Confirmed

Research Degrees Committee

Tuesday 5th November 2019

11am – 1pm

Minutes

Present Members: Professor David Bogle (Chair); Dr Helen Matthews; Ms Helen Notter; Professor Stephen Marshall; Dr Simon Banks; Dr Paulo Drinot; Professor Jill Norman; Dr Andrew Stoker; Dr Benet Salway; Professor Kaila Srai; Professor Tania Monteiro; Dr Mark Freeman; Dr Patti Adank; Mr Jim Onyemenam

Attendees: Miss Natalie Humphrey for item 8; Dr Alex Standen for item 10; Mr Adnan Ali (observer); Ms Naomi Mithran (observer); Ms Nabihah Moughal (observer), and Mr Darren Payne (secretary).

Apologies: Professor Hynek Pikhart; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Virginia Mantouvalou; Professor Andrew Wills; Dr Ruth Siddal.

Part I: Preliminary Business

1. Terms of Reference, Constitution and Membership 2019-20 (RDC 1-01 19-20)

1.1. Approved - the terms of reference, constitution and membership for Research Degrees Committee (RDC) 2019-20 at RDC 1-01 (19-20).

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

2.1. Approved - the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5th June 2019.

3.   Matters Arising from the Minutes

3.1.   There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 5th June 2019.

4.   Chair's Business

4.1.   It was noted that the research student, nominated by the Students' Union was still in the process of being finalised, and would be in-place for the next RDC.

4.2.   It was confirmed that the replacement for the Ex officio member 'Senior Executive Officer (Doctoral School)' will be in-place for the next RDC.

4.3.   The Chair thanked all of those involved in developing Faculty Strategies, and confirmed there will be meetings with all Faculties in the New Year. Initial invitations will be for Faculty Graduate Tutors, Vice Dean, and Director of Operations. However, this list is not prescribed and some Faculties may wish to bring others.

4.4.   The Chair noted they had recently co-organised a conference in September about 'Forces and Forms of Doctoral Education', which bought together a diverse mix of higher education researchers and practitioners. The conference highlighted the different ways Doctoral Education operates around the world, and how different indigenous knowledge systems impact this. They released a set of recommendations, which were provided to members of RDC in printed format, as well as via email after the committee. It is still being discussed how the overall outputs should be published.

4.5.   Members of RDC were also provided with a link to UCL's 'Open Science: an essential introduction for researchers', which introduced the different facets of Open Science: Open Access, Open and Fair Data, Research Integrity, and Citizen Science. It was noted Open Science is quite a broad area, and covers access, data, and integrity as some of its areas. Open Access is quite mature, but Open Data remains a considerable challenge.

4.6. The Chair noted that UCL is now in a better position to look forward to potential improvements to the Research Student Log. ISD will be consulting with the staff and student community, and add suggested improvements for consideration and prioritisation by the Log Management Board.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

5. Annual Research Degrees Committee – Annual Report to Academic Committee

5.1. Received - the report at RDC 2-01 (19-20). The Secretary introduced the item which outlined the main issues covered by RDC in the 2018-19 session, with the Chair reporting this to Academic Committee. The following topics will be highlighted to Academic Committee: the introduction of Joint/Double Research Degrees, PGR Space Issues, the new PGTA code of practice, and potential for E-theses.

5.2. E-theses are still in the early stages of consideration, but given the potential introduction of these would require other areas of UCL then Academic Committee being aware of this could help.

6. Annual Report on Minutes of Meetings of Faculty Committees Responsible for Overseeing PGT Student Provision

6.1. Received - the paper at RDC 3-01 (19-20). The Secretary introduced the item which covered the key issues arising at Faculty Research Degree Committees, and summarised the main areas of discussion.

a. Graduation fees for Research Degree Students were highlighted at one FRDC as potentially too costly for students who wanted to bring family with them. Many students had been found to be disappointed with having to pay for their parents to attend their graduation, in addition to extra costs for Academic dress (robes) hire.

b. Provision of mental health services for PGR students was noted, with concerns being raised that services seemed to be targeted to Taught students as they are not available outside of term time. It was felt that access to such provisions should be available at all times.

