MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BOARD OF THE GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL HELD IN THE OLD SENATE ROOM, IN THE IRWIN STREET BUILDING, ON TUESDAY, 14 MARCH 2006

PRESENT:

Dean of the Graduate Research School (Professor Robyn Owens) as Chair
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Krystyna Haq)
Professor Craig A Atkins (Deputy Chair)
Associate Professor Judith Johnston
Associate Professor Ian McArthur
Dr Allan McKinley
Professor Mark Randolph
Professor Jim Whelan
Professor Ken Clements
Associate Professor Kevin Croft
Professor Sarah Dunlop
Professor Norman Etherington
Professor Sarah Dunlop
Executive Officer (Mr Chester Cutinha)

BY INVITATION:

Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships (Dr Sato Juniper)
Graduate Education Officer (Dr Michael Azariadis)

OBSERVERS:

Professor Arun Dharmarajan

APOLOGIES:

Nominee of the Chair of the Academic Board (Associate Professor Annette George)
Professor John Cordery
Director, Research Services (Dr Campbell Thomson)

WELCOME

The Chair welcomed Professor Arun Dharmarajan to the meeting as an observer.

The Chair also thanked the retiring members, Professor Mark Randolph, Professor John Cordery and Dr Bu Yeap on behalf of the Board and the Graduate Research School for their contribution.

1. MINUTES – REF: F36

RESOLVED – 23

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Board of the Graduate Research School held on Tuesday, 14 February 2006 be confirmed.
2. CALL FOR DECLARATIONS OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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

Professor Ken Clements declared a conflict of interest with respect to the candidate referred to in item 12(vi) and did not speak to this item.

3. REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE AND OPERATION OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL’S SUBCOMMITTEES

Members were advised that Principle 7 from the principles for the operations of committees produced by the 2001-2002 “Review of the Efficiency and Effectiveness of Committees at UWA” required that the Senate, Academic Board and Faculties “monitor and regularly review their own performance and operation and that of their committees and committee structure”.

In September 2003 the review was extended by Academic Council to include subcommittees of the council. Further to the review of various subcommittees which also included the Board of the Graduate Research School in 2003, the Academic Council agreed that the review exercise was to be carried out every two years.

For the 2003 review, the Institutional Research Unit had prepared a hard-copy questionnaire tailored to suit each of the committees. Although the 2004/2005 questionnaire, which was now ready, was being conducted via a web-based form, the questions were based on the 2003 questionnaire.

Members were also advised that the Executive Officer would send out an invitation to the 2004/2005 Board members requesting them to complete the questionnaire and that Board members’ responses, including any comments made, would be anonymous. Reporting to the Board would be in aggregated form so that individuals could not be identified.

Noted.

4. CO-OPTED MEMBERS TO THE BOARD OF THE GRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOOL

The Chair of the Board, Professor Robyn Owens, advised the Board that Members had via circulation approved the co-option of four current members, Professor Ken Clements, Associate Professor Kevin Croft, Professor Sarah Dunlop and Professor Norman Etherington for a further period of twelve months. Members had also approved the co-option of two new members, Associate Professor Mike Anderson and Associate Professor Brett Nener to the Board for a period of twelve months. [N.B.: The twelve month terms specified are from 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.

Noted.

5. ELECTION OF DEPUTY CHAIR – REF: F34

Members noted that Professor Craig Atkins’ term as Deputy Chair of the Board expires on 31 March 2006. The Chair invited nominations for this position. Professor Atkins was nominated for the position of Deputy Chair. No other nominations were received and the Board

RESOLVED – 24

Unanimously to elect Professor Craig Atkins as Deputy Chair of the Board of the Graduate Research School for the term commencing 1 April 2006 to 31 March 2007.
6. PRINCIPLES FOR THE OPERATION OF COMMITTEES

Members had before them for discussion and noting the documents that had arisen out of the review conducted by the "Working Smarter Through Committees" working party commissioned by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Registrar in 2005 to investigate ways of streamlining and improving committee processes without compromising collegiality.

The Chair of the Board, Professor Robyn Owens, who also chaired the working party, spoke to this item outlining the work carried out by the working party.

