LONDON'S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

UCL

GREAT ORMOND STREET INSTITUTE OF CHILD HEALTH

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STAFF/STUDENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE (RESEARCH DEGREES) HELD ON 12th DECEMBER 2017

Present:	Dr Claire Thorne, Departmental Graduate Tutor, Co-Chair
	Stella Fusco, Senior Research Degrees Administrator (Notes)
	Dr Kenth Gustafsson, Postgraduate Tutor, Infection, Immunity, Inflammation
	Dr Hannah Mitchison, Postgraduate Tutor, Genetics and Genomic Medicine
	Dr Andrew Stoker, Postgraduate Tutor, Developmental Biology & Cancer

Student Representation:
Saba Manshaei, RSR – DBC, Year 1
Elsa Irving, RSR – DBC, Year 3
Melanie Koelbel, RSR – DN, Year 1
Hanne Stotesbury, RSR – DN, Year 2
Birgit Pimpel, RSR – DN, Year 3
Haya Alrashidi, RSR – GGM, Year 1
Matthew Wilson, RSR – GGM, Year 3
Elisabeth Robinson, RSR – III, Year 1
Lizzy Rivers, RSR – III, Year 2
Alina Petris, RSR – III, Year 3
Sarah Dib, RSR – PPP, Year 1
Emma Butcher, RSR – PPP, Year 2
Yi Lu, Lead RSR & Co-Chair – PPP, Year 3

Apologies:	Dr Frederique Liegeois (Postgraduate Tutor, Developmental Neurosciences)
	Professor Mary Fewtrell (Postgraduate Tutor, Population, Policy & Practice)
	Lorna Soar (Research Degrees Administrator, Secretary).

1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS:

    Members introduced themselves to the Committee, and their attendance was welcomed by the Chair.

2. MINUTES

    RECEIVED the minutes of the meeting held on 12th June 2017 which were approved as a correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

    To be addressed via the Agenda.

4. TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE SSCC AND ELECTION OF LEAD RSR

    i)   Terms of Reference

    RECEIVED the draft Terms of Reference for the Committee. The terms of reference are standard and have been updated across UCL. ICH's structure is slightly different in that the department has

two separate SSCCs, one for Taught Programmes and one for Research Degrees. RSRs were invited to discuss and give feedback on the document, and decide which parts of the ToR should be retained, amended, or removed.

a) It was acknowledged that this meeting, and future meetings, would be co-chaired by the Departmental Graduate Tutor (Research) and the Lead Research Student Representative in accordance with new arrangements for SSCC meetings across UCL.

b) ToR, Item 2, "*To report on priorities and agreed actions to the Research Degrees Committee, and to make recommendations where appropriate*". The ICH RDC has been recently restructured. The new membership comprises the Postgraduate Tutors for each academic programme, the Lead Research Student Representative, the Senior Research Degrees Administrator and Research Degrees Administrator. The main aim of the new Committee structure is to work closely with RSRs to resolve PGR-related matters.

c) ToR, Item 3(d), "*Assessment and feedback*". It was agreed that this should be removed as it does not apply to research degrees.

d) ToR, Item 3(g), "*Employment, employability and personal development*". "Careers" will be a standard item on each SSCC agenda.

e) ToR, Item 3(i), "*The effectiveness of the SSCC and the actions of the Students' Union and Departments in response to it*". At the end of the academic year, the SSCC will reflect on the actions and achievements of the Committee.

f) ToR, Item 3(j), "*The priorities and actions of the RDC*" will come under Item 2 of the ToR, see above.

g) ToR, Item 4, "*To facilitate greater communication between students and staff, and report key actions, discussions and recommendations to the wider student body*". This item on the ToR will be very key in terms of the role of the RSRs.

h) ToR, Item 6, "*To identify and disseminate examples of good practice*". Actions and initiatives agreed at departmental-level RDC and SSCC meetings will feed through to the Faculty RDC and will be shared with other departments within the Faculty.

i) ToR, Item 7, "*To enable the engagement of students through their representatives with processes to enhance students' experiences, such as the Annual Student Experience Review, and the development of strategies to support research students' experiences*". The Committee will refer to feedback submitted by students to the PRES survey as a useful source of information on which to base future discussion and progress towards improving the student experience.

Action: LS to add "Careers" as a standard item to future agendas.

ii) Election of the Lead Research Student Representative

Yi Lu has been standing in as the temporary Lead RSR since the beginning of the academic session, and attended the first RDC meeting on 20th September 2017. RSRs were invited to put themselves forward for the role but it was unanimously agreed by all members of the SSCC that Yi Lu should continue as the Lead RSR for the remainder of the 2017/18 academic year.

5. RESEARCH STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE FEEDBACK

i) Seeking feedback from students and developing action plans to address specific issues as appropriate
At the last SSCC meeting, it was proposed that the way in which RSRs gather feedback from their cohorts should be reviewed as the questionnaires that students were being asked to complete were not effective in helping to improve the student experience. The Committee would like to look at a more useful way of obtaining feedback and capturing relevant information so that the Committee can adopt a more targeted approach. RSRs were invited to give their views as to how the Committee should proceed.

