Imperial College London

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2020 at 14:00 via MS Teams

Present

Professor Yun Xu (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)
Dr Christos-Savvas Bouganis (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Ashley Brooks (ICU Deputy President (Education))
Professor Simone Buitendijk (Vice-Provost, Education)
Professor Laki Buluwela (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)
Emma Couves (Student Representative)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Mohit Devgan (GSU President)
Raya El Laham (Student Representative)
Dr Antonio Filieri (Computing)
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
Dr Hamed Haddadi (Design Engineering)
Milia Hasbani (Student Representative)
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Hannah Jones (Student Representative)
Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Dr Sally Leevers (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Professor Tony Magee (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)
Dr Enrique Martinez-Perez (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)
Robin Mowat (Centre for Academic English representative)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)
Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez (Mechanical Engineering)
Professor Carol Propper (Business)
Dr Bill Proud (Physics)
Professor Eduardo Saiz (Materials)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)

Professor John Seddon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr James Wilton-Ely (Chemistry)
Dr Jem Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Scott Tucker (Deputy Director, Academic Quality and Standards) [Secretary]
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review) [Secretary]

In Attendance

Judith Webster (Director, Academic Quality and Standards) [Item 4]
Andrew Williamson (Physics)

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Chair welcomed new members of the Committee, colleagues in place of existing members and non-members in attendance.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

David Ashton (Academic Registrar)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 12 February 2020 **[PRQC.2019.24a]** subject to the correction of the date of the next meeting to 13 May in item 10.1.

2.2 The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following actions due for completion by May 2020 **[PRQC.2019.24b]**:

(i) Proposed schedule for the review of postgraduate research regulations (February 2019, 5.1)

An updated set of academic regulations for postgraduate research degrees was on the agenda as item 4.

(ii) Imperial College Union PRES 2019 response (February 2019, 6.2.4)

The final report from the working group set up to consider the recommendations set out in the Imperial College Union PRES 2019 response was on the agenda as item 5.

(iii) Periodic Review (templates) (October 2018, 8.2.3)

The possibilities of the use of dashboards to provide supporting data for PGR Periodic Reviews is being explored with the Strategic Planning Office. In the interim period, Registry will continue to provide data via ICA reports.

Operational implementation of the proposed new procedure was still being discussed to ensure the new procedures could be administered correctly. It was confirmed that no students had been required to pay for printing copies of theses for examination.

(v) Persistent Identifiers for Research Data (October 2019, 5.2)

A paper had been received and would be circulated to members after the meeting for comment. This would be an agenda item for the October meeting.

(vi) Bursaries and Stipends (February 2020, 6.4)

It was reported that initial discussions had taken place within Registry in relation to support for students on 1+3 CDT programmes. Further meetings will be held with appropriate staff across Registry to ensure that current issues are resolved, and a new process is in place for October.

2.3 No further updates were required on the remaining ongoing actions.

3. Matters arising

3.1 No matters arising.

4. Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations [PRQC.2019.25]

4.1 The Committee considered the updated draft regulations for postgraduate research degrees. These updates reflected discussions held in the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations Working Group set up by PRQC.

4.2 It was reported that the document drew together regulations from a number of different documents with the aim of creating a single set of regulations that followed the student lifecycle.

4.3 The following points were raised in discussions:
- Entry requirements for intercalated PhDs and CDTs still needed consideration
- As the College still offers direct entry to a MPhil degree it was preferable to allow an option to transfer from the MPhil to a PhD which is not currently permitted
- The College must set out clearly any consequences in late completion or failure of the non-academic requirements of Early Stage Assessment (ESA) and Late Stage Review (LSR)
- Programme transfer requirements for MD(Res) and EngD degrees need to

be considered although few departments offer these routes.

4.4   The Committee discussed the timing of the ESA. It had been previously agreed by PRQC not to use date ranges so a 'hard' deadline of 12 months for the ESA to have taken place was proposed. However, it was not clear whether this included a re-submission period if this is required. The Committee considered timescales, and it was agreed to recommend that the ESA is held by ten months, which would allow two months for the student to complete any re-sit requirements. It was proposed that, through the approval process, CDTs should be able to propose alternate timescales according to the needs of the programme.

4.5   It was reported that, after the previous discussions at PRQC, UKRI had been contacted to query their position on student funding should a student withdraw after 12 months had passed. UKRI stated that unless College data shows completion rates below the threshold set out in the corresponding Research Council's terms and conditions, sanctions were unlikely to be imposed.

4.6   The Committee agreed that the draft was a positive development in the process of reviewing the regulations. It was felt that further meetings of the Postgraduate Research Degree Regulations Working Group were needed to consider specific topics:
- How CDTs are represented within the regulations
- Entry requirements for Intercalated PhDs
- Requirements for MD(Res) and EngD degrees
- Regulations and policies related to the Writing Up period
- Appeals processes for ESA and LSR
- Implementation of revised regulations for existing and new cohorts

4.6   Subsequent to these meetings taking place, a revised draft set of Postgraduate Research Degree regulations will be presented at the next PRQC on 21 October.
Action: Secretary

5.   **Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)**

5.1   **Report of the PRES 2019 Task and Finish Group [PRQC.2019.26]**

5.1.1   The Committee received the final report of the PRES 2019 Task and Finish Group. This group had been created to consider the recommendations from Imperial College Union in response to the 2019 PRES.

5.1.2   There were a number of recommendations across the following areas:

(i)   Research Culture and Environment
- Ensure oversight and review by departments, faculties and PRQC of progress on PRES action plans
- 'Communicating our Research Culture to Research Funders Working Group' (Culture Group) to report outcomes of work on the

research environment to PRQC.

