

sities. Vice-Chancellors and Deputy Vice-Chancellors, who, of course, cannot be assigned to faculties, are omitted from this table.

In arts faculties females account for 19.2 per cent of the academic staff. In science faculties, however, only 7.5 per cent of the academic staff is female. But the fact that in arts faculties only 32.5 per cent of the academic staff obtained their second degrees in Australia in contrast with 48.8 per cent in science further illustrates the problems facing females. Table 4 has shown that proportionately more females than males obtain their second degrees in Australia. It seems possible therefore that females are further disadvantaged in that they are trying to obtain positions with Australian degrees in the faculties which show a lower preference for local qualifications.

### Summary

Women are clearly disadvantaged but some of the reasons may be those not usually seen as discriminatory. They appear to be restricted by the operation of three factors in addition to those usually said to operate against women. A high proportion have Australian degrees, they may also have limited access to publication opportunities in overseas journals and are more frequently found in arts-type disciplines which appear to place greater emphasis on the first two factors than do science disciplines. Males trained in Australia may also be disadvantaged in comparison with those in the United Kingdom, and in more recent years, in North America. The survey has also shown that the so-called search for excellence does not result in the same appointment patterns in each university. There are distinct locational influences operating in different cities upon the selection of staff. Faculty procedures also differ and the age of the university may affect appointment. It is possible that differences in university structure and the faculty mix may also cause variations. Thus there are a number of variables operating to produce different staffing patterns within and between universities.

Several questions are prompted by these statistics. Why in all these years of appointing persons with overseas qualifications to maintain "standards of excellence" has that excellence not yet been able

to reproduce itself? Why with the declining academic market overseas is Australia still taking up the overproduction of other countries when most of those countries now place a quota on academics coming in from outside? In the present market situation, excellence could well be a nebulous, mystifying concept which results in Australia taking overseas people who cannot obtain positions in their own country. If our institutions cannot produce quality excellent enough for a higher percentage of appointments then graduates will lack the stimulus to further their education and our very foundations may be endangered.

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## HIGHER DEGREE EXAMINATION PROCEDURES IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES

Stephen Lovas

### Preamble

Some time after the award of my Ph.D. in April 1977 I made a submission to a number of Australian universities concerning *Proposed Alterations to University By-laws Governing Higher Degrees*. This submission dealt with various aspects of supervising and examining procedures. Its content was partly inspired by my own experiences as a Ph.D. candidate, although the issues raised in it were of a much more general nature and the suggested changes went well beyond the scope of my personal preoccupations. The document concentrated on the following main issues:

- (i) the role and responsibility of the supervisor,
- (ii) the secrecy surrounding the examiners, and their anonymity,
- (iii) the lack of provision for public debate, in case of a disagreement between the examiners, or the examinee and the examiners,
- (iv) more generally, the absence of any open appeal mechanism,
- (v) the lack of open consultation between the parties concerned (candidate, supervisor, examiners).

In detail the submission was:

### Supervisor

A candidate will be accepted if the head of a department, a professor, a reader, or a staff member holding a doctorate is willing to accept full responsibility as supervisor. The principal supervisor may be assisted by other members of the university staff and may refer the candidate for advice to any other appropriate specialist in the university or elsewhere. It is considered that a supervisor cannot without assistance adequately direct the work of more than four or five full-time Ph.D. candidates.

The supervisor should be thoroughly familiar with the relevant degree rules, with the advice to candidates on the presentation of a thesis, and with the suggestions to examiners. He or she should regularly draw the attention of candidates to pertinent aspects of the rules and encourage them to abide by them.

The supervisor should ensure that the candidate is engaged on a promising topic which might fairly be expected to produce sufficient results within a time

which does not greatly exceed the minimum period specified.

