

## Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

---

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2021 at 14:10 via MS Teams

---

### Present

Professor Yun Xu (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]  
Professor Laki Buluwela (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)  
Professor Emma McCoy (Interim Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)  
Michaela Flegrova (ICU Deputy President (Education))  
Zixiao Wang (GSU President)  
Abderrahim Boualam (Student Representative)  
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)  
Dr Ryan Barnett (Mathematics)  
Dr Christos-Savvas Bouganis (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)  
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)  
Dr Antonio Filieri (Computing)  
Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)  
Dr Hamed Haddadi (Dyson School of Design Engineering)  
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)  
Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)  
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)  
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)  
Dr Enrique Martinez-Perez (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)  
Robin Mowat (Centre for Academic English representative)  
Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)  
Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez (Mechanical Engineering)  
Professor Carol Propper (Business)  
Professor Eduardo Saiz Gutierrez (Materials)  
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)  
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)  
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)  
Professor John Seddon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)  
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)  
Dr James Wilton-Ely (Chemistry)  
Dr Jem Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)  
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review)  
[Secretary]

## **In Attendance**

Abhijay Sood (ICU President)  
Eleri Canning (Head of Assessment Records) [item 8]  
George Ellis (Assessment Records Officer) [item 8]  
Judith Webster (Head of Academic Services) [item 6]  
Scott Tucker (Deputy Director, Academic Quality and Standards)  
Tim Oliver (Quality Assurance Administrator (Standards, Monitoring and Evaluation))

## **Part 1 – Preliminary Items**

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

1.1 The Chair welcomed colleagues in place of existing members and non-members in attendance.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)  
Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering)  
Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)

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

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 October 2020 **[PRQC.2020.18]**.

The membership of PRQC includes a College Consul – as yet no Consul had been identified to join the committee. This would be followed up for the May meeting.

**Action: Secretary**

2.2 The Committee noted the action list. Actions from the October meeting had been completed or were on the agenda for this meeting. **[PRQC.2020.19]**

It was noted that several of the actions related to the data that PRQC views as part of its oversight function. It may be helpful over the summer to review the data that PRQC wishes to monitor and how it should be presented to the meeting.

### **3. Matters arising**

3.1 Use of Report and Support to identify cases of poor supervision (October 2020, 5.2.3)

Following the discussion at the October PRQC meeting, this matter was discussed at QAEC. It was felt that, although there were benefits to the proposal,

the sensitive nature of such disclosures requires further consultation. This project has been paused until after the results of the upcoming PRES survey are available.

### 3.2 Update on new supervisor training and development programme

3.2.1 After polling PGR students, this programme has been named as “Cornerstone – a foundation for successful doctoral student-supervisor partnerships”.

3.2.2 Development of phase one, which relates to core mandatory training for supervisors, is underway with the Digital Learning Hub. These units are based on the Research Degree Precepts and will cover the role, effective partnerships, PhD timelines and the research culture. The units will be launched in October and development of the optional modules in phase two will take place next year.

### 3.3 Selection criteria for President’s Scholarships (October 2020, 14.2)

3.3.1 Following the meeting, work was undertaken to look at the criteria and it was shown that some demographics were impacted by the requirement to hold a 1<sup>st</sup> class UG degree. The publication requirement also had an impact as international degrees may allow students more opportunities to publish at undergraduate and masters level in comparison to UK students.

There has not been an opportunity to review unsuccessful applications to assess the impact of the criteria, but a review may be helpful. This would be referred to the Research Office who coordinate the panels.

3.3.2 It was felt that it would be useful to review the President’s Scholarships criteria as part of the wider discussion of scholarships being undertaken by the Scholarships and Studentships Steering Committee. It was confirmed this was on the agenda for the next meeting and consultation will be undertaken across the College.

