Present: Professor Ross McAree (Chair), Mr Aleks Atrens, Associate Professor Han Huang, Professor Paul Lever, Associate Professor Rowan Truss. Mrs Kim Lamb.

Apologies: Professor David St John.

Minutes: The minutes of the meeting held on 17 December 2009 were approved subject to the following corrections –

Add Professor St John to the list of those present and delete from the list of apologies; and add Professor Lever to the apologies list and delete from the list of those present.

1. Grants awarded

a. Early Career Researcher Awards

Members congratulated Kamel Hooman and Ben Upcroft who were successful in gaining Early Career Researcher Awards.

b. MEI Grants

Members congratulated Han Huang who was successful in gaining a MEI grant for 2010.

2. Scholarships for RHD students

Members reviewed the document from the Dean of the Graduate School which set out changes to UQ International and RHD scholarships which took effect from 1 January 2010. The changes were made to give effect to the University’s desire to increase the numbers of RHD students as well as the Graduate School’s efforts to improve and simplify existing processes in RHD administration and the implementation of the UQ Advantage agenda in RHD training.

The scholarships included –

- IPRS (funded by the Australian Government) and “UQ Centennial Scholarships”, which targeted international students with demonstrable research strengths and strategic fit within the school. Both scholarships were for a maximum of 7 semesters and included (i) a stipend at the APA equivalent, (ii) a full tuition fee scholarship and (iii) overseas health cover. The enrolling unit would receive $5,000 of fee income per year (no overheads). If nominated by the enrolling unit. A 50/50 co-funded ‘top up’ scholarship of $5,000 (split between the Graduate School and school/advisor) would be considered during the relevant scholarship round.

- UQ International Scholarships: A limited number of “UQ International Scholarships” 50/50 co-funded scholarship (split between the Graduate School and school/advisor) at the APA rate would be available for students who narrowly missed out on the IPRS/UQ Centennial scholarship. These scholarships included a fee waiver scholarship and a stipend. The School would not receive fee income for these students.

- There would also now be a UQ Advantage “top up” scholarship for students on an IPRS or UQ Centennial Scholarship and to domestic students on APA scholarships. These would be awarded on merit $5,000 per year and co-funded 50/50 by the Graduate School and school/advisor.

The (former) UQIRTA was to be discontinued. However, some students on foreign government scholarships (e.g. Chinese Scholarship Council) could continue to be offered fee waiver scholarships. The enrolling unit had to guarantee a stipend to at least the APA equivalent which meant the school/advisor might need to fund a top up scholarship.

Key changes included –

- International student scholarship applications would be assessed in one of 4 rounds (end of February, May, August, November);
- Each round would have an allocated budget;
- Enrolling units were expected to rank applications in advance of each round;
- Applications may continue to be made at any time during the year; however
2. **Scholarships for RHD students**

   It was resolved –
   
   - that the School should continue to use its ranking process; however, it was agreed that it should be reviewed in conjunction with criteria used by the Graduate School;
   - that meetings to rank applicants for scholarships would be held 2-3 weeks prior to the Graduate School rounds and supporting documentation for the rankings would need to be carefully written; and
   - that further clarification on other fee waivers be sought from the Dean of the Graduate School prior to a revision to the School’s fee waiver guidelines.

3. **Introduction of vivas as part of the thesis assessment process**

   Members reviewed the discussion paper which had been prepared by Professor McAree in late 2009. The introduction of a viva (oral thesis examination) had been suggested as a way to decrease the thesis examination time which in the School ranged from 12-100 weeks over the past few years. The proposal was to have 80% of theses examined through a viva and to aim for a 16 week average thesis assessment time.

   There were clear benefits to the use of vivas – (i) immediate and unambiguous feedback to the candidate; (ii) shorter and more rigorous process; and (iii) a defined ‘rite of passage’ for the student.

   Challenges included increased cost (air fare/accommodation for the examiner) and difficulties with setting up a viva if the examiners were in widely different time zones. It was suggested that examiners resident in Australia could attend the viva with examiners from other countries made available through Skype or other suitable telecommunication device/s.

   Members discussed some implementation issues which included the possible change to GAR 4.15.4 (Assessment of thesis) which put the responsibility on the student to request an oral examination but did not include provision for the head of school to request same. Another key issue was the timing of examiner appointment which was now linked to the thesis assessment milestone.

   It was agreed that the discussion paper required amendment to address identified issues and to include a proposal for a pilot later in the year. The Dean and Deputy Dean of the Graduate School would also be invited to comment on the proposal.

4. **Research student conference**

   Members were pleased that the School of Civil Engineering wished to join the successful Research Student Conference in 2010. Members agreed that subject to availability of students enrolled through CRC-Mining and CAST-CRC, the conference would be held in the September mid-semester break.

5. **Research student development program**

   Members endorsed the proposal to hold 5 RHD development sessions which included –

   - March: Welcome to 2010 (including a BBQ organised through PRESS)
   - July: Oral presentation skills
   - August: 3 Minute Thesis Competition
   - September: Research student conference
   - October: Writing and publishing – which could include a panel of 4-5 academic staff to discuss why publish and strategies of where/how to publish.

   The goals of these sessions were to disseminate information, to increase oral presentation skills and to increase publications. The March/July/October sessions would be 30-45 minutes’ duration and include catering.