6.2. Mathematical & Physical Sciences – no FRDC minutes had been received in time to include on the report, but were received after the November RDC meeting.

The following corrections to the report were noted:
- it was noted that within the Joint Faculties (Arts & Humanities, and Social & Historical Sciences) entries on the summary table, PRES had not been discussed. It was confirmed the PRES results have been discussed during 2018-19 at their FRDC meetings.
- it was noted that the IOE FRDC was labelled as their 'Teaching and Quality Committee', which was the previous year's name. The IOE now use the title 'Faculty Research Degrees Committee'.
- it was noted that within Life Sciences the Three Minute Thesis had been discussed.

7. MRes-MPhil/PhD Application and Admissions Update

7.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-04 (19-20), which contained end of cycle admissions data. A fuller report will be discussed in more detail and will be provided at the next RDC.

7.2. It was noted there was a 15% decrease in applications from the UK and EU, and a 16% increase in those from Overseas. The EU figures were not considered particularly surprising given current political circumstances.

7.3. At the next meeting of RDC there is expected to be a larger discussion around expectations, offers, and the general admissions data trends.

8. Update on Student Support for PGR

8.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-05 (19-20). The Head of Student Support and Wellbeing introduced the item which focused on Support for PGR Students.

8.2. Student Support and Wellbeing (SSW) Communities of Practice had highlighted that PGR students were concerned with how they are being

supported by SSW, and there is a feeling that the majority of information is geared forwards taught students particularly online, at inductions, in handbooks, and the general language used.

8.3. One way to address these issues may be to create a mobile app specifically for the PGR community, which would contain features such as calendars of what is happening relevant to them, suggested meetings, induction events, message boards, and other events. It was noted that this would be particularly useful to help PGR students who are not based at UCL to help them feel part of the community. A rollout for 2020-21 was considered a possibility, and more details will follow.

8.4. Training is to be developed for both supervisors and students to better manage their relationship. The training for supervisors will involve highlighting student vulnerabilities, and making sure they are aware of the student support that is available. For students, the training will involve points on managing their relationship with supervisors and the generic skills required of a PGR student. This could possibly be made into a module for all students to attend. It was noted that this should be developed and delivered in tandem with Arena and the existing Supervisor training.

8.5. The SSW team have also developed a new SORA template to make it easier for students to complete if required. They have also been working on providing more information for PGR students, and worked on making the procedure more accessible for funding support for students. It focuses on improving the student experience area as students can get sent around to different departments, when signposting should be more effective and seamless.

9. PGR Mental Wellbeing

9.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-06 (19-20). HR indicated that some actions were being undertaken regarding PGT Mental Wellbeing, but it was noted that RDC is expected a full report to assess all of the 22 actions.

9.2.   A more formal report is promised from HR for the next RDC, and this should be prioritised for discussion.

10.   Development Opportunities for Experienced Supervisors

10.1.   Received - the paper at RDC 1-07 (19-20). The Associate Director (Early Career Academic and Research Supervisor Development) introduced the item, which provided an update on Development Opportunities for Experienced Supervisors.

10.2.   It was noted that there have not been major changes to the Arena supervisor development programme from last year, but the revised training launched in 2018 had prompted discussion about the need for ongoing training for experienced Supervisors.

10.3.   Last year the UKCGE piloted their new professional recognition scheme for experienced supervisors and UCL was invited to participate. Four UCL supervisors volunteered and all were successfully recognised by the scheme. All four indicated this was useful and they would implement the training into their work.

10.4.   Following a wide consultation exercise about the pilot, UKCGE officially launched the scheme in September 2019. RDC discussed whether UCL should encourage and support supervisors to participate in the scheme, but it was felt that there would not be wide appetite for this.

