

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

**Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2019 at 14:00 in
Gabor Room, 611, Electrical and Electronic Engineering Building,
South Kensington Campus**

Present

Professor Sue Gibson (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
Dr Christos-Savvas Bouganis (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Ashley Brooks (Student Representative)
Katherine Campbell (Business) [in place of Professor Carrol Propper]
Emma Couves (Student Representative)
Professor Dan Elson (Surgery and Cancer) [in place of Professor Michael Seckl]
Dr Matthew Fuchter (Chemistry)
Dr Saskia Goes (Earth Science and Engineering)
Dr Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)
Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)
Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School)
Professor Mike Lovett (NHLI)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)
Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez (Mechanical Engineering)
Caroline Ransom (Crick Doctoral Centre) [in place of Dr Sally Leever]
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr Andrew Williamson (Physics) [in place of Dr Bill Proud]
Dr Jeremy Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Scott Tucker (Assistant Registrar, Monitoring and Review, Registry) [Secretary]

In Attendance

Mohit Devgan (GSU President Elect)
John Neilson (College Secretary) [Item 8]
Professor John Seddon (in capacity of Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR))
Kirstie Ward (Assistant Registrar, Academic Standards) [Items 5.1, 5.2, 5.3]

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Chair welcomed new members of the committee (see Item 4), colleagues in place of existing members and non-members in attendance.

- 1.2 The Chair congratulated Mohit Devgan for being elected as GSU President. Mohit will formally take up post from July 2019.
- 1.3 The following apologies for absence were received:
- Professor Peter Allison (Deputy Director of the Graduate School)
 - Professor Simone Buitendijk (Vice-Provost, Education)
 - Raya El Laham (Student Representative)
 - Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
 - Dr Hamed Haddadi (Design Engineering)
 - Hannah Jones (Student Representative)
 - Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering)
 - Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
 - Alejandro Luy (ICU Deputy President, Education)
 - Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director)
 - Dr Enrique Martinez-Perez (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)
 - Dr Bill Proud (Physics)
 - Professor Carrol Propper (Business)
 - Professor Alessandra Russo (Computing)
 - Professor Eduardo Saiz (Materials)
 - Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)
 - Ute Thiermann (GSU President)
 - Professor Yun Xu (College Consul)
 - Carina Zhao (Student Representative)

2. Minutes of the previous meeting

- 2.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 February 2019 [**PRQC.2018.40a**], subject to minor correction.
- 2.2 The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following actions due for completion by May 2019 (*items have been cross-referenced where these were included on the agenda*) [**PRQC.2018.40b**]:

(i) Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2019 (February 2019, 6.3)

Five additional questions on wellbeing, set out by AdvanceHE but optional for providers, were added to PRES 2019. The GSU President, through consultation with the Surveys Officer, Registry (George Yeorghaki), also agreed the following two bespoke questions:

- If I am experiencing difficulties with my wellbeing, I feel comfortable to reach out for support within the college. (def agree, most agree, n/a, most disagree, def disagree)
- If I am experiencing difficulties with my wellbeing, I know which college services are available to support me (def agree, most agree, n/a, most disagree, def disagree)

(ii) Periodic Review (Templates) (October 2018, 8.2.3)

See Item 11.

(iii) PhD Plagiarism Working Group (October 2018, 9.1.5)

See Item 8.

(iv) Postgraduate research appeals regulations (February 29, 5.3)

See Item 5.2.

(v) College pastoral care structures (May 2018, 6.7)

See Item 10.1.

(vi) Submission Data (May 2017,9.1)

See Item 9.

(vii) Data on Cases of Late Submission (February 2017, 7.1.3)

The Student Records Team (Registry) is preparing for the implementation of Banner - completing system testing, receiving training and preparing for data migration from OSS. Following this work, the report on late cases will be produced and considered at a future PRQC.

Action: Secretary (and Student Records)

- 2.3 The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following actions due for completion from October 2019 onwards **[PRQC.2018.40b]**:

(i) PhD Thesis Submission – Procedures (October 2018, 18.1.2)

Following PRQC's recommendation and subsequent approval by QAEC that postgraduate research degree students will not be required to cover the cost of theses printing, and that the College will no longer require hard copies of theses (available on request), the Academic Registrar is exploring financial and operational implications and before new processes are implemented. PRQC to receive an update on 23 October 2019.

Action: David Ashton

- 2.4 There was no further update on the remaining ongoing action.

3. Matters arising

- 3.1 There were no other matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda.

