Imperial College London

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Minutes of the meeting held on 11 May 2018 at 14:00 in Ballroom, 58 Prince's Gate, South Kensington Campus

Present

Professor Sue Gibson (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Dr Anil Bharath (Bioengineering)
Nick Burstow (ICU Deputy President, Education)
Professor Daniele Dini (Mechanical Engineering)
Dr Matthew Fuchter (Chemistry)
Professor Amparo Galindo (Chemical Engineering)
Professor Uta Griesenbach (NHLI) [representing Professor Tony Magee]
Dr Hamed Haddadi (Design Engineering)
Professor Andrew Holmes (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)
Dr Sally Leevers (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)
Dr Bill Proud (Physics)
Professor Eduardo Saiz (Materials)
Dr Tony Southall (Life Sciences) [representing Dr Kleoniki Gounaris]
Dr Mark Ungless (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr James Wilton-Ely (Surgery and Cancer) [representing Professor Michael Seckl]
Dr Jeremy Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Scott Tucker (Assistant Registrar, Monitoring and Review, Registry) [Secretary]

In Attendance

Hannah Bannister (Director of Student Services) [Item 6.1, Paper PRQC.2017.33]
Professor Paul French (Vice Dean, Research) [Item 5.1, Paper PRQC.2017.32]
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School) [Item 6.1, Paper PRQC.2017.33]
Professor Peter Lindstedt (Senior Consul) [Item 8.1, Paper PRQC.2017.36]

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Committee welcomed colleagues in attendance and alternates.

1.2 The following apologies for absence were received:

Alexandre Adler (PhD Student Representative)
Professor Simone Buitendijk (Vice-Provost, Education)
Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
Professor Jonathan Haskel (Business School)
Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)
Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director and NHLI)
Luke McCrone (GSU President)
Professor Alessandra Russo (Computing)
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)
Dr Peter Vincent (Aeronautics)
Paul Wan (PhD Student Representative)
Professor Yun Xu (College Consul)

2. Constitution & Membership 2018-19 [PRQC.2017.29]

2.1 The Committee approved in principle, the PRQC membership for 2018-19, which included the following changes:

- Dr Chiu Fan Lee (Bioengineering) [for Dr Anil Bharath]
- Alejandro Luy (ICU Deputy President, Education) [for Nick Burstow]

2.2 Members were advised to communicate any further updates to the Secretary.

2.3 The PRQC terms of reference, including any revisions, will be presented at the next meeting on 24 October 2018.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting [PRQC.2017.30]

3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 February 2018, subject to a minor amendment.

3.2 The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following actions, which were scheduled for May 2018 completion:

(i) <u>Data on Cases of Late Submission 2015-16 (Feb 2017, 7.1.3)</u>

It is anticipated that, following further data quality checks by the Student Records and Data Team, a comparison of ESA/LSR completion rates between on-time and late case thesis submission students will be provided in the next iteration of the report (see Item 16.2, Paper PRQC.2017.43). Action ongoing.

(ii) Submission Data (May 2017, 9.1)
Thesis submission data for the 2017-18 academic year will be presented at the PRQC in October 2018. As well as submission rates, the Student Records and Data Team will collate data relating to other examination outcomes such as 'pass – 3 month revisions' and 'referred for resubmission'. Action ongoing.

(iii) Late Cases: Proposal to introduce an additional fee for CRS beyond the maximum period of registration (May 2017, 16.1.4)
The initial late cases proposal considered by PRQC in May 2017 is part of a wider conversation around how the College registers students. As a result, the Head of Academic Services/Head of Student Records and Data have asked for a full review of writing up status. The implementation of Banner has added an additional level of complexity. Action ongoing.

(iv) Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 (February 2018, 5.7)
A College level PRES summary was considered (see Item 7.3, PRQC.2017.35). Action complete.