10.5.   RDC discussed alternative options for the ongoing development of experienced supervisors. Faculties would rather that it not become mandatory, as there may be resistance to this, and also a desire to ensure this would not simply become a tick box exercise. It was raised that there could be potential for having the Faculty Graduate Tutor ask people to attend where necessary, or a mandatory refresher training.

10.6. It was raised that the absence of problems does not necessarily mean continued professional development is not required. It could potentially be seen as a weakness to wait until problems arise, when prevention via training should be key.

10.7. It was suggested that training could be tied to promotion, and then advanced training would be seen more as a positive as part of becoming a Professor. In addition, with Supervisors taking on addition students, any problems would then become compounded so the training would be more important. It was also noted that it is important Supervisors are made aware of regulatory change, and that they may be stuck in old ways if they have had no training since starting.

10.8. It was noted that Faculty Graduate Tutors could contact Arena if they wish to discuss tailored training for their Faculties or Departments.

11.   Studentship Stipend Payments

11.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-08 (19-20). The Faculty Graduate Tutor for Population Health Sciences introduced the item, which outlined issues regarding Studentship Stipend Payments.

11.2. It was noted that students are paid quarterly, which can have a profound effect on students as they are not considered employed with regular pay.

11.3. The paper suggested that students are moved to UCL's HR payment process, to ensure they get paid monthly. There has been instances where students are not paid under the current system, and are told it will be in several weeks before this will be received. This is not a realistic approach for students renting, and introduces an unnecessary stress for students unsure of their finances each month.

11.4. This issue had also been raised regularly with the Students' Union as an area of dissatisfaction amongst PGR students.

11.5. Agreed – RDC strongly supported the recommendation, and agreed that Studentship Stipend Payments should be moved into UCL's HR payment process.

Action: Secretary to inform Finance

12. Summary of UCL Qatar's Postgraduate Research Teach-out Plan

12.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-09 (19-20), which outlined the Teach-out Plan for remaining PGR students at UCL Qatar.

12.2. It was noted that all students were being moved to the Faculty of Social & Historical Sciences, where appropriate supervision would be put in place.

12.3. 4 students were identified, however 5 were noted on the PGR Log. The Faculty Graduate Tutor for Arts & Humanities was asked to investigate this further, and contact UCL Qatar with details if necessary as this may have just been an error.

Action: Faculty Graduate Tutor for Arts & Humanities

13. Research Degrees Academic Regulations Working Group Update

13.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-10 (19-20). The Secretary introduced the item, which provided an update to RDC regarding the Regulations Working Group.

13.2. It was noted that the Working Group had so far been through an initial re-draft of the Supervision, Admissions, and Registration sections, and will review further before submission to RDC.

13.3. As stated at previous meetings of RDC - the Working Group intends to compile basic queries for approval or discussion to RDC via a single paper as and when needed, but also bring queries that require larger discussion to RDC as soon as possible so it can be given wider consideration. Two areas surfaced by the Working Group were noted as being CRS (the culture and expectations surrounding this), and Location of Study (issues with face-to-face

versus distance and mixed mode). The Working Group will discuss these issues in more depth, and bring forward for discussion proposals on these issues at a future RDC.

13.4. It was confirmed that the Working Group were still aiming to publish all of the new regulations at once, with an intended publication for the 2020/21 academic year.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

14. Anonymised Suspension of Regulations Report

14.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-11 (19-20).

15. New and Amended Programmes and Qualifications Approved by RDC Chair's Action

15.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-12 (19-20)

16. Dates of Next Meeting

16.1. The dates of the RDC meetings for the rest of the 2019-20 session are:

- Wednesday 11th March 2019 11am to 1pm in Gordon St (22) G.12
- Wednesday 3rd June 2020 11am to 1pm in Rockefeller Building, David Sacks 337

Darren Payne

Secretary to RDC

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21st January 2020