

## **Quality Implementation Plan for the Graduate Studies Office**

### **Recommendations which the Department could implement unaided**

*Recommendation 8. As planned, the Dean of Graduate Studies should continue conversations with the Departments and Institutes that have experienced delays in fully adopting the new policies of the Structured Doctoral Programmes and the Ph.D. Research Student Supervisory Policy to address the issues associated with these delays and how best to resolve them. As ways are found to overcome delays, the Graduate Studies Office should direct energy and expertise to these departments to promote implementation of the policies.*

The Graduate Studies Office welcomes this recommendation and its recognition that change is a process that must be negotiated. All Departments have been required to submit their Research Student Handbook and their Initial Meeting Records to the GSO for the second time. On receipt of these the Dean will have met, before the end of November 2011, with any Department who are still having difficulties providing the required supports for their research students.

*Recommendation 9. Address the remaining problems with PAC.*

The Graduate Studies Office has reviewed the application process over the past year with a view to improving the usability of PAC and changing the application process to a rolling one. Several improvements were made, further training of PAC users was introduced, and changes were made to the application process itself. In addition to this its use was monitored on a monthly basis by the GSO throughout the academic year 2010-11 and was reported on to Faculties by the Dean of the Graduate School. While having a full-time senior administrator working on PAC, the introduction of the 'rolling application system' brought further problems and the system remains unsatisfactory.

A further review will be carried out this year before entering into a further contract with PAC, as there is still deep dissatisfaction at Departmental level and at student level with its usability. In addition it appears that there are simply too much room for error with so many Departmental users interacting with the system, and a centralization of conditional offers and firm offers is now likely. However, this will require further resources at central level.

*Recommendation 10. The Graduate Studies Office has initiated an important and timely comprehensive review of the success of current programmes. Procedures should be established to have early notification of the Graduate Studies Office by Departments and Institutes as they develop new programmes so that the Graduate Studies Office can help with market research before programme development is complete and to anticipate any additional resources needed to support new programmes. Equally important procedures should be put in place to discontinue unsuccessful programmes.*

With the employment of a Graduate Studies Officer responsible for marketing of programmes the link between the GSO and Departments on marketing has been further developed, and once again we have in 2011-2 seen an increase in applications for both taught and research programmes. The Graduate Studies Office has not yet completed its review of taught programmes, but will have it completed by end of Year 2011-12. A Quality Review of the Graduate School has been proposed for 2011-12 and this can lead to procedures which will discontinue unsuccessful programmes at both research and taught level.

*Recommendation 11. Considering the importance and the increase in the number of part time students and students in Taught Programmes, the Graduate Studies Office should consider designing and administrating surveys specifically for these student populations. Results of these surveys will determine the level of satisfaction these students have with the service and support they receive and will enable the Graduate Studies Office to better address problems that are uncovered and to support those activities that are successful.*

The Graduate Studies Office has now surveyed research students who registered between 2003-6 in 2010-11. In 2010-11 these surveys will be extended to all research students at NUI Maynooth and the results communicated to Faculty. The Teaching and Learning Committee are developing a tool to survey all taught students and this is expected to be administered in 2011-12. The Dean of Graduate Studies is working closely with the Head of Teaching and Learning to ensure that the questionnaire will cover graduate provision adequately, including that of part-time and full-time programmes.

*Recommendation 12. Use the move of the Graduate Studies Office as an opportunity to make the service and support provided by the Office better known with the graduate students and university wide.*

The move to the John Hume Building has been communicated widely and successfully. There has been improved consciousness among the students of its existence and increased use of its services. The Graduate Studies Office has also initiated a monthly drop-in coffee morning in the same building using a nearby conference room. It continues through its work with the student representatives on the Graduate Feedback Council to advertise and develop its support systems.

## **Recommendations which the Department could implement only with assistance from other bodies within the University and without cost implications**

Recommendation 3. *In administrative offices that serve and support graduate students designate one person responsible for working with the Dean of Graduate Studies and a member of staff in the Graduate Studies Office to ensure that quality service and support for Graduate Studies is a high priority throughout the University.*

The Graduate Studies Office welcomes this recommendation. The Dean of Graduate Studies will proceed to request the name of a designated person from each office. However, it is the case that administrative offices have in the main few staff and each member of staff has their role which often means we have to talk to a staff member directly as opposed to through that designated person.

