CONFIRMED

LONDON'S GLOBAL UNIVERSITY

RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

20 March 2017

M I N U T E S

Present: Professor David Bogle (Chair),
Dr Simon Banks, Dr Elvira Bramon, Mr Ben Colvill, Mr Mark Crawford, Professor Alison Diduck, Professor Dilly Fung, Professor Kirsten Harvey, Dr Stephen Marshall, Ms Helen Notter, Professor Martin Oliver, Mr Derfel Owen, Dr Hynek Pikhart, Dr Ruth Siddall, Professor Joy Sleeman, Dr David Spratt, Professor Kaila Srai and Dr Andrew Stoker

In attendance: Mr Rik Ganly-Thomas (vice Dr Virginia Mantouvalou), Ms Rowena Lamb for item 25, Professor Tania Monteiro (vice Dr Caroline Essex), Ms Caroline Ransom (vice Dr Sally Leevers), Dr Sam Smidt (vice Professor Dilly Fung), Mr Gary Smith for items 21 and 22, Mr Simon To for item 27, Mr Rob Traynor for item 28 and Ms Lizzie Vinton (Secretary)

Apologies received from: Ms Wendy Appleby, Professor Alison Diduck, Dr Caroline Essex, Professor Dilly Fung, Dr Sally Leevers, Dr Virginia Mantouvalou, Dr Benet Salway and Professor Anthony Smith

Key to abbreviations:

A&H	Arts and Humanities (Faculty of)
AC	Academic Committee
CRS	Completing Research Student
DGT	Departmental Graduate Tutor
FGT	Faculty Graduate Tutor
FRDC	Faculty Research Degree Committee (proposed in Item 28)
HR	Human Resources
IOE	Institute of Education
PGR	Postgraduate Research
PRES	Postgraduate Research Experience Survey
RDC	Research Degrees Committee
REF	Research Excellence Framework
SDS	Student Data Services (Student and Registry Services)
SHS	Social and Historical Sciences (Faculty of)
SMT	Senior Management Team
SSCC	Staff-Student Consultative Committee
StAR	Student Academic Representative
ToR	Terms of Reference
UCLU	UCL Union

PART I: PRELIMINARY BUSINESS

19 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

19.1 **Approved:** The minutes of the meeting held 18 October 2016 *[RDC 1-18, 18.19.16]*.

20 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

20A UCLU PGTA Report

(RDC Minute 8, 18.10.16)

20A.1 The Chair reported that he had followed up the key issues arising from the report with the Director of HR. HR are considering the matters raised and how they might be addressed, and would report back to the June RDC meeting.

PART II: MATTERS FOR DISCUSSION

21 MPHIL/PHD UPGRADE AND SUBMISSION DATA

21.1 **Received** – the report at RDC 02-01 (16-17) from the Head of Student Data Services.

21.2 The Head of SDS reported the following:

a) The annual report looked at three cohorts of Doctoral Students (2009-10, 2010-11 and 2011-12) showing the proportion of students submitting their thesis and the upgrade from MPhil to PhD within the prescribed time.
b) The IOE data combined that held on the Institute's former records system with Portico and there had been some issues in reconciling this. It was expected that this would improve in future as more of the data is drawn from Portico, thus allowing greater confidence in the IOE figures.
c) Noted that the figures contained an error in its inclusion of students who had left their programme within the first year. The report will try to replicate research council reporting practice and exclude these students, as they are not considered as failing to submit. This meant that approximately 30 students can be removed from the figures in each year's cohort, which would improve the overall figures by around 2%. The corrected figures will be updated and recirculated to members.
d) The data for part time students, not included in the report, was roughly similar to full time students. Data for age groups was very interesting, showing that older students were less likely to submit on time than their younger peers (it was noted that more of these students were self-funded).
e) The overall figures for submission within the prescribed time had dropped to 64% for the 2011-12 cohort from 68% the previous year.

