



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

7 MARCH 2012

MINUTES

Professor David Bogle (*Chair*)
Mr David Ashton
Dr Stephanie Bird
Dr Donna Brown
Dr Wendy Brown
Mr Ben Colvill
Professor Chris Danpure
Dr Julio Davila
Professor Alison Diduck
Professor Vince Emery
Dr Caroline Essex

Professor Mike Ewing
Professor Asterios Gavriilidis
Dr Tom Gretton
Professor Stephen Hart
Dr Joy Sleeman
Dr Dave Spratt
Professor Kaila Srail
Mr Ben Towse

In attendance: Mrs Helen Notter, Student Records Manager, Ms Bella Malins, Head of Outreach and Admissions, Ms Kathleen Nicholls, Director, Registry Information and Data Services, Mr Gary Smith, Head of Student Data Services and Ms Karen Wishart, RDC Secretary.

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Marco Federighi, Dr Sally Leever and Dr Ruth Siddall.

Key to abbreviations:

AC	Academic Committee
FGT	Faculty Graduate Tutor
JSSC	Joint Staff-Student Consultative Committee
NUS	National Union of Students
RAS	Registry and Academic Services
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
RPS	Research Publications Service
UCLU	University College London Union
UCU	University and College Union

14 **RDC MEMBERSHIP**

Noted

- 14.1 Dr Stephen Marshall, Faculty Graduate Tutor, Built Environment, was on sabbatical. Dr Julio Davila attended RDC on behalf of Dr Marshall. The Chair welcomed Dr Davila to the Committee.

15 **MINUTES**

Approved

- 15.1 The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 13 October 2011 [*RDC Minutes 1-11, 2011-12*], issued previously, were confirmed by RDC and signed by the Chair.

16 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

16A **Student Academic Representatives (StARs)**

[*RDC Minute 4.2, 13.10.11*]

Noted

16A.1 Simon To, UCLU reported that the JSSC had a StARs steering group which had agreed a communication strategy for handling information about StARs. Each Faculty had appointed a contact for maintaining up-to-date information of StARs in their Faculties. A list of Faculty contacts for StARs could be obtained from the RDC Secretary on request. There were currently 57 research student StARs.

16A.2 The UCLU Postgraduate Association Officer reported that the UCLU provided training and support to StARs. However it was noted that students could be representatives on departmental committees without being registered with the UCLU as a StAR.

16B **Revised list of MRes and PGR Programmes available at UCL**

Received

- 16B.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/01 (11-12) a revised list from Student Data Services of currently available PGR and MRes programmes by Faculty, for information.

17 **MRES / MPHIL/PHD APPLICATION AND ADMISSIONS DATA**

Received

17.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/02 (11-12) a report from the Head of Outreach and Admissions on the 2011 entry end of cycle statistics comparing applications / acceptances and enrolments. A second report showed the current application/ offers/acceptances for September 2012 entry.

17.2 An oral report from Ms Bella Malins, Head of Outreach and Admissions.

Reported

17.3 The Head of Outreach and Admissions reported that:

- Entry to research degree programmes did not follow the standard admissions cycle but operated on a rolling basis therefore it was difficult to draw definitive conclusions;
- For 2012 entry, Home/EU applications had increased by 6% and Overseas applications by 28% compared to a snap-shot at a similar date the previous year (27 Feb/1March) there was an increase in offers made to both home and overseas applicants (11% and 36% respectively);
- there was a large increase in acceptances which was thought to be due to the new on-line applicant portal which allowed electronic offers to be made and accepted.

Discussion

17.4 The Chair commended the improvements made to the processing of research degree application forms which was in part due to the new electronic application process. It was suggested that it would be interesting to analyse the overseas applications to establish which countries these were coming from. The Head of Outreach and Admissions agreed to look into this.

Action: Bella Malins

18 MPhil/PHD UPGRADE AND SUBMISSION DATA

Received

18.1 A report at APPENDIX RDC 2/03 (11-12) and an oral report by Mr Gary Smith, Head of Student Data Services, on MPhil/PhD upgrade and submission statistics. The data was presented by department with a summary graph for each faculty.

