

## Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

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**4 November 2015**

### Confirmed Minutes

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#### **Present**

Professor Sue Gibson (Chair and Director of the Graduate School)  
Dr Tim Albrecht (Chemistry)  
Ms Melanie Albright (Bioengineering) [representing Dr Anil Bharath]  
Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)  
Dr Simon Archer (College Tutor)  
Dr Marco Aurisicchio (Design Engineering)  
Professor David Dye (Materials)  
Dr Christine Franey (School of Public Health) [representing Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin]  
Professor Andrew Holmes (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)  
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)  
Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering) [representing Professor Amparo Galindo]  
Professor Stefan Maier (Physics)  
Dr Michael McGarvey (Medicine) [representing Dr Kevin Murphy]  
Dr Felicity Mellor (School of Professional Development)  
Dr Alessandra Russo (Computing)  
Mr Chun-Yin San (ICU Deputy President, Education)  
Dr Mike Tennant (Centre for Environmental Policy)  
Dr Mark Ungless (MRC Clinical Sciences Centre)  
Professor Tommaso Valletti (Business School)  
Dr Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)  
Professor Denis Wright (Director of Student Support)

#### **In Attendance**

Dr Krysia Broda (Computing) – in attendance for items 6 and 7  
Ms Laura McConnell (Graduate School Manager) – in attendance for item 8  
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 Andrew Amis (Mechanical Engineering)  
Dr Anil Bharath (Bioengineering)  
Dr Donna Brown (Crick Doctoral Centre)  
Dr Bernadette Byrne (Chair of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee)  
Professor Amparo Galindo (Chemical Engineering)  
Dr Niki Gounaris (Life Sciences)  
Professor Debra Humphris (Vice Provost, Education)  
Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)  
Professor Peter Lindstedt (College Consul)  
Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director and NHLI)  
Dr Kevin Murphy (Medicine)  
Mr Dean Pateman (Academic Registrar)  
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)

**3. Terms of Reference and Membership**

The Committee agreed the terms of reference and membership of the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee 2015-16.

**PRQC/2015/01**

**4. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2015 were approved.

**PRQC/2015/02**

**5. Matters arising**

5.1 The Committee received and noted an action list detailing matters arising from the previous meeting and containing updates on progress in completing the required action.

**PRQC/2015/03**

5.2 Minute 5.1.5 – Precept Review: Hong Kong University Joint Degree Programme – It was reported that further discussion was necessary to determine whether it would be beneficial to develop a bespoke student handbook template for joint and collaborative research programmes which could be adapted at local level to accommodate programme specific information. A further update would be provided at a future meeting.

5.3 Minute 9 – Research Degree Submission Data – It was reported that further discussions would take place regarding the future presentation and format of research degree submission data prior to its annual submission to the May 2016 meeting of the Committee.

5.3.1 MPhil and PhD Submission Rate Data 2014/15

5.3.2 The Committee considered a report of submission rates for students due to submit for an MPhil or PhD during the period 1 February 2014 to 31 January 2015.

**PRQC/2015/03(a)**

5.3.3 It was noted that the report had been compiled in response to requests at the previous meeting for access to more current data. The reporting period was therefore closer to the date of the meeting than had previously been the case.

5.3.4 The representative of the Business School reported that the submission rate data as presented did not correspond with locally held records in the Business School. It was agreed that the Registry would discuss this further with the Business School following the meeting to identify the possible cause(s) of the discrepancy.

**Action: Secretary, Head of Student Records and Data and Business School Representative**

5.3.5 In discussion the Committee identified some limitations with the current presentation of the data. In particular Committee members highlighted that the data did not clearly show the number of students who had transferred to MPhil from PhD. The Committee also felt that the data would be improved if it could also present information on the length of time taken by those students who did not submit on time to eventually complete their programme.

5.3.6 It was agreed that the Registry, in discussion with the Chair of the Committee, would take account of the Committee's views in reviewing the content and presentation of the data for its next scheduled submission to the May 2016 meeting.

