

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

7 November 2014

Confirmed Minutes

Present

Professor Sue Gibson (Chair)
Dr Tim Albrecht (Chemistry)
Mr Hassan Ahmadzadeh (Student Representative)
Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)
Professor Andrew Amis (Mechanical Engineering)
Dr Simon Archer (College Tutor)
Professor Erkkö Autio (Business School)
Dr Anil Bharath (Bioengineering)
Dr Donna Brown (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Dr Bernadette Byrne (Chair of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee)
Dr Niki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
Dr Imad Jaimoukha (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Professor Peter Lindstedt (College Consul)
Professor Stefan Maier (Physics)
Dr David McPhail (Deputy Chair)
Dr Felicity Mellor (School of Professional Development)
Dr Alessandra Rosso (Computing)
Dr Kevin Murphy (Department of Medicine)
Ms Nida Mahmud (GSU Chair)
Dr Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Professor Xiao Yun Xu (Chemical Engineering)

In Attendance

Ms Sally Baker (Senior Assistant Registrar, Senate and Academic Review)
Mr Richard Monk (Assistant Registrar, Senate and Academic Review)

1. Welcome

The Committee welcomed new members.

2. Apologies for absence

Professor Ferri Aliabadi (Aeronautics)
Professor Henrik Jensen [and alternate] (Mathematics)
Professor Andrew Holmes (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Professor Debra Humphris (Vice Provost, Education)
Professor Tony Magee [and alternate] (NHLI)
Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)
Mr Pascal Loose (ICU Deputy President, Education)
Mr Dean Pateman (Academic Registrar)
Professor Michael Seckl [and alternate] (Surgery and Cancer)
Dr Mike Tennant (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Dr Mark Ungless (MRC Clinical Sciences Centre)
Professor Denis Wright (Director of Student Support)

3. Terms of Reference and Membership

The Committee agreed the terms of reference and membership of the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee 2014-2015.

PRQC/2014/01

4. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 May 2014 were approved.

PRQC/2014/02

5. Matters arising

5.1 Minute 8.1 PRES 2013 – it was reported that the PRES response from the Department of Earth Science and Engineering had been received and approved by Chair's action as being exemplary.

5.2 Minute 15 – Research Degree Submission Data – it was reported that the research degree submission data had subsequently been presented to the Senate and that the Senate had asked that each Faculty should develop an action plan to address the decline in research degree submission rates and to present this to the December meeting of the Senate.

5.3 There were no other matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

6. Precept Reviews of Research Degree Provision

6.1 Precept Review of Research Degree Training in the Department of Bioengineering

The Committee considered the Precept Review of the Department of Bioengineering, in relation to 2012-13, presented by Professor Andrew Amis who had undertaken the review.

PRQC/2014/03

6.1.1 The reviewer highlighted evidence of good practice which had been identified, including:

Precept 2 (Offers/Admissions) – the consideration by the Departmental Management Committee of applications from self-funded students was considered to be a particularly good idea.

Precepts 14 and 15 (Early Stage Review and late Stage Review) – the concept of arranging dedicated ESA and LSR days was felt to be an example of good practice. The events not only encouraged participation from multiple members of staff, in addition to the students and supervisors directly involved, but also helped students to focus on the deadlines associated with each of the progression milestones.

6.1.2 The Committee agreed that the Department had adequately addressed the comments made by the reviewer. The Committee found that the Department was compliant in all precepts, and endorsed the reviewer's overall assessment of the Department of Bioengineering as 'Compliant'. The Committee noted that the Department would next be reviewed in 2016-17.

In further discussion, members were reminded that the Records team in the Registry must be kept informed of the dates on which students meet their milestones in order for their student record to be updated. Departments should be sure to confirm the date on which the milestone had been met in order to avoid a default date being entered which would not properly reflect the student's progress.

6.2 Precept Review of the Imperial-HKU Joint Degree Programme

The Committee noted that the Precept Review of the Imperial-HKU Joint Degree Programme, in relation to 2012-13, was in progress.

7. Review of Departmental Research Degree Provision: Periodic Reviews

The Committee noted that the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee had agreed a transitional procedure for consideration of periodic review reports, intended to simplify the consideration of review reports prior to implementation of new monitoring and review processes in 2015-16. The agreed procedure was outlined to the Committee and it was noted that the Chair of the Review Panel and representatives of the department under review, would not normally be required to attend the Committee for discussion of the report. The discussion would, in future, be led by the Committee Chair.

7.1 Department of Earth Science and Engineering

7.1.1 The Committee considered the periodic review of research degree training in the Department of Earth Science and Engineering, including the reports of the assessors, the internal Chair's completed Reviewer's Comments Form and the Department's response to the assessors' comments.

PRQC/2014/04

7.1.2 The Committee was advised that, in accordance with the new procedure, the Departmental response had been sent to the internal Chair who had confirmed that the Department had satisfactorily addressed each of the Panel's recommendations.

