



## RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Monday 11 June 2012

### MINUTES

*Present:*

Professor David Bogle (Chair); Mr David Ashton; Dr Stephanie Bird; Mr Neil Chowdhury; Professor Alison Diduck; Professor Vince Emery; Dr Caroline Essex; Professor Mike Ewing; Mr Marco Federighi; Dr Tom Gretton; Professor Stephen Hart; Dr Sally Leever; Dr Stephen Marshall; Mr Dante Micheaux (vice Mr Ben Towse); Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Dave Spratt; Professor Kaila Srani

*In attendance:* Mr Gary Hawes (Secretary); Dr David Stevens (Head of the International Office)

Apologies were received from Dr Donna Brown; Dr Wendy Brown; Mr Ben Colvill; Professor Chris Danpure; Dr Joy Sleeman; Mr Ben Towse.

*List of abbreviations*

AC	Academic Committee
DTCs	Doctoral Training Centres
HEIs	Higher education institutions
PGR	Postgraduate research
RCUK	Research Councils UK
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
REF	Research Excellence Framework
UCLU	UCL Union

### 31 CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP; TERMS OF REFERENCE

**Approved:**

31.1 At RDC 3-1 (11-12), the following proposed amendments to RDC's constitution and terms of reference in light of proposals that had been agreed at the meeting of AC held on 22 March 2012:

- Addition of the Head of Admissions and Outreach (Ms Bella Malins) to the RDC *ex officio* membership;
- Addition of the following clause to the RDC terms of reference:  
To formulate general UCL policy on the recruitment and admission of postgraduate research students in accordance with UCL's strategy for student recruitment and other relevant policy statements, and to promote and monitor the implementation of that policy

### 32 MINUTES OF 7 MARCH 2012 MEETING

**Confirmed:**

32.1 The Minutes of the RDC meeting held on 7 March 2012 [*RDC Mins.14-30, 7.3.12 refer*].

33 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

33A **E-theses submission via RPS** [Min.23 , 7.3.12]

**Received:**

- 33A.1 At RDC 3-2 (11-12), a note updating RDC on developments since its last meeting with regard to the confirmation of arrangements for enabling research student e-thesis submission via the UCL Research Publications Service.

33B **Working group on non-permissible forms and degrees of assistance for research students** [Min. 19.3, 7.3.12]

**Received:**

- 33B.1 An oral report by the Chair.

**Reported:**

- 33B.2 The Chair of RDC was in the process of establishing a working group to investigate the matter of non-permissible forms and degrees of assistance for research students. A report on the working group's deliberations would be submitted to the RDC.

34 **TURNITIN FOR DOCTORAL THESES** [Min.20, 7.3.12]

**Discussion:**

- 34.1 The Chair of RDC invited discussion of experiences within UCL faculties of using the Turnitin software for the submission of research student doctoral theses. The following main points were raised:

- Within some UCL faculties, eg Life Sciences, it was noted that it was usual practice for students to submit only the introduction and materials & methods sections of their doctoral thesis, rather than the whole thesis, to the Turnitin software, whereas in other UCL faculties, eg Arts and Humanities, students were required to submit their whole doctoral thesis in its entirety to the Turnitin software;
- In other UCL faculties, eg Laws, Medical Sciences, use of the Turnitin software was not formally prescribed – instead it was available for optional use as an information/developmental tool for students and their supervisors;
- Although the submission of student doctoral theses to the Turnitin software had raised a number of student copyright and intellectual property issues, it was noted that colleagues in the Laws Faculty had reportedly discovered a way to modify the software so that student doctoral theses submissions were only retained in the Turnitin database for 24 hours before being removed;
- Use of the Turnitin software as a formative process for the submission of MPhil to PhD student upgrade reports might be more broadly encouraged within UCL;
- It would be helpful to draft some best-practice guidance for UCL research students and staff on use of the Turnitin software, which would broadly advocate use of the software as a formative tool for the submission of student reports to their supervisors and as a means of checking non-results sections of student doctoral theses. checking reports, theses, etc that were submitted by students to their supervisors. It was further agreed that it would be helpful to receive clarification from Turnitin on the student copyright and intellectual property issues that had been raised.

**ACTION: Mr Gary Hawes/Mr Ben Colvil**

35 **OVERSEAS RESEARCH STUDENT RECRUITMENT AND ADMISSIONS**

[Min.17.4, 7.3.12]

**Received:**

- 35.1 A report on factors affecting UCL's overseas PhD student recruitment and strategies to address them, at RDC 3-3 (11-12), and an analysis of the country of origin of UCL's overseas research student applicants, at RDC 3-4 (11-12) – both introduced by Dr David Stevens, Head of the International Office.

