Imperial College London

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2022 at 14:10 in room GO1, Royal School of Mines building, South Kensington campus

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))
Xinyi Guo (FoNS Student Representative)
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Dr Mazdak Ghajari (Dyson School of Dyson Engineering)
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Yiannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Robin Mowat (Centre for Academic English representative)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Brain Sciences; Immunology and Inflammation; Infectious Disease; Metabolism, Digestion and Reproduction)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
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
Professor Martyn Boutelle (Associate Provost, Estates Planning) (for item 5)
Dr Rudiger Woscholski (Chemistry) (item 5)
Professor Dan Elson (Surgery and Cancer)

Part 1 – Preliminary Items

1.   Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1   The Chair welcomed new members of the committee for 2022-23 as follows:

Professor Peter Haynes – Interim Vice Provost (Education and Student Experience)

Dr Choon Hwai Yap – Bioengineering
Dr Mazdak Ghajari – Dyson School of Dyson Engineering
Dr Jeffrey Vernon – Faculty Senior Tutors (PGR) representative
Professor Charlotte Bevan – Surgery & Cancer

Hayley Wong - ICU President
Jason Zheng - ICU Deputy President (Education)
Chengning Yao - Postgraduate Research Representation Chair
Kuan-Cheng Chen - Postgraduate Research Academic & Welfare Officer (Engineering)
Xinyi Guo - Postgraduate Research Academic & Welfare Officer (Natural Sciences)

1.2   Apologies were received from:

Dr Dalal Alrajeh (Computing)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Professor Charlotte Bevan (Surgery and Cancer)
Professor Peter Haynes (Interim Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Dr David Mann (Life Sciences)
Dr Sally Leevers (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Professor Carol Propper (Business)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Professor James Wilton-Ely (Chemistry)
Hayley Wong (ICU President)

2.   **Minutes of the previous meeting**

2.1   The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 May 2022 **[PRQC.2022.01].**

2.2   The Committee noted the action list **[PRQC.2022.02]**.

2.3   Under action 4.2.3 – further information was requested regarding the system used by Bioengineering to record student/supervisor meetings. It was agreed that a demonstration of the system should be given at the next DPS lunch.
                                              Action: Laura Lane / Dr Choon Hwai Yap

2.4   Under actions 5.6 and 5.7, it was reported that the Central Secretariat had confirmed it was satisfied that the College's existing examination procedures assured the integrity of the College's research degrees and that Turnitin could be used where there was a suspected case of plagiarism. With that in mind, and noting the operational and technical constraints previously reported to the

Committee, the PRQC agreed that the use of Turnitin for submission of PhD theses should no longer be pursued.

2.5   The Chair's action report **[PRQC.2022.03]** was noted.

3.   Matters arising

3.1   Following the discussions at the May meeting about confidential reporting, members were asked if PRQC still wished to request this is built into My Imperial. This would need consultation with students to ensure they would be comfortable with a central system for capturing/viewing such concerns and it was unlikely it could be scheduled for development until 2024/25.

3.2   Members discussed the ongoing limitations with Banner and My Imperial to support PGR processes (such as milestone deadlines) including issues with developments that have been released so far which make processes more time-consuming to complete. It was agreed that members would send any suggestions for improvements to current processes such as examiner approval to Laura Lane for future consideration by the Student Lifecycle Administration Board.

Action: all / Laura Lane

It was agreed that Phil Power should be invited to the next DPS lunch to discuss Banner and My Imperial developments for PGR.

Action: Laura Lane

4.   PRQC Terms of Reference and Membership 2022-23 [PRQC.2022.04]

4.1   The Committee approved the Terms of Reference for 2022-23.

4.2   The membership had been updated to reflect changes in postholders and the new representatives from ICU. It was noted that there was no quoracy for the meeting. After discussion, it was agreed that it was not necessary to set a quoracy but that members should be asked to nominate an alternative representative for their department/service if they were unable to attend.