Reported

18.2 The data showed that for the 2004/5-2006/7 entry cohorts between 54% and 61% of students submitted their MPhil/PhD theses within the required time frame (3 or 4 years). The Head of Student Data Services confirmed that the data had been adjusted to reflect students who had formal approval to interrupt their studies. The number of students who upgraded from MPhil to PhD within the required 18 months was low: range 6% to 27%

Discussion

18.3 The Chair noted that there was increasing external scrutiny of MPhil/PhD completion statistics, particularly from Funding Councils, therefore it was important for students to submit within the required timeframe. FGTs were advised that research student supervisor training was available for individual departments or faculties specifically to look at the issue of timely completion and could be organised by the Graduate School on request.

18.4 The upgrade statistics had not previously been reported to RDC and the data showed that the number of students upgraded from MPhil to PhD within the required 18 months was low. The Director of Student Services reported that he had received three research student grievance cases and none of these students had been upgraded within the required timeframe. The Chair noted that the upgrade assessment was an important mechanism to ensure that students were

at the appropriate level and were working towards the required completion date, and that it is important for all to reinforce the new regulations, introduced in March 2009, requiring upgrade between 12-18 months.

18.5 The Head of Student Data Services confirmed that the upgrade date entered into the system was the date given on the upgrade form and not the date that the form was received by RAS therefore the data should be accurate. It was noted that the system did not account for upgrades which narrowly missed the 18 months by a few weeks, these would be recorded as not upgraded within the required 18 months.

18.6 The Chair requested that FGTs re-confirm the importance timely upgrade and timely completion to Departmental Graduate Tutors..

**Action: RDC Secretary to circulate the data file electronically;
FGTs to report to Departments**

19 THE WOOLF REPORT

Received

19.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/04 (11-12) a report by the *Woolf Inquiry into the LSE's links with Libya and lessons to be learned*. Members were referred, in particular, to Chapter 2, pages 28-53.

At APPENDIX RDC 2/05 (11-12) a note by the RDC Chair.

Discussion

19.2 The Chair noted that the Graduate School Management Board had discussed the Woolf Report and had identified a number of issues for RDC to consider outlined in the note at APPENDIX 2/05 (11-12). RDC responded to the issues as follows:

- i) The Head of Outreach and Admissions confirmed that the UCL admissions process was robust and a student would not be admitted without appropriate qualifications.
- ii) The Admissions Office was aware when a candidate had applied for more than one degree programme. It was noted that at UCL it was reasonable for students to submit more than one application, particularly for interdisciplinary research projects. The Chair noted that an offer should not be made to a candidate unless the necessary supervision was available.
- iii) It was confirmed by the Head of Outreach and Admissions and the Dean of Students (Academic) that entry standards would not be relaxed because of an 'idealism factor'.
- iv) The Chair noted that interdisciplinary PGR students all have a 'home' department and should be aware of this. This was a complex issue for some students on interdisciplinary programmes and it was agreed that this should be discussed further, once FGTs were familiar with the arrangements in their Faculties.
- v) The UCL structure of departments and faculties ensured that admissions and quality assurance processes were overseen by the Faculty and by UCL's central administration.
- vi) RDC discussed the matter of what should not be permissible in supervising a research student. There was concern regarding how this might be quantified. The Chair proposed that a Working Group of RDC be established to consider this further, with a view to including information in

- the Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees or as separate guidance if it is deemed appropriate.
- vii) Regarding PGR students being absent and carrying out their studies in another place, UCL's regulations specified that: *With the exception of non-resident PhD programmes (see 2.10), students, whether full-time or part-time, are expected to centre their academic studies on UCL. Students should ensure they are able to attend UCL in person for teaching and meetings as required by their supervisors. Students must obtain approval before they leave to collect or study material remote from UCL or work in remote facilities.*
 - viii) As part of the PhD final examination entry form, supervisors are required to confirm that the thesis is the student's own work. The viva voce examiners are required to question the student to ascertain their understanding of their work and the subject area concerned. The Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees clearly states that UCL expects all its researchers to act in a professional manner in relation to their work, and contains links to the regulations on plagiarism, self-plagiarism and research misconduct in the "Examinations" Section of the Academic Regulations for Research Degree Students, and also to UCL's Policy Statement on Plagiarism.
 - ix) ISD had confirmed that records were kept of emails sent from a student's UCL email account. However this would not apply to emails sent from students' other non-UCL email accounts.

