



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 4 June 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Professor David Bogle (Chair); Dr Steven Bloch; Dr Donna Brown; Mr Ben Colvill; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Caroline Essex; Professor Mike Ewing; Mr Marco Federighi; Dr Douglas Guilfoyle; Dr Sally Leever; Dr Stephen Marshall; Ms Helen Notter; Dr Benet Salway; Dr Joy Sleeman; Dr Dave Spratt; Dr Andrew Stoker; Professor Kaila Srari; Mr Ben Towse.

In attendance: Mr Gary Hawes (Secretary); Mr Callum Leckie (Careers Consultant and Deputy Head, UCL Careers); Ms Kathleen Nicholls (Director, Information and Data Services, Student and Registry Services)

Apologies were received from: Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu and Professor Claire Warwick.

Key to abbreviations

AC	Academic Committee
AI	Academic insufficiency
CALT	Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching
DPA	Doctorate of Public Administration
DTCs	Doctoral Training Centres
EdCom	Education Committee
FGTs	Faculty Graduate Tutors
ISBSB	International Student Barometer Student Barometer
PGR	Postgraduate research
PGTAs	Postgraduate Teaching Assistants
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
SLMS	School of Life and Medical Sciences
SSCCs	Staff Student Consultative Committee
STEaPP	Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy
UCLBE	UCL Board of Examiners
UKBA	UK Border Agency

30 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 5 MARCH 2014

Confirmed:

30.1 The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 5 March 2014 [RDC Mins. 16-29, 5.3.14].

31 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

[see also 33, 34 & 39 below]

31A Amendment of the offer letter for integrated MRes and PhD or EngD programmes

[RDC Min. 17A, 5.3.14]

Received:

31A.1 The note at RDC 3-1 (13-14), introduced by the Director of Student Administration.

Reported:

31A.2 Following consultation undertaken by the FGT for Engineering Sciences, the consensus of DTCs within Engineering Sciences was that there should be a single offer letter of admission for students on integrated 1+3 MRes/PhD/EngD programmes, provided that this made it clear that students would be required to pass the MRes year of the programme in order to progress to the three-year PhD/EngD. Accordingly, colleagues in Outreach and Admissions were now in the process of liaising with DTCs within Engineering Sciences with a view to clarifying the progression requirements that had been noted at RDC's previous meeting for all integrated MRes/PhD/EngD programmes *[RDC Min. 17B.2, 5.3.14 refers]*.

RESOLVED:

31A.3 That the Director of Student Administration report back on the resolution of the matter to RDC's next meeting.

ACTION: David Ashton

31B ISBSB data findings

[RDC Min. 19.8, 5.3.14 – see also 33 below]

Noted:

31B.1 Following presentation of the ISBSB data findings in relation to PGR students at RDC's previous meeting, it was agreed that it would be helpful receive more information regarding the lower student satisfaction scores that had been reported for course organisation and quality lectures, including an indication of what specific questions in these areas were put to students and, if possible, a breakdown of PGR student responses to these questions by research degree programme.

31B.2 The International Officer (Research and Analysis) had responded to the RDC officers to note that since all of the PGR students who responded to this question were identified generically as 'Research Degree' students it would not possible to provide a breakdown of PGR student responses to these questions by students' research degree programme or by year of study. She had confirmed, however, that the specific questions asked of students were as follows:

Learning Satisfaction - Please say how SATISFIED you are AT THIS STAGE IN THE YEAR with the following:

The organisation and smooth running of the course

The quality of lectures

[Students are then required to select a satisfaction rating of 1-4 (with 4 being most satisfied) or N/A for each each]

31C MPhil/PhD Upgrade data

[RDC Min.20.8, 5.3.14]

Noted:

31C.1 At its previous meeting on 5 March 2014, RDC received and considered data on MPhil/PhD upgrade and submission. It was noted that while there had been an increase in the overall upgrade rate (from 22% in 2007-08 to 33% in 2008-09), overall submission rates had dropped (from 73% in 2007-08 to 65% in 2008-09). In light of this, it was suggested that it would be helpful for RDC to be provided with upgrade data for 2009-10 and 2010-11 with a view to establishing if this upward trend was continuing.

