PRESENT:

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) (Professor Robyn Owens) as Chair
Postgraduate Students’ Association President (Ms Bronwyn Crowe)
Professor Kevin Croft
Professor Arun Dharmarajan
Professor Matthew Knuiman
Associate Professor Andrew Lynch
Associate Professor Ian McArthur
Dr Allan McKinley
Professor Susan Prescott
Professor Jim Whelan

Executive Officer (Mr Chester Cutinha)

BY INVITATION:

Director, Research Services (Dr Campbell Thomson)
Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships (Dr Sato Juniper)
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Michael Azariadis)

OBSERVERS:

Graduate Research Coordinator, School of Paediatrics and Child Health (Dr Sunalene Devadason)
Graduate Research Coordinator, School of Psychology (Associate Professor Murray Maybery)

APOLOGIES:
Nominee of the Chair of the Academic Board (Associate Professor Annette George)
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Krystyna Haq)
Professor Craig Atkins (Deputy Chair)
Professor John Cordery
Associate Professor Brett Nener

Professor Arun Dharmarajan arrived during the discussion of item 5(a)(i).

WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Dr Sunalene Devadason and Associate Professor Murray Maybery to the meeting as observers.

The Chair also congratulated Professor Susan Prescott on her recent promotion to Professor.

1. CALL FOR DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Members and invitees were requested to declare any conflicts of interest that they may have with respect to any items on the agenda.

Dr Allan McKinley declared a conflict of interest with respect to the candidate referred to in item 5(a)(ii). However, as requested by the School, this matter was held over to a future meeting for discussion.
2. MINUTES – REF: F36

RESOLVED – 22

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School held on Tuesday, 13 March 2007 be confirmed.

3. PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE RULES FOR THE GRADUATE RESEARCH TRAVEL AWARDS AND INTRODUCE A NEW COMPETITIVE SMALL GRANTS SCHEME FOR HIGHER DEGREE BY RESEARCH CANDIDATES – REF: F12806, F10219

Members were reminded that at its March meeting the Board discussed a proposal from the Graduate Research and Scholarships Office to vary the rules for the Graduate Research Travel Awards. There were two main points in the proposal: (1) to remove the restriction on the use of the Travel Awards by externally enrolled students to travel to UWA; and (2) to use any unspent allocation to fund a competitive small grants scheme for research students whereby students could apply for small grants (eg up to $5000) to use for their research or travel.

The first part of the proposal had been approved by the Board, but the second part had not. Members had indicated at that meeting that they would prefer to see any additional funds available utilised to increase the amount of each award rather than to begin an additional scheme. The Board had requested the Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships to investigate the cost of increasing the amount of the awards. An extract of the Minutes of the March meeting was provided to members for their interest.

Dr Sato Juniper, advised Members that an investigation had revealed that in 2006 the Graduate Research and Scholarships Office had allocated 168 full awards of $1,500 and 31 partial awards of $500. This equated to 178 full awards. Had each full award been increased by $500 the cost would have been an additional $89,000. This was more than could safely be assumed to be available from unspent funds in any year under the existing system for estimating the budget. Assuming that an extra $70,000 might safely be spent in any year under the existing system, the awards could be increased by only $390 each. However, it was not possible to predict accurately what the take up of the awards would be in any year; indeed, in some years the budget had been overspent. Members were reminded that the budget was estimated by assigning a fixed dollar value to each doctoral enrolment.

The Graduate Research and Scholarships Office suggested that, rather than asking for a one-off increase in the awards, the Board recommends to the Research Committee that from now on the amount of the awards be indexed each year, with an initial increase of, for example, 7% ($100) and thereafter an annual, rounded, increase in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI). This annual increase could be accounted for in the budget bid by indexing the dollar amount assigned to each doctoral enrolment.

The Graduate Research and Scholarships Office further suggested that the Board reconsider its response to the proposal to introduce a small grants scheme for Higher Degree by Research students. There were various merits in such a scheme, not the least of these being an opportunity to provide a mechanism by which students can obtain additional central funds to support their research, travel and professional development. Such a scheme would also provide practice and development in applying for grants. This could be funded by requesting an annual, dedicated fund of, say, $100,000 (not related to the Travel Awards). There need be no administrative load on the Board as the allocations could be made by a dedicated small panel outside the Board.

Dr Campbell Thomson, Director, Research Services, was invited to speak to this item. Dr Thomson reminded the Board that the yearly budget bid for the Travel Awards is necessarily based on a formula because the awards are automatic for eligible students and thus the expenditure in any year is not fully predictable. A surplus in any year is not subtracted from the budget bid for the following year but is used to offset any future deficits. Any proposed increase in the amount per Travel Award will require approval from the relevant UWA committees.

The Chair informed the Board that the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) is strongly in favour of the proposed new scheme as an opportunity to provide grants, and experience and development in grant writing, to research students.
In the discussion that followed, the following main points were raised:

- Indexing the travel grant each year is a good idea as the amount does not appear to have changed for several years and seems inadequate given the current cost of attending a conference.
- Could the proposed new grant be used as top-ups for existing Travel Awards? Yes.
- The proposed new grants should be capped at $5,000 per award so as to provide for at least 20 awards.
- Under the current Travel Award scheme, eligible students are awarded Travel Grants automatically, and unfortunately many do not provide good-quality reports of how the funds have been spent. Possibly, more should be required in relation to the existing Awards. One added benefit the proposed new scheme will have is in training students in grant writing.
- The application process for the proposed new grants is not expected to be too onerous, but students will be expected to clearly articulate what they require the funds for and cost the project to a professional level of detail.
- What might prevent supervisors from inappropriately using this funding source to simply augment their general research funds, or to cover unfunded work, without particular benefit to students? Should the allowable purposes be restricted? The Guidelines will be written to exclude inappropriate use of the funds. This concern is part of the reason for the suggestion that the funds be available only to those students whose research proposals, with associated budgets, have already been approved.
- What might be the success rate of such a scheme, and what is expected to be the additional administrative workload?
- It is difficult to estimate at this stage what number of applications will be received or what the additional administrative workload such a scheme would entail. However, the success rates for other schemes currently run are high. Certainly, students are motivated to apply.
- There is much support from the Research Development team, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) and it is envisaged that there will not be much difficulty obtaining volunteers to assess the applications.
- In relation to the proposal to increase the amount of the existing Travel Awards, $100 in the first instance seems too little. Could the Awards be increased by $250 in the first instance?
- How would the increase be implemented equitably? Various implementation models could be used, for example: nominating a particular cut-off date, after which all new awards are increased but the entitlement of students who have received full (or partial) awards before this date is not increased; increasing the entitlement of all enrolled students, including those who have already received their full entitlement under the current arrangements or nominating a cut-off enrolment date for entitlement to the new amount.
- It is important to give adequate warning of an impending change of policy.
- The Board should recommend to the Research Committee that the amount of the Awards be increased from 2008. When this recommendation is endorsed the Board can publicise the new amount, with effect from 2008. The Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships could prepare a set of Guidelines for equitable implementation.

The Board

**RESOLVED – 23**

To recommend to the Research Committee that the maximum amount that could be accessed by each student under the Travel Grant scheme be increased from $1,500 to $1,750 with effect from 2008 and indexed thereafter. The Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships, will prepare a set of Guidelines for implementation, for consideration by the Board.

**RESOLVED – 24**

To recommend to the Research Committee that from 2008 a separate sum of $100,000 be allocated towards setting up a competitive small grants scheme for research students whereby students could apply for small grants to use for their research or travel. The Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships, will prepare a set of Guidelines for consideration by the Board.