Action: Secretary

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

5.   Chemistry PGR Periodic Review

5.1   Review report **[PRQC.2020.05]**

5.1.1   The meeting received the panel report from the PGR Periodic Review of Chemistry. This had been conducted remotely with the panel meeting groups of staff and students for discussion. 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:
   - Use of badges to encourage training to support EDI initiatives

- Senior staff undertaking individual discussions with students at 32 months to consider progress and career plans
- Introduction of research themes to encourage networks across research groups
- Significant investment in academic facilities at White City

5.1.2   The report also included some recommendations to enhance practice:
- Mandatory advertising of all studentships
- Mechanisms to increase funding for studentships for under-represented groups
- Capture of baseline data to underpin EDI activities
- Introduction of a confidential reporting process for students
- Ensure supervisors are undertaking CPD training as required
- Encourage ways for SSLC to develop further as a proactive rather than reactive forum

5.2   Departmental response **[PRQC.2022.06]**

5.2.1   It was reported that the department was already taking action to address the recommendations from the panel as detailed in the response and action plan:
- Ensuring all studentships are openly advertised has been implemented
- Accessing baseline EDI data is problematic but the department will keep pursuing this – perhaps via the planned Unified Data Platform
- Funding models to support studentships for students from under-represented group are being investigated and contextual information is being used when considering studentship applications.
- The Head of Department is continuing to visit a range of universities in London to encourage more diverse applicants.
- A six-month confidential reporting system is already in place at masters level so will be extended to cover research.

5.2.2   It was clarified that any confidential reports would be viewed by the respective administrator and then sent to the DPS for action (unless there was a conflict). Any issues would then be raised with the primary or secondary supervisor as needed. The aim is to agree an appropriate resolution whilst protecting the student's position. Students could choose to simply submit that they had a concern and provide the actual details when meeting with the DPS.

5.2.3   The use of EDI badges was discussed by the group. It was clarified that staff acquire points for each level (bronze, silver, gold) through attending relevant training sessions - some of which are compulsory but not all. Participation is encouraged by the Head of Department rather than making this a requirement for staff. It was queried whether students understood the purpose of the badge or what has been done to achieve it – this would need to be checked.

5.2.4   There was one recommendation for the College regarding facilities at White City campus – the Associate Provost (Estates Planning) would take this forward under

his remit. It was reported that there is now space for student service representatives to spend time at White City which it is hoped will improve access to support services.

6.   Posthumous and aegrotat policy for research degrees [PRQC.2022.07]

6.1   The meeting reviewed the draft posthumous and aegrotat policy for research degrees. There was general support for the principle of posthumous and aegrotat degrees but it noted that the policy required further development.

6.2   The meeting considered the questions posed on the policy and concluded as follows:

> 1) It was agreed that backdating of applications should be permitted once the policy is introduced. Rather than set a specific time period, PRQC recommended that an application could be made within 5 years of date of the initial registration for the degree. Beyond this a special case would need to be made.
>
> 2) PRQC recommended that a one-year time limit to make an application should be adopted, as is currently set for undergraduate provision. However, the word 'normally' should be added to allow some flexibility to consider an application outside of this period.
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> 3) It was not felt that PRIs or Split PhDs need special consideration as students are registered for an Imperial award and the main supervisor will be from the College. External supervisors will naturally be involved in any applications as part of the supervisory team.
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> 4) PRQC does not recommend that a minimum period of attendance needs to be met before an award can be made.
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> 5) It was not recommended that an outcome of major corrections be permitted – the policy as written already allows for the panel to request further information or clarification when considering the evidence before reaching a decision.
>
> 6) It was not recommended that it be possible to appeal the outcome of the process.
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> 7) It was agreed that the degree certificate should be clear that a posthumous or aegrotat award has been made.
>
> 8) Members felt it was clear that where an application is being made on behalf of a student who has not submitted their thesis, there is no expectation that a thesis needs to be produced by any other person.

9) It was felt that it would appropriate to seek advice from Library Services and the Enterprise Unit regarding publication, open access and IP provision in the policy. It was reported that many journals will not accept research for publication where one of the authors is deceased.

10) It was recommended that the policy be retained as stand alone.

6.3   There was a general recommendation that careful consideration of the policy was required in relation to part-time students to ensure that they are treated equitably in comparison to full-time students and vice versa.

6.4   PRQC discussed the requirement in point 2.6 that:

"the candidate should normally have completed over 50% of their programme and have completed a significant enough body of work…"

It was felt that including a figure of 50% (even with the use of the word 'normally') was problematic. PRQC recommended that this reference be removed and the text adjusted as follows:

"the candidate should have completed a significant enough body of work…"

6.5   PRQC's recommendations would be sent to the Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards).

Action: Secretary

This policy would also be considered by the Regulations and Policy Review Committee. Recommendations from PRQC and RPRC will be used to shape the final draft of the policy which would be considered by QAEC for approval.

7.   Modality of Final Thesis Research Degree Vivas Working Group [PRQC.2022.08]

7.1   The meeting considered the report from the working group which outlined the principles under which a request to hold a research viva in a hybrid or remote mode could be considered. Subject to PRQC's approval, it was anticipated that further work would be required to put the principles into operation.

