Confirmed

Research Degrees Committee

Wednesday 10th March 2021

11am – 1pm

Minutes

Present Members: Professor David Bogle (Chair); Dr Helen Matthews; Ms Elizabeth Halton; Dr Sam Smidt; Ms Helen Notter; Professor Stephen Marshall; Dr Simon Banks; Dr Efrosyni Konstantinou; Dr Benet Salway; Mr Jim Onyemenam; Mr Naheem Yaqub, Professor Jasmina Jovanovic; Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Alan Ingram; Professor Jill Norman; Dr Andrew Stoker; Dr Patti Adank; Professor Alex Mills; Dr Mark Newman; Professor Tania Monteiro; Dr Jane Perryman; Dr Richard Bucknall.

Attendees: Ms Bella Malins (for item 4); Mr Gary Smith (for item 5); Mr Simon To (for item 6); Mr Dan Derricott (observer), and Mr Darren Payne (secretary).

Part I: Preliminary Business

18. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

18.1. Approved - the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November 2020.

19. Matters Arising from the Minutes

19.1. Regulations for PGR students supervising Taught students (minute 7.7, 20-21): it was noted that the Doctoral School was taking this forward, and that an update would be provided at the June 2021 meeting of RDC.

20. Chair's Business

20.1. It was noted that Brexit had impacted fees for EU students with UKRI now allowing international recruit up to a ~30% cap as a result. The Doctoral

School had secured tuition fee support for up to 130 students via a paper which was approved at SMT. 103 of these awards had been allocated to programmes as of March 2021. Allocations of awards would be done annually, but the scheme was only confirmed for two years for the moment anyway, at which point a review will be undertaken to coincide with UKRI's.

20.2.   The Doctoral School confirmed that the initial round (Phase 1) of UKRI funding extensions had been completed over the Summer (2020) for students whose end dates were up to 31 March 2021. The second round (Phase 2) had also been announced; UKRI had set up Phase 2 to be undertaken by institutions (rather than by grant holders as it was for Phase 1). As such, applications would need to be made centrally and local and central panels would review the applications. Successful applications would be allocated to either the institutional block award or to grant underspend. There were approximately 450 applications made in the initial Phase 2 funding round; students will be notified outcomes by Easter 2021.

20.3.   The Doctoral School noted that there had been a review of all Research IT systems such as Research Log, IRIS, etc but this was put on hold owing to Covid-19 priorities as well as Donna Swann, who had led the review, being seconded to a different role.

20.4.   It was confirmed that there was funding available for enhancements to the Research Log, and that work would begin after Easter. One recent development highlighted was the able to do reporting on whether a student had met with their supervisor within the last month or not. This update would help with engagement monitoring, and would be an auditable process for external bodies such as UKVI.

20.5.   The Doctoral School noted that the PGR Regulations Working Group had been on hold due to Covid-19, but that work would soon being on this again. Initially the group will focus on quick fixes to the current regulations such as making some of the Covid-19 additions permanent, Annual Leave for PGRs, and Staff Eligibility for Supervision; these changes will be retained in the fuller rewrite planned to complete for the start of the 2022/23 academic session

Part II: Matters for Discussion

20.6. **MRes-MPhil-PhD Application and Admissions Annual Report**

20.7. Received – the paper at RDC 2-01 (20-21). The Director of Admissions introduced the item, which summarised PGR Admissions over the last Academic Year.

20.8. It was noted that whilst it was early in the cycle for a full picture so far this year overall applications were up 6% with both UK and Overseas applications doing well. EU and Overseas had now been combined, but there had been a slight drop in applications from students in the EU. Offers had also increased by 9.2% and acceptances up 8.1%, although a degree of caution should be taken with the numbers as many of these could be deferrals. It was noted that the general trend was positive for UG and PGT students, and that this was expected to follow through for PGR as well. MRes numbers were up 15%, but it was noted that the numbers generally overinflate swings given the offers and acceptances are not as high.

20.9. EU fee status queries were highlighted as potentially increasing in the future due to the change of status from Home to International fees. Amended definitive guidance was planned to be released regarding EU fee status shortly; Admissions and the Doctoral School would send out communications accordingly.

20.10. The Director of Admissions highlighted to RDC that in general their admissions liaison could answer most queries, but that they are also available to assist and offer advice for more difficult cases.

20.11. It was noted that a review of Admissions had been on-going which was mainly focused on Taught due to the volume of taught students, but where issues aligned PGR admissions could also be included. Needs were most likely to align regarding diversity data, potential anonymisation of data, and improved access.

21.   MPhil/PhD upgrade and submission data

21.1.   Received - the paper at RDC 2-02 (20-21). The Head of Student Data
        Services introduced the item which summarised the MPhil/PhD upgrade and
        submission data at UCL.

21.2.   It was noted that submission rates by cohort of entry were: 66% in 2013/14;
        63% in 2014/15; and 57% in 2015/16. However, it was noted that for this
        latest cohort there were still approximately a quarter of students who could
        potentially submit so this figure would likely level out by the end of cycle.

21.3.   The Head of Student Data clarified that the IOE were not separated by
        Department in this report, but that for 2017/18 cohorts onwards, this would be
        split out.

21.4.   RDC raised whether the information in this report could be added to Tableau
        to help visualise it; however, it was not certain how useful live updated data
        would be for these data (in comparison to a once-a-year report).

