



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 17 June 2015

MINUTES

Present:

Professor David Bogle (Chair)
 Mr David Ashton; Dr Steven Bloch; Ms Mariana Ceccotti; Mr Ben Colvill;
 Dr Caroline Essex; Dr Sally Levers (*vice* Dr Donna Brown); Dr Virginia Mantouvalou;
 Dr Stephen Marshall; Ms Helen Notter; Dr Blandine Poulet; Dr Benet Salway; Dr Ruth Siddall;
 Dr Joy Sleeman; Professor Kaila Srjai; Dr Andrew Stoker; Professor Andrew Tolmie;
 Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu.

In attendance: Ms Julia Dawson (for Minute 39 only); Ms Cat Edera (For Minute 34 only);
 Mr Gary Hawes (Acting Secretary); Ms Bella Malins; Mr Derfel Owen (For Minutes 34 and 35 only);
 Ms Rebecca Reiner (for Minute 39 only).

Apologies were received from: Ms Wendy Appleby; Dr Simon Banks; Dr Donna Brown;
 Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Dilly Fung; Professor Nikos Konstantinidis; Dr Dave Spratt.

Key to abbreviations

CRS	Completing Research Status
DTCs	Doctoral Training Centres
EdCom	Education Committee
GES	Global Engagement Strategy
GRS	Graduator Research Scholarships
HEI	Higher Education Institution
IoE	Institute of Education
OfIA	Office for International Affairs
ORS	Overseas Research Scholarships
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PGT	Postgraduate Taught
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SMT	Senior Management Team
SRS	Student & Registry Services
TESQA	Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency

32 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 11 MARCH 2015

Approved:

32.1 The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2015 [*RDC Mins.14-31, 11.03.15*].

33 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES [see Minutes 34, 35, 37 and 38 below]

34 UCL ACADEMIC MANUAL 2015-16

[RDC Min.25, 11.03.15]

Received:

34.1 The final proposals for the new UCL Academic Manual 2015-16, including:

- i. At RDC 3-02, (14-15), proposals for a new UCL Academic Partnerships Framework, introduced by the Academic Standards and Quality Manager.
- ii. At RDC 3-03, (14-15), proposals for a new UCL Qualifications and Credit Framework, introduced by the Director of Academic Services.

Reported:

34.2 Following approval of the proposed policy for academic partnerships by EdCom and RDC at their March 2015 meetings and the subsequent approval of the governance framework for this by EdCom at its April 2015 meeting, RDC 3-02, (14-15) set out the proposed governance and regulatory framework and supporting processes for UCL's academic partnerships with other organisations which involved or contributed to the award of UCL credit and/or qualifications.

34.3 The proposed framework recognised the structure for international partnerships that had been included in the Global Engagement Strategy (see Minute 39 below). RDC's attention was drawn to the fact that the proposed framework also recognised that UCL had a number of DTCs, and proposed that any specific arrangements within these bodies that fell under the definition of academic partnerships would be covered by the terms of the framework and would need to be developed accordingly.

34.4 Subject to EdCom and RDC's support of the proposed framework, the underlying detailed procedures and proformas to support the relevant processes would be developed in consultation with colleagues across UCL. Terms of reference and membership for a cross-committee forum, which would comprise representatives of EdCom and RDC as well as of other stakeholder UCL departments, would also be developed with a view to ensuring collaboration between EdCom and RDC in scrutinising future proposals for academic partnerships. It was also noted that the terms of reference of other UCL committees would need to be amended as appropriate to reflect responsibilities and reporting arrangements for oversight of academic partnership activity.

34.5 The proposed new UCL Qualifications and Credit Framework at RDC 3-03, (14-15) had been developed with the aim of establishing a single, cross-institutional reference point describing the underpinning structures of all taught and research programmes leading to a UCL HE qualification. Consultation around the proposed framework had included Faculty Tutors and the departmental leads for a range of UCL programmes, and feedback from this process had been incorporated into the final version at RDC 3-03, (14-15).

