# Imperial College London

## Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

### Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 8 February 2023 at 14:10 via MS Teams

**Present**

Professor Yun Xu (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
Professor Laki Buluwela (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)
Jason Zheng (ICU Deputy President (Education))
Chengning Yao - Postgraduate Research Representation Chair
Dr Dalal Alrajeh (Computing)
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)
Professor Charlotte Bevan (Surgery and Cancer)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Dr Sally Leevers (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Dr David Mann (Life Sciences)
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)
Professor Carol Propper (Business)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Dr Jeffrey Vernon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr Choon Hwai Yap (Bioengineering)
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review) [Secretary]

**In Attendance**
Eleri Canning (for item 5)

## Part 1 – Preliminary Items

### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Chair welcomed Dr Rudiger Woscholski who had taken over as DPS for the Department of Chemistry from Professor James Wilton-Ely.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Dr Mazdak Ghajari (Dyson School of Dyson Engineering)
Professor Peter Haynes (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Yiannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Hayley Wong (ICU President)

## 2. Minutes of the previous meeting

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 October 2022 **[PRQC.2022.17].**

2.2 The Committee noted the action list **[PRQC.2022.18]**.

2.3 Under action 8.3 (October 2022) – members were encouraged to nominate a deputy or alternative representative for their department to ensure appropriate representation on the group if members were unable to attend.

2.4 Under action 2.1 (February 2021), it was reported that selection criteria for the President's Scholarships have been updated. This included changing the requirement for a first-class degree at undergraduate level if a Distinction had been achieved on a taught postgraduate programme.

There are three rounds of the College panel in order to allow more time for submissions to be made. The panel will also take note of widening participation contextual factors when making decisions on awards. Further information can be found here: President's PhD scholarships | Study | Imperial College London.

## 3. Matters arising

3.1 It was reported that the PGR annual leave policy had been approved by QAEC at its meeting that morning. There had been two amendments to the policy following its discussion at the last PRQC meeting:
1) clarification that PhD students employed by the College are subject to HR staff annual policies and procedures.
2) clarification that students are entitled to receive holiday pay during parental leave.

3.2 QAEC had also approved the Posthumous and Aegrotat Policy for Research Degrees. After Senate approval, the policy will be implemented.

**Part 2 – Matters for Consideration**

**4.       Modality of Final Thesis Research Degree Vivas Working Group**

4.1    **Outcomes of PGR and post-doc survey on viva modality [PRQC.2022.19]**

4.1.1   Following discussion at the previous meeting on the use of hybrid or remote vivas for the final thesis examination, the meeting received the results of a survey undertaken with research degree students and post-docs on this issue. There were responses from 1,405 research students across a range of departments and years and 135 post-docs responded across all faculties.

4.1.2   Respondents were asked whether they were supportive of the proposal to permit final vivas to take place in a remote or hybrid mode in exceptional circumstances.

84% of post-docs and 87% of research students supported the proposal. The main reason cited by respondents who did not support the proposal was that they felt the mode of the viva should be the student's choice.

4.2    **Policy statement on modality of final thesis research degree vivas [PRQC.2022.20]**

4.2.1   Following the results of the survey, the working group agreed to amend the policy statement and remove the word 'exceptional'. This is designed to reassure students but it will still be the responsibility of the DPS to approve the use of a remote or hybrid viva.

4.2.2   A proposed workflow to accommodate such requests is being developed for My Imperial and will be circulated to DPS for approval. It was noted that such requests can be made late in the process (i.e. after the examination entry) and the process needed to be able to accommodate this.

4.2.3   PRQC approved the policy statement. This will now be submitted to QAEC for final approval.

**Action: Laura Lane**

**5.       Special cases summary report update [PRQC.2022.21]**

5.1    The meeting received an update on recommendations from the special cases summary report. A summary of special cases considered in the 2021/22 academic year will be submitted to the May meeting.

The procedure had been clarified in regard to internal examiners who have not previously examined a research degree. In such cases, a second internal examiner will be appointed to support and mentor the new examiner. Internal examiners who have examined theses at previous institutions but not at Imperial will need to be briefed by the DPS but there is no requirement for a second internal to be appointed.

5.2     A new procedure has been introduced to address cases where students have failed to submit by their thesis deadline and have not formally requested an extension. This procedure permits a 6-month window following the missed deadline for communicating and engaging with the student with the aim of a successful submission. However, if there is no extension request or submission after 6 months, the student may be withdrawn.

