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(Title of item)

**Amendments to Guidelines for the submission and examination of Dissertations
in Taught Masters Programmes**

Guidelines for the submission and examination of Dissertations in Taught Masters Programmes

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It is currently recommended that Masters-level programmes should normally include an element of independent research by the student, with a minimum credit allocation of 30 ECTS credits, subject to disciplinary norms. A clear description of the assessment of this research must be provided in an appropriate module description. Research elements in taught programmes may be split between more than one module/project if a reasoned academic case for this is made. In addition, Marks and Standards policies regarding pass and progression, award of honours, possibility of compensation, and repeat examination arrangements (e.g., for resubmission of dissertations, requirement to pass exams first time in some programmes, assessment of generic training modules) must be explicitly provided for all taught postgraduate programmes and modules.

However, it is evident that there is currently a wide range of practice regarding the submission and examination of the research element.

- The current policy is for academic units to process their dissertations internally (i.e., manage submission, transfer to external examiners and uploading of marks); however, some units are still submitting dissertations to the Student Records and Examinations Office, where theses are handled in a manner broadly similar to that of major research theses.
- There is also variation in the grading of dissertations in Taught Masters programmes, and there is variability in terms of whether External Examiners see all or a subset of dissertations from within a programme.
- There also appears to be a level of inconsistency in the exact role of the External Examiner in the marking of these dissertations, in terms of whether they independently mark them or simply ratify the judgements of Internal Examiners, and whether the External Examiner can over-rule the judgement of an Internal Examiner.

There is also significant variation in practice in terms of whether dissertations are submitted for storage to the library or retained locally. It is estimated that only 30-40% of hard-bound Taught Masters dissertations are currently received by the Boole Library for cataloguing each year, and storage in the Special Collections area. Thus, it is clear that a significant proportion of such dissertations completed each year are stored, if at all, locally by academic units or project supervisors.

This document proposes a number of procedural clarifications to facilitate resolution of outstanding inconsistencies between programmes, or lack of clarity in regulations, and the

following principles for the examination of research components within Taught Masters programmes are hereby recommended for consideration by Colleges. Following approval by Academic Board, Dissertation module descriptions will need to be revised, and programme Calendar and Marks and Standards amended accordingly.

Regulations for the submission and examination of Dissertations in taught Masters programmes

1. Nomenclature for research components of Taught Masters programmes

1.1 All research elements included within taught postgraduate programmes require module codes and descriptions, and are treated as any other academic module in terms of approval. Such modules should have a descriptive title referring to the discipline or field on which the research leading to the dissertation will be conducted (e.g., Research project in Field X, where this relates to the Masters programme title). Each such module must also have a named Module Co-Ordinator who oversees the allocation of projects to students on the programme, and is responsible for submission of final marks on DMIS.

1.2 To differentiate such research elements from major theses undertaken within Masters (Research) or Doctoral programmes, it is recommended that the term **Dissertation** be used to describe the written and submitted output of modular research projects or activities, and that the term Minor Thesis no longer be used.

2. The role of supervisors of research within Taught Masters programmes

2.1 The role of the supervisor of a Masters Dissertation is fundamentally different to that of a supervisor of a major research thesis, in that in the latter case a supervisor is no longer an examiner of their supervisee's thesis, whereas in the case of a Dissertation, the supervisor is the primary Internal Examiner.

2.2 For this reason, a supervisor is not required to sign off that a Dissertation is ready to go forward for examination.

3. The use of intermediate examination boards

3.1 In some Taught Masters programmes, the assessment is divided into two parts, typically taught and research, with (A) a Summer board to consider marks from taught modules, to verify if a candidate has met the standard required for progression to the next part of the programme, and to determine where supplemental examinations may be required, and (B) a Winter board to consider the mark for the Dissertation and results of any supplemental examinations, and to fix the final mark and class of honours, where appropriate, for the Masters degree. Examiners must be aware that the ability of the final

Examination Board for a Taught Masters programme to influence the class of honours awarded to a student may be limited, on the basis of constraints imposed by an earlier Board having finalised marks for other components of the programme.