4. PRQC terms of reference, constitution and membership [PRQC.2018.41]

4.1 The Committee recommended to QAEC, the following revisions for 2019-20:

- Minor changes to the terms of reference for clarity
- Updates to the constitution:
Graduate School Head of Strategy and Operations (Laura Lane)
Faculty Senior Tutor (PGR) representative

It was agreed that one of the four Faculty Senior Tutors (PGR) will attend future PRQC meetings.

Action: Secretary

4.2 The Committee approved the following revisions for 2019-20:

- New members added:
Laura Lane (Graduate School Head of Strategy and Operations)
Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez replacing Professor Daniele Dini
(Mechanical Engineering)
Dr Enrique Martinez-Perez replacing Dr Mark Ungless (Institute of
Clinical Sciences)

5. Postgraduate research regulations and policy

5.1 Verbal summary of College complaints and appeals procedures

5.1.1 At the PRQC meeting on 20 February 2019, the GSU President suggested that it would be useful to receive a verbal summary of the College's complaints and appeals procedures. As a result, the Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) (Kirstie Ward) provided a summary, with key points as follows:

- There is often confusion between complaints and academic appeals, and students sometimes raise issues which do not fall neatly into either category
- The Office of the Independent Adjudicator's (OIA) 'The good practice framework: handling student complaints and academic appeals' (revised December 2016) sets out the following definitions:
 - Complaint - an expression of dissatisfaction by one or more students about a provider's action or lack of action, or about the standard of service provided by or on behalf of the provider
 - Academic appeal - a request for a review of a decision of an academic body charged with making decisions on student progress, assessment and awards
- Each provider has its own timelines and deadlines for the formal and review stages. It is good practice for providers to complete consideration of a formal complaint or academic appeal and any associated review within 90 calendar days
- The College receives very few complaints at PGR level
- The College currently has three PGR student appeals processes and there is work being undertaken by the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Team to rationalise procedures (see Item 5.2)
- The College has separate processes to manage complaints from students

and complaints from applicants (i.e. an appeal about the admissions process). PRQC felt that this might not be widely known across College.

- 5.1.2 The Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) reported that, in future, PRQC will receive an annual report on student complaints and appeals and asked how the committee would like to receive this. Committee members agreed that a high-level report would be welcomed.
- 5.1.3 It was made clear that, at present, the complaints process consists of three Stages: Stage 1 (Local), Stage 2 (Formal) and Stage 3 (Review). As Stage 1 is managed by Departments, collating data at College level for this Stage is problematic. However, it would be possible to provide data for Stages 2 and 3 as these are formally logged centrally.
- 5.1.4 In addition, the appeals process consists of three Stages: Informal Resolution (including Arithmetical Marks Check), Formal Appeal and Review of Appeal. As the Informal Resolution Stage is managed by Departments, collating data at College level for this Stage is problematic. However, it would be possible to provide data for Stages 2 and 3 as these are formally logged centrally.
- 5.1.5 The committee discussed whether formally recording Stage 1 data for both complaints and appeals would be beneficial to the College in relation to the level of resource required at Department level. Some members felt that, as the informal stage is designed to allow Departments the flexibility to exercise judgement on the most effective way to resolve the issue, implementing a requirement to formally log the Stage 1 in a fixed way might be detrimental.
- 5.1.6 However, some institutions across the sector approve a common format for the recording of Stage 1 complaints and appeals and report annually. Student representatives at PRQC agreed that this would be beneficial if anonymity was guaranteed. The Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) confirmed that, although data cannot be anonymised on a tracker immediately, in case it is escalated, a method of coding data could be explored. The Chair felt that embedding consistent processes in Departments at Stage 1 could give students increased confidence in the system.
- 5.1.7 It was agreed that a proposal for recording Stage 1 complaints will be considered at a future PRQC meeting.

Action: Secretary (and Assistant Registrar, Academic Standards)

5.2 Draft PGR academic appeals procedure [PRQC.2018.42]

- 5.2.1 On 13 March 2019, QAEC agreed that the current PGR academic appeals procedures should be rationalised and updated based on the principles of the taught appeals procedure, which has now been aligned to sector best practice as published in the OIA 'The good practice framework: handling student complaints and academic appeals' (revised December 2016) and the updated advice and guidance from the QAA to support the updated Quality Code (March 2018) Concerns, Complaints and Appeals (Nov 2018). It was agreed that this work

should be timed so that an updated PGR academic appeals procedure could be approved this academic year (2018/2019) for implementation from the beginning of academic year 2019/2020.

