



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 15 October 2014

MINUTES

Present:

Professor David Bogle (Chair)
Ms Wendy Appleby; Mr David Ashton; Dr Steven Bloch;
Dr Donna Brown; Ms Mariana Ceccotti; Mr Ben Colvill; Professor Alison Diduck;
Dr Caroline Essex; Dr Dilly Fung; Dr Stephen Marshall; Ms Helen Notter; Dr Blandine Poulet;
Dr Benet Salway; Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Joy Sleeman; Dr Dave Spratt; Dr Andrew Stoker.

In attendance: Mr Gary Hawes (Secretary).

Apologies were received from: Mr Marco Federighi; Dr Douglas Guilfoyle;
Professor Nikos Konstantinidis; Professor Kaila Srail; Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu.

Key to abbreviations

AM	Annual Monitoring
BEAMS	The School of the Built Environment, Engineering and Mathematical and Physical Sciences
CALT	Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching
DGTs	Department Graduate Tutors
DTCs	Doctoral Training Centres
FGTs	Faculty Graduate Tutors
FGTCs	Faculty Graduate Teaching Committees
IQR	Internal Quality Review
ISBSB	International Student Barometer Student Barometer
PGR	Postgraduate research
PGTAs	Postgraduate Teaching Assistants
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SLMS	School of Life and Medical Sciences
SSCC	Staff Student Consultative Committees

1 CONSTITUTION AND 2014-15 MEMBERSHIP; TERMS OF REFERENCE

Received:

- 1.1 The constitution and 2014-15 membership and terms of reference of RDC at RDC 1-01 (14-15).

Reported:

- 1.2 The Chair of RDC welcomed the following new members of RDC: Ms Wendy Appleby, Ms Mariana Ceccotti, Dr Dilly Fung, Dr Blandine Poulet, Dr Ruth Siddall.
- 1.3 It was confirmed that the details at RDC 1-01 (14-15) should also include the following addition within the Nominated constituency:

One Vice-Head of the Doctoral School,
nominated by the Pro-Provost (Doctoral School)

Professor Alison Diduck

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 4 JUNE 2014

Confirmed:

- 2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 4 June 2014 [RDC Mins.30-43, 04.06.14].

3 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

3A Amendment of the offer letter for integrated MRes/PhD/EngD programmes

[RDC Min.31A, 04.06.14]

Noted:

- 3A.1 It was reported to RDC's previous meeting on 4 June 2014 that following consultation undertaken by the FGT for Engineering Sciences, the consensus of DTCs within Engineering Sciences was that there should be a single offer letter of admission for students on integrated 1+3 MRes/PhD/EngD programmes, provided that this made it clear that students would be required to pass the MRes year of the programme in order to progress to the three-year PhD/EngD. Accordingly, colleagues in Outreach and Admissions were in the process of liaising with DTCs within Engineering Sciences with a view to clarifying the progression requirements that had been noted at RDC's previous meeting for all integrated MRes/PhD/EngD programmes.

Received:

- 3A.2 An oral report by the Director of Student Administration.

Reported:

- 3A.3 Colleagues in Outreach and Admissions were close to a solution to the matter, although the issue of whether the offer letter should specify two end dates (*ie* an interim end date after one year for the MRes component and a final end date after four years for the PhD/EngD component) or a single end date after five years still needed to be resolved. Outreach and Admissions colleagues were also compiling a list of MRes/PhD/EngD programmes within UCL where such an offer letter would be applicable, to ensure that these were all covered. The Director of Student Administration would report back on the outcome to RDC's next meeting.

ACTION: David Ashton

3B PhD student teaching survey

[RDC Min.33.15, 04.06.14]

Noted:

- 3B.1 RDC had received at its previous meeting on 4 June 2014 a summary of responses from other UCL faculties to the PhD student teaching survey that had previously been undertaken within SLMS and which had been received at RDC's meeting on 5 March 2014. RDC had agreed that it would be helpful to produce a more digestible summary of the responses for each Faculty with a view to sending this to CALT for information.

Received:

- 3B.2 The summary at RDC 1-02 (14-15).

Reported:

- 3B.3 The Director of CALT reported that there had been a good level of attendance among PGTAs for the UCL Arena One scheme which had started in September 2014, and that participants had provided some constructive feedback. The fact that the Arena One scheme would involve the coming together of PGTAs from different disciplines and backgrounds in regular group sessions would help to provide a framework going forward for keeping UCL informed of the experiences of PGTAs and for flagging any generic issues.

