

## Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

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**10 May 2016**

### **Confirmed Minutes**

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#### **Present**

Professor Sue Gibson (Chair and Director of the Graduate School)  
Dr Tim Albrecht (Chemistry)  
Professor Andrew Amis (Mechanical Engineering)  
Dr Anil Bharath (Bioengineering)  
Dr Paul Bruce (Aeronautics) [representing Professor Ferri Aliabadi]  
Dr Gerard Gorman (Earth Science and Engineering) [representing Professor Peter Allison]  
Dr Niki Gounaris (Life Sciences)  
Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)  
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)  
Professor Peter Lindstedt (College Consul)  
Dr Felicity Mellor (School of Professional Development)  
Professor Jonathan Morrison (Aeronautics) [representing Professor Ferri Aliabadi]  
Dr Kevin Murphy (Medicine)  
Ms Caroline Ransom (Crick Doctoral Centre) [representing Dr Sally Leever]  
Dr Alessandra Russo (Computing)  
Mr Chun-Yin San (ICU Deputy President, Education)  
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)

#### **In Attendance**

Mr Richard Monk (Assistant Registrar, Senate and Academic Review)  
Ms Eleri Canning (Records Officer, Research Degree Examinations, Registry)

#### **1. Welcome**

The Committee welcomed new members and alternates.

#### **2. Apologies for absence**

Professor Ferri Aliabadi (Aeronautics)  
Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)  
Dr Simon Archer (College Tutor)  
Dr Marco Aurisicchio (Design Engineering)  
Mr James Balloch (Acting Academic Registrar)  
Professor David Dye (Materials)  
Professor Amparo Galindo (Chemical Engineering)  
Professor Andrew Holmes (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)  
Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)  
Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director and NHLI)  
Professor Stefan Maier (Physics)  
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)  
Dr Mike Tennant (Centre for Environmental Policy)  
Dr Mark Ungless (MRC Clinical Sciences Centre)  
Professor Tommaso Valletti (Business School)  
Professor Denis Wright (Director of Student Support)

**3. Minutes of the last meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2016 were approved.

**PRQC/2015/31**

**4. Matters arising**

- 4.1 The Committee received and noted an action list detailing matters arising from the previous meeting and containing updates on progress in completing the required action.

**PRQC/2015/32**

- 4.2 Minute 5.2 (May 2015 meeting) – Precept Review: Hong Kong University Joint Degree Programme – It was noted that the majority of the joint PhD programmes were either no longer recruiting or due to be withdrawn (see also Section 11 below). In light of this the Committee agreed that it would no longer be necessary to develop a student handbook template for joint and collaborative PhD programmes. The action point was therefore considered to be closed.

- 4.3 The Committee agreed that the remaining matters arising were either ongoing and due for report at a subsequent meeting or that appropriate action had been taken since the last meeting.

**ITEMS FOR REPORT**

**5. Joint and Collaborative PhD Degree Programme Committees**

The Committee received minutes from joint research degree programme committee meetings and, where available, student data as follows:

**5.1 A\*STAR-Imperial Doctoral Programme**

**PRQC/2015/33**

The Committee noted that the programme was no longer recruiting and would be withdrawn for new entrants. Current students would be supported until completion of the programme.

**5.2 Malaysia-Imperial Doctoral Programme (MIDP)**

**PRQC/2015/34**

The Committee was reminded that the MIDP had been withdrawn for entry and that no new students had been admitted to the programme since January 2012. The Committee was reassured that the College was committed to supporting the remaining four MIDP students who were in the final stages of their PhD (i.e. awaiting viva or completing post-viva thesis corrections currently).

**5.3 Nanyang Technological University (NTU)/Imperial Doctoral Programme**

**PRQC/2015/35**

The Committee noted that there had been seven students on the programme in total, all of whom had completed their studies and most of whom had submitted their thesis, and that no new students had been admitted to the programme since September 2010. The Memorandum of Agreement governing the joint degree programme had expired in November 2014 and the programme was due to be formally withdrawn [see Section 11 below].