Received:

31C.2 A report on MPhil/PhD upgrade data for 2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12 at RDC 3-2 (13-14).

Reported:

31C.3 The overall upgrade rate had continued to increase, from 37.9% in 2009-10 to 41.7 in 2010-11, before decreasing slightly to 40% for 2011-12. It was noted that this latest data would be of interest to FGTCs or their equivalents.

31D Supply of electronic copies of PhD theses

[RDC Min.23, 5.3.14]

Noted:

31D.1 At its previous meeting on 5 March 2014, RDC agreed that for the time being the Student Records Manager should continue to deal with requests for supply of electronic copies of PhD theses as and when these were received. It was further agreed that in order to give an indication of the current level of demand for the supply of electronic copies of PhD theses, the Student Records Manager should be asked to give an indication of the number of requests for supply of electronic copy of PhD theses that she had received from examiners since the March 2014 meeting of RDC.

31D.2 The Student Records Manager had received three requests for students to submit electronic theses to examiners since RDC's previous meeting, two of which had been because the original bound copy had not arrived in time.

32 UCL 2034 STRATEGY DOCUMENT

Received:

32.1 The draft UCL 2034 Strategy document at RDC 3-3 (13-14).

Discussion:

32.2 The following main points were noted during discussion:

- In responding as part of the consultation process for the draft UCL 2034 Strategy document, the Chair of RDC had noted that the document did not contain any reference at all to research staff.
- The final version of the Strategy document would include more in terms of operational detail of how the strategy will be implemented across UCL, including

specific objectives and measures to support each of the principal themes and key enablers set out therein;

- Further development of strategy around the principle of delivering global impact through UCL's international activities and partnerships, which was one of the six principal themes outlined in the draft Strategy document, would be taken forward by the Vice-Provost (International) and would have a bearing on UCL's future research partnerships and research degree programme collaborations.

33 CAREERS ADVICE, WORK EXPERIENCE AND OPPORTUNITIES TO TEACH FOR RESEARCH STUDENTS

[RDC Min. 19.9, 5.3.14]

Noted:

- 33.1 At RDC's previous meeting on 5 March 2014, it was agreed that a representative of UCL Careers should be invited to the next scheduled RDC meeting for a discussion around the possible connection between the low satisfaction scores for careers advice, work experience and opportunities to teach that were revealed in the ISBSB data findings for PGR students that were presented to the meeting.
- 33.2 Dr Calum Leckie, Careers Consultant and Deputy Head, UCL Careers was in attendance for discussion of this item.

Received:

- 33.3 At RDC 3-4 (13-14), responses from other UCL faculties to the PhD student teaching survey that had previously been undertaken within SLMS and which had been received at RDC's previous meeting on 5 March 2014. (A more up-to-date version of this document including responses that had lately been received from some faculties was tabled at the meeting as RDC 3-4 (13-14) 1st Revision.)

Discussion:

- 33.4 PGR student responses to the ISBSB had appeared to indicate lower levels of student satisfaction with careers advice provided to students at departmental level relative to the advice that they received centrally from UCL Careers. In light of this, RDC wondered if this was indicative of a need for more bespoke, localised careers advice and guidance to be provided to PGR students at school, faculty and departmental level.
- 33.5 UCL Careers was moving towards a model of offering more dedicated local careers advice and support for students through its team of Careers Consultants who were allocated responsibility for different UCL departments. On the PGR student front, efforts were also being made to improve communication channels with UCL departments with a view to raising their awareness of existing programmes and services offered by UCL Careers to which they might refer PGR students – eg the creation of a 'menu' of services that had been disseminated to Heads of Department and PIs.
- 33.6 UCL Careers was also in the process of improving online careers information and resources available via its web pages for PGR students as well as for researchers more generally within UCL, eg to include case studies of PGR student graduates, an online jobs feed for PGR students, sector-specific careers information for researchers, improved information on international academic careers and careers destinations for graduates with research degrees. However, there would be resource limitations for extending more localised support for PGR students as the Career Consultant team only currently included three members of staff who had were

assigned as consultants for PGR students and research staff. In addition, UCL Careers Consultant colleagues were not always best placed or informed to respond to the very research-specific enquiries that were sometimes referred to them by PGR students, eg requests for advice on grant applications.

