



RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

5 June 2017

MINUTES

Present: Professor David Bogle (Chair),

Dr Simon Banks, Dr Elvira Bramon, Mr Ben Colvill, Mr Mark Crawford, Dr Sally Leever, Professor Tania Monteiro, Dr Jill Norman, Ms Helen Notter, Professor Martin Oliver, Mr Derfel Owen, Dr Hynek Pikhart, Dr Benet Salway, Dr Andrew Stoker, Dr Ruth Siddall, Professor Joy Sleeman and Professor Kaila Srail

In attendance: Ms Eleanor Millan (Observer), Ms Sarah Chaytor (Item 37), Ms Anniina Wikman (Item 41), Mr Geoff Lang (Item 40), Ms Rowena Lamb (Item 39), Mr Darren Payne (Observer), Dr Sam Smidt (vice Professor Dilly Fung) and Mr Rob Traynor (Acting Secretary for the meeting)

Apologies received from: Ms Wendy Appleby, Professor Alison Diduck, Dr Paulo Drinot, Professor Dilly Fung, Professor Kirsten Harvey, Dr Martins Paparinskis, Dr Virginia Mantouvalou, Professor Stephen Marshall, Professor Anthony Smith and Ms Lizzie Vinton

Key to abbreviations:

A&H	Arts and Humanities (Faculty of)
AC	Academic Committee
DGT	Departmental Graduate Tutor
FGT	Faculty Graduate Tutor
HR	Human Resources
HRPC	Human Resources Policy Committee
IOE	Institute of Education
NUS	National Union of Students
PGR	Postgraduate Research
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
SHS	Social and Historical Sciences (Faculty of)
SMT	Senior Management Team
UCLU	UCL Union
UCU	University and College Union

PART I: PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

35 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

35.1 **Approved:** The minutes of the meeting held 20 March 2017 [RDC 19-34, 20.03.17].

36 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

36A Research Student Mental Health Report

(RDC Minute 23, 20.03.17)

36A.1 RDC had approved at its last meeting the Research Student Mental Wellbeing Working Group report: Enhancing Research Student Mental Wellbeing at UCL (RDC Paper 02-03 (16-17),

circulated with the previous agenda). FGTs were asked to circulate the report to their faculties, drawing it to the attention of PGR supervisors and to bring back any comments and suggestions to RDC. It was further resolved that the Chair consider how the report might be taken forward at a higher level, in particular regarding resources for support services and on changing the culture at UCL.

- 36A.2 The Chair reported that a UCL Wellbeing Steering Group had been established which would include a representative of the Research Student Mental Wellbeing Working Group to raise PGR issues. The Research Student Mental Wellbeing report would also be considered by that body. It was noted that not all faculties had been able to consider the report, but those that had reported that it was well received, with some support for its ideas such as providing a single first point of contact for students and for introducing mental health support training for DGTs.
- 36A.3 The discussion focussed on how the issues raised by the PGR mental health report might be championed by the Wellbeing Steering Group and considered more widely within UCL. There had been an increase in PGR interruptions and students leaving their programmes due to mental health reasons and it would be important to identify trends and themes from the report's data. UCLU officers questioned whether one of the key recommendations on Student Psychological Services had led to any requests for more resources for it as the SMT had informed them that they would consider this, if received. It was noted that the review of Student Support and Welfare had identified the need to take a more preventative approach to student mental health and resources were being considered in light of this.
- 36A.4 **Agreed:** That the paper would be sent on to the UCL Wellbeing Steering Group with a note of RDC's approval, and that the Wellbeing Steering Group would be asked to formulate actions to address the recommendations. The Group would be asked to report formally to RDC with an action plan.