**5.4 National University of Singapore (NUS)/Imperial Doctoral Programme**

**PRQC/2015/36**

The Committee noted that the programme was no longer recruiting and would be withdrawn for new entrants (see Section 11 below). There were currently 21 students enrolled on the programme who would be supported through to completion. The Committee also noted that Professor Stefan Maier was now the Imperial Academic Lead for the programme.

**5.5 Hong Kong University (HKU)/Imperial Doctoral Programme**

**PRQC/2015/37**

The Committee noted that the programme was no longer recruiting and would be withdrawn for new entrants (see Section 11 below). There were currently 13 students enrolled on the programme who would be supported through to completion.

**5.6 Imperial-University of São Paulo Joint Degree**

**PRQC/2015/38**

The Committee noted that there were currently two students based at Imperial, the first was due to complete in September 2016 and the second was likely to complete in January 2017. A further student was due to arrive in September 2016 who was completing the first part of the Joint PhD at USP. The programme had received a request to submit two proposals under the BG-USP fellowship which would hopefully lead to two further candidates but this was still in progress. Discussions were also underway between Imperial and USP to agree the design of the joint PhD certificate.

**5.7 EngD in Nuclear Engineering**

**PRQC/2015/39**

The Committee noted that the programme had not been successful in obtaining new funding and would therefore not be recruiting any further students. Current students were unaffected and the existing Centre would support those students through to completion.

**5.8 EngD in Non-Destructive Evaluation**

**PRQC/2015/40**

The Committee noted that October 2014 had been the last intake of students in the CDT in Non-Destructive Evaluation. The Committee was pleased to note from the review of progress of the EngD cohorts that excellent outcomes were being achieved across the cohorts.

The Committee noted that the new Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in Quantitative Non-Destructive Evaluation had begun in academic year 2015-16, with the first intake of students commencing their studies in October 2015.

**5.9 EngD in Water Engineering**

**PRQC/2015/41**

The Committee noted that the Imperial cohorts were progressing well and that the programme appeared to be running smoothly.

**5.10 Medical Research Council (MRC)-Asthma UK Centre in Allergic Mechanisms of Asthma 4-year training programme**

**PRQC/2015/42**

At its May 2015 meeting the Committee had noted that the funding for the Centre had been through one five year renewal (10 years in total) and would not be renewed again by the MRC.

The Committee was therefore pleased to note that the Centre had since received further funding from Asthma UK to enable it to continue and another 8 students were due to commence their studies in October 2016.

**5.11 The London Pain Consortium 4-year PhD programme**

**PRQC/2015/43**

The Committee was reminded that the London Pain Consortium 4-year PhD programme had been withdrawn for entry and was no longer recruiting. The Committee noted that the last four students on the programme had started in September 2012 and were now in their final year, with one having been granted an extension to July 2016. There would be no further intake to this programme.

## **ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION**

### **6. Follow Up from Precept Reviews of Research Degree Provision**

#### **6.1 Department of Aeronautics**

6.1.1 The Committee considered a follow up report from the precept review of departmental research degree provision in the Department of Aeronautics (academic year 2013-2014).

**PRQC/2015/44**

6.1.2 It was noted that the outcome of the precept review was that the Department should provide a progress report on action taken to ensure compliance with Precept 16 (Writing-Up) in 12 months' time. In response the Department had provided an update which advised the Committee that the PhD handbook now clearly stated that students were not permitted to work in the lab during their writing-up period, and must have completed all experimental work before making the transition to Completing Research Status (writing-up). In addition, Departmental technicians and the Department's Safety Officer had been briefed on the issue to help to ensure that students adhered closely to this requirement. Since taking this additional action there had been no further incidents of students conducting experimental work in the labs during CRS.

6.1.3 The Committee was reassured by the action taken by the Department in respect of Precept 16 and agreed that the Department was now compliant with this precept.

### **7. World Class Research Supervision**

#### **7.1 Research Plan Confirmation and Professional Skills Requirement**

7.1.1 The Committee considered a paper outlining changes to the College Research Degree Precepts and other related policy documents and guidance notes. The paper also contained a proposal to remove the Research Plan Confirmation as a formal College requirement and proposed amendments to professional skills requirements at Early Stage Assessment.