- 33.7 While it was noted that DGTs and Careers Liaison Officers were also on hand to offer careers advice to PGR students at departmental level, RDC considered whether school and faculty research facilitators might play a more active role in offering more independent localised research-specific careers advice and guidance for PGR students and serving as contact points for referrals from UCL Careers colleagues. The Chair of RDC noted that he would be willing to raise this suggestion with the Vice-Provost (Research). In the meantime, the Chair of RDC asked FGTs to consult with colleagues within their faculties and with FGTCs or their equivalents with a view to determining the level of demand/appetite for the provision of more localised faculty career advice and events with a view to reporting back to RDC's next meeting.
- 33.8 Other points noted during discussion included the following:
- Careers advice and guidance was integral to the PGR student experience. In light of this, it would be helpful to consider critical stages of the PGR student journey when interventions around careers advice would be most effective for students.
 - Student engagement could sometimes be an issue: some UCL faculties and departments had made efforts to organise specific careers events for PGR students but these had not always been very well attended.
 - While PGR student supervisors and PIs would be well placed to offer advice and guidance on postdoctoral careers within academia, they would not necessarily be best placed or informed to offer independent and impartial advice to PGR students on non-academic careers.
 - SLMS had established an Academic Careers Office to promote, support and develop all aspects of academic and clinical academic careers giving advice to postdoctoral researchers and PGR students about academic careers.
 - It would be helpful if there could be a central forum for UCL Careers to engage with the community of Careers Liaison Officers and other departmental/faculty/school-based careers staff across UCL.
- 33.9 With reference to the report at RDC 3-4 (13-14), RDC noted that while there was some variability across UCL faculties in terms of the numbers of PhD students that were currently involved in teaching, the pattern of responses to the questions asked by the survey were broadly similar for each faculty. These demonstrated amongst other things that PGR students were generally being paid for the teaching that they undertook, that this was in the majority of cases not tied to a studentship and that while the level of support offered by departments for PhD students who were involved in teaching was variable, there was a general expectation that students would attend training modules offered by CALT.
- 33.10 Some members of RDC drew attention to the fact that there was an obligation for PhD students to be paid to teach under the UCL PGTA Scheme, recently revised details for which were available at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/post_grad_ta_scheme.php. Another related issue was whether or not PhD students should be paid to attend relevant teacher training courses.
- 33.11 RDC noted that PGTAs were being assigned to personal tutoring roles in some UCL departments (eg English, Geography). While these roles did not involve summative assessment of undergraduate students, RDC agreed that it was important that

appropriate training around pastoral support was provided by the relevant departments in these instances.

33.12 While it was generally regarded as a good thing for undergraduate students to have teaching contact with PGAs, it was noted that surveys such as the ISBSB sometimes revealed a tension between the desire of PGR students to have opportunities to teach and the expectation of undergraduate students that they would be taught by leaders in the academic field.

33.13 It was agreed that it would be helpful to produce a more digestible summary of the responses for each Faculty with a view to sending this to CALT for information.

RESOLVED:

33.14 That FGTs be asked to consult with colleagues within their faculties and with FGTCs or their equivalents with a view to determining the level of demand for the provision of more localised faculty career advice and events with a view to reporting back to RDC's next meeting.

ACTION: Faculty Graduate Tutors

33.15 That i) a more digestible summary of the Faculty responses at RDC 3-4 (13-14) 1st Revision be produced with a view to sending this to CALT for information and ii) in the meantime, RDC 3-4 (13-14) 1st Revision be circulated electronically to RDC members.

ACTION: Gary Hawes

33.16 That UCL Careers be invited to consider the establishment a central forum for engaging with the community of Careers Liaison Officers and other departmental/faculty/school-based careers staff across UCL.

ACTION: Gary Hawes (to inform Callum Leckie)

34 UPGRADE AND ACADEMIC INSUFFICIENCY

[RDC Min.20.8, 5.3.14]

Received:

34.1 The previously circulated note at RDC 2-5 (13-14) which was considered at RDC's previous meeting on 5 March 2014, introduced by the Graduate School Administrator.

