

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2020 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 Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
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 (Materials)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor John Seddon (Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr James Wilton-Ely (Chemistry)
Emma Rabin (Assistant Registrar, Partnerships, Monitoring and Review)
[Secretary]

Apologies

Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)

Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Dr Jem Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)

In Attendance

Bethan Ritchie (Manager of Graduate School Administration) [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 new members of the Committee, colleagues in place of existing members and non-members in attendance.

1.2 Apologies were received from:

Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
Dr Jem Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 13 May 2020 [**PRQC.2020.01**].

2.2 The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following actions due for completion by October 2020 [**PRQC.2020.02**]:

(i) Review of postgraduate research regulations (October 2019, 5.1)

An update will be provided under item 3 - Matters Arising.

(ii) Submission Data (May 2017, 9.1)

Assessment Records have not had workload capacity to produce data on referral and failure rates for comparison with submission rates. This will be requested for the next meeting.

(iii) Bursaries and Stipends (February 2020, 6.4)

This work needs to be taken forward with the relevant teams across Registry, Finance and the Graduate School.

2.3 No further updates were provided on the remaining ongoing actions.

3. Matters arising

- 3.1 It was reported that the working group convened for the Postgraduate Research Regulations will be meeting again in order to discuss specific areas of the PGR regulations that still need development. It is planned for three meetings to be held with recommendations being made to PRQC at the February meeting. The CDT Governance Committee will also be invited to discuss recommendations relating to the management of CDTs.

4. PRQC Terms of Reference and Membership 2020-21 [PRQC.2020.03]

- 4.1 The Committee noted that the changes proposed by the PRES Working Group and approved at the May meeting have been incorporated into the Terms of Reference.
- 4.2 The Terms of Reference and Membership were approved.

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

5. Best Practice in Supervision and Support

5.1 Departmental Focus on Best Practice in Supervision Workshops, Annual Report 2019/20 [PRQC.2020.04]

- 5.1.1 The Committee noted the annual report on supervision workshops. The following examples of best practice and common themes had been noted by the Graduate School:

- Further support is needed for students and supervisors on milestone and progression requirements
- Improvement on supervisor availability via planned contact points
- Better support for students on well-being and clearer information for supervisors regarding their responsibilities in this area
- Students value cross-departmental opportunities
- Overall, students felt supervisors cared about them and their research

- 5.1.2 The workshops were originally designed to be delivered face-to-face but have switched to online delivery due to COVID-19. It was queried whether departments can continue to defer these workshops until in-person delivery can be resumed. This has been left to the department to decide but the Graduate School can offer remote sessions at any point.

5.2 Using Report and Support to identify cases of poor supervision [PRQC.2020.05]

- 5.2.1 PRQC was asked to consider whether the planned Report and Support process could be used to identify cases of poor supervision. HR is introducing Report and

Support to allow students to report issues including harassment, discrimination and racism. Reports can be made anonymously, or students can disclose. HR have confirmed that the 'other' category could be used to report cases of poor supervision which will be defined as not meeting the requirements of the Mutual Expectations document.

- 5.2.2 If anonymous reports are received, these will be passed to the Graduate School for logging and monitoring if a pattern appears to develop over time. If students choose to disclose, support will be put in place including coaching and mediation as needed.
- 5.2.3 It was felt that this would be a useful tool for building up data on supervision practice. The Students' Union would support this but would want to ensure that any student disclosure is handled sensitively. This would be discussed further with the Graduate School prior to implementation.

Action: Michaela Flegrova / Laura Lane

5.3 Proposal for a new supervisor training and development programme [PRQC.2020.06]

- 5.3.1 It was reported that the PRES Working Group had had extensive discussions regarding how to support supervisors to develop effective relationships. As a result, a new supervisor training and development programme has been developed with input from students, tutors and senior tutors which is planned to launch in 2021. A competition is being run for PhD students to name the programme
- 5.3.2 The programme brings together existing content under one umbrella and aligns with international frameworks. It will be delivered via micro-modules which can be done autonomously with opportunities for networking and discussion. There will be four key areas that will be mandatory for new supervisors:
- Establishing an effective student-supervisor partnership
 - Rules, regulations and policy –linked to mutual expectations
 - Developing research culture in labs/groups
 - Support for supervisors

There will also be optional areas to address specific themes that have been identified for further work:

- Recruiting students (including under-represented groups)
 - Supporting new students
 - Critiquing work effectively
 - Supporting student progression
 - Academic integrity
 - Leading research groups and supervisory teams
 - Supporting students to enhance their networks
- 5.3.3 The Committee discussed how the College could ensure that supervisors were undertaking the necessary training. For new staff this is a requirement of the

probation process. Existing staff are required to undertake refresher training every six years but may be unaware of this requirement and participation is not monitored. It was reported that Precept 5 expects departments to have effective mechanisms to monitor the engagement of supervisors in CPD activities so this could be used to support this work although this will need embedding.

5.3.4 PRQC approved the proposal for the new programme.

6. Response to COVID-19

6.1 Covid-19: Impact on Researchers - Analysis of the SMARteN Survey [PRQC.2020.07a/b]

6.1.1 The SMARteN survey was carried out between SMARteN and Vitae to capture the impact of COVID-19 on PhD students and Early-Career Researchers. The survey was conducted across 128 UK Higher Education Institutions in April 2020. At Imperial, there were 387 responses from PhD students and ECRs. Data was analysed by the Graduate Students' Union and presented to PRQC.