34.6 While most of the qualifications listed at RDC 3-03 (14-15) related to UCL's taught provision, sections were included that listed UCL's PGR qualifications, descriptors for these qualifications and threshold qualification requirements for PGR programmes. The section of the Framework relating to RPL had also indicated that RPL might be considered for advanced entry to UCL research programmes in instances where a student had already completed learning of a standard judged equitable with the UCL

programme concerned, eg a student had commenced a PhD at another HEI and wished to transfer to a UCL PhD programme.

Discussion:

34.7 The following main points were noted during discussion:

- The sections in the UCL Academic Partnerships Framework at RDC 3-02, (14-15) pertaining to Faculty Management Framework (p11) and Procedure for approval of new academic partnership (p14) should be expanded to include reference to the procedures and committees at Faculty level that would also give oversight to academic partnerships;
- The paragraph pertaining to academic partnerships and DTCs in section 6 of the Framework document at RDC 3-02, (14-15) should also preferably make reference to the other areas of UCL in addition to UCL Research Services that were involved in developing and establishing DTCs (eg Doctoral School, Student Administration);
- It would be important in developing and establishing new DTCs to ensure that there was clarification from the outset around the administration and management of student records for PGR students who were based in DTCs, particularly in respect of students moving between institutions, through engagement with SRS. It would also be important in this context to keep under review UCL procedures and regulations around PGR student engagement monitoring;
- It would be advisable to keep a watching brief over the UCL committee structures that would be responsible for overseeing UCL's academic partnership activity in order to ensure that there was clarity and transparency around responsibilities and reporting arrangements, and that these continued to be fit for purpose;
- With reference to the list of PGR qualifications at section 1.3 of RDC 3-03 (14-15), the following qualifications were no longer offered by UCL: Doctor in Speech and Language Therapy (DSL); Doctor of Medicine (MD);
- It would be desirable for the PGR qualification descriptors at section 3.3 of RDC 3-03 (14-15) to include a separate descriptor for the MPhil award, as this was recognised as a research qualification in its own right rather than just a progression point or exit award;
- Some members of RDC suggested that the section on advanced entry to research programmes at section 5.6 of RDC 3-03 (14-15) should explicitly state that i) RPL would not be permitted for advanced entry to CRS status and ii) that applicants for RPL for advanced entry to research programmes would not be considered unless they had received research supervision for a minimum amount of time, eg one year.

RESOLVED:

34.8 That the proposals for a new UCL Academic Partnerships Framework and a new UCL Qualifications and Credit Framework at RDC 3-02 (14-15) and RDC 3-03 (14-15) respectively be approved subject to consideration being given to the various points raised by RDC at Minute 34.7 above and further amendment of the documents as appropriate.

ACTION: Academic Services officers

35 REVIEW OF THE PGR ACADEMIC REGULATIONS 2015-16

[RDC Min.25, 11.03.15]

Received:

- 35.1 At RDC 3-04 (14-15), proposals for the redevelopment of the PGR academic regulations during 2015-16, introduced by the Director of Academic Services.
- 35.2 At RDC 3-05 (14-15), a report on the regulations applicable to the UCL Institute of Education for MPhil/PhD students who registered prior to 2015-16 and for those registering from 2015-16 onwards, introduced by the Director of Student Administration.

Reported:

- 35.3 RDC had at its previous meeting on 11 March 2015 received outline proposals for the review of UCL's Academic Regulations during 2014-15 and 2015-16. The paper at RDC 3-04 (14-15) presented proposals for the management and coordination of the review and re-drafting of the PGR sections of the Regulations.
- 35.4 A key objective of the review would be to ensure that all regulations and associated guidance notes *etc* were written clearly and plainly, and that documents and websites were designed to help staff and students to find the right information as quickly and easily as possible. It was proposed that the review should be overseen by a working group of RDC convened by the Chair of RDC; and that a second RDC working group should be established to look at the specific detail and re-wording of the regulations themselves, and to ensure that staff and students across UCL were consulted on any proposed changes. The working groups would report to RDC throughout the year, with the aim of submitting final regulations for approval to the June 2016 meeting of RDC, and publicising the new regulations to staff and students in September 2016.
- 35.5 The report at RDC 3-05 (14-15) set out for RDC's information the different regulations applicable to MPhil/PhD students registered within the UCL IoE prior to the start of the 2015-16 session. It was proposed and agreed that from the 2015-16 session onwards, MPhil/PhD students enrolled within the UCL IoE would follow the UCL regulations applicable to MPhil/PhD students in all other faculties within UCL, so there would be one uniform set of regulations governing UCL's MPhil/PhD provision.

