Imperial College London

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee (PRQC)

Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2018 at 14:00 in Room G01, Royal School of Mines, South Kensington Campus

Present

Professor Sue Gibson (Director of the Graduate School) [Chair]
Katherine Campbell (Business) [Interim representative]
Dr Matthew Fuchter (Chemistry)
Professor Uta Griesenbach (NHLI) [in place of Professor Tony Magee]
Dr Hamed Haddadi (Design Engineering)
Professor Andrew Holmes (Electrical and Electronic Engineering)
Jo Horsburgh (CLCC/CHERS)
Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)
Professor Henrik Jensen (Mathematics)
Professor Serafim Kalliadasis (Chemical Engineering)
Dr Angela Kedgley (Bioengineering)
Dr Sally Leevers (Crick Doctoral Centre)
Professor Kevin Murphy (Medicine)
Dr Matthew Santer (Aeronautics)
Ute Thiermann (GSU President)
Dr Mark Ungless (Institute of Clinical Sciences and MRC LMS)
Professor Ahmer Wadee (Civil and Environmental Engineering)
Dr Jeremy Woods (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Professor Yun Xu (College Consul)
Scott Tucker (Assistant Registrar, Monitoring and Review, Registry) [Secretary]

In Attendance

Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations, Graduate School) [papers 2018.03, 2018.04, 2018.05, 2018.9, 2018.10, 2018.11, 2018.12 and 2018.13]

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

1.1   The Chair welcomed new members of the committee, colleagues in place of existing members and non-members in attendance.

1.2   The following apologies for absence were received:

- Professor Peter Allison (Earth Science and Engineering)
- David Ashton (Academic Registrar)
- Professor Simone Buitendijk (Vice-Provost, Education)
- Professor Daniele Dini (Mechanical Engineering)
- Dr Kleoniki Gounaris (Life Sciences)
- Alejandro Luy (ICU Deputy President, Education)
- Professor Tony Magee (Graduate School Deputy Director and NHLI)
- Dr Bill Proud (Physics)
- Professor Alessandra Russo (Computing)
- Professor Eduardo Saiz (Materials)
- Professor Michael Seckl (Surgery and Cancer)

1.3   The GSU President started in August 2018, taking over the role from Dr Luke McCrone. The GSU president will typically be in close contact with key staff across the College and sit on numerous committees in order to shape student-related policy and influence decisions for the benefit of Imperial College's postgraduate students. The GSU president reported that supervision and student wellbeing are just two of the areas she will focus on over the academic year.

2.   Terms of reference, constitution and membership [PRQC.2018.01]

2.1   The Committee noted the revised PRQC terms of reference, constitution and membership for 2018-19, as approved by Senate on 10 October 2018. There were no significant updates; revisions had been made to provide further clarity as to the Committee's remit.

2.2   The following PRQC representatives will be confirmed in due course:

- Imperial College Business School Representative
- Student representatives (up to three)

The Secretary will follow up with the Imperial College Business School, GSU President and ICU Deputy President (Education) to ensure that representatives from the respective areas are nominated.

Action: Secretary

3.   Minutes of the previous meeting

3.1   The Committee approved the minutes of the previous meeting held on 11 May 2018 **[PRQC.2018.02a].**

3.2   The Committee noted the action list and received updates on the following actions, which were scheduled for October 2018 completion **[PRQC.2018.02b]**:

(i)   Periodic Reviews of Research Programmes - Department of Physics (October 2017, 7.2.2)

In May 2018, PRQC confirmed the existing College guidance for ESA and LSR, which states that:

- ESA 'will be determined by an examination, held 9 months (18 months for part-time students) after the date of initial registration'
- (Regarding LSR) that 'a review of a student's PhD research ability must be undertaken between 18 and 24 months (between 30 and 36 months for part time students) after the date of initial registration'

Following a number of PGR periodic reviews held in 2017-18 and a more general examination of milestone on-time assessment rates across College, it is evident that ESA on-time completion is not as high as the College expects and all Departments appear to find the current ESA assessment deadline of 9 months problematic.