Key areas that the RSRs thought they may like to focus on when getting feedback are as follows:

a) Target student progress and supervision with lab-based and non-lab based questions;
b) Send out questionnaires later in the year, eg Term 2, so that new students are settled in and are more able to provide feedback;

c) Analyse the issues raised, drill down into those issues to determine whether they are generic problems, or individual cases;
d) Look at effective ways to draw out students' concerns, eg use PRES to identify what questions need to be asked, try and address concerns and come up with solutions;
e) Look at response rates to questionnaires, year on year. There tends to be a high response rate from first year students but would targeted relavant questions raise the response level where it is low in other cohort areas?
f) Look for trends so that these can be investigated;
g) Space – A survey is currently being carried out by the Doctorate School to see what is available to PGR students and, in particular, whether "hot-desking" is taking place. This should continue be monitored.
h) Skills Training and Advice – Look at whether students are being supported by their supervisors when discussing skills and training, and that supervisors are helping students to agree a personal development plan. This should take place in conjunction with using the e-log.

It was felt that supervisors do not take the e-log seriously. RSRs were keen for the Department to ensure that supervisors realise the importance of the e-log, and to emphasise to them that they are expected to support their student(s) in the completion of this electronic document by providing advice on progress, skills, training, personal development. They should also be made aware of the importance of signing off sections in a timely fashion which have been completed by their student.

There can often be a misconception about completing the e-log, and it is important for supervisors to know that a student's upgrade or submission of thesis cannot be approved at departmental level unless the e-log entries and skills training points are up to date.

It would be helpful for students to understand better how the e-log can benefit them, and to aim for better 'buy-in' from students and supervisors. Students should feel empowered to ask their supervisors for meetings in accordance with the mandatory requirements of completing the e-log as set out by the UCL Doctoral School. The e-log is currently being redeveloped by the Doctoral School so as to become a better tool for students. Student mentors are also encouraged to help new students understand the purpose of the e-log as well as how to use it during student mentoring meetings.

When drafting the new questionnaire, RSRs should avoid asking questions on whether students know where to find the online information which has already been made available to them. It would be preferable for students to be asked these types of questions at Student Mentoring meetings.

Action: CT to circulate PRES report to RSRs

Action: CT/SF to send out reminder to Supervisors on the importance of completing the e-log.

Action: RSRs to obtain feedback from cohorts on their understanding of the expectation for completing the e-log, and what the Department and/or Doctoral School could do to improve their understanding.

Action: RSRs to look at effective ways of obtaining and processing feedback from cohorts and work with their Programme Postgraduate Tutor to identify priority areas. To come up with core questions, plus follow-on questions where applicable for certain cohorts.

Action: YL, Lead RSR, to draft preliminary questionnaire for comments and then set up use of the questionnaire for RSRs via SurveyMonkey or RedCap.

ii) <u>Mentoring Update</u>

A new combined RSR and Student Mentor role was established at the beginning of the 2017/18 academic year. Feedback from the RSRs was that they liked the combined role as it made it easier for them to interact with their cohorts.

III reported that they have several new students in their mentoring group, some who are either current UCL employees or have been in the past.

PPP had a good meeting with their new students although they had received feedback indicating that the various inductions tended to duplicate information and were very repetitive. However, not all of the student felt this way, with positive feedback suggesting that new students found the local induction session at ICH very helpful as it covered all the essentials the new students need to know.

Action: CT to discuss with AS re reducing duplication for inductions

DN had received reports from some students to say that they had not received emails about the annual monitoring process. The SDRA informed the Committee that only students who registered prior to the summer of the previous academic year were asked to complete the annual monitoring of progress forms. All enrolled eligible students had been sent emails with the progress forms and timelines attached, and that where the forms had not been completed and the student had not engaged in the process, follow-up emails are sent. If students still fail to engage in the process, their details are passed on to Tutors who then write to the students themselves as a last resort. The DGT asked RSRs to get their cohorts to check 'Clutter' boxes as these types of emails can sometimes get caught up with junk mail.

New students (and their supervisors) are asked to complete an initial questionnaire at 4 months post-registration prior to becoming eligible to take part in the annual monitoring process. They are also invited to have an Early Review Meeting with a member of the Postgraduate Team.

Students are reassured by the ICH Postgraduate Team that all meetings are held in the strictest confidence – RSRs can also emphasise this to cohorts.

6. RSR APPOINTMENT PROCESS FOR FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

Each year, at the start of the academic year, new students are invited to put themselves forward for the role of RSR. Where two student volunteers come forward for the same role, both may be appointed. If more than two students are interested, then a ballot is held.

In addition, current research students will also be asked if they are interested in becoming an RSR to represent 2nd and 3rd year cohorts. RSRs who are already in post are also welcome to re-apply and, if uncontended, may continue in their role for a further academic year.