Recommendation 4. *Information management within the Graduate Studies Office should be further developed. Even with additional development within the Graduate Studies Office the level of expertise needed to ensure professional survey design, record keeping, data recovery and analysis, sound predictive information for strategic planning and to support essential activities for the Graduate School will require resources and expertise beyond those of the Graduate Studies Office. The Computer Center and Institutional Research appear to be ideal resources for several of these services.*

The Graduate Studies Office welcomes this recommendation in particular and sees the clear need for an Information Management Working Group. The Dean has approached the VP of Innovation and Strategy requesting him to set up a meeting to begin the process of developing sound information management practice in the University, and this is scheduled for October 2011. The Graduate Studies Office interaction to date on information systems has involved calling meetings with the VPs on specific system needs, but there is no ongoing forum of oversight or joined up thinking on this, at least not one that the Dean of Graduate Studies is involved in. The GSO regularly organises meetings with the Computer Centre again on specific systems projects, but sees the need for consistent overview and improvement of information management. Internally the Graduate Studies Office has improved its reporting, but has yet to be in a position to provide sound predictive information.

Recommendation 7. *Transfer the responsibility of handing the IRCSET and related fees and expenses from the Graduate Studies Office where there is no expertise in these areas to Finance or other unit with the expertise required.*

The employment of a new executive assistant (replacing a member of staff who moved out of the office) with skills in this area has enabled the Graduate Studies Office to fulfill its responsibility. Meetings with and support from the finance office has also helped induct this staff member into the finance office procedures and there is no longer a problem of quality in this area of the GSO's work.

## **Recommendations which the Department could implement only if additional resources are provided by the University**

Recommendation 1. *Increase the staff in the Graduate Studies Office by one to fully support and service the present and increasing activities of the office. Since the roles and responsibilities of the Graduate School Office have been increasing and those of the individual staff members continue to evolve, it would not be prudent to recommend the expertise and duties of the new staff member here. The Dean of the Graduate School should determine the needed expertise and responsibilities for the best functioning of the Graduate Studies Office as it is evolving with input from the rest of the Graduate Studies Office staff. Once this person is in place the workloads and responsibilities of the staff members should be balanced and reflect the needs of the Graduate Studies Office and the expertise of the staff.*

The Graduate Studies Office welcomes this recommendation, but is conscious of the climate in which the University operates where an increase in staff numbers is out of the question. The Graduate Studies Office has been fortunate in being able to replace an EA maternity leave with a secondment of a Research Support Officer and this has added greatly to the skill range in the current staff complement. However, should there be a need to centralize the application process, as it is in the other Irish Universities, this could not be done without at least one additional staff member.

Recommendation 2. *Create a much needed common-space for graduate students for professional development and social activities. Many students do have a dedicated space—an “association room” that may include study facilities. But where they exist they are within the departments/disciplines, and thus do not meet the urgent need for intellectual and social mixing across disciplines.*

This is the single greatest deficiency in the Graduate School at the moment and we need this to be taken into account in strategic planning. The Dean of Graduate Studies has now ‘requisitioned’ a small prefab space that was provided as a common room to Faculty of Arts graduate students previously. This is called the ‘HetHut’, and all graduate students will shortly have access to it in 2011-12. However, it is not advisable to use it in any advertising brochures as it would put off as opposed to attract additional students. The Dean has requested a graduate space audit to be carried out which will identify unused spaces at Departmental level. The new library developments will have a built in a study room suitable for research students and the new Iontas building provides two ‘state of the art’ graduate research spaces, one for each Faculty. It is hoped that by end of 2012 that we can guarantee all entering research students a research space. However, as of yet, the provision of a common-space has not been possible despite ‘the urgent need for intellectual and social mixing across disciplines’. The Dean will explore what these resource issues would be, and whether they might be incorporated into future development plans.

*Recommendation 5. To meet the increasing need for recruiting and marketing, additional members of academic staff be trained in and involved in recruiting. More University resources including incentives for staff engaged in these activities should be directed to Graduate School Recruiting and Marketing.*

The Graduate Studies Officer responsible for marketing will run recruiting and marketing workshops and will visit and work with each Department on their recruitment strategy.

*Recommendation 6. Develop a web portal facility for graduate students.*

This was planned for 2010-11 but staff discontinuity set this project back. Now a staff member is in the process of developing this.

### **Appendix: General departmental response to the Peer Review Report (optional)**

The staff of the Graduate Studies Office would like to take this opportunity to express their thanks to Professor Susan Ernst, Tufts University, USA for her generosity of time and effort as a Peer Reviewer, as well as to Professor Peter Denman for his work as Internal Reviewers and to Dr Richard Watson and Marguerite Lohan from the NUIM Quality Promotion Office, for their guidance and patience. The Graduate Studies Office has found the Quality Review process extremely useful in providing opportunity for reflection and planning, and know that it will prove fruitful in future development of the Graduate Studies Office and its activities. It was very difficult to distinguish the work of the Graduate Studies Office from that of the Graduate School throughout this review process, so the Graduate Studies Office looks forward to the forthcoming review of the Graduate School as discussed and agreed with the Director of Quality.