

Excellence and the UCL community: a shared endeavour

Foreword

UCL has an outstanding array of talent across its staff and students. Throughout this community runs the common thread of commitment to academic excellence; that is, to the conduct of research, publication, teaching and other forms of knowledge transfer, at the highest levels of international achievement. It is this talent, and the environment in which it is fostered, that allows UCL to flourish as a world-class university. Universities are communities of scholarship in which talented individuals are entrusted with a high degree of autonomy to develop an appropriate balance of activity which includes an obligation to undertake curiosity-driven research, teaching and enabling activities, and complying with national legislation such as health and safety or employment law.

This academic mission is the prime purpose of a university, upon which all our energy needs to be focused. UCL is an academic-led institution. We are entitled as a leading research university to have the highest expectations of all of our academic colleagues, throughout their careers at UCL, while accepting that the balance between components of different colleagues' contributions - to research, teaching, enabling and knowledge transfer - will naturally vary and may also change over time. Regular review of this balance needs to become part of our programme of annual appraisal.

We also recognise that people's ability to meet these expectations depends upon their having proper support from the institution, both directly in terms of resources, and less directly in terms of sustaining a thriving community of scholarship.

This paper sets out what we believe this means at UCL.

Malcolm Grant
President and Provost

Section One: Research

We expect that academic staff will undertake research, and will disseminate the results of that research as appropriate, and that the quality of their research will meet international standards of excellence.

The criteria for the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF) provide definitions of standards of quality that, although not unproblematic, are widely accepted across the research community and help us define an overall institutional aspiration. This is that UCL expects academic departments to aspire to the top levels of research activity, and that all academic staff undertaking research should aim to achieve a rating of at least 3* in REF 2014.¹

For individual academic staff, this gives rise to an expectation that they will:

1. Regularly publish research material or produce other research outputs in a form eligible for inclusion in REF or for equivalent peer review;

2. Consistently give leadership in research, and produce research outputs of a quality that is internationally excellent in terms of originality, significance and rigour;
3. Engage with the research life of their department, and, by doing so, help it to sustain a strong research culture. Contribution to the research environment will vary between disciplines but may typically include: attracting research income, research students and research studentships (see also 6 below), externally funded research fellowships, and distinguished overseas scholars to the department; provision of graduate research seminars; knowledge transfer activity;
4. Be proactive in applying for available research funding, and prove themselves capable of winning external research funding obtained on a competitive basis and through a process of peer review;
5. As appropriate to career stage and discipline, demonstrate an ability to manage research projects/programmes and promote the training and development of early career researchers and/or research assistants, including mentoring of colleagues, helping them to develop their research skills and to realize their research potential;
6. Satisfy their department's expectations in terms of supervision of research students, and assist students' timely and successful completion of research degree studies;²
7. More generally, contribute to the development of their field(s) of research activity, nationally and internationally, through, e.g., regular presentations at conferences, invitations to give key lectures, membership of peer review panels and/or subject associations or committees, editorial responsibilities in respect of major international journals and conferences, and reviewing research applications.

Section two: Teaching

Teaching is an essential function of a research university. It is an important mode of dissemination of knowledge and for inculcating in students the values of thought and research. Our manifesto and institutional strategy for learning and teaching³ take account of the changing national and international context of higher education in the UK and the recognition that UCL graduates will be making a leading contribution to an increasingly globalized world. We want the quality of the whole student experience to be outstanding both academically and pastorally. Teaching should be designed to inspire and motivate students to achieve their full potential.

We expect that all our academic staff will undertake teaching. This will commonly be at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and includes research supervision.

For individual staff, this gives rise to an expectation that they will:

1. Undertake teaching that is research-led and also, where appropriate, research-centred (i.e. in which students undertake research);
2. Undertake teaching that, where appropriate to the subject matter, properly integrates issues of diversity and equal opportunity, and acknowledges issues of gender, ethnicity, faith, nationality and disability;
3. Contribute to a student experience that is intellectually challenging and that helps develop qualities of global citizenship, social responsibility, and leadership;

4. Undertake appropriate professional development and training in teaching methodology/practice;
5. Contribute to the development and conduct of assessment that is fair, just, transparent, fully recognises equal opportunities and challenges the creativity and abilities of UCL students;
6. Undertake work as examiners, both internally and, as appropriate, as external examiners;
7. Innovate in teaching and learning and assessment methods, drawing on available technologies;
8. Provide student support, appropriate and timely feedback and guidance as personal tutors.
9. To work in the scholarship of their discipline and continue to be part of their scholarly community.

Section three: Enabling

Enabling takes many forms. It includes all the positive obligations of citizenship that flow from being a member of an academic community. It includes the generous help, support and fostering of the work of others, especially younger and newer colleagues, that has always been the hallmark of the conscientious academic; it includes support for and collaboration with administrative and technical staff. In some cases these obligations are formalized. Headship of Department, for example, is a challenging management and leadership role. Good academic citizenship is an essential facet of any career, and outstanding and selfless contributions warrant proper recognition.