21.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

a) It was queried whether the data could be matched to the Research Log data, but noted that this would be difficult to synchronise and produce. It was suggested that members interested in exploring the two data sets further should liaise with SDS.
b) An improvement in the upgrade data was expected for more recent cohorts, but members suggested that further thought was required about the potential for more formal procedures at the end of year 2/3, such as a completion plan and supervisor sign off, or even extending the use of the Research log, perhaps with Departmental Graduate Tutor sign-off. The main goal was for students to complete on time.
c) Noted that Life Sciences already had additional processes in place for upgrade and submission and that the Built Environment had enacted additional requirement for Completing Research Student status from 2015 onwards. All its departments were asked to follow procedures (e.g. written piece of work/ presentations) before sign up to CRS.
d) There was a request for the data to be broken down by domicile to show home and international students. More individualised data could also be provided on request to SDS.
e) Some departments had quite low rates for upgrade and submission, a real concern in terms of Research Council funding, including Anthropology, Economics and Bartlett.

21.4 **Agreed:** That the Head of SDS remove the first year leaver data and add the additional data requested on domicile and re-circulate the revised report to the members.

Action: Head of Student Data Services

21.5 **Agreed:** That members discuss the issues raised at their faculty-level committees and identify local actions for addressing some of the gaps, and where possible, for sharing good practice between Departments. Members should also refer any specific concerns regarding the accuracy of data for non-standard programmes to the Head of SDS.

Action: RDC Members and Head of Student Data Services to note

22 REPORT ON RESEARCH DEGREE ADMINISTRATION AND EXAMINATION STATISTICS 2015-16

22.1 **Received:** the report at RDC 02-02 (16-17) from the Student Records Manager.

22.2 The Student Records Manager reported the following:

a) The figures had risen each year and UCL was now making the second highest number of PGR awards in the UK.
b) IOE examiner nominations were not included in the report as they are not currently recorded on the student records system. Work to assimilate this process will begin shortly.
c) Although requested, only in around 25% of cases do administrators notify the Research Degrees Office of viva dates. It is difficult to implement proper checking processes for examiners' report forms and the outcome of exams without this data.
d) RDC requested a record of those occasions when students were permitted to submit their thesis directly to an examiner in future reports. This happens in exceptional circumstances when the viva has to be held at very short notice, when the posted copy is lost or delayed or when an examiner specifically requests an electronic copy.

22.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

a) It was queried whether, as preliminary reports do not state when the viva is, the viva date could be added to the thesis submission form. It was noted that that this was not possible as the date should not be set until the Thesis is sent to examiners.
b) The Chair thanked the members for their hard work in raising the numbers of students achieving PGR awards at UCL.

22.4 **Agreed:** That the Student Records Manager add the occasions that students were allowed to submit their thesis directly to an examiner to the report in future.

Action: Student Records Manager

22.5 **Agreed:** That the Faculty Graduate Tutors remind their departments to submit viva dates to the Student Records office so that they can make sure degrees are awarded on time.

Action: Faculty Graduate Tutors

23 RESEARCH STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH REPORT

23.1 **Received:** the report from the working group at RDC 02-03 (16-17), presented by the Senior Executive Officer (Doctoral School).

23.2 The Senior Executive Officer reported the following:

a) The Doctoral School had convened a Research Student Mental Wellbeing Working Group to examine issues particular to research student mental wellbeing and to make recommendations for future policy and practice to enhance students' educational and personal experience at UCL.
b) RDC was asked for its views on the Group's recommendations and whether it wished for anything to be stated more strongly or explicitly? The Group also requested RDC's views on how its recommendations should be taken forward and where in UCL (e.g. the SMT).