(v) Precepts Reviews of Postgraduate Research Programmes (February 2018, 6.2.3)
College guidance for recording ESA and LSR milestones was considered (see Item 9.2, PRQC.2017.38). Action complete.

(vi) Special Cases Reports, February 2018, 14.1.3
Reasons for Special Cases for Examination Arrangements were clarified in the documentation (see Item 16.1.ii, PRQC.2017.41). Action complete.

4. Matters arising

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

5. RCUK-funded doctoral studentship pathway [PRQC.2017.32]

5.1 A review of the RCUK-funded Doctoral Studentship process has been carried out by Professor Paul French (Vice Dean, Research) and Dr Suzanne Rolfe (Funding Strategy Manager, Research Office). A key driver of the project was to prepare for changes in roles and responsibilities that will occur as a consequence of the impending retirement of Malcolm Aldridge (Financial Controller). The Committee noted that Sue Ponter (Head of Financial Planning and Analysis) will take on some roles and responsibilities previously undertaken by the Financial Controller.

5.2 The review paper was first presented to the Vice-Provost's Advisory Group for Research (VPAGR), who agreed with the view for this project to be a joint effort with Education. The review recommendations were then presented to the Learning and Teaching Committee (LTC). Whilst the feedback received was mainly positive, LTC highlighted that additional action was required to provide pastoral care beyond the academic supervisory support. A review of pastoral care structures carried out by the Graduate School (Item 6.1, Paper

PRQC.2017.33) seeks to address LTC's concerns as well as follow on from the work undertaken by the World-Class Research Supervision Task and Finish Group.

6 College pastoral care structures

6.1 The Committee considered a review of pastoral care structures across departments [PRQC.2017.33].

6.2 The Committee acknowledged that there are a growing number of reports which show a decline in the wellbeing of UK students, with serious incidents of suicide and stress related disorders being reported (UUK, 2015). As a result, higher education institutions are considering how better to support the mental health and wellbeing of their students.

6.3 The review of pastoral care structures undertaken by the Graduate School follows on from the World-Class Research Supervision Task and Finish Group and draws upon data collected from the World Class Research Supervision Student Survey, PRES 2015, PRES 2017, and subsequent student focus groups. Feedback indicates that the main reason why PGR students feel unhappy relates to a breakdown in the student-supervisor partnership.

6.4 One of the recommendations of the World-Class Research Supervision Task and Finish Group was for the College to 'review and strengthen the role of Head of Department, Director of Postgraduate Studies, Postgraduate Tutor and Academic Mentor with respect to supporting the student-supervisor partnership.'

6.5 The Committee agreed that the College should continue to adopt the following principles:

i) All Departments should appoint a PG Tutor, whose primary role is to lead the department's PGR pastoral care support
ii) PG Tutors should continue to lead discussions about the pastoral care and welfare of research students in their department. These individuals will play a key role in Departmental Focus on Best Practice in Supervision workshops and will attend departmental and, where appropriate, Faculty level PG Staff Student Committees
iii) Research students will also have access to their Director of Postgraduate Studies, the department's Postgraduate Student representatives and the Unions
iv) At a Faculty level, all research students have access to a Faculty Senior Tutor, whose role is to ensure the delivery of consistent, high quality support for students in their personal, general academic and professional development

6.6 Following discussion, the Committee recommended to QAEC, the following principles set out in the proposal:

(i) In addition to their supervisor(s) whose roles are primarily academic, all

research students should have access to a departmental support network, led by the PG Tutor

(ii) Departments are free to decide which support network / model they would like to adopt in their department subject to the following:
   - The network should involve individuals who will support the PG Tutor in their role. The individuals should be the "eyes and ears" of the PG Tutor and should raise concerns with the PG Tutor, when these arise. The purpose of this system is to ensure that the role of PG Tutor is pro-active rather than reactive and that a network of support and community is developed within departments
   - Members of the network should meet regularly but informally with students. Existing departmental events, seminars and group meetings could be utilised for this purpose
   - Departments are free to propose their own model but might include the following: a network of Deputy PG Tutors, each assigned to a group of students; a mentoring scheme; Cohort building; Buddy scheme for PhD students (buddies could be postdocs or PhD students in their later years); or PG student reps who regularly meet with the PG Tutor

6.7 Departments were asked to provide a short written summary of their network at the next PRQC on 24 October 2018.

Action: Directors of Postgraduate Study

It was highlighted that Departments will be asked how their networks are managed through the precepts review and periodic review processes.

