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Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 9 October 2024 at 14:10 on MS Teams

Present

Professor Jennifer Quint (ECRI Academic Deputy Director) [Chair]
Ruksana Begum-Meades (ICU PGR Academic & Welfare Officer (Medicine))
Dr Dalal Alrajeh (Computing)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Professor Charlotte Bevan (Surgery and Cancer)
Professor Laki Buluwela (ECRI Academic Deputy Director)
Dr Chris Cantwell (Aeronautics)
Professor Jennifer Collier (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Dr Mazdak Ghajari (Dyson School of Design Engineering)
Professor Christopher Gourlay (Materials)
Professor Martyn Kingsbury (CLCC/CHERS)
Laura Lane (Associate Director (Strategy and Operations), ECRI)
Dr David Mann (Life Sciences)
Dr Sarah Martin (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Alex Michaelides (Business)
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 David Taborda (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Susi Underwood (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Jeffrey Vernon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)
Dr Rudiger Woscholski (Chemistry)
Dr Choon Hwai Yap (Bioengineering)
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review) [Secretary]

In Attendance
Dr Elena Forasacco (Senior Teaching Fellow, ECRI) for item 5.1
Jon Hancock (Research Integrity Officer, Division of the University Secretary) for item 6.1

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Dr Suzanne Husein (Funding Strategy Manager – Doctoral Training Lead, Research Office)

Emma Pruszewicz (Programme and Operations Manager, Centre for Academic English)

Bethan Ritchie (Manager of ECRI Administration) for item 5.1

Scott Tucker (Deputy Director, Quality Assurance and Enhancement)

Part 1 – Preliminary Items

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Chair welcomed new members to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

Camille Boutrolle (ICU President)
Emina Hogas (ICU Deputy President (Education))
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Professor Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Professor Peter Haynes (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Yiannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Dr Iro Ntonia (CLCC/CHERS)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting [PRQC.2024.01]

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 May 2024, subject to clarification that point 4.1.3 refers to potential sanctions for students who have not engaged with progression assessments and have also not requested extensions. This matter would be considered at the February meeting as part of the PhD regulation updates.

2.2 The Committee noted the action list [PRQC.2024.02].

    i. Action 4.4.4 (May 2024) – members were reminded to send any comments on the Unsatisfactory Engagement Policy and Procedure to Kirstie Ward as the policy is being re-drafted prior to final approval.

    ii. Action 5.4 (May 2024) – members were informed that QAEC had agreed that mandatory training on ethical uses of AI would be introduced for students and would be a requirement to complete prior to the ESA. This would take effect from 2025/26 academic year. Changes to the regulations to address this would be considered at the February meeting as part of the

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MPhil/PhD regulations updates.

2.3   The remaining actions from the May meeting had been completed or were on the agenda.

2.4   The committee noted the Chair's Action list [PRQC.2024.03].

3.   Matters arising

3.1   The committee noted the updated DoLS EDI form [PRQC.2024.04] and the Best Practice in Supervision workshop schedule [PRQC.2024.05].

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

4.   Terms of Reference and membership 2024/25 [PRQC.2024.06]

4.1   PRQC reviewed the Terms of Reference and membership. It was agreed to recommend these to QAEC for approval.

5.   Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2023 outputs

5.1   Report on improving the experience of women PhD students [PRQC.2024.07]

5.1.1   The results of the report and the recommendations were presented to the committee. The following additional areas for action were suggested by PRQC:
- Reviewing the guidance for milestone assessment panels to ensure a gender balance (where possible)
- Improving signposting for wellbeing and pastoral care support
- Reviewing the mutual expectations document to try and ensure open dialogue about setting productive and healthy student-supervisor partnerships
- Considering whether further developments are required in CPD training for supervisors

5.1.2   Whilst welcoming the recommendations, members noted that the main issue raised in the free text comments was to do with harassment which was not being directly addressed. It was felt that university policy and process for dealing with reports of harassment were not visible and students may not be aware of the support available. Physical safety could also be a concern for women students and staff working late at night on campuses. It was noted there is a distinction between harassment and unconscious bias which also needs addressing but will require different approaches.

5.1.3   It was reported that the ECRI will setting new objectives in regard to supporting

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diverse groups. The concerns raised about the subject of harassment (including student to student cases) would be referred back to HR to consider potential additional actions.

Action: Laura Lane

5.1.4   The report will also be submitted to the People and Culture Committee for consideration.

5.2   Report on challenges and barriers for dealing with poor supervision [PRQC.2024.08]

5.2.1   It was reported that departments had already been invited to review an earlier draft of the recommendations and had provided comments which had been incorporated into the final set for PRQC to consider.