The supervisor should assist the candidate to develop standards of achievement that will result in a thesis of merit. With this end in view the supervisor should —

- (a) plan with the candidate an appropriate course of study;
- (b) meet the candidate at regular intervals to discuss and guide the progress of the work;
- (c) advise the candidate on the aims, scope and presentation of the thesis and on any publication likely to arise from the work;
- (d) insist on seeing drafts of the major sections of the thesis as they are prepared;
- (e) comment critically on the draft of the completed thesis before it is submitted by the candidate;
- (f) ensure that, having regard to the nature of the topic, any thesis presented is not unnecessarily long.

### Change of Supervisor

A candidate may apply through the head of his or her Department to the Post-graduate Studies Committee at any time for a change in supervisor. However, it should be appreciated that unless another qualified person is willing to act as supervisor the candidature may lapse.

The supervisor(s) shall be required to provide a report on the thesis at the time of the submission to the examiners. The report will contain a history of the candidature, the problems and difficulties the candidate has encountered and in particular it will state which parts or aspects of the work represent the supervisor(s)' own contribution in the form of advice or instructions to the candidate.

In general, the report shall clearly state the extent to which the supervisor(s) accepted responsibility for, or approved of, the submitted work.

Copies of the supervisor(s)' report shall be made available to the Professorial Board, the examiner(s) and the candidate, who may object to the supervisor(s)' and the examiner(s)' disagreement with the report, if any.

### Examiner

The Professorial Board shall appoint three ex-

aminers of whom two at least shall be external to the university. Further examiner(s) may be appointed, either in lieu of or additional to the first mentioned examiners. After the recommendation is made for the appointment of the examiner(s) to the Professorial Board, but before the appointments are confirmed, the candidate shall be informed of the names of the proposed examiner(s) and shall have the right to veto the recommendations of any two appointments. The right of veto may also apply if the second set of examiner(s) is appointed at a later stage, but not on a third occasion.

Supervisors and examiners are expected, as a general rule, to hold the same or higher level degrees (academic status) to those for which the candidates are aiming. In fact, the Professorial Board may rule otherwise.

The examiner(s) may freely correspond with the candidate to clarify details before any decision is taken.

Time limit for the completion and submission of the examiner(s) reports will be three months, or in exceptional cases six months:

- (i) Each examiner shall report in writing to the Secretary stating whether it is recommended that:
  - (a) the degree be awarded to the candidate,
  - (b) the degree be not awarded to the candidate,
  - (c) additional work on the thesis be undertaken by the candidate.
- (ii) An examiner shall recommend additional work, pursuant to paragraph (i) (c) (as above), on the thesis only if in his or her opinion the thesis shows merit and may, by a limited amount of further work, under approved supervision, be sufficiently improved for re-submission. In such case, the Professorial Board shall inform the candidate of further work required in order to re-submit the thesis. The Professorial Board may specify the period within which such further work shall be completed. A thesis re-submitted under the conditions of By-Law (i) (c) (as above) shall again be reported on by the examiners, but shall not again be the subject of a recommendation under that paragraph.
- (iii) Before making their reports the examiners may consult together or otherwise communicate with each other regarding the thesis or work submitted and shall state in their reports whether or not they have so consulted or communicated. If their reports differ, the Professorial Board may invite the examiners to consult among themselves with the object of resolving their differences.
- (iv) In the event of conflicting reports and after

consultation the examiners are unable to resolve their differences, or in any case where the examiners have been unable to consult or have refused to consult, the Professorial Board shall appoint an ad hoc committee (a post-graduate committee) to report and recommend to the Professorial Board.

#### Discussion Forum

The candidate may request an open discussion arrangement in cases (i) (b) and (c) (as above) after re-submission where the controversial points arising from the various reports may be raised. The examiner(s) reports should be duplicated, the forum advertised, giving opportunity for any qualified person to attend and/or contribute to the discussion.

In the case when the recommendation of the examiners is unanimous according to (b) (as above), a Professorial Board recommendation is required for the open forum discussion.

The final acceptance or rejection of the thesis for the degree after the discussion will be decided by the Professorial Board or by a five member committee (appointed by the Professorial Board) by a majority vote (secret ballot).

