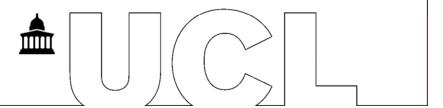**UCL DEPARTMENT OF COMPUTER SCIENCE**
DR ANTHONY STEED

30th April 2008

Annual Chairs Report, EngD/MRes/MSc in Virtual Environments, Imaging & Visualisation

1. Board of Examiner Meeting
The Board of Examiners met on 29 November 2007, chaired by Dr Anthony Steed (Programme Director) and attended by:

- Professor David Roberts (External Examiner);
- Five members of academic staff involved in teaching on the programme;
- Dr Marco Federighi (Faculty of Engineering Sciences representative);
- Mrs Romy Beattie (Programme Administrator and Secretary to the Board).

2. Comments on the examination process during the year
The examination business of the EngD VEIV is somewhat complex because the students, although registered in Computer Science or the Bartlett, work in a variety of departments and disciplines, and have a variety of relationships to their sponsoring companies. However, I am pleased to report that from the Chair's point of view, the process of managing the progression and decisions has been streamlined. There is a minor exception, which is the introduction of Portico, more on which below.

My thanks to Professor Roberts for his comments. In particular we wish to thank him for his positive comments about the innovative nature of the course, the novelty of the research, and the exemplary standard of the students.

We address the negative comments in order:

> *(h) whether suggestions/comments made by you last year were considered*
> *… my only substantive concern was the uncertainty of continuation of funding*

There was a discussion at the exam board concerning the potential funding of the EngD VEIV beyond 2008. The EngD is funded by the EPSRC through UCL's CTA and thus it has to periodically reapply for funding. In the exam board we discussed the fact that in 2006&2007 the EPSRC gave out several different indications of when all of the EngD centres would have to rebid. In particular, it was long assumed that the 2007/2008 intake was going to be the last intake under existing funding. Now bridging funding has been provided so that 2008/2009 is the last intake and the EPSRC has announced the call for new and renewed DTC/ITC proposals to fund students from 2009/2010. This impacts students because if the funding was discontinued, there would not be so many students in similar areas coming through. It would not impact teaching or training in any way, because all the modules students take are shared with existing MScs. Of course, the degree award would no longer be offered as well. We are rebidding, and as Director of the EngD Centre, as well as the exam board chair, I have kept the students informed of the intention to re-bid and the future of the centre.

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Overall Comments:
The board was considering the choices of options that the students had taken … better to have had these discussions before rather than after the event.

The programme for individual students is agreed between the student, supervisor, (co-)academic director at the programme start. The exam board does have a job to recommend options to students who are in the later years. In the coming year, we have added a pre-exam board meeting for July, where such issues will be discussed. This was decided at the exam board, and the external offered to attend if it was thought necessary. The board thought it was probably not necessary, but we will send him minutes and ask his advice if necessary.

The computer system for administration of marks has not coped … this has been picked up in advanced

Portico has been a failure as far as the EngD is concerned as a programme diet can't currently be created to fit the students. Prior to and after the exam board, at least a month of administrator time has been devoted to correcting records on Portico and creating mechanisms to represent our historical marks accurately. I make no apologies here, Portico was not designed with EngD students in mind, and the Portico team have been very clear that they are not a priority over managing the system for the bulk of the taught students. The situation will be better next year as all historical inaccuracies will be corrected but we will necessarily continue with paper records and use Portico to record the information that will appear on the student's transcript.

The dissertation report structure does not seem to encourage the concise description of the project …

We will request an abstract in the 1st & 2nd year reports.

Is there an end clock for a student completing writing up?

Yes, there are regulations on this. It is ten years from entry.

What happens if a company prevents the student from writing up?

There are no cases we know of a company explicitly preventing the student from writing up. For students who are secondees or are sponsored and subsequently work for the company after the initial four years, the company may implicitly do this by keeping the student too busy. We can't control companies who do this, just as we wouldn't be able to intervene in the case of a writing up PhD student or a part-time PhD student. However, we do advise companies at the programme outset that writing up takes considerable effort. We are monitoring this situation – we do have two students who have been on the programme for over 6 years now. The supervisor and academic director have talked to the company concerned, and we have plans from the students about how they will progress to submission.

Would it be better for the write up period to be at the university by default …?

The programme recommends that the last six months of the course be spent at the university writing up. Requiring this would almost certainly not be possible as it depends on personal and professional situation of the student.k

3. Comments on any cases of examination irregularity and plagiarism
There were no cases of examination irregularity or plagiarism.

Anthony Steed (Dr.)