Action: RDC Secretary

36B Departmental PGR Student Space Survey (A&H/SHS)

(RDC Minute 26, 20.03.17)

- 36B.1 RDC had approved at its last meeting a report on the findings of a PGR students space survey conducted by the joint faculties of A & H and SHS (RDC Paper 02-06 (16-17), circulated with the previous agenda). FGTs from the other faculties were asked to conduct similar surveys of their departmental PGR space/facilities, with a view to present the resulting data to the SMT and UCL Estates for consideration in UCL Estates planning.
- 36B.2 It was noted that none of the other faculties had yet conducted a survey of their PGR student views on space and facilities and without the resulting data and feedback, it was not possible for RDC to draw this to the attention of the SMT and UCL Estates. A link was also noted between student space and mental well-being with the UCL Student Mediator noting it as an increasing contributory factor cited in PGR student casework. Feedback from PRES also indicated that space was a particular concern for PGR students – in the 2015 survey the question regarding provision of “suitable working space” received the second lowest number of positive responses across all topics surveyed (and a difference of -5.2% compared to the sector benchmark).
- 36B.3 **Agreed:** That the A & H and SHS PGR student space survey (RDC Paper 02-06 (16-17)) be re-circulated to the members.
- Agreed:** That the other faculties would conduct their own surveys and to provide a written report in advance of the first RDC meeting next session.

Action: the Acting Secretary and FGTs

PART II: MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

37 RESEARCH STRATEGY

- 37.1 **Received** – RDC 03-01 (16-17): the draft Research Strategy presented by the Chair and the Director of Research Strategy and Policy/Joint Chief of Staff in the Office of the Vice-Provost (Research).
- 37.2 The Director of Research Strategy and Policy reported the following:
- a) The strategy was being revised in line with the overall institutional strategy, UCL 2034 and had three strategic aims: (i) to inspire and empower research leadership, (ii) to cross boundaries to increase engagement and (iii) to deliver impact for the public benefit. It was suggested that the third aim would need to be clear on what is meant by impact, in terms of the public good and in ensuring UCL research disseminated as widely as possible to communities beyond UCL. The strategy tried to take a broader approach to this than the HEFCE definition, but it was questioned whether it still gave a too narrow interpretation of what research outcomes might mean for the public benefit.
 - b) Consultation on the strategy is being undertaken with faculties and other colleagues across UCL to identify the key challenges for UCL research, including addressing environmental and other areas of concern, as well as specific issues such as developing research careers and pathways.
 - c) Initial conversations and discussions on the strategy were being held this term and it was intended to hold a UCL wide consultation with a Town Hall event in the Autumn term. The strategy would then be completed and submitted to Council in early 2018.
 - d) Ideas, reflections and queries on the strategy were welcomed from RDC.
- 37.3 The following points were noted and suggested in the discussion:
- a) The strategy should be clearer on what it meant by leadership, that this is seen in a broad and inclusive sense empowering all levels of research, not just for Heads of Research Groups and Departments, and faculty Deans. The strategy will need to bridge the tension between the top down development of ideas and policies and the bottom-up sense of ownership of them, which would need to be broad based in order to have traction within the university.
 - b) Other threats and barriers were identified, including the effects of Brexit, with staff already being excluded from research grants and conferences. A greater focus on self-reliance would be required to address this. There were also practical problems for research students including access to resources and study space.
 - c) It was queried whether there was an imbalance between UCL's projection of itself as London's global university, with research far more focussed on global engagement than that which directly addressed London issues. There was scope to redress this, for example by encouraging greater linkage between early careers researchers with smaller technology businesses, which would also align with the strategic aims of the Mayor of London office. There was also scope to widen PGR student engagement with community groups and the wider researcher community based in London in the government, think tanks and cultural industries.
 - d) The strategy should refer to the Connected Curriculum and how research informs UCL education for PGT and UG levels. It should also ensure that it is informed by research integrity. It was noted that discussions were planned on this as the strategy is developed.
- 37.4 **Agreed:** That the RDC members forward any views and comments on the strategy to the Director of Research Strategy and Policy Head and encourage colleagues to participate once the consultation commences in the Autumn.

