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Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee (ACGSC)

(Title of Item)

Revised Procedures for Investigating Allegations of Plagiarism in Research Thesis

Procedures for Investigating Allegations of Plagiarism in Research Theses

Research Integrity

University College Cork is committed to the highest standards of integrity in carrying out research and has adopted the [National Policy Statement on Ensuring Research Integrity in Ireland](#). This policy identifies education and promotion of good research practice as the foundations of research integrity and recommends that research students should become familiar with norms and guidelines on plagiarism, the correct usage of quotations, and the importance of the explicit acknowledgment of other's work. In addition the policy recognises plagiarism as representing one of the most serious examples of research misconduct and requires the University to put in place appropriate process of investigation and determination of the offence.

The Research Integrity policy states that the following principles for investigating allegations of research misconduct should be adopted:

- Investigations into research misconduct allegations must be fair, comprehensive and conducted expediently but without compromising accuracy, objectivity and thoroughness.
- Those parties involved in the procedure must ensure that any interests they have which might constitute a conflict of interest are disclosed and managed.
- Procedures for dealing with misconduct should be spelled out in sufficient detail so that the transparency of the process and uniformity within one domain of jurisdiction from one case to another is ensured.
- Investigation of research misconduct allegations should be conducted in a manner that is fair to all parties.
- Persons accused of research misconduct must be given full details of the allegation(s) in writing and allowed a fair process for responding
- Proportionate action should be taken against persons found to have committed research misconduct.
- Any action(s) taken should be subject to right of appeal.

ACGSC agrees that plagiarism represents a case of serious research misconduct. In order to satisfy the principles outlined in the Research Integrity policy ACGSC believes that an investigation of an allegation of plagiarism should be investigated separately to the examination process. As well as being a case of research misconduct, ACGSC also believes that plagiarism represents a case of student

misconduct and as such should be considered using the student discipline procedures (as is the case where plagiarism is alleged to have occurred in a taught programme).

Therefore ACGSC proposes the following policy, specific to the examination of research theses and includes the following:

- Definition of Plagiarism in a research context.
- Procedure to be followed by examiners if they suspect plagiarism.
- How the suspected case of plagiarism will be investigated.
- Possible Outcomes.

Plagiarism

In the context of postgraduate research theses, plagiarism is defined as:

- Submitting, as your own work, work that derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement.
- In the absence of due acknowledgment, plagiarism can take the form of direct reproduction of text or other material from another source; paraphrasing by changing some of the words or the order of the words from another source; and using ideas taken from someone else's work.
- Plagiarism can occur in respect of all types of sources, including text, illustrations, musical quotations, mathematical derivations, computer code, etc.; material downloaded from websites or drawn from manuscripts or other media; and both published and unpublished material.

The use of portions of text which have appeared elsewhere can rarely be justified, except where lengthy quotations which are clearly identified as such are necessary.

The use of text which has previously appeared in print in publications or other outputs relating to the thesis for which the candidate is an author is not regarded as plagiarism in this context. It is acknowledged material from multi-authored work (whether published or unpublished) or data generated by individuals other than the candidate may sometimes be included in a thesis for sound academic reasons; in such cases, a statement should be included at the beginning of the relevant chapter(s) or section(s) of the thesis explaining the extent to which material therein has been

generated by the author and the extent to which material presented has been generated by co-authors.

It is recognised that questions of plagiarism may arise before thesis submission (e.g., when a supervisor has concerns about draft material submitted by a student) but it is recommended that procedures be in place to handle such matters within the relevant School or Department. In addition, it is recognised that a key part of avoidance of matters relating to plagiarism becoming an issue during formal thesis examination is awareness among students (and supervisors). Thus, training on the nature of plagiarism and accepted academic norms relating to publication, citation, referencing and the general use of material from other sources should be provided to research students through appropriate postgraduate training modules, workshops etc, and supervisors should be proactive in ensuring their students are aware of norms in this regard. It is also noted that students and staff members can at any time use the Turnitin software to assist in consideration of such matters.

Procedure

The following procedures should be followed.

1. When a thesis is submitted, a signed declaration be included, stating that the thesis submitted is the candidate's own work and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. This declaration must explicitly make reference to the fact that the candidate is aware of the importance of plagiarism and that the text presented for examination does not include plagiarised material. The following wording should be used:

“This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism.”