23.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

a) The UCLU PG Students' Officer noted that students often raised an issue of not knowing where to find support for their well-being. Services needed to be better advertised and sign-posted to students, but an increase in resources was also needed as many were over-subscribed. Transition programme to ease students' progress from Masters level to PGR could also help.

b) Suggested that supervisors' training be improved to cover stress and overall wellbeing and to support development of policy on work-life balance. Workshops do exist, but recommendation here is that it is packaged/ marketed to DGTs and supervisors in particular. Noted that UCL Arena had been looking at supervisor training in general and questioned whether it might offer more bespoke training, though the supervisor work-life balance also needed to be considered.

c) Peer support and mentoring could be very helpful for students, though difficult to deliver, but good models are available. Networking with peers makes an enormous difference to PGR students, with opportunities for conferences and other events very important.

d) It was noted that supervisors were not necessarily well-equipped to provide pastoral care and may not have the right knowledge and expertise. It was suggested that a small group be formed in each Faculty and Department who would be kept up to date on latest policies and resources, and could provide triage and offer immediate help. This could be part of the role of the DGT, though more information and support would be needed to deliver this, as well as training for staff. Appointing experts in each department however would be very difficult and students might be better helped by improved sign-posting to the support services. It was however noted that services such as Student Psychological Services, were having difficulties in meeting the increased demand. Suggested that trained staff in departments could help by providing a first contact for students and holding preliminary conversations. Greater PGR-specific expertise was required as staff currently are uncertain of what works best for the students and when to refer. A review of Student Support and Welfare was currently underway which was recommending that PGR students are targeted in this way.

e) The Francis Crick Institute had introduced mental health first aiders as an initial point of contact for students, with serious cases referred on. The Crick would be willing to share this experience and provide more information on the specific training offered.

f) Noted that AC had received an annual wellbeing report and that it would be useful for the mental Wellbeing report to be submitted there too, to raise awareness. However, the report would need to be clear on AC's responsibility to discuss the recommendations and, for example, to put it in context of institutional strategy.

23.4 **Approved:** RDC 02-03 (16-17), the Research Student Mental Wellbeing Working Group report: Enhancing Research Student Mental Wellbeing at UCL.

23.5 **Agreed:** That the report be submitted to AC, taking note of the RDC discussion above.

Action: Senior Executive Officer

23.6 **Agreed:** That RDC members take the report back to Faculties for consideration and emphasise that it is about creating a better working environment for everybody and not just about mental ill health. The report should also be flagged to supervisors. FGTs were asked to bring back any comments and suggestions to the next meeting.

Action: Faculty Graduate Tutors

23.7 **Agreed:** 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.

Action: Chair

24 PGR REGULATIONS WORKING GROUP INTERIM REPORT

24.1 **Received:** The report at RDC 02-04 (16-17), presented by the FGT (IOE). The report included:

- Interim Report from the Working Group
- Minutes of the PGR Regulations Working Group held 6 October 2016
- Minutes of the PGR Regulations Working Group held 8 February 2017
- Minutes of the PGR Regulations Working Group held 1 March 2017
- Proposed PGR Regulations Structure - Working Document

24.2 The FGT (IOE) reported the following:

a) The interim report indicated the direction of travel and the work that the Group had undertaken so far. Thanks was given to all the contributors.
b) The Group had mainly considered the structure for the regulations consolidating admissions and registration regulations and scoping out the other areas of work.
c) Work had focussed primarily on identifying the straightforward matters to be modified, those which required more work and those substantive issues which will need to be referred to RDC for discussion. The thinking so far was that admissions and registration would not be problematic.
d) The Group was also considering how MRes and MPhilStud might be better incorporated. A framework was envisaged where programme-specific detail is moved down to programme summaries/ handbooks, thus helping departments to keep them up to date longer term.
e) The next steps will be looking at the assessment section, and at upgrade. The aim was for the Group's full report on straightforward matters to be approved at the RDC June meeting in time implementation for 2017-18. Some aspects will need to be referred to RDC for further development next year.

