

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 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)
Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)
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)
Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Dr Enrique Martinez-Perez (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)
Professor Martin McCall (College Consul)
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)
Professor Carol Propper (Business)
Professor Eduardo Saiz Gutierrez (Materials)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
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

Dr Samuel Krevor (Earth Science and Engineering)
Raleigh Mangsat (Surgery and Cancer)
Lizzie Huckle (Head of International Student Support) [item 4]
Judith Webster (Head of Academic Services) [item 5]
Ruth Harrison (Head of Scholarly Communications Management) [item 6]
Scott Tucker (Deputy Director, Academic Quality and Standards)

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:

Professor Stephen Warren (College Consul)
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 10 February 2021 **[PRQC.2020.31]**.

2.2 The Committee noted the action list. Most actions had been completed or were on the agenda for discussion at this meeting. **[PRQC.2020.32]**

3. Matters arising

3.1 Selection Criteria for President's Scholarships (February 2021, 3.3.4)

This issue had been raised at the last Scholarships and Studentships Steering Committee, but more in-depth discussions would be held at the July meeting. It was reported that the faculty ranking sheets were designed to allow faculties to account for differences between disciplines.

3.2 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) – additional well-being questions (5.1.5)

- 3.2.1 A set of well-being questions had been agreed by the ESOG Education group for inclusion in PRES.
- 3.2.2 The survey opened on 22 April – the current response rate is low, and members were asked to encourage their PGR students to complete the survey before it closed on 17 April. The previous survey in 2019 had a 49% response rate so the current low participation is disappointing.
- 3.2.3 The results from PRES will be reviewed by the Task and Finish Group. Preliminary outcomes and actions will be reported to the next PRQC meeting in October.

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

4. Graduate Worker Route visa

- 4.1 The meeting received a presentation about a new Graduate Worker Route visa which would allow international students to remain in the country after graduation to work or seek employment. Information about the visa's operation was noted as follows:
- The launch date is 1 July 2021
 - It is open to all international students at all levels of study who have previously been sponsored on a student visa by the College
 - PGR graduates can remain for three years or two years for UG/PGT graduates (it is not possible to apply for a shorter period than stated)
 - No employer sponsorship is required – the visa can be used to seek work or be self-employed.
 - There are no financial assessments but there are charges for obtaining the visa (£700) and paying the healthcare surcharge upfront for each year (£635 p.a.)
 - Students must be in the UK to make the application
 - Students had already been informed about this new visa and communications will be sent out as information is updated.
- 4.2 There are two areas where further clarification is needed from UKVI:
- 1) Some students will be studying here on a non-student visa so it needs to be confirmed whether they can apply for this post-study route
 - 2) How the College will provide graduation lists to UKVI as students will not be able to apply until after this has been confirmed by Imperial.
- 4.3 The meeting was reminded that it was important to ensure the PGR students' registration period was extended if they are waiting for their visa or are undertaking amendments so their student visa can also be extended to match.
- 4.4 A query was raised in relation to students who have been undertaking a PhD via the Partner Research Institution or Split PhD schemes. In these cases, sponsored students may have spent a significant amount of time studying outside the UK and it was not clear if this would affect their eligibility for this new visa. This would need to be investigated by the International Student Support team.

5. Postgraduate Research academic regulations [PRQC.2020.33]

- 5.1 PRQC received an updated draft of the Postgraduate Research Academic Regulations. These had been produced following further discussion in the working group and had been circulated to the DPS and PGR administrators for comment.
- 5.2 The main amendments were reported as follows:
- The Admissions section has been updated to reflect the Postgraduate Research Admissions Policy.
 - A new section on Progression had been created in order to fully articulate the College's expectations in relation to progression for the Early Stage Assessment and the Late Stage Review.
 - Clarification of Professional Skills requirements at milestones
 - Inclusion of use of Turnitin for thesis submission
 - Removal of the examination outcome option (d) of a thesis satisfying the examiners but the student failing to satisfy the examiners in the viva.
- 5.3 The meeting discussed the removal of examination outcome (d). It was agreed that this should be re-instated as this was a potential, if rare, outcome for a viva. Although there are no examination criteria specifically for the viva, it was felt examiners should make clear in the reports the reasons for this result. This outcome also permits a second viva to re-examine the student within 18 months. It was further agreed to reduce this to six months as it was felt to be fairer for the student and examiners.
- 5.4 It was noted that in examination outcome (a) – pass with minor amendments, the deadline for this had changed from three to six months. It was suggested that the six-month deadline should apply to current students undertaking minor amendments. It was agreed this could be changed for all students.
- 5.5 Further minor changes were agreed as follows:
- Allow the DPS or a nominee to approve study plans if a 36-month monitoring point is required.
 - Ensure it is explicit that the deadlines for milestones include completing any re-sit within that time.
- 5.6 The meeting approved the draft regulations subject to the above changes. These would be re-circulated to PRQC and then submitted to QAEC and Senate for approval.
- 5.7 It was reported that these will be kept under review and amended if issues are identified during the implementation. The next phase of the regulations review will be considering CDTs, Professional Doctorates and intercalated PhDs.