Members were advised that following the working party’s recommendations, the ‘Principles for the Operation of Committees’ had now been divided for ease of reference into three sections:

- Principles for the Operation of Committees
- Rules for the Operation of Committees; and
- University Committee Members’ Code of Conduct

Members were also advised that the documents listed above as well as the Working Party's report were also available on the Web at: [http://www.secretariat.uwa.edu.au/home/policies/commconst](http://www.secretariat.uwa.edu.au/home/policies/commconst)

No issues were raised by Board members after the Chair had briefed the Board and invited questions.

Noted.

7. PROPOSAL TO AMEND THE POLICY ON EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE FOR STUDENTS WRITING THESSES

Members had before them a proposal to amend the Board’s policy on the use of editorial assistance by candidates in the writing of their theses. Members were reminded that the Board's current policy on the use of editorial assistance in thesis writing precludes the use of paid editorial assistance other than in exceptional circumstances. One of the reasons for this policy is that it is impossible to effectively police the level of assistance that a paid editor will provide. For example, while it may be acceptable for an editor to advise on formatting and copy-editing, there is a danger that they might undertake more substantive editing and re-writing or "ghost-writing" that would not be acceptable. In formulating its policy the Board assumed that University staff would be expected to exercise judgement in this regard and are in any case bound by University policy, whereas external paid editors are not.

The following problems with this policy were identified:

1. compliance is very patchy across the University, which leads to inequities between candidates – it is well known that candidates in some areas use paid editors, and that many supervisors endorse, and even encourage, this practice;
2. the workloads of some supervisors are such that they are unable to provide the level of supervision of the thesis writing, including editorial advice, that some candidates need;
3. the workloads of the Graduate Education Officers are such that they are unable to assist all the candidates who require their help in this regard; and
4. the Board is receiving an unacceptable number of examiners’ reports that express strong dissatisfaction with the standard of writing and editing of the thesis.

In addition to the Proposal, the Activity Report of the Graduate Education Officers for 2005 and the University's Statement of Expectations on Supervision and Thesis Writing, which had been attached to the Agenda, members were provided with copies of a policy produced by the National Council of Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies on the editing of research theses by professional editors, which was tabled at the meeting. In brief, this policy restricts paid editorial assistance to Standards D (Language and Illustrations) and E (Completeness and Consistency) in the Australian Standards for Editing Practice.

In the subsequent discussion that followed the following main points were made:

- This is a highly vexed issue. When we confer a degree, what are we certifying that the graduate can do?
• The proposal suggests that a change in the policy would allow for a service that corrects errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation. Is that sufficient? Most students have a problem with clarity. We should allow students to obtain assistance in improving the clarity of their writing.
• We should aim for a process that educates the individual rather than a semi-automatic process of correction – a service that educates rather than simply edits.
• We do not need such a service – students should use grammar and spell checkers.
• We already have such facilities, as well as supervisors, and theses that are unacceptable are still being submitted.
• The problem is that students do not take advice. Also, many students do not read enough. This is why many of them have problems with writing.
• There are too many theses being submitted that are sub-standard in terms of the quality of the writing. The Graduate Education Officers are not able to read and vet them all. We need a process that will facilitate the production of well-written documents by students.
• Supervisors are responsible for overseeing the writing. They should be doing it.
• The main problem is time. Sometimes the student refuses or is unable to take the time needed to produce written work of an acceptable quality.
• Sometimes the type of feedback given to students is not helpful – they may not know what to do in response to for example, "this is not English".
• It used to be that PhD students had their theses typed by others. Often, the typist provided editorial assistance and advice. Now that students type their own theses they are at a disadvantage.
• The point at which to deal with students who are unable to write is the point of entry.
• There are already editors advertising their services on campus. Students (and some supervisors) are confused about the policy.
• We ask thesis examiners to comment on the standard of the English. If we were to change our policy we would be allowing paid editors to do part of the examinable work.
• Heads of School and Graduate Research Coordinators should not sign off on theses without reading them and ensuring that they are of an acceptable standard.
• The ratio of enrolled candidates to staff is increasing steadily. The situation will become more difficult unless something changes – you cannot get blood from a stone.
• Students use the Photographic Unit to assist with illustrations, and they use other facilities, such as the Statistics Clinic, to assist with other aspects of their thesis preparation. This proposal is simply for an extension of that assistance into the area of writing.
• The Confirmation of Candidature process will help to ensure that students develop their writing skills early in their candidature.
• Producing good quality writing is a serious problem for students whose preferred language is other than English.
• There is a potential problem of equity in this proposal. It would be unfair if some students used an editorial service but others did not.
• There are inequities now. Students in different areas of the University have different levels of access to facilities such as desks and telephones. Some students use the facilities provided and some do not. This proposal would allow the establishment of a service that was available to all but not obligatory.
• The Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies policy would be a good replacement for our present policy.
• Co-supervision should be compulsory and would greatly assist the supervision of writing. Advisory Panels can also help.
• Can we survey students, or their supervisors, whose theses have received adverse comments and ask them what their problems were in the production of their theses?
• We should amend the policy to allow the use of paid editors as long as this complies with the policy of the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies.