25 RESEARCH INTEGRITY TRAINING WORKING GROUP INTERIM REPORT

25.1 **Received:** The report at RDC 02-05 (16-17) presented by the FGT (Population Health Sciences) and the Cultures of Integrity Coordinator, Vice-Provost (Research) office. The report included:

- Minutes of the Integrity Training Working Group held 22 November 2016
- Minutes of the Integrity Training Working Group held 2 February 2017

25.2 The FGT and the Cultures of Integrity Coordinator reported the following:

a) The working group's overall aim was to explore ways to educate research students about research integrity; specifically to generate a set of objectives for improving research integrity education and determine a strategy for implementing these objectives as a cross-UCL solution. The group would also seek to make recommendations to RDC for UCL-wide discussion.
b) It was important that the principles of Research Integrity are instilled in students, that they have a good understanding of what it is, and how it relates to current research and beyond. The group is considering how to put this into action and emphasized that it is about culture as well as compliance. The group agreed that an initial training session should be mandatory for all PGR students and monitored at the upgrade point.
c) A survey on current practice was conducted which also asked specific questions about what faculties would like to see, with results summarised in the Research Integrity Annual Statement 2015-16. The feedback suggested that there was a clear need for a set framework on Research Integrity. Initial training was required and then options to build on bespoke learning, depending on the research area.
d) The group also considered the Doctoral Skills Development Programme which had many courses, workshops etc. related to Research Integrity, though the Group considered that they might be coordinated and structured more effectively to facilitate their use in training opportunities. The group then looked at gaps in the current offer and wanted to bring as much as possible into a single framework.
e) In considering the strategy for delivering Research Integrity training, a pyramid structure was proposed with four levels including induction, online resources – both mandatory – and then with more advanced and bespoke options at level 3 and 4, both central and local.

This was designed to cover Research Integrity overall, but would differ for staff and students. The group felt that a certificate should be awarded once students had completed the training, but had not yet agreed a proposal for what that might look like. Additional online resources would be required to manage capacity for 5000+ students and the online courses proposed would need to be developed. It was noted that more detail on this would be provided in the next report. The group will also consider whether mandatory training could be recorded through the research log.

f) It was noted that, in many cases, practical training revolved around the Dilemma Game, which enables staff and students to consider Research Integrity together. More work was needed to raise awareness of this.

25.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

a) Some concerns were expressed as to how it would be delivered by departments. It was noted that most of the suggestion would draw on bringing together current resources.
b) It was noted that online resources would help to deliver the mandatory training and that platforms were already available which could be used.
c) Noted that the Dilemma Game had been well received in departments and often adapted by them. Some departments also had ethics workshops around images and statistics. There was some agreement with a suggestion that events be set up to promote the issues to supervisors. This will help to establish a change in culture.

25.4 The Chair thanked the Working Group for the Interim report and looked forward to receiving the full report at the next meeting.

26 DEPARTMENTAL PGR STUDENT SPACE SURVEY (A&H/SHS)

26.1 **Received:** The report at RDC 02-06 (16-17) presented by the FGT (Arts and Humanities).

26.2 The Chair reported the following:

a) A survey in A&H and SHS on research student space was conducted by the Faculties in the summer of 2016. The survey was initiated following low scores received on research environment in the PRES 2015, where A&H and SHS were in the bottom quartile for this area. There was also a concerns that student space access also affected the results of the UCLU survey on Promoting Active Mental Health and Wellbeing for PhD students.
b) A&H responses stated that there were some departments with no study spaces at all for PGR students. Traditionally, there had been an assumption that humanities students would work in libraries and archives etc. and not need access to laboratory or desk space. However, times had changed in terms of students requiring access to IT, in the ways that libraries operated, and, the increasing student numbers using the libraries.
c) The survey's findings also correlated with the findings of the UCLU Research Student Mental Health report mental health (see item 23) and highlighted the connection between availability of study and social space on overall wellbeing (e.g. the absence of study space limited interaction between PGR peers).
d) The report also highlighted the risk of reputational damage to UCL in these subject areas. Its recommendations to RDC were to consider how to address these issues and also consider how pressure might be applied across UCL to make the necessary changes.

