RESEARCH DEGREES COMMITTEE

Wednesday 6 March 2013

M I N U T E S

Present:

Professor David Bogle (Chair); Dr Stephanie Bird; Mr Ben Colvill; Professor Alison Diduck; Dr Caroline Essex; Mr Marco Federighi ; Professor Mike Ewing; Dr Tom Gretton; Professor Anthony Harker; Ms Bella Malins; Dr Stephen Marshall; Mr Dante Micheaux; Professor David Muller; Dr Joy Sleeman; Dr Dave Spratt; Professor Kaila Srai; Mr BenTowse;.

In attendance: Mr Gary Hawes (Secretary)

Apologies were received from: Mr David Ashton; Dr Donna Brown; Dr Wendy Brown; Dr Sally Leevers; Dr Ruth Siddall; Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu.

Key to abbreviations
AC   Academic Committee

HEFCE   Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEIs   Higher education institutions
IP   Intellectual property
PGR   Postgraduate research
RDC   Research Degrees Committee
SSEES   School of Slavonic and East European Studies

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18   MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 15 NOVEMBER 2012

Confirmed:

18.1   The Minutes of the meeting of RDC held on 15 November 2012, issued previously *[RDC Mins.1-14, 15.11.12]*.

19   MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES *[see Minute 28A below]*

19A   Amendment of the offer letter for PGR students *[RDC Min.5, 15.11.12]*

Noted:

19A.1 At the previous meeting of RDC held on 15 November 2012, it was noted that discussions would still need to take place regarding the possibility of issuing a single offer letter in future for PhD programmes that included an integrated MRes, and that this would need to incorporate a broader discussion on whether the integrated MRes should be wholly integrated (and only offered as an exit award when students did not

go on to complete the PhD) rather than is the case currently where students completing the programme receive both an MRes and a PhD.

Reported:

19A.2 Discussions were continuing around the issue of whether it would be possible to issue a single offer letter in respect of PhD programmes that included an integrated MRes (*ie* 1+3 programmes). Although DTCs would prefer for a single offer letter to be issued, there were various complexities and technical issues that would not make it straightforward or appropriate to implement this arrangement across all PhD programmes that featured an integrated MRes, not least because completion of the MRes often served as a progression point for students onto the PhD programme. However, the Director of Student Services and Director of Admissions had been considering possible approaches for addressing the issue with a view to meeting with the Head of the Graduate School and discussing these in due course.

19B   Staff eligibility to supervise research students *[RDC Min.7, 15.11.12]*

Noted:

19B.1 The list of UCL staff categories that were eligible to supervise research students, which was agreed by RDC at its previous meeting, was available on the HR web pages at pages at http://www.ucl.ac.uk/hr/docs/phd_student_supervision.php. A link to the list had also been included in the Academic Regulations for Research Degree Students, and the list would also be publicised more widely within UCL via Exchange and the Week@UCL and submitted for information with a covering note to the next meeting of HRPC.

20   APPLICATIONS, OFFERS OF ADMISSION AND ACCEPTANCES TO PGR AND MRES PROGRAMMES

Received:

20.1 At RDC 2-01 (12-13) a report on student applications, offers of admission and applicant acceptances to PGR and MRes programmes of study, covering both end-of-cycle data for the 2012 entry admissions round as well as the latest data on 2013 entry – introduced by Ms Bella Malins, Director of Admissions.

Reported:

20.2 There had been a 55% increase in applications for MRes programmes overall for 2012-13 relative to the previous year, largely as a result of new programmes that had been launched in the UCL faculties of Engineering Sciences and Social and Historical Sciences. For all other research programmes, there had been an 8% increase in applications overall, although this figure failed to give a true indication of the differing performances across UCL faculties.

20.3 While full-time research student numbers across all years of study were up by 7.7% for UK/EU and 15.8% for overseas, the intake for 2012-13 was down by 4% overall. However, since entry to research degree programmes did not follow the standard admissions cycle but operated on a rolling basis, it was difficult to draw definitive conclusions from these data.