Discussion:

- 3B.4 With reference to the summary at [RDC 1-02 \(14-15\)](#), RDC agreed that it would be important for FGTs to continue to investigate and address any instances where PGTAs were not being paid by UCL departments, with reference if necessary to the recently revised details of the UCL PGTA Scheme, at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/post_grad_ta_scheme.php.
- 3B.5 While it was noted that the IQR process remained one of the main mechanisms for flagging any issues relating to the PGR student experience, this only took place quinquennially. While some members of RDC queried whether the AM process could be used to pick up any issues relating to the PGR student experience, it was noted that this process only currently related to taught programme provision. However, it was understood that the AM process was due to be reviewed by Academic Services during 2014-15, and it was agreed in light of this that the suggestion of this process being widened to encompass PGR programme provision might be considered as part of that review.

Action: the Secretary (to discuss with Academic Services colleagues)

3C Generic issues arising from Joint Examiner reports

[RDC Min.35, 04.06.14]

Noted:

- 3C.1 RDC had received at its meeting on 4 June 2014 reports from FGTs on generic issues or themes arising from Examiners' Joint Reports and agreed that FGTs who had not yet submitted a response to the RDC officers should be asked to do so.
- 3C.2 The RDC officers had since received responses from the FGTs for the Built Environment, Engineering Sciences and Population Health Sciences, all of whom had confirmed that there were no generic issues or themes arising from their scrutiny of Joint Examiner reports that they wished to flag for RDC's attention.

Reported:

- 3C.3 The Chair of RDC reminded FGTs of the expectation that they would continue to give scrutiny to Examiners' Joint Reports during the current session, particularly in instances of thesis referrals or failures, with a view to flagging any generic issues or themes for RDC's attention. FGTs would be expected to submit reports on their scrutiny of Examiners' Joint Reports to RDC's June 2015 meeting.

ACTION: Faculty Graduate Tutors

4 LOCAL CAREERS ADVICE AND EVENTS FOR PGR STUDENTS

[RDC Min.33.14, 04.06.14]

Noted:

- 4.1 RDC had agreed at its meeting on 4 June 2014 that FGTs should be asked to consult with colleagues within their faculties and with FGTCs (or their equivalents) on the level of demand for the provision of more localised faculty career advice and events for PGR students. Accordingly, FGTs were invited to report back their findings either to the meeting or to the next scheduled meeting of RDC that would take place on 11 March 2015.

Reported:

- 4.2 The following reports were received from FGTs:
- 4.2.1 *Arts and Humanities/Social and Historical Sciences* – no meeting of the Joint Faculty Research Students Committee for Arts and Humanities and Social and Historical Sciences had taken place since the June 2014 meeting of RDC. The relevant FGTs would therefore provide a report to RDC's Spring Term 2015 meeting (see Minute 4.7 below).
- 4.2.2 *Brain Sciences* – a survey involving 324 students had indicated that 20% had used the UCL Careers service and 35% had sought and received careers advice.
- 4.2.3 *Built Environment* – the Faculty was keen to encourage greater involvement of and liaison with UCL Careers on a local level with a view to complementing the various discipline-specific careers events that currently took place. To this end, it was hoped that a representative from UCL Careers could be invited to attend a future meeting of the Bartlett Research Degrees Committee to speak about the services that were available centrally. The Faculty was also keen to encourage a greater level of involvement of its alumni in careers activities and events taking place within the Faculty, such as employer-led skills workshop.
- 4.2.4 *Mathematical and Physical Sciences* – the Postgraduate Faculty Teaching Committee had discussed the possibility of running faculty-level careers events, and the Chair and other Faculty officers had met with the UCL Careers Advisor for the BEAMS School to discuss this. UCL Careers had indicated that it was keen for the Faculty to identify gaps in its current careers advice provision that might be plugged. In the meantime, the Faculty had proposed to analyse destination data to determine what careers PGR students went into after their time in the Faculty and with a view to inviting former PGR students back for careers events etc. It was also proposed to canvass SSCCs to find out what sort of careers advice students would like to receive.
- 4.2.5 *Medical Sciences* – Dr Callum Leckie had attended the May 2014 meeting of the Faculty Teaching and Research Committee, and Faculty-level events were in the process of being organised for 2014-15. In the meantime, Careers Leads had been identified in each of the Faculty's divisions, for the purpose of linking with UCL Careers.
- 4.2.6 *Population Health Sciences* – there were plans to undertake a similar careers survey of students to the one that had taken place in Brain Sciences. In addition, various Faculty-level events were also being considered.

Discussion:

- 4.3 It was noted that according to figures from the Royal Society, only 3.5% of science PhD graduates actually ended up pursuing long-term careers in university research,

and fewer than 0.5% eventually went on to become professors. This served to underline the need for there to be more in the way of local careers advice and guidance for PGR students for careers outside academia. However, PGR student supervisors and PIs were not always best placed for or disposed to offering this advice and guidance, and there needed to be more training and development provided for supervisors in this area.

