

Postgraduate Research Quality Committee

10 February 2015

Confirmed Minutes

Present

Professor Sue Gibson (Chair)

Mr Hassan Ahmadzadeh (Student Representative)

Professor Andrew Amis (Mechanical Engineering)

Dr Simon Archer (College Tutor)

Professor Marjo-Riitta Jarvelin (School of Public Health)
Ms Nida Mahmud (GSU Chair)
Dr Mike Tennant (Centre for Environmental Policy)
Professor Denis Wright (Director of Student Support)

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2014 were approved.

PRQC/2014/14

4. Matters arising

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

ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION

5. Review of Departmental Research Degree Provision : Periodic Reviews

The Committee was reminded that the Quality Assurance & Enhancement Committee had agreed a transitional procedure for consideration of periodic review reports, intended to simplify the consideration of review reports prior to implementation of new monitoring and review processes in 2015-16. The agreed procedure was outlined to the Committee and it was noted that the Chair of the Review Panel and representatives of the department under review would not normally be required to attend the Committee for discussion of the report. The discussion would now be led by the Committee Chair.

5.1 Department of Medicine

5.1.1 The Committee considered the periodic review of research degree training in the Department of Medicine, including the reports of the assessors, the internal Chair's completed Reviewer's Comments Form and the Department's response to the assessors' comments.

PRQC/2014/15

5.1.2 The Committee was advised that, in accordance with the new procedure, the Departmental response had been sent to the internal Chair who had confirmed that the Department had satisfactorily addressed each of the Panel's recommendations.

5.1.3 The reviewers had rated the Department of Medicine "compliant" with seventeen of the eighteen precepts. The Department was considered to be "non-compliant" with Precept 14 [Early Stage Assessment], but was working towards compliance in this regard and the panel therefore concluded that the Department was "compliant" overall. The panel considered that the research programme provided very good research training and support for postgraduate students, and noted that there were several areas where the provision was truly excellent and reached the highest standards of good practice.

5.1.4 The panel had commented that the students had been very positive about their overall experience and had reported excellent relationships with their supervisors.

5.1.5 The review panel had made three specific recommendations which had been thoroughly considered and responded to by the Department. The Chair of the panel had confirmed that he

conference proceeding prior to completing a research degree was encouraged. The Committee was however, mindful that time given over to writing papers and getting publishing may affect the student's timely completion of the thesis and that it may prove additionally time consuming to seek permissions from the co-authors of papers for inclusion of papers in the thesis.

8.3 There were also some concerns from the Committee about copyright constraints.

8.4 The Committee noted that some universities, for example the University of Manchester, had now introduced this "Alternative Format" thesis and agreed that there would be merit in pursuing the concept further. The Committee agreed that if this was introduced as an alternative to the standard Imperial thesis, that students should receive clear adv

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9.7 The Committee agreed to recommend that Senate should approve the proposal to widen full text open access to e-theses dating from before March 2013, subject to the safeguards outlined above.

10. English for Research Students

The Committee received a paper from the Centre for Academic English (CfAE) presented by the Director, Dr Julie King, and the Senior Teacher of English for Academic Purposes, Ms Hilary Glasman-Deal. The Committee was invited to discuss the proposals for the review of the English Language Requirement for Postgraduate Research Students.

PRQC/2014/21

10.1 Dr King reminded the Committee of the current Postgraduate English Requirement and explained the difficulties faced by the CfAE in being able to identify and support students with weaker English linguistic ability.

10.2 The Committee was supportive of the changes proposed by the CfAE, in particular that it should be compulsory for all non-native speaker students to take the Initial Test within one month of their programme start date, so that the support needed could be provided at a very early stage. The Committee agreed that the only category of students who should be exempt from taking the Initial Test should be students who had a minimum English language proficiency of IELTS 8.0 or equivalent.

10.3 The Committee agreed with the proposal that those students scoring below 45% on the Initial Test would be required to take a minimum of two (maximum three) core Academic English modules prior to being assessed at the ESA point.

10.4 The Committee agreed with the proposal to change from a pass/fail test to a learning-oriented progress assessment which would indicate a student's academic literacy competence in relation to PhD study.

10.5 The Committee agreed with the proposal to assess and report students' progress and proficiency at the Initial Test and ESA stages only, and to remove any assessment at the LSR stage unless it was specifically requested by the department.

10.6 In further discussion the Committee noted the variability in language help and support provided to students by supervisors and also the tenancy for some groups of students not to mix with English speaking students.

10.7 The Vice-Provost (Education) stressed that a special case for admission should not be made for any student who does not meet the College English language entry requirement.

10.8 The Committee agreed with all of the proposals for immediate changes to the English Language Requirement for doctoral students as presented by the CfAE, and noted the proposals for longer term developments.

11. Late submission of Theses

11.1 Data on cases of late submission in 2013/2014.

The Committee received a paper on cases of late submission in 2013/2014 presented by the Deputy Director of the Graduate School. The Committee was invited to consider the analysis of factors affecting the timely submission of theses in 2013/2014.

PRQC/2014/22

11.1.1 The Committee was reminded that the submission rate metric was used as a benchmark by Research Councils and in REF (The Research Excellence Framework) and that submission within 4 years was one of the performance indicators that they used. The Committee was also reminded that the percentage submission rate for students who submitted their thesis within 4 years of registration was taken into account as part of Research Council studentship applications when the figures also had to be reported at a College level. It was suggested that Research Councils may, in future, impose penalties on institutions with an overall submission rate below 90%.

11.1.2 The Committee was reminded that some cases for late submission could be dealt with by interruption of study. However the Committee was mindful that an interruption of study could have funding implications for students, as well implications for student visas and accommodation.

11.1.3 The Committee noted the range of factors which contributed to requests for late submission which were outside the student's control such as where a student had had to move labs, had had trouble with equipment or had had problems recruiting patients. Occasions where a new supervisor had had to be appointed also accounted for a number of delays.

11.1.4 The Committee thanked the Registry Research Degrees Team for providing the data. It was agreed that this report should be presented to the Committee on an annual basis.

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12.3 It was reported that the wo

