

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2021 at 14:10 via MS Teams

Present

Professor Yun Xu (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
Professor Emma McCoy (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)
Daniel Lo (ICU Deputy President (Education))
Dr Lloyd James (ICU President)
Tin Hang Un (FoE Student Representative)
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
Professor Christopher Gourlay (Materials)
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Dr Enrique Martinez-Perez (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)
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)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr James Wilton-Ely (Chemistry)
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review)
[Secretary]

In Attendance

Nicola Hann (Business)
Alex Page (Senior International Relations Officer, East Asia) [Item 6]
Scott Tucker (Deputy Director, Academic Quality and Standards)

Part 1 – Preliminary Items

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed new members of the committee for 2021-22 as follows:

Professor Christopher Gourlay (Materials)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Daniel Lo – ICU VP Education
Dr Lloyd James – ICU President
Tin Hang Un - ICU PGR Academic and Welfare Representative - FoE
Aryan Niknam Maleki - ICU PGR Academic and Welfare Representative – FoM

- 1.2 Apologies were received from:

Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Professor Laki Buluwela (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)
Professor Carol Propper (Business)
Professor John Seddon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)
Dr Jem Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Aryan Niknam Maleki (FoM Student Representative)
Ceire Wincott (FoNS Student Representative)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

- 2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 May 2021 **[PRQC.2021.01]**.
- 2.2 The Committee noted the action list. Most actions had been completed or were on the agenda for discussion at this meeting. **[PRQC.2021.02]**

3. Matters arising

- 3.1 The Chair reported that following the update to the good practice guidance for remote vivas approved by Chair's Action, the procedure for in person vivas was also being reviewed. This had previously been considered by ESOG – it would need to be confirmed which committee should now look at the guidance.

4. PRQC Terms of Reference and Membership 2021-22 [PRQC2021.03]

- 4.1 The Committee noted amendments to the Terms of Reference to include reference to the new College Education Committee and College Research Committee.

- 4.2 The membership had been updated to reflect changes in postholders and the new representatives from ICU.
- 4.3 The membership would be further updated to reflect Professor Murphy's role as DPS across the four departments emerging from the former Department of Medicine.

Action: Secretary

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

5. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2021

5.1 Summary results for PRES 2021 [PRQC.2021.04]

The meeting considered the summary results and benchmarking reports from the PRES. It was noted that the response rate of 41% was higher than the sector average (36%) but lower than previous years (50% in 2019, 59% in 2017).

Overall satisfaction was 79% - this is the same figure as the overall sector score. In the sector benchmarking reports, Imperial was in the top quartile in areas such as resources and research culture but were in the lowest quartile for supervision, progression and responsibilities. Performance also varied between disciplines in comparison to the global benchmarks.

5.2 PRES 2021 Task and Finish Group update [PRQC.2021.05]

5.2.1 It was reported that a Task and Finish Group had been convened to assess the impact of actions from the 2019 College PRES action plan and discuss the 2021 PRES results.

The group held its first meeting on 29 October and focussed on the categories where Imperial had scored in the bottom quartile as well as responses to the COVID-19 section. The following points had been noted:

- Although supervision scores were low, these had increased slightly from the 2019 and 2017 surveys
- Scores for progression and responsibilities were almost unchanged from the previous survey
- COVID-19 scores were above the global benchmark.
- Many comments in the COVID-19 section were negative about the communications – this was during a period where the College was itself unsure of government direction making it harder to provide clear guidance
- The lack of funded extensions for first year PhD students which was raised in comments had been discussed by the College Research Committee. It agreed that students who were in the first year of three-year funded programmes could apply for an extension.

It is planned for the group to meet two further times to review results in the other question categories. A finalised action plan will be presented to PRQC at its

February meeting.

- 5.3 Each department has received its results and is reviewing its action plan. Members were reminded that departmental action plans should be considered by the relevant faculty committee. It was agreed that the updated faculty PRES action plans should be submitted to the February PRQC meeting. It was agreed that faculties should be contacted to request they set clear deadlines for departments to have updated their action plans and the need to submit the faculty plan to the next meeting.

Action: Secretary

- 5.4 The ICU President noted that there were large differences in the results across departments, with some departments showing low scores across several areas. They are doing their own analysis of the results with a departmental performance focus and will make this available at a later date. The meeting agreed that departmental PGR student representatives should be involved with formulating the action plan in their department.