26.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

a) The Chair thanked the author for the report and analysis. It was noted that action had been taken to use the survey to raise these issues and to make PGR student space a higher priority with the two Deans.
b) The results showed a correlation between student satisfaction with the proportion of desk space to students. Any higher than 3 students to 1 desk and there was a negative impact on student satisfaction. It was noted that this also related directly to the UCLU Research Student Mental Health report's recommendation 13, on encouraging faculties to review PGR space needs and improve provision.

c) It was noted that the location of space for PGR students varied considerably across the faculties. Reported that the Faculty of Engineering found it a struggle not having colocation of supervisors and their research area, which tended to have a significant negative impact in keeping PGR students together.

d) There were also issues with the quality of space, as well as the quantity. Common rooms, often a key part of student dissatisfaction, also featured, so dissatisfaction was not just focussed on study space and desks.

e) The Chair wished to be able to present more comprehensive data on this to Estates Management Committee and requested that the other faculties conduct a similar exercise to illuminate these issues across UCL. It would be particularly important to understand the ratio of desks to PGR students and the data could then be presented, following analysis, to UCL Estates with a recommendation that it is considered as a priority for the Estates plan. This would help the case for Recommendation 2 in the report, that a minimum service standard be developed for PGR study space.

f) The report's recommendation 3 proposed that the Chair raise these issues with the SMT, Planning Team and others. The Chair noted that the Vice-Provost (Research) was well aware of the issues and of the impact on research environment, as well as the implications for the REF and PRES etc. It would be a challenge for UCL to address the expansion of UG and PGT numbers and their impact on study resources (particularly the library), but clear that discussions would need to be held on these matters at an institutional level.

26.4 **Approved:** RDC 02-06 (16-17), the A&H and SHS Departmental PGR Student Space Survey report. RDC endorsed the report's recommendations subject to the discussion above.

26.5 **Agreed:** That the other faculties conduct a similar survey of their departmental provision of space/facilities for PGR students, particularly the ratio of desks to PGR students. The data could then be presented, following analysis, to SMT and UCL Estates with a recommendation that it is accepted as a priority in UCL Estates planning.

Action: Faculty Graduate Tutors

27 StARS MID-TERM REPORT FEBRUARY 2017

27.1 **Received:** The report at RDC 02-07 (16-17), presented by the Representation and Campaigns Manager (UCLU) and the Director of Academic Services.

27.2 The Representation and Campaigns Manager (UCLU) and the Director of Academic Services reported the following:

a) Coverage of SSCCs by StARS at UCL was now at 99% (86% last year) with more StARs than ever before at this point, close to 1400. UCLU officers were working with the two SSCCs which had not returned StARs so far.

b) Training numbers were good with 68% trained, back to the high levels of 2014-15 numbers and high satisfaction scores (91%) received for the training. Advanced training sessions were also increasing in popularity and a leadership training module had been launched.

c) There had been changes in approach to the SSCC minutes analysis, with a new coding system developed using new categories in line with the NSS and other surveys. The sentiment of the comments had also been analysed to identify whether they were positive, neutral or negative. An annex on PGR representation had also been added for RDC, showing coverage data broken down to faculties, with the report showing where there are gaps. However, there was currently difficulty in seeing PGR-specific comments in the minutes, the analysis instead showing issues raised by SSCCs with PGR representation.

d) It was suggested that the SSCC data could be used to provide evidence for student feedback on the study space issues (see Item 26 above).

e) It was noted that Education Committee had approved the most recent iteration of the StARs 2020 vision strategy document, which would be circulated to members for information.

