



## RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Monday 11 June 2012

### MINUTES

*Present:*

Professor David Bogle (Chair); Mr David Ashton; Dr Stephanie Bird; Mr Neil Chowdhury; Professor Alison Diduck; Professor Vince Emereil; Professor Helen Turner; Professor (i/c) -3 Mr Gary Hawes (Secretary); Dr David

Agendas were received from Dr Donna Brown; Dr Wendy Brown; Mr Ben Colvill; Professor Chris Danpure; Dr Joy Sleeman; Mr Ben Towse.

*abbreviations*

|      |                               |
|------|-------------------------------|
| AC   | Academic Committee            |
| DTCs | Doctoral Training Centres     |
| HEIs | Higher education institutions |
| PGR  | Postgraduate research         |
| RCUK | Research Councils UK          |
| RDC  | Research Degrees Committee    |
| REF  | Research Excellence Framework |
| UCLU | UCL Union                     |

### 31 CONSTITUTION AND MEMBERSHIP; TERMS OF REFERENCE

**Approved:**

31.1 At RDC 3-1 (11-12), the following proposed amendments to RDC's constitution and terms of reference in light of proposals that had been agreed at the meeting of AC held on 22 March 2012:

Addition of the Head of Admissions and Outreach (Ms Bella Malins) to the RDC *ex officio* membership;  
Addition of the following clause to the RDC terms of reference:  
To formulate general UCL policy on the recruitment and admission of postgraduate research students in accordance with UCL's strategy for student recruitment and other relevant policy statements, and to promote and monitor the implementation of that policy

### 32 MINUTES OF 7 MARCH 2012 MEETING

**Confirmed:**

32.1 The Minutes of the RDC meeting held on 7 March 2012 [*RDC Mins.14-30, 7.3.12 refer*].

33 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

33A **E-theses submission via RPS** [Min.23 , 7.3.12]

**Received:**

- 33A.1 At RDC 3-2 (11-12), a note updating RDC on developments since its last meeting with regard to the confirmation of arrangements for enabling research student e-thesis submission via the UCL Research Publications Service.

33B **Working group on non-permissible forms and degrees of assistance for research students** [Min. 19.3, 7.3.12]

**Received:**

- 33B.1 An oral report by the Chair.

**Reported:**

- 33B.2 The Chair of RDC was in the process of establishing a working group to investigate the matter of non-permissible forms and degrees of assistance for research students. A report on the working group's deliberations would be submitted to the RDC.

34 **TURNITIN FOR DOCTORAL THESES** [Min.20, 7.3.12]

**Discussion:**

- 34.1 The Chair of RDC invited discussion of experiences within UCL faculties of using the Turnitin software for the submission of research student doctoral theses. The following main points were raised:

Within some UCL faculties, eg Life Sciences, it was noted that it was usual practice for students to submit only the introduction and materials & methods sections of their doctoral thesis, rather than the whole thesis, to the Turnitin software, whereas in other UCL faculties, eg Arts and Humanities, students were required to submit their whole doctoral thesis in its entirety to the Turnitin software;

In other UCL faculties, eg Laws, Medical Sciences, use of the Turnitin software was not formally prescribed – instead it was available for optional use as an information/developmental tool for students and their supervisors;

Although the submission of student doctoral theses to the Turnitin software had raised a number of student copyright and intellectual property issues, it was noted that colleagues in the Laws Faculty had reportedly discovered a way to modify the software so that student doctoral theses submissions were only retained in the Turnitin database for 24 hours before being removed;

Use of the Turnitin software as a formative process for the submission of MPhil to PhD student upgrade reports might be more broadly encouraged within UCL;

It would be helpful to draft some best-practice guidance for UCL research students and staff on use of the Turnitin software, which would broadly advocate use of the software as a formative tool for the submission of student reports to their supervisors and as a means of checking non-results sections of student doctoral theses.

checking reports, theses, etc that were submitted by students to their supervisors. It was further agreed that it would be helpful to receive clarification from Turnitin on the student copyright and intellectual property issues that had been raised.

**ACTION: Mr Gary Hawes/Mr Ben Colvil**



Committing funds to increasing the number of scholarships for overseas PGR students would be fundamental to increasing overseas PGR student recruitment and would pay dividends in the longer term through the contribution that these students would make to the research environment at UCL;

As a means of highlighting the contribution made by overseas PGR students to UCL's research environment, it would be useful to maintain a record of authors who were overseas PGR students who were returned in the REF 2014;

UCL might consider reviewing its fee-discounting policy with a view to offering increased fee discounts, eg 25% rather than 10%, for overseas PGR students who were supported by overseas funding bodies. Some members of RDC noted that it would be useful to consider information on the possible longer-term financial implications/cost benefits of this;

The way information and guidance for prospective overseas PGR student applicants was currently presented on UCL's web pages differed markedly across UCL faculties/departments and was characterised by an inconsistency of approach which was hampered by the absence of any strategy, guidance or template both centrally and at faculty level. UCL could learn in this area from some of its competitors, eg King's College, in terms of presenting guidance for overseas PGR students more pragmatically;

There needed to be more structured, transparent and efficient mechanisms, both centrally as well as at faculty level, for fielding and supporting initial enquiries from prospective overseas PGR students applicants, eliciting information from these applicants where applicable and directing them appropriately, eg to a more relevant potential supervisor/research group/department. Mechanisms at faculty level would need to take account of different faculty/departmental arrangements for research student recruitment along with the different circumstances and levels of enquiry of prospective applicants, and offer clear advice to applicants on how they should proceed with their application, eg through FAQ sections addressing next steps for each level of enquiry;

The fact that UCL's application to acceptance conversion rate was significantly lower for overseas PGR student applicants from India relative to those applicants from China or the USA possibly pointed to the need for a more nuanced approach to the assessment of Indian qualifications, informed by the provision of better information



students – the Chair of RDC had lately addressed a House of Lords Select Committee on the issue of funding for universities and students for postgraduate study;

Members of RDC shared concerns that had been raised regarding student fee increases but noted that fee-setting was a complex financial issue and that it would be difficult to compel HEIs to make a commitment to not raising fees during a lengthy programme;

