The University of Western Australia

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF THE GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL HELD ON TUESDAY, 28 JUNE 2005

PRESENT:
Dean of the Graduate Research School (Professor Robyn Owens) as Chair
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Krystyna Haq)
Postgraduate Students’ Association President (Ms Natalie Mast)
Professor Craig A Atkins (Deputy Chair)
Dr Ian McArthur
Dr Allan McKinley
Professor Mark Randolph
Associate Professor Jim Whelan
Professor Ken Clements
Professor John Cordery
Professor Sarah Dunlop
Professor Norman Etherington
Professor Matthew Knuiman
Dr Bu Yeap
Dr Sato Juniper (Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships)

By Invitation:
Dr Campbell Thomson (Director, Research Services)
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Judith Skene)

EXECUTIVE OFFICER
Mr Chester Cutinha

APOLOGIES:
Nominee of the Chair of the Academic Board (Dr Annette George)
Associate Professor Judith Johnston
Associate Professor Kevin Croft

Professors Norman Etherington, Professor Matthew Knuiman and Dr Allan McKinley were unable to attend the full meeting due to other commitments. The items 9(v) and 9(xv) for which Dr McKinley was the Reader and item 9(xvii) for which Professor Knuiman was the reader were brought forward and discussed as the first three items on Part III (Student Matters) and both Professor Knuiman and Dr McKinley left after the discussion and resolution of item 8(a)(ii). Professor Etherington left the meeting after the discussion and resolution of item 9(vi) for which he was the reader.

1. CALL FOR DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Members were requested to declare any conflicts of interest that they may have with respect to any items on the agenda. Professor John Cordery declared a potential for perception of conflict of interest with respect to the candidate referred to in item 9(xiv). Professor Sarah Dunlop declared a potential for perception of conflict of interest with respect to the candidate referred to in item 9(xiii). Dr Bu Yeap declared a potential for perception of conflict of interest with respect to the candidate referred to in item 9(vii). Professor Cordery, Professor Dunlop and Dr Yeap did not speak to the respective items.
2. **MINUTES – REF: F36**

**RESOLVED – 58/05**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School held on Tuesday, 10 May 2005 be confirmed.

3. **GENERIC ATTRIBUTES OF GRADUATES**

(i) **ARTICULATION OF DESIRED GENERIC ATTRIBUTES IN GRADUATING RESEARCH CANDIDATES**

Members recalled that the Report of the Strategy Review of Postgraduate Research (REF: F4813) recommended that the Graduate Research School identify and articulate the generic attributes that it expects all graduates from Research Higher Degrees at UWA to have.

Members also heard that the University had been asked to supply its list of generic attributes for graduate research candidates in its next Research and Research Training Management Report to DEST. Members were asked to consider three lists of generic attributes and to identify and add those attributes that it expects graduates from Research Higher Degrees at UWA to have.

The three lists were as follows: one list was compiled by the University in 1996 for undergraduates; another (tabled at the meeting; Attachment A) was condensed from that list and is in the University's Strategic Plan and the third is currently in use at The University of Melbourne.

A member asked whether the list is intended to represent desired skills or expected outcomes. The Chair responded that the list was to be desired outcomes. However, as the University progresses toward outcome-based education, the attributes will be increasingly expected, and perhaps measured. The final list should be reasonable expectations of all graduates from higher degrees by research.

Members heard that many, if not most, universities offer generic skills development programmes to their research students. These programmes facilitate, rather than delay, completion.

Members discussed several ways in which the lists of attributes could be amended and augmented to be more applicable to graduates from research degrees, and agreed that a small Working Party would work on the lists and place a draft on Koios for other members' comment.

The Working Party comprised of Professor Robyn Owens, Professor Sarah Dunlop, Professor John Cordery, Associate Professor Matthew Knuiman and Ms Natalie Mast.

(ii) **DRAFT NATIONAL FRAMEWORK, GUIDELINES AND ACTION PLAN FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF INVENTORIES OF GENERIC CAPABILITIES FOR RESEARCH CANDIDATES.**

Members had before them a draft paper which was recently presented at the National Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies and on which the University had been asked to comment. The draft set out a proposal and plan for the adoption and funding of a national framework for the development of inventories of desired graduate attributes. Members heard
that the proposal is closely linked with the current push to highlight, and tie funding to, quality as opposed to quantity in research output and training.

A brief discussion of the Research Quality Assessment exercises in the UK and New Zealand, and the forthcoming similar exercise in Australia, followed.