**Reported:**

- 35.2 The report at RDC 3-3 (11-12) had been originally drafted in October 2011 to draw attention to the multiplicity of factors affecting overseas PGR student recruitment. Although some of the data contained therein had since been superseded, the main issues and trends outlined in the report remained the same.
- 35.3 While UCL had a larger proportion of UK/EU students than most of its competitors, it had the lowest proportion of overseas PGR students among the Russell Group of HEIs. One of the chief reasons for this was UCL's significant successes, relative to its competitors, in winning RCUK funding. Other reasons included:
- the lack of financial incentive at supervisor/research group level to take on these students;
  - the fact that overseas PGR students who were recruited by UCL were more likely to be self-funded than those who were recruited by its competitors;
  - the fact that UCL attracted far fewer overseas PGR students who were funded by overseas governments or institutions, relative to its competitors – partly owing to the willingness of many competitors HEIs to offer greater discounts to overseas funding bodies.
- 35.4 The imperative for overseas PGR student recruitment was not related solely to fee income. Overseas PGR students also made a significant contribution to developing UCL's research base and outputs along with its research networks and potential collaborations – all of which would continue to play a role in determining UCL's research income.
- 35.5 The data at RDC 3-4 (11-12) illustrated the large differences between countries in terms of overseas PGR student applications received by UCL, offers made, applicant acceptances and final intake. In terms of the most recent cycles of UCL's overseas PGR student applications, the largest proportion of UCL's overseas research applications came from just three countries: China, the USA and India.
- 35.6 The way that in which enquiries and applications from overseas PGR students were handled was a crucial factor. Deficiencies in these processes had been shown to disproportionately affect overseas PGR students, who were generally less conversant with the UK education system and its practices;
- 35.7 The latest iteration of the International Student Recruitment Strategy and Marketing Plan had been rewritten to incorporate a change of emphasis from country-based activities to increasing the focus on research and marketing activities that were more closely aligned to the needs of faculties and subject areas.

**Discussion:**

- 35.8 The following main points were raised during discussion:
- In some UCL faculties, eg Engineering Sciences, the fact that there were a large number of overseas PGR student applicants who were without funding made the issue of securing funding for these students in the form of scholarships, studentships etc critical to their successful recruitment;

- Committing funds to increasing the number of scholarships for overseas PGR students would be fundamental to increasing overseas PGR student recruitment and would pay dividends in the longer term through the contribution that these students would make to the research environment at UCL;
- As a means of highlighting the contribution made by overseas PGR students to UCL's research environment, it would be useful to maintain a record of authors who were overseas PGR students who were returned in the REF 2014;
- UCL might consider reviewing its fee-discounting policy with a view to offering increased fee discounts, eg 25% rather than 10%, for overseas PGR students who were supported by overseas funding bodies. Some members of RDC noted that it would be useful to consider information on the possible longer-term financial implications/cost benefits of this;
- The way information and guidance for prospective overseas PGR student applicants was currently presented on UCL's web pages differed markedly across UCL faculties/departments and was characterised by an inconsistency of approach which was hampered by the absence of any strategy, guidance or template both centrally and at faculty level. UCL could learn in this area from some of its competitors, eg King's College, in terms of presenting guidance for overseas PGR students more pragmatically;
- There needed to be more structured, transparent and efficient mechanisms, both centrally as well as at faculty level, for fielding and supporting initial enquiries from prospective overseas PGR students applicants, eliciting information from these applicants where applicable and directing them appropriately, eg to a more relevant potential supervisor/research group/department. Mechanisms at faculty level would need to take account of different faculty/departmental arrangements for research student recruitment along with the different circumstances and levels of enquiry of prospective applicants, and offer clear advice to applicants on how they should proceed with their application, eg through FAQ sections addressing next steps for each level of enquiry;
- The fact that UCL's application to acceptance conversion rate was significantly lower for overseas PGR student applicants from India relative to those applicants from China or the USA possibly pointed to the need for a more nuanced approach to the assessment of Indian qualifications, informed by the provision of better information centrally, to ensure that UCL optimised its intake of good-quality students from India.

## 36 DEPARTMENTAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH STUDENTS [*Min. 19.3, 7.3.12*]

### **Received:**

36.1 At RDC 3-5 (11-12), a note giving details of current DTCs and funded research student programmes at UCL.

### 36.2 **Discussion:**

The following main points were raised during discussion:

- Although there were not perceived to be any issues currently in terms of the requirement for research students based in DTCs to be registered in a 'home' UCL department, it was always possible that this requirement would be overlooked in respect of some students, particularly given the interdisciplinary nature of their research;
- CoMPLEX had implemented arrangements whereby the 'home' departments for each of its research students were required to sign a form to acknowledge that they were aware of the student(s) in question and to confirm that they would have access to support. RDC agreed that it would be good practice to implement a similar arrangement more widely within DTCs.

### 37 NEW OVERARCHING AWARD FOR PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

**Received:**

- 37.1 At RDC 3-6 (11-12) a proposal for a new overarching degree title of Professional Doctorate (DPro), introduced by Professor Vince Emery.