6 Advice and support to prevent plagiarism in PhD theses

6.1 Updated guidance on issues relating to the use of previously published material [PRQC.2020.34]

- 6.1.1 The meeting received an updated guidance document for staff and students on plagiarism issues in theses. The section on the use of previously published material had been expanded and reference to the use of Turnitin had been added. Members approved the document.

Secretary's note: Subsequent to the meeting, the Chair approved amendments to the introduction of the document to refer to the Research Misconduct policy and to section 3.1 to provide further clarity on the definition of plagiarism.

- 6.1.2 The meeting discussed the use of Turnitin and how its use during thesis submission would be managed. It was re-iterated that Turnitin is a tool and any decision on plagiarism in a thesis is a matter of academic judgement. The use of the Turnitin similarity report may assist such decisions but should not be the sole factor in making them.
- 6.1.3 Members were reminded that no student should upload their ESA or thesis to the Turnitin Repository. The reason for this is that uploading to the repository means that Turnitin claims the IP which would cause issues later. The Turnitin website provides guidance to departments on how to set up their Turnitin submission Centre to ensure that student work is not submitted to the Turnitin Repository.
- 6.1.4 A point was raised in relation to the use of previously published material which had multiple student authors. It was queried how the contribution of each student to the publication could be quantified when it is referred to in the thesis. It was agreed that students would be asked to clarify if their contributions to any multi-authored work as part of the thesis originality statement. This would make it easier for examiners to check when reviewing the thesis. It was also agreed that it would be useful to refer to this in the PGR academic regulations. It was agreed that amendments to both the PGR academic regulations and the thesis submission checklist should be submitted to Registry.

Action: Laura Lane

6.2 Process map for the use of Turnitin for thesis submission [PRQC.2020.35]

- 6.2.1 PRQC approved the final process map for the use of Turnitin for thesis submission.
- 6.2.2 It was reported that the Central Secretariat had asked to be informed of the outcome where minor concerns had been raised prior to the viva, through the internal examiner.
- 6.2.3 The meeting agreed that a request should be made to the Central Secretariat to review the Research Misconduct Policy to ensure it aligns with this new requirement and the revised regulations.

Action: Laura Lane

6.3 Website to support use of Turnitin for thesis submission

6.3.1 The meeting was informed that a website will be launched at the end of May to provide guidance and support on the use of Turnitin for thesis submission.

6.3.2 It was felt that it would be important to ensure that internal examiners were referred to the existing guidance on how to interpret the reports. As external examiners would also see a static version of the report, they would also need support in reviewing the results. It was agreed that guidance for examiners reading static originality reports would be developed.

Action: Ruth Harrison

6.3.3 Students would be able to see their own similarity report in Blackboard, but this may not be helpful if they are not familiar with the report. It would be important to ensure there are ongoing discussions between students and supervisors regarding academic integrity as well as ensuring students are directed to appropriate support and training. It was agreed that guidance for students would be developed.

Action: Laura Lane and Ruth Harrison

6.3.4 It was noted that departments are not currently informed when the thesis has been dispatched to the external examiner so it was difficult to judge when the Turnitin report could be shared. However, there were other points during the exam entry process which departments could use as prompts to remind students of the requirement to submit their thesis through Turnitin. This would be highlighted in the new website guidance.

Action: Laura Lane

7. Interruptions of Study for research students [PRQC.2020.36a/b]

7.1 PRQC approved amendments to the Interruptions of Studies guidance and Interruptions of Studies form for PGR students to reflect that some funders will pay sick leave for sponsored students.

8. PGR Periodic Review schedule 2020/21 – 2024/25 [PRQC.2020.37]

8.1 The meeting received a revised PGR periodic review schedule. The College required these reviews to be carried out on a six-yearly cycle, but no reviews had been undertaken in 2018/19 and reviews had paused in 2019/20 due to COVID-19. It was planned to re-start the reviews in line with this revised schedule.

8.2 PRQC approved the schedule in principle but noted that departments should be permitted flexibility in setting the review dates or deferring the review if needed.

Part 3 – Matters for Information

9. PRQC subcommittees

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

- (i) Minutes of the Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 11 November 2020 **[PRQC.2020.38]**
- (ii) Minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 25 November 2020 **[PRQC.2020.39]**
- (iii) Minutes of the CDT-DTP Governance Committee held on 10 February 2021 **[PRQC.2020.40]**

10. Dates of future meetings for 2021-22

10.1 Provisional meeting dates for next year had been previously circulated as follows:

Wednesday 20 October 2021: 14.10 – 16.30
Wednesday 16 February 2022: 14.10 – 16.30
Wednesday 18 May 2022: 14.10 – 16.30

However, the October and May dates will now change to 27 October and 25 May to avoid clashing with Senate. Meeting invites will be circulated to members shortly.

Secretary's note: Following the publication of QAEC dates, the May meeting of PRQC was agreed to take place on Tuesday 10 May 2022.

11. Any Other Business

11.1 The student members were thanked for their participation in PRQC meetings this academic year. Thanks were similarly extended to staff members who may be changing roles.

11.2 Staff and student members were asked to inform the secretary if they would no longer be attending the meeting and were requested to pass on the names of new representatives.

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 Research Admissions – 2019-20 entry **[PRQC.2020.41]**

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.