3.3.3 Members raised further issues relating to the application process which they felt should also be considered when these scholarships are discussed:

- The volume of documents and short deadlines for departmental staff to assess and rank applications
- The ranking of students against others from different disciplines
- It is harder for students to publish in some disciplines than others
- The criteria favour the most-advantaged students who are more likely to undertake internships

3.3.4 It was agreed that the Scholarships and Studentships Steering Committee would consider the matter and the outcome would be reported back to PRQC.

**Action: Emma McCoy / David Ashton**

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

### **4. Submission of PhD theses via Turnitin process map [PRQC.2020.20]**

- 4.1 It has previously been agreed that ESA reports and PhD theses should be submitted to Turnitin. This has been implemented for ESA for students started from September 2019. The thesis submission element is due to start in the 2021/22 academic year and the paper shows a potential process map for this. It is hoped to get the process agreed by March to allow time for implementation.
- 4.2 The map has been discussed with Registry, the Library and E-learning and circulated to the Crick and PGR administrators. This process is at an early stage and feedback would be helpful.
- 4.3 It was noted that this new requirement would mean that the pre-viva meeting would need to take place before the viva date (rather than on the day as is typical) in order for the results to be reviewed by the examiners.
- 4.4 The meeting discussed the process including the extra burden on the internal and external examiners to carry out this requirement, the potential difficulties of interpreting the report and its implications for the student and whether this requirement could be completed remotely.
- 4.5 The process map would be circulated to DPS for further comments and a final process would be agreed including guidance to support students and supervisors.

**Action: Laura Lane**

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

### **5.1 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey update [PRQC.2020.21]**

- 5.1.1 PRES runs biennially and is due to run again this year. QAEC have already approved the survey dates (22 April - 17 May) but PRQC was asked to consider whether Imperial should adopt the option to add some additional questions to the core set, including institution-specific questions.
- 5.1.2 There was some discussion over whether the survey should be run given the ongoing disruption from COVID-19 but it was agreed that it would be useful to receive student feedback and results would be considered with due reference to the current circumstances.
- 5.1.3 A new optional question set for COVID-19 is available for institutions to include in the survey. If this set is included the results would be benchmarked against other HEIs which may prove useful. It was agreed to include the COVID-19 questions.
- 5.1.4 It was reported that Advance HE had chosen to remove the set of optional questions available in PRES 2019 relating to well-being after consultation with members. Whilst the wording of the well-being questions could be improved, ICU felt that it was important to ask questions about this area and optional institution-specific questions could be drafted and included in PRES 2021 for this purpose.

- 5.1.5 It was agreed that the inclusion of additional institution-specific questions would be taken forward under the remit of the ESOG Student Experience subgroup. A small group, including student representatives, would agree additional questions to include and the areas to cover.

**Action: David Ashton**

## **5.2 Faculty of Medicine PRES 2019 action plan update**

- 5.2.1 PRQC received an oral update on PRES actions from the Faculty of Medicine. It was reported that the departmental action plans are regularly discussed by the faculty including in at the FoM Doctoral Degree Forum and monthly PGR student rep meetings. Improvements resulting from PRES action plans have included:
- improved computer access and assessment of computing needs and set-up
  - better signposting to central support services
  - delivering workshops within the Faculty including ones on resilience
  - interactive departmental inductions
  - DPS and PGR admin are operating online drop-in sessions
  - the use of buddy and mentoring schemes including Year 2 and 3 students as mentors
  - cohort-building activities such as book clubs
  - well-being questionnaires
  - currently producing videos to support and explain milestone activities
  - arranging online supervisor training

## **5.3 Faculty of Natural Sciences PRES 2019 action plan update [PRQC.2020.22]**

- 5.3.1 The meeting noted the update on faculty PRES actions. It was reported that a survey of well-being support was carried out across FoNS. The results have been discussed with each department and they were encouraged to consider the mechanisms for delivering support that would be most effective for their programmes.

## **5.4 Faculty of Engineering PRES 2019 action plan update [PRQC.2020.23]**

- 5.4.1 The meeting noted the update on the faculty PRES actions.