**PRQC/2015/45**

7.1.2 Following discussion the Committee agreed to approve the proposed amendments to the College Research Degree Precepts and Professional Skills Requirement at Early Stage Assessment. The Committee noted that the proposed amendments were in response to recommendations made by the Working Party for World Class Research Supervision; specifically that the College requirement to complete a Research Plan Confirmation (RPC) should be removed and that professional skills requirements at Early Stage Assessment should be reduced to two courses (instead of four) with students completing a further two courses by the Late Stage Review. In addition to the Research Degree Precepts the Committee also approved associated amendments to the following documents:

1. Code of Practice for Research Supervisors
2. Code of Practice for Research Students
3. Guidance notes for the Early Stage Assessment
4. Early Stage Assessment form
5. Guidance notes for the Late Stage Review
6. Late Stage Review form
7. Professional Skills Development Statement of Policy and Attendance Requirement

7.1.3 The Committee further agreed that approval of the above amendments would be with effect from 1 October 2016.

## **8. Amendments to Regulations for the award of PhD and MPhil (for students registering in and after January 2011)**

8.1 The Committee considered amendments to the Regulations for the award of PhD and MPhil (for students registering in and after January 2011).

**PRQC/2015/46**

8.2 It was noted that the proposed amendments intended to better articulate the rules governing students who registered for an MPhil award only. The Committee noted that the overwhelming majority of students would continue to register directly for the PhD as was currently the case but that there would in future be provision in the regulations for students to register for the MPhil only.

8.3 The Committee agreed that an amendment was necessary to clause 1.4 of the version of the regulations presented. The Committee agreed that the inclusion of the word 'normally' (i.e. 'a candidate registered directly for the award of the MPhil degree will not *normally* be permitted to transfer to the PhD degree') would permit some flexibility and could enable a student 'exceptionally' to transfer to the PhD. The Committee was confident that this would not undermine the principle of direct registration which had operated for a number of years and was therefore well embedded across the College.

8.4 The Committee agreed to recommend that Senate approve the amendments to the Regulations for the award of PhD and MPhil (for students registering in and after January 2011).

8.5 Consequent to the amendments to the Regulations the Committee also agreed to recommend that Senate approve amendments to the related policy document 'Research Degree registration for staff on 12 months' funding'.

8.6 The Committee further agreed that the amendments to the regulations and the associated policy document would take effect for students registering on or after 1 October 2016, allowing time for approval of the amendments to the regulations by Senate in June 2016.

## **9. Procedure for Appointment of Examiners for Research Degrees**

9.1 The Committee consider a proposed amendment to the Procedure for Appointment of Examiners for Research Degrees.

**PRQC/2015/47**

9.2 The Committee noted that the amendment had been proposed to ensure that the criteria for appointment of External Examiners within the procedure fully accorded with College policy for establishing and reviewing collaborative provision wherein it was specified that under consortium arrangements (e.g. multi-institutional CDTs) external examiners must be appointed from outside the consortium.

9.3 The Committee agreed to recommend that the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee approve the amendment to the Procedure for Appointment of Examiners for Research Degrees.

## **10. Submission Data**

10.1 The Committee considered a report of submission rates for students due to submit for an MPhil or PhD during the period 1 February 2015 to 31 January 2016.

**PRQC/2015/48**

10.2 The Committee welcomed the provision of more current data than had been the case in previous years. This was considered preferable to evaluating the submission data retrospectively. The Committee noted that the overall College on-time submission rate had remained consistent with the previous year at 86.4%. On-time submission rates for the majority of Departments showed an increase on the 2014-15 figures.

## **11. Withdrawal of Programmes**

- 11.1 The Committee considered proposals to permanently withdraw the following programmes:
- NTU/Imperial Doctoral Programme **PRQC/2015/49**
  - NUS/Imperial Doctoral Programme **PRQC/2015/50**
  - HKU/Imperial Doctoral Programme **PRQC/2015/51**
  - A\*STAR/Imperial Doctoral Programme **PRQC/2015/52**
- 11.2 The Committee noted that the HKU, NUS and NTU programmes had ceased to recruit and that the remaining students on the HKU and NUS programmes would be fully supported through to completion. The A\*STAR programme had also ceased to recruit as A\*STAR was no longer funding the programme, the final student having commenced in January 2016. Although the programmes were no longer recruiting students they were yet to be formally withdrawn.
- 11.3 The Committee agreed to recommend that the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee approve the permanent withdrawal of the four collaborative PhD programmes listed above, for onward submission to the Senate. Withdrawal of the programmes would be with immediate effect.

