

Research Degrees Committee

28 October 2021

Confirmed Minutes

Present Members: Professor David Bogle (Chair); Dr Helen Matthews; Elizabeth Halton; Dr Sam Smidt; Helen Notter; Professor Simon Banks; Naheem Yaqub, Professor Jasmina Jovanovic; Dr Ruth Siddall; Dr Alan Ingram; Professor Jill Norman; Dr Andrew Stoker; Professor Alex Mills; Dr Mark Newman; Professor Tania Monteiro; Dr Richard Bucknall; Dr Josephine Barnes; Dr Yasminah Beebeejaun; Dr Richard Freeman; and Noora Almarri (from 12.00pm).

Apologies for absence: Dr Jane Perryman (represented by Dr Richard Freeman)

Attendees: Anniina Wikman (secretary)

Part I: Preliminary Business

1 Terms of Reference, Membership and Constitution 2021-22

- 1.1 The Chair confirmed that RDC would continue to meet virtually, but one of the meetings this Academic Year could be held in person if the members so wished.
- 1.2 It was noted that RDC will continue to report to Academic Committee.
- 1.3 It was noted that RDC constitution had not changed even though there had been an external review of the UCL committee structure last academic year.
- 1.4 It was noted that Dr Efrosyni Konstantinou had stepped down from RDC prior to this meeting. It had been confirmed that a new Academic Board representative would be elected during Academic Board's usual committee representative elections in the spring.
- 1.5 **Approved** – the Terms of Reference, Membership and Constitution 2021-22.

2 Minutes of the Last Meeting

- 2.1 **Approved** - the minutes of the meeting held on 16th June 2021.

3 Matters Arising from the Minutes

- 3.1 There were no matters arising from the minutes of the meeting held on 16th June 2021.

4 Chair's Business

- 4.1 The Chair updated RDC on the relationship between RDC and the Research, Innovation and Global Engagement Committee (RIGEC). While RDC had no budgetary responsibility it could endorse bids for resources, and this would be done through submitting the relevant minutes to RIGEC. The Chair of RDC would also discuss any such matters directly with the Chair of RIGEC as RIGEC reported to the new University Management Committee that was responsible overseeing the allocation of resources across UCL.
- 4.2 The Doctoral School noted that Phase 2b of allocating the final UKRI funding to support students in the pandemic was still ongoing. Standard stream of Phase 2b had been run and results were to be announced imminently. The project was moving to Phase 3 which was at programme-level. Programme Directors would be able to answer any questions related to Phase 3.
- 4.3 It was noted that the actions related to the recent Barriers to Doctoral Education report were ongoing. The latest update on progress with the actions would be circulated to RDC members after the meeting.
- 4.4 The Chair noted that the Provost's consultation on the new UCL strategy was ongoing and issues had been raised regarding early career researchers. The Chair had sent a response to the consultation on behalf of the Doctoral School and the response would be circulated to RDC members after the meeting.
- 4.5 The Chair had started his annual meetings with Faculties and discussion topics this year were likely to include building cohorts, space and EDI. The inclusion of PGR supervision in workload management systems was also relevant.

- 4.6 Students concerned about guidance provided by different supervisors on self-plagiarism had contacted the Doctoral School. The issue was on how the definition of self-plagiarism was interpreted by different supervisors. It was noted that clearer guidance on self-plagiarism was under development and would be circulated for comment by e-mail in the short term. It was noted that guidance on self-plagiarism was an ongoing issue but had not been discussed at institutional level before.

Part II: Matters for Discussion

5 Annual Report on Proceedings of Faculty Research Degree Committees in 2020-21

- 5.1 Received – the paper at RDC 1-02 (21-22). The Secretary to RDC introduced the item, which summarised the main discussion items at Faculty Research Degree Committees during 2020-21.
- 5.2 RDC discussed the format of the annual report, and it was agreed that the summary table was helpful but additional short commentary on any outliers should also be included for context. It was also agreed that the Terms of Reference of FRDCs would need to be reviewed and updated for 2022-23.
- 5.3 RDC had a discussion on the social events held for PGR students across different Faculties as well as the buddying schemes ran by some Faculties. Faculties were encouraged to share good practice with each other on these areas.
- 5.4 **Approved** – the paper at RDC 1-02 (21-22).

6 New Double Research Degree with Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

- 6.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-03 (21-22). The Senior Policy Adviser (Academic Partnerships) and the FGT for Engineering Sciences introduced the item which was a summary of UCL's first double PhD degree for approval by RDC on recommendation of the RDC sub-group for academic partnerships.
- 6.2 The RDC discussed the process of approval of double and joint PhDs and noted that to ensure success of the proposal, backing from the whole

Department for the programme was necessary. Developing joint and double PhDs required significant effort as, in addition to designing the programme itself, all supporting student administration processes of both institutions also needed to be looked at and the institutions had to agree how they would be managed jointly.