6.8 To help embed these principles, the Committee recommended to QAEC, the formation of a working group to:

i) Explore how the proposed principles set out in the pastoral care structures paper can be effectively implemented over the student lifecycle
ii) Discuss non-prescriptive guidelines, to be produced by the Graduate School
iii) Discuss, if appropriate, any other areas such as the recording of ESA dates, oral assessment and sign-off.

Action: Secretary

6.9 To ensure the effective review of these principles, the Committee recommended to QAEC, the proposal to change the title of Precept 9 – 'Cohort Building', to the following:

Precept 9: Research Student Communities
Departments must make provision to allow research students to interact with their peers and should facilitate the existence of a collegial/scholarly community.

6.10 Furthermore, the Committee recommended to QAEC, the proposal to introduce a new precept:

Precept ['x']: Pastoral Care Network

Departments must make provision for a research student pastoral care network, led and managed by the PG Tutor. Departments are free to choose which model to use, but the model should be clearly communicated to students. Examples may include, cohort building, mentoring, or a buddy scheme.

6.11 In light of the changes already made to the personal tutoring system, namely that each taught student should have access to either a Senior Tutor (UG) or a Senior Tutor (PG), the Committee recommended to QAEC, the proposal that the Senior Tutor (PG) becomes Senior Tutor (PGT) and that the Postgraduate Tutor becomes Senior Tutor (PGR). The role of Senior Tutor (PGR) remains largely the same as the current role of PG Tutor but there are a few changes proposed which aim to strengthen this role and to reflect the principles described above.

6.12 In summary, the Committee recommended to QAEC:

i) That the College continues to adopt the principles set out in 6.5 i-iv
ii) That the College adopts the principles set out in 6.6 i-ii
iii) That Departments provide details of their pastoral support network at the next PRQC on 24 October 2018 (6.7)
iv) That a working group is convened to undertake the duties set out in 6.8 i-iii
v) That the title of precept 9 is changed from 'Cohort Building' to 'Research Student Communities' (6.9)
vi) That a new precept is introduced entitled 'Pastoral Care Network' (6.10)
vii) A change to the title of Senior Tutor (PG) to Senior Tutor (PGT) (6.11)
viii) A change to the title of Postgraduate Tutor to Senior Tutor (PGR) (6.11)
ix) That the Roles and Responsibilities Senior Tutor (PGR) document is revised to address the proposed changes set out in 6.11.

7 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017

7.1 The Committee received a brief verbal PRES update from the Department of Chemistry as, due to staff absence, it was not possible to receive this at the previous meeting when the PRES response and action plan from the Faculty of Natural Sciences was presented.

7.1.1 Areas of good practice were reported in the following areas: progress and assessment; research skills; professional development; and opportunities/GTA training. Opportunities for enhancement were reported in the following areas: supervision; resources; research culture; and completion.

7.2 The Committee received the PRES response and action plan from the Faculty of Engineering [PRQC.2017.34].

7.2.1 The Faculty of Engineering reported a higher percentage satisfaction than the College average in eight of the ten categories above. Satisfaction was equal to the College average in the remaining two categories (Professional Development and Participation).