5.2.2   The meeting reviewed the recommendations. Members felt that there were potential areas that could still be explored relating to training for supervisors and having a series of escalation points available to departments rather than having to refer cases to HR from the outset.

5.2.3   The recommendations would be taken forward by ECRI.

Action: Laura Lane

5.3   Faculty PRES action plans [PRQC.2024.09]

5.3.1   The meeting received the faculty PRES actions plans.

5.3.2   In regard to the Imperial College Business School action plan, it was reported that Centre for Academic English (CfAE) had previously offered courses for business students, however, ICBS had developed their own pre-sessional programme and asked that all students be directed to this provision.

6.   Research student publications

6.1.   Questions relating to students publishing on non-thesis topics [PRQC.2024.10]

6.1.1.   PRQC was invited to consider a number of questions relating to whether students would need supervisor permission to publish articles outside their research topic – particularly if they are using the Imperial affiliation. This issue has arisen from recent research misconduct cases.

6.1.2.   Members felt that, whilst students publishing (potentially multiple) articles outside of their thesis topic could indicate there were issues with their studies, the supervisor did not need to give explicit permission for them to do so. However,

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students should not use the Imperial affiliation or use university funds to pay for such publications.

6.1.3. It was agreed that ECRI would work with the Research Integrity Officer to set up a group to develop guidance in this area.

Action: Laura Lane

7. GTA Training

7.1 Introduction of compulsory safeguarding training for GTAs [PRQC.2024.11]

7.1.1 Following a request by the Director of Safeguarding, the meeting considered a recommendation to require all GTAs to complete safeguarding training.

7.1.2 The meeting discussed the recommendation. It was noted that although the training is available, it is not currently possible for the university to confirm that it has been completed so it will be difficult to check if the requirement has been met.

7.1.3 The group felt that clarity was needed in relation to the term 'young people.' Although some students may be under eighteen when starting the course, any GTA interaction would be in a group environment. If this relates to outreach work then it would be expected that the outreach team would already have requirements in place to address this.

7.1.4 It was agreed that clarity would be sought as to the group(s) and scenarios which it would envisage the compulsory safeguarding training would cover. This would then be reviewed at the next PRQC meeting.

Action: Laura Lane

8. PGR roles and responsibilities

8.1 Updates to Research Degree Supervision Policy [PRQC.2024.12]

8.1.1 Members noted proposed updates to the policy to address supervision by Teaching and Learning (T&L) staff and by Imperial College Research Fellows (ICRF).

8.1.2 Members considered that requiring ICRFs to be present for the full duration of the student's studies in order to be eligible to co-supervise would limit opportunities for these staff to develop key academic skills. As ICRF are appointed for four years, the policy would require them to immediately undertake supervision from the start. Instead it was felt that they could be appointed to a supervisory team (for example as a third co-supervisor) for however long their fellowship permits.

8.1.3 Members disagreed with the amendments proposed to clarify that Teaching and Learning family staff could not be the main supervisor for students with projects that are not focussed on pedagogy or education. It was felt that these staff could

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supervise discipline-specific projects with the agreement of the Head of Department.

8.1.4   It was noted that there is no clarity regarding whether Professional and Technical staff could supervise. This would be referred to the Vice-Provost (Education and Student Experience) for consideration.

8.1.5   It was agreed the recommended update regarding ICRF should be amended to remove the duration requirement. It was agreed the current text regarding staff in the T&L family should be retained and the proposed amendment was rejected.

Action: Laura Lane

8.2   **Updates to roles and responsibilities for Senior Tutor (PGR) and Departmental Disability Officer [PRQC.2024.13]**

8.2.1   PRQC approved the updates to the Senior Tutor (PGR) role to reflect the mutual expectations document and ensuring the DDO role explicitly states this covers PGR students.

Part 3 - Items for note

9.   **List of Partner Research Institutions, Split PhDs and Imperial Recognised Locations [PRQC.2024.14]**

9.1   The meeting noted the updated list.

10.   **Report of sub-committees [PRQC.2024.15]**

10.1   The group noted the unconfirmed minutes of the Crick Research Degree Committee meeting held on 6 March 2024.

11.   **Any Other Business**

11.1   It was confirmed the 'Procedure for appointment of examiners for research degrees' had been updated and clarified the options open to DPS if there was a need to appoint a second internal examiner.

12.   **Dates of future meetings**

12.1   Meetings will be held via Microsoft Teams as follows:
- Wednesday 26 February 2025, 14:10-16:30
- Wednesday 21 May 2025, 14:10-16:30