- 5.2.2 The Assistant Registrar (Academic Standards) undertook a consultation process, whereby prompts were disseminated to QAEC members and distribution list, PRQC members and distribution list, Imperial College Union Advice Centre, Graduate School, Research Degrees and College Consuls. FEC secretaries were also requested to provide the consultation to their respective committees for review, or to send them on to any faculty based research committee or group where more appropriate.
- 5.2.3 PRQC received a draft 'Academic Appeals Procedure for Research Programmes'. As responses to the consultation had been limited, PRQC revisited the consultation prompts and allowed members to provide any final feedback prior to QAEC.

Following discussion, PRQC recommended the following:

- That deadlines are set by working days, and that the period to submit an appeal be no longer than 20 working days (but that QAEC should consider 15 working days in line with the taught procedure, from September 2019)
 - That submission timeline commences from the point of the official written notification of the result (not from the date of the examination/review meeting) and may be extended where a reasonable request to do so is made
 - That mitigating circumstances should remain an eligible grounds for appeal
 - That there should be no 'local' consideration of appeals for final examination for PhD and that appeals for final examination are considered centrally in the first instance (before being referred to Departments, where appropriate)
 - That the proposed make-up of the Research Academic Appeals Panel for consideration of eligible appeals was appropriate, as follows: an experienced member of the designated list of the Academic Appeals Panel members approved by Senate to serve as Chair; a Director of Postgraduate Studies (or equivalent); and a further member drawn from the designated list of the Academic Appeals Panel members approved by Senate (and that it is not necessary to outline specific reference to supervisory experience)
 - That the College may decide to hold a paper based 'hearing' for an eligible appeal, with the proviso that a student has the right to request a full hearing if they so wish (PRQC agreed that the wording in the procedure should not imply any negative connotation that may deter students from requesting a full hearing).
- 5.2.4 PRQC recommendations will be incorporated into the next iteration of the draft Academic Appeals Procedure for Research Programmes, for consideration at QAEC in July 2019. As this is an additional QAEC meeting, there is not a

subsequent Senate and so it is envisaged that Chair's action will be sought.

5.3 Research Degree Regulations update [PRQC.2018.43]

5.3.1 PRQC recommended to QAEC, the following principles to inform revisions to the Research Degree Regulations for September 2019 implementation:

- Consistent definitions for the terms 'Registration', 'Enrolment' and 'Study Leave'
- Clarification that failure to submit within 12 months of entering write up stage (or 48 months from registration, and as equivalent period for part time students) will result in failure of the programme
- Clarification that PRI students must attend Imperial for 2 months per year, with a view to revisiting whether an exemption to minimum attendance requirements is appropriate and, if so, what the minimum attendance should be.

5.3.2 PRQC discussed a number of other areas in which Registry has received requests for changes/greater clarity for potential consideration. Following debate, it was agreed that the following areas would be further explored by a PGR Regulations Working Party, as part of the full review of Research Degree Regulations, for September 2020 implementation:

- Different tuition fee bands based on access to College resources: Students often require access to labs after 36 months and having a financial incentive *not* to use College resources could disadvantage some students. Writing up process to be reviewed
- Viva examination outcomes and timeline for corrections: To be reviewed in line with feedback from internal and external examiners. The Committee also agreed that the terms 'major corrections' and 'minor corrections' need further clarity
- English language requirements as part of milestone progression: Further clarify is required as to the implications on progression of failing to complete required English language assessments
- Registration periods/writing up: Further clarify is required as to which circumstances could allow a student to enter writing up prior to 36 months. Consideration should be given to research projects that do not have a clear delineation between a 'data sourcing' and 'writing up' stage.

5.3.3 It was announced that QAEC has agreed for a working group to be established to consider updates to the postgraduate research regulations. The constitution of the group will include the following members:

- One representative from Each Faculty (a Director of Postgraduate Studies)
- Graduate School representative
- Registry representative

Further members will be identified as appropriate. A wider consultation via email will still take place so all PRQC members will be fully consulted.

5.4 Milestone tracker process mapping

- 5.4.1 The College is developing an application designed to track postgraduate research students through key stages of the research cycle. Despite significant progress with the technical design, it is apparent that certain key principles relating to progression must be clarified prior to further development and configuration work of the application.

Commensurate with 5.3.2, the following requirements will be considered with regards progression through the upcoming review of the Research Degree Regulations:

- Professional skills courses
- Ethics approval
- English Language requirements

6. Centres for Doctoral Training and Doctoral Training Centres

6.1 CDT/DTC approval process [PRQC.2018.45]

- 6.1.1 The College has been successful in securing UKRI funding for a number of new Centres for Doctoral Training. Funding has also been secured for the renewal of some of the College's current CDTs. In addition, the College has agreed to act as a partner institution for CDTs led by other parties.

