Imperial College London

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2023 at 13:00 via MS Teams

Present

Professor Yun Xu (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
Professor Laki Buluwela (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)
Jason Zheng (ICU Deputy President (Education))
Aryan Niknam Maleki (PGR Academic & Welfare Officer (Medicine))
Dr Dalal Alrajeh (Computing)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)
Professor Charlotte Bevan (Surgery and Cancer)
Dr Adam Celiz (Bioengineering)
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Yiannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Dr Sally Leevers (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Dr David Mann (Life Sciences)
Susan McBride (School of Public Health)
Robin Mowat (Centre for Academic English representative)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Brain Sciences; Immunology and Inflammation;
Infectious Disease; Metabolism, Digestion and Reproduction)
Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez (Mechanical Engineering)
Professor Carol Propper (Business)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Dr Jeffrey Vernon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr Rudiger Woscholski (Chemistry)

Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review)
[Secretary]

In Attendance
Scott Tucker (item 4.1)
Claudia Minett (items 4.2, 5.1)
Emma Hewett and Jenny Rae (item 8.2)

Part 1 – Preliminary Items

1.   Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1   The Chair welcomed Claudia Minett to the meeting who, along with Debbie Clarke, will be job-sharing the role of Head of Assessment Records during Eleri Canning's maternity leave. Claudia will be leading on PGR matters.

1.2   Apologies were received from:

Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Dr Mazdak Ghajari (Dyson School of Dyson Engineering)
Professor Peter Haynes (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Dr Choon Hwai Yap (Bioengineering)
Hayley Wong (ICU President)

2.   Minutes of the previous meeting

2.1   The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 February 2023 **[PRQC.2022.27].**

2.2   The Committee noted the action list **[PRQC.2022.28]**.

Action 4.2.8 (February 2022) – this should be corrected to reflect that the Project Recovery Framework pilot will take place in the 2023/24 academic year not 2022/23.

2.3   The committee noted that Chair's Action **[PRQC.2022.29]** had been taken to approve the changes to the Procedure for the Appointment of Examiners for Research Degrees following its discussion at PRQC.

The policy had been submitted to QAEC who requested changes – these would be discussed with Assessment Records for implementation. The policy will be published once QAEC has approved it.

3.   Matters arising

3.1   No matters were reported.

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

4.   Academic Regulations and Procedures

4.1   **Updates to the PhD and MPhil Academic Regulations [PRQC.2022.30]**

4.1.1   The meeting received recommendations for updates to the PhD and MPhil

regulations to take affect from October 2023. The first part of the paper listed changes required to reflect current practice or new policy that has been agreed as follows:

- Confirmation of MPhil as a level 7 degree in the FHEQ
- Confirmation that all successful MPhil and PHD students will receive the Diploma of Imperial College London (DIC)
- Confirmation that there is one formal re-sit opportunity for ESA or LSR
- Confirmation of the minimum registration period for part-time students to enter Writing Up status
- Reference to the new Research Degree Student Leave policy
- Reference to the new Policy for the Award of Aegrotat and Posthumous Postgraduate Research Degrees

4.1.2   Members were asked to consider further questions and consider whether changes should be made to the regulations or whether further discussion was needed on the following matters:

(i)   Explicitly defining a minimum and maximum period of registration for MPhil and PhD
(ii)   Setting a deadline for enrolment/re-enrolment for each session
(iii)   Time period for a student to complete an MPhil following a transfer as a result of an unsuccessful ESA

4.1.3   The meeting discussed the issue of setting minimum and maximum registration periods in the regulations. The following points were raised:

- Students (particularly self-funding) may try to transfer to Writing Up status early to reduce their fee liability even if they are still completing experimental work
- A potential 96-month maximum registration period for full-time students would imply an 192 month maximum (16 years) for part-time students which is not reasonable
- CDTs may have different timescales (including 1+3) and expectations students will submit within funded period regardless of the College's deadlines.

4.1.4   It was agreed that this should not be introduced at this time but that it may be useful to discuss CDTs in more detail at the CDT-DTP Governance Committee.