7.1.3 The reviewers had rated the Department of Earth Science and Engineering "compliant" with each of the eighteen precepts and "compliant" overall. The panel considered that the research programme provided excellent research training and support for postgraduate students, and noted that research supervisors took their role very seriously and care about their students. The panel observed, from talking to the research students, that they very much appreciated this professionalism and the care and support provided to them.

7.1.4 The panel had commented on the excellence of the physical working environment, conducive to the conduct of first rate research, and the highly collegial and friendly working atmosphere.

7.1.5 The review panel had made four specific recommendations which had been thoroughly considered and responded to by the Department. The Chair of the panel had confirmed that he was satisfied with the responses presented. In discussion, the Committee noted in particular the action to be taken in response to Precept 6 [Supervisory Arrangements] to address the concern that student responses in a College survey had shown that 40% of PhD students did not "strongly agree" they were getting the supervision appropriate to their needs.

7.1.6 The panel had highlighted several examples of good practice, including:

- a. The welcome process and general student induction;
- b. The student handbook, which is of the very highest quality;
- c. The transparent allocation of PhD students (and funding) to staff;
- d. The in-house online student information system (EISIS);
- e. Excellent working environment for students and the cohesive feeling provided by coffee and meeting rooms;
- f. The organisation of GTAs and, in particular, the use of three "super GTAs" to arrange the allocation of teaching support.

7.1.7 It was agreed that the report would be presented to Senate with the recommendation that the Department of Earth Science and Engineering be invited to report to the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee on developments since the periodic review as part of the next precept review in three years' time.

8. Good Practice Highlighted by Periodic Reviews

8.1 The Committee received and noted a report from the Senior Assistant Registrar (Senate and Academic Review) on good practice highlighted by periodic review panels in reviews which had been reported to Senate during the 2013-14 academic session.

PRQC/2014/05

8.2 Members were invited to present examples of good practice identified within their own departments and were asked to disseminate the good practice by discussing the paper at staff meetings on an annual basis.

9. Eligibility for Research Degree Supervision - Post-doctoral Research Assistants

Members received College guidelines on categories of staff eligible to supervise research degree students.

PRQC/2014/06

9.1 Members were reminded that post-doctoral research assistants were not normally eligible to be appointed as research student supervisors, and that their contribution to day-to-day supervision could be recognised informally by the use of the title "Assistant Supervisor".

9.2 Members were reminded that post-doctoral research assistants involved in the day-to-day supervision of research students must attend the "Practical Guide to Assisting with PhD Supervision" workshop run by the Educational Development Unit. Equality & Diversity and Harassment workshops run by the Learning and Development Centre were also considered important.

9.3 It was agreed that "Junior Research Fellows" should be explicitly added to the category of staff eligible for the "Assistant Supervisor" title.

9.4 In further discussion it was suggested that the College should introduce two levels under the "Assistant Supervisor" title to reflect the different stages of postdoctoral research experience which assistant supervisors may possess. It was noted that the Working Party for World Class Research Supervision would address this issue.

9.5 Members were reminded that persons appointed as research student supervisors should be members of academic staff.

9.6 In further discussion, it was proposed that the Committee should simplify the terminology being used to describe the different supervisory roles. The Committee was referred to the glossary of supervisor terms at the end of paper. The Committee was told that the QAA did not offer a glossary of formal supervisor titles, but referred simply to a "main" supervisor and a "second" supervisor.

9.7 It was suggested that the College should use the title of "main" supervisor and "second" supervisor, and discontinue the use of the titles "principal" and "lead" supervisor, "co-supervisor" and "joint" supervisor. In discussion, it was noted that alternative terminology would need to be retained for use in joint and collaborative programmes. The Committee agreed that it would be useful to be informed of the terminology used by other institutions and it was agreed that the matter would be deferred for further discussion at a subsequent meeting.

10. Department of Computing Doctoral Teaching Scholar Programme [DTS]

10.1 The Committee received a progress report on Year 3 [2013-14] of the Doctoral Teaching Scholar programme, presented on behalf from Dr Krysia Broda, the Scheme Coordinator. Members were reminded that the scheme had been designed to give PhD students the opportunity to study for a PG Certificate at Imperial and to gain wider teaching experience than is possible through tutorial help. The scheme was funded by the Department and pays fees and maintenance for 4.5 years.

PRQC/2014/07

10.3 It was reported that all of the students on the programme were progressing well and completing their milestones on time. Students on the programme were gaining a variety of teaching experience including tutoring, project supervision, tutorial and laboratory planning and lectures. All the students were committed to an academic career, and the department benefitted greatly from the teaching contributions that they each made.

10.4 It was noted that the progression milestones reflected 4.5 year programme length and that the students were nevertheless expected to submit a thesis within 5 years of initial registration.

10.5 It was reported that the Department had allocated additional funding to the scheme and that four new scholars had started the programme in October 2014. Members were reminded that one student had started in 2011, two in 2012 and one in 2013. It was noted that the programme had initially been approved as a pilot with effect from 2011-12, and confirmed that the Department intended to continue offering the programme longer term.

