

Graduate School Committee minutes, 19th January 2018

Summary

The January meeting of Graduate School Committee considered a number of strategic issues relating to the student experience, principally student feedback regarding the experience of Research Students who Teach (also known as Graduate Teaching Assistants), as well as agreeing a schedule for the cyclical review of the academic policies that relate to postgraduate research students.

In view of the strength of feeling and multiple concerns relating to Research Students who Teach, the Committee agreed to form a Task and Finish Group to expedite actions in this area. This group met for the first time on 6th February, and agreed to prepare a statement and provide an update to Executive Committee (ExCo) by the end of February.

The first policy revisions will be submitted as a consultation document to School Boards of Studies in the Spring Term 2018. The committee also agreed to revise the policy on the appointment of independent chairs for viva voce examinations to allow the Senior Tutor for Research (STR) to nominate an alternate to perform this role.

No actions required.

Recommended Action

Senate is asked to **note** the attached minutes. Where Schools contest proposed policy revisions, these will be brought back to Graduate School Committee, and if necessary Senate, for discussion and approval.

Publication: Open

**CITY GRADUATE SCHOOL COMMITTEE
MEETING 22 HELD ON 19th JANUARY 2018
UNCONFIRMED MINUTES**

Attendance List

Name of Member		Meeting 20 20/09/2017	Meeting 21 14/11/2017	Meeting 22 19/01/2018
Staff members	Professor Ken Grattan (Chair)	✓	✓	✓
	Professor Steve Cottrell	✓	✓	✓
	Professor Davide Ravasi	✓	A	✓
	Dr Giovanni Cespa	A	A	N/A
	Dr Andreas Tsanakas	N/M	A	A
	Professor Gary Morgan	✓	N/A	N/A
	Professor Chris Hull	✓	✓	✓
	Dr Youyou Yan	A	✓	✓
	Ms Stephanie Wilson	✓	✓	✓
	Professor Panos Koutrakos	✓	✓	A
	Professor Susannah Quinsee	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Professor Pam Parker	A	A	✓
	Professor Andrew Jones	N/A	A	N/A
	Professor Charles Baden-Fuller (Senate representative)	N/A	S	S
Student Members	Malek Arab (Students' Union, Vice-President Education)	✓	A	A
	Aurora Herrera (student representative)	✓	✓	✓

In attendance: Richard Alderman (Secretary), Alison Edridge, Dr Jessica Hancock, Olesea Matcovschi, Dr Karen Shaw

Attendance key:

- ✓ Present
- A Apologies received
- N/A No apologies received
- N/M Period when not a member
- S On Sabbatical leave

Part One – Preliminary Items

1. Apologies and welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and **welcomed** members; apologies **received** and **noted**. The Chair welcomed Dr Jessica Hancock, recently appointed Lecturer in Educational Development (LEaD) to support postgraduate research students, and it was **agreed** to add Dr Hancock to the permanent membership of the Committee.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the City Graduate School Committee held on 14 November 2017 were **approved** as an accurate record.

The Committee **noted** that members absent from the 14 November meeting did not agree with the decision made not to participate in the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey in 2018. This does not preclude Schools undertaking surveys of their postgraduate research students locally.

3. Matters Arising

The Committee **noted** the Matters Arising.

Funding from the University of London noted at the previous meeting had been distributed as conference travel bursaries – 32 applications had been received from PGR students and 16 awards with a combined value of £12,500 made. Student members noted that conference funding varied by School and student fee status, and that the Committee should make the case to ExCo for a consistent level of University-wide funding as part of the annual planning process.

Action: Chair

It was also agreed for the Chair to speak with the Director of Alumni Relations to determine if University of London funding was likely to be available on an annual basis, to allow earlier planning.

Action: Chair

In consideration of the University committee cycle and that many members would be taking annual leave following the end of the summer term, it was proposed and agreed to move the July Committee meeting forward by a couple of weeks.

Action: Secretary

4. Chair's Business

The Deputy Director of Learning Enhancement and Development reported that a bid had been submitted to the HEFCE Catalyst Fund in response to a call for projects in support of understanding and addressing issues of PGR student wellbeing. City would be informed of the outcome of the proposed 2-year project in late January/February.