As this is a College-wide issue, PRQC agreed that the matter should be discussed as a separate agenda item at the PRQC to be held on 20 February 2019. The Committee agreed that consideration should be given as to whether the current ESA and LSR deadlines are realistic and whether Departments and/or the College could provide further guidance or resource to support the timely completion of ESAs in particular.

In order to inform discussion at the next meeting, it was agreed that supporting documentation should be provided to clarify:

- Progression regulations at other institutions
- Terms and conditions of UK Research Council grants
- Department/College ESA and LSR data including:
    - Successful completion by 9 Months
    - Successful completion by 12 Months
    - Successful completion after 12 months or pending completion
    - Transferred to MPhil
    - Withdrawn

Action: Secretary

Members also suggested that any implications of data returns should be explored.

(ii) <u>College pastoral care structures (May 2018, 6.7)</u>

Departments to provide a short written summary of their (pastoral care) network

Action: Directors of Postgraduate Study

(iii) <u>College pastoral care structures (May 2018, 6.8)</u>

The formation of a working group is no longer required as pastoral care structures are in place across Departments.

(iv) <u>Request from the Faculty of Natural Sciences to extend the Early Stage Assessment for PGR Chemistry students to September 2018 (May 2018, 14.1.3)</u>

The Secretary communicated PRQC approval to relevant colleagues on 5th June 2018. However, further discussion regarding an extension to the final submission deadline for the affected cohort was carried out (Item 6).

(v) <u>Academic Regulations and policy - College guidance for recording ESA and LSR milestones (May 2018, 9.2.1)</u>

The Secretary clarified College guidance to relevant colleagues on 7th June 2018. It was confirmed that both ESA and LSR should be recorded as the date of assessment/review, not the date by which students submit work for assessment/review.

4.   Matters arising

4.1   There were no other matters arising not appearing elsewhere on the agenda.

5.   Best practice in supervision workshops [PRQC.2018.03]

5.1   The Head of Strategy and Operations (Graduate School) presented the Focus on Best Practice in Supervision Workshops Annual Report 2017-18.

5.2   The Graduate School has established a Framework for the Support and Development of Supervisors which stipulates that the College will continue to provide mandatory training for all new supervisors and those with limited prior experience of supervising PhD students.

As part of the Framework, the College delivers Departmental 'Focus on Best Practice in Supervision' workshops. Prior to each workshop, a senior leadership meeting and a student focus group are held in order to inform the content of the workshop.

In 2017-18 the following Workshops took place:

- Centre for Environmental Policy, 29 November 2017 and was attended by a total of ten supervisors within the Department
- Departmental of Civil and Environmental Engineering, 22 November 2017, and was attended by 19 supervisors in the Department
- Department of Materials, 15 May 2018 and was attended by twenty-four supervisors within the Department
- Department of Mathematics, 15 February 2018 and was attended by eleven supervisors within the Department
- National Heart and Lung Institute, 03 May 2018 and was attended by fourteen supervisors within the Department.

5.3 Following feedback from students and supervisors, the following areas of enhancement were identified: Milestones, progression and feedback; research community development; student wellbeing; student supervisor partnership.

The following areas of good practice were identified:

- Students feel that supervisors generally have a personal interest in them as people, and supervisors give them academic freedom to explore their research with guidance and where appropriate
- Collaborations and supervision from industry are well-received by students, who feel it provides beneficial input. Supervisors also bring invaluable experience to both networking and attending conferences
- Whilst not all students felt they have enough contact with their supervisor, others commented positively on the regular contact they had with their supervisors, with one-to-one meetings taking place as well as group lab meetings. Positive feedback and support is offered as part of these and is appreciated by the students
- There is the opportunity to develop effective working relationships in the department, which provides students with the opportunity to meet people within their supervisor's network
- Students are happy with the academic support given to them by their supervisors.

5.4 It was confirmed that it is a requirement for all new supervisors to complete a compulsory course entitled Introduction to PhD Supervision at Imperial College. The course is available as a full day, face-to-face workshop, delivered by the Educational Development Unit (EDU) or as an online course, depending on the level of experience of the new supervisor when commencing appointment with the College. New supervisors with no, or limited, prior experience of supervising PhD students will be required to complete the full day, face-to-face Introduction to PhD Supervision at Imperial College workshop.

