

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

26 October 2016

Confirmed Minutes

Present

Professor Sue Gibson (Chair and Director of the Graduate School)
Dr Simon Archer (College Tutor)
Dr Marco Aurisicchio (Design Engineering)
Professor Yun Xu (College Consul)
Professor Andrew Amis (Mechanical Engineering)
Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor David Dye (Materials)
Mr David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Professor Andrew Holmes (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)
Professor Alison McGregor (Surgery & Cancer) [representing Professor Michael Seckl]
Professor Stefan Maier (Physics)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)
Dr Felicity Mellor (School of Professional Development)
Professor Alessandra Russo (Computing)
Dr Mark Ungless (MRC Clinical Sciences Centre)
Professor Ferri Aliabadi (Aeronautics)
Dr Anil Bharath (Bioengineering)
Dr Niki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
Dr Catherine O'Sullivan (Civil & Environmental Engineering) [representing Professor Ahmer Wadee]
Mr Ahmed Shams (GSU President)

In Attendance

Professor Stephen Skinner (Materials) – in attendance for item 6
Ms Laura McConnell (Graduate School Manager) – in attendance for item 8
Mr Bojan Cvijan (Quality Assurance Administrator, Senate and Academic Review)

1. Welcome

The Committee welcomed new members.

2. Apologies for absence

Professor Simone Buitendijk (Vice-Provost [Education])
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Professor Jonathan Haskell (Business School)
Professor Denis Wright (Director of Student Support)
Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Matthew Fuchter (Chemistry)
Dr Mike Tennant (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director and NHLI)
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)
Mr Luke McCrone (ICU Deputy-President [Education])

3. Terms of Reference and Membership

The Committee agreed the terms of reference and membership of the Postgraduate Research Quality Committee 2016-17.

PRQC/2016/01

4. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2016 were approved.

PRQC/2016/02

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/2016/03

- 5.2 Minute 12.1.3 – PRES – Departmental Responses – It was reported that the remaining outstanding action plan from the Department of Materials had been followed up with the Faculty of Engineering. The other outstanding action plan from the Department of Aeronautics was included in the papers.

- 5.3 Minute 12.2.3 – PRES 2017: Consultation – It was reported that this action was completed. The Committee's comments on the draft consultation were reported to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee's meeting of 17 May 2016 and to the Senior Assistant Registrar simultaneously.

- 5.4 Minute 5.2 – Precept Review: Hong Kong University Joint Degree Programme – It was reported that the majority of the joint PhD programmes had now been withdrawn and two other programmes were no longer recruiting. In light of the above the Committee agreed at the May 2016 meeting that it was no longer necessary to develop a student handbook template for joint and collaborative PhD programmes.

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

6. Centre for Doctoral Training in the Advanced Characterisation of Materials

- 6.1 The Committee considered a request from the Department of Materials to introduce alternative milestone dates for the 4 year integrated PhD programme offered as part of the CDT.

PRQC/2016/04

- 6.1.1 The Committee noted that the request for alternative milestone dates would bring the CDT into line with similar four year integrated PhD programmes offered by the Departments of Civil Engineering and Computing.

- 6.1.2 The Committee noted that by moving the dates of the Early Stage Assessment and Late Stage Review (LSR) to take place at later points (12 months and 21-27 months respectively) within the programme it was anticipated that students would have sufficient time to develop their research ideas and complete a realistic thesis plan.

- 6.1.3 The Committee discussed whether students would have an opportunity to be reassessed should the alternative milestone dates be approved. The Department reassured the Committee that robust processes were in place to ensure students were progressing well and to identify any issues as soon as they arose.

- 6.1.4 The Committee agreed to recommend that QAEC approve the Department of Materials' request for alternative milestone dates as outlined in the proposal paper for the 4 year integrated PhD programme offered as part of the Centre for Doctoral Training.

7. Periodic Reviews of Research Provision

- 7.1 The Committee considered the periodic review report and Departmental response from the Institute of Clinical Sciences.

PRQC/2016/05

- 7.1.1 The Committee confirmed the outcome of the Periodic Review report and agreed that the Department would be asked to follow-up on the periodic review as part of its precept

review in 3 years' time as per the normal review cycle. The final report and the department's response would be submitted to Senate in December 2016.

- 7.2 The Committee considered the periodic review report and Departmental response from the Department of Surgery and Cancer.