19.3 The Head of the Graduate School and RDC Chair would report back to the UCL Council on the above.

**Action: RDC Secretary to establish a WG as noted at (vi) above.
Action: FGTs to report on the Departmental arrangements for interdisciplinary PGR students.**

20 TURNITIN FOR DOCTORAL THESES

Received

20.1 A note by the Chair at [APPENDIX RDC 2/06 \(11-12\)](#).

Discussion

- 20.2 The following points were raised during the discussion of the use of Turnitin for doctoral theses:
- The intellectual property issues, particularly with regard to research in the School of Life and Medical Sciences and Biosciences;
 - the possible submission to Turnitin of the introductory chapters only;
 - possible prejudice towards a student if Turnitin suggested that a high percentage of the document was plagiarised;
 - it was suggested that it would not be reasonable for MPhil/PhD examiners to use Turnitin as part of the *viva voce* examination;
 - students might be encouraged to use Turnitin themselves to check their own work;
 - supervisors might use Turnitin with students as a teaching tool.
- 20.3 RDC agreed that the important issue was to ensure that PGR students understood what plagiarism was and were able to correctly reference their work to avoid plagiarism accusations. It was the role of PGR supervisors to ensure that students were properly educated with regard to plagiarism and if necessary attend appropriate training courses. The Chair asked FGTs to take the idea of using Turnitin for doctoral students back to their Faculties and to encourage

students and Supervisors to use the software regularly from the outset of the doctoral programme as appropriate. FGTs were asked to report back to RDC with relevant experiences within their Faculties.

Action FGTs

21 MAPS FACULTY POSTGRADUATE OPEN DAY

Received

- 21.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/07 (11-12) a report by the MAPS FGT on the Faculty's open day for postgraduate students.

Discussion

- 21.2 Dr Essex reported that the MAPS Faculty Postgraduate Open Day had been a success but might be enhanced by broadening this to include the Faculties of Life Sciences and Engineering Sciences.
- 21.3 The Faculties of Arts and Humanities and Social and Historical Sciences had also run an open day for graduate students which had been successful. The Chair proposed that it might be appropriate for each School to run an Open Day.
- 21.4 The FGT from Arts and Humanities reported that she had attended a recruitment fair in Belgium and the UCL brand had not been widely recognised by visitors. The Chair suggested that this might be specific to the subject as UCL was widely recognised internationally as a place of excellence for Biomedicine.
- 21.5 The Chair proposed that the Head of the International Office, Dr David Stevens, be invited to the next RDC meeting to comment on UCL brand recognition.

Action: RDC Secretary to invite Dr Stevens to the RDC meeting on 11 June 2012.

22 VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR MPHIL/PHD EXAMINERS

Noted

- 22.1 External examiners who came from outside the EU were required to enter the UK on a tier 5 visa. This change was to reflect that examiners were entering the UK to undertake paid work. This had been added to the guidance notes for the *Nomination and Appointment of Examiners for UCL/UoL Research Degree Candidates* at: http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ras/research_degrees/research_degrees_docs/ddnomform
The Student Centre noted that the number of examiners from outside the EU, or with non-EU passports was small therefore the new visa requirement was not expected to have a significant impact on departments.

23 E-THESES SUBMISSION VIA RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS SERVICE (RPS)

Noted

- 23.1 UCL Publications Board, chaired by Professor David Price, requested that students use UCL RPS (Research Publications Service) for the deposit of

electronic PhD theses with UCL Library Services. In this model, students would upload their digital theses, their Deposit Agreement, and any accompanying files directly to RPS. This would supersede the current arrangement, under which students are required to provide electronic theses on a CD-ROM accompanying their bound copies, for subsequent upload by Library Services staff.

