

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

**Minutes of the meeting held on 21 February 2018 at 14:00 in
Room G01, Royal School of Mines, South Kensington Campus**

Present

Professor Sue Gibson (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
Dr Anil Bharath (Bioengineering)
Alison Cambrey (Surgery and Cancer) [representing Professor Michael Seckl]
Professor Amparo Galindo (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
Dr Hamed Haddadi (Design Engineering)
Professor Jonathan Haskel (Business School)
Professor Andrew Holmes (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)
Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director and NHLI)
Luke McCrone (GSU President)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)
Dr Salvador Navarro-Martinez (Mechanical Engineering) [representing Professor Daniele Dini]
Caroline Ransom (Crick Doctoral Centre) [representing Dr Sally Leever]
Professor Alessandra Russo (Computing)
Professor Eduardo Saiz (Materials)
Dr Mark Ungless (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)
Dr Peter Vincent (Aeronautics)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr James Wilton-Ely (Surgery and Cancer) [representing Professor Michael Seckl]
Dr Jeremy Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Professor Yun Xu (College Consul)
Scott Tucker (Assistant Registrar, Monitoring and Review, Registry) [Secretary]

In Attendance

Eleri Canning (Records Officer, Research Degree Examinations, Registry)
Lucy Heming (Senior Assistant Registrar, Quality Assurance and Enhancement, Registry)

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

- 1.1 The Committee welcomed colleagues in attendance and alternates.
- 1.2 The following apologies for absence were received:

- Alexandre Adler (PhD Student Representative)
- Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)
- David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
- Professor Simone Buitendijk (Vice-Provost, Education)
- Nick Burstow (ICU Deputy President, Education)
- Professor Daniele Dini (Mechanical Engineering)
- Dr Matthew Fuchter (Chemistry)
- Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)
- Dr Sally Leever (Crick Doctoral Centre)
- Dr Bill Proud (Physics)
- Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)
- Paul Wan (PhD Student Representative)

2. Terms of Reference & Membership [PRQC.2017.18]

2.1 The Committee approved the revised terms of reference and membership for 2017-18, which included the following updates:

- Reference to the School of Professional Development replaced with the Centre for Languages, Culture and Communication (CLCC) / Centre for Higher Education Research and Scholarship (CHERS)
- Jo Horsburgh to act as CLCC / CHERS representative
- Dr Marco Aurisicchio replaced with Dr Hamed Haddadi as Dyson School of Design Engineering representative.

3. Minutes of the last meeting [PRQC.2017.19a]

3.1 The Committee approved the minutes of the last meeting held on 25 October 2017, subject to a minor amendment.

4. Matters arising [PRQC.2017.19b]

4.1 The Committee noted an action list detailing matters arising from previous meetings and updates on progress in completing the required actions.

Late Cases: Proposal to introduce an additional fee for CRS beyond the maximum period of registration (May 2017 16.1.4 refers)

4.2 The initial late cases proposal considered at PRQC in May 2017 is part of a wider conversation around how the College registers students. As a result, Judith Webster (Head of Academic Services) and Claire Salter (Head of Student Records and Data) have asked for a full review of writing up status. The implementation of Banner has added an additional level of complexity so an update will be provided at the next meeting.

4.3 The Committee agreed that the remaining matters arising were ongoing and due for report at a subsequent PRQC meeting, where appropriate.

5. Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 [PRQC.2017.20]

A revised internal reporting and action plan process for PRES was approved in February 2017 (PRQC/2016/21). In line with this process, PRES Faculty level reports/action plans are considered by PRQC.

5.1 Faculty of Medicine Report and Action Plan - PRES 2017 [PRQC.2017.20a]

5.1.1 The Committee welcomed the formation of the Faculty's Doctoral Degrees Forum (DDF), which now oversees departmental PRES action plans. DDF activities have helped co-ordinate Faculty level actions and as such, the following initiatives are underway:

- An evaluation of the PGR 'Training and Development' contract
- An evaluation of all PGR feedback forms currently in use in the Faculty, with a view to developing a single form that can be used Faculty wide
- A Faculty adoption of updated and improved student and supervisor expectations
- The development of an integrated approach to Faculty GTA recruitment and training
- The establishment of a Faculty Internship Awards scheme
- The delivery of an annual Faculty hosted workshop 'Everything you need to know about applying for a fellowship', with follow-up support in preparing for postdoctoral fellowship applications
- A look at the feasibility of collating and promoting details for Faculty seminar programmes in both Faculty and Departmental newsletters.