The Board

RESOLVED – 25

To approve the amendment of the Statement of Expectations on Supervision and Thesis Writing to allow the use of paid editors in accordance with the policy produced by the Deans and Directors of Graduate Studies.
8.(a) PROPOSED CO-TUTELLE WITH THE HONG KONG UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Board considered a proposal from the School of Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering to establish a co-tutelle agreement with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST). Members had before them a draft Memorandum of Agreement for a general exchange programme and Checklists for Joint/Double-Badged Agreements for two candidates. Members heard that the proponents of the proposal and the Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships, recommended several amendments to the documents. This recommendation followed discussions with the HKUST that had occurred after the documents had been sent out with the agenda.

In brief, there are some problems of terminology. HKUST does not approve the use of the term “exchange student”. This is because at that university “exchange” has a specific meaning: exchange agreements relate only to students from other universities who visit HKUST for a limited period and are not permitted to take out HKUST degrees. At UWA the term is used more broadly, and exchange agreements are also used to underpin joint programmes. HKUST is likely to accept the term “exchange agreement” as long as it is carefully defined and the documents do not mention “exchange students”. In addition, HKUST does not approve the use of the term “fee waiver”, as it does not provide fee waivers. Rather, it provides scholarships that assist students to pay tuition fees. Since these issues are semantic rather than substantive, they can be resolved by re-wording the documents and defining the terms carefully.

The more substantive changes that were recommended were to indicate in the document that HKUST requires that its own policies, procedures, rules and guidelines be observed in parallel with those of UWA. This is in line with other agreements and should not present difficulties.

A possibly more problematic issue is the testamur. HKUST is unlikely to approve the inclusion of UWA’s name or crest on its testamur. This is counter to UWA’s preferred practice for such programmes.

The Board agreed to convey to the Academic Council its approval of the proposal, subject to the changes discussed. The Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships, will amend the documents and bring the final agreement back to the Board before forwarding the documents to the Academic Council.

A member questioned why all proposals for joint/double-badged PhD programmes needed to be brought before the Board when many of them did not require variation from UWA’s usual Rules. Members heard that the processes and documentation for these programmes are currently under review. It is expected that there will be an increase in the number of such proposals, and it is important to streamline where possible.

The Board

RESOLVED – 26

To approve in principle the proposal to establish a joint/double-badged PhD agreement with the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (HKUST), subject to the changes discussed.

(Item for the attention of the Senior Faculty Administrative Officer, Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics)
8.(b) PROPOSED CO-TUTELLE WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF EVRY VAL D’ESSONE

Members had before them a proposal from the School of Biomedical, Chemical and Molecular Sciences to establish a co-tutelle agreement with the University of Evry Val d’Essonne. The proposal immediately concerns two candidates who are currently undertaking PhD research at Evry under the supervision of Professor Ian Small, who has recently joined UWA as the Director of the ARC Centre of Excellence in Plant Energy Biology.