**Action: Secretary, Head of Student Records and Data and PRQC Chair**

5.4 The Committee agreed that the remaining matters arising were either ongoing or that appropriate action had been taken since the last meeting.

## **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **6. New 4 Year PhD Programme in High Performance, Embedded and Distributed Systems (HiPEDS)**

6.1 The Committee considered a proposal from the Departments of Computing and Electrical and Electronic Engineering to introduce a new 4 year PhD programme in High Performance, Embedded and Distributed Systems (HiPEDS), with effect from October 2016.

**PRQC/2015/04**

6.1.1 The Committee noted that the 4 year PhD programme would replace the existing 1+3 programme in HiPEDS, which commenced in October 2014. The Committee further noted that the Department had found the MRes programme to be a deterrent to some outstanding applicants, as they had already studied for 5 years as an undergraduate and Master's student. The Department required an MSc or MEng for entry to the programme and therefore felt that some applicants would wish to start PhD research immediately. Additionally, some scholarships did not cover MRes studies. The Department was confident that its aspirations for the CDT could still be met with the proposed integrated programme.

6.1.2 The Committee approved the milestones outlined in the document presented, noting that the milestones varied from the standard PhD milestones to align with the four year training schedule. The alternative milestones were agreed on the basis that the PhD programme consisted of a highly structured first year, resembling an MRes programme, which enabled the Early Stage Assessment to occur at 12 months. It was emphasised that the College requirement for final thesis submission within 48 months of initial registration remained unchanged.

6.1.3 The Committee agreed to recommend that the proposed 4 Year PhD programme in High Performance, Embedded and Distributed Systems (HiPEDS) be approved by Senate, with effect from October 2016.

### **7. Department of Computing Doctoral Teaching Scholar Programme [DTS]**

7.1 The Committee received a progress report on Year 4 [2014-15] of the Doctoral Teaching Scholar programme, presented by Dr Krysia Broda, the Scheme Coordinator (succeeded by Dr Tony Field with effect from 1 October 2015). 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. This includes approximately 1 year of teaching experience duties within the Department and 3 months study time for the PG Certificate.

**PRQC/2015/05**

7.1.1 It was reported that the scholars (up to the end of the 2014-15 session) recruited in 2011, 2012 and 2013 were all on target to complete on time. Four scholars had been appointed in 2014 and all appeared to be enjoying the scheme. The three scholars recruited in 2011 and 2012 had completed the PG Certificate, two of whom had also become Higher Education Academy (HEA) associates with the 2011 entrant also in the process of applying to become an associate. The Committee also noted that the Department had continued its commitment to support the programme and had appointed three new scholars for 2015.

7.1.2 It was reported that all of the students on the programme were progressing well and completing their milestones on time. Three of the first four scholars were likely to finish in the normal 4 year period for a PhD, rather than the 4.5 years permitted. Students on the programme were gaining a variety of teaching experience including tutoring, project supervision, tutorial and laboratory planning and lectures. All of the scholars had taught on a variety of undergraduate courses and achieved good results in the SOLE surveys. One had been voted best Engineering Faculty Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA), with another receiving the runner up award.

- 7.1.3 The Committee considered whether there was a need to continue with the requirement for the Department to submit an annual progress report, given the good progress of students on the programme since its inception in 2011. The Committee noted that this was the fourth annual report received since the programme had commenced and that there had not been any significant issues arising from any of the reports. Although the Committee had previously agreed in November 2014 that the Department should continue to provide a short progress report for the next three years (2015-2017 inclusive) it took the view that this was no longer necessary in light of the good progress of students through the programme. The Committee therefore agreed that this would be the final routine progress report.

## **8. Working Party for World Class Research Supervision**

- 8.1 The Committee considered the final report of the Working Party for World Class Research Supervision.