RESOLVED:

- 35.6 That the proposals at RDC 3-04 (14-15) for the redevelopment of the PGR sections of the UCL Academic Regulations during 2015-16 be approved.

36 DOCTORAL EDUCATION AT UCL

Received:

- 36.1 At RDC 3-01 (14-15), a draft paper, introduced by the Chair.

Reported:

- 36.2 The paper at RDC 3-01 (14-15) outlined a draft strategy for Doctoral Education at UCL, drawing from UCL's 2034 Strategy and other key UCL strategies, as well as key themes identified by UCL faculties as part of the Doctoral Planning Process. The draft would be further developed over the summer 2015 in consultation with SMT and UCL faculties with a view to final approval being sought during the Autumn term 2015. The draft would also be submitted for discussion to the 25 June 2015 meeting of AC and would ultimately be submitted to UCL Council for approval.

Discussion:

- 36.3 The content of the draft strategy at RDC 3-01 (14-15) was broadly welcomed by RDC. Some members questioned the wording used in the vision statement at the beginning of the strategy – in particular the use of the term ‘frontier research’, whose meaning was felt to be opaque and not generally recognised across all disciplines at UCL or externally. In light of this, the RDC members concerned wondered whether the term ‘basic research’ might be a more appropriate term to use. However, the Chair of RDC noted that the term ‘frontier research’ had gained currency within various spheres as a synonym for ‘basic research’ and was part of current research parlance both within and outside UCL.
- 36.4 The following other main points were noted during discussion:
- The draft strategy should ideally give greater prominence and elaboration to the principle of ‘integrity’ – which was mentioned on the first page but not expanded on elsewhere in the strategy;
 - Similarly, greater prominence needed to be given to outreach and public engagement as ‘impact’ activities;
 - With regard to the section of the strategy outlining the four proposed enabling action lines:
 - ‘1. Ensuring a high quality research education environment preparing for a broad range of careers:
 - ‘a. Promote our doctoral programmes that aim for four years’ – some members of RDC suggested use of the word ‘encourage’ over ‘promote’
 - ‘b. Review the supervisory development programmes for new and experienced supervisors’ – some members of RDC noted that this would also need to take account of other infrastructure within UCL;
 - ‘3. Encourage cross-disciplinary working and thinking [...]’
 - ‘b. Enable research students to audit advanced courses’ – some members of RDC queried what was meant by ‘advanced courses’ and suggested use of ‘other appropriate courses’ instead to avoid confusion with advanced courses offered at undergraduate level;
 - ‘c. We must support candidates to be part of various research student communities: all will be a member of a Department or Division and at least one Research Group...’ – some members of RDC suggested that i) ‘research student communities’ be amended simply to read ‘research communities’ and ii) ‘Research Group’ should be decapitalised, as this term was more applicable to science-based departments than departments in the arts and humanities.
 - ‘4. Expand training for impact [...]’
 - ‘d. Encourage contributing to solving London’s challenges’ – some members of RDC felt that this should be widened to encompass global challenges, as London’s challenges might be less applicable or relevant to some PGR students, particularly those from overseas [...]
 - ‘g. Promote internships and collaboration with non-academic partners’ – some members of RDC noted that time spent by PGR students on internships would need to be reconciled with Research Council submission deadlines, although the Chair of RDC noted that the expectation would normally be that PGR students would choose to interrupt their studies for the duration of these;
 - RDC agreed that it was important that PGR students should be prompted and encouraged to give greater consideration to the potential impact of their research at the outset of their studies, eg impact statements.