RSRs reported that they hadn't received notification of the RSR training provided by the Students' Union, and some had just turned up which didn't seem to be a problem. The ICH Research Degrees Office had provided the Faculty Education Officer with the names and contact details of all ICH RSRs, and it is the Faculty's responsibility to forward this information on to the Students' Union. There may have been a communications issue between the Faculty and the Students' Union and Andy Stoker would look into this as Faculty Graduate Tutor. Andy also mentioned that there is the possibility that the Faculty, in conjunction with the Students' Union, may run its own training session for postgraduate students in future.

7. COHORT BUILDING – POSTGRADUATE SOCIETY

The Postgraduate Society are currently working towards purchasing a film licence to be shared with the Institute for Global Health. The aim will be to show films in the Leolin Price Lecture Theatre at ICH once the licence is in place.

8. ICH OPEN DAY AND POSTER COMPETITION

After the poster competition had taken place on 8th November, judges were thanked for their participation and asked to provide any feedback on the judging process if they felt that improvements could be made. Some judges raised concerns about the definition of 'Best Newcomer' and the eligibility criteria for this category. They felt that the current requirement that students must be registered between 0-12 months as at the date of the poster competition were unfair as new students might find it difficult to prepare and enter a poster if they have only just

arrived. As an alternative, the judges suggested that the requirement should be changed so that the category represents students who have registered during the period October-October, eg 1st October 2016-30th September 2017, which is based on academic year.

The arguments for keeping the current arrangements, were that:

  i)   The highest number of posters (15) were entered for this category, including posters submitted by new students who had registered since 1st October 2017. The higher number of posters in this category made it harder for students to win a prize, and moving the parameters would increase the number of entries even more.
  ii) The view that the current eligibility criteria for Best Newcomer is unfair was theoretical. New students are **invited** to participate, it is not mandatory for them to do so. Also, the 2017 prize winning poster and Specially Commended poster were both entered by new students who had registered post-October.
  iii) If the change were to be implemented, any new student who registered on or after 1st October 2017 would not be eligible to take part in the competition. This would exclude the majority of new students going against the aim of the competition, to be inclusive and bring all research students together as part of a community-building exercise.

Based on the information above, the RSRs rejected the new proposal and unanimously agreed that the current arrangements for the Best Newcomer category should not be changed, and that the eligibility dates should remain as 0-12 months registration as at the date of the competition.

9.   3MT COMPETITION

The RSRs had recently held a planning meeting with good attendance.

Although the arrangements for the Programme heats were still ongoing, it was expected that the dates and venue for each Programme event would be confirmed by 20th December. Yi Lu will then write to all students before the end of term and encourage them to enter, or attend as part of the audience. A further notification is to be sent out to all research students and staff (administrative as well as academic) via the ICH Research Degrees Office to publicise the Programme events and encourage staff and students to attend. Each Programme heat will take place by mid-late February so that Programme winners can be identified to go through to the Institute-level competition before it is due to take place on 14th March.

This year will be the first year where Programme heats will be held. The Institute-level competition was a great success last year, with lots of positive feedback received from students and staff who attended.

10.   THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE SSCC AND SUPPORT FOR RSRs

This item will be addressed at meetings in March and June.

11.   STUDENT SUPPORT

See 5(ii) above.

12.   DISCUSSION OF RESULTS OF PRES

See 4(i)(i) and 5(i)(d) above. Claire Thorne will circulate the Faculty PRES document to RSRs so that they can look through it and identify which areas of student experience their feedback questions should focus on.

13.   OTHER REPORTS FROM DEPARTMENT OR FACULTY

i)   Faculty PGR Student Handbook

      The new Faculty PGR Student Handbook had been circulated to all research students at the beginning of the academic year.

iii)   <u>Wellbeing</u>

The SSW is currently making changes and improvement to its provision of services. It is an ongoing programme relating to a new strategy which includes the appointment of Wellbeing Champions, and will be rolled out across UCL over the next year.

RSRs can look at the Student Support and Wellbeing website for further information, and can direct any students who need to know about these services to the website.

14.   <u>ANY OTHER BUSINESS</u>

The Faculty Symposium, which includes the Faculty-level 3MT competition and poster competition, will be taking place at ICH on 17th April.

15.   <u>DATE OF NEXT MEETING</u>

The next meeting will take place on Tuesday 13th March 2018, at 12pm in the Lower Ground Seminar Room.

Action: LS to extend the duration of future SSCC meetings to 1.5 hours, ie 12.00-1.30pm.

Summary of Action Points:

Date of Meeting	Item	Action	By Whom	Status
12/12/2017	4	Circulate PRES results to RSRs	CT	C
12/12/2017	4	Send out reminder to Supervisors emphasising importance of supporting students with the completion of the mandatory e-log	CT/SF	O
12/12/2017	4	Obtain feedback from cohorts on how understanding of the expectation of completing the e-log could be improved	RSRs	O
12/12/2017	4	Draft preliminary questionnaire for comments. Set up questionnaire using SurveyMonkey or RedCap	Lead RSR	O
12/12/2017	5	Discuss reduction of duplication for inductions with AS (FGT)	CT	O
12/12/2017	15	Extend the duration of future SSCC meetings to 1.5 hours, ie 12.00-1.30pm	LS	O

C = Complete
O = Ongoing