21.5.   **Student Priorities for Education Report 2020**

21.6.   Received - the paper at RDC 2-03 (20-21). The Policy, Governance & Insight
        Manager introduced the paper which highlighted trends in annual student
        feedback.

21.7.   The report looked at feedback received by over 2000 Academic
        Representatives, and included positive, negative, and neutral items. It was
        noted that the report was focused on feedback received prior to March 2020
        so Covid-19 was not necessarily reflected in the report.

21.8.   Positive areas were teaching delivery, social aspects, and student voice,
        whereas the most negative areas were assessment timing, feedback, and
        common/study spaces, an issue especially prevalent for PGRs.

21.9.   Covid-19 issues had also been raised with PGR Reps. In general, remote
        learning had been seen as a positive experience and students had

appreciated the support and availability of resources and staff. However, there had been some issues raised with value for money, lack of access to facilities, and fees & funding which had been raised by PGR students much more than Taught students.

21.10. PRES 2021 was discussed. It was raised whether holding the PRES survey during Covid-19 would mean fewer students would respond. It was also noted that this PRES would have an additional Covid-19 section.

22. Generic issues arising from Joint Examiner Reports

22.1. Received - the paper at RDC 2-04 (20-21). The item summarised the generic issues raised across all Faculty's Joint Examiner Reports.

22.2. It was noted that the online experience had proven to be both positive and robust during Covid-19, which was widely seen as a good outcome given the short timespan required to implement remote working. It was highlighted that the number of student complaints had actually gone down in comparison to this time last year. This was seen as an affirmation that the online experience had overall been positive.

22.3. One concern raised was the quality of the thesis that examiners were receiving, e.g. having issues such as overly long introductions. It was raised that students have struggled to get onto thesis writing courses due to lack of capacity. The Doctoral School noted that this would be looked into as it is an issue that is raised frequently.

22.4. Self-plagiarism guidance had also been raised in some reports with confusion over whether published papers could be included in a student's thesis. The Doctoral School noted they would look into this. In addition, it was noted that Turnitin had previously been considered as a possible tool to use for plagiarism support; however, at the time, it was decided against as it was very difficult to get a meaningful report for doctoral theses (as compared to essays

for a taught programme). This could be reviewed again in light of advances in this technology though.

23. Covid-19 impact form for doctoral examination

23.1. Received - the paper at RDC 2-05 (20-21). The Deputy Director (Doctoral School) introduced the item which was a Covid-19 impact statement form for approval by RDC.

23.2. It was noted that this item had first been submitted to RDC in November 2020 and was being re-submitting following amendment. Focus had been shifted from statement on quality vs quantity to more of a context setting exercise for the examiner to understand how Covid-19 affected the candidate's work.

23.3. The Covid Impact Form is designed to be an objective summary of how Covid-19 affected them, and not a plea for leniency for examiners.

23.4. **Approved** - it was noted that the paper was formally approved by RDC.

24. MPhil Stud Regulations

24.1. Received - the paper at RDC 2-06 (20-21). The Faculty Graduate Tutor for Arts and Humanities introduced the item which was first reading of MPhilStud regulations to be published in the Academic Manual for 2021/22.

24.2. It was noted that the MPhilStud was not a new programme, but a writing into regulations of a programme that had already existed and successfully recruited 15-20 students a year and had never formally had its own regulations since being adopted from the University of London. The regulations are intended to be a way of formalising the programme into the Academic Manual.

24.3. The MPhilStud regulations had been modelled on the DPA regulations which had captured everything required minus some small changes exclusive to the MPhilStud.

24.4. It was highlighted that the programme had an unusual mix of taught and research elements. "Taught" elements on the programme were mostly modelled on provision by departments similar to taught students undertaking a dissertation but with it being examined by research degree regulations. The MPhilStud would therefore adopt the language of 'Training Modules' for compulsory elements, and 'Research Specialisation' for optional elements with both being delivered similar to Taught elements. RDC was generally comfortable with this given the financial consequences of declaring them to be specifically 'Taught' elements.

24.5. MPhilStud supervisor load was noted as another area this differed – current practice was that MPhilStud students do not count towards the overall Supervisor load. Load is guided by Supervisors based on their overall load beyond MPhilStud students. This could also have an impact on examiners when students then go up to the Doctorate, so this may need to be looked into further as a potential issue.

24.6. It was noted that the structure and how the programme is presented could be reviewed. It was suggested that potentially the MPhilStud could be a standalone programme modelled as a PhD with an integrated masters.

25.   Electronic submission of final corrected thesis

25.1. Received - the paper at RDC 2-07 (20-21). The Deputy Director (Doctoral School) introduced the item which was an update on an item which had been approved in principle at the November 2020 RDC.

25.2. It was noted that Library Services wanted to retain hard copies as an opt-in option rather than an opt-out. It was raised that the option to opt-in was very important to some areas of UCL on degrees where the material format of the dissertation is crucial, e.g., the Slade or the Bartlett.

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Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

26.   Report on Research Degree Administration and Examination Statistics 2019-20

26.1. Received - the paper at RDC 2-08 (20-21).

27.   Anonymised Suspension of Regulations Report (since November 2020)

27.1. Received - the paper at RDC 2-09 (20-21)

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

28.1. Received - the paper at RDC 2-10 (19-20)

Darren Payne

Secretary to RDC

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29th March 2021