Action: RDC Members

38 PGR REGULATIONS WORKING GROUP

(See also RDC Minute 24, 20.03.17)

- 38.1 **Received:** the report at RDC 03-02 (16-17) introduced by the IOE FGT/Chair of the Working Group.
- 38.2 The IOE Faculty Graduate Tutor reported the following:
- The Group recommended that six sub-chapters are used to provide a common framework for the PGR regulations covering Admissions, Registration, Programme of Study, Supervision, Progression and Upgrade and Final Assessment. The chapters should cross refer to other sections of the Academic Manual as appropriate.
 - Further recommendations included the removal of programme specific requirements from the regulations (to be provided in programme handbooks or specifications instead) and a separate chapter for the MRes regulations.
 - The report also listed areas where more work and agreement was necessary.
 - The draft regulations were still being edited due to delays including key staff unavailability.
- 38.3 There was some discussion of how, given the delays in drafting the regulations, they would be given final consideration and approval. It was suggested that delaying by twelve months would not be desirable and noted that the draft regulations were almost ready. There could also be advantages to publishing the drafts in one go, which would allow any queries on anomalies arising to be addressed incrementally in future iterations. Feedback suggested that people favoured the PGR regulations being made accessible in a single, separate chapter in the Academic Manual.
- 38.4 **Agreed:** That the Working Group forward the draft regulations once ready for circulation to the Committee for comments and suggestions. A final edit would then be conducted for final sign off by Chair's action in July.

Action: the IOE Faculty Graduate Tutor and the Chair

39 RESEARCH INTEGRITY TRAINING WORKING GROUP REPORT

(See also RDC Minute 25, 20.03.17)

- 39.1 **Received:** the final report from the working group at RDC 03-03 (16-17), presented by the Population Health Sciences FGT/Chair of the Working Group and the Cultures of Integrity Coordinator, Vice-Provost (Research) office.
- 39.2 The Population Health Sciences FGT and the Cultures of Integrity Coordinator reported the following:
- The report outlined a framework for research integrity training and recommendations to implement provision to educate students and staff. This was informed by the four main principles of research integrity found in the [UCL Statement](#). The Framework's training will consist of different complementary levels, from induction to more advanced levels, with completion of the core level to be mandatory in order for students to upgrade to PhD.
 - The report recommended that a number of resources to support the training would be required including a Moodle site containing training materials and guidance for staff and students (already in development) and a new integrity section of the e-log to record that the training had taken place.
 - The report also outlined a timeline for a suggested action plan showing what would be available for the next session and the provision to be available in 2018-19.
- 39.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:
- The Moodle site would help engagement by providing materials and guidance which would also allow faculties and departments to tailor their own provision. It was noted that research integrity is included in PGR student inductions, though students could miss its importance due to the amount of other information they receive at that time. It was also suggested that clear guidance for staff and supervisors is provided in the Moodle pages.
 - A number of queries were raised. How will compliance with the training be monitored and enforced at upgrade which is required in the guidance? It was not clear whether there were pockets of low engagement with research integrity across UCL. There was also issues of

when students take the training, with some taken sometime before the upgrade, resulting in quite a gap before they were researching more independently. More problems generally arose closer to the upgrade, with students finding that they needed to do so quickly. It was noted that the new training provision in place for students upgrading in 2018-19 should help to address these and there would be some encouragement to also take the more extensive training available.

- c) The Dilemma Game is used by many to help students undergo the training. It was felt inappropriate to require this as there is a diversity of approach by departments. It was agreed that a mechanism in the Research Student Log be developed to record uptake of training and that discussion of research integrity matters had taken place between student and supervisor. The record of this compliance would need to be clearly visible to Departmental and Faculty Graduate Tutors. This would require some resources and time for ISD staff to implement.

39.4 **Approved:** RDC 03-03 (16-17), the Research Integrity Training Working Group report and its' recommendations.