A member commented that the documentation indicated that one of the two candidates is expected to submit his thesis in December 2006. If this were to occur as proposed, then this candidate would fall outside of the current rules for joint PhD programmes, which require candidates spend at least one year at UWA. The other candidate has commenced more recently and thus could be accommodated within the rules.

Another member noted that under the proposed agreement, candidates appear to be guaranteed the right to resubmit their theses in the event that they do not meet the requirements of the PhD in their first submission. Other candidates for the PhD at UWA do not have such a guarantee. This raised the general question of what would happen under such an agreement if a candidate failed to meet the requirements of one of the universities. The Manager, Graduate Research and Scholarships responded that if a candidate met the requirements of one university but not the other, they could be awarded a degree by the university for whom they had met the requirements. The other university could withhold the award of its own degree if it saw fit.

The Board agreed that the agreement should be drafted to replace the sentence “if the majority decision is that the oral defence is not acceptable, the student will be invited to rewrite and re-present the work” with “if the majority decision is that the oral defence is not acceptable, the student may be invited to rewrite and re-present the work”.

The Board also agreed that the "one year rule" should be adhered to, ie that the candidate who is due to complete within one year should not be enrolled in a joint programme but should be accommodated in another way.

The Board further agreed that UWA’s usual requirements in relation to English language qualification would need to be met in order for candidates to be enrolled in this programme.

The Board

RESOLVED – 27

to recommend that the Academic Board/Council approve the Memorandum subject to the change suggested above and the establishment of a formal Exchange Agreement with the University of Evry Val d’Essone.

(Item for the attention of the Administrative Officer, Faculty of Life and Physical Sciences)

9. PROPOSAL TO OFFER RESEARCH TRAINING BY ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

Members had before them a proposal from the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts to reconfigure the Doctor of Architecture into a Research Training Scheme (RTS) course in which the examinable, ie research, component consists of architectural design rather than a thesis. In brief, this professional doctorate would concentrate on the production of an examinable architectural design. This would be unlike other RTS courses at UWA, all of which include a substantial written component, but would be similar to courses in the discipline offered at other universities. It is consistent with the DEST definitions of research.
In general, the Board reviewed the proposal favourably. In the discussion, the following main points were made:

- The PhD has a prescribed maximum word limit. In the proposal, the scope of the project is set by the value of the building that has been designed. The relationship between the word limit for a thesis and the proposed monetary value for the design is problematic because the value of money changes with inflation. Could another set of descriptors be identified to more accurately define the scope of projects within this proposal over time? Examples suggested were definition in terms of exemplars (eg equivalence to particular existing buildings) or in terms of relative costs (eg 2006 Australian dollars). These could be updated as needed.
- There should be some requirement to communicate about the project, verbally or in writing. Research at this level should be intelligible to people outside the immediate discipline. There should be some means by which non-architects can understand the meaning and significance of the design. This could be in the form of an exegesis, a public presentation and defence or an expanded abstract or it could be included as part of the brief. A member suggested that the A3 volume should include a long description, up to 5 000 words, of the work and its impact.
- How will the work be disseminated? Work produced in a PhD is usually expected to be disseminated via publication. This is not a PhD but a professional doctorate. It is reasonable to expect that the work will be disseminated through the profession.
- All grant applications include a long description of the work in lay terms. All graduates from doctoral programmes should be able to describe their research work in lay terms. However, this is not a current formal requirement of the PhD or other doctoral programmes.
- The Faculty should be asked to produce a statement for the Academic Council as to how those outside the discipline might be able to get a sense of the contribution of the work to the discipline.
- A member expressed concern that a person who had already completed a major design might then enrol and submit the design for assessment. It was responded that this could be accounted for in the rules for the course, which were yet to be written. The rules could be similar to those of the PhD, which state that the thesis must be substantially completed during enrolment in the degree.

The Board

**RESOLVED – 28**

To communicate to the Academic Council its approval of the proposal in principle, with the recommendation that the Faculty be asked to provide a statement for the Academic Council that sets out how each candidate in this programme will explain their response to the brief and communicate their contribution to the discipline.

(Item for the attention of the Faculty Administrative Officer, Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts)