



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

14 JUNE 2011

MINUTES

PRESENT:

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

Mr Marco Federighi
Professor Asterios Gavriilidis
Dr Tom Gretton
Dr Sally Leever
Dr Stephen Marshall
Professor Tony Roth
Dr Ruth Siddall
Dr Joy Sleeman
Dr Dave Spratt

In attendance: Mrs Helen Notter, Student Records Manager, Ms Margaret Stone, UCL Library Services for Minute 37 and Ms Karen Wishart, RDC Secretary.

Apologies for absence were received from Dr Caroline Essex, Professor Mike Ewing, Mr Dante Micheaux and Mr Alex Nesbitt.

Key to abbreviations:

DGT	Departmental Graduate Tutor
EdCom	Education Committee
FGT	Faculty Graduate Tutor
GEESC	Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee
PIQ	Programme Institution Questionnaire
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
SHS	Social and Historical Sciences

33 **RDC MEMBERSHIP 2010-11**

Noted

- 33.1 The Chair welcomed the following new members: Dr Stephen Marshall, the new FGT in the Faculty of the Built Environment and Mr Ben Colvill the new Graduate School Administrator.

34 **MINUTES**

Approved

- 34.1 The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 21 March 2011 [*RDC Minutes 13-30, 2010-11*], issued previously, were confirmed by RDC and signed by the Chair.

35 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

35A **Faculty Approval of Supervisors**

[*RDC Minute 15A, 21 March 2011*]

Noted

- 35A.1 At previous meetings of GEESC and RDC, FGTs have reported on the process for the approval of research degree supervisors in their faculties. Information on the supervisor approval process in the Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences was awaited, along with copies of any documentation.

Received

- 35A.2 An oral report by **Dr Tom Gretton**, on the supervisor approval process in the Faculty of Social and Historical Sciences.

Reported

- 35A.3 Dr Gretton reported that requests for permission to supervise research students were made to the FGT via the DGT. It was expected that a supervisor would have completed the Graduate School's training programme for supervisors or a similar training programme elsewhere and/or have experience of supervising at another institution.

- 35A.4 The Chair noted as good practice the procedure and forms used in the MAPS Faculty which were available at:
<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/maps-faculty/intranet/ResearchSupervisors>.

35B **PIQ for MRes and Taught Doctoral Programmes**

[*RDC Minute 16, 21 March 2011*]

Noted

- 35B.1 At the last RDC meeting the Chair noted that the PIQ form did not include questions specific to research degrees. It was agreed that the Chair would review the PIQ form to consider what additions might be appropriate.

Received

35B.2 An oral report by the **Chair**.

Reported

35B.3 It was reported that the PIQ form, which was now completed electronically, had helped to streamline the process for approving new degree programmes. The form required a detailed description of the taught components of degree programmes but did not require details of the research component for MRes and taught doctoral programmes. The Chair proposed that more details of the research component of these programmes and the research skills being developed should be required to ensure that the research component was adequate for the award.

Discussion

35B.4 The Director of Student Services proposed that this could be obtained by requesting programme directors to submit a separate note, attached to the PIQ form, to outline the requirements of the research component.

RESOLVED

35B.5 That programme directors of new MRes and taught doctoral programmes be required to submit, with the PIQ form, information regarding the research component of the programme.

ACTION: Karen Wishart to liaise with David Ashton

35C **Statistics for Upgrade from MPhil to PhD**

[RDC Minute 19.3, 21 March 2011]

Received

35C.1 At APPENDIX RDC 3/33 (10-11) a report from Student Data Services on time taken for MPhil/PhD students to upgrade to PhD.

35C.2 An oral report by the **Chair**.

Reported

35C.3 The Chair noted that the data on time taken to upgrade from MPhil to PhD was not routinely circulated to FGTs. The document at APPENDIX RDC 3/33 (10-11) combined the upgrade data over three entry cohorts. This was intended to give an overview of the time taken to upgrade by faculty.

Discussion

35C.4 It was proposed that the data might be more useful when combined with MPhil/PhD submission data. It was suggested that to receive the information in a graph rather than a table might be helpful. The Chair would liaise with Student Data Services to discuss the format and timing of future reports.

ACTION: RDC Chair to liaise with Gary Smith

35D **MPhil/PhD Upgrade Process in the Department of Chemistry**

[RDC Minute 19.4, 21 March 2011]

Noted

35D.1 At the last RDC meeting, the DGT in the Department of Chemistry outlined the Department's process for upgrade from MPhil to PhD. It was agreed that a note would be circulated to describe this in more detail. The note was attached at APPENDIX RDC 3/23 (10-11)

Reported

35D.2 Dr Brown reported that the system used in Chemistry helped to monitor the progress of the large number of MPhil/PhD students registered in the Department. Upgrade took place at 15 months for all students and upgrade interviews took place during the same week for all students where possible. This worked well for both students and staff.

35DE **Induction for Taught Degree Graduate Students**

[RDC Minute 20, 21 March 2011]

Noted

35E.1 At the last RDC meeting the Chair reported that with the increase in taught degree graduate students it was difficult for the Graduate School to manage induction sessions for all taught graduate students. FGTs were requested to consider how induction sessions for these students might be managed in future.

Discussion

35E.2 It was noted that there were no lecture theatres large enough for all taught Masters students to attend an induction at the same time. The Director of Student Services noted that this might be an item to be discussed by Education Committee because it related to taught students rather than research students.

ACTION: Karen Wishart to refer to EdCom

36 **MRES AND MPhil/PHD APPLICATIONS FOR SEPTEMBER 2011**

Received

36.1 At APPENDIX RDC 3/24 (10-11) a report from the Head of Outreach and Admissions on MRes and MPhil/PhD applications and offers for September 2011.

Discussion

36.2 It was noted that it was difficult to predict the relationship between the application data in June and how this would be reflected in the number of students registering in September. Some students would not register due to lack of funding or may take up offers at other institutions. It was suggested that it would be useful to review the information on offers and acceptances alongside the actual number of students who register in September. A further report would be requested for a future RDC meeting.

ACTION: Karen Wishart to liaise with the Chair and Bella Malins

37 **PUBLICATION OF MRES DISSERTATIONS**

Ms Margaret Stone, UCL Library Services, attended for this item.

Received

- 37.1 At APPENDIX RDC 3/25 (10-11) a note on the proposal to publish MRes dissertations on UCL Discovery.

Discussion

- 37.2 It was noted that the proposal to publish MRes/Masters dissertations resulted from discussions at the UCL Publications Board with the intention to enhance UCL's reputation. During the discussion the following points were raised:
- how would dissertations be selected for publication;
 - some MRes programmes required a number of mini projects rather than one main projects;
 - an MRes dissertation might form the basis of an MPhil/PhD;
 - copyright issues with data included in dissertations and how to ensure that all material was appropriately referenced.
- 37.3 It was agreed that given the issues noted above RDC would not recommend MRes dissertations for publication on UCL Discovery. However it was noted that individual departments may publish MRes or other dissertations on their own web pages if desired.

RESOLVED

- 37.4 RDC agreed that MRes dissertations should not be published on UCL Discovery.
ACTION: Karen Wishart to inform the Secretaries to the Publications Board and EdCom

38 **APPROVAL PROCESS FOR UCL UNITS THAT WISH TO OFFER RESEARCH DEGREES**

Received

- 38.1 At APPENDIX RDC 3/26 (10-11) a report by the Director of Student Services on the approval process for new Departments/Centres/Units proposing to offer research degrees.

Reported

- 38.2 The Director of Student Services noted that it was important that any new academic or research units established by UCL were able to discharge their duties with regard to the Graduate School's *Code of Practice* and the *Academic Regulations for Research Degree Students*. It was proposed that the following criteria should be met before research students may be registered to an academic unit:
- (a) a Faculty overseeing the research degree student experience;
 - (b) a Departmental Graduate Tutor;
 - (c) sufficient research activity so that there is a research environment, together with sufficient facilities, within which the student can work;

- (d) sufficient potential supervisors within the unit in order to act as principal supervisors as well as others engaged in research relating to potential students' research interests;
- (e) the opportunity to participate in a staff/student consultative committee;
- (f) a unit-level committee that is either solely responsible for the oversight of research degrees or has it as part of its remit;
- (g) the necessary administrative support.

Discussion

- 38.3 RDC agreed that the above proposals be approved. It was agreed that the RDC Chair, on behalf of the Committee, would assess applications from new units or research groups to ensure that the above criteria were met.

RESOLVED

- 38.4 That the approval process for new academic units/departments, proposed by the Director of Student Services, be approved. All applications would be considered by the RDC Chair, on behalf of the Committee. RDC would be informed when a new department or unit had been approved to supervise research students.

ACTION: Karen Wishart to arrange for dissemination of the above requirements and their inclusion in the Academic Manual.

39 MRES PROGRESSION TO AN ASSOCIATED RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMME

Received

- 39.1 At APPENDIX RDC 3/27 (10-11) a note on amendments to the regulations relating to registration and progression from an MRes to its associated research degree programme.

Reported

- 39.2 The Director of Student Administration reported that at the end of 2009-10 there had been an issue with students from MRes programmes registering for the associated EngD or PhD even though they had not passed the MRes. A meeting was convened by the Head of the Graduate School with relevant UCL officers to agree rules for progression from an MRes to its associated doctoral degree, as set out in APPENDIX RDC 3/27 (10-11).

RESOLVED

- 39.3 RDC approved the proposal at APPENDIX RDC 3/27 (10-11) regarding rules for progression from an MRes to its associated research degree.

ACTION: Karen Wishart to disseminate as appropriate.

