

## Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

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**Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 14 February 2024 at 14:10 on MS Teams**

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### **Present**

Professor Yun Xu (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]  
Professor Laki Buluwela (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)  
Michaela Flegrova (PGR Academic & Welfare Officer (Natural Sciences))  
Nan Fletcher-Lloyd (PGR Academic & Welfare Officer (Medicine))  
Dr Dalal Alrajeh (Computing)  
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)  
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)  
Dr Alexis Barr (Institute of Clinical Sciences)  
Dr Chris Cantwell (Aeronautics)  
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)  
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)  
Dr Mazdak Ghajari (Dyson School of Dyson Engineering)  
Professor Christopher Gourlay (Materials)  
Nicola Hann (Business School)  
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)  
Dr Yiannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)  
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)  
Professor Jennifer Quint (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)  
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)  
Jennifer Simeon (Surgery and Cancer)  
Dr Jeffrey Vernon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)  
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)  
Dr Rudiger Woscholski (Chemistry)  
Dr Choon Hwai Yap (Bioengineering)  
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review)  
[Secretary]

### **In Attendance**

Claudia Minett (Head of Assessment Records) (item 6)

Annemarie Gupta (Assistant Registrar, Academic Policy)

Judith Webster (Director of Academic Quality and Standards)

## **Part 1 – Preliminary Items**

### **1. Welcome and apologies for absence**

#### 1.1 Apologies were received from:

Professor Charlotte Bevan (Surgery and Cancer)

Camille Boutrolle (ICU President)

Professor Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)

Professor Peter Haynes (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)

Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)

Professor Alex Michaelides (Business)

Yi Yang (ICU Deputy President (Education))

### **2. Minutes of the previous meeting**

#### 2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 25 October 2023 **[PRQC.2023.19]**.

#### 2.2 The Committee noted the action list **[PRQC.2023.20]**.

Action 5.2.2 (October 2023) – it was reported that Computing had used a single scholarship to increase GTA pay for current students with effect from 1 January to assist them with the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. This funding was used as other budgets were already set and could not be re-distributed at that point in the year. The department will be looking to address this in the next planning round and consider their scholarship offer for next year.

#### 2.3 The committee noted that Chair's Action **[PRQC.2023.21]** had been taken to amend the thesis extension request guidance to reflect that a statement of originality may not be required for an extension request relating to a MPhil degree.

### **3. Matters arising**

#### 3.1 No matters were reported.

## **Part 2 – Matters for Consideration**

### **4.1 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey draft College action plan **[PRQC.2023.22]****

#### 4.1.1 The meeting received the draft College action plan from the PRES working

group. Actions were assigned under a number of themes: induction and welcome, EDI, poor supervision, progression and assessment, wellbeing and sharing best practice. The group had tried to ensure that actions were aligned with activities that may be taking place in other areas and not duplicating work.

4.1.2 In relation to the induction and welcome actions, the following points were noted:

- In addition to October, some departments also run inductions at other entry points in the year.
- Crick holds year briefings for its students. Chemistry noted it did the same but attendance could be low.
- Providing information in bite-sized formats may be more effective than handbooks.
- A site/VLE for each programme may also be an effective way of providing information.
- Students should be consulted on how / where they would like to access information.

4.1.3 The following points were noted in relation to the EDI actions:

- It will be difficult for students to apply for funds to support group activities if there are no pre-existing networks/communities for these cohorts.
- There is a Black student doctoral network and relevant staff networks which PhD students can join so linking to these forums may help engagement.
- There is work underway with female students to identify the types of support they would find most useful.

4.1.4 The group discussed the actions proposed to tackle poor supervision scores. The following points were noted in discussion:

- A template improvement plan may be useful for departments when managing cases of poor supervision.
- If penalties were introduced in such cases (e.g. restricted access to funded scholarships), HR would need to be involved as these will impact on career progression.
- The Focus on Best Practice workshop is mandatory but this is not monitored centrally and it is unclear how non-attendance is dealt with.
- It was felt that in most cases where there are issues with supervision, this is actually due to a mismatch of communications and expectations between the supervisor and student. As well as working with supervisors, students may need support with managing their own projects and working independently.
- When issues are raised via formal mechanisms (e.g. complaints) towards the end of the degree, there are frequently signs that the student has been struggling from an earlier stage. Departments may permit students to progress with the hope/expectation their performance will improve but should ensure there is appropriate support in place.
- Training for supervisors tends to be focussed at the start of undertaking these duties. There is lot of training available but it is usually not compulsory – does this approach need to be re-considered?

- There is a concern about staff workload which may lead to pushback if compulsory training is introduced.

4.1.5 It was reported that when the Continuing Professional Development framework was introduced, there was broad support for engagement to be on a voluntary basis. Currently only Cornerstone for new supervisors and the Focus on Best Practice workshop are mandatory. It may be helpful to review the framework at the next meeting to consider whether this is still appropriate.

