



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

21 March 2011

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Professor David Bogle (*Chair*)
Mr David Ashton
Dr Wendy Brown
Professor Chris Danpure
Professor Alison Diduck
Professor Vince Emery
Dr Caroline Essex
Professor Mike Ewing
Mr Marco Federighi
Professor Asterios Gavrilidis
Professor Tony Harker
Ms Anne Macdonald
Mr Alex Nesbitt
Dr Ruth Siddall
Dr Dave Spratt
Professor Philip Steadman

In attendance: Bella Malins, Head of Outreach and Admissions, Registry, (*for Minute 17*), Dr Vivek Mudera, Division of Surgery and Interventional Sciences, (*for Minute 16*), Helen Notter, Student Records Manager and Karen Wishart (RDC Secretary)

Apologies for absence were received from: Dr Stephanie Bird, Dr Donna Brown, Dr Tom Gretton, Dr Sally Leever, Mr Dante Micheaux and Dr Joy Sleeman

Key to abbreviations:

DGT	Departmental Graduate Tutor
FGT	Faculty Graduate Tutor
GEESC	Graduate Education Executive Sub-Committee
HoD	Head of Department
PIQ	Programme Institution Questionnaire
PMASG	Programme and Module Approval Sub-Group
QA	Quality Assurance
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
SERAus	School of Energy and Resources, Australia

13 **RDC MEMBERSHIP 2010-11**

Noted

- 13.1 The elected members for Research Degrees Committee were:
- Dr Wendy Brown (Department of Chemistry)
 - Professor Asterios Gavriilidis (Department of Chemical Engineering)
 - Dr Joy Sleeman (Slade School of Fine Art)
- 13.2 The Chair welcomed the elected members to their first meeting.

14 **MINUTES**

Approved

- 14.1 The Minutes of the meeting of Research Degrees Committee held on 18 November 2010 [*RDC Minutes 1-12, 2010-11*], issued previously, were confirmed by RDC and signed by the Chair.

15 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

15A **Faculty Approval of Supervisors**

[*RDC Minute 3A, 18 November 2010*]

Noted

- 15A.1 In June 2009 the Graduate School requested Faculties to provide lists of approved supervisors to GEESC. It was also requested, 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.
- 15A.2 At previous meetings of GEESC and RDC reports had been received from Faculties describing their processes for the approval of research degree supervisors. Information on the supervisor approval process in the Faculties of Engineering Sciences and Social and Historical Sciences was awaited, along with copies of any documentation.

Received

- 15A.3 An oral report by **Marco Federighi**, FGT, on the supervisor approval process in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences.

Reported

- 15A.4 The FGT received CVs from new staff joining the Faculty and where necessary set up a meeting with them to discuss their training needs; new staff who previously worked in industry were usually required to undertake the new supervisors course run by the Graduate School. The FGT also approved supervisors based at SERAus in Adelaide. The FGT met with three of the four members of staff at SERAus and discussed with them in detail the UCL requirements and processes relevant to MPhil/PhD awards.

Discussion

- 15A.5 The Chair noted that the UCL overseas institutions which awarded UCL degrees, such as SERAus and the new centre in Qatar (UCL-Q), were required to follow UCL quality assurance processes. Although Heads of international campuses would report direct to the VP (Academic and International) their research students would continue to belong to Faculties and they would be part of the QA processes of the designated Faculty (SERAus in Engineering Sciences and UCL-Q in Social and Historical Sciences). Graduate students at these overseas institutions must also use the Graduate School Research Student Log.
- 15A.6 In future, it was expected that when staff had been approved as MPhil/PhD supervisors it would be recorded by HR in their staff record and also in Portico. It was noted that if a member of staff had been approved as a PhD supervisor they were also eligible to supervise MRes level projects. However, if a member of staff was approved as a supervisor of MRes projects it did not necessarily allow them to supervise PhD students, this required further approval by the FGT.
- 15A.7 It was confirmed that when candidates were accepted to study for an MPhil/PhD degree the Department was not required to name the prospective student's supervisor, and the offer letter does not include this information, with the exception of candidates applying to some programmes at the Faculty of the Built Environment. It was noted that in some instances the supervisor may not be known at the time of acceptance or may be subject to change; therefore it might not be helpful to require supervisors to be identified at the application/acceptance stage.
- 15A.8 The FGT for Social and Historical Sciences was unable to attend the meeting and would be requested to provide a written report in advance of the next meeting and to make an oral report to RDC on the supervisor approval process within the Faculty.