Reported:

34.2 The note at RDC 2-5 (13-14) had invited RDC to consider whether the current upgrade regulations should be altered to work more clearly and seamlessly with the AI process. RDC had agreed at its previous meeting to ask FGTs to canvass views within their faculties on the three possible options that were explored out at RDC 2-5 (13-14) and to report back to the next meeting of RDC.

Discussion:

34.3 Opinion across faculties with regard to the three options set out at RDC 2-5 (13-14) had been mixed. While some faculties had expressed a preference for option 1 (ie adding a potential "Termination of Studies" outcome to a student's second upgrade attempt, whereby students were automatically de-registered following a second failure), other faculties had favoured option 3 (ie adding a potential "AI Proceedings" outcome to the student's second attempt at upgrade only whereby proceedings to terminate a student's registration under AI would automatically commence).

- 34.4 Some faculties had noted that the AI process could be invoked at any stage of a student's PhD studies and felt that awareness of this and the fact that there was a clear process in place for dealing with PhD student cases of AI needed to be raised more generally among staff with a view to ensuring that the process was invoked at an earlier and more timely stage of a student's studies in cases where this was felt to be warranted.
- 34.5 Some members of RDC noted that in cases where a student failed their first upgrade attempt, a review of the student's performance that mirrored the informal stages of the AI process (*ie* discussions between the student and their supervisor, referral to the DGT) normally took place as a matter of course without resort to invoking the AI process unless this was deemed absolutely necessary (and this was very rare). It was agreed that PGR student supervisors generally needed to be imbued with greater confidence and awareness around discussing and managing AI and poor performance informally with their students so that any concerns over student progress could take place in a timely manner without the need to escalate this to the formal stages of the AI process. Some members of RDC noted that to this end, summer workshops for DGTs around managing poor performance had been organised in some faculties (*eg* Brain Sciences).

RESOLVED:

- 34.6 That i) given the lack of consensus on which of the three options explored at RDC 2-5 (13-14) to take forward, the matter be kept under review by RDC over the course of the next year in the light of further evidence and with a view to bringing a proposal to a future meeting of RDC and ii) in the meantime consideration be given to ways of better promulgating the AI process to PGR student supervisors.

ACTION: Gary Hawes/Ben Colvill

35 GENERIC ISSUES ARISING FROM JOINT EXAMINER REPORTS

Received:

- 35.1 The report at RDC 3-5 (13-14), introduced by the RDC Secretary.
- 35.2 At RDC 3-6 (13-14), referral statistics for research degree examinations for the current and previous sessions, introduced by the Student Records Manager.

Reported:

- 35.3 RDC had agreed previously that FGTs should be asked in future to give particular scrutiny to Examiners' Joint Reports with a view to extracting from these an generic issues or themes that might be flagged for RDC's attention. The report at RDC 3-5 (13-14) included a summary of responses received from FGTs.
- 35.4 While the reports from FGTs had not drawn attention to any substantive or generic institutional issues, the report from one FGT had drawn attention to the fact that a number of PGR student theses that had been referred by examiners for re-submission within 18 months had demonstrated significant issues with proof reading/typos/written English/formatting. In light of this, RDC wondered if this signified a need for more training to be provided in this area in some faculties. Some members of RDC noted that in a number of cases pressure of submission could be creating some of these issues.

RESOLVED:

- 35.5 That FGTs who had not yet submitted a response to the RDC officers be asked to do so.

ACTION: Gary Hawes

36 PGR STUDENT SUPERVISION BY PROBATIONARY MEMBERS OF STAFF

Received:

- 36.1 The note at RDC 3-7 (13-14), introduced by the Graduate School Administrator.

Reported:

- 36.2 RDC was invited to consider whether i) the Academic Regulations for Research Degree Programmes that governed the right of probationary staff to act as Principal Supervisors were satisfactory and clear and ii) one model should be applied to all UCL staff regarding the implementation of these regulations in light of the fact that this currently differed across faculties.

Discussion:

- 36.3 RDC was of the view that provided that probationary members of staff had received the necessary training, they should not be prohibited from being appointed as a Principal Supervisor. RDC further agreed that it would not be necessary or desirable to impose a common model for the implementation of these regulations across UCL.
- 36.4 It was agreed that in cases where probationary members of staff were considered for appointment as Principal Supervisors, much would depend on their prior experience and that appointment of probationary staff to this role should ultimately be at the discretion of the DGT.