**PRQC/2015/06**

- 8.1.1 The Committee noted that one of the strategic aims set out in the College's Education and Student Strategy, published in Autumn 2013 and now incorporated within the College Strategy 2015-20, was for the College to achieve international recognition for a distinctive education. This had in turn led to the development through extensive consultation of a Doctoral Proposition which outlined what postgraduate research students could expect of their education and wider student experience at the College.

- 8.1.2 It was further noted that the Doctoral Proposition stated that Imperial would provide a world class research programme throughout which internationally acclaimed academics would support, inspire and challenge students as they developed into independent researchers. The Working Party for World-Class Research Supervision, reporting to the Vice Provost's Advisory Group for Education (VPAGE) and the Vice Provost's Advisory Group for Research (VPAGR), had been established by the Graduate School to develop this part of the proposition.

- 8.1.3 It was reported that during the 2014-15 academic year the Graduate School had carried out a number of activities as part of the project (as outlined in Section 2 of the Committee's paper). There had been widespread consultation with staff and students to ascertain what constituted world-class research supervision. The recommendations within the final report had been developed in response to these consultations.

- 8.1.4 The Committee discussed a number of the recommendations in detail, in particular some of the recommendations relating to progression, professional skills, student wellbeing, research culture and funding. Whilst recognising that there were some issues that would need to be addressed and some minor refinement of the recommendations in order for them to be implemented in full the Committee was nevertheless content to approve the recommendations contained within the Working Party's report.

- 8.1.5 It was further noted that the Working Party's final report would be submitted to the next meeting of Senate and also to VPAGE and VPAGR with the intention of implementing the recommendations from 2016-17.

## **9. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2015**

- 9.1 The Committee considered Departmental responses to the PRES 2015 results. In addition to this paper the responses from the Institute of Clinical Sciences and the Business School were tabled at the meeting.

**PRQC/2015/07**

- 9.1.1 The Committee noted that the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee had agreed at its meeting in May 2013 that Directors of Postgraduate Studies should be asked to comment on their Departmental results and formulate an action plan and that these should be considered by the PRQC in the Autumn. A summary of themes and

trends would subsequently be reported to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee and the Senate.

9.1.2 Committee members were reminded that at the 15 May 2015 meeting it had been agreed that the survey results and action plan should be discussed at Staff Student Committees (SSC) and should be signed off by at least one of the student representatives and the SSC Chair as confirmation that this step had taken place.

9.1.3 It was noted that the following Departmental responses and action plans were outstanding and it was agreed that these would be requested from the Departments concerned:

- Aeronautics
- Electrical and Electronic Engineering
- Materials
- Mathematics
- Mechanical Engineering
- Surgery and Cancer

**ACTION: Registry Surveys Team**

9.1.4 In discussion a number of Departmental Representatives commented that participation rates had been lower than anticipated. It was noted that postgraduate research students had been asked to participate in the World-Class Research Supervision survey two weeks before the PRES and that this may potentially have led to survey fatigue and therefore affected participation in the PRES. The Committee determined that it would be beneficial to avoid scheduling major surveys in such close proximity in the future.

9.1.5 In further discussion the Committee was advised that two Departments had experienced an issue whereby a number of eligible students had not been included in the survey and it was unclear why this had occurred. In order to ensure that all eligible students were included in the survey in future it was suggested that the Registry Surveys Team send a list of eligible students to Departments in advance of the survey for checking.

**ACTION: Registry Surveys Team**

9.1.6 Having reviewed the action plans the Committee was content that each Department had fully addressed the PRES results and had adequately responded to its students.

**10. Review of Departmental Research Degree Provision: Periodic Reviews**

The Committee was reminded that the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee had agreed a new procedure for consideration of periodic review reports in 2014-15, intended to simplify the consideration of review reports. 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 now be led by the Committee Chair.

**10.1 Department of Chemical Engineering**

10.1.1 The Committee considered the periodic review of research degree provision in the Department of Chemical Engineering, including the report of the review Panel and the Department's response to the report. The periodic review took place on 9 July 2015.

**PRQC/2015/08**

10.1.2 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.