15B Criteria and process for approval of MRes supervisors
[RDC Minute 7, 18 November 2010]

Noted

- 15B.1 At its last meeting RDC approved the decision that MRes project supervisors should be approved by Faculty Graduate Tutors following the same procedure as that for doctoral degree supervisors. Following the meeting an email message was sent to Faculty Graduate Tutors and Faculty Administrators to inform them of this decision.

16 **REPORT FROM PMASG ON PROPOSALS FOR NEW MRES AND DOCTORATE PROGRAMMES**

[Dr Vivek Mudera, Division of Surgical and Interventional Sciences, Faculty of Biomedical Sciences attended for this item]

Noted

- 16.1 The Programme and Module Approval Sub-Group of Education Committee (PMASG) had received PIQs for the following programmes: MRes Linguistics and Doctorates in Orthopaedics (Doc Orth) and Dentistry (DDent). The DDent met all the requirements for a post graduate research degree and had been approved by PMASG. Summary reports were provided for the MRes and Doc Orth.

Received

- 16.2 An oral report by the Chair of PMASG on the MRes Linguistics programme.
At APPENDIX RDC 2/14 (10-11) the PIQ for the Doctorate in Orthopaedics.

Reported

- 16.3 The RDC Chair confirmed that for new MRes programmes RDC would only consider the research element of the programmes and would be advised by PMASG for the taught components. The research component would be reviewed to ensure that it met the required minimum of 105 credits and that the programme conformed to the Code of Practice for Research Degrees and all QA processes. It was noted that PMASG reviewed PIQs for all new programmes and would report to RDC any issues for further consideration relating to MRes or Doctoral level programmes.
- 16.4 The Chair of PMASG noted that the research component of the MRes Linguistics had been queried with the programme director, but it had subsequently been confirmed that the research component did comply with UCL norms and would be equivalent to 105 credits.
- 16.5 Dr Mudera noted that the Doctorate in Orthopaedics (Doc Orth) would comprise a taught element and two projects. The first project would reflect the advanced elements of clinical practice carried out by the students and would be assessed by a 20,000-40,000 word dissertation. The second project would be an original research project of 50,000 words which would be examined in the same way as a PhD thesis, and would be subject to a viva voce examination.
- 16.6 Dr Mudera confirmed that the Doc Orth would only be available to practising surgeons. He noted that student numbers were small, 2-3 each year, and that funding arrangements had been made with the appropriate NHS Trust. This new programme complemented the NHS desire to integrate clinical practice, research and education aiming to speed the development of improvements in patient care.

Discussion

- 16.7 The Chair noted that students on the Doc Orth should use the Graduate School Research Student Log and should be made aware of the training and facilities available for graduate students at UCL.
- 16.8 At a general level, the Chair noted that the PIQ form did not include specific questions relevant to postgraduate research degrees. He suggested that it would be useful to include a section on the PIQ form on the supervision process for taught doctorates and confirmation that these complied with the UCL Code of Practice for Research Degrees. The Director of Student Services advised that a new on-line PIQ form had been introduced which required more details about the research element for taught doctorate and MRes programmes with the aim to maintain consistency among these types of programmes.
- [Action: RDC Chair to review PIQ]**

RESOLVED

- 16.9 That RDC recommends to AC the approval of the Doc Orth.
- [Action: RDC Secretary]**

17 MPHIL/PHD APPLICATIONS 2010-11

[Bella Malins, Head of Outreach and Admissions, Registry, attended for this item]

Received

- 17.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/15 (10-11) a report from the Registry on MPhil/PhD and MRes applications and admissions in session 2010-11 and 2011-2012.
- 17.2 An oral report by **Bella Malins**, Head of Outreach and Admissions, Registry.