Part Two – Reports from Student Members

5. Update from Students' Union

The Students' Union President reported on a number of current projects, including the study well campaign, sabbatical officer and student representative elections, international week and changes to union by-laws to appoint both a postgraduate taught and a postgraduate research student representative.

Issues relating to research students who teach were continuing to cause concern, including patchy awareness of training requirements amongst students and supervisors, issuing of employment contracts in good time, and the separation of subsistence and teaching payments in PhD studentships. Committee members were in agreement that this was the prime issue driving PGR student dissatisfaction at present, and **agreed** to form a task and finish group, including Human Resources representation, to address these concerns specifically.

Action: Chair, Secretary

6. Update from Graduate School student representative

This update was reported as part of discussion relating to Item 5.

Part Three – Report from Vice-President (Research and Enterprise)

7. Update from Vice-President (Research and Enterprise)

The Director of Research and Enterprise, on behalf of the Vice-President, reported on work ongoing towards an application for an EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training, consultancy

presently engaged in reviewing research student support structures, the contribution of PGR students towards the research environment metric in REF2021 (noting that students returned would have already commenced their PhD study), and which aspects of the researcher development programme for academic staff could also be offered to PGR students.

Part Four – Items for Discussion

8. Policy and guidance revisions

The Committee received four changes to policy and guidance, previously considered by the Committee, now for onward submission as consultation documents to School Boards of Studies before final approval by Senate. Feedback and proposed amendments from previous committee meetings would be included in the consultation document.

The Committee **agreed** to send the policies and guidance on to School Boards of Studies, with Committee members having ten days to provide additional comments before the preparation of the consultation document

Action: Committee Members (by 1 February 2018), Secretary

9. Policy review schedule

The Committee received a proposed schedule for the review of research degree policies over the next three academic years, noting that a number of policies had not been formally reviewed since the establishment of the Graduate School in 2012. The schedule had been drawn up to focus attention initially on policies that relate to strategic objectives, such as student retention.

Committee members recognised that the proposed schedule was ambitious, particularly in requiring engagement from Schools and that the schedule may ultimately extend to four academic years. Key engagement was likely to be with Associate Deans, Senior Tutors for Research and the Graduate School Committee, and consequently that policy changes should be consulted and circulated widely, as well as formally to School Boards of Studies, to allow meaningful engagement in advance of Graduate School Committee meetings where major issues could be adjudicated, if necessary.

10. Appointment of independent chairs for viva voce examinations

Steve Cottrell, on behalf of a department in the School of Arts and Social Sciences, asked the Committee to consider the current mandatory policy, which was causing issues of workload for some departmental Senior Tutors of Research (STR) that typically perform this role. A brief investigation of Russell Group universities indicated that only 6 of the 24 institutions mandated an independent chair, with the majority allowing the option of one.

Committee members acknowledged that the current policy existed to ensure knowledge of City academic regulations in circumstances where the internal examiner is a new/relatively junior member of City academic staff. The Committee was, therefore, averse to a weakening of procedure, but **agreed** to make a recommendation to Senate to revise the wording the policy to allow the appointment of a nominee of the STR as independent chair to share the workload amongst senior academic staff.

Action: Secretary

11. IT Services support for postgraduate research students

Several Committee members had raised issues of consistent IT support for postgraduate research students, including student web profiles, administrative access for the installation of bespoke software, and access to City computer systems post-submission (e.g. for submission of journal articles)

It was **agreed** that any other issues should be sent with the Secretary to then meet with staff in IT Services. It was also **agreed** to consider wider issues of research student spaces at the March Committee meeting.

Action: Committee Members (by 15 February 2018), Secretary

12. City Students' Union Academic Impact Awards

Committee members received information on the City Students' Union Academic Impact Awards, including two PGR awards for Research Supervisor of the Year and Best Graduate Teaching Assistant. The awards would be launched on 1st February and information circulated to research degree students at that time.

Part Three – Items for Information

13. AoB and date of next meeting

There was no other business to discuss. The next meeting would be held on Thursday 22nd March from 11.30am to 1.00pm in Room AG02 (College Building, Northampton Square)

Richard Alderman
Assistant Registrar (Research Degrees)
January 2018