39.5 **Agreed:** That the Chair further discuss with the Working Group Chair and the Cultures of Integrity Coordinator the processes and provision for training and monitoring to be implemented in the action plan, including any necessary changes to the Research Student Log.

Action: the Chair and the Population Health Sciences FGT and the Cultures of Integrity Coordinator

40 UCLU PGTA REPORT RESPONSE FROM HUMAN RESOURCES

40.1 **Received:** The report at RDC 03-04 (16-17), presented by the Director of Human Resources Strategy and Planning.

40.2 The Director of Human Resources Strategy and Planning reported the following:

- a) HR had set up a PGTA Employment Charter Working Group to respond to the concerns raised in the UCLU report on PGTAs. The report was also intended to address the ten recommendations of an NUS and UCU PG Employment Charter and to revise and improve guidance in a PGTA Code of Practice and where appropriate, to change the relevant UCL policy. The draft responses were discussed with the UCLU Postgraduate Officer at the Group's final meeting.
- b) The Group did not necessarily accept everything in the UCLU report, but acknowledged that there was substance to the concerns raised and in particular those around consistency of practice around UCL. It was noted that 80% of PGTAs were employed on casual contracts, against 20% on employment contracts (generally at Grade 5), which fostered a different relationship between the student and department.
- c) The Group hoped that the ten recommendations in the Code of Practice would address most of the concerns and lead to greater consistency in practice across UCL and a better experience for the PGTAs.
- d) RDC was asked to comment on the draft and to approve the final version to go to the HR Policy Committee for formal approval.

40.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

- a) It was suggested that PGTAs should have parity with PG Research Assistants, who were employed on Grade 6 contracts. This would bring them into line with the UCL strategy to create greater equity between research and teaching at UCL, though a concern was raised that this could upset PG Research Assistants. It was noted that grading decisions should be based on the PGTA job description and not on other factors such as departmental budgets. The policy was thus not a decision for RDC, but for the HRPC to decide on.
- b) There was a concern that PGTAs engaged in laboratory work are sometimes pressurised into taking this on and working extra hours unpaid by their supervisors. The Code of Practice

aimed to address this by ensuring that the PGTAs' line managers are experienced staff and not their supervisors.

- c) There was general agreement that recognition of the PGTAs' additional work in preparing for teaching and in assessing work was important, although this could be difficult to gauge in practice due to individuals' approach and efficiency in undertaking work.
- d) It was further noted that monitoring the new arrangements would be difficult and may depend on feedback from the PGTAs and possibly evaluation of complaints arising. It was suggested that Internal Quality Reviews might check on this, though as they were only run every six years, this would limit action to address problems. Another suggestion was for the SMT to receive PGTA figures annually and to consider the numbers on casual contracts as an indicator (i.e. on the basis that the PGTAs on employment contracts were in a stronger position).

40.4 **Approved:** RDC 03-04 (16-17), the draft HR PGTA Employment Charter Working report. The report will be submitted to the next meeting of HRPC for final discussion and formal approval.

Action: the Director of Human Resources Strategy and Planning

41 UPDATES TO THE ACADEMIC MANUAL 2017-18: CHAPTER 7 ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIPS FRAMEWORK

41.1 **Received:** RDC 03-05 (16-17): the draft Academic Manual Chapter 7: Academic Partnerships Framework presented by the Senior Policy Advisor (Academic Partnerships).

41.2 The Senior Policy Advisor (Academic Partnerships) reported the following:

- a) The main amendment to the regulations relating to PGR is the addition of Section (2.3) on the Split-site PhD, providing a definition for it, the process for establishing such an arrangement and a draft proposal form.
- b) It was noted that a split-site PhD was where a student's subsidiary supervisor came from another institution and the student was expected to also spend time at that institution working on their research.
- c) RDC was asked to approve amendments to the Academic Manual Chapter 7 relating to research degrees and specifically the Split-site PhD section. It was noted that amendments not relating to research degrees would be submitted to EdCom on 13 June for approval.