2. Letters of Instruction to Examiners shall include the following statement:

[For Masters theses]

“If an internal or external examiner, on review of the thesis submitted, believes in their academic judgement that plagiarism has occurred, this evidence must be investigated before completion of the examination process. In such cases, an examiner should immediately, and before completion of the examination report, notify the UCC Graduate Studies Office for advice on next steps to be followed.”

[For Doctorate theses]

“If an internal or external examiner, on review of the thesis submitted, believes in their academic judgement that plagiarism has occurred, this evidence must be investigated before completion of the examination process. In such cases, an examiner should immediately notify the UCC Graduate Studies Office for advice on next steps to be followed. Such notice may be given at any time before the *viva voce* examination, and this examination will not proceed until the matter has been appropriately investigated.”

Investigation

3. When the Graduate Studies Office receives such a notification of concern from an examiner, the office will in the first instance contact the Head of the relevant School/Department to inform them of this matter, and will also inform the other Examiner(s) and the Dean of Graduate Studies, that the examination process for this particular student is to be paused pending consideration of this matter; and that, in the case of a PhD examination, the *viva voce* should not proceed until this consideration is complete. The Graduate Studies Office will also inform the student in writing of this. The Examiner who has raised the issue will be required to provide written evidence of the substance of their concern to the Head of School/Department, who will allow the student and others involved in the process an opportunity to respond to the allegation in writing. This correspondence should be copied to the Graduate Studies Office.
4. The Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic shall nominate an alternative senior academic member(s) of staff to perform the functions of the Head of School/Department under this policy in the following circumstances:
 - a. Where the Head is a supervisor of the student involved, or an examiner of the thesis in question;
 - b. Where the student involved is a member of staff in UCC.

5. When the Head of School/Department (or replacement) is satisfied that all parties have been afforded a full opportunity to respond to the allegations, he/she will forward all relevant documentation to the Dean of Graduate Studies. This correspondence will be copied to the Graduate Studies Office. The Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic shall nominate an alternative senior academic member(s) of staff to perform the functions of the Dean of Graduate Studies under this policy in cases where the Dean is a supervisor of the student involved, or an examiner of the thesis in question.
6. The Head and Dean (or their replacement(s)) will jointly consider the documentation and make a determination as to the severity of, and hence consequences of, the allegations made. They will revert to the Examiners or the student only if clarification is required on any aspects of the material received, and in such cases all parties should be aware of such clarification, and given an opportunity to respond if appropriate.
7. During the course of their deliberations, the Head and Dean (or their replacement(s)) may consult with other individuals as they see fit.

Outcome

8. On considering the evidence submitted, the Head and Dean (or their replacement(s)) may decide as follows:
 - a. The matter does not constitute plagiarism within the UCC definition. In such cases, new internal and external examiners shall be appointed and the examination process will recommence.
 - b. Plagiarism is present. In such a case, the Head and Dean (or their replacement(s)) will prepare a report and refer the matter to the Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic or nominee, who, along with the Chairperson of the Student Discipline Panel/Committee or nominee from the Student Discipline Panel/Committee, will consider the matter and determine the penalty in accordance with the procedures set out in the relevant section of the *Examination Regulations and Procedures*. The report shall recommend one or more of the following penalties:
 - i. A judgment of "Reject, but permit submission of revised thesis". The re-submitted thesis will be examined by the original examiners. In the case of a

Masters by Research degree for which a class of honours or a numerical mark is awarded, the re-submitted thesis will be capped at an award of Pass (40%).

ii. A judgment of “Reject”.

The decision of the Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic and the Chairperson of the Student Discipline Panel/Committee, and the reasons underpinning that decision, shall be communicated in writing to the student, the examiners, the Head of School/Department, the Dean of Graduate Studies and the Graduate Studies Office. In the case of a judgment of “Reject”, this communication will constitute the final examination report for the thesis. In the case of a judgment of “Reject, but permit submission of a revised thesis”, this communication will constitute the initial examination report submitted to Academic Council Graduate Studies Committee; the examination report submitted by the examiners after the revised thesis has been examined will constitute the final examination report.

9. In cases where the Head and Dean (or their replacement(s)) do not agree on one of the courses of action set out above, the Registrar and Senior Vice President Academic shall nominate a senior academic member of staff to provide a third recommendation. The Graduate Studies Office will forward all relevant documentation to the nominee.

The Procedures for Submission and Examination of Research Masters Degrees and of Doctoral Degrees will be updated to include the procedures to be followed in cases of suspected plagiarism so that Examiners will be clear as to processes to apply and steps which must be taken.