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Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Confirmed minutes of the meeting held on 26 February 2025 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 Alexis Barr (Institute of Clinical Sciences)
Professor Charlotte Bevan (Surgery and Cancer)
Dr Chris Cantwell (Aeronautics)
Professor Jennifer Collier (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Abbas Dehghan (School of Public Health)
Professor Pier Luigi Dragotti (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Dr Kate Ippolito (EDU)
Professor Martyn Kingsbury (CLCC/CHERS)
Laura Lane (Associate Director (Strategy and Operations), ECRI
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Dr Sarah Martin (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Alex Michaelides (Business)
Robin Mowat (Centre for Academic English representative)
Professor Martin Rasmussen (Mathematics)
Professor Ben Sauer (Physics)
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
Nikki Hann (Programme Director – Doctoral Programmes, ICBS) for item 5
Dr Suzanne Husein (Funding Strategy Manager – Doctoral Training Lead, Research Office)
Louise Lindsay (Director of Safeguarding) for item 7.1
Scott Tucker (Deputy Director, Quality Assurance and Enhancement)
Kirstie Ward (Assistant Registrar: Academic Standards) for item 4.3
Steve Ward (Assistant Registrar: Academic Policy)

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Part 1 – Preliminary Items

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1   The Chair welcomed new members to the meeting. PRQC was informed that from 1 February 2025 Professor Vahid Shahrezaei had taken over from Professor Laki Buluwela as one of the Academic Deputy Directors of ECRI.

1.2   Apologies were received from:

Camille Boutrolle (ICU President)
Emina Hogas (ICU Deputy President (Education))
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Professor Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Professor Christopher Gourlay (Materials)
Professor Peter Haynes (Vice-Provost, Education and Student Experience)
Dr Jun Jiang (Mechanical Engineering)
Professor Cleo Kontoravdi (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Yiannis Kountouris (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Dr David Mann (Life Sciences)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Brain Sciences; Immunology and Inflammation; Infectious Disease; Metabolism, Digestion and Reproduction)
Dr Iro Ntonia (CLCC/CHERS)
Dr David Taborda (Civil and Environmental Engineering)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting [PRQC.2024.16]

2.1   The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 October 2024 [PRQC.2024.16], subject to correction of point 5.1.3 that concerns about managing harassment cases would be referred back to HR rather than the Associate Provosts EDI as stated.

2.2   The Committee noted the action list [PRQC.2024.17]. The majority of actions had been completed or were on the agenda for discussion.

3. Matters arising

3.1   No matters were noted.

Part 2 – Matters for Consideration

4. Academic regulations and policy

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4.1 MPhil/PhD academic regulations for 2025/26 [PRQC.2024.18]

4.1.1 Members were informed that further updates would be submitted for consideration at the May meeting. The main purpose of this set of updates was to clarify areas where the regulations were ambiguous.

4.1.2 The meeting discussed the recommended changes as follows:

    i. Direct entry to MPhil programme – it was agreed to keep this possibility open even if it is rarely used. This will need to be supported by having adding regulations for managing MPhil programmes to the document under review.

    ii. Attendance requirement for PRIs and Split PhDs – currently the attendance requirement does not differentiate between full-time and part-time study modes which can lead to queries. The committee agreed that the current attendance requirements should be retained and that these will apply to all modes of study but will not apply in the writing up period.

    iii. Purpose of Early Stage Assessment – it was agreed this should be added to the regulations

    iv. Purpose of Late Stage Review – it was agreed this should be added to the regulations

    v. DACR requirements – it was noted this section may require changes if paper PRQC.2024.21 is approved.

    vi. Writing up period – it is not clear that students are not required to enter writing up prior or undertake the progress review even though most students will do this. This has been an issue in cases where students wish to submit their thesis early. It was agreed this should be clearly stated.

4.1.3 Members raised a concern that a minimum registration period was not clearly stated in the regulations and where this was addressed it was in relation to entering writing up status. It was agreed that it was important to establish a minimum registration period that was set in relation to the thesis submission deadline rather than writing up. This will be investigated and recommendations brought to the May PRQC.

