

researchers. The Director of the Doctoral School informed the Committee that arrangements were still under consideration in collaboration with Organisational Development. RDC would be provided with an update in due course.

Action: Elizabeth Halton to provide further update at next RDC.

4. Chair's Business

- iv. Positive access schemes - there was some progress with the schemes, with good examples across UCL. Consideration is required on the barriers and challenges for the positive access schemes, including knowledge barriers. There had been some experiments in departments to introduce pre-doctoral pathway schemes and summer schemes to address this, as well as research placements for UG and Postgraduate (PG) students. Research England and Office for Students (OfS) had given one scheme an award, but this was of limited duration and it was unclear whether funding would continue.
 - v. Career barriers RDC had previously prioritised this area and UCL Careers had since developed career mentoring and advocacy programmes, including sessions for students from WP backgrounds.
 - vi. Research culture and wellbeing many faculties were active in improving research culture though it was not yet clear how good practice and outcomes were shared in UCL and the wider sector. This included recruitment and training for disability advisors and a focus on accessibility for events and resources. However, there were questions over whether the right training and support was being provided to staff.
- 5.4. RDC discussed the need for consistent socio-economic data to help advance the contextual offers admissions process and to inform actions on addressing financial barriers to doctoral education. It was suggested that the data should be provided earlier to inform decisions on contextual offers,. The data was also available in the reports that the Doctoral School provides to Faculties
- 5.5. There were some concerns that additional EDI processes in PGR recruitment processes might slow down decision-making and risk losing highly qualified candidates to swifter competitors. Clarity was important in evaluation of student talent and previous experience to ensure the right questions were asked. There also needed to be recognition, as for taught students, that recruitment was only a part of the student journey and that the correct support structures were in place for students throughout the programme. For instance, the Engineering Faculty had increased the amount of mental health training for PGR students and staff as part of provision.
- 5.6. **Agreed:** that a forum be established to consider initiatives, share good practice and review policies, reporting to RDC and led by Dr Lindner. The forum should also consist of academic staff volunteers interested in WP, EDI and wider matters relating to PGR recruitment and include relevant professional services staff and student representatives. It might wish to link with the London Higher EDI working group

Action: Faculty Graduate Tutors to email Rebecca Lindner with local WP initiatives.

6. Start Dates 2023/24

- 6.1. Received - the paper at RDC 1-04 (22-23), introduced by Ms Elizabeth Halton, Director of the Doctoral School, which proposed decreasing the number of possible start dates for PhD and EngD students from 2023-24 to three entry points per annum. This entry points for PhD and EngD degrees for the current session, replacing the previous arrangements where students could start at any point during the session.
- 6.2. RDC noted that reducing entry points had many benefits including better induction, more transparent admissions processes and efficient administration and clearer funding periods for stipends and fees. Reducing the entry dates would also help address student feedback from the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) that those enrolling later in the terms or in the summer had a poorer induction and then wider student experience.
- 6.3. The three entry dates proposed were as follows:
- 1 October 2023
 - 1 February 2024
 - 1 May 2024
- 6.4. Concerns were raised that reducing the entry points further could create more problems as some departments could request too many exceptions, particularly those which already used a wide spread of start dates. This was countered with the view that introducing fewer dates with proper planning would provide more clarity for students

9.3. A breakdown of complaints by faculty was provided although it was noted that there

Research Degrees Committee