

MINUTES 158TH FC MEETING – 5 JUNE 2014

Attendees

FC Members	Guests	MT	Official Secretary
Jan Sirks	Carla Dirks-van den Broek	Abe de Jong	
Chandro Kandiah	Anne van de Graaf	Eric Waarts	
Jelle de Vries	Finn Wynstra		
Miruna Carlugea	Bas Louwman (STAR)		
Jules Maitrepierre	Klaas Wassens		

1. Opening

Jan opens the 158th meeting at 10.35 am.

2. Agenda

The MT is wondering why the PC issue is missing from the agenda. As already asked in January, the FC is waiting for a concrete proposal, but so far only the white paper has been provided. The FC feels that their requests regarding the PCs have been formulated and have been clearly stated already a year ago. MT states that Model 1 from the white paper is their concrete proposal as it is indicated in the cover letter; however, from the standpoint of the FC, Model 1 should not be the proposal. As direct representation was seen as the most important issue during other meetings, Anne indicates that Model 1 will solve the issue.

The FC feels that discussions will make things more complicated. As Model 1 now only represents a point in the white paper, a clear proposal should be provided so that the council can vote on it. Anne suggests rephrasing the letter, so that the white paper is not considered anymore, but that Model 1 will be introduced as the concrete proposal. A PC that has 12 masters in one representative body will be too big for proper representation, and this is how Model 1 is designed. Eric finds this structure feasible and the board checked with the chair of the PC and he is in favour of having all masters structured like this as they all have the same curriculum. As all programmes are available to discuss issues together, this arrangement can be regarded as efficient.

The FC concludes that the PC issue cannot be further discussed during this meeting. Anne proposes that the board can reach a compromise by offering Model I as the concrete proposal including the new text of the Faculty Regulations (the original text provided by the FC was kept, but small adjustments were made).

3. Minutes

The minutes are approved without further remarks or amendments.

One of the action points concerned the scientific integrity policy. Finn Wynstra, present during this meeting, offers more information about this. In the fall of last year, the signing of a pledge by a university-wide working group was recommended, a proposal which was eventually accepted. The integrity declaration (as it is called now) is a capstone for a training and awareness process. It has been agreed that the recommendations would be implemented by different schools. For example, within ERIM, the intention is that 80% of the researchers will sign the declaration by the end of December. This code also applies to non-researchers: discussions with the Dean at RSM and also ESE will be conducted in order to find ways to have these people sign the pledge.

Within RSM, the idea is to have a training and awareness session on integrity, for instance, by using the Dilemma Game. This will be part of the new faculty orientation programme. There is a standard text which all schools are

using, which was piloted within ERIM in winter 2012-2013. Jan mentions that the Faculty of Social Sciences was undergoing a reorganisation and they were concerned about the legal consequences if people did not want to sign the declaration due to various reasons. Within ERIM, there were people that did not want to sign the pledge publicly due to their backgrounds (e.g. coming from totalitarian regimes), so they were allowed to sign individually. Legally, there is no difference whether the person signs the declaration or not, as he/she is already bound by being an employee of the faculty. The main goal of this is to make people aware so that they read the code.

The FC is curious to know what the position of the Faculty within this integrity declaration is. Finn states that especially in the past few years, an increased desire for institutional responsibility has been noticed. Promoting the right ambitions for professional righteous behaviour incorporates both awareness creation and corrective mechanisms. RSM should have a second confidential advisor or integrity coordinator; this would be one of the steps towards creating a better and more transparent environment, where people can express their concerns.

In the relationships between PhDs and supervisors there is some risk involved, as some issues concerning hierarchy might appear. Fortunately, these issues do not arise frequently. However, once they arise, it is important to make them known at an early stage. The PhD Council within ERIM is taking a more active role, which is stressed from the moment of the first welcoming sessions for the doctoral students.

4. Announcements

The FC makes one announcement:

1. Karin is ill and the FC has to reorganize its organizational 'backbone'.

The MT makes three announcements:

1. Tom Mom is outside the country; Klaas Wassens came on his behalf for the TER discussion.
2. Frank van der Kruk is on holiday. On his behalf, Abe announces that Frank drafted a proposal for the reduction of generic staff as ordered by the Executive Board of the University. This will be discussed during the MT meeting on July 7th, where the proper procedures for action will be investigated.
3. There has been a decision regarding housing (i.e. reallocation of departments). There has been an undesirable situation where two departments that were merged were separated from each other. Another situation was that an existing department was split between several floors. These departments will be brought together again, which, on average, constitutes an improvement.

