

## **Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)**

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**Minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2019 at 14:00 in  
Room G01, Royal School of Mines, South Kensington Campus**

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### **Present**

Professor Sue Gibson (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]  
Dr Christos-Savvas Bouganis (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)  
Professor Peter Allison (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)  
Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez (Mechanical Engineering)  
Dr Matthew Fuchter (Chemistry)  
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)  
Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)  
Dr Hamed Haddadi (Design Engineering)  
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)  
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)  
Dr Nesrina Imami (Medicine) [in place of Professor Kevin Murphy]  
Professor Holger Krapp (Bioengineering) [in place of Dr Angela Kedgley]  
Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering)  
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)  
Professor Carrol Propper (Business)  
Professor Alessandra Russo (Computing)  
Professor Eduardo Saiz (Materials)  
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)  
Ute Thiermann (GSU President)  
Dr Mark Ungless (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)  
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)  
Dr Andrew Williamson (Physics) [in place of Dr Bill Proud]  
Dr Jeremy Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)  
Professor Yun Xu (College Consul)  
Ashley Brooks (Student Representative)  
Emma Couves (Student Representative)  
Raya El Laham (Student Representative)  
Hannah Jones (Student Representative)  
Carina Zhao (Student Representative)  
Scott Tucker (Assistant Registrar, Monitoring and Review, Registry) [Secretary]

## **In Attendance**

Professor Marek Sergot (Emeritus Professor in Computing) [Paper 2018.28]  
Michelle Galloway (Quality Assurance Administrator, Registry) [Observing]

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

1.1 The Chair welcomed new members of the committee (see Item 4), colleagues in place of existing members and non-members in attendance.

1.2 The following apologies for absence were received:

- David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
- Professor Simone Buitendijk (Vice-Provost, Education)
- Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)
- Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)
- Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
- Alejandro Luy (ICU Deputy President, Education)
- Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director)
- Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)
- Dr Bill Proud (Physics)
- Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)

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

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 24 October 2018 [**PRQC.2018.22a**], subject to the following amendment:

(9.1.1) That the use of the Turnitin software for masters and PhD theses was not a proposal, but a recommendation that had previously been approved by the Provost's Board.

2.2 The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following actions due for completion by February 2019 [**PRQC.2018.22b**]:

**(i)** College pastoral care structures (May 2018, 6.7)

Directors of Postgraduate Study are submitting summaries. The Secretary will collate the information and distribute to PRQC members for a College overview.

**Action: Directors of Postgraduate Study**

**(ii)** College pastoral care structures (May 2018, 6.8)

It has been agreed that the formation of a working group is no longer required as pastoral care structures are now embedded within Departments.

(iii) Academic Regulations and policy - College guidance for the approval of Partner Research Institutions (PRIs) and Split PhDs (May 2018, 9.3.2)

A College-wide review of research degree regulations will now take place. The review will cover the current PRI scheme and Split PhD procedures.

It is clear that the PRI scheme and Split PhD procedures cannot be reviewed in isolation as they are linked to External Study Leave procedures and the wider College regulations.

(iv) Terms of reference, constitution and membership (October 2018, 2.2)

See Item 4.1.

(v) Periodic Reviews (Milestones) (October 2018, 3.2(i))

See Item 5.2.

(vi) Periodic Review (Templates) (October 2018, 8.2.3)

The Self-Evaluation Document template will be updated and circulated to PRQC members in due course. Timelines for periodic review will be as flexible as is possible to accommodate Departments' availability and workload.

**Action: Secretary**

(vii) PhD Plagiarism Working Group (October 2018, 9.1.5)

PRQC feedback was communicated to the College Secretary (John Neilson). The College Secretary reported via email that the Working Group has continued to meet and the Head of Scholarly Communications Management (Ruth Harrison) has joined as a formal member; a PRQC recommendation. Suggested approaches to various practical issues of implementation are being worked up and will be discussed at PRQC on 15 May 2019.

(viii) Special cases reports (Special Cases - Late Cases Thesis) (October 2018, 20.3.2)

At the previous meeting, it was noted that there were 8 late cases recorded as a result of 'confusion over College procedures'. The Secretary confirmed the current College regulations on interruptions and external student leave:

- A student should request an interruption if undertaking activities which do not directly contribute towards the degree registration (e.g. alternative research or an internship)
- A student should request 'External Study Leave' if undertaking activities which directly contribute to the degree registration.

Departments are encouraged to direct students to the relevant procedure and guidance, where appropriate.