27.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:

a) Members queried how the difficulties in recruiting PGR StARS might be addressed. There were currently128 PGR StARS, 11% of the total, some way below the proportion of PGR students at UCL.
b) Concerns were raised regarding the performance of some existing StARS on the committees and how they engaged with the role. Those who were elected are sometimes the least engaged and the yearly elections could make it difficult to address those who aren't engaging. There was also an issue of non-attendance by the StARs at the meetings.
c) Members requested a breakdown of the number of PGR StARs for each faculty.
d) The StARS Steering Group had requested that RDC help to promote PGR representation, particularly with the right way to address the students. It was acknowledged that the terminology used (SSCCs and StARS itself) were problematic, as many PGR students saw themselves as early career researchers more than students and tended to have a much stronger association with their departments, rather than connection to their Faculty.
e) The Chair thanked the StARS Steering Group for their report.

28 FACULTY RESEARCH DEGREE COMMITTEES DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

28.1 **Received:** The paper at RDC 02-08 (16-17) presented by the Quality Assurance Coordinator (Academic Services).

28.2 The Quality Assurance Coordinator reported the following:
a) Draft terms of reference for these committees are outlined in the paper at RDC 02-08 (16-17).
b) The terms of reference for the committees was based closely on the FTCs and it was proposed that, once approved, they be published in the Academic Manual alongside the FTC policy. It was proposed to call them Faculty Research Degrees Committees (FRDC), for clarity and to align them more closely with RDC

28.3 The following points were noted in the discussion:
a) Suggested that greater emphasis be added to the draft student membership section that the PGR representatives need to be StARs.
b) It was noted that the Laws PG Committee covered both PGT and PGR matters and would have responsibility for the FRDC Terms of Reference in addition to the FGT Terms of Reference.
c) Noted that ToR 8, to receive reports on the appointment of examiners by departments within the faculty, could be problematic, as this information is not currently collected in a format that could be readily used. It was agreed that this ToR be amended to state that the faculty monitor the process for convening panels instead and note at the FRDC whether this had been appropriately conducted (including where examiners were declined). It would also discuss common matters arising from the examiners reports.

28.4 **Approved**: the Faculty Research Degree Committees Draft Terms of Reference, subject to the amendments suggested by the Committee.

Action: RDC members to note and Policy Advisor, Academic Services

29 FACULTY REPORTS ON GENERIC ISSUES ARISING FROM JOINT EXAMINERS' REPORTS

29.1 **Received:** the reports at RDC 02-09 (16-17), presented by the FGTs.

29.2 The following points were noted in the discussion:
a) The report showed a summary of the issues raised in examiners joint reports, arising from each faculty. No significant systemic problems across UCL were noted however, there appeared to be ongoing issues with statistics and the use of English.
b) Queried whether the reports could be distributed to PGR administrators electronically, but noted that this was not possible due to a lack of resources.

PART III: OTHER MATTERS FOR APPROVAL OR INFORMATION

30 NEW AND AMENDED PROGRAMMES AND QUALIFICATIONS APPROVED BY RDC CHAIR'S ACTION

30.1 **Noted:** The programmes approved by RDC chair's action at RDC 02-10 (16-17).

31 MINUTES OF SUB COMMITTEES

31A **Approved** – the Minutes of the StARs Steering Group held *8 November 2016* at RDC 02-11 (16-17).

32 SUSPENSIONS OF REGULATIONS REPORT

32.1 **Approved:** The suspensions of regulations at RDC 02-12 (16-17).

33 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

33A Codes for Programmes

33A.1 FGTs have been asked to review their PGR programmes and to combine into a finite number, to help build cohorts. It was requested that they return them to the Doctoral School as soon as possible.

Action: Faculty Graduate Tutors

34 DATES OF NEXT MEETING

- Monday 5 June 2017, 10.30am – 1.00pm, Haldane Room, Wilkins Building

ROB TRAYNOR on behalf of

LIZZIE VINTON
Secretary to Research Degrees Committee
Assessment Regulations and Governance Manager | Academic Services | Student and Registry Services
30 May 2017