5. TER

The TER includes some minor changes (for instance, regarding the PTO exam regulations). The FC was interested to find out why Cambridge exams are not accepted anymore as entry requirements. The reason for this change was that these exams are very rarely used. Usually, an extremely small number of students applied with a Cambridge exam qualification. Additionally, IELTS and TOEFL are much more accessible all over the world and they work with the four sub-scores the University is evaluating. Another advantage is that the Faculty acquires access to the databases of IELTS and TOEFL to verify the results.

The FC will send a letter to confirm its agreement on the TERs.

6. Cum laude figures

The FC was shocked about the 'cum laude' figures, thus there are fears that the excellency status is becoming lost, especially because some programmes are achieving scores of 30% cum laude (even up to 50% in MPhil).

The Board is not happy with some scores, but for some programmes there is a real explanation behind the figures. For instance, the IM-CEMS programme is really selective, so one would expect better students to achieve better grades. Some other programmes are more worrying. The reason for higher scores for these programmes could be related to the choice of assessment (e.g. assignments). Assignment grades can be easily improved based on feedback, whereas exam grades can only be improved through a resit. Taking too many resits will not enable the student to achieve a 'cum laude' anymore.

The FC is concerned that if in a programme 40% of students receive the 'cum laude' certification, then this will decrease the real value of this award. Anne indicates that people who judge the thesis as the main component are the same across all master programmes. It would be difficult to impose evaluation criteria on them that are different among the various programmes. One solution is to show insights regarding how many students of a certain programme belong to the top 5%.

The FC regards the current process as being very mechanical. The council is afraid that there is more pressure on professors to award higher grades. Students are not pleased with a 6 anymore, because it is taking away their possibility of getting 'cum laude'; they are sometimes involved in discussions on this matter. They expect to receive a better grade than a 6, which should still be seen as an honest grade. Anne states that this kind of behaviour is expected more from international and external students, especially the IBA students who are very ambitious. It is important to explain to students that this is how the current grading works.

Eric states that there is a lot of debate within the University as well on the topics of 'cum laude' and 'summa cum laude'. The Examination Board should look at these figures and make assessments, to see what the standpoints are. It is important to get more information behind the numbers (for instance, how many students are just behind the 'cum laude' threshold) and check whether the figures are justifiable. As discussed in the previous meeting, Abe reminds everyone that the number of resits will be capped at 2 (BSc) and 1 (MSc) in order to be eligible for 'cum laude'. Anne thinks that it is a good sign that students are ambitious, but it is a bad sign that students put pressure on professors to get higher grades. Reasons might include going to another university where the student can apply only if he/she has a 'cum laude'. The MT agrees that the stakes are very high.

For some universities in other countries, it is very easy to achieve a 'cum laude', but the University cannot influence what is happening in other countries. Probably an American University would regard the 'cum laude' scores from RSM as low. Anne suggests that good information should be provided to students which they can later use (e.g. where they stand in the overall distribution of the grades). The Admissions Office at RSM works very professionally, because they compare the grading standards between countries. GMAT should also be seen as another indication, especially since it is universal. The university could provide grading conversions for students.

7. Master thesis manual

The FC does not have any advice from the Examination Board. Carla states that the Examination Board was very much involved with the thesis manual. However, the Thesis Manual is the result of discussions with the programme management.

The manual makes a good effort in describing how the thesis should look and how it should be approached. The FC is concerned that the manual is mainly focused on the quantitative type of thesis. For these theses, data may already be available and easily extracted from databases. Nonetheless, for many thesis projects, a significant amount of work is data collection, which is largely disregarded in the thesis manual. For instance, in finance there may be a more standardized approach to have a database from which the students can draw some data and conduct analyses, while in OB type of projects interviews, surveys or experiments might be needed. It is more

difficult to conduct a qualitative-thesis in the given time slot, so this should be considered in much more detail. Anne informs everyone that the content was written by Ad Scheepers a number of years ago, so now the content has only been adapted a little. The thesis manual is created for all kinds of masters, but most programmes provide additional specific information regarding what is expected from students.

The FC also pointed out the issue of meeting the coach, as it is not clearly stated whether it is the responsibility of the student to meet the coach or what happens if the coach is not able to meet so often. Anne sees this issue as a 'grey area', because the number of meetings depends on the individual person. The student is responsible for conducting a successful research process, but the student needs input from the coach and co-reader. According to Anne, the thesis manual makes the best effort possible in describing the various roles of these persons. On the one hand, if the student feels the coach is not helping him enough and it is impossible to arrange meetings, then the student can go to an Examination Board. On the other hand, if the student still meets only a few times with the coach, but the coach is always approachable by e-mail and the two of them also have Skype meetings, then the student could be satisfied with the level of coaching.