Action: Scott Tucker

4.2 Conduct of oral examinations for research degrees and related matters [PRQC.2024.19]

4.2.1 It was reported that this document had been removed for discussion as it needs further review and will be submitted to the May meeting for updating or rescinding.

4.3 Unsatisfactory engagement policy and procedure [PRQC.2024.21]

4.3.1 It was reported that the Regulations and Policy Review Committee (RPRC) had recommended this policy be updated to address timescales and the involvement of

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the same roles at each stage of consideration to align with best practice from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA).

4.3.2   It is anticipated that there will be an over-arching policy but a specific procedure for each student type such as research students.

4.3.3   The current procedure for research students involves additional stages that are not part of the UG/PGT procedures and require input from the same people at each stage. RPRC have recommended that these additional stages are removed – PRQC agreed with this recommendation.

4.3.4   No further comments were received on the policy and procedure. This will be reviewed again by RPRC with the intention that a revised policy will be in place for the 2025/26 academic year.

4.4   Updates to the Doctoral Academic Communication Requirement (DACR) [PRQC.2024.21]

4.4.1   The meeting received a paper proposing updates to the current Doctoral Academic Communication Requirement managed by the Centre for Academic English (CfAE). The rationale for the proposed changes was as follows:
- Criteria to identify students who need to undertake the DACR are complex
- Identifying these students is difficult and administratively burdensome
- The assessments are perceived as high stake which can lead to cheating or students concealing difficulties rather than seeking support
- Around 15% of students who need to undertake DACR2 do not fulfil the requirement
- Exempt students may also benefit from support with their academic communication skills

4.4.2   CfAE are recommending that the focus of the requirement is changed from targeting a specific cohort to requiring all research degree students to undertake a mandatory academic communications course to be completed before the ESA. Students will also have an option to submit a piece of academic writing and receive feedback from CfAE staff.

4.4.3   The following points were noted in discussion:
- The expected time commitment for the new training is planned to be 2-3 hours to mirror the plagiarism course that is already a requirement.
- Although this will reduce the workload centrally to administer, it will increase the workload for students who were previously exempt from this requirement.
- Part of the training will be a self-diagnostic exercise so students can be directed to appropriate sources of support.

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- If this is mandatory, how will compliance be monitored by departments and how will non-compliance be managed?
- That this will apply to all students including native speakers who may have different academic communication needs.

4.4.4 The student representative noted the increased workload for students who had previously been exempt from the requirement. It was requested that CfAE hold focus groups with current students to capture views on this new approach.

4.4.5 The meeting supported the proposal in principle but would like the CfAE to consider the use of focus groups and to submit a paper to the May meeting with further detail on how this will be put into operation and how the impact on students has been considered.

Action: Robin Mowat

4.4.6 It was confirmed that if the May PRQC meeting approves the changes, there is time to update the regulations and procedures in order to introduce this for the 2025/26 academic year.

4.4.7 It was reported to the meeting that if the approach is not approved for the upcoming academic year, CfAE will not be in a position to support the administrative burden related to the DACR1 and DACR2 assessments. Therefore this work will need to be undertaken by departments.

4.5 **Policy on research degree supervision [PRQC.2024.22]**

4.5.1 It was reported that following discussion at the last PRQC, the changes recommended by the meeting had been considered by the Vice Principal (Education and Student Experience) who had revised some of the recommendations. PRQC was invited to review the amendments.

4.5.2 Members discussed the policy which linked the supervision category to the role level in the job family with the aim of achieving consistency between job families.

4.5.3 Whilst it was felt the focus on job families was helpful, the committee felt that there was still inconsistency between the types of supervision that could be undertaken by a research fellow and a teaching fellow. It was agreed to request that the possibility of a teaching fellow co-supervising with HoD approval be re-instated. This request would be taken to the VP (Education and Student Experience) and the policy re-submitted to the May meeting.