- 23.2 The requested change related only to the mode of delivery of the electronic copy of the thesis. The requirement for students to submit both a print and electronic copy of the thesis, and the rights and permissions framework previously agreed by RDC, would remain unchanged.
- 23.3 UCL Discovery staff would prepare on-line documentation on how to upload a thesis and Agreement form to RPS, and support individual students thereafter according to need.
- 23.4 Registry and Academic Services (RAS) staff would be required to check that the electronic copy of the thesis had been submitted before sanctioning the award. Such checks would be made in RPS. UCL Discovery staff would provide appropriate training for RAS staff.
- 23.5 The Director of Student Administration confirmed that this was approved in principle by RAS and the details of how the process would work were being discussed.

Action: RDC Secretary to report on progress

24 POSTGRADUATE EMPLOYMENT CHARTER

Noted

- 24.1 The NUS, in conjunction with the UCU had published a *Postgraduate Employment Charter* which outlined good practice in the employment of postgraduate students. The full document was at: <http://www.ucu.org.uk/media/pdf/l/r/postgrademploymentcharter.pdf>. The key points noted in the charter were:
- Fair and equal appointment processes;
 - a fair rate of pay for all hours worked;
 - supervision or mentoring and line management;
 - formal and informal feedback on performance;
 - induction and training;
 - support for appropriate continuing professional development;
 - representation within the institution and by a trade union;
 - integration into the professional academic culture;
 - access to the necessary facilities and resources required to undertake the role;
 - a reasonable balance between employment and research.
- 24.2 The Postgraduate Association Officer noted that the UCLU were undertaking a survey of postgraduate student employment at UCL and would report to a future RDC meeting.

25 **REPORT FROM THE RDC WG ON MPhil/PHD EXAMINER GUIDELINES AND TRAINING**

Received

25.1 At the RDC meeting on 18 November 2010 [*Minute 5*] it was agreed that a Working Group should be established to review the guidance provided to MPhil/PhD candidates and examiners on the *viva voce* examination. The report of the WG was at APPENDIX RDC 2/08 (11-12) along with the revised *Procedures for Viva Examination for Research Degrees*.

25.2 The Chair noted that RDC members were invited to contact him with any comments regarding training for MPhil/PhD examiners.

26 **GRADUATE SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT**

Received

26.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/09 (11-12) the Graduate School Annual Report for information.

27 **RDC ANNUAL REPORT 2010-2011 TO ACADEMIC COMMITTEE**

Received

27.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/10 (11-12) the RDC Annual Report 2010-2011 for information. This was approved by AC at its meeting on 15 December 2011.

28 **CHAIRS REPORT**

28A **Approval of new degree programmes**

Noted

28A.1 Since the previous RDC meeting on 13 October 2011, the following new programmes had been approved by the Chair on behalf of RDC:

- MRes Biodiversity, Evolution and Conservation
- MRes Web Science

28B **Research Student Log Uptake Data**

Received

28B.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/11 (11-12) a report on the number of PGR students using the Research Student Log.

Reported

28B.2 The Chair reported that uptake of the Research Student Log, although good in some departments, was lower than desired. He noted that the Log was a useful

tool for monitoring student progress and that the skills self-assessment section of the Log had been enhanced for the beginning of the 2011/12 session to incorporate the Vitae Researcher Development Framework.

29 **ENGAGEMENT MONITORING**

[RDC Minute 28, 21 March 2011]

Noted

- 29.1 At the RDC meeting on 13 October 2011, the Director of Student Services noted that it was essential for UCL to comply with the requirements of the UK Border Agency for UCL as a highly trusted sponsor. A memorandum was sent to Faculty Tutors and Faculty Graduate Tutors on 23 September 2011 outlining the monitoring requirements for all students and the procedure for 2011-2012

Reported

- 29.2 The Director of Registry Information and Data Services reported that checks were being made in Portico to identify departments which were not complying with Engagement Monitoring. A report would be made to Faculties who should liaise with non compliant departments.

30 **NEXT MEETING**

Noted

- 30.1 The final meeting of RDC this session would be on Monday 11 June 2012 at 10am in the South Wing Council Room.
- 30.2 With effect from 19 March 2012 Mr Gary Hawes, Senior Academic Support Officer, RAS, would be assuming the role of Secretary to RDC.

Karen Wishart
Academic Support
19 March 2012