10.6 It was agreed that the Department should continue to provide a short report on progress for

the next three years, by which time the success of the first two cohorts of students could be measured.

11. Working Party for World Class Supervision

The Committee received a verbal report from the first meeting of the Working Party for World Class Supervision.

11.1 The Committee was reminded that the working party had been established to develop a strategy for the delivery and implementation of the doctoral proposition, including the consideration of what constitutes world-class research supervision from a staff and student perspective, and how best to ensure that this ideal is delivered to every doctoral student.

11.2 It was reported that a student break out session had been run recently by the Graduate School to establish what constitutes world-class research supervision from a student perspective. The breakout session had included presentations from winners of the President's award for excellence in research supervision and the President of the GSU. It was expected that the outcome of these discussions would inform a questionnaire for research students on what constitutes world-class research supervision.

11.3 It was reported that the Chair of the Working party would meet with the 2013 and 2014 winners of the President's award for excellence in research supervision and the 2014 winner of the Student Academic Choice award for best supervision. The information gathered at these meetings would inform the staff survey.

11.4 It was reported that the Chair of the Working Party would be visiting academic Departments with a view to determining what constitutes world-class research supervision from a departmental perspective, to discuss the various models for supervisory arrangements and to consider departmental submission rates. The outcome of these discussions would also inform the staff survey.

11.5 It was reported that the Working Party had considered the departmental submission rates for 2012-13 and had expressed concern at the drop in submission rates for the College over the last two years. The Working Party had reviewed the discussion paper prepared by the Deputy Director of the Graduate School following an analysis of special cases for late submission conducted during 2012/2013. It was noted that data on last cases submitted in 2013/2014 would be presented to the next meeting of the PRQC.

11.6 The Working Party discussed whether some cases for late submission could be dealt with by interruption of study. It was noted that an interruption of study could have funding implications for students, as well implications for student visas and accommodation.

11.7 The Working Party noted that many supervisors were unaware that a student who was granted a request for late submission would nevertheless be recorded as a non-submitter in terms of the College's performance indicators. The Working Party had agreed new wording to be included on the request for Late Submission form to raise awareness of this fact.

12. CRICK PhD Programme

The Committee received a paper (tabled) showing students who had registered on the CRICK PhD Programme in September 2014.

PRQC/2014/08

12.1 It was reported that 48 students had been registered in total across the three Crick partner Universities, of which 18 students were registered for research degrees at Imperial, and one as an MRes student in the Department of Chemistry. It was reported that the research students joining the programme in 2014 were based at the NIMR or LRI, and would transfer into the Crick building with their research groups in November 2015.

12.2 It was reported that the induction week held at the start of the Crick PhD Programme had been very successful in helping to establish the first cohort of students, allowing them to get to know each other, the NIMR and LRI institutes, their university and the PhD Programme.

12.3 The Committee was reminded that students on the Crick doctoral programme would have access to expertise, facilities and activities, both within the Crick locations and at the three Crick

partner universities, and were reminded of the opportunities to maximise new collaborations between the staff at the different institutions.

13. Postgraduate Professional Development Committee: update

The Committee received the unconfirmed minutes of the Professional Skills Development Committee meeting held on 2 July 2014.

PRQC/2014/09

13.1 It was reported that, following the review of the Research Skills & Development course earlier in the year, the contracting of an external tutor to help deliver this course would cease. It was further reported that the Graduate School was currently recruiting for an additional part time Teaching Fellow.

13.2 It was reported that the Graduate School would be introducing an annual review process to ensure their portfolio of courses remained current and up to date. This would involve seeking external advice on the programme as a whole, primarily from employers of Imperial graduates. The outcome of the annual review would be reported to the PRQC in due course.

ITEMS FOR REPORT

14. Chair's Action

Members were asked to note action taken by the Chair, following PRQC consultation, to agree to remove the requirement for a student to submit the description of thesis form as part of their examination entry.

15. Senate

Members noted that the latest executive summaries from Senate were available [here](#).

16. Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee

Members noted that the latest executive summaries from the QAEC meetings were available [here](#)

17. Any Other Business

There was no other business raised for discussion.

18. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday 10 February 2015. The meeting will start at 10:00. The deadline for papers is Tuesday 27 January 2015.

19. Dates of following meetings

Tuesday 10 February 2015

Friday 15 May 2015

Meetings will start at 10.00am.

20. Reserved Business (not circulated to student members)

20.1 Special Cases Panel – Doctoral Programmes 2014-15

The Committee received and approved the updated membership of the special cases panel for Doctoral programmes for the 2013-14 session.

PRQC/2014/10

20.2 Special Cases Reports

The Committee received reports on special cases reports as follows:

- (i) Special cases for admissions considered by the special cases panel for doctoral programmes (tabled)

PRQC/2014/11

- (ii) Special cases for Examiners, considered by the Director of the Graduate School

PRQC/2014/12

- (iii) Special cases for late entry, considered by the Director and Deputy Director of the Graduate School

PRQC/2014/13