2.3 The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following action due for completion by May 2019 **[PRQC.2018.22b]**:

(i) PhD Thesis Submission – Procedures (October 2018, 18.1.2)

Following PRQC's recommendation that research degree students should not be required to cover the cost of theses printing, the Academic Registrar explored how the College could provide support financially and/or by changing submission requirements. Following a number of possible solutions put forward by the Academic Registrar via email, PRQC recommended the following to QAEC:

- That the College no longer requires hard copies of theses and requests an electronic versions only
- That both internal and external examiners are offered hard copies of theses, the costs of which will be covered by the College

Should QAEC endorse PRQC's recommendation then the contract with the Elvaston Group will need to be managed and internal College administration processes adapted. PRQC recommended that the College should aim for new theses submission processes being implemented by 1 August 2019.

**Action: David Ashton**

2.4 There were no further updates on the other ongoing actions.

**3. Matters arising**

3.1 There were no other matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda.

**4. PRQC membership [PRQC.2018.23]**

4.1 The Committee approved the updated PRQC membership, which included the following additions:

- Dr Saskia Goes - Earth Science and Engineering (for Professor Peter Allison, who was previously covering ESE as well as Deputy Director of the Graduate School role)
- Dr Christos-Savvas Bouganis - Electrical and Electronic Engineering (for Professor Andrew Holmes)
- Professor Mike Lovett – NHLI (for Professor Tony Magee, who was previously covering NHLI as well as Deputy Director of the Graduate School role)
- Professor Carol Propper (now the permanent PRQC Business School representative)
- Student representatives (up to three of which will attend each meeting):
  - Ashley Brooks
  - Emma Couves
  - Raya El Laham
  - Carina Zhao
  - Hannah Jones

## 5. Postgraduate Research Regulations

### 5.1 Proposed schedule for the review of postgraduate research regulations [PRQC.2018.24]

5.1.1 As discussed briefly at the termly Directors of Postgraduate Studies meeting in the Autumn term, following the review of the College's taught regulations it is intended to undertake a review of those for postgraduate research regulations.

5.1.2 This review will seek to ensure the regulations are fit for purpose and future-proofed. It is not anticipated the scale of change will be near that undertaken for the taught regulations and therefore it is planned that the consultation, review and rewriting process will be completed by Spring 2020, in order for implementation in Autumn 2020.

5.1.3 PRQC noted the following schedule:

Date	Action
20 February 2019	Kick off of research regulations review at PRQC
March – June 2019	Identification of key issues to be reviewed; review of best practice in the sector
June – December 2019	Development of revised regulations
February 2020	20/21 Research Regulations to be presented to PRQC for consideration
March 2020	20/21 Research Regulations to be presented to QAEC for approval
March 2020	20/21 Research Regulations to be presented to Senate for approval
March – September 2020	Communication of approved regulations to staff; dialogue over implementation
2020/21	Collation of feedback on operation of regulations
Spring 2021	Review of operation of regulations

5.1.4 Members were asked to advise on any specific areas of the current regulations which may need addressing urgently for October 2019. Although no areas were highlighted at the meeting, feedback can be provided to the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team (Registry) over the course of the review.

### 5.2 Current College guidance on PhD milestones [PRQC.2018.25]

5.2.1 PRQC considered the current timings of ESA and LSR milestones, informed by the following sources:

- UKRI training grants regulations
- UKRI Submission Rate Survey rules
- College student withdrawals statistics
- Milestone timings across the sector

- 5.2.2 The current ESA deadline of 9 months was discussed. Although this is in line with sector norms, ESA clashes with undergraduate assessment and, as a result, workload can be an issue.

PRQC recommended a change to the ESA deadline - that students should be assessed by 10 months, with an additional 2 months for re-assessment. Should a student withdraw after 12 months, UKRI had previously confirmed that, subject to the terms and conditions, training grant funds may be used, without reference to the Research Council, in such a manner as to best undertake the provision of training leading to the award of a postgraduate degree, which must fall within the remit of the Council concerned.

- 5.2.3 PRQC also recommended that the current LSR completion window of 18-24 months should be revised to a deadline of 24 months. Students will be guided by departments as to an appropriate timeframe to complete the LSR (should this be earlier 24 months) but, if LSR is considered a point at which a student might be transferred to MPhil or withdrawn, then a 'hard' deadline must be prescribed within the regulations to ensure fairness and consistency. Further discussion will take place at PRQC around LSR timings and requirements.

It was agreed that the recommendations will feed into the broader review of Postgraduate Research Regulations and wider consultation. Any proposed revisions will be formally considered at PRQC, QAEC and Senate.