5.1.2 The Faculty has been in discussion with its PGR students, primarily through the Faculty level Staff-Student Liaison Committee (SSLC), to arrive at a definition for what constitutes 'feedback' in a PGR setting. The Committee debated whether an agreed College definition would help clarify expectations and provide a stronger basis for enhancing the student experience.

Some members of the Committee highlighted that students and supervisors should have ongoing dialogue so it is often difficult to underpin which conversations constitute feedback. The College should think broadly about feedback and, as PGR students are valued as colleagues, the working relationships that are built provide far more effective continuous feedback opportunities than those offered through more formal mechanisms. Other members agreed that students welcome ongoing dialogue but also rely on the College's formal milestones where they can take stock of their learning to date. It is also important to ensure that students are aware of when feedback is being provided, particularly in the rare instances where there are any issues in the student-supervisor relationship.

The Committee acknowledged that a College definition would be difficult to construct and that the agreement of a set of feedback expectations was more appropriate. It was agreed that discussions should involve colleagues in the

Graduate School, who have published recent documentation on supervision and feedback.

The Chair emphasised that the purpose of the discussion was not to create bureaucracy or construct new processes but come to an understanding or set of principles as to what the College constitutes as feedback.

Post-meeting note:

With regards to feedback, Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations) has started work on a document from both students' and supervisors' perspectives. Students and staff will be consulted as part of the document's development. It is envisaged that a draft document will be presented at the Autumn Term PRQC.

5.2 Faculty of Natural Sciences Report and Action Plan - PRES 2017 [PRQC.2017.20b]

5.2.1 The Committee welcomed notable areas of good practice across departments, which included:

- Life Sciences – supervision, research culture, progress and assessment, responsibilities, research skills, professional development, overall experience, completion
- Chemistry – progress and assessment, research skills, professional development, opportunities/GTA training
- Physics – supervision, research culture, progress and assessment, research skills, professional development, completion
- Mathematics – supervision, research culture, progress and assessment, responsibilities
- Centre for Environmental Policy – research skills, professional development, opportunities/GTA training

5.2.1 The Faculty identified a number of areas for improvement, which are being addressed locally, and some areas that require College attention. It was acknowledged that the resource issues in Chemistry should be alleviated following the move to White City and, in the interim, the department will continue to engage and communicate with students over the move, making every effort to minimise disruption.

5.2.2 The Committee agreed to refer the following College-wide concerns to Chris Banks (Assistant Provost (Space) & Director of Library Services):

Mathematics

- 'The Department requires appropriate space to accommodate its growing activity.'

Post-meeting note:

Chris Banks (Assistant Provost (Space) & Director of Library Services) is not the route through which significant growth in space requests are managed; these are outlined in the [College Space Sharing Programme](#). However, Chris acts as

sponsor of the College Space Sharing Programme. The approach being taken to support teaching growth is to work with 'clusters' of departments to support the sharing of timetabled space. Mathematics is part of the North cluster and, in particular, will share space with Computing. These departments have complimentary learning and teaching space provision which it is believed will enable greater flexibility of delivery.

Centre for Environmental Policy

- 'As an inter-disciplinary department, most of our students require academic resources that are not available in ICL's collection e.g. social science journals.'

Post-meeting note:

The CEP librarian confirmed that, at induction, staff and students are made aware that they can make suggestions for purchase/licence, particularly if they are researching in areas not core to existing College research strengths and therefore unlikely to be covered by existing content. There are no CEP titles amongst those currently requested by departments, neither essential (reading list) nor other titles, so these will need to be requested.

5.3 Imperial College Business School Report and Action Plan - PRES 2017 [PRQC.2017.20c]

- 5.3.1 There was a small improvement in the students' overall experience from previous PRES results. The programme has been recently restructured to a 1+4 so there are still a number of students progressing from the 'old' programme. Much work has been undertaken to improve the experience of these continuing students but it is anticipated that PRES 2019 results will show significant improvements. The Committee welcomed the encouraging results in the areas of resources, research skills and professional development, and the steady increase in overall experience.

