



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Monday 17 June 2013

MINUTES

Present:

Dr Dave Spratt (Acting Chair); Mr David Ashton; Dr Stephanie Bird; Dr Steven Bloch;
Dr Donna Brown; Mr Ben Colvill; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Caroline Essex;
Mr Marco Federighi ; Professor Mike Ewing; Dr Sally Leevers; Ms Bella Malins;
Dr Stephen Marshall; Dr Joy Sleeman; Professor Kaila Srαι; Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu.

In attendance: Mr Gary Hawes (Secretary); Ms Helen Notter

Apologies were received from: Professor David Bogle; Dr Tom Gretton; Professor Anthony Harker; Mr Dante Micheaux; Professor David Muller; Dr Ruth Siddall.

Key to abbreviations

DGT	Departmental Graduate Tutor
FGT	Faculty Graduate Tutor
FGTC	Faculty Graduate Teaching Committee
OIA	Office of the Independent Adjudicator
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
SAS	Study Assistance Scheme
SRS	Student and Registry Services

31 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 6 MARCH 2013

Confirmed:

31.1 The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 6 March 2013 [*RDC Mins.18-30, 6.3.13*].

32 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

32A Amendment of the offer letter for PGR students [*RDC Min.19A, 6.3.13*]

Reported:

32A.1 The Director of Student Administration reported that a single offer letter covering both the MRes and PhD awards had been devised by SRS officers for 2014-15 for PhD programmes that included an integrated MRes. Further discussions around student progression for these programmes were also taking place within the Faculty of Engineering Sciences, where the majority of these types of programmes were currently based.

33 GUIDELINES FOR SUPERVISING VISITING RESEARCH STUDENTS

Received:

- 33.1 Proposed guidelines for the supervision of visiting research students, at RDC 3-01 (12-13), introduced by the Graduate School Administrator.

Reported:

- 33.2 Students enrolled on a PhD programme of study overseas were able to apply to come to UCL as a visiting research student for a period of between three and 12 months to undertake research that was complementary to the PhD project they were undertaking. Although these students would for the most part be subject to UCL Regulations and the Code of Practice for Research Degrees during their time at UCL, there were certain areas where it was felt that different guidance should necessarily apply. For example, the guidelines at RDC 3-01 (12-13) proposed that visiting research students should only be required to have one supervisor allocated to oversee their work.

Discussion:

- 33.3 Some members of RDC queried whether the guidance on the minimum level of engagement between research students and their supervisors (which was the same for UCL research students and visiting research students) needed to be reviewed. However, it was noted that the level of engagement that was considered necessary between research students and their supervisors would vary across the disciplines. In light of this, it was agreed that the current guidance that was set out in the UCL Regulations and the proposed guidelines at RDC 3-01 (12-13) of a minimum of a meeting every two months should be retained. However, it was agreed that, as acknowledged in the proposed guidelines at RDC 3-01 (12-13), more regular meetings with their supervisors might be appropriate in the case of visiting research students who were only based at UCL for three months.

RESOLVED:

- 33.4 ***That the proposed guidelines for supervising visiting research students at RDC 3-01 (12-13) be approved and included in the UCL Academic Regulations and Guidelines for Research Degree Students.***

ACTION: Ben Colvill

34 RESEARCH DEGREE EXAMINATION ENTRY FORM AND APPROVED FIELD OF STUDY

Received:

- 34.1 A note at RDC 3-02 (12-13) inviting RDC to discuss the utility of the 'Approved Field of Study' section of the Research Degree Exam Entry Form, introduced by Ms Helen Notter, Student Records Manager.

Reported:

- 34.2 While the 'Approved Field of Study' section had ceased to have any administrative function within UCL, research students were free to enter any description or phrase in this section of the form, which was then recorded on their SITS record along with the thesis title. Once an award had been made, the field of study appeared on:

- The pass list, issued each month for confirmation of awards by the Chair of RDC;
- The statement of award, issued to students with the letter confirming their award (and issued subsequently if follow-up copies are required);
- The programme for research students' graduation ceremonies;
- The announcement of the award at research students' graduation ceremonies.

However, the field of study was not quoted on degree certificates.

Discussion:

- 34.3 The fact that students were free to enter any description or phrase in the 'Approved Field of Study' section meant that there was a great deal of variation in the use of this section across UCL faculties and departments. However, some members of RDC noted that for students in some faculties, especially those who were engaged in interdisciplinary research projects, this section was welcomed as it provided an opportunity for them to give a more accurate description of their research project than the description that was included on their degree certificate, which would also be more meaningful to prospective employers.
- 34.4 While it was suggested that modifications to the Research Degree Exam Entry Form – such as giving students a drop-down list of options to select for the 'Approved Field of Study' or restricting the number of characters that they could use for inputting a description into this section – might be considered, it was agreed that more guidance on what description students should include in this section would need to be provided to supervisors and DGTs who were responsible for completing and signing off the form. To this end, it was noted that it would be helpful if the FGT in the Faculty of Medical Sciences would be able to circulate the guidance on completion of the 'Approved Field of Study' that he routinely issued to DGTs in his Faculty.