Reported

- 17.3 Reports on student applications and admissions were previously considered by the Committee for the Recruitment of Students which was disestablished last session. Therefore reports regarding MRes and MPhil/PhD applications would now be considered by RDC, as appropriate.
- 17.4 It was noted that:
- there was an increase in MRes and MPhil/PhD applications compared to the same period last year and a subsequent increase in offers;
 - there was a lower level of acceptances than at the same period last year but it was noted that this might have been due to problems with the on-line application system at the end of last year;
 - the largest drop in acceptances was in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities;
 - there was a drop in applications and offers in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences;
 - the largest increase in acceptances was in the Faculty of the Built Environment;
 - the numbers quoted for the Faculty of Biomedical Sciences were not accurate because applications for some programmes were managed at Faculty level and did not come via the UCL Registry.

Discussion

- 17.5 The FGT from the Built Environment attributed the increase in acceptances to the economic recession - with less jobs available more people were encouraged to study. The FGT in Engineering Sciences noted that the Departments within his Faculty were optimistic about student recruitment. It was noted that the tables provided at Appendix RDC 2/15 were a snapshot and might not reflect the actual student numbers enrolling in September 2011. The application data available in April/May would provide a more accurate picture of student recruitment for programmes starting in September 2011.
- 17.6 It was agreed that it would be useful for RDC to receive an updated report on the number of applications received and offers made. Bella Malins would produce a further report for the RDC meeting on 14 June 2011.
- 17.7 It was noted that 'Visiting Research' students, previously called 'Affiliate Research Students' were not always accepted because some candidates had not identified academics they wished to work with and no appropriate supervisors were available. It was noted that some students applying to come to UCL through this mechanism were funded by overseas governments who would only provide funding for 12 months. Therefore they could not complete a PhD but could undertake a useful component of their research project in 12 months if an appropriate supervisor was available at UCL.
- 17.8 The Chair noted that RDC should consider reports on applications as a standing item on the agenda for RDC meetings in February/March and May/June each year.

18 PHD SUBMISSION AND COMPLETION RATES

Received

- 18.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/16 (10-11) a report from Student Data Services on PhD submission rates.
- 18.2 An oral report by the **Chair**.

Reported

- 18.3 The Chair noted that, with the exception of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, there was a small decline in the number of full-time PhD students submitting their PhD theses on time, contrary to the trend in recent years. It is important for UCL as a whole to improve its submission rates and it was noted that these were reviewed externally by Research Councils and by HEFCE. FGTs were urged to encourage departments to try to improve submission rates. The Chair noted that FGTs could use the Portico research student record reports to monitor PhD submission rates by Department as well as using the Research Student Log. It was suggested that with the removal of 'post completing research student' status (see Minute 26) the situation should improve.
- 18.4 The tables at Appendix 16 showed that full time students and students aged up to 24 years were more likely to submit their theses within the prescribed time than part-time students aged over 24.

Discussion

- 18.5 The FGTs noted that it would be helpful to be able to send the submission data to Deans of Faculties and Heads of Departments for information and discussion. The Graduate School Administrator would send the Excel spreadsheets to FGTs, HoDs and DGTs.

[Action: Graduate School Administrator]

19 **STATISTICS FOR UPGRADE FROM MPhil TO PHD**

Received

- 19.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/17 (10-11) a table to show the average number of months to upgrade from MPhil to PhD by Faculty, for students who upgraded in the academic year 2009-10, irrespective of start date. The report was produced by the Graduate School using data from Portico.

- 19.2 An oral report by the **Chair**.

Reported

- 19.3 The Chair suggested that it would be helpful to receive upgrade data annually to be considered by RDC. It was noted that the usual upgrade period from MPhil to PhD was 12-18 months after the start date, for part-time students the upgrade period was 20-30 months. It was noted that Registry was not necessarily informed immediately upgrade had been approved, therefore there might be a delay in this information being recorded on Portico. It was also not recorded whether the student had been upgraded at the first or second attempt. It was suggested that rather than monitoring the average time to upgrade, it might be more useful to look at the data in terms of the median time to upgrade. It was suggested that it might be helpful to correlate the upgrade data with the submission data, and also data on the number of students referred - this would need to be discussed with Student Data Services. It was noted that the date used should be the actual upgrade date rather than the date of notification by Departments to the Registry.