RESOLVED:

- 36.5 That the Chair of RDC give consideration to the comments and suggestions raised during discussion and noted at Minute 36.4 above in developing subsequent drafts of the strategy document at RDC 3-01 (14-15).

ACTION: Professor David Bogle

37 UCL OVERSEAS CAMPUSES

Received:

- 37.1 At RDC 3-06 (14-15), a data report on the profile of PGR students at UCL overseas campuses.
- 37.2 A report on the run-out plans for PGR students at UCL Australia from the Faculty Graduate Tutor for Engineering Sciences (filed with these Minutes as RDC 3-10 (14-15)).

Reported:

- 37.3 After 31 December 2017 UCL Australia would cease its stand-alone presence. In the meantime, UCL Australia was working closely with TEQSA to ensure that their requirements regarding changes that will impact on the ability to meet the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2011 were met.
- 37.4 Currently there were five PGR students whose official enrolment was expected to extend beyond the end of 2017. All five students had primary supervisors who were currently full-time academic staff at UCL Australia, and all five were in the process of having discussions with the Departmental Graduate Tutor and with the Departmental Manager concerning their future studies with a view to identifying outcomes that would enable the students to complete their research degrees in a manner that was acceptable to them, that was feasible in terms of implementation and that met all necessary quality standards. A more detailed report on these plans and their implications would be submitted to RDC's Autumn Term 2015 meeting.
- 37.5 Work was also being undertaken by the UCL Faculty of Engineering Sciences to identify areas of risk with regard to the student experience for UCL Australia students and to implement pre-emptive measures to address potential problems. Pastoral care and skills training had been identified as areas affecting PGR students for which pre- and post-2017 plans would be required. These matters would be discussed at meetings in July 2015, with detailed plans to be presented to RDC's Autumn Term 2015 meeting and thereafter as required.

Discussion:

- 37.6 The following main points were noted during discussion:
- It was unclear whether current UCL Australia PGR students who were due to finish their studies after 2017 would graduate with UCL degrees. This would need to be clarified, as would the question of whether or not these students would have a right to transfer their studies to UCL;

ACTION: Dr Simon Banks to consult with SRS officers

- In light of the issues at UCL Australia, it would be important also to ensure that there was appropriate academic oversight of PGR students who were based at UCL Qatar. While it had not been possible to deliver all aspects of the UCL experience to PGR students, there were not felt to be any substantive issues around student supervision, and there had been signs that UCL's presence was proving to be a

positive force in light of the encouraging number of female students who had been appointed to prominent positions following their studies.

RESOLVED:

- 37.7 That RDC receive at its next meeting an update report on arrangements and plans for PGR students based at UCL Australia.

ACTION: Dr Simon Banks

38 APPLICATIONS, OFFERS OF ADMISSION AND ACCEPTANCES TO MRES AND PGR PROGRAMMES

[RDC Min.21, 14-15]

Received:

- 38.1 At RDC 3-08, (14-15), the latest PGR admissions data, introduced by the Director of Access and Admissions.

Reported:

- 38.2 UK PGR student applications were up 6.7% on the previous year's figures, while EU PGR student applications were up by 28.8%. However, overseas PGR student applications had decreased by 10.8%. The increase in applications across all categories was attributable in part to an expansion in UCL's portfolio of MRes programmes.
- 38.3 The number of offers being produced for UK PGR student applications was down by 15.3%, while offers for EU PGR student applications were up by 28.8% and Overseas offers were at the same level as the previous year. Offers to MRes applicants had increased across all categories, with the largest increase in the Overseas category, with 35.7% more offers being made.
- 38.4 UK application acceptances to PGR programmes had fallen by 16.5%. However, acceptances from the EU had increased by 30.3% and by 5.1% for Overseas applicants. All categories of MRes acceptances had also seen an increase.

Discussion:

- 38.5 While concern was expressed by some members of RDC regarding the decrease in offers and acceptances for UK PGR student applicants, the Chair of RDC noted that i) this was consistent with feedback from UCL faculties obtained during the Doctoral Planning Process that had indicated that faculties wished to hold steady on and consolidate their PGR student numbers and ii) many student applications for PhD programmes were embedded in the MRes applications. The Chair of RDC further noted that the new UCL Director of Planning would shortly be commencing general discussions within UCL around the balance of UCL's undergraduate, PGT and PGR students.