Action: Laura Lane

5. **Postgraduate Research Periodic Reviews**

5.1 **Imperial College Business School PGR Periodic Review report**

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[PRQC.2024.23]

5.1.1 The committee noted the report of the PGR Periodic Review for the Imperial College Business School (ICBS). The department was judged to be compliant with the precepts and a number of commendations and recommendations were included in the report.

5.2 **ICBS PGR Periodic Review departmental response and action plan [PRQC.2024.24]**

5.2.1 The Academic Director (ICBS) reported that the department was working through the recommendations as outlined in its response.

5.2.2 One of the recommendations was to investigate whether there could be opportunities for students to undertake elective modules for the MRes in other departments. Some specialities would benefit from taking maths or computing modules in particular but this had not been permitted by departments due to space concerns. Even auditing modules was not a possibility. ICBS would like to increase the number of PhDs it offers so the availability of elective modules would be a key factor in supporting this.

5.2.3 The meeting discussed university expectations regarding the percentage of a cohort submitting their thesis on-time (which would include students with approved thesis extensions). Currently, there is no benchmark set. However, it was reported that this may be a factor in future iterations of REF – if this is confirmed it may be useful for the university to discuss if it would want to implement a benchmark.

6. Draft guidance for research degree students on the use of the Imperial affiliation when publishing [PRQC.2024.25]

6.1 Following the discussion at the October PRQC meeting, draft guidance has been produced for research students to clarify the use of the Imperial affiliation when publishing – particularly if the publication is not directly related to their research project.

6.2 The meeting reviewed the draft guidance and the following points were noted in discussion:
- It should be clarified that the Imperial affiliation can be used for any publication linked to the research project not just areas that will be used in the thesis.
- Point 10b should be strengthened to make it clear that students cannot use the Imperial affiliation if publishing external research rather than should not.
- It may be helpful to include some examples to illustrate key points
- Could it be clarified that if someone is publishing work started at Imperial and then developed at another institution that both affiliations can be used.

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6.3   It was agreed these suggestions would be reviewed with the Research Integrity Officer and the guidance updated.

Action: Laura Lane

7.   GTA Training

7.1   **Introduction of compulsory safeguarding training for GTAs [PRQC.2024.26]**

7.2   Following discussion at the previous PRQC meeting, the Director of Safeguarding has provided additional information to address the concerns raised by members.

7.3   The Risk and Compliance Committee has agreed that safeguarding training is required for all staff regardless of role and this would include GTAs given the nature of their roles. This is the general training and ensures people are aware of the process to follow if something of concern is disclosed to them.

7.4   Although there is no central dashboard for GTAs that replicates the Imperial Essentials dashboard, GTAs will receive an email confirming they have passed the quiz at the end of the training which can be provided to their department to show they have met the requirement.

7.5   It was noted that it was important that GTA coordinators will need to be informed about this requirement so they can incorporate this into their systems. There was no committee where these roles would meet. However, it was suggested that the ECRI GTA Programme Leader should disseminate this document to the departmental contacts in their network and invite comments.

Action: Laura Lane

7.6   Subject to no serious concerns being raised during the consultation with the GTA coordinators, PRQC approved the proposal.

Part 3 - Items for note

8.   Reports of sub-committees

8.1   The group noted the following minutes:
   i.   Confirmed minutes of the CDT/DTP Governance Committee meeting 22 May 2024 [PRQC.2024.27]
   ii.   Confirmed minutes of the Crick Research Degree Committee meeting 5 June 2024 [PRQC.2024.28]
   iii. Unconfirmed minutes of the CDT/DTP Governance Committee meeting 13 November 2024 [PRQC.2024.29]

9.   Any Other Business

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9.1   A question was raised regarding the differing requirements expected of internal and external examiners – particularly the levels of experience required to undertake each role. The Chair reported that ECRI is discussing research degree examiner requirements with Registry so this is being considered.

9.2   Members were encouraged to participate in and publicise the [Festival of Teaching and Learning](#) which was taking place on 24-26 March. There will be sessions dedicated to research degrees.

10.   Dates of future meetings

10.1   The next meeting will be held via Microsoft Teams on Wednesday 21 May 2025 from 14:10-16:30.