- 4.4 It was agreed that events and fora organised for the purpose of regularising contact between PGR student supervisors and PIs and creating a sense of community among these colleagues would help to raise awareness of and facilitate discussion and the exchange of information and ideas around careers advice and guidance and other relevant issues. It was noted that the Doctoral School had engaged CALT to review current arrangements for PGR student supervisor training and development within UCL. Accordingly, CALT colleagues had begun discussions with UCL faculties around possibilities for establishing a differentiated programme of developmental activities for PGR student supervisors, which could be tailored to meet the needs of each faculty and involve staff at all levels in discussion around some of the issues relating to PGR student supervision and in the sharing of knowledge and best practice. In this context, RDC was informed of the rolling careers programme that was organised within the Francis Crick Institute and which involved various round-table events organised in response to student issues and discussion between supervisors and thesis committee members. CALT input into this would be sought as there were plans to roll this out more widely. The Director of CALT would report further on faculty discussions at RDC's next scheduled meeting.

ACTION: Dr Dilly Fung

- 4.5 RDC endorsed the principle of establishing local careers champions at departmental and faculty level for the purpose of facilitating communication and liaison over PGR student careers advice and guidance with UCL Careers. In addition, it was noted that establishing a forum for regularising contact and discussion among DGTs would also be a helpful development in this regard.
- 4.6 It was also agreed that more activity around asking PGR students to identify what sort of careers advice and guidance they would find helpful and raising staff awareness of the career destinations of PGR students would be desirable. More concerted efforts to make contact with PGR student alumni with a view to enlisting their involvement in careers events and the provision of careers advice and guidance would also be a welcome development. To this end, the Chair of RDC had been in discussion with DARO with a view to obtaining and developing information on PGR student alumni.

RESOLVED:

- 4.7 That FGTs who had not already done so be asked to provide a report on local careers advice and events for PGR students within their respective faculties to RDC's March 2015 meeting.

ACTION: Faculty Graduate Tutors

5 INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW 2012-13

Received:

- 5.1 At RDC 1-03 (14-15), a summary of recommendations identified in IQR reports in 2012-13 in relation to PGR programmes and the research training environment, introduced by the RDC Secretary.

Reported:

- 5.2 While no substantive generic issues in relation to PGR programmes and the research training environment had been raised in the 2012-13 round of IQRs, a number of recommendations of IQR teams had once again pertained to PGTA training and teaching opportunities. It was hoped that the recent advent of the CALT Arena One scheme would help to address some of the issues in this area that were flagged annually through the IQR process.
- 5.3 The use and application of the Research Student log had also featured among some of the recommendations made by some IQR teams. It was noted that Doctoral School and ISD colleagues were currently in the process of exploring ways of making the Research Student log more flexible so that it could be used across different research degree programmes without the need to create specially tailored versions to accommodate the needs of specific programmes.
- 5.4 The Chair thanked all RDC members who had served on IQR panels during 2012-13 and the latest academic session. The need to ensure that appropriate coverage was given by the IQR process to the PGR student environment remained an important concern.

6 ANNUAL REPORT ON MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF FACULTY COMMITTEES RESPONSIBLE FOR OVERSEEING PGR STUDENT PROVISION

Received:

- 6.1 The report at RDC 1-04 (14-15), introduced by the RDC Secretary.

Discussion:

- 6.2 While the report at RDC 1-04 (14-15) had not identified any generic issues arising from PGR student matters that had been considered by Faculty committees, some members noted that the Joint Faculty Research Students Committee for Arts and Humanities and Social and Historical Sciences had raised concerns around the timeframe for submission of PhDs and the fact that owing to time constraints, some PhD theses were being submitted regardless of whether or not they were completed. RDC noted that the scrutiny given by Research Councils to institutional PhD submission rates had contributed to this issue, but that it would be important for both faculties to continue to monitor the situation with a view to determining whether any other factors, eg student work commitments outside their studies, needed to be taken into account.

Action: Dr Joy Sleeman/Dr Benet Salway

- 6.3 RDC agreed that it was important to ensure that the quality of PhD theses was taken into account alongside the need to ensure their timely submission, particularly as universities and other potential employers of PhD students were far more likely to take account of factors such as the knowledge and experience of PhD graduates than the timeframe in which their thesis was submitted.

7 REPORT ON RESEARCH DEGREE EXAMINATION STATISTICS

Received:

- 7.1 The report at RDC 1-05 (14-15), introduced by the Student Records Manager.

Reported:

- 7.2 The numbers of UCL PhD, MD(Res) and EngD awards, research degree submissions and examiner nominations during the 2012-13 reporting period had all increased relative to the previous year's figures. There had also again been a very small number of resubmissions (42) relative to the total number of research degree submissions (895), although the total number of fails (3) had increased slightly on the previous year's figure (1).
- 7.3 The report at RDC 1-05 (14-15) also included for the first time an indication of the number (122) of MPhil/PhD/Specialist doctorate students who had withdrawn from UCL without completing their programme of study.

