



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 16 October 2013

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Present:

Professor David Bogle (Chair); Mr David Ashton; Dr Stephanie Bird (vice Professor Claire Warwick); Dr Steven Bloch; Dr Donna Brown; Mr Ben Colvill; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Caroline Essex; Professor Mike Ewing; Mr Marco Federighi; Dr Sally Leever; Dr Stephen Marshall; Ms Helen Notter; Dr Benet Salway; Dr Joy Sleeman; Dr Dave Spratt; Professor Kaila Srail; Mr Ben Towse.

In attendance: Mr Gary Hawes (Secretary); Mr Gary Smith (for Minute 10)

Faculty Graduate Tutors:
Laws
Population Health Sciences

Dr Douglas Guilfoyle
Dr Andrew Stoker

One Vice-Head of the Graduate School, nominated by the Head of the Graduate School

- Professor Alison Diduck

- 1.3 Owing to the fact that it had been confirmed that Dr Joy Sleeman had not yet completed her current six-year term of service on AB, she had been reinstated to the Elected constituency of RDC, from the Co-opted constituency, as one of the three academic staff members of RDC elected by and from among the professorial and non-professorial academic staff members of AB.
- 1.4 With the establishment with effect from 2013-14 of the StRAC, responsibility for formulating general policy on the recruitment and admission of PGR students had been transferred from RDC. Accordingly, RDC's terms of reference had been amended and the Director of Access and Admissions was no longer an *ex officio* member of RDC. However, in spite of this, it was proposed that RDC should continue to receive an annual report from the Director of Access and Admissions on PGR student numbers at its Spring Term meeting so that it could be kept apprised of developments on the recruitment and admissions front that might impact on the PGR student experience.

Discussion:

- 1.5 It was noted that the fact that there was some membership crossover between StRAC and RDC would help to ensure that any issues arising from meetings of StRAC could be reported if necessary at RDC. However, it was proposed that the possibility of the Chair of RDC serving on StRAC as an *ex officio* member in his capacity as Head of the Graduate School might also be suggested to the StRAC officers as means of helping to ensure that consideration was given to admissions and marketing issues in respect of PGR students.

RESOLVED:

- 1.6 That it be suggested to the StRAC officers that the Head of the UCL Graduate School be added to the *ex officio* constituency of StRAC.

ACTION: Gary Hawes (to inform StRAC officers)

2 MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 17 JUNE 2013

Confirmed:

- 2.1 The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 17 June 2013 [*RDC Mins.31-44, 17.6.13*] subject to the following amendments (through insertion of the underlined text and deletion of the strikethrough text):

- 35.6 It was agreed that it would be more useful in future if particular scrutiny was given by FGTs to Upgrade Panel Reports and Examiners' Joint Reports in instances where MPhil/PhD students ~~had either failed to make the criteria for upgrade or~~ 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

35.8 That DGTs and

4 PROGRESSION LEVEL FROM MRES to PhD ON 1+3 PROGRAMMES

5 PROPOSED AMENDMENT TO THE EXAMINATION CRITERIA FOR RESEARCH DEGREES

Received:

- 5.1 A proposal at RDC 1-03 (13-14), introduced by the Graduate School Administrator.

Reported:

- 5.2 UCL's current assessment criteria for research degrees focused on the submitted PhD thesis and on research skills as demonstrated by the thesis. However, given the shift in emphasis in PhD training to include the wider skills of the researcher and the importance of adequate communication skills and viva performance, RDC was invited to consider the proposal at RDC 1-03 (13-14) for amendment of the UCL PhD Joint Examiners' Report form.