40 RESEARCH STUDENT GRIEVANCES

Received

- 40.1 At APPENDIX RDC 3/28 (10-11) a report from the Director of Student Services on research student grievances.

Reported

- 40.2 The Director of Student Services noted that during 2009-10 four student grievances were submitted by research students. The grounds for the grievances covered a range of categories including deficient supervision, alleged bias in the examination, not allowed to continue due to unsatisfactory academic progress, and transfer from MPhil to PhD not allowed. In three of the three cases submitted it was found that there was no case to answer, the fourth case proceeded to a full Panel meeting and this case was partially upheld.

Discussion

- 40.3 It was noted that the number of complaints from research students was very low. This was against the national trend which had seen an increase in grievances from research students. The Chair noted that this was due to the efforts of DGTs and FGTs who resolved problems before a grievance resulted. It was noted that often problems/complaints were encountered at the time of upgrade and/or the viva voce examination.
- 40.4 There was some discussion regarding the guidelines and information available to MPhil/PhD examiners. The Chair reported that there was currently a sub-group of RDC looking at the information and guidelines available on the viva voce examination.

41 ACADEMIC REGULATIONS FOR STUDENTS: PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATES

Noted

- 41.1 At the GEESC meeting on 18 May 2010 the FGT for Life Sciences reported that the Faculty was reviewing the regulations for the specialist doctorates in psychology and language sciences.

Received

- 41.2 At APPENDIX RDC 3/29 (10-11) the revised Academic Regulations for Students: Professional Doctorates. This document had been reviewed by the Graduate School Management Board and the Curricular Development and Examiners Office. The final draft was submitted to RDC for approval.

Discussion

- 41.3 It was noted that professional doctorates were unique in that they included a taught component, a research component and also a practical component. The taught doctorates resulted in a professional qualification, for example in clinical or educational psychology, speech and language therapy and dentistry.

RESOLVED

- 41.4 RDC approved the revised Academic Regulations for Students: Professional Doctorates, these would be added to the Registry website. The Chair thanked Professor Roth for his hard work in producing the revised regulations.

42 **THESES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

Noted

- 42.1 At its meeting on 23 October 2009 GEESC received a paper from Dr Stephanie Bird, FGT in Arts and Humanities, on the proposal to allow research students, in specified departments, the option to write their PhD theses in a language other than English. This currently required approval by the RDC Chair following rules and precedents set originally by the University of London. Following discussion at the meeting the proposal was revised and resubmitted to GEESC on 23 February 2010. Following further discussion GEESC agreed to refer the matter to AC for approval.
- 42.2 Following the disestablishment of GEESC at the end of 2009-10 session and the establishment of Research Degrees Committee, the proposal for theses in foreign languages required approval by RDC rather than AC.
- 42.3 Dr Bird had discussed the proposal with appropriate Deans and the RDC Chair had discussed the matter with the Vice Provost (Academic and International). A revised proposal was attached at APPENDIX RDC 3/30 (10-11). One of the concerns raised by GEESC was the point at which students had to make the decision to write their theses in a foreign language. This point had been addressed in the revised proposal.

Discussion

- 42.4 It was noted that the proposal to allow theses to be written in foreign languages applied only to the following: School of European Languages, Culture and Society, School of Slavonic and East European Studies and the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies. It was expected that there would be a low to moderate demand from students requesting to write their theses in another language. It was noted that the English language requirements would still apply.

RESOLVED

- 42.5 RDC approved the proposal to write theses in a foreign language as detailed at APPENDIX RDC 3/30 10-11). The FGT of Arts and Humanities will be responsible for informing the Registry when a request has been approved and it will be recorded on the student's record.

43 **REJECTION OF MPhil/PHD EXAMINERS AND NON-APPROVAL OF SUPERVISORS**

Received

- 43.1 At APPENDIX 3/32 (10-11) a note from Professor Chris Danpure on the Faculty of Life Sciences practice in the rejection of MPhil/PhD examiners and non-approval of supervisors.

Discussion

- 43.2 The Chair welcomed the note from Professor Danpure which gave clear criteria for the non approval of examiners and supervisors.

44 **CHAIRS BUSINESS**

44A **Late Enrolment Fee**

Noted

44A.1 At the last meeting, under Reserved Business the Chair noted that there had been an increase in the number of requests for the suspension of regulations to allow delayed enrolment. The Chair proposed that the late enrolment fee should be raised. The Dean of Students (Academic) supported this decision and the late enrolment fee had been increased to £100. This would take effect from 2011-2012 session.

45 **RDC MEETINGS 2011-2012**

Note

45 Meetings for RDC in session 2011-2012 have been scheduled as follows:

- Thursday 13 October 2011 at 10am
- Tuesday 6 March 2012 at 10am
- Monday 11 June 2012 at 10am

Karen Wishart
Registry and Academic Services
27 June 2011
k.wishart@ucl.ac.uk