

A temporary operating model for AY20/21

A brief description intended to provide clarity for UCL leadership teams

UCL will be open and ready to teach at the start of the new academic year, but in a very different world. We are used to an operating model where there are no externally-driven restrictions on the volume and type of teaching and learning activity on campus. However, ongoing restrictions on social distancing and international travel will prevent normal operation of the UCL campus for teaching and learning. We have estimated that adhering to current social distancing rules reduces the capacity of spaces on campus by up to 85%. This includes all lecture theatres, seminar rooms, teaching laboratories and studio spaces and means that opportunities for face-to-face activities on campus will necessarily be significantly limited throughout Term 1 and quite likely beyond. Research projects also will be affected by the need for academic staff to work on a rota to maintain social distancing.

Current teaching and learning plans

We will therefore need to operate in a different way for Term 1 of the next Academic Year, and possibly beyond. We will need to provide online teaching enhanced with some face-to-face activity where that is safely possible. The approach, both to manage staff workload and of safety-driven pedagogy, will have to be one of what activities can be delivered within reason given the availability of time and the estate.

- The campus will be open in Term 1.
- Staff should prepare to deliver all of their teaching remotely for Term 1 where that is needed.
- Where possible and safe, we will be able to offer a limited amount of small group activity on campus within social distancing guidelines
 - Examples could include studio-based learning, laboratory sessions, tutorials, colloquia, careers or networking events
 - This activity will add value to the core content of a module/programme which will be delivered remotely.
- We are currently undertaking a detailed assessment of the estate to understand how much 'in person' activity can be delivered safely.
 - It is proposed that departments will be offered time and space on the estate and they can decide how best to deliver this activity.

We will expect students to travel to London wherever possible and warmly welcome them on campus. Some students may be unable to travel internationally and so for Term 1 will need to access online provision. All of this will need to be done as an academic community that may be remote, but is not distant; and in a context where staff and students may need to self-isolate intermittently.

Health, safety and wellbeing plans

All teaching and learning must prioritise the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students. Appropriate arrangements to ensure this will be in place across campus, and we will follow Government advice as a minimum, requiring additional safety

requirements (such as face coverings) where our academic experts think it is appropriate. Such precautions and the impact of COVID-19 may impact our staff and students in different ways, so attending to access and inclusion must also be a priority.

This way of operating will require short-term changes in our organisational model to ensure that staff and students are properly supported. The organisational capabilities and competencies that help us deliver online learning will be augmented significantly, and those that allow us to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students will be specifically tailored to the ongoing needs arising from the global pandemic.

Transition plans

The new operating model will be temporary, but we do not know how long it will be needed. Our objective is to restore our normal teaching and learning activity on campus as soon as safely feasible. As social distancing measures are relaxed, we will move in a phased fashion to deliver as much face-to-face teaching and learning as we can. This will be a major logistical challenge for timetabling the curriculum. We will need to provide sufficient time for overseas students unable to attend UCL during Term 1 to obtain visas, travel to the UK and complete any quarantine required. This means that a transition cannot be immediate, may need to be planned to overlap with a logical break in the curriculum, and is likely to take up to three months.

Capabilities

We have identified four enhanced capabilities needed to support our temporary way of operating for teaching and learning. These are not the only important areas to address, but represent the most critical priorities that must be completed before the start of the next Academic Year. Without delivery of these capabilities, we will be unable to deliver the operating model.

The most important need identified is to enhance the capacity of our Virtual Learning Environment to support up to 12,000 simultaneous connections. This project is underway and will complete by September 2020.

In addition to enhancing our VLE, all critical University processes must be adapted to work digitally and provide the most joined-up online student/staff experience we can deliver. To do this, a significant number of IT enhancements are required. These will allow students to register online, deliver research teaching, provide additional loan laptops for students, enhance security throughout for online working and learning and provide other critical enhancements to digital learning. These will be completed by September 2020.

The third key priority is to deliver the estates and timetabling changes necessary for safe operation of any teaching and learning spaces that will be used for face-to-face teaching; and arrange for the safe operation of student accommodation. This work has started and is linked to the phased reopening of campus that is currently underway.

The final priority is to ensure an enhanced level of student and staff welfare support. The capabilities identified are enhancements of currently existing programmes and capabilities, but will require some additional capabilities that reflect the nature of the

pandemic (for example, additional mental health support). In addition, our students will look to their departments for leadership, challenge and support. We must proactively mentor students in new ways of learning, engage them with our latest research and guide them to our enhanced welfare provision, whenever this is required.

Competencies

Staff require support and training to make the most effective use of online learning. We have created a set of minimum standards (the Connected Learning Baseline), templates and exemplars for Moodle and rich online support materials and training. This will include a staff development programme.

Staff may need to be re-deployed to assist with the development of Term 1 programmes in the context of restrictions on new hires, and this will bring with it a requirement for appropriate training and support.

Research and innovation plans

UCL also expects to be open and undertaking research and innovation at the start of the new academic year, but different temporary operating models will also be required. A continuation of social distancing under current guidance will mean that normal operation of research groups and laboratories sharing a common space will not be possible. Any reduced level of service from science technology platforms may affect ongoing research. Travel restrictions will restrict or curtail international collaborations, conferences and networking opportunities. And there will be a major shift in the availability of research funding from charitable sources.

The temporary operating model enforced by social distancing will slow the pace of research and potentially affect career progression. This has the potential to affect disproportionately early career researchers. We will mitigate these consequences as much as we can. The Research and Innovation workstream will be bringing forward plans in the next few weeks.