20.4 UK/EU applications for research programmes for the current admission cycle were down by 2% overall compared with the previous year's snapshot data, while Overseas applications were down by 9%. With the exception of Medical Sciences,

Discussion:

21.5   With regard to the data on MPhil/PhD upgrade and submission, the following main points were noted during discussion:

It would be interesting to consider information on how many students had withdrawn without upgrading at the twelve-month mark;

In most cases, the data did not appear to show any significant correlation between upgrade and submission;

While it was reassuring to see that submission rates had improved in a number of faculties, upgrade rates were generally less encouraging. In light of this, departments would need to be encouraged to implement closer monitoring of postgraduate research students during the initial stages of their studies;

Data on rates of qualification from postgraduate research degrees were produced annually by HEFCE and would be received at RDC's next meeting in June 2013. The most recent data had shown that UCL was close to the benchmark figure of 81% in terms of the number of students who had obtained their PhD qualification within seven years;

Some members of RDC queried whether there needed to be a stricter approval process for considering student progression in cases where transfer of registration from MPhil to PhD had not been completed in the prescribed 18 months. Currently, the Code of Practice advised that such cases should be drawn to the attention of the DGT for consideration.

21.6   The Chair of RDC requested FGT members of RDC to take the MPhil/PhD upgrade and submission data back to their faculties for dissemination and discussion at FGTC/FTC meetings. He noted that it would also be helpful for the data to be disseminated to Deans, Heads of Department and DGTs with a view to re-confirming the importance of timely upgrade and completion for PhD students.

RESOLVED:

21.7   *That the Head of Student Data Services be asked to clarify outside the meeting whether the data at <u>RDC 2-02 (12-13)</u>, included information on students who had withdrawn after one year, but before upgrading.*
<div align="right">*<u>ACTION: Gary Smith</u>*</div>

21.8   *That i) Faculty Graduate Tutor members of RDC be asked to take the MPhil/PhD upgrade and submission data back to their faculties for dissemination and discussion at FGTC/FTC meetings and ii) the data also be disseminated to Deans, Heads of Department and DGTs with a view to re-confirming the importance of timely upgrade and completion for PhD students.*
<div align="right">*<u>ACTION: Faculty Graduate Tutors/Gary Hawes</u>*</div>

21.9   *That i) the proposal at <u>RDC 2-03 (12-13)</u> be approved and ii) the Academic Regulations for Research Degree Students and related guidance be amended accordingly and notified to UCL colleagues as appropriate.*
<div align="right">*<u>ACTION: Ben Colvill/Gary Hawes</u>*</div>

22   **GRADUATE SCHOOL R**

Reported:

22.2   There had been a total of 986 out of 4138 respondents to the Survey, which
        represented 23.8% of the registered research student cohort at the time that the
        Survey was commissioned in July 2012.

Discussion:

22.3   With regard to the fact that 38% of respondents had indicated that they had not found
        the information skills training offered by UCL services to be very useful, some
        members of RDC noted that it would be helpful to gain a sense of whether this related
        to more specialised, advanced information skills training or to the more basic,
        introductory information skills training. It was understood that ISD colleagues would
        be undertaking their own training needs analysis with a view to helping to determine
        what sort of information skills training students wanted.

23   AMENDMENT OF THE OVERSEAS RESEARCH STUDENT STUDY LEAVE FEE

Received:

23.1   The note at <u>RDC 2-05 (12-13)</u>, introduced by the Chair of RDC.

Reported:

23.2   The note at <u>RDC 2-05 (12-13)</u> outlined a proposal by the School Finance Director for
        Arts and Social Sciences for amending the overseas research student study leave fee
        from 50% of the equivalent research student UK/EU fee to 50% of the research
        student overseas fee.

Discussion:

23.3   It was noted that one of the reasons set out in the note at <u>RDC 2-05 (12-13)</u> for
        proposing an amendment to the overseas research student study leave fee was that
        changing methods of communication had facilitated better levels of communication
        between supervisors and their students while the latter were away on Study Leave.
        However, opinion amongst RDC members differed as to the extent to which
        supervision levels altered from the usual model during periods when students were
        away on Study Leave. Moreover, RDC members noted that the impact of Study
        Leave on supervisory responsibilities differed across the disciplines.

23.4   RDC noted that while it was not clear why it was originally agreed that Overseas
        students should pay 50% of the Home/EU rate rather than of the Overseas rate, it
        was far from clear what impact ra/T02Swas origiit Tw Tʃ Discussio(me)]Tthe Ovd theidaJ-19.044it im

RESOLVED:

23.6 **That the proposal at <u>RDC 2-05 (12-13)</u> for amending the overseas research student study leave fee should not be endorsed by RDC.**
<u>*ACTION: Ben Colvill/Gary Hawes*</u>

24   CONCORDAT TO SUPPORT RESEARCH INTEGRITY

Received:

24.1   At <u>RDC 2-06 (12-13)</u>, the Universities UK's concordat to support research integrity, introduced by the Chair of RDC.