5.5 The College has processes in place to address the rare cases where there is a breakdown in the student-supervisors relationship. Any issues are usually addressed efficiently and sensitively by Departments via a Senior Tutor (PGR) but there is also a mediation process (Item 10) and formal mechanisms to submit

complaints. It is the intention of the College that no student should be discriminated against or in any way penalised for raising a compliant.

6 Submission deadlines for PGR chemistry students

6.1 On 11 May 2018, PRQC received a request from the Faculty of Natural Sciences to extend the Early Stage Assessment for PGR Chemistry students by three months. It was explained that this will allow students to continue work in the laboratories, whilst these are still operational at the South Kensington Campus, and use downtime during the move to White City to write their ESA reports. PRQC agreed that this was a very sensible approach and will ensure students face the minimum disruption to their studies as a result of the move. PRQC recommended to QAEC that the ESA for PGR Chemistry students is extended to 27th September 2018. QAEC subsequently approved the request on 22 May 2018.

6.2 As anticipated, the move to White City has posed a number of challenges. It was agreed that students coming to an end of their registered period would be offered stipends from the College to support the extension of their registrations. The Chair felt this was exemplary practice by the College. Most students are currently funded for 3-3.5 years so extending registration by 2-3 months is good estimate, which will still result in theses submission by 48 months. If there are a significant number of late cases then a single cohort late case submission case might be an option to reduce the administrative burden on Departments. The Department of Chemistry will be responsible for any ramifications beyond the College that late requests lead to, such as loss of studentship under funder rules, for example.

6.3 The milestone on-time submission rates for Chemistry will inevitably be lower due to the move to White City. However, the data will be contextualised in the review of research degree provision in the Department of Chemistry so as not to unfairly judge the Department as a result of events outside of the Department's control.

7 Feedback

7.1 Providing feedback on your students' research progression **[PRQC.2018.04]**

7.1.1 PRQC noted a short document produced by the Graduate School to emphasise the importance of effective communication skills when providing feedback to research students. It was designed to raise awareness of some of the difficulties students face when receiving feedback and includes information on the following areas: Positive as well as constructive feedback; power dynamics; conflicting messages; feedback as dialogue; and milestones. The document also highlights sources of support for both students and staff.

7.1.2 Some Departments have been consulted on the content of the paper, which has also received scrutiny from the GSU Committee.

7.2 Receiving feedback on your research progression **[PRQC.2018.05]**

7.2.1 PRQC also noted a short document produced by the Graduate School for

research students to set out expectations regarding feedback and provide some examples of types of feedback students can expect to receive from supervisors and others.

7.2.2 The Committee welcomed the document and felt it would serve as a useful tool to highlight the multiple forms of feedback and help manage students' expectations. However, some members highlighted that there is a more fundamental issue around the lack of time available for more informal student-staff interaction. Although College PhD milestones are invaluable opportunities to receive formal feedback, the more informal interactions are often just as important. It was reported that the Dyson School of Design Engineering build in more social aspects into the timetable. This was piloted last academic year and proved to be popular with students.

7.2.3 Principle 9 of the Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Student Supervisor Partnership states that 'supervisors should set aside normally a minimum of one hour per week (on average) for consultation with students. This may take the form of individual meetings, tutorials, group meetings or lab meetings, email or Skype'. Although some students may feel that a more explicit period consultation and feedback should be set, it is important to maintain a degree of flexibility to allow a supervisor to make an academic judgement on when the student might need more or less support over the duration of the PhD programme.

7.2.4 The Committee agreed that both documents should be made available online for students and staff.

8   Periodic review

8.1   Periodic Review of Research Degree Provision: Centre for Environmental Policy **[PRQC.2018.06]**

8.1.1   PRQC considered the review of postgraduate research provision in the Centre for Environmental Policy (CEP), which took place on 25 April 2018, and CEP's response.