8 UCL - INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION MERGER

Received:

- 8.1 The report at RDC 1-06 (14-15), introduced by the Registrar.

Reported:

- 8.2 The report at RDC 1-06 (14-15) proposed i) the establishment of award of a PhD by Publication (available only at the IoE), which was required in order to honour commitments to existing IoE staff who were undertaking this qualification and in post on 1 December 2014 when the IoE ceased to be a separate degree awarding authority with effect from 2 December 2014 following its prospective merger with UCL and ii) that UCL should adopt the regulations that supported this award directly from the IoE's current regulations, without amendment, as this would serve to distinguish these from other UCL regulations for postgraduate research degrees.
- 8.3 More generally, the regulations for research degree programmes offered by the IoE would be incorporated within UCL's overall regulatory framework. A review of both sets of regulations would take place at an appropriate point with a view to aligning these, ideally for the start of the 2015-16 academic session (see also Minute 9.4 below). Two new doctoral awards would be introduced as a result of the merger: the Doctor of Education (EdD) and Doctor of Education Psychology (DEdPsy).
- 8.4 UCL SRS colleagues were still in the process of gathering information on higher doctorate awards that were offered by the IoE. However, it had been agreed that the IoE would award its own honorary doctorates at its final graduation ceremony in April 2015 before these became UCL honorary doctorate awards with effect from the 2015-16 academic session.

Discussion:

- 8.5 Some members of RDC noted that it was their understanding that UCL already awarded its own DEdPsy, and that the Registrar would wish to check whether this was the case and, if so, whether it would present any conflicts.

Action: Wendy Appleby

RESOLVED:

- 8.6 That the proposal at RDC 1-06 (14-15) for establishment of award of a PhD by Publication (to be available only at the IoE) be approved.

9 UK QUALITY CODE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION – UCL PRACTICE IN RELATION TO THE CODE FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

Received:

- 9.1 The report at RDC 1-07 (14-15), introduced by the Doctoral School Senior Executive Officer.

Reported:

- 9.2 The QAA had developed proposals for revising and restructuring its existing Code of Practice for the Assurance of Quality and Standards in Higher Education into a new Quality Code. In accordance with arrangements agreed by QMEC, a draft of UCL's provision in respect of Part B, Chapter 11 of the Code (which pertained to research degrees) had been prepared by the RDC officers in consultation with relevant stakeholders and was set out at RDC 1-07 (14-15).

Discussion:

- 9.3 Some members of RDC noted that the existing MPhil to PhD upgrade form along with the associated online Guidance Notes appeared to be out of step with the process around PhD student upgrade that was outlined at RDC 1-07 (14-15) and proposed that modifications might be made to the current upgrade form and guidance notes to take account of this. The RDC members concerned agreed to pass their suggestions for modifications to the form and Guidance Notes onto the RDC officers outside the meeting.

Action: Dr Benet Salway

- 9.4 One of the indicators at RDC 1-07 (14-15) was that HE providers would have regulations for research degree programmes that were clear and readily available to research students and staff, including examiners. In this context, it was noted that a new Academic Regulations and Governance Manager post had been established in Academic Services, and that one of the tasks of the appointee, who would be taking up post in January 2015, would be to engage in a major review and rewrite of UCL's academic and general regulations during 2014-15. In light of this, the RDC officers would also ensure that the comments and suggestions of RDC members received in relation to Minute 9.3 above were also passed onto the appointee so that these could be considered in tandem with the task of rewriting the academic regulations and guidelines pertaining to research degree students. RDC agreed that any substantive changes or additions to the research degree programme regulations suggested by this review should come to RDC for approval.

Action: Gary Hawes

10 RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE – ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

Approved:

- 10.1 At RDC 1-08 (14-15), the RDC Annual Report 2013-14 for forwarding to the December 2014 meeting of AC.

11 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

11A Faculty doctoral strategy plans

Reported:

11A.1 The Chair of RDC reported that he had now received Doctoral Strategy plans from each Faculty. These had amongst other things given an indication that modest growth was planned institutionally in terms of UCL's overall numbers of doctoral students.

11A.2 The Chair of RDC would be preparing a digest of the plans and projections for each Faculty for the Vice-Provost (Research) and for subsequent discussion by the Provost's SMT. He would also be providing feedback on the plans to each Faculty in due course.

12 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Noted:

12.1 The next meetings of RDC were scheduled as follows:

- **Wednesday 11 March 2015 - 10am**
- **Wednesday 17 June 2015 - 10am**

GARY HAWES

Academic Support Officer (and Committee Operations Co-ordinator)

Academic Services

Student and Registry Services

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10 February 2015