Reported:

24.2   The Concordat sought to provide a comprehensive national framework for good research conduct and its governance that would help to ensure, amongst other things, that research produced by or in collaboration with the UK research community was underpinned by the highest standards of rigour and a culture of integrity and conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks, obligations and standards. Signatories to the concordat included the Department for Employment and Learning, HEFCE, the Research Councils UK, Universities UK and the Wellcome Trust.

24.3   Recent research misconduct cases involving experienced research student supervisors within UCL had brought to light issues around the integrity and conduct of research practices that had failed to seek the necessary ethics approval or deviated from agreed protocols. This had in turn raised concerns about the need to ensure that supervisors were aware of their responsibilities for making sure that research being undertaken by students under their supervision was being conducted according to appropriate ethical, legal and professional frameworks and that the highest standards of rigour and integrity were maintained.

Discussion:

24.4   Members of RDC agreed that ethical practice and research integrity needed to be seen as important cultural value that was instilled in students as an integral part of their training and studies, and that it was an important role of supervisors to communicate these values. It would also be important to develop training methods and practices that incorporated this and trained students how to think about these issues as part of their research studies. Some members of RDC noted that a particular area where greater clarity was needed was the issue of student IP and copyright.

24.5   Some members of RDC noted that their own faculties, *eg* Laws, Medical Sciences, had already organised seminars and workshops that had been dedicated to the issue of research ethics and integrity and to the broader aspects of this for staff who were supervisors.

24.6   The Chair of RDC agreed to keep RDC informed of developments within UCL around implementation of the Concordat.

25   GRADUATE SCHOOL – ANNUAL REPORT 2011-12

Received:

25.1   At <u>RDC 2-07 (12-13)</u>, the Graduate School Annual Report 2011-12.

Reported:

25.2   The Chair of RDC drew attention to the following areas of the Annual Report in particular:

As part of the Yale UCL Collaborative Partnership, the UCL Graduate School had designed and launched an Exchange Scheme for doctoral students at both at both institutions, giving Yale and UCL research students the opportunity to undertake a period of research at the partner institution as part of their doctorate.
There had been a significant rise in the number of submissions to the Graduate School's annual Research Poster and Research Images competitions relative to the previous year;
The Graduate School had achieved the joint highest satisfaction rate of support services at UCL in the International Student Barometer, maintaining a 95% satisfaction rate.

25.3   The Chair of RDC conveyed his thanks to the team of colleagues in the Graduate School for their dedication and hard work in the course of the previous year.

26   MINUTES OF FACULTY GRADUATE RESEARCH COMMITTEES

Received:

26.1   The note at <u>RDC 2-08 (12-13)</u> summarising proposed arrangements for the future monitoring by RDC of the work of FGTCs in relation to postgraduate research provision, introduced by the RDC Secretary.

Reported

26.2   One of the recommendations arising from the review of AC and its substructure that was agreed by AC its meeting on 13 December 2012 was that with effect from 1 January 2013, FGTCs should report to RDC in respect of postgraduate research students, and that RDC should put in place arrangements for the monitoring of the work of FGTCs in relation to postgraduate researan ExchahmP ҒTJ0.0sE8or4h4SAsDC /C2_0 1 EM

29B   **Introduction to Research Student Supervision course**

   Reported:

29B.1   Some members of RDC enquired whether consideration had been given to offering an electronic version of the Introduction to Research Student Supervision course that was mandatory for or all members of academic staff wishing to be appointed as research student supervisors at UCL, with a view to giving more options to facilitate the participation of clinical staff who found it difficult to attend the physical sessions that were offered twice a year. In confirming that there were no current plans to offer the course electronically, the Chair of RDC noted that the fact that the course was currently offered at six-monthly intervals should offer colleagues plenty of notice to plan their attendance.   It was also noted that ELE colleagues had reaffirmed the importance of face-to-face contact as part of the course.

29B.2   It was further noted that there had been discussions around the prospect of increasing the frequency of the Introduction to Research Student Supervision course to three sessions with effect from 2013-14.

30   **DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS**

   Noted:

30.1   The next meeting of RDC was scheduled as follows:

   Wednesday 10 June 2013, 10am, Foster Court Room 114

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4 June 2013