7.2   Consultations had already been undertaken with staff. Consultations on this approach with students and post-docs would be underway shortly via a survey. Members were asked for assistance with distributing the survey to the relevant cohorts within their departments.

7.3   The following points were noted in discussion:
- It was anticipated that the request for a remote or hybrid viva would be initiated by the student
- The meanings of 'hybrid' and 'remote' needed to be clearly defined in the principles

- If the DPS is to make the decision – how would they be aware that a request has been made?
- Would the student have the right to appeal the DPS's decision?
- Ideally, any such requests should be made via My Imperial – perhaps as part of the examination entry process.

7.4   The latter three points would be considered by the group as part of the work to put this into operation.

7.5   It was clarified that Imperial's standard position on vivas was that these should be carried out in person. This was suspended during the pandemic to permit remote vivas but it was now expected that normal practice should have been resumed. DPS still have discretion to approve remote vivas but these principles would establish parity of approach. It may be necessary for some clear messaging to departments to clarify this position.

8.   PGR student leave policy [PRQC.2022.09]

8.1   The meeting considered the draft for an updated PGR student leave policy. Annual leave is covered in the Mutual Expectations document but is framed as a recommendation – this policy will clarify the students' entitlements and restrictions and will need approval by QAEC.

8.2   The following points were noted in discussion:
- Imperial matches the UKRI leave entitlements for all students. The only exception is if a sponsor has different leave allocations.
- The document sets the maximum leave in one year as 8 weeks – this should be amended to match the UKRI figures which state a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 40 days.
- The Mutual Expectations document should also be amended to reflect this wording.
- A student taking the maximum leave permitted each year would lose a considerable amount of research time over the course of the degree – they should be aware of this.
- The situation for international students needs to be checked to ensure it does not conflict with visa requirements.
- Leave must be requested in advance and agreed with supervisors. Unused days cannot be carried forward into the next year and cannot be paid in lieu.
- It was noted that Teamseer cannot be used to record PGR annual leave. An offer was made to submit a request to ICT for an in-house system to record PGR annual leave. However, Departments declined this offer in favour of developing their own system of recording PGR annual leave.

8.3   A revised draft of the policy would be circulated to members to gather final feedback prior to submitting the policy to QAEC.

Action: Laura Lane

9.   Graduate Teaching Assistant framework [PRQC.2022.10]

9.1 The meeting discussed the amendment to the framework which permitted MRes students to be recruited as GTAs. This had been included as a few departments had requested that MRes students take the training for them to perform this role but it was not expected that this would be a common occurrence.

9.2 Members raised concerns that MRes students have a heavy workload of their own and permitting them to do GTA work could impact on their performance in their degree.

9.3 It was agreed this amendment would be removed. In the case that a department wished to use MRes students for this role, training would be arranged as a special case for this discrete cohort.

Part 3 – Matters for Information

10. Research Degree Precepts [PRQC.2022.11]

10.1 The Precepts were reviewed and the following amendments to the policy or associated documents were requested prior to publication:
- Precept 1 – consider if the text can be amended to emphasis the role of the second interviewer as a neutral party
- Precept 8 – amend handbook for research students to include text about Faculty Senior Tutor role
- Precept 14 – amend linked ESA form and guidance to the Doctoral Academic Communication Requirement Assessment 2 (DACR A2) is explicitly referenced.
- Precept 14 – remove requirement that any transfer to the MPhil programme must take place within one year of registration
- Precept 15 – include transfer to MPhil as a potential outcome of the LSR

Action: Secretary

11. List of Partner Research Institutions, Split PhDs and Imperial Recognised Locations [PRQC.2022.12]

11.1 The meeting noted the document.

12. PRQC subcommittees

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

(i) Unconfirmed minutes of the CDT-DTP Governance Committee held on 18 May 2022 **[PRQC.2022.13]**
(ii) Unconfirmed minutes of the Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 1 March 2022 **[PRQC.2022.14]**
(iii) Minutes of the meeting of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 30 March 2022 **[PRQC.2022.15]**

(iv)   Unconfirmed minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development
Committee held on 6 July 2022 **[PRQC.2022.16]**

13.   Dates of future meetings

13.1   Meetings will be held as follows:

Wednesday 8 February 2023: 14.10 – 16.30
Wednesday 10 May 2023: 14.10 – 16.30

13.2   It was agreed that the meetings would take place via Teams.

13.   Any Other Business

13.1   None reported.