4. *Submission of dissertations*

4.1 Dissertations should be submitted to Departments and Schools directly, with a clear identification of the person or office to take receipt of such. Departments and Schools then have responsibility for circulation of Dissertations to examiners.

4.2 One soft-bound copy of the Dissertation per examiner, or as many as candidates on the programme are advised, should be submitted by the student.

4.3 For 90-credit programmes run full-time over a 12-month period, dissertations must be submitted no later than the last Friday in September of the year after commencement of the programme (or equivalent for programmes which start at different points) with the same deadline applying in a repeat year.

4.4 Module descriptions for Dissertations must specify penalties for submission after specified deadlines which will be imposed subject to any accepted mitigating circumstances.

5. *The nomination and role of External Examiners*

5.1 Each Taught Masters programme will have one or more External Examiners, appointed through the normal UCC procedures; more than one Examiner for a Masters cohort may be appointed where there are a wide range of topics covered by the research undertaken in the programme. External Examiners will be responsible for oversight of the examination of Dissertations within that Programme. It is recommended that additional External Examiners not be appointed for individual Dissertations.

5.2 The External Examiner(s) for a programme may read all of the Dissertations submitted by students on a programme or, where there are large numbers of students on a programme, a sample of the Dissertations. In the latter case, the role of the External Examiner should be to assure themselves of the academic standards and ratify marking scales and ranges in relation to the judgements of Internal Examiners based on the subset of dissertations assessed.

5.3 All dissertations must be read and assessed by at least two examiners and a mark agreed.

5.3 Where all Dissertations in a programme are read by the External Examiner(s), the two markers would normally be the Supervisor, as Internal Examiner, and the External Examiner. Where a mark cannot be agreed, the view of the External examiner will normally take precedence, but the Supervisor must ensure that all relevant information regarding the Dissertation is presented to the External Examiner.

5.4 Where an External Examiner(s) reads a sample of Dissertations in a Programme, the two markers will be the Supervisor, as Internal Examiner, and a second Internal Examiner. Where a mark cannot be agreed, the view of the External examiner will be sought.

6. *The marking of Dissertations and arrangements for repeating*

6.1 Terms which are used for the examination of Research Theses (e.g., Award with no corrections needed, Refer back for major corrections) are not applicable for Masters Dissertations.

6.2 University-level Examination Boards will consider only final marks or judgements for the Dissertations from a Taught Masters programme, as opposed to actual reports. The judgement or mark will be recorded for the Dissertation module on the students' transcript (i.e., the thesis title itself will not appear).

6.3 On the recommendation of the responsible School/Department, an Examination Board may decide that a dissertation is a borderline pass/fail and may agree to permit the student to make minor corrections to achieve the pass standard (40 or 50 per cent, as detailed in the module description) for the Dissertation within six weeks of the publication of examination results. In such cases, the supervisor of the Dissertation will sign off on such changes and confirm to the Student Records and Examinations Office whether they have been completed satisfactorily or not, and the result will be considered by a subsequent Examination Board. This option should apply only where examiners are satisfied that the research described in the Dissertation is sound and that the fail judgement relates solely to the presentation of the Dissertation, which can be improved to a pass standard within the 6-week period. Where the corrections have not been signed off and/or they have not been submitted within the six week time frame, a fail judgement will be recorded.

6.4 Each Masters programme must state clearly in their programme Marks and Standards the policy which will apply where a student fails such that they do not fit the criteria described in point 6.3, i.e., where the work described does not meet the Masters standard, and additional research or a new project entirely is required. In such cases, programmes may specify one of two options:

- (a) a candidate will have **one** chance to repeat the Dissertation module in a subsequent year;
- (b) a candidate does not have the possibility of repeating the Dissertation module (unless mitigating circumstances apply). This option can only be specified if there is an exit qualification which such candidates can take (e.g., Postgraduate Diploma/Postgraduate Certificate).

7. *Storage of dissertations*

7.1 Masters Dissertations from taught programmes should not be submitted to the Library for cataloguing, and will not be included in the UCC institutional repository. However,

Dissertations from recent years should be held at a local (Department/School) level where subsequent consultation by future students may be desirable.