\* \* \*

I further enclosed with my submission, an outline of the Hungarian Science Academy's examination procedures, description of which was sent to me by a member of that Institute (Appendix I). The democratic method given in it greatly surprised me and I find their system far superior to our own.

I received replies from all the universities concerned. Some simply acknowledged my letter, others expressed their interest and concern. A few institutions informed me that they had committees investigating the problems associated with the examining of post-graduate degrees. They also undertook to refer my proposals to these committees and to keep me informed of the results of their deliberations. In one case I was invited to meet the chairman of the relevant committee, who was a senior professor in his university, to present my case personally. He promised to send me minutes of his committee's discussions on the problems I was concerned with, although this was a rather unusual undertaking as the proceedings of these committees are not normally made public.

Another professor wrote to me as follows:

*My personal feeling is that the system of assessing Ph.D. theses in Australian universities has a number of weaknesses. On the one hand, an incompetent supervisor can hide behind a candidate, without there being any formal process allowing to define his or*

*her share of personal responsibility. On the other hand, there is a general assumption that a supervisor is not competent to assess a project which he or she guided the candidate to conceive and accomplish, and there must be complete separation between the supervising and assessing processes.*

*Thirdly, although as graduates Ph.D. candidates are members of the academic community and are likely to have a fairly senior academic standing in it, they are treated as though they were primary school children with regard to the assessment of their research. Our universities do not offer appeal mechanisms, and instead of encouraging the candidate, the supervisor and the examiners to engage in constructive intellectual intercourse, they are carefully kept apart and are prevented from communicating (or are forced to communicate illegally). Finally, supervisors and examiners are answerable to no one, least to the person most concerned, namely the candidate.*

Some years have gone by since the submission of my proposals, but in spite of initially favourable replies and many promises, nothing seems to have happened. Not only am I not aware of any substantial change in Ph.D. regulations in Australian universities, but I have not been notified of any decisions made or discussions held by the appropriate committees.

#### Further Suggestions Based on Practices of Other Institutions

I can now look at the problem dispassionately as my Ph.D. graduation is well behind me. I have had the opportunity to travel and I visited a number of universities not only in countries I consider to be bastions of democracy like the U.K. and the United States, but also developing countries such as Chile, Argentina and Brazil, which have military dictatorships. Having held discussions with academics and administrators in a number of these universities, I was surprised to discover that even in the tertiary institutions of these undemocratic countries the Ph.D. examining system was much more enlightened than in Australia, and showed tendencies towards free discussion, conciliation and other desirable features our system lacks. They shared these tendencies with the universities of North America, whose regulations I found particularly attractive.

The following aspects of the American (in most cases both North and South American) regulations deserve special mention:

- (1) The examiners are always known to the candidates. They cannot hide behind the veil of anonymity. The chances of their handing down irresponsible verdicts are reduced.

In some cases the candidate had the right to veto the appointment of an examiner if he or she felt that the examiner would be biased. (Such bias may be due to methodological or political differences, to the candidate's critical comments in the thesis on the examiner's published work, possibly to the fact that the candidate had published an unfavourable review of a book written by the examiner (this latter case had occurred in my own experience), and occasionally other personal tensions, jealousies or antipathy of which the Head of Department and the university cannot be expected to be aware.

- (2) In the North American system the candidate, the supervisor(s) and the examiners work together for several years so that the candidate may benefit from the experience, scholarship, creative imagination and critical insight of several senior academics at a time when their advice can be of maximum usefulness.

- (3) The old tradition of the defence of doctoral theses has survived in a modified form in many universities. The possibility of a public debate on the thesis is the best guarantee of justice and fairness when a thesis is severely criticized by the examiners. The institution of a public debate deters examiners from making rash and irresponsible statements, and provides the candidate with an opportunity to defend his or her theories, an opportunity which the Australian system denies.

- (4) In many North American universities examination committees comprise an academic chosen from outside the candidate's major discipline. Such an examiner may provide the necessary balance, independence and detachment often needed in the assessment of academic research.