The Board agreed that the list of attributes derived by its Working Party for item 3(i) should be forwarded to the author of the paper.

4. **PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE A FORMAL CONFIRMATION OF CANDIDATURE AT THE END OF THE FIRST YEAR OF CANDIDATURE**

Members heard a proposal from the Chair that UWA introduce a process for formal confirmation of candidature in the PhD at the end of the first year of candidature. The other Go8 universities have introduced such processes, and this was a recommendation of the Strategy Review of Postgraduate Research (REF: F4813).

The experience of other universities who have adopted a confirmation process has been that most withdrawals are self-motivated, within the first year of candidature. The National Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies is keen that statistics for completion, retention and attrition of graduate research candidates be reported and compared for candidates whose candidature has been confirmed, rather than for all candidates as they are currently. This would provide more meaningful performance measures for universities than the current measures.

Confirmation of candidature, which constitutes approval to continue as a candidate, would be on the basis of the candidate achieving satisfactory performance against specific milestones. Members recalled having discussed recently (at the meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School on 09.11.04) a proposal from the School of Psychology that all PhD candidates be required to enrol in the first instance in a Master by Research and be allowed to upgrade into a PhD only if certain milestones had been met. While having similar advantages, the current proposal lacks the disadvantages that had been identified with that earlier proposal.

Confirmation of candidature would be by the Board of the Graduate Research School. However, it would be on the recommendation of the school/s in which the candidate is enrolled. Maintenance of a University-wide standard would be important, but there are important differences between disciplines and different practices in schools. Therefore, it would also be important that each school determine, implement and report on the nature and scope of milestones that would be required for confirmation. When a candidate first enrols they would need to be provided with a clear statement of what they would be expected to have achieved in the first year.

Possible milestones include: having had the Research Proposal accepted; having presented their work orally to the School; having produced a substantial piece of academic writing, additional to the Research Proposal, at an acceptable standard; and having obtained any Ethics and other approvals required. The piece of writing could include, for example, definition of a research problem, a critical review of the relevant literature and a discussion of the proposed research approach. A further milestone could be satisfactory completion of any coursework units prescribed for the candidate, and/or completion of one or more modules for the development of generic skills, as appropriate to the candidate.

Members were reminded that Annual Progress Reports are now due on the anniversary of commencement. Because of this, it would be relatively simple to specialise the first Report to
function as a Confirmation Report, with ongoing candidature beyond the first year being conditional on all the agreed milestones having been met.

Members agreed that having the Research Proposal accepted and making an oral presentation were appropriate milestones. They also agreed that requiring a further piece of writing would be desirable, but opinions differed as to how this might be managed.

The following points were raised in the discussion:

- Some members were concerned that requiring a substantial Review of Literature in addition to the Research Proposal in the first year would be inappropriate for some disciplines.
- One member proposed that requiring a Proposal in six months and another major piece of writing six months later would be counter-productive. We could bring forward the due date for the Proposal to three months to separate the Proposal from the other assessment. This was considered by other members to be too short a time to allow for the Proposal, and was not accepted.
- Perhaps the Research Proposal could be re-structured to include only the management issues, with the Review of Literature presented as a separate document.
- It might be preferable to re-structure the Research Proposal to require that all candidates include a fully-referenced Review of Literature as part of the Proposal.
- Some members suggested that the Board could drop its requirement for central approval of the Research Proposal altogether. Other members considered it important to maintain this process. Two important reasons are (1) to ensure the University's compliance with legislative requirements and (2) to ensure that adequate budgetary arrangements are made for each project. Both have been ongoing issues, and it is essential to have a central process to monitor them.
- The stated milestone requirement could be a piece of academic writing to an acceptable standard. Schools could define and assess this. It could, for example, be a journal article.
- If the piece of writing were to be a scholarly article it might have several authors, and it would be difficult to ensure that it was the student's work that was being assessed.
- The Board could issue a statement of expectations about the piece of writing, including its intended purpose, and it could also request a declaration that it was the student's own work.
- The Board could provide each school with a list of examples of what the piece of writing could be, and schools could determine the best option for them.
- A Student Agreement should be drawn up and signed at the commencement of each candidature, with details of what each candidate is required to do, and the timeframe.
- What would the process of confirmation be? At the end of the year, the candidates' school could recommend one of the following in the Annual Progress Report:
  (1) Satisfactory Progress – confirm candidature
  (2) Some concerns – candidate to complete designated activities within three months or candidature will be terminated
  (3) Unsatisfactory progress – do not confirm candidature