**Reported:**

- 37.2 Given the likely expansion in award of professional doctorates by UCL, it was key that these awards were recognised as equivalent to, but different from, the traditional PhD award. In order to achieve this, the recommendation was that UCL should introduce a new overarching degree title of Professional Doctorate (DPro), which would capture all new and some existing professional doctorate programmes and include an indication the relevant field of study – for example, DPro Orthopaedics, DPro Clinical Communication Sciences, DPro Biomedical Sciences etc.

**RESOLVED:**

- 37.3 To recommend to AC that UCL adopt the proposal for an overarching degree title of Professional Doctorate (DPro) for its professional doctorate programmes, at RDC 3-6 (11-12).

**ACTION: Mr Gary Hawes**

### 38 PART-TIME PHD STUDENT SUPPORT

**Received:**

- 38.1 At RDC 3-7 (11-12), a report by the UCLU Postgraduate Association on problems faced by part-time PhD students at UCL, including recommendations for improvement, introduced by Mr Ben Chowdury and Mr Dante Michaeux.

**Reported:**

- 38.2 The report and recommendations at RDC 3-7 (11-12) had been informed by a survey of part-time UCL PhD students that had been undertaken by the UCLU Postgraduate Association in the Spring 2012, UCLU's existing policies and other claims, reports and requests that had been received by the UCLU and Postgraduate Association.
- 38.3 One of the chief recommendations of the report was the need to improve information, advice and guidance for part-time PhD students seeking funding. It was proposed that this should be achieved through production by UCL departments of guidance setting out funding opportunities within the relevant subject field for both incoming and current students.

**Discussion:**

- 38.4 The following main points were raised during discussion:
- A forthcoming Portico development would go some way to creating a centralised information and data point on funding opportunities that were available for research students;
  - Part-time research students had also expressed some concern about the lack of (paid) teaching opportunities;
  - While it would be possible to lobby colleagues within UCL in respect of some of the issues that had been raised within the report at RDC 3-7 (11-12) – eg increased opening hours of facilities – it would be more effective for other issues, such as the issue of extending TfL discounts to part-time students, to be taken up by UCLU and other HEIs' student unions collectively, or referred to the NUS, with a view to their lobbying the relevant parties;
  - RDC noted that UCL was continuing to speak out about the funding situation facing

students – the Chair of RDC had lately addressed a House of Lords Select Committee on the issue of funding for universities and students for postgraduate study;

- Members of RDC shared concerns that had been raised regarding student fee increases but noted that fee-setting was a complex financial issue and that it would be difficult to compel HEIs to make a commitment to not raising fees during a lengthy programme;
- It would be impractical from the point of arranging for key UCL officers to be available to introduce more frequent small induction sessions for research students throughout the year. However, some members of RDC drew attention to the fact that the Graduate School induction for research students was now available online. Although some members of RDC suggested that moving to a system of having three separate registration/start dates for research students throughout the year would help to facilitate and fix the organisation of student induction events, there was not broad support for this suggestion among RDC members.

## 39 RESEARCH STUDENT GRIEVANCES

### **Received:**

- 39.1 At RDC 3-8 (11-12) a report on research student grievance cases, introduced by Mr David Ashton.

### **Reported:**

- 39.2 During 2010-11, a total of seven grievances cases involving research students were received and investigated according to UCL's Grievance Procedure. All bar one of these cases had pertained to supervision issues, which, amongst other things, served to underline the importance of ensuring that both students and their supervisors were clear on the responsibilities and expectations of arrangements for research student supervision, and that any changes to these arrangements were made clear to students.

## 40 VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR RESEARCH DEGREE EXAMINERS [Min.22, 7.3.12]

### **Noted:**

- 40.1 At RDC 3-9 (11-12) a note updating RDC on the introduction of a new immigration category of visitors to the UK undertaking a permitted paid engagement, which would pertain to visiting research degree examiners from outside the EU and which superseded the guidance received at RDC's previous meeting on 7 March 2012.
- 40.2 Those eligible under this category would be able to visit the UK for up to one month without the need to be sponsored under the points-based immigration system. Provided that the individuals concerned were not required to obtain a visa to visit the UK, it would not be necessary for them to apply in advance to enter the UK under this category. Instead, they would be required to bring with them a copy of the invitation from the HEI and to provide evidence that the engagement related to their field of expertise and/or qualifications, and full-time profession overseas. Further information was available at: <http://www.ukba.homeoffice.gov.uk/visas-immigration/visiting/paid-engage/documents/examine/>.

## 41 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

### **Noted:**

- 41.1 The Chair has taken action on behalf of RDC since RDC's previous meeting to approve the request for research students to be registered within the UCL Institute of the Americas.

**42 DATES OF MEETINGS 2012-13**

***Noted:***

42.1 Dates of meetings in 2012-13 had been scheduled as follows for 2012-13:

Thursday 15 November 2012, 10am

Wednesday 6 March 2013, 10am

Wednesday 10 June 2013, 10am

(Rooms to be confirmed)

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