### **5.3 Postgraduate research appeals regulations [PRQC.2018.26]**

- 5.3.1 Over the past 3 years, a task and finish group has been considering the student casework policies and procedures, and updates have been approved and effective from September 2018 for Student Discipline, Academic Misconduct (Taught assessment only), Mitigating Circumstances and Academic Appeals (Taught programmes). The Appeals process for Research programmes has not been reviewed as part of the work of this group. In light of changes to the sector level guidance for academic appeals over recent years, and reflecting on recent casework, it is appropriate to now review the Research Appeals procedures.

- 5.3.2 Following a steer from the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team, PRQC recommended to QAEC that:

- A review of the research appeal procedures takes place
- A separate research specific policy and procedure is maintained, but is updated using the principles and basic procedure of the taught programme policy
- An updated version of the policy(s) is prepared for implementation in 2019-2020

### **6 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2019 [PRQC.2018.27]**

- 6.1 The Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) is an annual national survey of postgraduate research students (PhD, EngD or MD(Res)) hosted by AdvanceHE. It is run biennially at the College.

- 6.2 There is significant flexibility in terms of the timing and so PRQC recommended to QAEC that the survey is open from 25 April 2019 to 17 May 2019.
- 6.3 Institutions are also permitted to add additional questions to the survey. As the College is committed to student wellbeing, PRQC recommended to QAEC that 5 additional questions on wellbeing, set out by AdvanceHE but optional for providers, are added to the survey. PRQC also recommended to QAEC that 2 additional questions on wellbeing, drafted by the Graduates Students' Union, are added to the survey.

**Action: Secretary, Ute Thiermann**

## **7 Periodic review**

### **7.1 PGR Periodic Review - Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering [PRQC.2018.28]**

- 7.1.1 The Committee considered the report and Departmental response from the periodic review of postgraduate research provision in the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, which took place on 18 May 2018. PRQC noted that the review panel expressed full confidence in the Department's ongoing management of the academic standards of its research degree provision and the quality of learning opportunities provided to its students.
- 7.1.2 The panel recognised the Department's world leading research and facilities, which provide a highly stimulating environment for research activity. The panel also praised the organised and effective Research Office, with a proactive PGR administrator (Sarah Willis), who has made significant improvements to the Department. The team were congratulated on their thesis on-time completion rate.
- 7.1.3 The periodic review report highlighted a number of areas of good practice including: Thorough induction arrangements; informative departmental documentation; encouraging postdocs to seek formal recognition as Assistant Supervisors; and strengthening engagement with student reps through promoting attendance at Department committees.
- 7.1.4 The review panel recommended that the Department addresses the following to enhance its postgraduate research degree provision:
- Allocate sufficient resources to further engender research collaboration and cohort building
  - Ensure that space is carefully managed and considered in relation to student recruitment
  - Proactively engage students on a pastoral level
  - Provide clarity as to the resource available for student conference travel
  - Ensure the new PGR administrative structure is sustainable
  - Ensure that feedback for ESA and LSR is provided in a timely manner

7.1.5 The Panel recommended that the College addresses the following to further enhance its postgraduate research degree provision:

- Investigate why departments are finding it problematic to meet ESA deadlines and provide solutions or guidance as to how departments can ensure ESAs are completed within an appropriate timeline

The College recommendation will form part of the wider review of postgraduate research regulations (see Item 5).

7.1.6 PRQC agreed that a formal follow-up to the periodic review, including actions taken to address any concerns, will be carried out in three years in line with the College's Precept Review cycle.

## **7.2 Revised PGR periodic review - Self Evaluation Document template [PRQC.2018.28 – not received]**

7.2.1 To be noted at the next meeting on 15 May 2019.

## **8 Policy on Research Degree Supervision [PRQC.2018.30]**

8.1 PRQC considered the following minor amendments to the College's Research Degree Supervision Policy as follows:

- Hyperlinks added where these are missing
- Reference to Postgraduate Tutor have been changed to Senior Tutor PGR
- Clarification that, at the point of allocation, the main supervisor should be contracted to the College for at least the period of the student's PhD

8.2 Given the College is moving towards strengthening its profile in terms of pedagogic scholarship and research, demonstrated by the newly created Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship, it was also proposed that a new section is added which allows staff within the Learning and Teaching family to supervise PhD students.

8.3 PRQC recommended the proposed revisions to QAEC.

8.4 The GSU President requested further information on the College's complaint and appeals procedures so the committee agreed to invite the Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) (Kirstie Ward) to the next meeting to provide a verbal summary.

