

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2022 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)
Daniel Lo (ICU Deputy President (Education))
Aryan Niknam Maleki (FoM Student Representative)
Tin Hang Un (FoE Student Representative)
Dr Dalal Alrajeh (Computing)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
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)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Professor John Seddon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr James Wilton-Ely (Chemistry)
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review)
[Secretary]

In Attendance

Dr Ioannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Professor Martin McCall (College Consul) for item 4
Professor Daniele Dini (Mechanical Engineering) for item 4
David Parrott (Head of Admissions) for item 6
Scott Tucker (Deputy Director, Academic Quality and Standards)

Part 1 – Preliminary Items

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Chair welcomed Dr Dalal Alrajeh who has joined the committee as the new DPS in Computing and Dr Ioannis Kountouris who was representing the Centre for Environmental Policy following Dr Jem Woods appointment as Interim Director of the CEP.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

Professor Emma McCoy (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)
Dr Lloyd James (ICU President)
Ceire Wincott (FoNS Student Representative)
Dr David Mann (Life Sciences)
Dr Hamed Haddadi (Dyson School of Design Engineering)
Dr Jem Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 16 February 2022 [**PRQC.2021.25**].

2.2 The Committee noted the action list [**PRQC.2021.26**]. Some actions were still in progress and would need to come back to future meetings.

2.3 The meeting noted the report of Chair's Actions [**PRQC.2021.27**].

3. Matters arising

3.1 Remote viva working group (February 2022, 3.2)

It was reported that a questionnaire would be circulated to departments to collect data regarding remote vivas. The working group will use this information in its discussions. PRQC members were invited to contact Yun Xu and Laura Lane if they wished to be a member of the working group.

A query was raised in relation to the current guidance on remote vs in-person vivas if the supervisor, examiners and students could not agree the format for the examination. It was noted that the default position was for an in-person viva. However, if the student had compelling reasons to request a remote viva and the examiners were in agreement, this could be agreed. The DPS in the department would be expected to consider such cases as they arise.

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

4. PGR Periodic Review of Department of Mechanical Engineering

4.1 Panel report [PRQC.2021.28]

- 4.1.1 The meeting received the panel report from the PGR Periodic Review of Mechanical Engineering. Overall, the department was judged to be compliant with the research degree precepts and providing a high-quality academic experience to its research students. The panel noted a number of commendations as well as a few recommendations to enhance practice.
- 4.1.2 The use of the Well-being Advisor and EDI advisor were noted as good practice as was the focus on encouraging conference attendance by students. However, in relation to the latter, the panel noted that the use of conference attendance as part of the Late-Stage Review impacted on timings and it was suggested the department consider how to manage cases where conference attendance or publishing papers was not a possibility.

4.2 Departmental response [PRQC.2021.29]

- 4.2.1 The Director of Postgraduate Studies for Mechanical Engineering reported that the department was already taking action to address the recommendations from the panel as detailed in the response and action plan.
- 4.2.2 One recommendation related to GTA training. The Graduate School had discussed this and were willing to see if the core training could be tailored further if that would be helpful. The department felt this could be helpful in the long term but the focus initially was on encouraging programme leaders to deliver targeted training as needed.
- 4.2.3 PRQC members were asked to provide examples of IT systems that may already be in use to capture supervisor / student interactions. Bioengineering, Crick Institute, Computing and Earth Science and Engineering all run systems that require supervisors to confirm that they are meeting regularly with their students. The original purpose of these systems was to facilitate engagement monitoring for Tier 4 / Student route visa holders but it is routinely undertaken across the entire cohort. Bioengineering would forward information about its IT solution to Mechanical Engineering.

Action: Angela Kedgley

- 4.2.3 It was discussed whether it would be preferable to focus on students logging their interactions with supervisors to avoid adding to academics' workloads. There are systems in place such as the six-month forms but students can be reluctant to disclose issues and response rates can be poor so it was felt it was sensible to investigate other approaches.

5. Piloting the submission of theses through Turnitin report [PRQC.2021.30]

- 5.1 The meeting received the report of the pilot for submission of theses through Turnitin which took place between January and April 2022. The departments of

Mechanical Engineering and Surgery and Cancer were thanked for their participation in the pilot programme.

- 5.2 The pilot scheme identified a number of areas which would need to be addressed in order for this to be successfully rolled out across the College in October as planned. Feedback was grouped under two themes – Training and support and Operational and Technical.
- 5.3 Training and support issues identified a need to provide further training and guidance to clarify the process for submitting the theses via Turnitin and clarify understanding of self-plagiarism and how to interpret the similarity reports in these cases. It was felt that these could be addressed by October if supervisors and internal examiners were able to engage with training.
- 5.4 The main area of concern was related to Operational and technical issues as follows:
- Limits on the file size that can be uploaded to Turnitin at one time
 - Students needing to upload their theses twice as the Turnitin Blackboard submission cannot be linked to My Imperial submission
 - Internal examiners outside of the department only being able to access a static pdf making interpretation of results challenging
 - The administrative burden on departments in setting up the Blackboard submission centre, chasing internal examiners for outcomes, recording outcomes and advising staff of these given there is no central solution (e.g. My Imperial) to track and record this

It was felt that it was unlikely these issues would be resolved by October and therefore the proposed roll-out would be highly problematic. It was reported that the issue with linking the Turnitin Blackboard submission to My Imperial was due to the way that Blackboard operates and is not in Imperial's control to change. There are other IT solutions to identify plagiarism but Turnitin is the only one supported by ICT.