39 UCL GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Received:

- 39.1 At RDC 3-07 (14-15), the UCL GES, Chief of Staff to the Vice-Provost (International).
- 39.2 An oral report on by Assistant Director (Americas, Central Asia), OfIA on the work of the Student Mobility Task and Finish Working Group.

Reported:

- 39.2 Council had approved the new UCL GES at RDC 3-07 (14-15) following its away-day meeting on 30 March 2015. The extension of UCL's practical impact globally through partnership activities was a central principle of the GES, and joint/dual research degree programmes would be one aspect of this that would fall within RDC's sphere.
- 39.3 Of the five strategic drivers outlined in the GES, the driver to increase UCL's independent research capability around the world would be particularly relevant to PGR students. This driver was also closely linked to the driver for UCL as a world-class research powerhouse to co-create wise solutions to enduring and emerging global problems and Grand Challenges.
- 39.4 While the Student Mobility Task and Finish Working Group had access to data on student mobility at PGT level, data sets for PGR student mobility had still to be defined in order to determine the current level of activity and to set targets.

Discussion:

- 39.5 Some members of RDC queried the distinction between 'institutional' and 'anchor' partnerships. The Chief of Staff Chief to the Vice-Provost (International) explained that 'institutional' partnerships would be cross-faculty collaborations involving two or more UCL faculties, whereas 'anchor' partnerships would comprise a more finite number of longer-term cross-faculty collaborations that would demand the Provost's time and attention and be supported by strategic funding. UCL's 'anchor' partnerships would also be approved and monitored by Council. The governance framework for UCL's global partnerships that was in the process of being drafted for approval by UCL Council would delineate the different types of partnerships that were proposed in the GES. It was expected that joint degree programmes would feature as part of some of UCL's institutional and anchor partnerships.
- 39.6 Some members of RDC argued that the use of metaphorical terms such as 'current funding' and 'sea funding' in the GES was obfuscatory as the meanings of these terms had not been made clear.
- 39.7 RDC noted its interest in research student international mobility and encouraged OfIA to actively consider this as part of its ongoing work in the area of student mobility. It was noted that the Student Records office in SRS already had in place a process for recording and monitoring PGR student study leave activity, and that information gleaned from this could help towards the collection of data on PGR student mobility.

RESOLVED:

- 39.8 OfIA colleagues would liaise with the Student Records Office as appropriate and report back to a future meeting of RDC on progress.

ACTION: Chief of Staff to the Vice-Provost (International)

40 SUSPENSIONS OF REGULATIONS FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH STUDENTS

Received:

- 40.1 At RDC 3-09 (14-15), the anonymised report on suspension of regulations for PGR Students.

41 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

41A Proposed deadline for departmental nominations for GRS/ORS scholarships

Reported:

41A.1 One member of RDC drew attention to the proposal by SRS to bring forward the deadline for departmental nominations for GRS/ORS scholarships by two weeks, to 15 January 2016, noting that this would have consequences for application deadlines and interview schedules in a number of departments in the faculties of Arts and Humanities, Laws and Social and Historical Sciences, along with possible implications for student recruitment. Other members of RDC noted, however, that the proposed brought-forward deadline would better suit their own faculties as it would enable them to be quicker off the mark in terms of selecting students.

41A.2 It was understood that the proposed brought-forward deadline was still subject to confirmation, but that only three UCL departments had to date raised concerns about this. In light of this, FGTs were encouraged to solicit departments that had any specific concerns to relay these directly to Student Funding in SRS.

ACTION: Faculty Graduate Tutors

42 DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

Noted:

42.1 Future meetings of RDC in 2015-16 were scheduled as follows:

Wednesday 14 October 2015	10.00-12.30	Room tbc
Wednesday 9 March 2016	10.00-12.30	Room tbc
Wednesday 8 June 2016	10.00-12.30	Room tbc

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