10.1.3 The Committee congratulated the Department on the significant number of instances of good practice highlighted by the Panel, noting in particular that the Panel had

commended the Department's PhD scholarship scheme, the excellent support provided to early-career researchers and the strong leadership of the Department which was supported by a clear strategy for the future direction and development of postgraduate research.

- 10.1.4 The review panel had made eight 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. The Committee noted in particular the Department's plans to repackage its internal research structures to improve clarity, the redefinition of the role of the Academic Mentor and the enhancement of its postgraduate committee structures which included the addition of student representation on its Postgraduate Studies Committee.
- 10.1.5 It was agreed that the report would be presented to Senate with the recommendation that the Department of Chemical 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.

## **11. Proposals to Establish New Student Exchange Partners**

### **11.1 University of Hong Kong (HKU)**

- 11.1.1 The Committee considered a proposal to establish a postgraduate student exchange scheme with the University of Hong Kong (HKU).

**PRQC/2015/09**

- 11.1.2 The Committee noted that the proposed scheme would replace the existing Imperial/HKU collaboration for the joint PhD programme. Having conducted a review of the joint PhD programme the College had determined that a more flexible PhD exchange scheme be developed which would maintain the institutional links developed through the joint PhD programme whilst giving more students the opportunity to spend time at partner institutions. It was anticipated that 3-6 students from each institution would join the programme each year. The Committee further noted that the duration of the agreement was 3 years.

- 11.1.3 The Committee approved the proposal to establish a postgraduate student exchange scheme with HKU.

### **11.2 National University of Singapore (NUS)**

- 11.2.1 The Committee considered a proposal to establish a postgraduate student exchange scheme with the National University of Singapore (NUS).

**PRQC/2015/10**

- 11.2.2 The Committee noted that the proposed scheme would replace the existing Imperial/NUS collaboration for the joint PhD programme. Having conducted a review of the joint PhD programme the College had determined that a more flexible PhD exchange scheme be developed which would maintain the institutional links developed through the joint PhD programme whilst giving more students the opportunity to spend time at partner institutions. It was anticipated that 3-6 students from each institution would join the programme each year. The Committee further noted that the duration of the agreement was 3 years.

- 11.2.3 The Committee approved the proposal to establish a postgraduate student exchange scheme with NUS.

## **12. Postgraduate Professional Development Committee**

- 12.1 The Committee received and noted the confirmed minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee meeting held on 22 April 2015 and the unconfirmed minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2015.

**PRQC/2015/11 & 12**

### **ITEMS FOR REPORT**

#### **13. Chair's Action**

- 13.1 Members were asked to note action taken by the Chair to approve an exceptional variation to the Examination Regulations of the joint Imperial/NUS PhD programme for one graduating student.

- 13.1.1 It was noted that this action related to an issue where the Examination Regulations had not been followed in their entirety for the student concerned. Specifically, the External Examiner had not been physically present at the PhD examination but had produced a report which would have been taken into account when the examination panel arrived at its final decision. NUS had also confirmed that it had taken action internally to ensure that the issue did not reoccur. It had therefore been approved as an exceptional variation to the regulations so as not to disadvantage the student and in order to allow them to proceed to conferment.

#### **14. Senate**

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

#### **15. Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee**

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

#### **16. Any Other Business**

There was no other business raised for discussion.

#### **17. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Friday 4 March 2016. The meeting will start at 10:00. The deadline for papers is Friday 19 February 2016.

#### **18. Dates of following meetings**

Tuesday 10 May 2016 at 10.00am

#### **19. Reserved Business (not circulated to student members)**

##### **19.1 Special Cases Panel – Doctoral Programmes 2015-16**

The Committee received and approved the updated membership of the special cases panel for Doctoral programmes for the 2015-16 session.

**PRQC/2015/13**

##### **19.2 Special Cases Reports**

The Committee received reports on special cases as follows:

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

**PRQC/2015/14**

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

**PRQC/2015/15**

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

**PRQC/2015/16**