[Action: The Chair to discuss the reporting of upgrade data with Gary Smith]

Discussion

- 19.4 The FGT for the Bartlett noted that it had improved its upgrade procedure which was managed at Faculty level. The Graduate Tutor from the Department of Chemistry noted that its upgrade procedure was managed centrally by the Department and all students with the same start date were examined for upgrade during the same 2-3 day period, this year, out of 30 students, 5 students had been referred. The referral process varied on a case by case basis, in some instances students were required to act within a specified time frame, in other circumstances the referral requirements were agreed with the student. Dr Wendy Brown agreed to write a short note to describe the Department's process for circulation to RDC members.

[Action: Dr Wendy Brown]

- 19.5 Where students were not upgraded at the first attempt, it was suggested that it would be preferable to agree with the student the further requirements necessary for the second attempt, to avoid the potential for student grievances to be made with reference to unfair demands.

20 **INDUCTION FOR TAUGHT DEGREE GRADUATE STUDENTS**

Received

- 20.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/18 (10-11) a report from the Graduate School on the current induction arrangements for graduate students on taught degree programmes.

Discussion

- 20.2 The Chair noted that in the last three years there had been an increase in taught postgraduate student numbers from around 4,000 to 6,500 if all were to attend this would require around twelve separate induction sessions which would be difficult for the Graduate School to manage.
- 20.3 It was suggested that it might be possible for the induction to be made available on-line but there was uncertainty about whether students would engage with this material on the website. It was noted that induction sessions for students were important because they provided information about central UCL services such as libraries, computing facilities, the UCL and University of London Unions and the Careers Service. Induction arrangements were also scrutinised by external bodies such as the Quality Assurance Agency.
- 20.4 It was suggested that the advantage to running UCL wide inductions was that students felt part of a multi-faculty university and were provided with an opportunity to meet students from other Faculties. There was a query regarding the separate induction sessions for overseas student and whether there was too much overlap with other induction sessions.
- 20.5 There was no decision made regarding the future of induction arrangements but FGTs were requested to give this further consideration.

[Action: FGTs]

21 **THREE MINUTE THESIS COMPETITION**

Noted

- 21.1 A 'Three Minute Thesis Competition' was described as an 'exercise in developing academic and research communication skills'. Its aim was for research students to disseminate their work to a wider audience. The UCL Public Engagement Unit had confirmed that it would be interested in considering proposals to be involved in such a competition, provided that real engagement with the public was included. The competition could be run by Faculties.

Discussion

- 21.2 It was suggested that the 'Three Minute Thesis Competition' provided research students the opportunity to present a brief overview of their work and explain what they were doing, how they were doing it and its relevance to the world in a way that would be accessible to a non-specialist audience. The FGTs in Life Sciences and Engineering Sciences would encourage their Faculties to trial such a competition.

[Action: Professor Chris Danpure and Marco Federighi]

22 **GRADUATE SCHOOL ANNUAL REPORT 2009-10**

Received

- 22.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/19 (10-11) the Graduate School Annual Report to Academic Board and Council. The report was also available on the Graduate School Website at <http://www.grad.ucl.ac.uk/annreport/>.

23 **GRADUATE SCHOOL RESEARCH STUDENT SURVEY**

Noted

- 23.1 A research student survey was completed by the Graduate School in July 2010. The results of the survey were available on the Graduate School website at <http://www.grad.ucl.ac.uk/survey/>
- 23.2 The Chair noted that UCL did not currently participate in the Higher Education Academy's Postgraduate Experience Surveys but the Graduate School carried out its own surveys. The latest Graduate School survey noted that 18.3% of the registered research student population completed the survey, which aimed to capture levels of satisfaction regarding the following aspects of the research student experience at UCL: admissions, induction, the Graduate School, research, finances, skills development, the research student log, libraries, computing, the Student Union, the Careers Service and ethics.
- 23.3 The survey showed that there was a very positive view of the research environment, facilities and the research student experience - 92% reported to be very satisfied or satisfied with their supervisor. However the survey reported the following:
- 8% of students received unsatisfactory supervision;
 - 38% were not aware of the Graduate School's Code of Practice for Research Degree Students;
 - 23% did not know their Departmental Graduate Tutor;
 - 50% were not encouraged to use the Research Student Log.