Discussion:

- 5.3 Following discussion around clarification of how 'peers' and 'the larger scholarly community' should be defined in the context of requiring examiners to satisfy themselves that PhD candidates were able to communicate with these groups in general about their areas of expertise, it was agreed that the following modification to the amendment to the UCL PhD Joint Examiners' Report form that was proposed at RDC 1-03 (13-14) should be made (through deletion of the strikethrough text):

The examiners have satisfied themselves that the candidate, as evidenced by the thesis and the Viva, can communicate with ~~their peers and the larger~~ scholarly community in ~~general~~ about their areas of expertise

- 5.4 It was agreed that the above amendment should take effect from 1 January 2014 and should apply to all PhD examinations held thereafter.
- 5.5 In terms of communicating the above amendment to UCL faculties and departments, it was agreed that the revised UCL PhD Joint Examiners' Report form should be circulated to FGTs with the instruction for them to cascade this down to DGTs, supervisors and PGR students, drawing attention to the above amendment and to the fact that this simply made explicit what had previously been implicit.

RESOLVED:

- 5.6 That i) the proposal at RDC 1-03 (13-14) for amendment of the UCL PhD Joint Examiners' Report form be approved subject to the further modification proposed at Minute 5.3 above, ii) this amendment take effect from 1 January 2014 and apply to all PhD examinations held thereafter and iii) the revised UCL PhD Joint Examiners' Report form be circulated to FGTs with the instruction for them to cascade this down to DGTs, supervisors and PGR students, drawing attention to the above amendment and to the fact that this simply made explicit what had previously been implicit.

ACTION: Ben Colvill/Helen Notter

6 REPORT FROM THE WORKING GROUP ON NON-PERMISSIBLE FORMS OF SUPERVISION FOR PGR STUDENTS

Received:

- 6.1 A report at RDC 1-04 (13-14), introduced by Professor Alison Diduck.

Reported:

- 6.2 The report at RDC 1-04 (13-14) included proposed guidance for PGR student supervisors on the type of advice and the levels of assistance they should give to their research students. The proposed guidance had been drafted by the working group, chaired by Professor Diduck, that had been established by RDC in response to some of the issues raised by the Woolf Report on the Saif Gadhafi case at the LSE.
- 6.3 The working group had been particularly conscious about the need to clarify appropriate forms of supervision in the context of the relationship between supervisors and their PGR students without being too exhaustive or prescriptive and with a view to trusting the professionalism and better judgement of supervisors in such matters. Once approved, it was proposed to include the guidance either in the Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees or as separate guidance if this was deemed appropriate.

Discussion:

- 6.4 RDC members suggested various amendments to the text of the guidance at RDC 1-04 (13-14).
- 6.5 While it was accepted that all considerations around PhD thesis submission were matters for the student and supervisor to negotiate, some members of RDC suggested that the Submission of Thesis Form for Supervisors should be amended to make explicit the direction that supervisors should not divulge to examiners that a thesis had been submitted against their advice.
- 6.6 The following further suggestions were also made during discussion:
- That with a view to ensuring that all UCL guidance on PGR student supervision and the responsibilities of supervisors was available in a single location, a link to the guidance, once finalised, should be included in the Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees;
 - The guidance, once finalised, should also be routinely distributed to participants on the 'Introduction to Research Student Supervision at UCL' briefing session that was organised by the UCL Graduate School and mandatory for all research student supervisors;
 - That once finalised, the guidance should also be cascaded down to Heads of Department, FGTs and DGTs *via* the UCL Graduate School;
 - That a copy of the guidance should also be made available to the UCL Union Rights and Advice Centre.

RESOLVED:

- 6.7 That i) subject to incorporation of the amendments suggested by RDC members at the meeting, the guidance at RDC 1-04 (13-14) be approved and ii) the suggestions set out at Minute 6.5 above also be taken on board by the RDC officers in finalising and disseminating the guidance.

7 INTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW 2011-12

Received:

- 7.1 At RDC 1-05 (13-14), a summary of recommendations identified in IQR reports in 2011-12 in relation to PGR students and/or the Graduate School, introduced by the Chair of RDC.

