



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

13 March 2018

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Professor David Bogle (*Chair*)

Mr Derfel Owen; Mr Ben Colvill; Ms Helen Notter; Professor Kaila Srαι; Professor Kirsten Harvey; Professor Tania Monteiro; Dr Simon Banks; Dr Elvira Bramon; Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Andrew Stoker; Dr Jill Norman; Dr Helen Matthews.

In attendance: Mr Darren Payne (Secretary to Research Degrees Committee); Ms Lizzie Vinton; Mr Gary Smith, Mr Simon To.

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr Sam Smidt; Mr Mark Crawford; Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Hynek Pikhart; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Martins Paparinskis; Dr Paulo Drinot; Professor Martin Oliver; Dr Benet Salway; Dr Sally Leevers; Professor Stephen Marshall.

Key to abbreviations

CRS	Completing Research Status
IQR	Internal Quality Review
FRDC	Faculty Research Degrees Committee
HRPC	Human Resources Policy Committee
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
SSCC	Staff-Student Consultative Committee
UKVI	UK Visas and Immigration

Preliminary business

17 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

- 17.1 The Faculty Graduate Tutor for Mathematical and Physical Sciences raised an issue with their part of minute 6.2, as it did not accurately reflect submissions rates within the Faculty. A correction to the minutes will be sent to the secretary and re-circulated to members of RDC.

ACTION: the Secretary

Matters for discussion

18 UPDATE ON PGR ACADEMIC MANUAL 2018-19

- 18.1 **Received** – PGR Academic Manual 2018-19 Summary: at RDC 2-01 (17-18).
- 18.2 The Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager introduced RDC to some of the upcoming changes that are going into the Academic Manual for 2018/19. In 2016/17 a PGR Regulations working group looked at all of the regulations to identify what needed to be changed in order to streamline them into a single set, and also substantive issues with the regulations that would require further discussion at RDC. Details of substantive issues will be circulated alongside the updated regulations in June.
- 18.3 It was re-iterated that currently the Research Degree regulations, policies, and forms are all held in different places, and that one of the aims of the re-structure is to ensure that they are all in a single place.
- 18.4 The rationalisation and re-drafting that this entails is nearing completion, with the Supervision and MRes sections remaining. More substantive issues have been identified to be looked at in more depth in 2018/19, and there is currently an ongoing discussion for the MPhilStud regulations.
- 18.5 It was noted that not all regulations can be consolidated as they also apply to Taught students or sit within the Student Casework chapter. These include sections relating to Academic Misconduct, Student Complaints, and Support to Study and Fitness to Study.
- 18.6 The Faculty Graduate Tutor for Engineering raised concerns about timings, and if drafts are checked by different members of RDC, will they only see the complete chapters a week in advance of RDC.
- 18.7 The Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager indicated they were happy to circulate these in advance of the papers formally being circulated, as it is important that the drafts are approved at the June 2018 RDC in time for the next academic session.
- 18.8 RDC was informed that these regulations can be re-visited and revised if necessary in 2018/19 if after approval it is subsequently found that any issues were not picked up during the checks and scrutiny of RDC. A clear audit trail of all changes has been made, in case during the process of re-structuring anything was changed inadvertently.
- 18.9 The Chair is currently looking for people to read each revised section, and the Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager will be in touch to allocate these to pairs of RDC members.

ACTION: Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager

19 MRES/MPHIL/PHD APPLICATION AND ADMISSIONS ANNUAL REPORT

- 19.1 **Received** – Research Degrees Admissions Report at RDC 2-02 (17-18).
- 19.2 The Chair indicated that the figures are broadly stable overall, and Faculties are reporting that they are not expecting a significant rise in numbers.
- 19.3 Members noted continuing year-on-year downtrend of both UK and EU applications, but increase in overseas students.
- 19.4 Concerns have been raised about support for overseas students, as there are Tier 4 implications, and engagement monitoring that needs to happen. Currently, the Code of Practice mandates that supervisory meetings should take place at least every two months, this will be changed to once per month (this is a requirement of the UKVI per the recent audit). However, Study Leave does make it more difficult to supervise and monitor attendance. Student Records should be informed about any adjustments due to Study Leave arrangements, as varied engagement monitoring can be used in those circumstances.
- 19.5 The reason for changes in numbers were discussed, and one possible reason may be the way that applications are being handled. The Life Science Faculty Graduate Tutor noted a significant drop, whilst the Engineering Faculty Graduate Tutor noted a significant increase – both Faculties had changed systems using either Prism or Select. The Engineering Faculty Graduate Tutor noted that they do not believe there has been such a big increase, and that the change of application system is therefore the cause.
- 19.6 Some Faculties noted that applications are often batches, and then they consider the top students and have another application round. Whilst this is a fair system, there was an argument that batching decisions mean that students can wait too long and potentially end up going to another institution.
- 19.7 The Chair noted that in discussions with Faculties, there has been concerns raised about marketing, and that RDC members would have good practice that can be shared between the Faculties.
- 19.8 The Chair noted that MRes applications were up quite significantly, which may indicate that MRes is gaining more international recognition.