8.1.2   The review panel expressed full confidence in CEP's ongoing management of the academic standards of its research degree provision and the quality of learning opportunities provided to its students. The review panel identified a number of features of good practice on which it wished to commend the Department. PRQC members particularly welcomed CEP's active engagement with students in developing the Centre's new research strategy. CEP's DPS also thanked the GSU President for her work in setting up the 'Problem Solving Club', which was also highlighted as a feature of good practice.

8.1.3   There were some aspects of provision where further enhancement was recommended by the panel; these have been addressed by CEP and appropriate actions have been allocated to key members of staff.

8.1.4 PRQC members discussed the recommendation to diversify communication channels. It was acknowledged that many PGR students do not regularly check emails, an issue experienced across the College, which is problematic given that email is still the College's main mechanism to communicate to cohorts. The GSU President felt that there can be a distinction between students who have come from the workplace to study and those that have not, with the former group usually more responsive to email. A cultural shift might therefore be required.

Although there are reports of research groups setting up local communication channels using social media platforms, members were in agreement that continuing to use and encourage students to engage through email is essential but that other methods of communication should be explored. In any case, the established channel must be clarified and consideration should be given as to whether the communication channel is appropriate and accessible. It was agreed that the College should be responsive to student requirements and flexible enough to engage in alternate forms of communication.

8.1.5 PRQC members briefly discussed the recommendation to formalise the timely submission of ESA and LSR documentation, and monitor completion rates. Following Item 3.2(i), it was agreed that further discussion around ESA and LSR timings would be carried out at the next meeting, with supporting documentation.

8.1.6 PRQC confirmed the outcome of the periodic review and agreed that a follow up would be undertaken through the precepts review procedure in three years' time, as per the College's normal cycle.

8.2 Proposed revisions to PGR periodic review process [PRQC.2018.07]

8.2.1 To ensure procedures remain robust and proportionate, and align with the relevant expectations and practices set out in the revised UK Quality Code for Higher Education, PRQC approved the following revisions to the PGR periodic review process and self-evaluation document template:

- That a PGR periodic review panel is required to provide an overarching assessment of a Department's PGR provision using nomenclature set out in the College's precepts review process ('compliant', 'working towards compliance' and 'non-compliant')
- That the Self-Evaluation Document (SED) template is further aligned with the College precepts
- That the periodic review guidance is rationalised and, where appropriate, is placed directly into the SED template

8.2.2 Members recommended that, given the current difficulties for departments in producing accurate PGR careers data, the prompts regarding an analysis of student destinations should be made more realistic in terms of scope. It was reported that the Institute of Clinical Sciences use LinkedIn to gather careers data but this is a resources intensive exercise.

8.2.3 PGR periodic review templates will be revised and circulated to members.

Action: Secretary

9 PhD Plagiarism Working Group

9.1 Update on the PhD Plagiarism Working Group **[PRQC.2018.08]**

9.1.1 The College Research Misconduct Annual Report contained several recommendations that were approved by the Provost's Board, one of which was that masters and PhD theses should be checked for plagiarism using the Turnitin software, as is the practice for undergraduate theses.

9.1.2 A PhD Plagiarism Working Group has been established to identify a mechanism for ensuring that PhD theses consistently undergo a plagiarism check prior to final submission. The Working Group is mindful of implementing this requirement with the need to take account of local practice whilst introducing the consistency that is being sought across the College. The Group is also aware of those students that will be close to completion at the point of the introduction of this requirement. It is therefore proposed to introduce this requirement for the 2019-20 academic year.

9.1.3 PRQC members agreed roles and responsibilities would need to be clear as to who would interpret Turnitin reports and what training would be provided. Members were conscious that any process would need to avoid placing significant extra workload on students and staff. Guidance would also need to be provided on around self-plagiarism.

9.1.4 Following further debate, the following three areas were highlight as requiring further discussion by the Plagiarism Working Group.

- Interpretation: Who should interpret the Turnitin report – the student, supervisor or administrator? In the Business School, the programme administrator checks the Turnitin report and refers any significant issues to the supervisor.
- Time Scale: Will a Turnitin report for an ESA submission result in any meaningful feedback?
- Confidentiality: What are the expectations of the use of Turnitin regarding Sensitive or potentially embargoed research? Does submission to Turnitin constitute a legal disclosure and what are the implication on intellectual property?