RESOLVED:

- 34.5 That consideration be given by SRS officers to making the modifications suggested in Minute 34.4 above to the Research Degree Exam Entry Form.
ACTION: Helen Notter
- 34.6 That the guidance provided to DGTs in the Faculty of Medical Sciences on completion of the 'Approved Field of Study' section of the Research Degree Entry Form be circulated to FGTs.
ACTION: Dr Dave Spratt

35 KEY ISSUES ARISING FROM RESEARCH DEGREE EXAMINERS' JOINT REPORTS

Received:

- 35.1 A note at [RDC 3-03 \(12-13\)](#), introduced by the Secretary.

Reported:

- 35.2 The Chair of RDC had proposed that it would be useful if RDC could receive in future a digest of some of the key issues or themes arising from Research Degree Examiners' Joint Reports.
- 35.3 Currently, Examiners' Joint Reports were received and scrutinised by SRS officers, and any issues or concerns were flagged and referred to the relevant FGT for

investigation and follow-up action if required. Regardless of whether or not any issues or concerns were raised, copies of all Examiners' Joint Reports were forwarded to FGTs as a matter of course for them to check and act upon if necessary.

Discussion:

- 35.4 The Student Records Manager noted that comments included by examiners on the Examiners' Joint Reports tended to include very little in the way of information that was not academically based and were generally too technical to extract generic issues or themes. However, any generic issues that did arise from these reports were flagged to FGTs as well as to the Head of the Graduate School for attention, and the annual report on research degree administration that was received at RDC's meeting in the Autumn term usually included an indication of any instances of this.
- 35.5 Whereas some of the FGT members of RDC who were present at the meeting confirmed that they had routinely received copies of Examiners' Joint Reports, others reported that this had not been the case.
- 35.6 It was agreed that it would be more useful in future if particular scrutiny was given by FGTs to Examiners' Joint Reports in instances where MPhil/PhD students had not fulfilled the requirements for an MPhil or PhD, with a view to extracting from these any generic issues or identifiable themes or trends that might be flagged for RDC's attention. It was further agreed that DGTs should also be advised to give similar scrutiny to Upgrade Panel Reports with a view to reporting any generic issues or identifiable themes arising from these up to FGTs.

RESOLVED:

- 35.7 ***That SRS officers take action to ensure that copies of Examiners' Joint Reports are routinely issued to all FGTs.***

ACTION: Helen Notter

- 35.8 ***That DGTs and FGTs be asked in future to give particular scrutiny to Upgrade Panel Reports and Examiners' Joint Reports respectively in instances where MPhil/PhD students either fail to make the criteria for upgrade or do not fulfil the requirements for an MPhil or PhD, with a view to extracting from these any generic issues or themes from these that might be flagged for RDC's attention.***

ACTION: Faculty Graduate Tutors/Departmental Graduate Tutors

36 PHD TUITION FEES STATUS AND THE UCL STUDY ASSISTANCE SCHEME

Received:

- 36.1 A note at RDC 3-04 (12-13), introduced by the Secretary.

Reported:

- 36.2 Concerns had been raised by some UCL departments regarding the application of Regulation 2.6 (Section 1) of the Academic Regulations and Guidelines for Research Degree Students, which prescribed that PhD students who were employed by UCL, benefiting from the UCL SAS and had not submitted a thesis after three years would be permitted to continue to pay the same fee for the remaining periods of their normal part-time registration (*ie* 25% of the full-time fee), irrespective of whether or not they remained on the SAS or continued to be employed by UCL. In light of this, the departments concerned had asked that consideration be given to removing this Regulation so as to reduce the liability on UCL departments and to allow them to

decide at their own discretion whether or not to continue to support a student's fees after the student had left the employ of UCL.

Discussion:

- 36.3 There was consensus among members of RDC that the current wording of Regulation 2.6 (Section 1) appeared to be at odds with the entitlements of the SAS, as set out at <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/osd/sas/index.php>, and that it should therefore be removed

RESOLVED:

- 36.4 That Regulation 2.6 (Section 1) of the Academic Regulations and Guidelines for Research Degree Students be amended through removal of the following section:**

Students studying for the award of PhD who are employed by UCL and benefiting from the Study Assistance Scheme who have not submitted a thesis after three years, will continue to pay the same fee for the remaining periods of normal part-time registration, that is, 25% of the full-time fee [50% of the part-time fee], irrespective of whether they are still employed by UCL and continue to benefit from Study Assistance, have left UCL employment or are overseas candidates.

ACTION: Gary Hawes

37 DRAFT GRADUATE MARKETING STRATEGY

Received:

- 37.1 The draft Graduate Marketing Strategy at RDC 3-05 (12-13).

Reported:

- 37.2 While the draft Strategy at RDC 3-05 (12-13) would be referred to the RDC PhD Marketing and Admissions Working Group, which had its next meeting on 2 July 2013, it was being submitted to RDC with a view to inviting additional feedback from RDC members.