- 6.3 RDC discussed the requirement for this double PhD to have an article submitted for publication in a scientific journal before taking the thesis examination. The FGT for Engineering Sciences noted that this had been discussed extensively with PUC and it was a compromise between each institution's standard requirements as PUC's standard regulations stipulated that students needed to have had an article published before examination.
- 6.4 **Approved** – the double research degree proposal at RDC 1-03 (21-22).

7 Discussion paper: Upgrade requirements

- 7.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-04 (21-22). The Deputy Director (Doctoral School) introduced the paper which set out proposed updates to the upgrade requirements.
- 7.2 It was noted that the proposed upgrade requirements would not be included in the regulations but would be considered as guidance. The proposed updates aimed to address feedback received from Faculty Research Degree Committees.
- 7.3 RDC discussed the following main points:
- 7.3.1 The roles of the Department Graduate Tutor (DGT) and principal and subsidiary supervisor needed clarity, especially the role of the DGT in the upgrade examination process.
 - 7.3.2 Faculties had different views on when the upgrade process should take place. It was agreed that the purpose of the upgrade process should be clearly articulated in the guidance for use across the institution as the timing of the upgrade process was linked to its purpose. If the purpose of the upgrade was to not assess the research per se but the student's potential and ability to complete their research project, the timing of the upgrade was not dependent on the stage of the student's research.

- 7.3.3 The guidance related to considering students' mental health in the upgrade process needed to be reviewed to ensure it was clear what this section referred to.
- 7.4 RDC noted that as the upgrade requirements were guidance as opposed to regulations, they could be published and adopted as soon as they were approved by RDC.
- 7.5 It was agreed that an extraordinary meeting of RDC would be scheduled in early December to focus exclusively on the upgrade requirements. Members of RDC should collate comments from within their Faculties and send comments to the Deputy Director (Doctoral School) prior to the extraordinary meeting.

8 International Scholar Awards for Doctoral Training (ISAD) Tuition Fee Support: 2021-22 Summary

- 8.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-05 (21-22). The Deputy Director (Doctoral School) introduced the paper which summarised the ISAD tuition fee support provided to eligible students in the 2021-22 academic year.
- 8.2 RDC noted that the ISAD scheme had been set up to cover the gap between home and international tuition fees this year due to changes in the UK regulatory environment because of Brexit and new UKRI policy.
- 8.3 RDC further noted that the UCL Student Funding team was making the case for ISAD to continue beyond this year and subsequently merging the Overseas Research Scholarship (ORS) budget with the Graduate Research Scholarship (GRS), terminating the ORS. This would mean that the GRS would continue to be open to home and international students, with international students who had funding from external sources up to the home student fee cap eligible for support from ISAD. The Student Funding team's proposal paper would be circulated to RDC after the meeting for comment.
- 8.4 RDC noted that all the allocations had not been used as UKRI reviewed applications blindly and not based on nationality so the exact number of international and home students receiving external funding was not known in advance.

- 8.5 RDC agreed to recommend the continuation of the ISAD scheme going forward.

9 Updated CRS and Fee Reduction Regulations

- 9.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-06 (21-22). The Deputy Director (Doctoral School) introduced the item which was a draft for RDC to comment on regarding Completing Research Status (CRS) and the fee reduction regulations.
- 9.2 RDC noted that the updates to the regulations were aimed to address confusion about how students' transfer to CRS took place and what the related tuition fee arrangements were.
- 9.3 RDC discussed the following main points:
- 9.3.1 Whilst it was recognised that regulations should not be written based on funding bodies' approach, it was agreed that submitting the thesis should always be possible within the advertised programme length, for example for EDI reasons.
 - 9.3.2 Moving to a unified approach to research degree length (4 years) could be an issue for some disciplines. However, the regulations would make it clear that submission early would be possible which should mitigate any issues.
 - 9.3.3 Any new regulations would be implemented from October 2022 for new students only.
- 9.4 Members of RDC were invited to send comments to the Deputy Director (Doctoral School), who would bring back an updated paper to the March meeting of RDC.

Part III: Other Business for Approval or Information

10 Research Degrees Committee – Annual Report to Academic Committee

- 10.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-07 (21-22).
- 10.2 **Approved** – the paper at RDC 1-07 (21-22).

11 MRes-MPhil-PhD Application and Admissions Update

- 11.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-08 (21-22).

12 Anonymised Suspension of Regulations Report (since November 2020)

12.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-09 (21-22).

**13 New and Amended Programmes and Qualifications Approved by RDC
Chair's Action**

13.1 Received - the paper at RDC 1-10 (21-22).

**14 Confirmed minutes of the Academic Partnerships Review Group for
Joint and Double Research Degrees**

14.1 Received – the papers at RDC 1-11 (21-22).

Anniina Wikman

Secretary to RDC

Senior Policy Advisor (Academic Partnerships)

Academic Services

22 November 2021