- (5) Supervisors and examiners are expected, as a general rule, to hold qualifications at least equal to those sought by the candidate. This is far from being the case in Australian universities, and such a situation may lead to intangible but very real manifestations of spite, envy or hostility, even though this may be difficult to prove.

- (6) Examiners are usually informed of the extent to which the supervisor is responsible for the premises, assumptions, methodological orientation and the content of a thesis. In the Australian system a supervisor may act quite irresponsibly, and the candidate alone will be penalized for the supervisor's errors of judgement.

(7) In most North American universities the supervisor and the examiners are required to offer the candidate guidance, criticisms and suggestions on all aspects of the thesis before it is finally submitted. The candidate is free to accept or reject such suggestions but is not allowed to submit bound copies of the dissertation until these suggestions have been considered.

(8) Where a discussion forum (or defence) or oral examinations are an integral part of the Ph.D. assessment procedure, every effort is made by everybody concerned that the examination should be humanized to a very high degree, in the words of the Berkeley regulations. It is imperative that a harmonious and pleasant atmosphere should prevail, whilst always maintaining the standards. In Appendix II I have reproduced the speech given by the Dean presenting the graduate Adviser's Handbook to the qualifying examination committee (Berkeley, California).

I presented and discussed this submission a great many times with academic people (professors, senate members, etc., of different universities). All of them encouraged me to persevere with it. (None of them argued against it.) They outlined personally, and some of them in writing too, that I am one person who can do this, for by doing so I cannot lose and do not risk my position, and do not attract animosity.

I am a business man in semi-retirement. I have no academic post nor aspiration, therefore this submission of mine has no other purpose than to save the future young generation from a possible unfair treatment, which may derive from an outdated examination system.

This position brought me to the point that I offer the following comment.

#### Conclusion

My visits to both North and South American universities made me strongly aware of the contrasts between their procedures and the Australian system. This comparison has shown up the Australian system as particularly regressive, unenlightened, intellectually counterproductive, undemocratic and uncivilized. My American contacts were often quite incredulous when I explained our Ph.D. regulations to them.

#### Appendix I

**Procedures for Gaining Equivalent Degrees to the Master of Arts; and Doctor of Philosophy in Hungary by the Hungarian Scientific Academy**  
Bachelor of Arts; Master of Arts; Doctor of Philosophy.

The middle grade is called **the candidature of sciences** and corresponds to the degree in Australia of the Master of Arts.

The higher degree of Doctorate embraces all the faculties, human and exact sciences.

#### The Candidature of Sciences

The candidate's dissertation has to be defended in an open discussion against the reports of two examiners (opponents), after three years of research work guided by a faculty professor or a nominated scientist. The names of the opponents, delegated by the Academy, are not disclosed in advance, but the candidate receives their written reports signed.

An open forum (debate) is required in addition to an oral examination to win the degree. (The procedure of the open forum is similar as described below.)

In exceptional cases (verified scientific work) the three years' period is negotiable and the examination might be disposed of, but the open forum discussion is compulsory. After the successful defence the aspirant wins the degree of The Candidate of Science.

#### The Higher Degree of Doctor of Science

This degree corresponds with what we in Australia call Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Economy, etc.

This degree can be attained only after a further two years course following the above degree of The Candidate of Science. The thesis for the doctorate has to be submitted to the Academy. This thesis is to be prepared fully and independently and entirely free from consultation with professors or supervisors. Three examiners (opponents) are delegated by the Academy, two of whom must already be Doctors of Science.

The condition in both cases (M.A. and/or Ph.D.) is that the theses must present new, significant and original findings.

A short summary of these findings will be printed and sent out by the Academy to all graduates of the Institute, informing them of the date and place of the debate. This information should be advertised in the newspapers.

The discussion will be open, any qualified person can be present, and anybody may contribute. The examiners (opponents) will declare the thesis fit and complete for debate. If, out of the delegated three examiners, two reject the debate, the candidate may still insist that his paper should be presented to the open discussion.