Discussion:

- 37.3 Some members of RDC noted that some of the Faculty postgraduate student number projections for 2013-16 that were included as an appendix to the Strategy seemed unrealistically ambitious given the highly competitive nature of the current postgraduate student recruitment market. It was also noted that the holistic approach to postgraduate marketing that appeared to be envisioned by the draft Strategy would not be appropriate given the fact that more targeted marketing of postgraduate programmes was likely to become increasingly important.
- 37.4 Some members of RDC noted that current student number planning within UCL appeared to be characterised by a lack of academic input at faculty and departmental level.

RESOLVED:

- 37.5 That the comments of RDC members at Minutes 37.3 and 37.4 above be passed onto to the authors of the Draft Graduate Marketing Strategy.**

ACTION: Gary Hawes

38 DOCTORATE EXTENSION SCHEME FOR TIER 4 VISA HOLDERS

Received:

- 38.1 A note at RDC 3-06 (12-13), introduced by Helen Notter, Student Records Manager.

Reported:

- 38.2 The information at RDC 3-06 (12-13) had been circulated to UCL departments and FGTs.

39 REPORT ON RESEARCH STUDENT GRIEVANCES

Received:

- 39.1 An oral report by David Ashton, Director of Student Administration.

Reported:

- 39.2 Of the 52 student grievance cases that had been initiated during 2011-12, two had related to research degree students.
- 39.3 Since UCL was required to submit an annual report to the OIA for each calendar year rather than academic year, the SRS officers had proposed that it would make sense for future reports to RDC on student grievances to synchronise with this reporting cycle. The next such report would therefore be submitted to RDC's Spring Term meeting in 2014.
- 39.4 In the meantime, it was noted that the UCL student grievance procure was in the process of being revised by SRS officers with a view to this incorporating the student complaints procedure. A draft would be submitted to RDC in due course.

40 ANNUAL REPORT ON MINUTES OF MEETINGS OF FACULTY GRADUATE TEACHING COMMITTEES

Received:

- 40.1 A report at RDC 3-08 (12-13) introduced by the Secretary.

Reported:

- 40.2 Since not all Minutes of meetings of FGTCs (or their equivalents) held during 2012-13 had yet been made available to the RDC officers, it was now proposed that RDC officers would give scrutiny to FGTC Minutes over the summer 2013 with a view to preparing an annual report on the proceedings of FGTCs, identifying salient issues and themes in relation to PGR provision, for submission to RDC's meeting in the Autumn Term 2013.

41 WORKING GROUPS REPORTING TO RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Noted:

- 41.1 The following working groups of RDC were currently established and would be submitting reports to future meetings of RDC:
- RDC PhD Marketing and Admissions Working Group – chaired by Professor David Bogle
 - RDC Working Group on Permissible and Non-Permissible forms of supervision for PhD students - chaired by Professor Alison Diduck
- 41.2 Minutes of meetings of these working groups were available on the RDC SharePoint at <https://sharepoint.adm.ucl.ac.uk/sites/rdc/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx>

42 RESPONSIBILITIES OF DEPARTMENTAL GRADUATE TUTORS

Reported:

- 42.1 One of the FGT members of RDC had requested clarification outside the meeting about the responsibilities of DGTs with regard to PGR students and/or supervisors who were registered/based in other UCL departments. The RDC officers had in turn confirmed that, formally, students were the responsibility of the DGT in the department in which they were registered, and that the expectation was that supervisors who needed to discuss issues relating to the supervision of the student would normally do so with the DGT in the department in which the student was registered.

43 FORMATTING OF PHD THESES

Reported:

- 43.1 Some members of RDC queried whether the current UCL guidance on the formatting of PhD theses might be reviewed with a view to permitting the submission of theses on double-sided paper. There was consensus among members of RDC that this would be desirable both from a 'green' perspective as well as in terms of reducing the bulk of PhD theses.

RESOLVED:

- 43.2 *That UCL guidance on the formatting of PhD theses be revised to permit the submission of PhD theses on double-sided paper.*

ACTION: Helen Notter

44 DATES OF MEETINGS 2013-14

Reported:

- 44.1 Dates of meetings of RDC for 2013-14 had been circulated to RDC members by email and were scheduled as follows:

Wednesday 16 October 2013 - 10am
Wednesday 5 March 2014 - 10am
Wednesday 4 June 2014 - 10am

CONFIDENTIAL (RESERVED) BUSINESS

45 CONFIDENTIAL (RESERVED) MINUTES OF 15 NOVEMBER 2012 MEETING

Confirmed:

- 45.1 The Confidential (Reserved) Minutes of the RDC meeting held on 6 March 2013, issued previously [*RDC Mins.31-32, 6.3.13*].

46 CHAIR'S RESERVED BUSINESS

46A Suspension of Regulations report

Received for information:

- 46A.1 At RDC 3-09 (12-13), a report on suspensions of the Regulations for students proceeding to research degrees.

GARY HAWES

Academic Support Officer (and Committee Operations Co-ordinator)

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Student and Registry Services

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24 September 2013