24 **WELLCOME TRUST LONDON PAIN CONSORTIUM RESEARCH DEGREE PROGRAMME**

Received

- 24.1 At APPENDIX RDC 2/20 (10-11) a report from the External Advisory Board of the Wellcome Trust's London Pain Consortium four year research degree programme. The report noted how co-operation, communication and collaboration had enhanced the student experience on the programme and the report was circulated as an example of good practice.

25 **THESES INCORPORATING DOCUMENTARY FILMS**

Noted

- 25.1 At its meeting on 23 February 2010, GEESC approved the inclusion of documentary films as part of a PhD thesis. It was agreed that Professor Stephen Hart, Vice Head of the Graduate School, Arts and Humanities, Laws, Social and Historical Sciences would produce guidelines for students wishing to include a documentary film. The Guidelines were attached for information at [APPENDIX RDC 2/21 \(10-11\)](#).

26 **REMOVAL OF POST COMPLETING RESEARCH STATUS (CRS)**

Received

- 26.1 An oral report by Helen Notter, Student Records Manager, on the impact of the removal of Post CRS status.

Reported

- 26.2 There had been very few issues raised following the removal of Post CRS status. The only comment from students was that they could no longer access on-line journals remotely. It was reported that:
- 334 student records had been closed;
 - 10 students had re-enrolled as fee paying students;
 - 94 students had requested approval to submit their theses late as non-registered students;
 - records had been closed for students whom it had not been possible to contact.

Discussion

- 26.3 The Chair noted that it was important to try to contact students who had lost touch with their supervisors/Departments. It was also noted that records should be kept of attempts made to contact students. The Director of Student Services noted that in future Portico would include the capability to record that a plan of action to contact students had been received.

[Action: David Ashton to liaise with the Chair on developments in Portico]

27 **REPORTING BY RESEARCH DEGREE EXAMINERS**

Reported

- 27.1 Helen Notter noted that the reporting process for research degree examiners had been simplified and that the examiners' joint report form and summary report form had been combined into one report. The forms were available on the Registry web pages at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/registry/examiners> and the information sent to examiners had been amended. FGTs were requested to circulate this information to departmental colleagues.

[Action: FGTs]

28 ENGAGEMENT MONITORING

Reported

- 28.1 The Director of Student Services reported that engagement monitoring of all students was important for the following reasons:
- pastoral and duty of care;
 - meeting the requirements of the UK Border Agency for UCL as a highly trusted sponsor, where applicable;
 - meeting the requirements of the Code of Practice;
 - obligations to sponsors, fee payers;
 - ensuring appropriate access;
 - meeting regulatory requirements such as the period of registration in order to be allowed to enter examinations;
 - insurance purposes;
 - collection of tuition fees;
 - statistical returns, such as to Government agencies.
- 28.2 In order to ensure that UCL complied with the requirements, six points of engagement had been set. The first point of contact was enrolment or re-enrolment. The remaining five points of engagement could be set by the host department and could include the following:
- attendance at a departmental induction event;
 - a meeting between supervisor and research student (the Research Student Log could be used to note this);
 - attendance at lectures, seminars, laboratory sessions or any teaching sessions;
 - submission of work;
 - email contact with supervisor;
 - response to a departmental circular.
- 28.3 It was noted that some, but not all, points of contact could be by electronic means. Departments were required to keep an audit trail of their engagement monitoring activities and a system had been developed in Portico to assist with the monitoring of students.

Discussion

- 28.4 The Director of Student Services was concerned that some Faculties and Departments did not realise the importance of keeping records of student engagement. FGTs were requested to encourage departments to ensure that their Portico records of engagement monitoring were kept up to date and to notify the Director of Student Services if particular problems had been had been encountered which prevented the Portico records being updated.
- [Action: FGTs]**

29 GRADUATE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

Reported

- 29.1 The Chair reported that Anne Macdonald, the Graduate School Administrator, was retiring at the end of May 2011. He expressed his immense gratitude for her outstanding service to UCL. He noted that she would be greatly missed by both staff and students.

30 **NEXT MEETING**

Noted

- 30.1 The next meeting of RDC was scheduled for **Tuesday 14th June at 10am** in the **South Wing Council Room** (not Wednesday 25th May at 10am as previously circulated).