



**White Paper: Proposed Amendments to the PhD Admissions Process  
August 2010**

A) Increased HoRG involvement

1. PG Admin will make initial assessment of applicant's suitability for a group's interests, and will also monitor the overall progress of applications and feedback given online. BUT the role of HoRGs in the admissions process needs to be more formally recognized and outlined.
  - a. HoRGs need to be aware of the status of applications to their group and monitor the responses of staff members of the group, actively encouraging supervisors to give feedback.
  - b. Need to ensure group discussion over which candidates to interview takes place in preparation for the panels.
  - c. HoRG need to be part of a culture of transparency between other groups: if a candidate is strong but unable to be supervised by the group applied for then Heads should nominate another group/supervisor to pass the application to.

B) Online Feedback System

1. Problem:
  - a. The online system is not being used consistently by staff to leave feedback and there is often not enough information given for informed decisions to be made quickly and easily.
  - b. Members of research groups and PG Admin do not know when an application has been assessed, and when feedback has been left.
  - c. Responsibility for monitoring feedback and progression of process has not been clearly outlined.
  - d. Download times of documents can be slow.
2. Solution/Rationale:
  - a. Staff must use the online system more consistently; in order to elicit clearer and more helpful information the feedback section of the website will be improved. Potential questions could be the following and comments in some parts will be required:
    - i. Is the candidate suitably academically qualified?
    - ii. Should they be interviewed?
    - iii. Are you interested in supervising?
    - iv. Are they a good match for this research group?
    - v. If not, do you have any suggestions for another possible group or supervisor?
      1. [NB: we are investigating whether this section could link to a drop down box to choose another research group, and whether it would be possible to then send an automatic email to the Head of the proposed alternative group telling them that an application has been passed over to them.]
  - b. Automatic notifications to be sent to HoRG and PG Admin whenever any feedback is given online so that progress can be monitored and staff know when an application has been assessed by colleagues [currently being investigated].
  - c. Both Heads of Research Groups and PG Admin need to be more proactive in ensuring that applications are assessed. HoRGs must take primary responsibility for monitoring feedback on their groups' applications is being given and prompting their staff if not.
  - d. Documents to be scanned in a lower resolution, and TSG to be contacted about whether any other improvements to the server can be made.

C) Return to a Two-round System of Panel Meetings

1. Problem:
  - a. The move to only one panel may have saved time spent in meetings, but it did not increase the efficiency of the admissions process.
  - b. Interviews were not scheduled consistently or at all in some cases and a far greater number of students, some of whom were strong, fell through the cracks.
2. Solution/Rationale:
  - a. Return to the 2 meeting system.

- b. This will promote a better circulation of information on candidates between groups, allowing very strong candidates who are not suitable for the group applied for to be picked up by others, and will act as a reminder for supervisors to prepare interviews.

#### D) Number of Deadlines and Panels

1. Problem:
  - a. Having only two panels means large periods of inactivity with applications and leaves candidates waiting far too long for an answer (risking that they accept offers from other institutions).
  - b. Late panels are problematic (staff on leave July/Aug; visa deadlines for incoming students).
  - c. June deadline are not catching the current MSc students.
2. Solution/Rationale:
  - a. To have three deadlines and two formal intake times in September and January.
    - i. Deadline one – January, at the start of term: to provide candidates for UCL scholarships
    - ii. Deadline two – May, at the start of term: to provide candidates for any DTA funds
    - iii. Deadline three – September, mid-month: to catch current MSc students for a January start
    - iv. Interviews would now be scheduled to take place during a specific narrow time-frame – over several days of one week. This will be organised in conjunction with admin (PG or Siranee) but all supervisors must make themselves available at these chosen times – advertised in advance. Forcing interviews to take place within one small timeframe would also allow for greater comparison of candidates.
  - v. Example of proposed timetable for the coming academic year:
    1. Deadline one: Friday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2011
      - a. First Panel 2 weeks later e.g. Thurs 20<sup>th</sup>/Fri 21<sup>st</sup> Jan
      - b. Interview week w/c 24<sup>th</sup> Jan
      - c. Second Panel 1 week later e.g. Thurs 3<sup>rd</sup>/Fri 4<sup>th</sup> Feb
    2. Deadline two: Friday 6<sup>th</sup> May 2011
      - a. First Panel 2 weeks later e.g. Thurs 19<sup>th</sup>/Fri 20<sup>th</sup> May
      - b. Interview week w/c 23<sup>rd</sup> May
      - c. Second Panel 1 week later e.g. Thurs 2<sup>nd</sup>/Fri 3<sup>rd</sup> June
    3. Deadline three: Friday 16<sup>th</sup> September 2011
      - a. First Panel 2 weeks later e.g. Thurs 29<sup>th</sup>/Fri 30<sup>th</sup> September
      - b. Interview week w/c 3<sup>rd</sup> Oct
      - c. Second Panel 1 week later e.g. Thurs 13<sup>th</sup>/Fri 14<sup>th</sup> Oct
  - b. Holding any sort of panel in July and August is unpractical due to staff holidays. Holding panels earlier will also prevent any problems with international students not getting visas on time.
  - c. Having a deadline in September will allow current UCL MSc students to apply once more of an idea about their results is known. If we have a January intake it means they are not left waiting around until the following September. They can still be considered for scholarships/studentships along with applicants in the Jan/May panels if strong enough.

#### E) 'Any' Category and applications with general or no research proposal

1. Problem:
  - a. Notifications of applications uploaded to this group are signed up for voluntarily; consequently these applications are not getting reviewed; some strong candidates have slipped through.
2. Solution/Rationale:
  - a. This group will be got rid of: all candidates will now have to specify at least one research area/group on their application (the website will advertise this clearly) and PG Admin will take responsibility for chasing applications who do not and will not circulate the application without one.
  - b. If a decision cannot be made on applications' they will be passed to the Grad Tutor to make an assessment of suitable research group or area.
  - c. Supervisors could also update their research interests on the website and include more information on what areas they wish to supervise on.

#### F) Creation of a 'floating' group to meet on an ad hoc basis to discuss 'emergency' cases

1. To include: David Rosenblum as Graduate Tutor, the new Deputy Graduate Tutor, the proposed research groups' head and the proposed primary supervisor.