- 5.5 After discussion, PRQC agreed that this process was not ready to be implemented on a college-wide basis in October.
- 5.6 Registry and the Graduate School would meet to discuss the technical issues and see if the Student Administrative Lifecycle Product Board could allocate resource to address this. The piloting departments should also be involved in this discussion.

Action: Laura Lane / David Ashton

- 5.7 It was agreed that Central Secretariat, who initiated this requirement, would be contacted to raise these issues and consider whether this approach was appropriate in relation to the number of cases of plagiarism recorded by the College. As an alternative, it was suggested that the College informs students that Turnitin may be used if a concern about plagiarism is raised in relation to a specific thesis. This would allow the use of Turnitin where it was warranted

without making it a general condition of submission.

Action: Yun Xu / David Ashton

6. Policy for admissions with advanced standing for doctoral students [PRQC.2021.31]

- 6.1 PRQC was invited to approve amendments to the 'Research Degree Students: Transfer of Registration for Admission' policy and procedure.
- 6.2 This policy change has been recommended to extend admissions with advanced standing to Imperial staff or Imperial NHS trust employees who are undertaking research work and wish to register for a PhD. Previously these registrations have been back dated but this is not good practice for records and reporting purposes. The use of advanced standing with a curtailed registration period would ensure that records reflect actual activity. Applications where advanced standing is requested would be considered by the Deputy Directors of the Graduate School following approval by the department.
- 6.3 It was noted that the minimum period of registration under this advance standing route is 12 months. The form to request advanced standing allows the students and departments to request exemption from the ESA and LSR. It was felt that exempting the student from LSR, even with a curtailed registration period, was not appropriate and this option should be removed from the form and policy.

Action: David Parrott

- 6.4 PRQC approved the amendments to the policy and procedure.

7. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

7.1 Faculty of Engineering PRES action plan [PRQC.2021.32]

- 7.1.1 The meeting received the PRES action plan from the Faculty of Engineering. The faculty noted that the lowest satisfaction scores were received in the category of supervision and departments had identified a number of actions to address this with input from student representatives.

7.2 Faculty of Natural Sciences PRES action plan [PRQC.2021.33]

- 7.2.1 The meeting received the PRES action plan from the Faculty of Natural Sciences. Actions for the faculty included a focus on well-being and improvement to infrastructure across its buildings to provide more study and workspace for students.
- 7.2.2 The action plan included recommendations to the College. A request to increase e-book provision in the library is being discussed with the faculty librarian. The inclusion of milestone tracking on My Imperial was also highlighted as a priority. This development is in process but it would be useful to have an updated timeframe on delivery – this would be requested from Assessment Records.

Action: David Ashton

It was noted that there are changes planned to My Imperial and the introduction of a Unified Data Platform which may impact on this work.

- 7.2.3 It was noted that the College PRES action plan included actions to increase availability of counselling sessions as this was a common issue across the College.

Part 3 – Matters for Information

8. PRQC subcommittees

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

- (i) Minutes of the Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 9 November 2021 **[PRQC.2021.34]**
- (ii) Minutes of the CDT-DTP Governance Committee held on 16 February 2022 **[PRQC.2021.35]**
- (iii)

9. Dates of future meetings

- 9.1 Meeting dates for 2022/23 academic year will be circulated to members once QAEC dates are confirmed.
- 9.2 Following discussion, it was agreed that PRQC would meet in person or remotely as agreed by members at the previous meeting. The first meeting of 2022/23 would be in person.
- 9.3 Thanks were extended to PRQC members for their participation with the committee.

Staff and student members were asked to inform the secretary if they would no longer be attending the meeting and were requested to pass on the names of new representatives if known.

10. Any Other Business

- 10.1 There was a query from Chemistry as to whether the 3-month deadline for submitting minor amendments after a viva related to the corrections being submitted to the Internal Examiner within this period or the fully corrected thesis to be re-uploaded by this point. Clarification would be sought from Assessment Records.

Action: James Wilton-Ely

Secretary's note: Assessment Records have confirmed that the deadlines refer to the corrections being submitted for review. While not stated explicitly in the

Regulations, this is made clear in the message communicating the outcome of the PhD viva to the PhD candidate.

- 10.2 It was felt that charging each member of a graduate's family £20 to attend the reception after the graduation ceremony discouraged attendance as it made it expensive for graduates and families to attend. It was felt that Imperial should remove this fee given the importance of developing good relationships with alumni. This would be raised with the Events team.

Action: David Ashton