7.2.2 The Committee noted examples of good practice across the Faculty including:

- Supervision: Monitoring of supervisors' feedback through their PhD student's milestones evaluation reports (3 months, 9 months, 24 months, and 36 months).
- Resources: Using a centralised space database to keep track of all research desks which can quickly highlight space constraints at key points in the year e.g. start of term.
- Progress and Assessment: Clear communication about the thesis preparation process.
- Responsibilities: The Women's Tutor, PGR Tutor, Deputy Director of Research and Director of Research keep close contact with students and engage promptly with students' requests.
- Research skills: Workshops are offered to develop research skills, e.g. paper writing, and paper reviewing.

7.2.3 The Committee noted the following Faculty key priority areas:

- Development of a PhD milestones tracking system
- Exploration of alternative options for delivering GTA training with the Graduate School.

7.3 The Committee considered a College level PRES summary [PRQC.2017.35].

7.3.1 The summary included areas of good practice noted at PQRC on 21 February (PRQC.2017.20) and set out in paper PRQC.2017.34.

7.3.2 The Committee noted College level actions in the following areas:

- Providing feedback to students (i.e. what constitutes feedback?) – addressed by the Graduate School
- Space Constraints - addressed through the College Space Sharing Programme
- Access to Library Resources – resolved by the CEP librarian

8 Periodic Review of Postgraduate Research Programmes

8.1 The Committee considered the report and Departmental response from the periodic review of postgraduate research provision in the Department of Mathematics, which took place on 22 January 2018 [PRQC.2017.36].

8.2 The periodic review report highlighted a number of areas of good practice including: an effective induction programme; improved monitoring mechanisms for milestones; reading groups; engage with employers; and student-led initiatives.

8.3 In addition, the chair of the review panel reiterated to the Committee the importance of the Postgraduate Administrator (Mr Anderson Santos) who is organised, approachable and makes a significant positive contribution to the overall student experience.

8.4 It was reported that the external reviewers felt the review process was well-conducted, rigorous, and a useful exercise to enhance the quality of PGR provision across the College.

8.5 The Committee confirmed the outcome of the periodic review as 'full confidence' and recommend to QAEC that the College follows-up as part of the precepts review in three years' time, as per the normal review cycle.

9 Academic Regulations and policy

9.1 The Committee considered proposed revisions to the Regulations for the award of MPhil and PhD, for October 2018 implementation [PRQC.2017.37].

9.1.1 At present, there is a separate set of research degree regulations for students registering before January 2011 and those registering in and after January 2011. A full review of the Regulations for the award of MPhil and PhD will take place in 2019.

9.1.2 In the interim, the Committee recommended to QAEC, revisions to the following sections, for October 2018 implementation (if approved, the proposed changes will be applied to both sets of research degree regulations):

- 4.1 - Reference to the Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Supervisor
- Partnership
- 4.7 - Partner Research Institutions and Split PhDs
- 7.2d - Student choice regarding Creative Commons licence

9.2 The Committee considered the current College guidance for recording ESA and LSR milestones and an audit undertaken of ESA and LSR practices across departments [PRQC.2017.38]

9.2.1 The Committee noted that there is currently mixed practice across the College as to what the ESA and LSR dates refer. Following an internal audit, it was evident that departments record ESA and LSR dates as either 1. Date of submission 2. Date of assessment or 3. Date of DPS approval/sign off. The majority of departments fall under '2 Date of assessment'. Although the College's Student Information Management Programme (SIMP) might lead to the development of a central record system which allows all three dates to be recoded in a systematic way, the Committee agreed that, in the interim, all departments should follow current College guidance, which states that:

- ESA 'will be determined by an examination, held 9 months (18 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration'
- (Regarding LSR) that 'a review of a student's PhD research ability must be undertaken between 18 and 24 months (between 30 and 36 months for part time students) after the date of initial registration'

As a result, all ESA and LSR dates should refer to the date of assessment, not the date of submission or sign-off. The Committee agreed the importance of current students not being disadvantaged so, for example, where a student has been directed to submit ESA documentation at 9 months, this timeline should remain. Departments not currently recording ESA and LSR dates as the date of assessment will be required to do so from 1 October 2018. Appropriate internal mechanisms to arrange an ESA within 9 months and a LSR within 24 months should be put in place.