4.1.5   It was agreed that an enrolment deadline should be set for PGR students to enrol/re-enrol at the start of the academic session. However, clarity on the process that would be followed if students failed to do this was needed before an exact deadline could be agreed.

Action: Scott Tucker / Claudia Minett

4.1.6   The meeting agreed that a student who was transferred to the MPhil programme following an unsuccessful ESA would be permitted 12 months to submit their MPhil thesis.

4.1.7   It was requested whether My Imperial milestone deadlines could be re-framed to

make it clear that the date shown on the system was the date by which all steps in the process should be completed (including any re-sit opportunities). This is to avoid confusing students when departments communicate earlier deadlines in order to ensure the overall timeframe is met. This will be investigated to see whether My Imperial can be adjusted to make this more explicit.

Action: Emma Hewitt

4.2   **ESA and LSR Deadline Extensions Procedure [PRQC.2022.31]**

4.2.1   The meeting received the proposal to introduce a procedure for agreeing extension requests for the ESA and LSR progression points. Departments will already consider and approve requests to defer the deadline for these assessments but this would not be captured centrally resulting incorrect information being held on the system and visible on My Imperial.

4.2.2   Members discussed the paper and a number of points were noted:
- No time limits have been suggested for the maximum extension period.
- Guidance might be helpful to prompt whether an extension or an interruption may be more appropriate.
- There was no support at the current time to introduce sanctions if ESA or LSR were not completed.
- As this is a new process, flexibility for departments to set extension periods would be welcome initially. This could then be reviewed once the process is embedded.
- The use of Word documents to capture these extension requests made it harder to monitor – an online workflow would be better.
- Assessment Records staff will contact PGR administrators to check when deadlines are close or appear overdue rather than students directly.

4.2.3   PRQC agreed that this procedure should be introduced. However, further work needs to be done to consider how it can be made operational in departments. Members were asked to supply any further comments on the procedure or operational requirements to implement it to the Head of Assessment Records so these can be considered in the next version of the procedure.

Action: all / Claudia Minett

4.3   **Thesis submission checklist [PRQC.2022.32]**

4.3.1   The meeting approved the amendments to the Thesis Submission checklist.

5.   **Special cases report – non-standard examiner nominations and thesis extensions [PRQC.2022.33]**

5.1   The meeting noted the summary of non-standard examiner nominations received and outcomes for the 2021-22 academic year.

5.2   No recommendations were made in regard to this area of work but members discussed how members of staff new to research degree examinations could be

supported including an induction session for new internal examiners or appointing a chair alongside a new internal examiner.

5.3   The meeting was informed that staff from the Crick Institute are considered internal examiners for Imperial examination purposes. Additionally, if a Crick academic has been appointed as the internal examiner, the external examiner should not come from UCL or Kings as they are also partners in the Crick Institute.

5.4   The meeting briefly reviewed the summary of thesis extension requests in 2021/22 and the recommendations in the report. Members were asked to send any comments to the Head of Assessment Records.

Action: all

6.   **Working Group to review GTA rates of pay [PRQC.2022.34]**

6.1   The interim report of the Working Group established to review GTA rates of pay was received. A final report will be submitted to the autumn PRQC – recommendations should be presented in time to be included in the next planning round and implemented in 2024/25.

6.2   The group noted that Imperial's rates for GTA pay are higher than other HEIs but that 26 rates of pay are being used with limited consistency between roles and departments.

6.3   The Working Group had agreed that a single approach to pay as well as a single source of information relating to GTA pay and roles should be implemented. In addition, it had been agreed that:
- Roles should be standardised.
- Pay should include holiday pay.
- GTAs should be paid for preparatory work but guidance would be needed on this.
- Rewards for GTAs also needed to be considered.
- Clarification was needed on activities where casual workers and GTAs could perform the same roles (e.g. exam invigilation).
- Further discussions were needed with the Business School regarding their GTA / TA structures.
- The use of GTAs on fieldtrips needed special consideration and guidance.