**Action: Laura Lane / secretary**

4.1.6 The committee approved the action plan. This will also be submitted to the Student Experience Forum for review.

## **5. Centres for Doctoral Training UKRI/EPSRC 2023 funding round**

### **5.1 List of new and renewed CDTs [PRQC.2023.23]**

5.1.1 The meeting noted the list of Centres for Doctoral Training that had been awarded in the latest UKRI/EPSRC funding round.

5.1.2 It was noted that the information relating to the renewal of the UKRI AI for Healthcare CDT in the paper was incorrect. The CDT had been renewed under the name 'UKRI AI Centre for Doctoral Training in Digital Healthcare' and the CDT remained based in Computing.

5.1.3 It was noted that there is an embargo on advertising the CDTs until the end of March. Given this, it was hoped that the College would allow some flexibility in regard to deadlines for modifications for CDTs that include a taught programme as part of a 1+3 model. The meeting was reminded that Programmes Committee would consider major modifications at its March meetings.

5.1.4 The meeting approved the creation of new programme titles and codes for the following CDTs:

- Mathematics for our Future Climate: Theory, Data and Simulation (Mathematics)
- Collaborative Computational Modelling at the Interface (Mathematics)
- EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Statistics and Machine Learning (Mathematics)
- Centre for Doctoral Training in Green Industrial Futures (Chemical Engineering)

### **5.2 List of CDT withdrawals [PRQC.2023.24]**

5.2.1 The meeting noted the list of CDTs that were unsuccessful in their bids to have their funding renewed and have admitted their final intake in October 2023.

5.2.2 The meeting approved the suspension of the following programme titles and codes which are linked to CDTs that will be phasing out:

- Mathematics of Random Systems (PhD) – G1ZR
- EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training in Nuclear Energy Futures – H8Z1

## 6. Special cases report [PRQC.2023.25]

6.1 PRQC received the annual report detailing non-standard examination nominations and thesis extension requests for the 2022-23 academic year.

6.2 The following points were noted in the report:

- Only 5% of all examiner nominations needed to be referred.
- In the majority of cases, the outcome was for the DPS to brief the internal examiner prior to the viva.
- The number of thesis extension requests has increased with 30-40% of students submitting a request.
- Most requests are for less than 12 months.
- Many students submitting extension requests also appear to have undertaken their ESA and LSR assessments late.
- Assessment Records are considering how to monitor minor revision deadlines but this is dependent on having information that the viva has taken place.

6.3 The meeting discussed the use of a second internal examiner (IE) when the nominated internal has no PhD examination experience at any institution. This is a rare occurrence but there is a concern about workload as the second IE also needs to read the thesis and complete a report. It may be helpful to clarify the extent of the report required from the second internal and whether they also need to approve any corrections. Assessment Records will review and clarify the guidance as needed.

**Action: Claudia Minett**

6.4 The meeting agreed it could be useful to investigate if there was an actual correlation between students completing milestones late and subsequently requested extensions to their thesis submission deadlines. The College expectation is that students complete in four years (for full-time study) and departments should manage the degree accordingly. It is hoped the planned development of the PGR milestones in Banner will make extension requests more visible in My Imperial.

## 7. PGR Periodic Reviews

### 7.1 Chemistry 12-month periodic review update [PRQC.2023.26]

7.1.1 The meeting received the update on actions from the PGR Periodic Review of Chemistry. Good progress had been made on the recommendations and many had been completed.

7.1.2 Work is ongoing in the EDI area to ensure there is a pipeline of students progressing from Masters to PhD study but as the department only receives three DTP studentships, it is hard to ringfence these for WP students. The endowment

for Nigerian students has conditions upon it that limit the funding to one year per student so this is better used for MRes programmes rather than research degrees.

- 7.1.3 The meeting noted that capturing robust WP data for research students was a concern for several departments which are focusing on EDI initiatives. It was felt that ways of capturing this information through College systems should be explored rather than producing individual workarounds. One avenue to explore could be reviewing the PGR application form with Admissions to see how this data could be captured. It was suggested that a small sub-group of interested PRQC members could be convened to take this matter forward.

**Action: Laura Lane**

### **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 Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 14 June 2023 [**PRQC.2023.27**]
  - (ii) Unconfirmed minutes of the CDT-DTP Governance Committee held on 15 November 2023 [**PRQC.2023.28**]

#### **9. Dates of future meetings**

- 9.1 The date of the next meeting had been changed to Wednesday 22 May to avoid a clash with PG Graduation. A new meeting invite had been circulated to members.
- 9.2 Members were asked to confirm whether 22 May was feasible or whether 15 May would be a better alternative. 22 May appeared to be the most popular date so this was confirmed.

#### **10. Any Other Business**

- 10.1 Clarity was requested in relation to the changes to Precept 1 in regard in interviewing and the requirement for an independent interviewer. It was confirmed that if a student has named two supervisors and they choose to interview together, a separate independent interviewer would be required. This could be from the pool of positions identified by the department as being able to fulfil this role.
- 10.2 Members were reminded the next DPS lunch meeting would be taking place on Wednesday 21 February via Teams and they were encouraged to attend.