Key actions agreed at the September 2017, November 2017 and January 2018 meetings as they relate to academic quality and standards

September 2017

- The Committee considered changes to the Annual Programme Evaluation (APE) template for research degree programmes; principally the datasets used to inform the evaluation. In light of the strength of feeling at the Committee, the Committee resolved to use the current template for 2016-17 evaluations, with further revisions made for approval by Senate by May 2018 for use in the 2017-18 cycle.
- The Committee considered revised policies on the suspension of studies and extensions to the period of study. In view of the University’s strategic objective to improve completion rates and completion times across all programmes, it is important to distinguish the criteria for a suspension (which places a ‘pause’ on the calculated length of study) and an extension (which could extend the period of study beyond the desired four/seven year maximum, but which would be appropriate in some circumstances).
- The Committee considered revised guidance on the role of external supervisors and consultants, where they have a contractual relationship for the second supervision of a postgraduate research student (for instance, where the PhD programme of study is in collaboration with an industrial partner). The guidance outlines the expectations of a consultant for the first time.

November 2017

- The Committee considered an Action Plan prepared in response to the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES) 2017 results. As well as institutional actions, particularly relating to research culture, there was wide variation between Schools and programmes and the Committee agreed that Senate and School Boards of Studies would receive the plan.
- Schools returned data on postgraduate research students that were engaged in teaching and teaching support activity (also known as Graduate Teaching Assistants), including information on restrictions on teaching hours, confirmation that LEaD training had been undertaken and that students had a named mentor for this work. As the first time this exercise had been undertaken, there were gaps in the data that would be followed up with Schools. However, it indicated that there may be quality concerns relating to students being trained in time for the start of their contracted teaching, as well as consistency in peer observation/double marking.
- The Committee considered a draft policy on PhD by prior publication, a growing area of interest particularly in STEM disciplines and clinical staff. The policy aims to set out academic standards expected for a submission via this route.

January 2018

- The Committee continued to consider issues relating to research students who teach, including contractual issues, and agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group to expedite progress on actions in this area.
- The Committee approved revised policies considered at the September and November meetings for submission to School Boards of Studies in the form of a consultation. Subject to their broad agreement, Senate will approve the revised policies in May 2018.
- The Committee agreed a proposed schedule for the cyclical review of academic policies relating to research degree provision over the next three years. A number of policies have not been reviewed since the establishment of the Graduate School in 2012, representing a risk to academic standards where practice has evolved from the codified policy.
- The Committee considered the current policy for the mandatory appointment of an independent chair for viva voce examinations. Whilst not universal practice across the sector, the Committee agreed the benefit in ensuring City academic standards are upheld, but agreed to allow the Senior Tutor for Research to nominate alternates for this role to reduce the workload faced in some departments.