6. International PhD Task and Finish Group [PRQC.2021.06]

- 6.1 The meeting reviewed the draft recommendations from an International PhD Task and Finish Group which was instigated by the College Research Committee. This group was tasked with reviewing the current models of research collaboration and investigating whether these remain appropriate in the light of Brexit and COVID-19.

- 6.2 The group considered the following recommendations:
1. Ensure terminology is clearly defined and consistently used
 2. Review the Split PhD/PRI schemes with a view to combining these with the Collaborative PhD scheme with strategic partners
 3. Permit the consideration of joint PhDs subject to exceptionally high academic, financial, administrative, and quality requirements
 4. Review the use of the current Occasional (Visiting) student route to support PGR mobility
 5. Pilot a Remote Support PhD programme with Imperial staff providing remote supervision to students studying PhDs at universities in their own country

- 6.3 The following points were raised in discussion:
- The need for consistency and clarity in relation to the terminology was welcomed
 - For recommendation number 2, the group had proposed a minimum attendance period of six months at Imperial. It was agreed this should be changed to 12 months, so students remain eligible for a Graduate Worker Route visa
 - It was expected a very high bar would be set for any joint PhD proposal to succeed but it was felt important to have a clear route for consideration
 - Departments use the Occasional Student route in a number of different ways, and it was important to understand these approaches before

recommending any changes

- 6.4 The Remote Support PhD programme would be a new area for Imperial. One strand under consideration is supporting academic staff at universities in Low- or Middle-Income Countries (LMICs) to gain PhDs from their own institutions. The other possibility being explored is a cohort model, similar to a CDT, with a central body in the country/region working with local students and supervisors and co-ordinating with Imperial. In both cases, the degree would come from the local university – students would not be registered for an Imperial research degree.
- 6.5 If the recommendations are approved, the paper suggested that working groups be set up to manage the implementation. It would be important to ensure that there was appropriate representation on these groups such as the Graduate School and that they work closely together as there will be areas where work may overlap.
- 6.6 It was noted that Turing funding can be used to support outgoing PGR mobility. This is positive although it would be hoped that such mobility is reciprocal as a way of building links with partners. This may be something for the proposed working group for this recommendation to consider.
- 6.7 The committee supported the recommendations, but members were invited to contact Alex Page if they had further comments.
- 6.8 The paper will also be reviewed by the College Research Committee. Following this, final recommendations will be sent to Provost's Board for approval.

7. Turnitin Implementation Group update

- 7.1 It was reported that, following Senate's decision to pause implementation of Turnitin for thesis submission for the 2021-22 academic year, a working group had been set up to consider the ongoing concerns and operational issues.
- 7.2 One of the main concerns was the External Examiner access to the interpretation report where there were concerns regarding timing and support for them to fulfil this duty. The procedure has now been amended that only the Internal Examiner will have access and responsibility for interpreting the Turnitin report.
- 7.3 One ongoing operational issue was the lack of linkage between My Imperial and Blackboard which means students must submit the thesis twice. This has been raised with the Student Lifecycle Administration Board.
- 7.4 The Departments of Mechanical Engineering and Surgery and Cancer have volunteered to pilot the new process between January and April 2022. Further recommendations will then be made to the May PRQC meeting.

8. Cornerstone supervisor training and development programme update

- 8.1 Members received an update on the progress of a new supervisor training and development programme which PGR students had opted to name 'Cornerstone'. The programme is being developed and it is intended to launch the first phase after Christmas. A dedicated Teaching Fellow had been recruited to support this work.
- 8.2 A programme development group has been set up with representation from the Graduate School, Educational Development Unit, Post-Doc Development Centre, and People and Organisational Development to ensure new and existing training is properly linked together. It is intended that anything related to supervisor training and support will appear under the Cornerstone umbrella.

Part 3 – Matters for Information

9. Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Staff Partnership [PRQC.2021.07]

- 9.1 Members were reminded that this document should be discussed by the supervisor and student within the first three months of the student starting the degree. It should also be discussed at the first meeting of the academic year in the relevant Student Staff Committee.

10. List of Partner Research Institutions, Split PhDs and Imperial Recognised Locations [PRQC.2021.08]

- 10.1 The meeting noted the document.

11. PRQC subcommittees

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

- (i) Minutes of the CDT-DTP Governance Committee held on 12 May 2021
[PRQC.2021.09]
- (ii) Minutes of the Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 4 March 2021
[PRQC.2021.10]

12. Dates of future meetings

- 12.1 Meetings will be held as follows:

Wednesday 16 February 2022: 14.10 – 16.30

Tuesday 10 May 2022: 14.10 – 16.30

13. Any Other Business

- 13.1 None reported.