

Confirmed
Research Degrees Committee

Wednesday 3rd June 2020

11am – 2pm

Minutes

Present Members: Professor David Bogle (Chair); Dr Helen Matthews; Ms Elizabeth Halton; Ms Helen Notter; Professor Stephen Marshall; Dr Simon Banks; Dr Paulo Drinot; Professor Jill Norman; Dr Andrew Stoker; Dr Benet Salway; Professor Tania Monteiro; Dr Mark Freeman; Dr Patti Adank; Mr Jim Onyemenam; Mr Graham Van Goffrier; Professor Jasmina Jovanovic; Dr Kathryn Walsh; Professor Hynek Pikhart; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Virginia Mantouvalou; Professor Andrew Wills; Dr Ruth Siddal.

Attendees: Professor Dave Spratt for item 4; Ms Karen Smith for item 5; Mr Simon To for item 12; Miss Natalie Humphrey for item 13; Dr Alex Standen for item 15; Professor John Martin for item 16; Mr Adnan Ali (observer); and Mr Darren Payne (secretary).

Part I: Preliminary Business

17. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

17.1. Approved - the minutes of the meeting held on 5th November 2019 and 11th March 2020 (COVID-19 meeting).

18. Matters Arising from the Minutes

18.1. Monthly Student Studentship Stipend Payments (minute 11.5, 19-20): It was confirmed that these are to go live in the September 2020 payment onwards, and that this would be communicated to students in advance.

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19. Chair's Business

19.1. The chair welcomed Professor Jasmina Jovanovic, who was the new Faculty Graduate Tutor for Life Sciences, replacing Professor Surjit Kaila Singh Srail.

19.2. The chair also welcomed cu1 12 Tf1 0 0 1 152.66 800.76 Tm0 g0 G[)TJETQq0.06ba 15tha

20.2. The first issue considered was Annual Leave, and whether there should be a formal regulation to mandate parity between research students and staff regarding the number of days of leave allowed. It was generally agreed that this approach would be best, however a number of issues would need to be considered such as Tier 4, how and where to log annual leave, and the interaction between conference attendance and annual leave. It was agreed that Annual Leave and these issues could be discussed within Faculties and brought back to the working group to finalise.

Action: Faculty Graduate Tutors

20.3. The second issue considered was whether Viva chairs could be introduced. It was noted that these had previously been rejected. It was also noted that recordings were currently being used for the virtual vivas and could be considered as an alternative. It was noted that the proposal was not to make viva chairs mandatory, but to have it as an option that would no longer require a Suspension of Regulations. This would then be a 'may allow' within the regulations, under specific circumstances such as complex 18-month resubmissions, at a student's request, or when the student was also a staff member of UCL.

20.4. It was agreed that a paper would be produced to outline the benefits and difficulties of having a Viva chair to be discussed further within Faculties.

Action: The Chair of the Working Group

20.5. The third issue considered was whether the following wording was still accurate, and if it could be extended to all staff:

is a member of the academic staff of UCL, no examiner may be appointed

20.6. It was agreed that the removal of 'academic' was not contentious, and there did not seem to be any valid reason to separate out staff in this way. It was also noted that an internal examiner is important as they are familiar with UCL

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practices, and part of their role is to ensure UCL processes are followed. A potential adjustment would be to amend the rule such that the internal cannot be from the same department as the student or supervisor(s). There would then be a clause that allows an internal examiner from the same department if necessary (e.g. if nobody with sufficient expertise available), if a Viva chair is used.

- 20.7. It was agreed that a paper would be produced to outline the benefits and challenges to be discussed further within Faculties, and to also help explore whether any important issues had not been considered by altering the wording.

Action: The Chair of the Working Group

- 20.8. The fourth issue considered was study leave fee variation, which was noted as having become a bigger issue with the COVID-19 situation since most students are studying away from UCL until the subsequent academic year.

- 20.9. It was agreed that discussion with Finance is necessary first, and this could then be escalated as necessary through the COVID-19 groups.

Action: The Chair of the Working Group

- 20.10. The fifth issue considered was re-submission timings. It was noted that at numerous FRDC meetings and in joint examiner reports this was highlighted as an issue. In some cases, 18-month re-submissions were incorrectly being utilised to simply give students additional time rather than its intended use to indicate that significant further work is required.

- 20.11. It was noted that 1, 6, and 18 months could have benefits and that it was important to inform supervisors that the times are “up to” and not necessarily intended to be the full duration. There could also be a renewal system, where a student is given 3 months and then could be renewed further if necessary, without requiring a suspension of regulations as is the situation currently.

20.12. It was agreed that the Working Group will take the suggestions forward, and these will be bought back to be considered by RDC once ready.

Action: The Chair of the Working Group

21. PGR Mental Wellbeing

21.1. Received - the paper at RDC 3-02 (19-20). The Head of Wellbeing introduced the item which provided an update on the recommendations and actions produced by the PGR Mental Health Working Group.

21.2. It was confirmed that progress was being made and the Working Group has collaborated across different parts of UCL to ensure there is sharing of good practice. Currently all of the actions are “in progress”, but it was noted that work to improve PGR Mental Wellbeing would continue even after the actions are “completed”.

21.3. The Working Group had originally had a focus on staff and students, but it was now a key focus of the Working Group to draw out key issues for students and have a clearer line between staff and student needs. PGR students are officially students but many of the issues are more similar to staff issues.

21.4. It was agreed that regular updates to RDC would be beneficial, and could also help to guide the work of the group when input is needed from RDC.

Action: The Head of Wellbeing

22. New online PGR processes

22.1. The Student Records Manager (Research) gave an oral update on some of the updates to PGR processes that had been bought in during the 2019/20 academic year.

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29.2. It was noted that processes had had to be moved online very quickly as a result of the COVID-

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30.4. It was noted that Continued Professional Development could take

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31.3. The main conclusions of the review found that: the MD(Res) does not fulfil the criteria of a Doctorate as students can submit after a minimum of two years (the Bologna Process states that a Doctorate should take three to four years

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