For the FC it is not clear what would happen to students if a coach falls ill, for example. The question here is who is responsible for solving this kind of problem. Jan claims that the master thesis coordinator should be responsible for appointing a new coach in these special circumstances. The thesis manual should make it clear that it is a joint responsibility from both sides: the student and the programme. The programme should ensure that the student will have the opportunity of good and proper coaching.

The FC is curious regarding what happens if the student cannot find a co-reader. The management finds this issue very troublesome and it is worrying them as well. Programmes deal with this issue differently; as some students are assigned to coaches from the programme while others are assigned to those from outside the programme. Anne acknowledges that this significant problem is very difficult to solve, but they are carefully and thoroughly assessing it and looking for solutions. Abe states that even though students have to eventually look for someone from outside the programme, in the end, the issue is solved within the programme itself as there is always someone who takes the responsibility of being the co-reader.

The FC was also intrigued by how the public private defence was phrased. In essence, it is still a public defence, but it was formulated as a non-public one, because you can bring one person only. However, in the regulations it is stated as public. The FC was also surprised that there are some requirements about the person the student can bring. As it was left very ambiguous, Anne indicates that the management is now receiving lots of signals also from faculty members, so the Faculty can no longer be vague about this aspect. The problem is that everybody is trying to book the larger rooms for a public defence with family and friends and this is not the model anymore. The provision in the TER derives from the national legislation: normally, oral exams are public unless the Examination Board stipulates otherwise and both the School and the examinee can assign a person that they wish to attend the defence. Normally, this is done by special permission of the Examination Board. Nonetheless, the Faculty did not want to follow this path.

Students usually invite their parents or their boyfriend/girlfriend since it may be that they feel vulnerable and they want to be more comfortable during their defence. Anne indicates that the person coming with the student should be someone who is able to judge the defence. The management is concerned that it is becoming more like a 'celebration' activity. The FC is questioning why the old system was abolished. Anna states that half of the students was in favour of the large type of defence, whereas the other half was happy with how the format is now.

Keeping the main goal of having students graduate in early summer, the University was aware that there is no capacity or flexibility to book all the rooms needed. Thus, they needed to make the process more flexible.

Regarding the administration, the council states that arranging the defence dates costs a lot of time and it is very cumbersome. Anne indicates that this has always been an issue; the difference is that there are more students in a concentrated period now than in the past. A possible option RSM-wide was to reserve three days to conduct the defences and everybody would have to book those days, but it would be unsuccessful as conflicts in schedules appear and people have their own obligations. A suggestion is to start early with arranging the meetings. However, there is no immediate solution.

The FC would like to know whether advice from the PC was given. Anne indicates that the thesis manual is not a decision-making document and no formal advice was requested from the PC, but it was discussed in a PC meeting. However, the FC feels that the PC should be consulted, as the FC is depending on information from other parties as well. Anne states that she will check the minutes of the meeting with the PC, but she assures everyone that there were no major issues.

The FC will offer advice on the manual, as any input is highly appreciated and welcomed.

8. Any other business

Abe discusses the two letters received from the FC:

1. Letter about the internal communication: it is regarded as highly informative and the information is very useful, so it will be taken into consideration seriously. Most of the suggestions are very realistic and specific, such as information provision to the employees and students, having a management bulletin for the school, and these are already on the MT agenda. Abe will take the document to the MT meeting. Nonetheless, some suggestions are not feasible e.g. such as having minutes of the MT meeting publicly available, as it would provide too much information to the outsiders of the school.
2. The advice on CAR is greatly appreciated. It provides three points that the FC is raising and Abe is answering all of them:
 - a. Procedure for finding a director for the new department: the MT has advertised the position at the BV and there were 40 applicants; two or three people were shortlisted.
 - b. Transfer of people between the public body of the school and the BV: the issue is more complex than suggested in the letter. This was a first-experience with transferring people and Abe is aware that the process could have been conducted better. A discussion with the FC has already taken place and some of the suggested improvements have been already implemented. Thus, the letter is lagging a bit behind on the actual situation.
 - c. Differences in labour conditions between the BV and the public body: the Faculty is working on this issue. As people employed in both institutions have their rights, changing these rights in order to harmonize labour conditions is very difficult. A lot of effort is put into this process, but it still remains a very complex operation. Over the coming years, more efforts will be seen in this respect.

9. Closure

Jan closes the meeting at 11.50am.

Next FC meeting 3 July 10.30 am in T03-42.

To do before the next meeting

Task	Person Responsible	Progress
Provide letter on TER	FC	Pending
Provide advice on the master thesis manual	FC	Pending
PC proposal	Eric, Anne	Done