6.1.2 The following points were highlighted in the report and presentation:

- A higher number of responses were received from PhD students (275) than ECRs (112)
- There was an approximately even split between responses from UK citizens and overseas students undertaking PhDs. Around 60% of the ECR respondents were from overseas.
- Most PhD students who responded were in Years 1-3 of the degree.
- 'I feel I have been able to make up my own mind about things' scored poorly for PhD students but ECRs were more positive.
- The majority of PhD students had not had the deadline for submission of their thesis extended or changed. This may be due to the fact that many students are at an earlier stage in their degree so feel that the impact on research can be managed. This may change later.
- UK PhD students and ECRs generally reported lower scores in response to the questions about emotional state than the overseas respondents.
- Data collection was cited as the most impacted area of work for PhD and ECRs. Discussing ideas/findings was also an area of concern.
- 16% of the respondents felt their relationship with the university had worsened but 18% felt that it had improved.

6.1.3 It was felt that some of the scores (e.g. for services) were disappointing. However, it was noted that the survey took place in April before much of the additional support for PhD students and post-doctoral researchers had been implemented. ESOG is meeting weekly to monitor provision and ensure that ongoing issues are identified and addressed.

6.1.4 The student representatives were encouraged to identify any areas where it was felt additional support could be provided. It was reported that overall, the support

was in place, but some labs are still closed which affects students and supervisors could be encouraged to make more use of available online resources to support students.

- 6.1.5 A concern was raised regarding recent PhD graduates given the weak job market they are entering. This is not just important for the individuals but also the College since grant bids often require data on outcomes. Careers provide support to recent graduates and are part of ESOG which will allow cohort-specific issues to be discussed.

7. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) College Action Plan Update [PRQC.2020.08]

- 7.1 The meeting noted the update on the PRES College Action Plan. Some actions have slipped but it is hoped that these should be completed in due course. A further update will be provided to PRQC.
- 7.2 PRQC members were asked to remind colleagues that the Mutual Expectations document should be discussed within three months of students starting the degree.
- 7.3 The Terms of Reference expect faculties to provide an update to PRQC on the faculty PRES action plan on an annual basis. Faculties are asked to provide this for the February meeting. The secretary will contact faculties regarding deadlines.

Action: Secretary

8. Persistent Identifiers for Research Data Interim Report [PRQC.2020.09]

- 8.1 PRQC had previously approved a proposal to implement the use of persistent identifiers (PIDs) for research data in PhD theses. This paper was requested to demonstrate how this could be put into operation.
- 8.2 This report includes a new recommendation that PhD research students create a data management plan (DMP) at the beginning of their project or prior to data collection and no later than Early Stage Assessment (ESA). The Committee agreed to recommend this as good practice if appropriate for the project but not to make it a mandatory requirement.
- 8.3 It was noted that the implementation of PIDs requires input from several teams, including several which are extremely busy due to the current situation. It would be preferred to ensure students have taken the data management training offered via the Graduate School and that IT support is in place before changing thesis guidelines.

Part 3 – Matters for Information

9. Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Staff Partnership [PRQC.2020.10]

9.1 The document has been updated for 2020-21 to reflect changes made as a result of COVID-19 and EDI requirements.

10. Research Degree Precepts 2020-21[PRQC.2020.11]

10.1 The document has been updated to reflect changes agreed by PRQC following the recommendations from the PRES Working Group.

10.2 It was requested that the fifth bullet point under Precept 7: Induction be modified from 'English language requirements' to 'Imperial College London Doctoral Academic Communication Requirement'. This was agreed.

11. List of Partner Research Institutions, Split PhDs and Imperial Recognised Locations [PRQC.2020.12]

11.1 The committee noted the list.

12. PRQC subcommittees

11.1 The Committee noted minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 8 April 2020 [**PRQC.2020.13**]

11.2 The Committee noted minutes of the CDT DTP Governance Committee held on 13 May 2020 [**PRQC.2020.14**]

11.3 The Committee noted minutes of the Crick Research Degrees Committee held on 14 February 2020 [**PRQC.2020.15**]

13. Dates of meeting for 2020-21

13.1 Meetings in 2020-21 will be held as follows:

Wednesday 10 February 2021, 14:10 – 16:30

Wednesday 12 May 2021, 14:10 – 16:30

14. Any Other Business

14.1 The Committee discussed the selection criteria for the President's Scholarships as concerns were raised by members that the current requirements disadvantaged some students and gave an advantage to others.

14.2 It was agreed that the Academic Registrar will ask for the criteria to be re-visited and to review some of the cases where students have been unsuccessful to ensure there is no bias in the consideration process.

Action: David Ashton

15. Special cases reports

- 15.1 The Committee noted the following reports on special cases considered by the special cases panel for doctoral programmes:
- (i) Non-Standard Examiner Approvals– October 2020 **[PRQC.2020.16]**
 - (ii) Late Case Thesis Approvals - October 2020 **[PRQC.2020.17]**
- 15.2 It was noted that the number of late case thesis approvals were higher than normal due to COVID-19. If departments have concerns or need further details on the cases they should contact Registry.
- 15.3 For future meetings, it is hoped to present this data at departmental level rather than student level as this will be more useful for PRQC in its oversight role.