Action: Secretary

9.3 The Committee considered the current College guidance for the approval of Partner Research Institutions (PRIs) and Split PhDs [PRQC.2017.39].

9.3.1 The College occasionally permits students to carry out some research for a PhD away from College under approved conditions. Two arrangements allow for this: 1. Split PhD and 2. PRI Scheme. College guidance is clear on how students are guided and the minimum attendance required at the College under both arrangements, however there is some overlap between the two process and further clarity is needed.

9.3.2 The Committee agreed that consultation should be carried out with the Research Office as well as an exploration of the procedures at other institutions. Revised draft guidance, with accompanying flowcharts if appropriate, should be presented at a future PRQC.

Action: Secretary

10 Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Supervisor Partnership

10.1 The Committee noted a minor revision to the Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Supervisor Partnership document, to reflect that annual leave includes bank holidays. Approved by Chairs action 27 February 2018.

11 Graduate School

11.1 The Committee noted the Graduate School Annual Report 2016-17.

12 Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)

12.1 The Committee noted the latest minutes from QAEC.

13 Senate

13.1 The Committee noted the latest minutes from Senate.

14 Any Other Business

14.1 The Committee received a request from the Faculty of Natural Sciences to

extend the Early Stage Assessment for PGR Chemistry students by three months to September 2018.

14.1.1 It was explained that this will allow students to continue work in the laboratories, whilst these are still operational at the South Kensington Campus, and use downtime during the move to White City to write their ESA reports.

14.1.2 The Committee agreed that this is a very sensible approach and will ensure students face the minimum disruption to their studies as a result of the move. However, the Committee emphasised that the Department of Chemistry must be responsible for any ramifications beyond the College that this request leads to, such as failure at ESA leading to loss of studentship under funder rules, for example.

14.1.3 The Committee recommended to QAEC that the ESA for PGR Chemistry students is extended to 27th September 2018. If approved by QAEC (to be noted at Senate), relevant parties including the Dean of Faculty, Head of Department, DPS, Research Degrees Team and Graduate School will be informed.

Action: Secretary

15 Dates of 2018/19 meetings

15.1 The Committee confirmed the following dates:

- Wednesday 24 October 2018, 14:00-16:30, Room G01, RSM
- Wednesday 20 February, 2019, 14:00-16:30, Room G01, RSM
- Wednesday 15 May 2019, 14:00-16:30, Room G01, RSM

15.2 The Chair thanked committee members for their contributions at PRQC throughout the 2017-18 academic year and, in particular, the student representatives: Nick Burstow; Luke McCrone; and Paul Wan.

16 Special Cases Reports

16.1 The Committee received the following reports considered by the Special Cases Panel for Research Programmes as of May 2018:

(i) Special Cases for Admissions [PRQC.2017.40]
(ii) Special Cases for Examination Arrangements [PRQC.2017.41]
(iii) Special Cases for Late Entry [PRQC.2017.42]

16.2 The Committee considered the Annual PGR Special Cases Report (Thesis Submission) 2016/17 [PRQC.2017.43].

16.2.1 The PGR Special Cases Report (Thesis Submission) provides an overview of the number of late case requests submitted throughout the academic year, along with information on the reasons for, and duration of, late case periods.

16.2.1 144 late case requests were submitted to the Registry Research Degree Examinations Team for processing in the 2016/17 academic year. This accounts for 16% of the 904 thesis submissions expected in 2016/17 (a 3% increase from 13% in 2015/16).

16.2.2 The Committee discussed ESA and LSR completion rates for students who subsequently went on to submit a late case (for thesis submission). For these students, ESA on-time completion was 26% and LSR 7%. The Committee agreed that these figures were extremely low but asked that ESA and LSR data for on-time (thesis submission) students is provided in the next report.

Action: Secretary (via Research Degrees Team)