RESOLVED:

- 36.5 That no changes be made to the current UCL regulations governing the right of probationary staff to act as Principal Supervisors.

37 SUPPORT TO STUDY POLICY AND FITNESS TO STUDY PROCEDURE

Received:

- 37.1 The report at RDC 3-8 (13-14), introduced by the Director of Student Administration.

Reported:

- 37.2 RDC was invited to consider and approve the proposed Support to Study Policy and Fitness to Study Procedure at RDC 3-8 (13-14). Both had been discussed with key UCL colleagues who were directly involved with student support and wellbeing, as well as with the UCLU sabbatical officers. They had also been received at the last two meetings of EdCom, where they had been broadly welcomed. Subject to final resolution of the wording of paragraph 23 of the Fitness to Study Procedure, both the Support to Study Policy and Fitness to Study Procedure had been approved by EdCom for implementation with effect from the 2014-15 session.

Discussion:

- 37.3 RDC welcomed the Support to Study Policy and Fitness to Study Procedure at RDC 3-8 (13-14) as helpful frameworks for dealing with students who were affected by these issues.
- 37.4 RDC did not express any objections to the principle outlined in paragraph 23 of the Fitness to Study Procedure, that any lack of engagement of students with the Procedure should not be construed against them.
- 37.5 Some members of RDC noted that it might be necessary to consider different approaches for implementing the Policy and Procedure for PGR students, especially since some PGR students could be argued to be more comparable to staff than other UCL students. In light of this, it was suggested that HR colleagues might be invited to comment on the Policy and Procedure.
- 37.6 The Director of Student Administration and the Director of Student Support and Wellbeing were also in the process of investigating other possible means of welfare support for students, including an occupational health policy for students.

RESOLVED:

- 37.7 That the proposed Support to Study Policy and Fitness to Study Procedure at RDC 3-7 (13-14) be endorsed by RDC.

ACTION: Gary Hawes (to inform EdCom officers)

38 TIER 4 DOCTORATE EXTENSION SCHEME

Received:

- 38.1 An oral report from the Director, Information and Data Services, who was in attendance for this item.

Reported:

- 38.2 The Tier 4 Doctorate Extension scheme had come into effect in April 2013. The scheme gave provision for students who were completing a PhD or other doctorate level qualification at UCL to apply to stay in the UK on a Tier 4 visa for 12 months after completing their qualification, and was designed to allow full-time Tier 4 PGR students a longer period to gain practical work experience in their field.
- 38.3 While UCL procedures for implementing the scheme appeared to be working well, international PGR student take-ups had not been significant: only 20 confirmations of acceptance for studies had so far been issued to students across UCL faculties.
- 38.4 PGR student activity, particularly in relation to study leave, was proving to be one of the biggest challenges for HEIs around ensuring compliance with Home Office and UKBA regulations for international students. The Home Office was in the process of consulting with the Russell Group on this particular issue, and it was hoped that this would lead to more research-student-friendly guidance around ensuring compliance with Home Office regulations in due course.

39 PGR STUDENT SUPERVISION BY RETIRED STAFF

[RDC Min.22, 5.3.14]

Received:

39.1 The proposal at RDC 3-9 (13-14), introduced by the Graduate School Administrator.

Reported:

39.2 At its previous meeting on 5 March 2014, RDC received a note inviting it to consider current arrangements for PGR student supervision by retired members of staff and whether these should be tightened or amended. In agreeing details of arrangements and additional guidance that should ideally apply in these instances, RDC agreed that a formal proposal for amendment of the UCL Academic Regulations and Guidance for Research Degrees to include these arrangements and guidance should be submitted for formal approval to RDC's next scheduled meeting.

RESOLVED:

39.3 That the proposal at RDC 3-9 (13-14) for amendment of the UCL Academic Regulations and Guidance for Research Degrees be approved.

40 CHARGING OF RESIT FEES

Noted:

40.1 At its meeting on 26 February 2014, UCLBE agreed that the practice of charging resit fees for students who were not in attendance should be discontinued with effect from 2014-15 and should be recommended to EdCom for consideration subject to the continuation of the policy of requesting students to confirm in writing their re-entry intentions.