No issues were reported as College-wide but the Committee noted a number of areas that the School is looking to enhance:

- Supervision – although the overall expertise and knowledge of supervisors was ranked highly, there seems to be a distinct split between those satisfied with their supervision and those who were not. Issues centred on supervisors supporting students' personal development as researchers and so the programme team will systematically monitor attendance at supervisory meetings to ensure these are held regularly.
- Research Culture - the programme team has, alongside the seminar series, organised specific sessions for PhD students to meet speakers, paper development workshops and an active series of job talks. Despite these activities, research culture was the lowest scoring area. The School will discuss this issue further with student representatives to review expectations and perceived barriers.

- Progress and Assessment - this is an area of particular concern because students are currently struggling to meet thesis submission deadlines. The programme team will review the messages students receive about their milestones and programme structure.

5.4 Faculty of Engineering Report and Action Plan - PRES 2017

5.4.1 Departmental PRES plans will be considered at FEC on 28 February. A Faculty level response will then be drafted and considered at PRQC on 11 May.

5.5 School of Professional Development Report and Action Plan - PRES 2017

5.5.1 Due to very small PGR student numbers, the School was concerned that student anonymity would be compromised if PRES were to be rolled out. The College agreed at the start of the academic year that the School would not be included in PRES 2017 and that there are sufficient alternate mechanisms in place that allow students to provide feedback. Participation in PRES 2019 will be reviewed in due course.

5.6 The Committee approved the Faculty PRES reports/plans and referred relevant issues for further action to the appropriate person (as above, see 5.2.2).

5.7 A College PRES summary will be drafted for consideration at PRQC on 11 May, QAEC on 22 May and Senate on 20 June.

Action: Secretary

6. Precepts Reviews of Postgraduate Research Programmes

6.1 Postgraduate research provision in the Department of Chemical Engineering [PRQC.2017.21]

6.1.1 In line with the College's Procedures for the Review of Departmental Research Degree Provision, The Committee considered the precepts review report, with reviewer's comments, and the department's response.

6.1.2 The Department reported that the milestone data provided, held in OSS, was not accurate and that there were some discrepancies with data held within the Department. It was clarified that data issues are ongoing and, although these will be addressed through the implementation of Banner, interim measures to resolve data quality issues are being investigated by Registry Systems, and the Student Records and Data team.

6.1.3 It was highlighted that interview procedures in the Department vary depending on the source of funding. If the funding is provided by the supervisor then set questions are not used. The Department conducted an audit of the outcomes of PhD students two years ago, following which it was deemed unnecessary to prescribe the format of the interview to individual supervisors.

6.1.4 The Committee agreed with the internal reviewer that the Department is

compliant in its overall provision of research degrees and compliant in each of the individual precepts.

- 6.1.5 The Committee confirmed that no immediate follow up is required and the Department's PGR provision would next be reviewed through the periodic review process in 2020-21.

6.2 Postgraduate research provision in the Department of Medicine [PRQC.2017.22]

- 6.2.1 In line with the College's Procedures for the Review of Departmental Research Degree Provision, The Committee considered the precepts review report, with reviewer's comments, and the department's response.
- 6.2.2 The internal reviewer commented that the induction offered for students not starting in October seems adequate but does not appear to be compulsory. The Department clarified that, whilst students are encouraged to engage with induction sessions, and attendance is monitored, it is difficult to make compulsory. Presentations from the induction day are available to students online, and the research degrees manager and the DPS are also available to answer students' queries. The Department will continue to discuss with student representatives whether there are other measures that can be taken to facilitate inductions for new students. Some departments have trialed two formal induction sessions per year but found that there was not much take up for the second induction. The Committee agreed that the College has a responsibility to ensure students are adequately introduced to processes and procedures but that a number of approaches are required for students not starting in October.
- 6.2.3 Milestone data was discussed (as per 6.1.2) but, in addition to data quality issues, the Committee discussed how ESA and LSR milestones are interpreted by Department: whether these dates are recorded as the date the student submits documentation or the date of the oral assessment. The internal reviewer recommended that ESA and LSR dates should refer to the date of submission, which the department strongly supports. College guidance currently states that ESA and LSR dates are based on the assessment so further review of how ESA and LSR dates are defined should be undertaken.

Action: Secretary (and Registry)

- 6.2.4 The Committee agreed with the internal reviewer that the Department is compliant in its overall provision of research degrees and compliant in each of the individual precepts.
- 6.2.5 The Committee confirmed that no immediate follow up is required and the Department's PGR provision would next be reviewed through the periodic review process in 2020-21.

