



Research Degrees Committee

Friday 24 May 2024, 2:00pm

Confirmed Minutes

Present Members:

Professor David Bogle (Chair); Dr Josephine Barnes; Professor Andrew Bevan; David Blundred; Professor Annie Britton; Professor Paul Dodds; Dr Andrew Flinn; Yasmin Garcia Sterling, Professor Adam Gibson; Dr Nicholas Grindle; Elizabeth Halton; Professor Jane Holder; Professor Jane Perryman; Dr Benet Salway; Issy Smith; Paula Speller; Professor David Spratt; Dr Andrew Stoker; Professor Stan Zochowski.

Apologies:

Karen Barnard
Professor Andrew Flinn
Professor Jasmina Jovanovic
Professor Jill Norman

In attendance:

Natalie Connor – Secretary to the Committee
Professor Richard Freeman, IOE
Zoe Harrison, Casework Manager (Minute 27)
Sarah Henderson – Senior Compliance Officer (Minute 31)
Holly Rose – Doctoral School Support Officer

Part I: Preliminary Business

24. Minutes (3-01)

24.1. Research Degrees Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 5 March 2024.

25. Matters Arising

25.1. Arising from Minute 17.1, 5 March 2024 concerning RDC's request that the Chair explored avenues for a cross University discussion on PhD research student modes of attendance, the Committee was updated that a brief discussion had taken place on this at Academic Committee, with further

discussions taking place in due course ahead of the matter being raised at Academic Board.

- 25.2. Arising from Minute 19.1, 4 March 2024, the Committee was advised that a full update in relation to the Admissions Transformation Programme was included in agenda item 24, paper number (3-09) . This included the anticipated scheduling of the revised admissions transformation programme going live in September 2024, the Committee noted that it would initially offer the same functionality as the existing UCL Select system.

26. Chair's Business

In recognition of his last meeting chairing the Research Degrees Committee, David Bogle shared his reflections on the progress made within the doctoral school and thanked Committee members for their commitment to creating a culture of innovation and critical thinkers among UCL's Post Graduate community.

Part II: Strategic Items for Discussion

27. Student Complaints Annual Report (3-02)

- 27.1. Zoe Harrison, Casework Manager, introduced the paper that set out information on the number of PGR student academic appeals received in the calendar year 2023 as well as detailing developments in the UCL Students' Academic Appeals Procedures. The Committee was advised that PGR Academic Appeals continued to decline, with only 4 academic appeals in 2023, 3 of which were not upheld, one remained in progress. It was noted that in contrast there had been a significant increase in UG and PGT student appeals.

- 27.2. The Committee welcomed the decline in PGR academic appeals, however felt that in order for the Committee to effectively scrutinise the data, it would be helpful for the next report to the Committee to include a clear breakdown of complaints and appeals to enable the Committee to identify emerging trends and/or areas of concern.

ACTION: Zoe Harrison to feedback RDC's comments to the Head of Casework ahead of the next Committee meeting.

- 27.3. Research Degrees Committee noted the PGR Academic Appeals Annual Report 2023.

28. Changes to PGR Regulations (3-03)

- 28.1. Elizabeth Halton, Director, Doctoral School, updated the Committee on the work of the Regulations Rewrite Working Group, this included a summary of the main pieces of work completed as well as a plan for future workstreams and a workflow of approval for large scale regulation changes. Committee members were asked to share this information within their faculties to seek feedback.
- 28.2. The Committee welcomed the report and proceeded to highlight the following key points -
 - a. It would be beneficial to see financial considerations included in the next iteration, particularly to support the discussion with Deans on workflow and regulation changes.
 - b. It was important that supporting papers in relation to big regulatory changes were clear about the anticipated benefits.
 - c. Advised that the terms of reference were checked against any decisions taken that required final sign off to ensure they had followed the correct governance pathway.
 - d. It was necessary to remain cognizant of the expectations of workflow timeframes to ensure that regulatory changes could be approved in time to go live in the next academic session.
- 28.3. The Research Degrees Committee noted the update provided.

29. MPhil/PhD Upgrade and Submissions Data (3-04)

- 29.1. David Bogle, Chair introduced the paper on behalf of the Head of Student Data, that provided the annual update on the submission rates of MPhil/PhD students and Specialist Doctorate students and upgrade rates of MPhil/PhD students. In the ensuing discussion the Committee noted the generally stable data and highlighted the following key points –
 - a. There was lack of parity between submissions and upgrade rates across different faculties. Committee members were encouraged to consider what was in places among their faculties to improve this.
 - b. The Committee queried how the differing culture across departments and faculties affected the inconsistencies of submission and upgrade rates, particularly in terms of study leave and extensions granted and how this subsequently impacted the data.
 - c. The Committee acknowledged that with 4 year programmes becoming the norm, students were faced with increased funding issues that impacted general student wellbeing and therefore the likelihood of extensions being required.
 - d. The Committee felt it would be helpful to see benchmarking against other similar HE institutions.

29.2. The Research Degrees Committee was advised that any further queries could be sent to Gary Smith, Head of Student Data.

29.3. The Research Degrees Committee noted the update provided.

30. FGT Joint Examiners Report (3-05)

30.1. David Bogle, Chair, introduced the paper that provided the Committee with a summary of the issues raised in each faculty's Examiners ' Joint Report.

30.2. The Committee was advised that a written report would be provided from Dr Andrew Flinn in relation to Arts & Humanities.

30.3. The report was well received by the Committee, as they noted the positive feedback regarding UCL examiners' professionalism, the reduced concern in relation to statistics and the absence of any contentious issues raised.

30.4. The Research Degrees Committee noted the paper.

31. OfS Risk Register Update (3-06)

31.1. Sarah Henderson, Senior Compliance Officer, introduced the paper that provided the committee with an update on the OfS conditions of registration mapping document and associated risk register. The Committee highlighted the following points of discussion –

- a. Although the risk assessment for the conditions listed had a low likelihood of being realised, it was recognised that if any came to fruition there would be significant impacts.
- b. The Committee recognised that there were robust procedures in place to mitigate the identified risks, however it was felt that quality monitoring and assurance reporting could be improved.
- c. The Committee felt that the emerging risks around AI should feature on the risk register.

31.2. The Research Degrees Committee noted the report.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

32. Anonymised Suspension of Regulations Report (3-07)

32.1. Research Degrees Committee noted the report.

33. New and Amended Programmes and Qualifications Approved by RDC Chair's Action Report (3-08)

33.1. Research Degrees Committee noted the report.

34. Confidential: MR-es MPhil-PhD Application and Admissions Update (3-09)

34.1. Research Degrees Committee noted the report.

35. RDC Draft Annual Report 22/23 (3-10)

35.1. Research Degrees Committee approved the report.

36. Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles (3-11)

36.1. Research Degrees Committee noted the report.

Natalie Connor, Secretary to the Research Degrees Committee
May 2024