9.1.5 The committee strongly recommended that Ruth Harrison, Head of Scholarly Communications Management, Library, be invited to join the PhD Working Party. PRQC Feedback will be provided to John Neilson (College Secretary). The committee would like to be updated and provided with the opportunity to feedback on the development of this project.

Action: Secretary

10   Research degree mediation process [PRQC.2018.09]

10.1   Although the majority of research degree student supervisor partnerships work extremely well, the Graduate School has developed and implemented a number of mechanisms to support both students and supervisors to have effective working relationships, such as the Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Partnership, a doctoral student coaching programme and a brand new Continuing Professional Development Framework for Supervisors.

10.2   In addition, the Graduate School has worked in partnership with the Director of Student Services and the College's accredited mediators to establish a pilot research degree mediation process for research students and their supervisors. Mediation is designed to help both parties move forward. This pilot scheme is specifically for students and their supervisors and is not for student-student disputes.

10.3   PRQC noted the new process, which had been approved at College level, and welcomed the initiative to further support students.

11   Task and Finish Group for the Student Supervisor Partnership

11.1   Final Report of the World-Class Research Supervision Task and Finish Group for the Student Supervisor Partnership **[PRQC.2018.10]**

11.1.1 PRQC noted the Final Report of the World-Class Research Supervision Task and Finish Group for the Student Supervisor Partnership. Of the 40 recommendations made by the Working Party for World-Class Research Supervision, seven fell within the remit of the task and finish group for the student supervisor partnership.

11.1.2 The task and finish group for the student supervisor partnership met seven times to develop the recommendations of the Working Party and, as a result, the following recommendations have now been addressed by the College.

- To review and strengthen the role of Head of Department, Director of Postgraduate Studies, Postgraduate Tutor and Academic Mentor with respect to supporting the student-supervisor partnership.
- To review the Educational Development Unit's support for the student-supervisor partnership
- To review the student supervisor codes of practice documents to promote mutual respect and successful collaboration.
- To review the role and valuable contribution postdocs make to supervision and to implement means of recognition
- To share broadly examples of excellent student-supervisor partnerships
- To recognise and celebrate the diversity of outstanding student-supervisor partnerships.

- To ensure the EPSRC and MRC Doctoral Prize Fellowships are the MRC Academic Clinical Lectureships are promoted more widely and that the College considers approaching donors to extend these models

12 Wellbeing and mental health [PRQC.2018.11]

12.1 PRQC received an update on the HEFCE project 'Exploring wellbeing and mental health and associated support services for postgraduate researchers'. Whilst work is ongoing to consider and address outcomes of the project, the following activities have already been put in place by the Graduate School, in partnership with colleagues across College during 2017-18, which are designed to complement other support services available to support the wellbeing and mental health of College research students:

- The Task and Finish Group for Doctoral Wellbeing, which submitted its final report to this Committee in May 2018, developed a brand new online course for supervisors, which is available on Blackboard, at any time – Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of Imperial College PhD students
- The development of a new online supervisors' guidebook, with a dedicated section on support students wellbeing and also information for supervisors about their own wellbeing
- The development of Mutual Expectations for the Research Degree Partnerships – again, with a dedicated section on wellbeing and designed to support effective partnerships
- The implementation of a pilot Research Degree Mediation programme
- Revisions to the role of the Senior Tutor (PGR), and implementation of Departmental support networks.

13 Graduate teaching assistant annual report

13.1 PRQC noted the GTA Programme Annual Report 2017-18. Between December 2017 and March 2018, the new GTA Programme Leader, Dr Richard Bale, conducted a review of GTA training provision and produced a proposal for the Graduate School's new GTA Programme (GTAP). GTAP consists of two core courses, eight optional courses and optional GTA retreats.