20 MPHIL/PHD UPGRADE AND SUBMISSION DATA

- 20.1 **Received** – MPhil/PhD Upgrade and Submission Data at RDC 2-03 (17-18).
- 20.2 The Head of Student and Programme Data Services introduced the item, which focused on when students submit and upgrade depending on cohorts. Times have been adjusted using Portico data for those students interrupting.
- 20.3 The Student Records Manager (Research) indicated that the data does not necessarily reflect everything as Student Records are not always told in time. Student Records will use the “data of upgrade” data rather than the signed date on the form. It was suggested that the form could be updated to be more explicit

in what the date means. Furthermore, an entirely different electronically enabled process could be built into Portico, instead of having to use a form.

- 20.4 The Faculty Graduate Tutor for Engineering noted that they had previously bought a paper to address the issue of late upgrade. The proposal was not to enforce for all, but for faculties to essentially sign up to a process to submit a data for vivas, with failure to submit counting as the student's first attempt like any other assessment. This would encourage upgrades in a timely manner, as departments currently have no mechanism to enforce upgrades. Flexibility to allow setting of dates should be part of UCL formal policy, so that those Faculties wishing to do it can.
- 20.5 The Faculty Graduate Tutor for the Medical School agreed that they had seen a big increase in timely upgrades at the Eastman Dental Institute as a result of setting an upgrade deadline on entry.
- 20.6 There were some concerns raised about not automatically penalising students, and that formative feedback would need to be provided at reasonable points in the process. The Faculty Graduate Tutor for Engineering gave an anecdotal example that if a student had been enrolled for 18 months, then it is reasonable to expect that enough work should have been done by this point, or there are clearly underlying issues.
- 20.7 The Student Records Manager (Research) noted that this could potentially solve the issue of students waiting longer than necessary when they are ready, but their supervisor feels they are not. Clear deadlines would allow for sufficient feedback, and the goal to be worked towards.
- 20.8 The Head of Student and Programme Data Services finished by noting that younger groups of students tend to submit with the prescribed time.

21 REPORT ON RESEARCH DEGREE ADMINISTRATION AND EXAMINATION STATISTICS 2016-17

- 21.1 **Received** – Report on Research Degree Administration Statistics 2016-17 at RDC 2-04 (17-18).
- 21.2 The Student Records Manager (Research) introduced the item, noting that number of awards made and related events have remained steady year-on-year with very little different or problematic outcomes since the previous year.
- 21.3 There has been a slow increase year-on-year, but this is due to student numbers naturally increasing at the institution.
- 21.4 The Student Records Manager (Research) advised RDC that Student Records currently do get important documentation late, such as nomination forms, which puts pressure on timelines within Student Records.

22 DEPARTMENTAL PGR SPACE SURVEY UPDATE

- 22.1 **Received** – Update on Departmental PGR Space Survey at RDC 2-05 (17-18).

22.2 The Chair briefly discussed what to do with the survey results and agreed that the Secretary would collate these with a view to discussing them all at the next RDC.

ACTION: The Secretary

23 STARS ANNUAL REPORT 2016-17 & STARS STEERING GROUP MINUTES 11 JULY 2017

- 23.1 **Received** – StARs Annual report and StARs Steering Group minutes at 2-06 (17-18).
- 23.2 The Students' Union Leadership Development & Change Manager introduced the item, apologising for it being late in the cycle as it was for the last academic session. The report outlines all of the work around academic representation at all levels, including research students.
- 23.3 For PGR students, the figures have declined slightly year-on-year, and the representative to student ratio has gone down too.
- 23.4 RDC has previously approved a new 2020 vision for academic representation, as there was a concern that research representatives were perhaps applying a taught structure to their approach. Currently there is a scoping exercise to ensure that research representatives are structured appropriately for the nature of their work.
- 23.5 Engagement overall has increased, and the figures have bounced back from last year. Final figures for 2017-18 are not yet ready, but for 2016-17 there were 184 representatives versus the 155 of the previous year, making it a 20% increase. While engagement has increased overall, the engagement levels could potentially be higher.
- 23.6 No major issues were raised by research students, but it was acknowledged that it can be difficult to identify what issues are raised by who specifically.
- 23.7 RDC was reminded that StARs has now been rebranded to Academic Representatives from 2017-18 onwards due to feedback from Postgraduate and Research students.
- 23.8 It was raised whether or not to have specific SSCCs just for Research Students. Depending on student numbers, this may or may not work in practice. For large student bodies mixed does not necessarily work in practice despite there often being some common areas for Postgraduate Taught and Research student issues. There can also be scaling issues, where it is just not feasible to have such a specific committee when the Research student numbers are relatively small.

24 INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW 2017-18

24.1 **Received** – Internal Quality Review 2017-18 at 2-07 (17-18).

24.2 The Chair briefly introduced this item, and confirmed that there had been a trial of a new IQR, but there was nothing of significant importance that had come out of the IQRs.

<p style="text-align: center;">Other matters for approval or information</p>

25 NEW AND AMENDED PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS APPROVED BY RDC CHAIR'S ACTION

25.1 **Noted** – New and Amended Programmes and Qualifications at RDC 2-08 (17-18).

26 ANONYMISED SUSPENSION OF REGULATIONS REPORT

26.1 **Noted** – Anonymised Suspension of Regulations at RDC 2-09 (17-18).

27 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

27.1 The Chair thanked Dr Elvira Bramon for their service on RDC, as this is the last RDC that they will be attending. It was noted that Dr Patti Adank will take over the role of Faculty Graduate Tutor for the Faculty of Brain Science.

28 DATES OF NEXT MEETING

- Tuesday 5 June 2018, 11am to 1pm, Malet Place Engineering Building 1.20.

DARREN PAYNE
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20/04/18