## 9 PGR Entry Requirements 2020-21 [PRQC.2018.31]

9.1 The College's postgraduate research admission policy confirms the general entry requirements for Research study at the College as;

- Normally, a 2:1 Bachelor (Honours) degree and Master's degree, or other qualification at FHEQ Level 7 (e.g. MSci, MEng, MBBS). Approved professional qualifications obtained by written examination may also be considered.

Whilst the College website does not have 'Research' subject course pages, Admissions (Registry) consults all departments annually regarding their general entry requirements and English entry requirements. This is intended to inform the admissions processing of applications, as well as the publication details of the College prospectus.

9.2 PRQC recommended to QAEC that the proposed Postgraduate Research General Entry Requirements for 2020-21 are adopted as follows:

All Faculties (excluding Medicine):

- 2:1 Bachelor (Hons) degree in an appropriate subject. Applicants must also normally hold or be studying towards a Master's degree.

Faculty of Medicine:

- Normally applicants require an MBBS, or Master's degree and a 2:1 Bachelor (Hons) degree in an appropriate subject.

PRQC noted that these requirements are considered the 'general' entry requirements. Departments may make offers at or above these level (above the general level) and may consider applicants below this level providing that they still satisfy the College minimum general entry requirement.

9.3 PRQC recommended to QAEC the following English entry requirements for 2020/21 entry:

Higher Level English:

- Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication (no change)
- Department of Chemical Engineering (no change)
- Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (no change)
- Imperial College Business School (no change) (entry via successful completion of MRes, not directly via admissions).

All other Imperial departments operate the 'Standard Level' English requirement for entry to Research.

9.4 PRQC also recommended to QAEC that the Centre for Environmental Policy only applies the English language exemption from degrees studied in approved

majority English speaking countries, where the full degree has been studied in that country, not just 1 year including the final year. This is in line with the Business School and Department of Mathematics.

## **10 PhD Plagiarism Awareness Course [PRQC.2018.32]**

- 10.1 PRQC received a paper setting out the updates that have been made to the College's Plagiarism Awareness course. The course aims to introduce Doctoral students to the concept of plagiarism. The course does not cover College regulations, although it does refer to these as part of the feedback provided to students completing the mandatory quiz on self-plagiarism, scenario 'Peng'.
- 10.2 Following PRQC's feedback on 24 October 2018, the importance of the College's regulation on self-Plagiarism has been strengthened within the course content. The course advises students to discuss this regulation with their supervisor and to ensure that any previously published research work or adapted papers included in the main body of the thesis are properly referenced. It also reminds students that they may also need to check whether they need to obtain permission from the publisher. The course also shows students how to re-use their published research in other work (not only their thesis) without committing self-plagiarism or copyright infringement. PRQC welcomed the updates.

## **11 Revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education [PRQC.2018.33]**

- 11.1 PRQC noted the revised [UK Quality Code for Higher Education Advice and Guidance - Research Degrees](#).
- 11.2 The theme 'Research Degrees' relates to higher education research in the specific context of research degrees and particular requirements for doctorates and research master's degrees. It refers to the research environment and the supervisory process which are distinct requirements of research degrees and enable higher education providers to provide an effective student experience and maintain academic standards for research degrees. A number of other themes in QAA's 'Advice and Guidance' documents are equally applicable to research degrees and some outline specific guidelines in the context of research degrees.

## **12. PRQC subcommittees**

PRQC noted the minutes from the following sub-committees:

- 12.1 Minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 5 December 2018 [PRQC.2018.34]
- 12.2 Minutes of the Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 12 June 2018 [PRQC.2018.35]
- 12.3 Minutes of the CDT DTP Governance Committee held on 7th February 2018 [PRQC.2018.36]

**13. Any other business**

- 13.1 The GSU President is exploring the possibility of a cross-faculty fund for GSU events. Members supported this initiative but proposed that the item is put forward to Vice-Provost's Advisory Group for Education (VPAGE) and/or Provost's Board as it falls outside the remit of PRQC

**14. Date of next meeting**

- 14.1 Wednesday 15 May 2019, 2pm – 4:30pm, Gabor Room, 611, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Building, South Kensington campus.

**15. Special cases reports**

PRQC received reports on special cases as follows:

- 15.1 Special cases for examination arrangements, considered by the Director and/or Deputy Directors of the Graduate School – February 2019 [PRQC.2018.36].
- 15.2 Special cases for late theses submission, considered by the Director and/or Deputy Directors of the Graduate School – February 2019 [PRQC.2018.36].