14 PGR review schedule [PRQC.2018.13]

14.1 PRQC noted the College's precept and PGR periodic review schedule for 2018-19:

Precept reviews
- Institute of Clinical Sciences
- Department of Life Sciences
- Department of Surgery and Cancer

Periodic reviews
- Department of Aeronautics
- Department of Chemistry

- Department of Computing
- Imperial College Business School
- Department of Mechanical Engineering

15   Partner research institutions, split PhDs and Imperial recognised locations

15.1   On 7th November 2017, the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee (QAEC) approved a minor amendment to the procedure for approval, renewal and review of PRIs: that five-year reviews of active PRIs will not be undertaken; instead, PRQC will receive an annual list of active PRIs, Split PhDs and IRLs (minute 12.1.3). PRQC therefore noted the list of active PRIs, Split PhDs and IRLs.

15.2   The process for the approval and a review of PRIs, Split PhDs and IRLs is currently being reviewed (Action May 2018, 9.3.2). PRQC recommended that as part of the review, it should be made clear as to how the Research Office is involved in the process, particularly regarding research collaboration agreements and intellectual property negotiations.

16   PGR admissions

16.1   PRQC noted Postgraduate Research Admissions 2018 Cycle Statistics.

16.2   Members queried why the statistics for Imperial College Business School were not included.

Post meeting note: David Parrot (Deputy Head of Admissions) confirmed that the Business School allows some students to progress from MRes to PhD. However, as they are progressed via Student Records they do not reapply directly for PhD and so are not included in application statistics.

17.   PRQC subcommittees

17.1   PRQC noted the minutes of the CDT DTP Governance Committee held on 7th February 2018.

17.2   PRQC noted the minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 22 November 2017.

17.3   PRQC noted the minutes of the Postgraduate Professional Development Committee held on 21 May 2018.

18.   Any Other Business

18.1   PhD Thesis Submission - Procedures

18.1.1 PhD students are required to submit their theses electronically, via The Elvaston Group's eThesis website. Two copies must be ordered at a cost of £70 to the student. Students are not permitted to use an alternate supplier as The Elvaston

Group performs an administration function on behalf of the College, such as the distribution of theses to external examiners. So the provider is very much built into College administration processes.

18.1.2 Some students have complained that the cost of printing with Elvaston exceeds that of a number of other providers and students should at least have the option to print elsewhere at a reduced rate. PRQC strongly supported the case and felt that further exploration should be undertaken as to whether the College could bear the costs of all PhD theses printing.

Action: David Ashton

18.2 President's Scholarship

18.2.1 It was reported that students were receiving scholarship funds later than anticipated so clarity was sought on payment procedures.

Post meeting note: Laura Lane (Head of Strategy and Operations) confirmed that:

- *All students (UG, PGT and PGR) in receipt of a scholarship are paid one month in arrears. The reason for this is because the College needs to ensure the students are in attendance and not just enrolled, when the first payment is made. This is stipulated in the terms and conditions of all scholarships.*
- *Students receive bursary payments on the 7th day of each month. Therefore, if a student started before the 24th September, they will be paid on the 7th October. If they started after the 24th September but before the 24th October, they will be paid on the 7th November and so on.*
- *In previous years, the terms and conditions relating to Scholarships were not always upheld and this explains why some bursaries were paid sooner than a month in arrear and why there has been a perceived delay this year. Moving forward, the Registry is keen to ensure that all terms and conditions are met.*

19 Date of next meeting

19.1 The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 20 February 2019, at 2pm in Room G01, Royal School of Mines, South Kensington campus

20 Special cases reports

PRQC noted special cases reports for Admissions, Examination Arrangements and Late Theses Cases:

20.1 PGR Special Cases (Admissions) - October 2018

20.1.1 PRQC noted the special cases report on admissions.

20.2 Special Cases (Examination Arrangements) - October 2018

20.2.1 PRQC noted the special cases report on examination arrangements.

20.3   Special Cases (Late Cases Thesis) - October 2018

20.3.1 PRQC noted the special cases report on late case thesis submission.

20.3.2 The Chair commented on the high number of cases and encouraged supervisors asked to address these in good time. It was queried whether students on short-term internships should be recorded via the interruption of studies route and whether the current guidance on this procedure is clear.

Action: Secretary