41.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

- a) Queries were raised on the status of the subsidiary supervisor for a Split-site PhD. It was noted that subsidiary supervisors need to sign honorary contracts at UCL, which ensures that they are subject to UCL regulations for supervision. It was suggested that this might be added to the Split-site PhD Proposal form. However, it was noted that the form was intended to be an internal UCL document, to get approval for the Split-site PhD proposal from the principal supervisor, the department and the faculty. Supervisory arrangements and study leave are covered elsewhere in the regulations (although referenced in the form) and in terms of the other institution, are covered by the wider partnership agreement negotiated and signed with it. The agreement is thus at an institutional level (i.e. not by the individual supervisors) and if any problems arose, it is the institution which is liable, not the individual supervisor.
- b) It was also noted that the Split-Site PhD section did not cover students on industrial placements, which were a third level of supervision often referred to as industry advisors. This is also covered elsewhere in the Academic Manual. However, this did prompt some discussion on training for these supervisors/industry advisors, possibly on-line.
- c) It was intended to review the Split-Site PhD registration process after its first year of operation in 2017-18 to amend and update as necessary in light of this. The Senior Policy Advisor (Academic Partnerships) welcomed any comments or feedback from RDC members on the policy.

41.4 **Approved:** RDC 03-04 (16-17), the draft Academic Manual Chapter 7: Academic Partnerships Framework.

42 INTERNAL EXAMINERS' PAYMENTS

42.1 **Received:** An oral report from the Director of Academic Services.

42.2 The Director of AS reported that the institutions making up the University of London had traditionally paid internal examiners from the different colleges for their work. This practice had largely disappeared as the colleges became autonomous institutions with their own degree awarding powers, with examiners from different colleges now regarded and paid as external examiners. Internal examiners duties should be covered by the staff contracts. However, a small minority of examiners internally in UCL was still claiming these payments now, in addition to their salary and it was proposed to discontinue payments for internal examiners (it added to the substantial costs for examining within UCL). RDC was asked to approve this proposal.

42.3 **Approved:** the proposal to discontinue payment for internal examiners. RDC noted no concerns.

Action: the Director of Academic Services to amend regulations accordingly

PART III: OTHER MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR INFORMATION
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43 EROS Application Form

43.1 **Received:** RDC 03-06 (16-17) the EROS Application Form introduced by the Engineering Faculty Tutor.

43.2 The Engineering Faculty Tutor noted that the proposed EROS supervisors' application form had been developed following discussions in two RDC working groups (PGR Regulations and Research Integrity). It was intended to make the process for supervisor approval by departments and faculties more efficient, with the necessary information in one document, to be managed centrally. It would also prompt the supervisors to select their contract type and to confirm UCL supervisor training, as well as familiarisation with UCL Research Integrity expectations. It was noted that the form may not suit all faculty processes but could prove to be very useful and be adapted. It was suggested that the form was made available on the Doctoral School website.

43.3 **Approved:** RDC 03-06 (16-17), the EROS Application Form to be made available as a tool for faculties on the Doctoral School website. The Chair encouraged faculties to make use of it.

Action: the Senior Executive Officer, Doctoral School to note

44 NEW PROGRAMMES APPROVED BY RDC CHAIR'S ACTION

44.1 **Noted:** None approved since the previous meeting.

45 MINUTES OF SUB COMMITTEES

45.1 **Noted:** None approved since the previous meeting.

46 SUSPENSIONS OF REGULATIONS REPORT

46.1 **Approved:** The suspensions of regulations at RDC 03-7 (16-17).

47 DATES OF NEXT MEETING

47.1 This was the final RDC meeting of the 2016-17 session. Dates for 2017-18 will be confirmed with the Chair and circulated to the members in due course.

ROB TRAYNOR on behalf of

LIZZIE VINTON

Secretary to Research Degrees Committee

Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager | Academic Services | Student and Registry Services

5 September 2017