The Board

**RESOLVED – 59/05**

to recommend to the Academic Board that UWA introduce a formal process for confirmation of candidature of PhD after one year of candidature (FTE). Candidates would be expected to meet agreed milestones by an agreed deadline in order for their ongoing candidature to be confirmed.
5. PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE THE REQUIREMENT FOR A COMPLETION PLAN AS PART OF THE THIRD ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT FOR PHD CANDIDATES

Members had before them a sample Completion Plan and were asked to consider a proposal that candidates submitting Annual Progress Reports at the end of their third year (FTE) of candidature be required to submit comprehensive Completion Plans as part of the Reports.

Members recalled that applicants for Completion Scholarships are required to submit Completion Plans as part of their applications. The Board heard that, in addition, candidates are now routinely requested to supply Completion Plans with applications for extensions of candidature. Together with the proposal to introduce a mechanism for confirmation of candidature after the first year, this change would effectively separate and distinguish the Annual Progress Reports at the Confirmation, Consolidation and Completion stages of candidature and would assist to reinforce the expectation of, and facilitate, timely completion.

Members agreed with the proposal and

RESOLVED – 60/05

to request candidates to submit comprehensive completion plans as part of their third (FTE) Annual Progress Reports

6. PROPOSAL FROM THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE AND DENTISTRY TO ALLOW GRADUATES WITH A BACHELOR OF MEDICINE/BACHELOR OF SURGERY TO BE ADMITTED TO CANDIDATURE IN A PHD WITHOUT FURTHER RESEARCH PREPARATION

Members had before them the following documents:

- a proposal from the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry that graduates from the Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) programme be admitted to candidature in a PhD without being required first to undertake further research training;
- a comment on the Proposal from the Vice-Chancellor expressing concern that the MBBS on its own may not be adequate preparation for a PhD, but noting that that proposal might be acceptable if a mechanism could be implemented for provisional candidature, with ongoing confirmation contingent on satisfactory progress in the first year; and
- the current Rules for admission into the PhD.

Members were advised that the proposal from the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry could be accepted by the Board without the need for a change in the relevant Rules if the Board was prepared to recognise the MBBS as being equivalent to a bachelor's degree with at least second class Honours.

Several members expressed concern that graduates from the MBBS would not have the necessary background in research to succeed in a PhD in a timely way. However, given that completions are an important driver of funding, it is not in the interest of schools to accept candidates who do not have adequate research preparation. Further, introduction of a process for formal confirmation of candidature would provide a mechanism for provisional enrolment in the first instance, and to confirm ongoing candidature only if the candidate makes adequate progress.
Members agreed that the proposal could be accepted provided that the proposal to introduce a formal process for confirmation of candidature was also accepted and had been implemented.

The Board

**RESOLVED – 61/05**

to communicate to the Academic Board that the Board of the Graduate Research School is prepared to recognise completion of the MBBS as equivalent to a bachelor degree with at least second class Honours for the purpose of entry into a PhD, provided that a formal process exists for confirmation of candidature after the first year.

NB: A proposal has been received to modify the above resolution as follows:
to communicate to the Academic Board that it is prepared to recognise completion of the MBBS (with a weighted average mark of at least 70% in the final year) as equivalent to a bachelor degree with at least second class Honours for the purpose of entry into a PhD, provided that a formal process exists for confirmation of candidature after the first year.

The Board will be asked to consider this amendment at its next meeting.
Students at The University of Western Australia are encouraged and facilitated to develop the ability and desire:

- to master the subject matter, concepts and techniques of their chosen discipline(s) at internationally-recognised levels and standards;
- to acquire the skills required to learn, and to continue through life to learn, from a variety of sources and experiences;
- to adapt acquired knowledge to new situations;
- to communicate in English clearly, concisely and logically;
- to acquire the skills needed to embrace rapidly-changing technologies in a global environment;
- to think and reason logically and creatively;
- to undertake problem identification, analysis and solution;
- to question accepted wisdom and be open to new ideas and possibilities;
- to acquire mature judgement and responsibility in ethical, moral, social, and practical, as well as academic matters;
- to work independently and in a team;
- to acquire cross-cultural and other competencies to take a citizenship and leadership role in the local, national or international community.

July 2002

The University's last Research and Research Training Management Report cited the above list, with the statement: "These attributes are common to all UWA students, but graduate students are expected to have developed considerably beyond the undergraduate level in all attributes".