



## RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

13 OCTOBER 2011

### MINUTES

*PRESENT:*

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

Professor Mike Ewing  
Mr Marco Federighi  
Dr Tom Gretton  
Professor Tony Harker  
Professor Stephen Hart  
Dr Stephen Marshall  
Dr Dave Spratt  
Professor Kaila Srail

*In attendance:* Mrs Helen Notter, Student Records Manager and Ms Karen Wishart, RDC Secretary.

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Wendy Brown, Professor Asterios Gavriilidis, Dr Sally Leever, Dr Ruth Siddall and Dr Joy Sleeman

*Key to abbreviations:*

CALT	Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching
FGT	Faculty Graduate Tutor
IQR	Internal Quality Review
NIMR	National Institute for Medical Research
RAS	Registry and Academic Services
RDC	Research Degrees Committee

## 1 TERMS OF REFERENCE, CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP 2011-12

### ***Received***

- 1.1 At APPENDIX RDC 1/01 (11-12) - RDC's membership and terms of reference for the 2011-2012 session.

### ***Reported***

- 1.2 The Chair welcomed the new members to RDC: Professor Kaila Srail, the new FGT in the Faculty of Life Sciences (and interim FGT in the Faculty of Brain Sciences) and Mr Neil Chowdhury, the new Medical and Postgraduate Students' Officer, UCL Union.

## 2 MINUTES

### ***Approved***

- 2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 14 June 2011 [*RDC Minutes 33-45, 2010-11*], issued previously, were confirmed by RDC and signed by the Chair.

## 3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

### 3A **Faculty Approval of Supervisors**

[*RDC Minute 35A, 14 June 2011*]

### ***Noted***

- 3A.1 In June 2009 the Graduate School requested Faculties to maintain a list of approved research degree supervisors. It was also noted, as a result of requirements in the report of the Post Institutional Audit Steering Group (PIASG), that these lists should be regularly maintained and published on Faculty web pages.
- 3A.2 Last session each FGT outlined their processes for approval of research degree supervisors. Confirmation regarding the publication on the Faculty's website of the list of approved supervisors was awaited from the Faculty of SHS.

### ***Reported***

- 3A.2 The FGT for Social and Historical Sciences reported that a procedure had been established for the approval of new academic staff who wanted to supervise research students. It was also confirmed that a list of approved research degree supervisors was on the Faculty's web pages.
- 3A.2 The Chair reported that the new EROS system for recording approved supervisors directly in the HR Roles Database would shortly be launched. This new central system would replace the current mechanism for recording these data in Faculties. Portico Services would also be undertaking a second phase of the EROS Project to create a link from the HR Roles Database to Portico to enable departments to add approved supervisors to individual student's records.

#### 4 INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW 2009-10

##### **Received**

- 4.1 At APPENDIX RDC 1/02 (11-12) the summary of good practice identified in IQR reports in 2009-10 and at APPENDIX RDC 1/03 (11-12) the summary of recommendations noted in IQR reports in 2009-10, with particular reference to PGR students.

##### **Reported**

- 4.2 It was reported that it could be difficult to get Master's students to participate in SSCC or other departmental committees, particularly if they were only at UCL for a year. It was noted that the UCL Student Union had trained student volunteers to be student representatives on UCL and departmental/divisional committees. It was suggested that if it was available it would be useful for FGTs to receive a list of StARs (Student Academic Representatives).

**Action: RDC Secretary to contact UCLU**

#### 5 PATTERN OF RE-ENROLMENT OF RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENTS

##### **Received**

- 5.1 A report at APPENDIX RDC 1/04 (11-12) and an oral report from the Director of Student Services.

##### **Reported**

- 5.2 It was essential for all students, both taught and research, to re-enrol by 31<sup>st</sup> October deadline, including students who had started at different times during the academic year. This should be done on-line through Portico. It was noted that there were 900 postgraduate students who had not re-enrolled at 6 October 2011. The Director of Student Services agreed to arrange for a list of research degree students who had not re-enrolled to be sent to FGTs.

**Action: David Ashton/Helen Notter**

#### 6 REPORT ON RESEARCH DEGREE ADMINISTRATION

##### **Received**

- 6.1 A report on research degree administration at APPENDIX RDC 1/05 (11-12)

##### **Reported**

- 6.2 The Chair reported that in the period of the report, 1 June 2010 to 30 June 2011 all research degree *viva voce* examinations resulted in an award - there were no failures. It was not clear whether the eight MPhils awarded were the result of a failed PhD or were intended to be MPhil awards.

- 6.3 It was proposed that it would be useful to receive a report on the number of research degree examiners not submitting the preliminary report on a student's PhD thesis prior to the *viva voce* examination. The Student Records Office would collect this information and report back to a future RDC meeting.

**Action: Helen Notter**

7 **REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON THESIS COMMITTEES**

[RDC Minute 6, 18 November 2011]

**Noted**

- 7.1 At the RDC meeting on 18 November 2010 it was agreed that a working group of RDC should be established to review current practices for managing the progress of MPhil/PhD students and consider the use of thesis committees.

**Received**

- 7.2 The working group's report at APPENDIX RDC 1/06 (11-12).