7. Admissions

7.1 PGR end of cycle admissions statistics 2017-18 [PRQC.2017.23a]

7.1.1 The Committee considered a report showing a comparison of postgraduate research applications made for 2017-18 compared with the previous two academic years. It was noted that the College is still recruiting in the 2017-18 cycle so the applications, offers, accepts and enrolments will continue to increase up until the end of September 2018. For this reason it may appear that numbers are lower compared with the previous two cycles as previous cycles are complete whilst the 2017-18 is not. The admissions statistics exclude anyone who has enrolled on a postgraduate research programme after progressing through the 1+3 route.

7.2 PGR application statistics for postgraduate research programmes as of 18 January 2018 [PRQC.2017.23b]

7.2.1 The Committee considered a report showing a comparison of postgraduate research applications made for 2018-19 compared to the same day for the previous two academic years. It was noted that data does not include applications deferred from one year to the next and exclude anyone who has enrolled on a postgraduate research programme after progressing through the 1+3 route.

7.3 Entry requirements for postgraduate research programmes for 2019-20 entry [PRQC.2017.24]

7.3.1 The Committee considered the entry requirements for postgraduate research programmes for 2019-20 entry. The document was presented in a different format to that submitted previously, however, it provided the overview required for all intended purposes. The College does not publish individual research programme webpages that this data inform and it would be impractical to capture the general requirements with respect to all of these individually. Registry will continue to consult all departments annually regarding their general entry requirements and English entry requirements, which will inform the admissions processing of applications, as well as the publication details of the College prospectus.

7.3.2 The Committee approved the following entry requirements for postgraduate research programmes for 2019-20 entry:

All Faculties other than Medicine:

2:1 Bachelor (Hons) degree in an appropriate subject. Applicants must also normally hold or be studying towards a Master's degree.

Faculty of Medicine:

Normally applicants require an MBBS, or Master's degree and a 2:1 Bachelor (Hons) degree in an appropriate subject.

7.3.3 The Committee approved the following English entry requirements for postgraduate research programmes for 2019-20 entry:

Higher Level English

- Science Communication Unit (no change)
- Department of Chemical Engineering (change for 2019/20 from standard level previously)
- Department of Electrical and Electronic Engineering (*change for 2019/20 from standard level previously)

All other Imperial departments operate the 'Standard Level' English requirement for entry to Research.

8. CDT/DTP Governance Committee

8.1 The Committee noted the minutes of the Graduate School CDT/DTP Governance Committee held on 14 November 2017 [**PRQC.2017.25**].

9. Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC)

9.1 The Committee noted the [minutes of QAEC](#) held on 16 January 2018.

10. Senate

10.1 The Committee noted the [minutes of Senate](#) held on 6 December 2017.

Any other business

11. PhD mentoring Scheme

11.1 A paper on PhD mentoring will be presented at the next meeting by Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations) and Hannah Bannister (Director of Student Services). There will be an opportunity to discuss any resource implications.

12. PhD feedback guidelines

12.1 Guidelines on PhD feedback will be presented at the next meeting by Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations). It is envisaged that the role of assistant supervisors and mentors in providing feedback will be clarified.

13. Date of next meeting

13.1 The next meeting will be held on Friday 11 May 2018 at 10:00 in the Ballroom, 58 Prince's Gate, South Kensington campus. The deadline for items is 20 April 2018. The deadline for papers is 27 April 2018.

13.2 The dates for 2017-18 PRQC meetings will be confirmed at the next meeting.

14. Reserved Business (not circulated to student members)

14.1 Special Cases Reports

14.1.1 The Committee received reports on special cases as follows:

- Special cases for examination arrangements, considered by the Director and/or Deputy Directors of the Graduate School – February 2018 **[PRQC.2017.26]**
- Special cases for PGR admissions (September 2017 – February 2018) considered by the Director and/or Deputy Directors of the Graduate School **[PRQC.2017.27]**
- Special cases for late entry, considered by the Director and/or Deputy Directors of the Graduate School **[PRQC.2017.28]**.

14.1.2 It was noted that the reason for an increase in special cases for examiners is due to the increase in new examiners. The Committee agreed that new examiners should be supported in the first instance and that this in turn safeguards students.

14.1.3 The Committee had no concerns with the number of special cases but asked that some of the reasons for referral are clarified.

Action: Secretary