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Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2025 at 14:10 on MS Teams

Present

Professor Jennifer Quint (ECRI Academic Deputy Director) [Chair]
Dr Dalal Alrajeh (Computing)
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Dr Alexis Barr (Institute of Clinical Sciences)
Professor Charlotte Bevan (Surgery and Cancer)
Dr Chris Cantwell (Aeronautics)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Emina Hogas (ICU Deputy President (Education))
Dr Jun Jiang (Mechanical Engineering)
Professor Martyn Kingsbury (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Laura Lane (Associate Director (Strategy and Operations), ECRI)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Robin Mowat (Centre for Academic English representative)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Brain Sciences; Immunology and Inflammation; Infectious Disease; Metabolism, Digestion and Reproduction)
Dr Iro Ntonia (CLCC/CHERS)
Fryni Panayidou (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Martin Rasmussen (Mathematics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Professor Vahid Shahrezaei (ECRI Academic Deputy Director)
Dr David Taborda (Civil and Environmental 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 Joanna Clark (Cross Faculty Director (Partnerships)) for item 4.2
Annette Fitzpatrick (Head of Assessment Records) for items 4.5 and 5.1
Louise Lindsay (Director of Safeguarding) for item 6.1
Kirstie Ward (Assistant Registrar: Academic Standards) for items 4.1 and 4.3

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Dr Joanna Clark (Cross Faculty Director (Partnerships)) for item 4.2

Part 1 – Preliminary Items

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1 The Chair welcomed members to the meeting.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

Camille Boutrolle (ICU President)

Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)

Dr Mazdak Ghajari (Design Engineering)

Professor Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)

Professor Peter Haynes (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)

Dr Yiannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)

Dr David Mann (Life Sciences)

Dr Sarah Martin (Crick Doctoral Centre)

Professor Alex Michaelides (Business)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting [PRQC.2024.30]

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 26 February 2025.

2.2 The Committee noted the action list [PRQC.2024.31]. The majority of actions had been completed or were on the agenda for discussion.

2.3 The committee noted the Chair's Action list [PRQC.2024.32].

3. Matters arising

3.1 It was reported that the policy on research degree supervision had been considered by QAEC at its April meeting. QAEC had requested minor edits which have been done and the paper will be re-submitted to the June QAEC meeting for approval.

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

4. Academic regulations and policy

4.1 MPhil/PhD academic regulations for 2025/26 [PRQC.2024.33]

4.1.1 Following discussions at the last meeting, members were asked to consider a set of reflective questions relating to proposed updates to the regulations. These had

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arisen due to individual student cases over the year where the regulations were ambiguous or did not address the issue.

- 4.1.2 The meeting discussed the recommended changes as follows:
- i. Re-admission of students previously withdrawn due to academic failure to the same PhD programme – it was agreed this should be an admissions decision but applicants should be aware their previous academic performance may be taken into account.
 - ii. Set an upper limit to the number of times a student can switch from FT to PT study modes – it was agreed this should be left to the discretion of the DPS who will approve such requests.
 - iii. Set an automatic re-sit opportunity for ESA and LSR – currently, students are not automatically entitled to a second opportunity if they fail the EAS or LSR. It was agreed that an automatic re-sit opportunity should be offered.
 - iv. Purpose of Late Stage Review – it was agreed these should be amended to include analytical ability and discussion of preliminary results.
 - v. DACR requirements – it was noted this would be amended depending on the final approval of changes to the DACR requirement.
 - vi. Clarification that no further amendments to the thesis are permitted once it has been submitted to Spiral – the committee felt that further consideration was needed of the scenarios that may lead to such requests before a decision was reached as different approaches may be required.
- 4.1.3 Members also requested that the regulation that permits the supervisor(s) to form part of the assessment panel for the ESA or LSR should be amended to say this is not permitted. This will be taken forward along with consideration of point vi. above.

Action: Scott Tucker/Kirstie Ward

4.2 **Addendum to Mutual Expectations for the Research Student Supervisor Partnership [PRQC.2024.34]**

- 4.2.1 The meeting considered a new Code of Practice for Shared Workspaces which was proposed to be added as an addendum to the Mutual Expectations. This had been created as a recent situation had shown that Imperial's expectations regarding student behaviour in such spaces were not consistently communicated.
- 4.2.2 The following points were noted in discussion:
- The majority of the document was linking to pre-existing policies but presenting these in one place for easier access.
 - This only addressed shared workspaces within Imperial – this should be changed so that it also applies to external workspaces as well.
 - The document is supportive in tone until the final section regarding breaches. It was felt this should be amended to reflect that even if students are under investigation they are encouraged to access support services.
 - It was noted that even though students are subject to our disciplinary processes,

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partners can take unilateral action on breaches which can make the situation difficult to manage.

- 4.2.3 It was agreed that this should be added as an addendum. The document will be amended to reflect the amendments suggested above and will be approved by Chair's Action.

Action: Joanna Clark

4.3 **Unsatisfactory engagement policy and procedure [PRQC.2024.21]**

- 4.3.1 Following discussions at the previous PRQC, the Unsatisfactory Engagement Policy and Procedure had been reviewed by RPRC. In order to address the differing requirements for taught and research students, it was being proposed that an overarching policy regarding unsatisfactory engagement be adopted with separate procedures for taught and research students operating underneath. PRQC was asked to review the structure and consider the procedure for research students.