6.4   Further consultation will be carried out with departments around these issues over the summer.

7.   **Student representation at PGR Periodic Reviews [PRQC.2022.35]**

7.1   The meeting discussed the proposal to pay PGR student representatives to be panel members on PGR Periodic Reviews. Given the time and effort required, it was felt that this was no longer appropriate to expect students to carry out this role on a voluntary basis.

7.2   Members agreed to the proposal but it was felt that it would be best for this role to be considered as part of the Working Group to review GTA rates of pay to ensure consistency against other activities.

Action: Laura Lane

7.3   It was queried whether more than one PGR student representative should be included on the panel to ensure that the student felt able to voice questions and concerns that may not be recognised by academic panel members. However, it was not felt this was an issue if the Chair of the panel was briefed and took action accordingly.

7.4   The Academic Registrar has agreed to identify funding which can be used to pay for student representatives for this purpose.

Action: David Ashton

7.5   It was queried whether there were other roles fulfilled by students in College processes where the issue of payment may need to be considered. The Students' Union may wish to investigate this.

8.   **Modality of final thesis research degree vivas**

8.1   **Draft guidance for staff and students on modality of final thesis research degree vivas [PRQC.2022.36a/b]**

8.1.1 Following on from the policy on modality of final thesis research degree vivas, guidance has been produced for staff and students on the use of remote or hybrid vivas. It has been designed to provide guidance at each stage of the process and a section on good practice.

8.1.2 It was reported that QAEC had considered the policy and had determined that the references to the process being student-led should be amended to refer to student consent. Once the policy is implemented, the number of requests and decisions should be monitored. The policy will be launched in October 2023, once it receives final approval.

8.1.3 In the meeting, it was suggested that the difference between remote and hybrid modes could be defined more clearly as they are treated slightly differently in the guidance. The reference to undertaking a mock viva could be reviewed. Members were encouraged to review the guidance within their departments and send any comments or suggestions to the Graduate School Head of Strategy and Operations.

Action: all

8.2   **Implementation of viva modality workflow in My Imperial**

8.2.1 The meeting received an update on work to build thesis modality into the thesis submission process currently live on My Imperial. The team is looking at the

whole PGR journey with the aim of making recommendations for changes.

8.2.2 Departments will be consulted as part of this process. PGR Administrators will be the first point of contact but this is planned to be a multi-pronged approach, including individual meetings and workshops, and DPS will be part of the consultations.

8.2.3 The team is also looking at interim solutions whilst the full specification is being developed but it is important to avoid causing issues down the line. Where changes are made these will be released incrementally.

8.2.4 Members noted that having the right access for their role was a key concern as well as being able to view all the relevant information when being asked to approve online requests. It was reported that, as part of the Unified Data Platform (UDP) project, access to data via role permissions is pertinent to a number of functions and is a key part of that work.

8.2.5 It was agreed that it would be useful to have an update on the progress of the My Imperial developments, either at a future PRQC or a DPS lunch.

Part 3 – Matters for Information

9.   PRQC subcommittees

9.1   The Committee noted minutes of the subcommittees / reports from collaborative committees as follows:

(i)   Unconfirmed minutes of the Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 20 June 2022 **[PRQC.2022.37]**

(ii)   Unconfirmed minutes of the CDT-DTP Governance Committee held on 16 November 2022 **[PRQC.2022.38]**

(iii)   Unconfirmed minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 30 November 2022 **[PRQC.2022.39]**

10.   Dates of future meetings

10.1   Dates for meetings for next year will be circulated to members once Senate and QAEC dates have been set.

10.2   It was suggested that the first meeting of the year be held in person (subject to room availability) and the rest held remotely.

11.   Any Other Business

11.1   Members were asked to encourage their students to respond to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey which was currently running**.**

11.2   The Chair thanked attendees for their contributions over the year, particularly

those members for whom this was their last meeting. Any changes of roles for PRQC should be communicated to the Secretary.

11.3 Members were reminded that the DPS lunch on 21 June would be held in person and it was hoped that people would be able to attend.