- 6.1.2 A full review of the College's collaborative programme approval procedures will be undertaken in due course but, in the interim, in order for CDTs to be set up for October 2019 recruitment, PRQC recommended to QAEC that:

(i) PRQC receives a summary document to *note** for each new CDT (or renewals where significant changes are proposed)

* PRQC *recommends* to QAEC, any programme specific regulations proposed in the summary document. CDT programmes leading to an Imperial award must normally follow the College's postgraduate research regulations. However, a number of CDT programmes may propose a 12 month ESA deadline, which has previously been approved for some 4 year integrated CDT models

(ii) PRQC receives a list of new and renewed CDTs periodically to note

(iii) PRQC receives a list of CDT withdrawals (due to the end of the funding period) to note

(iv) Due to the timings of CDT bids and the urgency in setting up CDTs for recruitment, it is envisaged that some CDT summary documents will require PRQC Chair's Action (and QAEC, where appropriate).

6.1.3 The full review of the College's collaborative programme approval procedures will include input from Programmes Committee, where taught elements require scrutiny.

6.2 CDT programme withdrawals [PRQC.2018.46]

6.2.1 PRQC noted the following CDT programme withdrawals:

- CDT Neurotechnology (Department of Bioengineering)
- EngD in Water Engineering (Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering)
- EPSRC Centre for High Performance Embedded and Distributed Systems (Department of Computing)
- Wellcome Trust MRes Molecular and Cellular Basis of Infection (Department of Medicine)

6.2.2 The programmes have been withdrawn for October 2019 recruitment, following the end of UKRI funding. The CDTs are not being renewed.

7. Roles and responsibilities

7.1 Roles and responsibilities of the Departmental Senior Tutor (PGR) [PRQC.2018.47]

7.1.1 At its meeting on the 11 May 2018, PRQC discussed the wellbeing of PGR students and what departments could do to strengthen support. A number of changes have been successfully implemented through effective pastoral care structures.

7.1.2 One of the changes was the introduction of the Senior Tutor (PGR) (formerly the 'Postgraduate Tutor'), which was approved by QAEC and subsequently endorsed by Senate. Although the new role of the Senior Tutor (PGR) will remain largely the same as the current role of 'Postgraduate Tutor', the Head of Strategy and Operations presented the new 'Roles and Responsibilities Senior Tutor (PGR)' document.

7.1.3 PRQC welcomed the changes and recommended the 'Roles and Responsibilities Senior Tutor (PGR)' document to QAEC.

8. Implementation of Turnitin for PhD theses [PRQC.2018.48]

8.1 At the PRQC meeting held on 24 October 2018, the Committee discussed the implications of the proposal approved by the Provost's Board to introduce plagiarism checks for PGR students. The PRQC Secretary provided feedback to the College Secretary (John Neilson), as Chair of the Working Group tasked with operationalising the use of Turnitin.

8.2 The College Secretary thanked members of the Working Group for their input and presented the following recommendations:

- The ESA report will be submitted to Turnitin prior to the ESA deadline
- The final thesis will be submitted to eThesis prior to Turnitin. Any originality issues may be raised as part of the viva and can be discussed. If the Turnitin report raises significant problems with the originality of the thesis, the case will become one of research misconduct; the existing referral process will be used and the thesis will be 'held'
- Departments will have the flexibility either to submit ESA reports and final theses to Turnitin themselves (as the Business School do) or to ask students to submit via Blackboard.
- Turnitin reports will be sent to supervisors for interpretation
- Students starting a PhD in October 2019 will be the first to submit a copy of their ESA report to Turnitin.

8.3 As a result of the recommendations, The College Secretary presented proposed revisions to the following documents:

- Guidance Notes – Early Stage Assessment (ESA) 9 months for full-time students/18 months for part-time students
- Theses for Imperial College Research Degrees
- Policy on Research Degree Supervision Roles And Responsibilities Main Research Degree Supervisor
- Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Supervisor Partnership

8.4 Following a number of questions from PRQC members, the following points were noted:

(i) Software

It was confirmed that Turnitin was selected by the College as the academic integrity tool of choice as it is widely used across the UK Higher Education sector and worldwide.

(ii) Integration

The College is developing a Milestone Tracker, which will link to Banner. Turnitin will not be integrated to the Milestone Tracker in the first instance. Proposed integration would be part of the specifications for a new system, which is some time off.