Communications about this new procedure have been circulated to departments and it has been put into operation. It is intended to build this into a workflow in My Imperial and SLAB have approved development time for this in spring/summer.

5.3     A department reported that there had been instances of a student being withdrawn even though the department was working to re-engage them their studies. It would be helpful to have a way to suppress the communications if the department is working with the student but it was noted that the department should inform Registry that they are addressing the situation.

It was noted that current communications are only directed to the student and supervisor. Students who have missed their submission deadline are usually suffering difficulties that will require extensive support and the DPS would need to be aware of this. Similarly, the reason for the non-submission may be due to a breakdown in the relationship between the student and supervisor so it would be important for the DPS to have visibility of this process. This should be considered when setting up the workflow.

**Action: Eleri Canning**

5.4     It was noted that paragraphs 6 and 10 of the Procedure for Appointment of Examiners for Research Degrees needed updating to reflect current practice. The links in the 'Guidelines for Requesting an Extension to the Thesis Deadline' would also be checked.

**Action: Eleri Canning**

**6.     PGR programme development**

6.1     **New PhD programme proposal [PRQC.2022.22]**

6.1.1   The meeting received a proposal from the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) and the Institute for Security Science and Technology (ISST) to introduce a new PhD programme: 'Security and Resilience'.

The new PhD programme will be hosted jointly between ISST and CEE, with CEE providing the infrastructure, administrative and pastoral support. The programme is aligned with College's strategic research themes. Only students registered in CEE and researching with ISST will be enrolled on this programme. Students researching security and resilience who are supervised by staff in another department will be registered under that department's PhD programme(s).

It was noted that the department may wish to identify if other universities are offering PhDs with a very similar title to ensure they have considered the marketing aspects of the new programme.

6.1.2   PRQC approved the new programme proposal

6.1.3   Members suggested amendments to the research degree new programme proposal form as follows:
- Include a question/questions regarding marketing and competitor programmes
- Include a question to clarify how the cohort will be integrated into the wider research degree community across the College.

**Action: Secretary**

6.2   **PhD programme withdrawal request [PRQC.2022.23]**

6.2.1   PRQC received a request from the Department of Aeronautics to withdraw the PhD programme titled 'Joint Research with USP Home USP (JPUSP.2)'

6.2.2   It was reported this was linked to a joint PhD arrangement where the agreement had ended and there was no desire to renew it. The programme was administratively burdensome for the number of students participating. Now the final students had been awarded the programme should be withdrawn.

6.2.3   PRQC approved the request to withdraw the programme.

**7.   Graduate Teaching Assistant framework [PRQC.2022.24]**

7.1   The meeting received an updated version of the Framework for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). This had been amended to give students who had completed formal training on teaching and learning and who would like to act as GTAs whilst undertaking their PhD to be exempted from the compulsory College training.

7.2   It was queried as to whether this would be a blanket exception as a CertEd or diploma was not comparable to the MEd or a qualification attained under the HEA framework. It was confirmed that it was expected that this would only apply to specific cases and students would need to apply for the exemption and detail their experience / qualification as part of the application.

7.3   PRQC approved the changes to the framework.

7.4   The Chair informed members that she had been asked to form a group to review GTA pay and develop guidelines for inclusion in the framework. The aim is to ensure that pay rates are appropriate to the tasks involved and consistent across the College.

The work had not yet commenced but departments would be involved and it was

expected that an initial report would be made to the next PRQC meeting.

7.5    The GTAs in the Faculty of Engineering had written to the faculty raising the issue of different pay rates for similar or identical work. This had arisen when GTAs from Computing and Bioengineering had worked on a shared module but received different pay rates. This would be shared for the review.

**Action: Dalal Alrajeh**

7.6    It was noted that it would be helpful if the review could also clarify the reference in paragraph 2.4 in the framework which says teaching should not exceed 10 hours in any given week. It would be helpful to establish if this figure was actual teaching hours or whether it included time for associated tasks such as marking.

**Part 3 – Matters for Information**

**8.    PRQC subcommittees**

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

(i)    Confirmed minutes of the CDT-DTP Governance Committee held on 6 July 2022 **[PRQC.2022.25]**

(ii)    Confirmed minutes of the meeting of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 6 July 2022 **[PRQC.2022.26]**

**9.    Dates of future meetings**

9.1    The next meeting will be held as follows:

Wednesday 10 May 2023: 14.10 – 16.30 via MS Teams.

**10.    Any Other Business**

10.1    None reported.