Examples of enabling are: service as Chair or member of a UCL Committee or working group, Chair or member of an Internal Quality Review (IQR) team, representation of UCL overseas, service in a role of UCL, departmental or Faculty responsibility (e.g. as an admissions tutor, programme director, graduate tutor).

For individual academic staff, this gives rise to an expectation that they will:

1. Contribute to innovative curriculum development (introduction and review of courses and programmes), in line with UCL strategies and policies;
2. Participate in Quality Assurance and Enhancement processes, including annual monitoring and IQR, at departmental, faculty and/or institutional levels;
3. Undertake roles of responsibility and serve on committees, working groups and panels within UCL;
4. Where appropriate, represent UCL or their discipline on national and international bodies;
5. Provide appropriate support and guidance to more junior colleagues and make an active contribution to an inclusive community in which diversity is embraced and celebrated;
6. Work in collaboration with UCL's Corporate Support Services to ensure administrative processes run smoothly and effectively;
7. Be aware that in every circumstance, they are ambassadors for UCL and in all communications aim to enhance UCL's reputation.

Section four: Knowledge Transfer

UCL's primary mechanisms for knowledge transfer are the supply of well-educated graduates, research publications and academic texts. Other modes involve more direct engagement with external organisations in more direct ways, such as consultancy, research collaborations, short courses, events, sponsored studentships, and technology commercialisation. Such activities generally enrich the research and teaching of those who engage in them.

UCL has committed to a major expansion and reframing of these knowledge transfer activities to enable and encourage its academic staff and students to engage with industry, government and community organisations. Opportunities differ between disciplines. But UCL regards knowledge transfer as an integral part of an academic's portfolio, enriching other aspects of academic activity, and will recognise and reward significant contributions accordingly.

For individual academic staff, this gives rise to an expectation that they will:

1. Seek out and pursue opportunities to engage directly with external organisations in ways that result in direct transfer of their expertise and knowledge to the benefit of businesses and the community;
2. Give encouragement and support to other staff and students to engage with external organisations where such activity is congruent with their research and teaching strengths;
3. Act in a professional manner in relation to such activities, ensuring that the need of the partner is understood, that expectations are aligned and that every effort is made to ensure excellence in delivery;
4. Conduct negotiations in collaboration with UCL in a timely and responsive manner, assisting UCL to secure reasonable contractual terms.

Section five: Institutional obligations

UCL will:

1. Provide an intellectual and physical environment that is supportive of all areas of academic activity, including excellent laboratories and library resources and learning technologies;
2. Secure administrative and technical support that is of the highest quality, efficient, effective and responsive, and aligned to the support and promotion of the academic mission while also protecting UCL's institution-wide needs and priorities;
3. Develop and support high quality academic leadership for all areas of academic activity and enable UCL managers to attain the management competencies UCL requires of them;
4. Provide proper support for the development of individuals' careers, including regular performance review;
5. Provide professional support for academic staff engaged in knowledge transfer, consultancy, industrial research collaboration, policy shaping, and other forms of knowledge transfer;
6. Maintain and implement fair policies on equal opportunities, harassment, grievance and disciplinary matters;

7. Recognise excellence by ensuring that cases for reward and promotion of academic staff are rigorously and fairly assessed against clear and consistent policies, which acknowledge and value excellence in research, teaching and other modes of knowledge transfer, and enabling;
8. Offer opportunities and provide encouragement to undertake professional development and training of the highest quality;
9. Provide support for those undertaking roles as examiners, IQR reviewers, committee Chairs, representatives on national bodies and other roles of institutional citizenship;
10. Develop a fresh approach to workload allocation across the portfolio of academic duties (e.g., teaching duties/ student contact hours/knowledge transfer/research time/administrative duties);
11. Offer sabbatical leave in accordance with institution-wide policies;
12. Provide information, guidance and other support for academic responsibilities as a researcher and teacher;
13. Provide support and training in academic roles (such as research group leader or personal tutor to students);
14. Offer opportunities and provide encouragement to participate in scholarly activity such as conferences, editorial duties and learned societies.

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Notes

1. This statement should be read in conjunction with the UCL code of practice on preparing REF 2014 submissions which will be prepared once the UK higher education funding bodies have confirmed the detailed guidance on submissions for REF 2014 in mid-2011.
2. In accordance with (i) the UCL *Code of Practice for Graduate Research Degrees* (http://www.grad.ucl.ac.uk/codes/CoP_Research_09.pdf) and (ii) the expectations of the relevant UK research council or research sponsor.
3. UCL Manifesto for Teaching and Learning (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/staff/policy/UCL_ILTS_Manifesto.pdf), UCL Institutional Learning and Teaching Strategy 2010-2015 (http://www.ucl.ac.uk/teaching-learning/staff/policy/UCL_ILTS_2010-15.pdf).