The acceptance of the paper will be decided by a simple majority from the five-member committee, through secret ballot.

#### Appendix II

Presenting the graduate Adviser's Handbook (1977-78) to the chairman and members of the qualifying examination committee, Dr Sanford S. Elberg, Dean (University of California, Berkeley), said:

To: Chairman and Members of  
Qualifying Examination Committee  
From: Sanford S. Elberg, Dean

In order to maintain the traditional quality and scope of the qualifying examinations, I would like to present to you some of our thinking concerning the examinations, as it has emerged in discussions of the Graduate Council's Administrative Committee. It is assumed at the outset that all of you know that the student must be registered the quarter when the examination is taken.

Before the examination begins, the chairman and members of the committee should review the candidate's preparation and how it relates to the degree goal specified in the letter of admission to the student. In Schools where a professional doctoral degree is offered in addition to the Ph.D. degree, the committee should be very aware of the specific degree for which the examination is being conducted. The examination itself should demonstrate the candidate's ability to synthesize the factual information and training in techniques absorbed through course work and seminar research. The knowledge to be tested at this juncture is not just the sum total of the smaller provinces of knowledge acquired in classroom work and tested by routine final examinations and term papers; it should be more as regards breadth, depth, and sophistication, and may be less as regards the recital of bare facts. Although the examination is designed to test the candidate's readiness to enter the research phase of graduate studies, it is not to be concerned solely with a dissertation prospectus. Testing the student's general mastery of the field is regarded as an essential part of the examination.

The qualifying examinations are a Graduate Division and Council matter and the examination should also reflect non-departmental spheres of knowledge. The student should be able to handle the outside subject on its own terms as well as to appreciate its relatedness to the major field of interest.

The chairman is expected to ensure that the examination is handled fairly for both the committee and the student. During the oral phase of a qualifying examination the chairman should do all in his/her power to put the student at ease at the outset of the examination, perhaps by asking the student a few general questions of a personal or professional nature before the examination in formal fields of knowledge begins.

Should it become necessary for the committee to discuss the progress of the examination and the student is asked to leave the room, an explanation should be given of what is happening, to alleviate any undue concern. It should be a decision of the committee whether the examining process by individual members may be interrupted by other members, and if this is allowed, it is the chairman's prerogative to ensure that the candidate is not driven to distraction by an excessive application of this privilege. It is also our tradition that the committee ordinarily allows the candidate to state a preference for the order in which the questions in various fields at issue will be put.

In evaluating the student's performance in the qualifying examination, each member of the committee should be polled and the vote recorded. Split votes, when they occur, are resolved by the Administrative Committee of the Graduate Council, which has the final jurisdiction in such cases. **If a split vote does occur, the student should not be told anything about the "probable result" until the Administrative Committee's final decision has been made and reported to the chairman of the examining committee.**

Non-voting observers who are members or visiting members of the faculty may be invited or not, upon the unanimous support of the committee and the candidates. At times, the mere presence of a faculty member who knows the candidate well but who does not participate in the examination may be a strong support to the student.

In summary, I am most concerned that the student be given as completely fair an examination as is humanly possible, and that the committee members feel free to express themselves to me personally if they feel that all or part of the examination was not conducted in a fair and reasonable manner.

The purpose of these suggestions is to try to humanize an inherently difficult examination without lowering of standard or loss of scholarship. Ideally, this examination should be a great experience and a source of deep satisfaction for all parties concerned. A residue of failure is inevitable; but frictions, known to leave scars, are for the most part avoidable.

The student may be recommended for conferral of the *Candidate in Philosophy* (C. Phil.) degree (when offered by the department or group) upon successful completion of the Ph.D. qualifying examinations and formal advancement to candidacy; i.e. the student is believed to possess the intellectual capacity to complete the requirements for the Ph.D. degree and the department is ready to provide space and facilities as needed for the Ph.D. degree programme itself.