- Explicit references to research culture and environment to be included in PRQC Terms of Reference and the Precept Review process
- Graduate School to undertake a college-wide review of supervisor support and development. Results to be reported to the Culture Group and PRQC
- The Graduate School to explore with Faculties whether a statement of minimum working conditions for PGR students could be developed.
- The Graduate School to work with CLCC and ICU to explore possibilities for further collaborations on PGR professional development opportunities

(ii) Effective Student-Supervisor Partnerships
- All departments to hold an annual meeting with research supervisors to review the mutual expectations document and other aspects of their role in supporting students
- Ensure departments monitor that students and staff have discussed the mutual expectations document within three months of starting degree.
- Mutual expectations document should be standing agenda item for the first meeting of all PGR SSCs each year
- The College will monitor discussion of the mutual expectations document is occurring via the ESA and Research Degree Precepts

(iii) Supervisor Support and Development Opportunities
- Outcomes of Graduate School review of supervisor support and development will be reported to Culture Group and PRQC for consideration, including how to deal with cases of poor supervision.
- Departments required to actively monitor the number of students per supervisor. This will be monitored via the Research Degree Precepts

(iv) Doctoral Student Wellbeing and Poor Supervision
- Research Degree Precept 10 to be amended to clarify that a member of staff assigned to provide pastoral support to a student is not involved in the student's assessment.
- A link to the Student Support Zone should be added to the mutual expectations document
- Members of staff with pastoral care responsibilities should receive appropriate training to support them in this role. The Graduate School will investigate what could be delivered.
- Faculties to be asked to contribute a total of £10k per year towards PGR community development. The amount each faculty pays

would be proportionate to the number of research students.

5.1.3   It was felt that Senior Tutors in faculties could contribute to staff training for supervisors and would be well placed to ensure that the support networks in the faculty are discussed as an agenda item at the Faculty SSCs.

5.1.4   The Committee recommended all the recommendations in the paper. Subject to approval by QAEC, where relevant, and endorsement by the VPAGR, these developments would be publicised to research degree students via the Graduate School newsletter. ICU and the Graduate School Union would also publicise this via their newsletters.

5.2   Update on Department PRES actions plans and Faculty responses

5.2.1   It was reported that FECs have considered department PRES actions plans and the Faculty responses for ICBS and Engineering had been circulated to PRQC members for information. Responses from Natural Sciences and Medicine were to follow.

6.   Response to COVID-19

6.1   Report on impact and proposed mitigations for COVID-19 [PRQC.2019.27]

6.1.2   The paper detailed the current actions being taken in response to COVID-19. There was a strong focus on taught programme issues, but the underlying principles would also apply to research degrees.

6.1.3   Specific issues that needed consideration for research degree students were noted as follows:
- Remote assessment requirements for students in the first year of a 1+3 CDT. Modifications to taught elements would need to go through the modification process
- Implementation of the safety net for students on the MRes/MSc section of a 1+3 CDT
- Impact of mandatory attendance requirements for students on Split PhDs or at PRIs who may be unable to travel to the UK
- Adjustment of the late case procedure to take account of COVID-19 impact
- Extensions to timelines for milestones and thesis submissions – as these are not automatic, departments will need to decide how to implement adjustments
- College position on TIER 4 students who will require a no-cost extension due to COVID-19 delays and may need visa extensions.

6.1.4   It was reported that a COVID-19 Research Group had been established. This group would consider specific issues for research degree students. A College policy on stipend extension is being agreed and will be published shortly. It was agreed that the Director of the Graduate School should seek guidance from the group regarding the no-cost extensions.

6.2   Summary of external guidance on the response to the COVID-19 pandemic [PRQC.2019.28]

6.2.1   The meeting noted the guidance from the Office for Students, Quality Assurance Agency and the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. It was reported that, although much of the guidance was published after decisions had already had to be taken by the College, it is felt that the College is compliant with its OfS conditions of registration.

6.2.2   Published QAA guidance to date has focussed on taught programmes. It may publish guidance on research degree programmes in the future.

6.3   UKRI Implementation Guidance for Training Grant Holders [PQRC.2019.29]

6.3.1   It was reported that some non-UKRI funders had also published guidance about extensions to stipends and the College will be publishing its policy for other funded students shortly. This will allow a funded extension of up to 3 months – this will need to be requested via a specific procedure (to be published) and will require departmental and central approval.

6.3.2   The CDT Governance Committee had discussed UKRI guidance on extensions. The requirement for extensions to be evidence-based was noted. Reporting deadlines for notifying extensions for final year students had been extended to 7 June. It is expected that extensions for UKRI-funded students in earlier years of the degree should be reported in autumn.

6.4   Update on PGR Periodic Reviews during remote working

6.4.1   Reviews are currently on hold due to COVID-19. Once it has been agreed to resume, departments will be contacted to set a mutually agreeable date.

7.   PRQC subcommittees

7.1   The Committee noted minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 5 December 2019 [**PRQC.2019.30**]

7.2   The Committee noted minutes of the CDT DTP Governance Committee held on 5 February 2020 [**PRQC.2019.31**]

8.   Dates of meeting for 2020-21

8.1   Meetings in 2020-21 will be held as follows:
        Wednesday 21 October 2020, 14:00 – 16:30
        Wednesday 10 February 2021, 14:00 – 16:30
        Wednesday 12 May 2021, 14:00 – 16:30

9.   Special cases reports

9.1 The Committee noted the following reports on special cases considered by the special cases panel for doctoral programmes:

(i) Late Case Thesis Approvals - May 2020 **[PRQC.2019.32]**

(ii) Non-Standard Examiner Approvals – none submitted