PRQC/2016/06

- 7.2.1 The Committee confirmed the outcome of the Periodic Review report and agreed that the Department would be asked to follow-up on the periodic review as part of its precept review in 3 years' time as per the normal review cycle. The final report and the department's response would be submitted to Senate in December 2016.

8. Working Party for World Class Research Supervision

- 8.1 The Committee considered a paper from the Graduate School on the work of the World Class Research Supervision Task and Finish Groups.

PRQC/2016/07 & 7a-c

- 8.1.1 The Committee considered a list of questions prospective students may wish to ask at interview. The questions were intended as guidance to prospective students to ensure that they obtained all necessary information and to help to set expectations between students and supervisors. The Committee noted that the majority of departments interview students before inviting them to formally apply to the College. The Committee agreed that the list of questions could be simplified to reduce overlap and that the list of questions might be more useful to current Master's students considering PhDs.

- 8.1.2 The Committee considered a PhD proforma to be used as a central source of information for prospective students. The Committee noted that the answers to most of the questions on the proforma would be standard between all departments and that such a proforma would be difficult to keep up to date. The Committee formed the view that it might be more useful to provide a set of minimum requirements in terms of information departments should provide on their websites. This could include a departmental spokesperson whom students could contact with any queries.

- 8.1.3 The Committee noted that the format of assessment for the LSR was non-prescriptive and that each department could decide how best to assess student progress as part of the milestone.

- 8.1.4 The Committee noted departmental responses to the request to consider applying the higher level English Language and Academic Entry requirements. Departments were keen to retain autonomy in determining their entry requirements and noted that the primary factors affecting successful completion were ill health or financial issues.

9. Alternative PhD Thesis Format

- 9.1 The Committee considered a proposal from the Department of Computing for an alternative PhD thesis format.

PRQC/2016/08

- 9.1.1 The Committee noted that the alternative PhD thesis format would enable students to incorporate sections of work in their thesis that were in a format suitable for submission for publication in a peer-reviewed journal/conference proceedings or that had already been published in a peer-reviewed journal/conference proceedings. Apart from the inclusion of such materials an alternative format thesis would nevertheless need to conform to the same standards expected of a normal thesis.

- 9.1.2 Following discussion the Committee was minded to support the proposal in principle but agreed that it would benefit from further refinement and additional detail and would also need to outline how the alternative thesis format would function. The Committee agreed that an expanded paper should be produced for consideration at the next meeting, taking account of current College regulations and ordinances.

ACTION: Registry Quality Assurance Team

10. PRES 2015 Departmental Responses

10.1. The Committee considered a response from the Department of Aeronautics to the PRES 2015 results.

PRQC/2016/09

10.1.1 The Committee noted that the response rate from students was not high but that students were satisfied overall.

11. Postgraduate Professional Development Committee

11.1 The Committee received and noted the unconfirmed minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee meeting held on 13 April 2016.

PRQC/2016/10 & 11

ITEMS FOR REPORT

12. Chair's Action

There was no Chair's Action to note.

13. Graduate School's Annual Report 2015-16

Members noted the latest report from the Graduate School.

PRQC/2016/12

14. Understanding the Interdisciplinary Research Environment

Members noted a review published by HEFCE and Research Councils UK on the interdisciplinary research landscape in the UK, supported by a report examining 10 institutional case studies in English Universities.

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

No other items of business were raised.

18. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 22 February 2017 in Room G01, Royal School of Mines, South Kensington Campus. The meeting will start at 14:00. The deadline for papers is Wednesday 8 February 2017.

19. Date of Following Meetings

Wednesday 10 May 2017 at 14.00 [paper deadline 26 April 2017]

20. Reserved Business (not circulated to student members)

20.1 Special Cases Panel – Doctoral Programmes 2016-17

The Committee considered a paper regarding the continued need for a Special Cases Panel for doctoral programmes and to make a recommendation to QAEC.

PRQC/2016/13

20.1.1 The Committee agreed that a Special Cases Panel was no longer required and approved the proposed alternative to the Special Cases Panel with special case decisions being sent to the Deputy Directors of the Graduate School in future.

20.1.2 The Committee agreed to recommend that QAEC approve the dissolution of the Special Cases Panel for doctoral programmes and the adoption of the proposed alternative where decisions on special cases would be taken by the Deputy Directors of the Graduate School.

20.2 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/2016/14

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

PRQC/2016/15

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

PRQC/2016/16