- 4.3.2 The following points were noted in discussion:

- It is difficult to set a consistent expectation regarding engagement for research students so this may be most appropriately left to the department to determine
- There is a difference between attendance and engagement but international students on student visas will have attendance requirements to be met
- If the student is having difficulties, this can be managed under other processes – this should be the very final step in a situation
- There can be very little evidence of informal management of lack of engagement when the process is invoked meaning the informal stage has to be repeated
- It is important to ensure that the student has been given an opportunity to engage and they are clear how to do this so there is clear justification for decisions
- It is important to ensure that different people are considering the case at each stage
- It would be helpful for staff to be trained/reminded that they should keep records of supervisory interactions as this can be vital evidence when considering situations

- 4.3.3 As further development of the policy and procedures was required, it would not be possible for this to be ready for the 2025/26 academic year and any cases would need to be dealt with under the currently approved process.

Action: Kirstie Ward

4.4 **Updates to the Doctoral Academic Communication Requirement (DACR) [PRQC.2024.36]**

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- 4.4.1 Following discussion at the previous meeting, the Centre for Academic English had carried out consultation with students regarding the proposed changes to the DACR. The results and a proposed operational workflow had been added to the paper.
- 4.4.2 It was not possible to hold a focus group but a survey had been sent to students who had been exempt under the current DACR – the responses were in support of this training. It was felt that this created opportunities for more students to engage with communications training.
- 4.4.3 It was confirmed that the revised requirement would apply to new students starting from October 2025. Existing students would follow the current structure.
- 4.4.4 The meeting approved the changes to the DACR requirement. This would now need to be considered by QAEC.

Action: Robin Mowat

4.5 **Procedure for the appointment of research degree examiners [PRQC.2024.37]**

- 4.5.1 It was reported that this had been brought to PRQC to consolidate two previous updates and approve a single master version. In addition, a paragraph had been added to confirm that visiting academic staff cannot act as internal or external examiners for Imperial research degree examinations.
- 4.5.2 Some concerns were raised about the requirements for the internal examiner which were felt to be too restrictive regarding who can perform this role. It was reported that ECRI had been discussing this topic with Assessment Records and it is expected that this will result in changes to the requirements.
- 4.5.3 It was noted that the procedure should be clear on whether honorary academic staff can act as examiners.

Action: Annette Fitzpatrick

- 4.5.4 PRQC approved the changes.

4.6 **Updates to the ESA and LSR guidance and forms [PRQC.2024.38]**

- 4.6.1 The ESA and LSR guidance and forms have been updated to reflect the new credit amounts for ECRI courses. It was noted that a further update will be required to the ESA form to reflect the decision to change the DACR requirement.
- 4.6.2 PRQC approved the changes. It was requested that the changes were reported in a format that would allow administrators in departments who use electronic systems to manage assessment to easily pick up the changes needed.

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Action: Scott Tucker/Laura Lane

5. Special cases annual summary [PRQC.2024.39]

- 5.1 The meeting received the annual report on the number of special cases for non-standard examiner nominations and number of thesis extension requests processed in the previous academic year.
- 5.2 Although the development work had been paused due to lack of IT resource, the recommendations had been left in as it was felt these were still valid.
- 5.3 A new dashboard had been created that allowed departments to view their thesis extension request data and analyse it as required.
- 5.4 It was noted that the highest number of non-standard examiner nominations referred to ECRI for a decision related to conflicts of interest. It was queried if it was possible to determine if this was due to inconsistency between DPS approaches to checking this when approving or an additional concern had been identified by Assessment Records.

Action: Annette Fitzpatrick

- 5.5 It was queried whether thesis submission rates would form part of the next REF submission. This would need to be clarified with the Strategic Planning and Insight Division (SPID) who lead on REP preparations.

Action: Secretary

Secretary's note: SPID confirmed that thesis submission rates would form part of the People, Culture and Environment (PCE) element in REF 2029, however it was not known how this would be factored in. It is anticipated that the PCE metrics and indicators will be published in winter 2025.

6. GTA Activities, Remuneration and Training policy [PRQC.2024.40]

- 6.1 Following the discussion at the February PRQC meeting and further consultation with GTA coordinators in departments, it has been agreed that GTA roles involving work with young people must do safeguarding training. However, departments are not expected to keep a record of this and the student should retain their confirmation of passing the training for checking as needed. The policy has been updated to reflect this change.
- 6.2 PRQC approved the updated policy.

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Part 3 - Items for note

7. Reports of sub-committees

7.1 No reports were received for noting

8. Any Other Business

8.1 The Chair noted that this was Laura Lane's final PRQC meeting as she was leaving her role as Associate Director (Strategy & Operations) in ECRI to move to another role at Imperial. The committee extended its thanks for her significant contributions to improving the experience of research students at the university.

8.2 The Secretary requested that members who may be standing down as DPS for the next academic year provide the name of their successor to update the membership list.

9. Dates of future meetings

9.1 Meeting dates for 2025-26 will be circulated to members. It was requested that the May meeting date be reviewed whilst noting that QAEC dates limit flexibility in this time period.