**Discussion**

- 7.3 The Chair of the Thesis Committees Working Group noted that there were a number of mechanisms established in UCL departments/divisions for supporting PhD students, the introduction of thesis committees was one method to manage research students' progress. The document at Appendix RDC 1/06 was intended to provide guidelines for departments that wanted to introduce thesis committees. The guidelines were intended to allow for flexibility in the membership and frequency of meetings of thesis committees to make these appropriate to different academic areas.
- 7.4 Dr Brown noted that since the introduction of thesis committees at the NIMR three years ago both upgrade rates and submission rates had improved. It was noted that if TCs were introduced they should be introduced across a whole department for all graduate research students and not on an individual basis.
- 7.5 The Chair welcomed the report and expressed his thanks to the Chair of Working Group.

**RESOLVED**

- 7.5 The RDC Chair formally approved the guidelines for thesis committees and agreed that these should be publicised.

**Action: RDC Secretary to send an electronic copy of the guidelines to RDC and arrange for their inclusion in the Academic Manual**

8 **UCL's CENTRE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING (CALT)**

**Received**

- 8.1 An oral report from the Chair on the recent changes to UCL's Centre for The Advancement of Learning and Teaching - with particular reference to support for research students and supervisors.

**Reported**

- 8.2 Following a restructure in CALT there were now teaching fellows assigned to each of the three Schools (School of Life and Medical Sciences [SLMS], School of Arts, Humanities, Laws and Social and Historical Sciences [SLASH] and the School of the Built Environment, Engineering Sciences and

Mathematical and Physical Sciences [BEAMS]. CALT would continue to work closely with the Graduate School to offer a number of courses aimed at postgraduate research students, including those under the umbrella 'Maximising Your Potential' and a range of courses covering teaching skills for Postgraduate Teaching Assistants. CALT would also continue to work with the Graduate School in organising the programme of research supervision training, delivered by Professor John Wakeford.

## 9 CHAIR'S REPORT

### 9A Approval of new degree programmes

#### *Noted*

9A.1 Since the last RDC meeting the following new programmes had been approved:

- MRes Medical Physics and Bioengineering
- MRes Healthcare Engineering for an Ageing Population
- MRes Risk and Disaster Reduction

9A.2 At APPENDIX RDC 1/07 (11-12) was a list, provided by Student Data Services, of available PGR programmes. In the document the term 'visiting research' referred to students registered at institutions other than UCL, but who were enrolled at UCL for anywhere between a term or a year, after which they return to their home institution.

#### *Discussion*

9A.3 There were some questions regarding what appeared to be multiple entries for the same programme and whether the list was current or included "historical" programmes with no currently enrolled students. The RDC Secretary would liaise with Student Data Services regarding this.

**Action: RDC Secretary**

### 9B Religion and Belief Equality Policy for students

#### *Noted*

9B.1 The Religion and Belief Equality Policy for Students was approved by the Chair on behalf of RDC. The policy was confirmed by Council and is in the Academic Manual at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/academic-manual/part-5/religion-belief-equality>. A copy is attached to these Minutes for information.

### 9C Guidelines for research students funded on Graduate Research Scholarships, Research Council awards and by other funding bodies

9C.1 As Head of the Graduate School, the RDC Chair approved an amendment to the guidelines for research students funded on Graduate Research Scholarships, Research Council awards, and other awards where the funding body allows paid absence within their terms and conditions. The amendment allows for an increase in paid maternity leave for a period of up to six months. This accords the UCL guidelines with those of the RCUK. The guidelines are available at:  
[http://www.ucl.ac.uk/finance/research/res\\_student/rescoun\\_sicknesssect.html](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/finance/research/res_student/rescoun_sicknesssect.html)

9D **Enhancements to the Research Student Log - Vitae Researcher Development Framework**

**Reported**

9D.1 The Chair reported that the self-assessment tool of the UCL Research Student Log has been considerably enhanced for the 2011/12 academic session. In line with the new Vitae Researcher Development Framework, the tool enables research students to build an initial profile of professional skills and attributes, and to guide subsequent development planning and the selection of appropriate development activities offered within departments, by the Graduate School's Skills Development Programme, and elsewhere.

Links:

Research Student Log: <https://researchlog.grad.ucl.ac.uk/>

Vitae Researcher Development Framework:

<http://www.vitae.ac.uk/researchers/428241/Researcher-Development-Framework.html>”

10 **ENGAGEMENT MONITORING**

[RDC Minute 28, 21 March 2011]

**Noted**

10.1 At the RDC meeting on 21 March 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. A copy was attached for information at APPENDIX RDC 1/08 (11-12).

**Reported**

10.2 The Director of Student Services reported that Engagement Monitoring needed to be done in Portico. It was important for UCL to retain its Licence from the Home Office for recruiting overseas students. A report from RAS on the completion of engagement monitoring would be made to RDC at the meeting in March 2012.

11 **NEXT MEETING**

**To note**

11.1 RDC meetings in 2011-2012 session were scheduled as follows:

- Wednesday 7 March 2012 at 10am in the South Wing Council Room
- Monday 11 June 2012 at 10am in the South Wing Council Room.

Karen Wishart  
Academic Support  
Registry and Academic Services  
16/11/11