Present: Professor Ross McAree (Chair), Professor David Mee, Professor David St John, Dr Saiied Aminossadati, Dr Vince Wheatley, Mr Wouter Mostert, Mr Mitchell Dunn, Mrs Kim Lamb, Ms Brianne Mackinnon.

Apologies: Professor Han Huang, Prof Jin Zou, Associate Professor Rowan Truss.

Invited: Dean of the Graduate School, Professor Alastair McEwan
Director (Acting) Ms Samantha Valentine
Professor Andre Atrens
Professor Peter Knights

Prof McAree welcomed Prof McEwan and Ms Valentine to the meeting and gave a brief overview of the School in terms of the size and composition of the cohort. Prof McAree noted that over the past several years the intake has shifted from predominately domestic students to a 50/50 split of domestic and international students. Our students are generally completing their milestones on time, with a minimal number overdue each month. Our completion times have remained relatively steady, as have our examination outcomes, though we would like to see the numbers of students receiving minor or corrections increasing. Prof McAree noted that scholarships are an area the School would like to see more success and would appreciate any guidance in this matter.

a. UQ Career Advantage

The UQ Career Advantage program has not been implemented and the Dean noted that there will be changes made to the current structure. A working party will be formed to review and develop the program, which will be rolled out in 2014.

It was noted that disciplinary skills are part of the training given at a School level, so the UQ-wide program should look at generic transferrable skills. This will likely take the form of small discrete packages associated with teaching, commercialisation, leadership training, cultural knowledge and language skills. Transferrable skills such as communication skills and team work should also be built into the Milestone process. The main objective for students should still be to obtain a PhD.

b. Internships

The Graduate School is working towards creating internship opportunities with industry to raise the profile of PhDs in the wider community. There is an existing partnership AMSI, and a new agreement with 3M. Another program, to be piloted next year with the Queensland government, would see students undertake an internship in a department for 30 days. Once this program has been rolled out in the government sector, the Graduate School will work to extend into the private sector.

There are challenges with these types of agreements, and the Graduate School is working through these to find solutions. For example, the students in the pilot program will likely be given an extra month scholarship (if they hold a UQ scholarship), to cover the time lost undertaking the internship.

The Graduate School is aiming to create three or four different internship models, so that when industry is approached to participate there is a framework in place that has passed through the UQ legal office.

Members noted that there is an existing relationship with BHP Billiton that could be expanded to include internships of this kind.

It was noted that most of our PhD graduates enter industry after graduation and undertake some form of internship during their studies, so we have experience in this area.

One issue noted for our School is that industry often does not know how to use a recent PhD graduate. The graduate is either able to adapt and work within the system, or is disabled by the lack of analytical
process. It would be useful if this issue could be addressed through training, perhaps by the School of Business. Members noted that this item would be forwarded to the EAIT Associate Dean (Research).

c. Supervisor Training

Prof McEwan noted that UQ is weak in the area of RHD supervisor training and accreditation under the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Higher Education standards. It is important the UQ complies and demonstrates that adequate supervision is being provided.

UQ does not currently centrally document a staff member’s suitability to supervise, or manage the workload of supervisors, though this is covered at a School level through annual performance reviews and workload models. The monitoring of a supervisor’s training is built into the performance review process, and in the classification brackets (e.g. a Level B T&R academic criteria include “He or she will usually contribute to the effective supervision of Honours and Research Higher Degree students.”)

The Graduate School is considering how to address this issue, potentially through a register of supervisors, or a noting on UQ Researchers. This will allow the University to begin to manage the number of students supervised per staff member, and ensure that supervisors are kept informed of UQ’s processes and vision.

There is no intention to create a system where every main supervisor has to qualify to supervise candidates, or where there is a restriction on staff that they must be an associate supervisor for a student through to completion before becoming a principal. In the case of the latter, it would be an expectation that a senior person would act as a mentor to ensure that supervisor was developing the appropriate skills.

It was noted that supervisor training was being discussed around Australia.

d. Recruitment

While UQ is successful in terms of research, our RHD domestic enrolments are decreasing. UQ is now fifth in the Go8s in the area of RHD enrolments; the other member universities do not appear to be experiencing a similar decrease in numbers. Prof McEwan indicated that this is something that needs further investigation by the Graduate School.

This trend of decreasing domestic enrolments has been noted within the School over the past three years, though our international numbers have increased which has kept our overall numbers steady. Members noted that in the area of engineering, many students have secured jobs prior to graduation so recruitment strategies should include making research higher degrees more attractive. The Dean acknowledged that Schools within the Faculty’s of EAIT and Science Faculties are very strong with international enrolments, however this is only possible due to UQ scholarships (tuition fee waivers) which may not be a sustainable practice.

e. China Partner Program

3+1+1 is a collaborative program between the EAIT Faculty and its Chinese partner institutions where Chinese students undertake the final year of their home university engineering program as a Study Abroad student at UQ. Students who successfully complete their UQ Study Abroad year are awarded an engineering degree from their home university and are eligible to apply for the Master of Engineering Science at UQ. Several of these students have elected to undertake an MPhil instead of the Master of Engineering Science.

Students who complete an MPhil at UQ are not eligible to apply for an IPRS at UQ to undertake a PhD under the Australian Government IPRS guidelines. The only UQ scholarship option open to these students is a UQI 50/50 (where the principal supervisor funds 50% of the living allowance).

The 3+1+1 program is strategic for our School and it is understand that it is a commonwealth rule that is the issue, members raised this as a threat to our potential enrolments from a strong cohort.
f. Withdrawal

Prof McAree noted that the withdrawal of students close to completion is a cause for concern for our School as we have a duty of care towards our students. These students are at a critical point in their studies, and can often be quite stressed. They are sent a 'faceless' email from the Graduate School which could cause significant distress (as it did for one student).

Members raised their concerns with the withdrawal process, noting there is no advantage to the School to withdraw the student, while there are many advantages to working with the student to complete.

Ms Valentine noted that the students should follow the directions given by the Graduate School in email correspondence, namely to contact the Graduate School and explain any issues. Prof McEwan noted that the Postgraduate Coordinator should be included in this correspondence.

g. Recent changes

There have been some recent changes to the scholarship eligibility rules, and further details will be sent soon. In 2014 there will be three scholarship rounds.

Prof McAree thanked Prof McEwan and Ms Valentine for attending and noted that the School wants to work in close collaboration with the Graduate School to get the best outcome for our students.