## **5.5 Imperial College Business School PRES 2019 action plan update [PRQC.2020.24]**

- 5.5.1 Work is ongoing on PRES actions. The number of PGR students is relatively small but there is a focus on ensuring there is consistency between departments.
- 5.5.2 Members were encouraged to ensure that departmental and faculty PRES action plans continue to be monitored at FECs. When the latest PRES results are received, departments and faculties will be expected to review the analysis and amend their action plans as necessary.

## **6. Postgraduate Research academic regulations update [PRQC.2020.25]**

6.1. The meeting received the update on the amendments to the Postgraduate Research academic regulations. Some areas highlighted in the Annex will need further discussion by the working group.

6.2 The meeting discussed the specific areas raised in the paper as follows:

### **6.2.1 Milestones**

1. It was agreed that departments should retain flexibility in the constitution of the 'Panel' for the LSR and the documentation required for the review.

2. It was agreed that failure to meet the professional skills development requirements and the Doctoral Academic Communication Requirement Assessment 2 (if required at the ESA stage) could prevent students passing the milestone but the Working Group would discuss the progression implications that could arise from this.

It was felt that the key issue for the ESA and LSR milestones was ensuring they took place in the specified time limits as these were key periods to identify problems within the programme of study. There should be an official mechanism for students to request an extension to the ESA and LSR deadlines to align with the existing late case thesis process.

### **6.2.2 Examinations**

3. It was agreed that in the cases where the outcome of the original viva is to resubmit within 18 months, this re-submission option should be removed as a potential outcome from the second attempt.

### **6.2.3 Implementation of new regulations**

4. The meeting discussed whether these changes should apply to all new and continuing students from 2021-22. This could be implemented via the enrolment / re-enrolment process. It was felt this would be preferable, but the working group should discuss this to ensure the implications for continuing students are fully considered.

6.3 Subsequent to the working group discussions, an updated draft version of the regulations will be presented to the next PRQC meeting.

**Action: Judith Webster**

## **7. Student casework – research annual report [PRQC.2020.26]**

7.1 The meeting noted the casework report. As the number of cases across the categories are very low, it is difficult to identify trends or draw conclusions from the data.

7.2 It was noted that although numbers are very low, PGR students may be afraid to raise official complaints due to the fear of repercussions on their studies. It was

also noted that when there are official complaints, the cases may be complex. Members were reminded that the Graduate School can offer mediation in such circumstances, but this depends on both parties agreeing to participate.

## **8. Special cases – thesis extension report 2019-20 [PRQC.2020.27]**

8.1 PRQC had previously received this information, in the form of a list of students at each meeting. For this meeting, the data has been presented in the format of an annual report which allows analysis of the data at departmental level.

8.2 It was noted that COVID-19 has skewed the results in relation to the number of extensions requested and the impact is expected to continue for a number of years.

8.3 It was agreed that this new format for the data should be continued and this will be presented as an annual report going forward.

**Action: Secretary / Assessment Records**

## **Part 3 – Matters for Information**

### **9. PRQC subcommittees**

9.1 The Committee noted minutes of the subcommittees:

(i) Postgraduate Professional Development Committee - 18 July 2020

**[PRQC.2020.28]**

(ii) CDT DTP Governance Committee - 18 November 2020 **[PRQC.2020.29]**

### **10. Dates of future meetings for 2020-21**

10.1 The next meeting of PRQC will take place on Wednesday 12 May 2021, 14:00 – 16:30.

### **11. Any Other Business**

11.1 A request was made for clarification of the requirements for an Internal PhD examiner. The meeting was informed that once the amendments to the PGR academic regulations are agreed, the associated policies will be reviewed to ensure they align with the regulations and provide the information needed.

### **12. Special cases reports**

12.1 The Committee noted the following report on special cases considered by the special cases panel for doctoral programmes:

(i) Non-Standard Examiner Approvals– February 2021 **[PRQC.2020.30]**

12.2 It was agreed that this data should be reported to PRQC as an annual report at

departmental level as with the other special cases reports.