Reported:

- 7.2 While the recommendations identified in IQR reports in 2011-12 in relation to PGR students and/or the Graduate School had not revealed any key institutional issues, a number of recommendations had pertained to the need for more training for PGTA's. This had been discussed at length within UCL and given rise to the development by CALT of a comprehensive scheme of PGTA training and development that was being run through each of UCL's three schools and centrally through the Graduate School's Skills Development Programme.
- 7.3 The Chair of RDC noted that guidance on providing teaching opportunities for PGR students had also been previously prepared by the UCL Graduate School and was available online at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/guidance_to_teaching.php. This advised, amongst other things, that PGTA's should have a maximum load of 180 hours per year (to include teaching, preparation and training).

Discussion:

- 7.4 It was noted that questions pertaining to PGTA training and opportunities to teach were also included as part of the Graduate School Survey and the Student Barometer and International Students Barometer for the purpose of canvassing and keeping UCL informed of the views and comments of UCL students.
- 7.5 It was suggested that it would be helpful to invite CALT's Principal Teaching Fellow, Dr Paul Walker to attend the next meeting of RDC to discuss the scheme of PGTA training and development that had been implemented by CALT.
- 7.6 It was also suggested that it would be useful for RDC to receive at its next meeting the results of a survey of PGTA's that had been carried out within SLMS and which would be helpful in giving an indication of how much teaching PGTA's were actually undertaking.

RESOLVED:

- 7.7 That Dr Paul Walker be invited to attend the next meeting of RDC to discuss the scheme of PGTA training and development that had been implemented by CALT.
ACTION: Gary Hawes
- 7.8 That RDC receive at its next meeting the results of a survey of PGTA's that had been undertaken within SLMS.
ACTION: Gary Hawes (to consult with Dr Dave Spratt)

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

Received:

- 8.1 A report at RDC 1-06 (13-14), introduced by the Chair of RDC.

9 REPORT ON RESEARCH DEGREE ADMINISTRATION

Received:

- 9.1 The report at RDC 1-07 (12-13), introduced by the Student Records Manager.

Discussion:

- 9.2 While it had not been possible for SRS colleagues to identify any generic issues or themes arising from research degree examination reports in the process of compiling the report at RDC 1-07 (12-13), the Chair of RDC reminded RDC that it had been agreed at the Committee's previous meeting on 17 June 2013 that FGTs should be asked in future to identify and bring to RDC's attention any systemic issues or trends arising from research degree examination reports in their faculties. In the meantime, the RDC officers would be giving further consideration to a mechanism for facilitating this arrangement.

10 HEFCE REPORT ON RATES OF QUALIFICATION FROM POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH DEGREES

Received:

- 10.1 At RDC 1-09 (13-14), the above HEFCE report published in July 2013, introduced by the Chair of RDC.

Noted:

- 10.2 The full report was available at:
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2013/201317/#d.en.82794>

Reported:

- 10.3 According to the method that had been used by HEFCE to produce the data set out in the report at RDC 1-09 (13-14), a projected 83% of PGR degree starters at UCL would qualify with a PGR degree over the projected period of 25 academic years.
- 10.4 While this projection was behind some of UCL's competitors, it was noted that UCL had the highest number of PGR degree starters overall of all of the HEIs included in the report. However, while it was noted that the information at RDC 1-09 (13-14) was useful for comparison purposes, RDC was advised against applying too much significance to the data. It was noted that concerns around how the data were processed had been previously raised by UCL, which had led to a decision to suppress the calculated UCL values in the previous year's report which had been published by HEFCE in May 2012, and that results for a number of HEIs, including Imperial College and Leeds, had been suppressed in the latest HEFCE report.
- 10.5 For future HEFCE reports on rates of qualification from PGR degrees that would be received by RDC, the Head of Student Data Services agreed to look into the feasibility of providing a breakdown of the information by Faculty and funding status of student.

RESOLVED:

- 10.6 That for future HEFCE reports on rates of qualification from PGR degrees that would be received by RDC, the Head of Student Data Services look into the feasibility of providing a breakdown of the information by Faculty and funding status of student.

ACTION: Gary Smith