## **12. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES)**

### **12.1 PRES 2015: Departmental Responses**

- 12.1.1 The Committee considered a Departmental response to the PRES 2015 results from the Department of Mechanical Engineering.

**PRQC/2015/53**

- 12.1.2 Committee members were reminded that at the 15 May 2015 meeting it had been agreed that the survey results and action plan should be discussed at Staff Student Committees (SSC) and should be signed off by at least one of the student representatives and the SSC Chair as confirmation that this step had taken place.

- 12.1.3 It was noted that the following Departmental responses and action plans were outstanding and it was agreed that these would be requested from the Departments concerned as soon as possible for presentation to the October 2016 meeting:

- Aeronautics
- Materials

**ACTION: Registry Surveys Team**

### **12.2 PRES 2017: Consultation**

- 12.2.1 The Committee considered the draft College response to the PRES 2017 consultation.

**PRQC/2015/54**

- 12.2.2 The Committee noted that the Higher Education Academy had been carrying out a consultation on possible changes to the PRES which had been prompted by feedback from the sector. Topics of the consultation included: the relevance of PRES for Doctoral Training Centres/Partnerships and Professional Doctorates; the timing of PRES; and the publication of results.

- 12.2.3 The Committee was largely content with the draft response but suggested that the College's response to Question 3 should be strengthened by selecting 'mostly disagree' rather than 'neither agree nor disagree'. The Committee took the view that adding further content to the PRES survey as proposed in consultation question 3 was not desirable and that without further detail of the types of questions that might be used to assess student engagement in a future PRES the consultation response should clearly indicate that the College did not support that particular proposal. It was agreed that the Committee's feedback would be communicated to the Senior Assistant Registrar (Quality Assurance & Enhancement) who had produced the draft response on behalf of the College.

**ITEMS FOR REPORT**

**13. Chair's Action**

- 13.1 It was noted that no action had been taken by the Chair on behalf of the Committee since the previous meeting in March 2016.

**14. Imperial College Union: Research Representatives Review Project**

- 14.1 The Committee received and noted a briefing paper from the ICU on the Research Representatives Review Project.

**PRQC/2015/55**

**15. Imperial Recognised Locations (IRLs) and Partner Research Institutions (PRIs) Report 2015-16**

- 15.1 The Committee received a report of current IRLs and PRIs, noting those which had been recently approved and the numbers of students at each location.

**PRQC/2015/56**

**16. Postgraduate Professional Development Committee**

- 16.1 The Committee received and noted the confirmed minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee meeting held on 17 February 2016.

**PRQC/2015/57**

**17. Application Statistics – Postgraduate Research Application Numbers for 2016 entry**

- 17.1 The Committee received and noted a report showing the number of postgraduate research applications (excluding MRes) made for 2016 entry by 18 April 2016 compared with the number of applications made at the same point in the previous two years.

**PRQC/2015/58**

**18. Senate**

Members noted that the latest executive summaries from Senate were available [here](#).

**19. Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee**

Members noted that the latest executive summaries from the QAEC meetings were available [here](#)

**20. Any Other Business**

There was no other business raised for discussion.

**21. Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 26 October 2016. The meeting will start at 14:00. The deadline for papers is Wednesday 12 October 2016.

**22. Reserved Business (not circulated to student members)**

**22.1 Special Cases Reports**

The Committee received reports on special cases as follows:

- (i) Special cases for admissions considered by the special cases panel for doctoral programmes

**PRQC/2015/59**

- (ii) Special cases for Examiners, considered by the Director of the Graduate School

**PRQC/2015/60**

- (iii) Special cases for late entry, considered by the Director and Deputy Directors of the Graduate School

**PRQC/2015/61**