(iii) Confidentiality

There was concern that some projects contain sensitive items and that, following submission to Turnitin, sensitive data would be stored in the Turnitin's global database. It was confirmed that there is an option in Turnitin that restricts the submission being stored and therefore eliminates confidentiality issues. The Working Group thought this was entirely practical solution but the Committee highlighted that this will need to be made clear in student facing documentation and built into the Plagiarism Course content delivered by the Graduate School. The College needs to be sure that submission to Turnitin via this method does not legally count as a disclosure or else risk losing significant future revenue from IP due to invalidated patents.

It was also agreed that further discussion should take place with Registry on how to check plagiarism on sensitive theses which contain material of national security classification.

(iv) Regulations

The proposal sets out that 'if the Turnitin report raises significant problems with the originality of the thesis, the case will become one of research misconduct'. It was felt that some of the policy and guidance documents could be more explicit in highlighting the potential severity of plagiarism being detected.

For example, Paragraph 3.2 of the Roles and responsibilities document states 'in those cases where problems with the degree of similarity are identified, the supervisor should provide guidance to the student on avoiding plagiarism and explain the consequences of the report'. This statement could be clearer that academic misconduct could be an outcome.

(v) Process

Page 2 of the proposal states 'accordingly, it will only be possible to complete the entry form once the thesis has been sent to Turnitin'. It was agreed that this typo should be corrected to state that the Examination Entry Form will be submitted at least 4 months prior to the prior to examination, and that students will then then submit their theses to Turnitin.

- 8.5 PRQC recommended to QAEC that the policies and guidance documents are revised, reflecting the implementation of the decision to introduce plagiarism checks, subject to the comments above. Following QAEC's approval, suitable communication of this change will be undertaken to relevant staff and students.

9. Thesis submission rates [PRQC.2018.49]

- 9.1 PRQC noted a summary of Department thesis submission rates (1 February 2018 to 31 January 2019). College totals were as follows:
- No. due to submit: 764
 - No. submitted on time: 654
 - Submission rate: 85.6%
- 9.2 An error was highlighted with the submission rate for the Department of Aeronautics. Departments were asked to contact the Registry Degrees Team in Registry if any further errors were noted.
- 9.3 It was noted that the 35.7% submission rate for the Francis Crick Institute was negatively affected by the legacy groups moving into the building and it is expected that this rate will improve significantly.
- 9.4 It is anticipated that, following the work involving Banner implementation, 5 years' worth of submission rate data will be provided to PRQC for comparison.

10. Pastoral care structures

- 10.1 Directors of Postgraduate Study are submitting departmental summaries. The

Secretary will collate the information and distribute to PRQC members as a College overview.

Action: Directors of Postgraduate Study

11. Periodic review

- 11.1 The Self-Evaluation Document template will be updated and circulated to PRQC members in due course.

Action: Secretary

12. Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)

- 12.1 PRQC noted the latest [minutes from QAEC](#).

13. Senate

- 13.1 PRQC noted the latest [minutes from Senate](#).

14. PRQC subcommittees

PRQC noted the minutes from the following sub-committees:

- 14.1 Confirmed minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 5 December 2018.
- 14.2 Confirmed minutes of the CDT DTP Governance Committee held on 14 November 2018.

15. Dates of next meetings

- 15.1 The following 2019-20 PRQC meeting dates were approved:

- Wednesday 23 October 2019, 14:00-16:30
- Wednesday 12 February, 2020, 14:00-16:30
- Wednesday 13 May 2020, 14:00-16:30

- 15.2 It was agreed that an extraordinary meeting to consider PGR regulations was not required as a separate working group will be convened.

16. Any other business

16.1 Postgraduate Research Experience Survey

- 16.1.1 A document summarising the current PRES 2019 College/Departmental participation rates was tabled. The College participation rate was 40%, but with two more days until the survey closed, it is hoped that the final participation rate is closer to 50%. Final PRES data will be presented at the PRQC in October 2019.

16.2 PRQC Chair

16.2.1 The Chair announced her retirement from July 2019. Members thanked Professor Sue Gibson for all her work with PRQC and the College as a whole. A successor will be named in due course.

17. Special cases reports

PRQC received reports on special cases, considered by the special cases panel for doctoral programmes, as follows:

17.1 PGR Special Cases (Exam Arrangements) - May 2019

17.2 PGR Special Cases (Late Cases Thesis) - May 2019

17.2.1 A student should request an interruption if undertaking activities which do not directly contribute towards the degree registration (e.g. alternative research or an internship)

17.2.2 A student should request 'External Study Leave' if undertaking activities which directly contribute to the degree registration. Departments are encouraged to direct students to the relevant procedure and guidance, where appropriate.