41 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

41A Proposed Doctorate of Public Administration

Received:

41A.1 A tabled note outlining the case for establishing a DPA as a new UCL qualification linked to STEaPP's proposed EngD track of the Department's doctoral training programme (filed with these Minutes as RDC 3-11 (13-14)).

Reported:

41A.2 The proposed DPA would:

- follow the same structure as the modular EngD programme;
- be similar to other professional research doctorates such as the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) and Doctor of Education (EdD);
- fill a gap in the market by offering the first truly interdisciplinary link between public policy and science, technology and engineering;
- confront very limited international competition, and none at the levels of UCL both in terms of ranking or location.

41A.3 RDC's comments on the new proposed qualification were invited prior to this being submitted to EdCom and AC. All three relevant Deans of Faculty were fully supportive of the proposal. The UCL School of Public Policy had been consulted on the proposed new DPA qualification. While the School would not have any issues with UCL making this award, it would not be choosing to award it in connection with its own research degree programmes.

Discussion:

41A.4 While the note made a strong case for distinguishing the DPA from the few existing DPA programmes in the UK and other relevant and alternative programmes run by possible international competitors and no major issues were raised by members of RDC, some concerns were expressed by members around i) recognition of the award of DPA by possible employers and recruiters and ii) potential for the proliferation of research degree titles within UCL and the possible impact of this in terms of the undermining of the PhD brand nationally.

41A.5 In terms of the structure of the programme, it was noted that further consideration would need to be given to defining i) clear annual progression points within the DPA programme and ii) arrangements for students who wished to transfer between the DPA and the PhD programmes.

41A.6 It was further noted that it would be necessary to check whether the DPA was among the list of acceptable Doctorate awards recognised by the UKBA for students coming to the UK under Tier 4 of the Points Based System, since this would have implications for exemption of Tier 4 students from the five-year maximum study cap and for Tier 4 students wishing to apply for the Doctorate Extension Scheme.

RESOLVED:

41A.7 That the proposal for establishing the DPA be endorsed by RDC subject to the concerns raised at 41.4 being reported, and this be worked up into a formal proposal for submission to EdCom and AC.

ACTION: Mr Marco Federighi

[Secretary's Note: in the event, the proposal for establishing the DPA was not pursued by the proponents, and a formal proposal was not submitted to EdCom or AC]

41B Proposed amendments to the guidelines for upgrade from MPhil to PhD status

Received:

41B.1 A tabled paper proposing amendments to the guidelines for upgrade from MPhil to PhD status (filed with these Minutes as RDC 3-12 (13-14)).

Reported:

41B.2 Subsequent to the paper's circulation, various further amendments to the guidelines relating to the Principal Supervisor had been proposed by one member of RDC in consultation with the RDC officers (these are attached with these Minutes at RDC 3-12 (13-14) (1st Revision)). RDC agreed to approve these in principle, subject to these being reported.

RESOLVED:

41B.3 That i) the proposed amendments to the guidelines for upgrade from MPhil to PhD status set out at RDC 3-12 (13-14) be approved and ii) the further proposed amendments be approved in principle subject to these being notified to RDC (see RDC 3-12 (13-14) (1st Revision)).

42 DATES OF MEETINGS 2014-15

Noted:

Dates of meetings for RDC in the 2014-15 session had been scheduled as follows:

Wednesday 15 October 2014 - 10am

[Secretary's note: the start time for this meeting has changed to 11am]

Wednesday 11 March 2015 - 10am

Wednesday 17 June 2015 - 10am

<p>CONFIDENTIAL (RESERVED) BUSINESS</p>
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43 SUSPENSION OF REGULATIONS REPORT

Received:

43.1 At RDC 3-10 (13-14), a report on suspensions of the regulations for students proceeding to research degrees.

Noted:

43.2 FGTs were requested to remind DGTs that any requests for the suspension of the regulations for students proceeding to research degrees should be notified to Helen Notter, Student Records Manager.

GARY HAWES

Academic Support Officer (and Committee Operations Co-ordinator)

Academic Services

Student and Registry Services

[telephone 020 7679 8592, UCL extension 28592, email: g.hawes@ucl.ac.uk]

24 September 2014