that the GSU be mentioned in each handbook.

GS/08-09/054 Vivas for Resubmitted Theses

The Dean invited Professor John Kelly to speak to this item. Professor Kelly explained that he has noticed several cases where the decision on a student's thesis is for major revisions, when the actual problem is not with the text of the thesis but that the student "failed" the viva and showed a lack of understanding with what had been written. Professor Kelly wanted to discuss whether the committee thought that in these circumstances a second viva should be given when the thesis is resubmitted.

It was argued that this could be logical on an ad-hoc basis particularly if there is any doubt over plagiarism. However, these would be exceptional cases.

It was also argued that the system we currently have in place (with only one viva) works well, as it encourages the examiners to make firm decisions. A second viva could be seen as a way of drawing out the process.

One new option to consider would involve each student having two vivas with the first taking place during their third year, as a pre-defence (similar to the system in place in many US universities). This might eliminate some of the problems that arise when the viva is held only at the end of four or five years of work, as it would enable the external examiner to provide input at an earlier stage.

With the current system, the confirmation process should also help with this issue.

The role of the supervisor was also discussed in relation to this problem; however it was argued that the student must take ownership of their own thesis and responsibility for defending their work.

The Dean summarised that this was an issue that deserves further discussion should be considered furthering during the next academic year.

GS/08-09/055 Any Other Business

a) English Language Support. The Dean explained that there are 40 pre-sessional places available and 40 places for in-sessional.

b) Part-time research fees. The Dean spoke to the memo, and noted that the lower fee of 70% that has been introduced for part-time PhD/research students is a welcome development. However there is an issue in that if a part-time student leaves after 5 or less years (which is what the calendar currently states is the minimum duration on the part-time register) they will have paid a significantly lower total fee than those on the full-time register. The Dean is requesting that the Calendar be changed to indicate that if a student on the part-time register leaves before they have completed 6 years on the register, they pay the difference in fees between the total part-time fees they have already paid and the equivalent full-time fees that they would have spent during that time on the register, up to a maximum of 4 years full-time fee. The Committee supported this change.

c) The Committee noted and approved the proposed *Calendar Part 2* changes for 2009 as listed in Section B1 on the agenda (items a – q).

The Committee also noted and approved the Texts, Contexts, Cultures handbook changes as listed in Section B2 on the agenda.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 11.05 am.